4.1.2. Increase enrolment in and quality of the early childhood education by improving access to and quality of care system and services, promoting holistic development of children, and as a result also facilitate the participation of women in the labour market

Summary of checks performed by relevant authorities on the steps for which funding is requested, including weaknesses identified and any corrective actions taken

In accordance with the national legal framework on public internal control, financial management and internal audit, the RGF Regulation and the applicable Commission Implementing Decision, the competent authorities conducted a comprehensive verification process for this reform step.

This included the systematic collection and review of relevant evidence by the Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship, Trade and Innovation (MIETI), with internal audit units exercising their functions in accordance with their mandate. The checks and verifications were performed through the relevant layers of the control system, including the units responsible for implementation of this reform step, the Reform Agenda coordination unit in MIETI, and the Secretary General of the Ministry.

The Reform Agenda coordination structures within the Office of the Prime Minister carried out additional checks and verifications to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the reported information and supporting evidence.

The step under review	At least 80% of all ECEC institutions comply with at least 40% of the quality assurance framework.
Baseline	No compliance assessment of ECEC with quality assurance framework
Deadline of the step	June 2025
Actual results	In 2023, the Assembly of Kosovo adopted Law No. 08/L-153 on Early Childhood Education. The Law aims to ensure high-quality education, care and learning for children from birth to six years of age. It also establishes standards for the organisation, management, supervision and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders in early childhood education. As part of the legal and policy package deriving from this Law, the results will be elaborated in the following three aspects: 1. **Curriculum on Early Childhood Education (2025)** The Early Childhood Education Curriculum is the core document guiding the organisation of educational activities in early childhood education institutions. It supports the holistic development of children, building on Kosovo's educational tradition while reflecting national and international development trends. The Curriculum guides the work of early childhood education institutions across all forms of organisation. It brings together the relevant theories, principles, values, competencies and pedagogical approaches required for the implementation of early childhood education. Its implementation is supported by the broader set of accompanying documents foreseen under the Law on Early Childhood Education. 2. **Quality Assurance Framework in Early Childhood Education (2026)** The National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education is the central reference document for quality in Kosovo's early childhood education sector. It defines the national vision for quality early childhood education, sets out quality

	expectations at different levels of the system, and provides the basis for assessment, monitoring and continuous improvement. The Framework is addressed to all stakeholders involved in early childhood education quality assurance, including the Ministry of Education and Science, municipal authorities and Municipal Directorates of Education, directors and educators of early childhood education institutions, inspectors from the Education Inspectorate, and families. The Quality Assurance Framework was developed in line with reform step 4.1.2 of the Education Strategy 2022–2026. 3. **Assessment of Compliance of Early Childhood Education Institutions with the National Quality Assurance Framework** The assessment report presents the results of the national assessment of compliance of early childhood education institutions/kindergartens in Kosovo with the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education. It is a technical document outlining the assessment methodology, tools used and results achieved. The report was prepared based on inputs from the Education Inspectorate, early childhood education institutions and staff of the Ministry of Education. Therefore, it was not considered necessary for the Inspectorate to prepare a specific separate report. The report was prepared with expertise of an independent consultant to support Reform Agenda reporting and to inform the next phase of quality assurance implementation in the early childhood education sector. It serves both as a policy reference and as a technical resource for the Government of Kosovo, the Ministry of Education and Science, and partners involved in early childhood education reform. The report assesses whether the national compliance threshold has been met and provides a broader analysis of quality assurance implementation. It covers national scores, quality categories, dimensions, subcategories, indicators, differences between institutions, municipality-level trends and data quality issues. The Quality Assurance Framework is in place, and the compliance assessment was conducted for early childhood education institutions against the minimum 40% compliance threshold. A total of 164 ECEI/kindergartens completed the self-assessment process. However, in four cases, supporting verification documentation was largely missing, meaning that the reported self-assessment scores could not be reliably verified. These four cases were therefore excluded from the analytical dataset. The final analytical denominator used in the report is N = 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens, with each institution counted once. Using the agreed 0–100% scoring conversion model, 147 of the 160 assessed institutions reached or exceeded the 40% compliance threshold. This corresponds to 91.9% of assessed institutions and exceeds the Reform Agenda target of 80%. The national mean overall score was 65.50%, with a standard deviation of 16.44 and a median score of 66.34%. Scores ranged from 13.07% to 98.52%, indicating substantial variation across institutions. Based on the collected data, the reform step related to improving access to and quality of early childhood development services in Kosovo has been fully achieved. The target has been met and exceeded, as 91.9% of assessed institutions reached or

	exceeded the required 40% compliance threshold, compared to the Reform Agenda target of 80%.
Evidence provided[1]	1. Law No. No. 08/L-153, on Early Childhood Education https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=7900 2. Curriculum for early childhood education in Kosovo, 2025, attached 3. National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education in the Republic of Kosovo, attached in English and accessible below in Albanian https://mash.rks-gov.net/alldocuments/korniza-kombetare-per-sigurimin-e-cilesise-ne-edukimin-ne-femijerine-e-hershme-ne-republiken-e-kosoves/ 4. Guidelines for Internal Quality Assessment in Early Childhood Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo, attached 5. Instrument for Internal Quality Assessment in Early Childhood Education Institutions in the Republic of Kosovo, attached. 6. Technical Report for Reform Agenda Reporting: Assessment of Compliance of Early Childhood Education Institutions with the National Quality Assurance Framework, June 2026, attached
Checks performed in the verification of the step and related findings	During the verification of this reform step, all relevant evidence was reviewed and summarised in the control checklist, while all supporting documents were properly stored to ensure a complete audit trail. The conducted checks and verifications confirmed that: • all required documents, as specified in Annex 1 of the Reform Agenda, were provided and attached to this report; • the submitted evidence is consistent with the description and requirements of the reform step set out in the Commission Implementing Decision; • the submitted documentation confirms the fulfilment of the reform step; • the submitted documentation confirms the period in which the reform step was fulfilled. Based on the checks and verifications conducted and the evidence provided, the achievement of the reform step and the relevant implementation period can be confirmed. No related findings were identified.
Compliance with general principles and DNSH principle	The implementation of this step does not contravene the general principles outlined in Article 4 and 11(4) of Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 and Article 3 of the Facility Agreement. The implementation of this step does not contravene the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle (DNSH).
Double funding	External expertise of an independent consultant was used to prepare the technical report assessing the compliance of ECEI with national quality framework. Based on the RGF

	guidelines for double funding, in our assessment this support does not constitute double funding.
Clear conclusion on the achievement of the step	Based on the above, in our assessment, this reform has been fully achieved.



REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

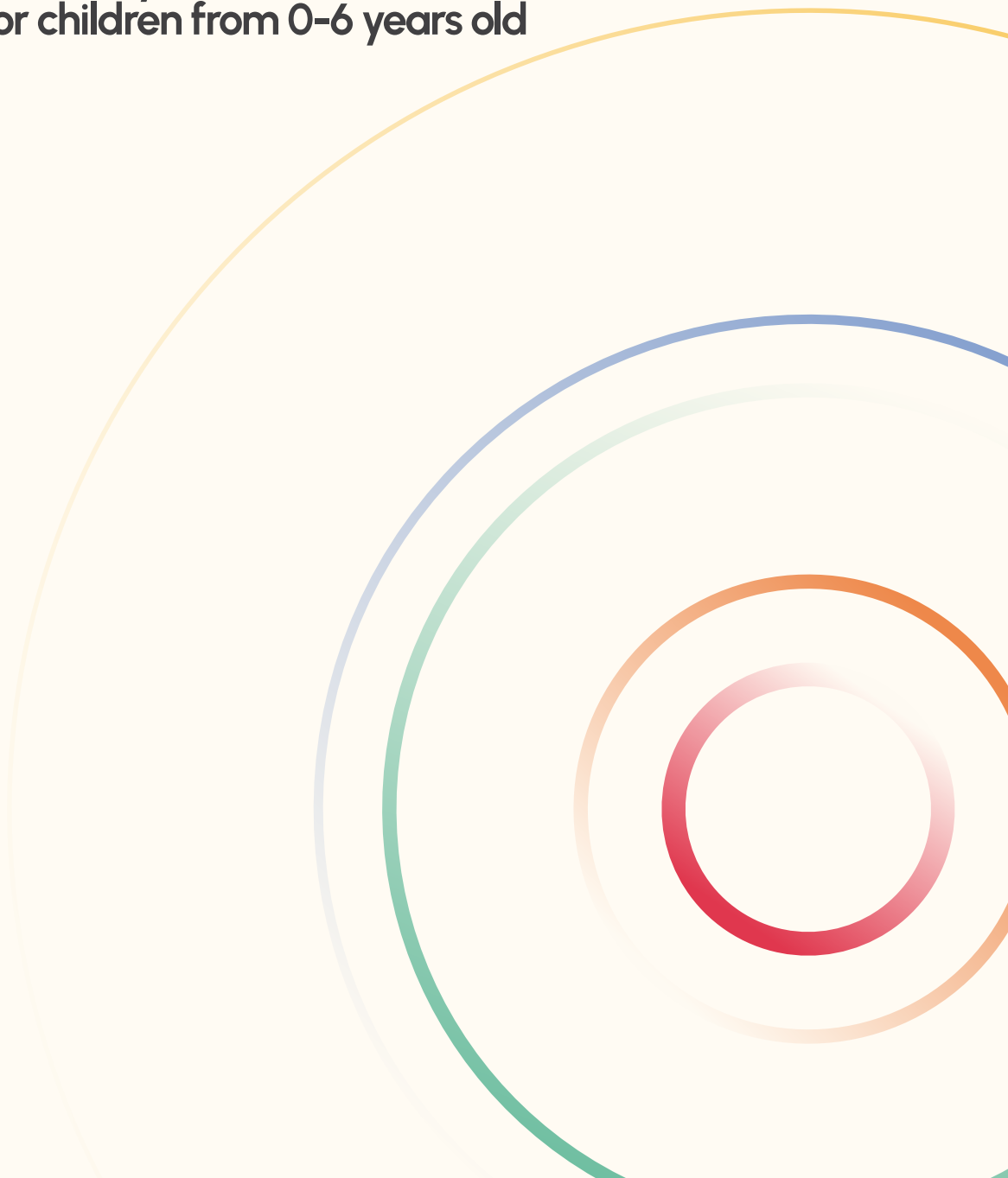
Children as Explorers

Curriculum for Early Childhood Education in Kosovo for children from 0-6 years old

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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This publication has been developed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation in Kosovo, Department of Pre-University Education, Division of Early Childhood Education, with the support of UNICEF in Kosovo.

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Foreword by the Minister

Dear children, educators, early childhood education leaders, parents and caregivers, and citizens of the Republic of Kosovo,

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) of the Republic of Kosovo, with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility, I hereby present for implementation the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (ECE) for children aged 0–6, as approved by official decision. The curriculum is accompanied by its implementation component, consisting of practical manuals that enable and facilitate its application in practice. This document marks the beginning of a national journey—one that starts in the earliest years of a child's life and extends toward the future of our Republic.

This Curriculum is the result of the dedicated work of MESTI, along with local and international education experts, and is expected to contribute to improving the quality of education and building a sustainable education system in line with current developments and demands. Investment in Early Childhood Education helps reduce inequalities in foundational skills—especially for children in vulnerable situations—by narrowing future skill gaps and contributing to the formation of a youth ready for the labor market, given that this document stimulates the holistic development of children. It is the foundation upon which we build the future of our country: a society rooted in knowledge, inclusivity, and opportunity for every child. The Early Childhood Education Curriculum is our investment in the youngest citizens—in Kosovo's human capital that drives economic development, strengthens social cohesion, and deepens our democratic values.

It is precisely in the early years of life that children begin to lay the foundations for cognitive, emotional, and social development—foundations that will guide them along their lifelong learning journey. Grounded in a comprehensive and holistic approach, and based on learning through play, the Curriculum fosters the development of the following competencies in children:

- Competence in creativity and critical thinking;
- Competence in communication through verbal and non-verbal languages;
- Socio-emotional competence;
- Competence in science, technology, and logic;
- Competence for global citizenship.

The new ECE Curriculum places at its core the essential components of quality, child-centered pedagogy, such as:

i) organizing inclusive and stimulating learning environments and structuring the day to promote inclusive education;

ii) strengthening children's autonomy and exploration as a means for learning, and fostering critical thinking and creativity;

iii) encouraging the active involvement of parents and legal guardians in early childhood education institutions and at home; and

iv) the continuous observation and documentation of children's work and achievements to enable a holistic, development-focused assessment.

With the proper implementation of this Curriculum, we aim to raise healthy, curious, capable children who are effective communicators, socially engaged, and active citizens.

Beyond policies, it is essential to recognize the human contribution that brings education to life. This refers to the dedicated professionals in early education, health, and wellbeing; to parents and guardians; administrators—and above all, to the children, whose limitless potential compels us to work harder and with higher quality.

This version of the Early Childhood Education Curriculum reflects the experiences of ECE institutions during the pilot phase, good practices, successes and challenges during practical implementation, insights from the mentoring and monitoring process, and recommendations from experts, inspectors, and national and international development partners. Furthermore, the Curriculum is grounded in scientific evidence and internationally recognized practices in the field of early childhood education.

Early education professionals and administrators are encouraged to apply their experience and expertise in implementing this document, in ongoing collaboration with parents, legal guardians, and the wider community. We assure you of our continued support for the successful implementation of this Curriculum and its accompanying documents (such as practical guides).

Together, we are building not only a quality early education system—but also a brighter future for every child!

Sincerely,
Arbërie Nagavci

DALJE
Nr. Br. No. 01-1562 Data/Datum/Date 17.04.2025
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Republika Kosova-Republic of Kosovo
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Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës, Teknologjisë dhe Inovacionit/
Ministarstvo Obrazovanja i Nauke,Tehnologije i Inovacija / Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Kabineti i Ministres/Kabinet Ministra/Cabinet of the Minister

Numër: 01-030
Data: 17.04.2025

Ministrja e Arsimit, Shkencës, Teknologjisë dhe Inovacionit, në mbështetje të neneve 8, 10 dhe 11 të Ligjit Nr. 06 / L-113 për Organizimin dhe Funksionimin e Administratës Shtetërore dhe të Agjencive të Pavarura (Gazeta Zyrtare nr. 7/01 mars 2019), nenit 7 të Ligjit Nr. 08/L-153 Për Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme (GZ. e Republikës së Kosovës / Nr. 17 / 3 Gusht 2023, Prishtinë), nenparagrafit 1.5 i paragrafit 1 të nenit 11 të Ligjit Nr.08/L-117 Për Qeverinë e Republikës së Kosovës (G.Z. e Republikës së Kosovës/Nr. 34/18 Nëntor 2022, Prishtinë), nxjerrë:

V E N D I M
Për aprovim

1. Aprovohet Kurrikula për Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme.

2. Vendimi hyn në fuqi me nënshkrimin e tij.

A r s y e t i m

Duke u mbështetur në dispozitat e shënuara më lartë, në Kërkesën me nr.prot. 01 - 029 dt.16.04.2025, si dhe me qëllim të aprovimit të Kurrikulës për Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme, u vendos si në dispozitiv të këtij vendimi.

Vendimi i dorëzohet:
1. Kabinetit të Ministres/MASHTI;
2. Zyrës së Sekretares së Përgjithshëm/MASHTI;
3. DAP/MASHTI;
4. Arkivit /MASHTI.

Arbërie Nagavci
Ministre e MASHTI

Acronyms

ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEI	Early Childhood Education Institutions
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
KOMF	Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
ECD	Early Childhood Development

Contents

Foreword by the Minister 3
Acronyms 7

Chapter I **11**
1. Introduction **13**
1.1 Curriculum Structure 13
1.2 Learning Theories 14
1.3 The idea of childhood 14

Chapter II **17**
2. Aim, Principles, and Context **19**
2.1 The Aim of the Early Childhood Education Curriculum 19
2.2 Values and Principles 20
2.3 Contextual Sensitivity of the Curriculum 22

Chapter III **23**
3. Curricular Competences **25**
3.1 Competence for creativity and critical thinking 25
3.2 Competence for communication through verbal and non-verbal languages 29
3.3 Socio-emotional competence 33
3.4 Competence in science, technology, and logic 36
3.5 Competence for global citizenship 38

Chapter IV **41**
4. Pedagogical approach and curriculum implementation elements **43**
4.1 Learning Environment 43
4.2 Materials 44
4.3 The role of the educator 45
4.4 Planning tools 46
4.5 Time management 47
4.6 Educator-child dialogue 50
4.7 Inclusion and inclusive approach 50
4.8 Family participation 52
4.9 Transitions 54

Chapter V **57**
5. Documentation and assessment in the learning process **59**
5.1. Assessment and Learning 59
5.2. Observation 60
5.3. Pedagogical documentation 60
5.4. Assessment documentation (frequency and form) 61

Chapter VI **63**
6. Curriculum Glossary **65**

Chapter 1

Introduction

1



1. Introduction

1.1 Curriculum Structure

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Curriculum is the fundamental document upon which the educational activity is organized in Early Childhood Education institutions. The role of the Early Childhood Education Curriculum document is to support child's comprehensive development by following and adapting local educational tradition to development trends at the national and international levels. The curriculum also supports and guides the work in Early Childhood Education Institutions in all forms of organization. Therefore, this document is a compilation of theories, principles, values, competences and pedagogical approaches, the systematic review of which makes sense only if perceived within the context of the entire package of accompanying documents that constitute and make this Early Childhood Education Curriculum applicable.

The curriculum package consists of a set of documents divided into two main parts:

Conceptual part - which comprises the Curriculum itself, and

Implementing part - consisting of accompanying documents (practical guides), which enable and facilitate its implementation in practice.

As a global citizen in an evolving and increasingly interconnected world, the child must be adaptable, exploratory, creative and flexible. He/she must develop and learn how to learn in order to adapt to new situations and contexts. Hence, the curriculum focuses on the development and education of the child, development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, and the affinities that support lifelong learning.

All children are born with different capacities; therefore, quality education at an early age helps them develop these capacities and build a strong foundation for everyday life and future learning. The Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Kosovo is based on pedagogical, cultural and organizational fundamentals on the latest learning theories and the most contemporary and innovative curriculum approaches.

The ECE curriculum is an open curriculum, inspired by the IBE-UNESCO guide on 21st century competences (IBE-UNESCO, 2017). It incorporates essential elements of local and contemporary cultures, such as a focus on competence development, attention to global citizenship education, sensitivity to gender issues, and environmental and economic sustainability.

Therefore, the UNESCO framework serves as a reference for defining the competences of this curriculum, which are clustered into five categories and cover the competences that a child should develop during early childhood (until the age of 6 when primary education begins).

The learning process should be seen as something beyond the general skills that are developed and documented. Thus, this curriculum approaches learning holistically, considering it as a continuous and complex process, drawing support and inspiration from the educational experiences of different approaches and methodologies that have served as a reference for many years, such as **Reggio Emilia, Montessori, Step by Step** and Socratic Maieutics (among others). Furthermore, this curriculum takes into account the traditions, cultural values, as well as the contextual and national features of the country.

1.2 Learning Theories

When we talk about children, we rely on scientific research from fields such as biology, philosophy, psychology, architecture, and neuroscience. It is essential to constantly consider the context of scientific research, which must be integrated into the research that is carried out every day in educational institutions and into the practices that experience leads us to develop.

The child, from birth, is motivated to create meaning (Moss, Dahlberg, and Pence, 1999) about the world and the processes in it. It is an effort, a search that begins and develops independently, in accordance with and strongly oriented to the environment and social context in which events occur. Context is essential for child development and as such allows for constant exploration.

The child independently develops learning skills, strategies, ways and paths to integrate and connect these with practice. Thus, they produce cognitive instruments and theories about the contexts that surround them. The child creates "mind maps" that enable them to guide their exploration. These mind maps orient the child from a social, cognitive, symbolic, affective, relational, and emotional perspective.

The child becomes a strong, active, critical, and competent protagonist of his/her own development and education. He/she produces changes, creates and compares ideas, produces knowledge and culture, and develops unlimited communication skills, which stem from the possibility of mastering different skills and learning styles. Children can construct language, symbols, and codes, interpret existing ones, and assign meanings, even quite complex ones, to the events around them.

Recent research on learning processes has overturned traditional theories of linear learning. As already proven, there is a general awareness that the acquisition and development of new knowledge is a process in which the individual/child who is learning has an active role in reprocessing and reorganizing information. Above all, the learning process is based on how knowledge is organized. It is a filter through which new information passes and the criterium used to accept or reject it.

We can no longer think of the teaching/learning process as a transition from one field to another, as we have in the past, but now educational content in practice is provided by interconnecting fields or competences.

An essential theoretical reference at the curricular level is Jerome Brunner, one of the most innovative and contemporary interpreters of the open and evolving curriculum, also known as the spiral curriculum.

The theories that led to this new conception of knowledge are described in more detail in a separate document (Guide on Learning Theories), which comprises the curriculum package, where several concepts are presented extensively to guide thinking about children's learning, such as:

- Constructivist theory
- Interactionist theory
- Social constructivist theory and
- Systemic theory

1.3 The idea of childhood

The Early Childhood Education Curriculum, together with other supporting documents, is based on the Curriculum Framework for Pre-university Education, approved by MESTI in August 2016. In structure and content, this curriculum differs from the core curricula for other formal levels of education and is adapted to the age and specificities of early childhood. Similar to the core curricula for other levels of pre-university education, this curriculum is organized into learning competences, which are interconnected and contribute to the achievement of pre-university education competences.

The pre-primary class (Ages 5-6 years old) moves from the core curriculum for ISCED 1 and becomes part of this curriculum, which in terms of content is applied equally to all forms of early childhood education organization.

Institutions providing early childhood education are educational environments containing

Levels according to ISCED [1]		Formal Levels of Pre-University Edu-cation in Kosovo [2]	Ages
		Adult Education/Large-scale Lifelong Learning (formal and non-formal)	**23/24+**
ISCED 6		Postgraduate Education	**23/24+**
ISCED 5		Undergraduate Education	
ISCED 4	Level 5 according to the National Qualifications Framework	Post-secondary non-tertiary education	**18 +**
ISCED 3	Level 4 according to the National Qualifications Framework	Upper Secondary Education - Gymnasium grades X-XII Vocational schools (grades X-XII)	**15-17**

situations and relationships between children and adults from which learning and cultural construction originate. With this principle, this document aims to contribute to building a comprehensive and advanced image of childhood. Early Childhood Education embodies an exploration-and-play-oriented approach in the context of early education throughout Kosovo, but also by means of regional and international associations.

It is essential to reflect on the idea we have about the child. In this way, we give meaning to the word "childhood".

Reflecting on the idea of childhood means discussing the historical and cultural interpretations and definitions of humanity. Children are defined through our perspective, the way we see them, and, consequently, through our cultural filter. Therefore, the idea of the child is what we know and assume about him/her, as well as the image of the child based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Cognitive, symbolic, affective, social processes and the relationships created are related to the context of early childhood institutions where children develop. Therefore, the development of a child is a social process, because the creation of his/her knowledge and skills is built in close relationships with others, both with other children and with adults.

The child has the right to respect in communication, is a holder of rights from birth, and is at the same time a constructor of knowledge, wisdom, and culture. In this way, children enrich and present the culture of their family and country. From an early age, the child learns and grows in relationships with others by actively participating in the world around him, including in various activities and events in the community.

The curriculum continuously and purposefully defines educational practices based on a holistic perspective. It guides the activities of educators and all professionals involved in early childhood education. The Early Childhood Education Curriculum defines the basic content of education for children aged 0-6 in our country, while scientifically, the childhood period can extend up to the age of 8.

While a holistic, purposeful and inclusive curriculum brings numerous benefits to the development of the educational system, it contributes to the educational efforts of Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in terms of:

- General organization of educational work
- Assessment through observation and documentation
- Development and educational projects
- Family and community involvement
- Professional development of educational and support staff
- Educational environments (spaces and resources).

Curriculum implementation should always place the child's mission at the center of every effort, supporting ECE staff and Early Childhood Education institutions in the child's development and learning processes, as well as providing valuable experiences for their holistic development.



Chapter II

Aim, Principles, and Context

2



2. Aim, Principles, and Context

2.1 The Aim of the Early Childhood Education Curriculum

The aim of the ECE Curriculum is to support well-being, learning through play, healthy life habits and child's development as an explorer. It is essential to reflect on the idea and understanding we have about the child and childhood in general, in order to give the word childhood its proper meaning. This curriculum aims to reflect the skills and abilities that support the child's holistic development as an independent individual, a critical and open-minded thinker, with self-confidence towards the future.

It also aims to generate educational experiences to the best interest of the child in early childhood education institutions but also in the family environment in cooperation with parents/legal guardians.

Early childhood education institutions are educational environments that encourage and support children by creating situations that support reciprocal relationships in everyday life.



2.2 Values and Principles

History, traditions and culture in the Kosovar context, and contemporary trends, dictate the values that represent the foundation upon which the ECE Curriculum is built. These are:

Interculturalism: Kosovo is an intercultural country, historically characterized by an ethno-cultural unity among members of different religious and ethnic communities. Seen from this perspective, coexistence in Kosovar society emerges as a value and "model" for other societies in the globalist context where multiculturalism constitutes the main challenge of modern societies. It is the principle of interculturalism, peaceful coexistence, and integration of all communities educated within the Kosovo education system that enables early childhood education institutions to welcome every child. Intercultural elements must be present in the different competences and applied in any pedagogical approach chosen to develop the educational process in Early Childhood Education institutions.

Family in function of growth, education, and continuous support: Traditionally, the Kosovar society has recognized four basic functions of the family: the function of bringing up and educating children, the function of reproduction, the function of economic support, and the protective and companionship function of the family. These functions have undergone occasional changes; however, the family connotes the fundamental community of society, based on kinship, love, harmony, and respect. Every child should be respected and learn a culture of mutual respect towards their peers, other adults, and the environment surrounding them. This value is reflected in the ECE curriculum approach, which also emphasizes the inseparable role of the family with the early childhood education institution.

In Kosovar culture, **caring for people in need** is a highly valued principle, including the elderly, vulnerable groups, as well as children, who enjoy high consideration both in the family and in the community.

Young population: Kosovo is the only country in Europe classified as being in the period of early demographic dividend. This means that the percentage of the working-and-reproductive-age population is higher than the percentage of the dependent or inactive population. This presents a golden opportunity for continued investment in human

capital through education, family-supportive policies, and overall progress in economic development and well-being.

In order to inspire such values, the curriculum emphasizes fundamental principles, which are grounded on Kosovo legislation and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), such as:

Inclusion: In early childhood, this principle means creating an environment that welcomes and supports all children, regardless of their race, color, gender, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, economic status, disability, family background or any other condition of the child or his/her parents/legal guardians. ECE institutions should provide care and education for all children based on a participatory approach; they support the engagement of educators, professional support staff, leaders and other members of the institution's community. These are essential to ensure inclusion and group education for all children, regardless of their differences.

Like the goals of inclusive education, the main goals of the curriculum in terms of inclusion are to ensure that every child experiences a sense of belonging within the educational community and to strengthen each child's sense of identity as an individual. Educational resources, learning spaces, and educator attitudes play a key role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in early childhood education spaces.

These aspects must work together to create an inclusive environment in which human differences are recognized and valued. Educational resources in the classroom/group should represent diversity. Toys and materials should represent gender diversity. Foods, parties, and celebrations should reflect the different groups present in the class/group.

A child-centered approach - A child-centered approach is based on early childhood theory and emphasizes the individual construction of knowledge based on children's interests, developmental needs, and abilities. It also offers children the opportunity to experiment, distinguish, think critically, and be creative while obtaining knowledge and understanding. Putting the child at the center of the pedagogical process leads to a different structuring of learning, the educational environment, and the role that adults (educational staff, parents/legal guardians) take in motivating the child to learn, develop, and use different skills.

This pedagogical approach requires educational staff to create various purposeful environments that represent contexts from everyday life in order for children to gain useful experiences and develop the skills set out in this curriculum.

All educators interact with children of different backgrounds, abilities, interests, and educational needs in early childhood education institutions. In inclusive early childhood education settings, the educational staff use child-centered pedagogy to observe and meet the needs and interests of all children. In various parts of the world, education is very traditional (learning by heart) and in many cultures, respect for the teacher/educator is very important. When implementing a child-centered pedagogy, local conditions and culture must be respected and taken into account. It is possible to implement elements of child-centered pedagogy in a more traditional system. The key point to remember is that to develop a child-centered pedagogy, the educational staff often need to begin to change their behavior in the group: where they stand, how they use resources, how they talk and interact with children, and how they assess children's achievements.

Learning through play: A play-based early education approach supports children's development based on their needs, promotes language and communication development, and provides the opportunity for educational staff to translate the curriculum into play activities. ECE theories emphasize that language and learning are closely related and that knowledge is constructed through a play-based approach that provides the opportunity for social interaction with peers and adults, expressed through language. To bring learning through play to life, educational staff use culturally responsive pedagogy (by supporting language, cultural values, and customs) that interconnects home and classroom experiences, while being aware

of children's developmental stage, and sees children as the source and shaper of the curriculum on an ongoing basis.

2.3 Contextual Sensitivity of the Curriculum

The curriculum begins with understanding the context in which the child is developing. Analyzing the context is a necessary first step in developing the necessary competences. The context is usually complex, multidimensional and diverse. Each context presents different needs of an individual and collective nature. The 21st century, especially the digital world, imposes challenges and opportunities for which the child and the educator must be prepared. The curriculum supports the child in developing the skills to address these challenges effectively. It must identify and create opportunities, thereby producing individual, collective and global benefits.

The Kosovar curriculum has another essential element which is the special elements of local culture. This aspect guarantees consistency with the context. Therefore, the curriculum takes into account elements of local culture related to early childhood education and care. It is essential that the curriculum is derived from and addresses contextual needs and opportunities to ensure that learning outcomes are relevant and practical and support the healthy development of the child, as well as prepare the child for life and school.

Chapter III

Curricular Competences





3. Curricular Competences

In the Early Childhood Education Curriculum, competence is defined as the ability to develop for ethical use and synthesize information, knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and technologies, to engage effectively and act in diverse ways to achieve individual, collective and global good. This definition implies that supporting the child in acquiring knowledge, skills and values should be complemented by providing opportunities for the child to create connections through elements of multiple competences or skills, to integrate and apply them interactively so as to respond to different situations and to influence change in situations as needed. The approach of a "list" of skills to be learned is no longer applicable in many global contexts. Meanwhile, determining how learning can take place during rapid and unpredictable processes is now essential.

A competency-based curriculum encourages the child to learn and understand knowledge thoroughly. Their application is often directed towards real-life situations (learning by doing) that the child may encounter later in life, thus providing him/her the opportunity to apply what he/she has learned. Competency-based curricula, unlike thematic/disciplinary ones, are based on understanding.

Competency-based curricula and approaches are constructed by the child and the adult in a way that enables and encourages the child to use what is learned in everyday situations. However, implementing and translating the competences into action is not the ultimate aim of the learning process.

This competency-based curriculum is multidimensional and requires serious commitment, practical experience, and exploration of all areas, often simultaneously, as they naturally overlap with each other and work together in real-life experiences and scenarios. The curricular competences that will be developed in early childhood education, as per this curriculum, are:

- Competence for creativity and critical thinking
- Competence for communication through verbal and non-verbal languages
- Socio-emotional competence
- Competence in science, technology, and logic
- Competence for global citizenship

3.1 Competence for creativity and critical thinking

Metacognition refers to an individual's ability to think and reflect on their thought processes. This includes two critical components: cognitive aspects and executive functioning/knowledge application. In the context of early childhood education, metacognition refers to the development of awareness and understanding of children's thoughts, knowledge, and learning strategies at an early age. It includes the ability to monitor, develop and reflect on one's own cognitive processes and to self-regulate engagement during educational and learning processes. Educational staff supports the development of metacognition through:

- supporting the child in understanding his/her own thoughts;
- encouraging him/her to reflect on his/her own learning experiences; -
- support in setting learning goals and planning strategies to achieve them;
- supporting self-reflection and self-assessment skills to develop problem-solving abilities and skills.

Metacognition in early childhood is about understanding personal everyday life experiences, different situations, especially when it comes to their interconnection in learning environments. Metacognition indicates the child's ability to reflect on the skills they have mastered in order to use them appropriately in different life situations.

Critical thinking in early childhood education refers to a child's ability to analyze information, understand different perspectives in order to solve problems and make decisions. This is a complex skill that requires the use of higher-level thinking processes, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The goal of critical thinking in early childhood education is to help the child understand thoroughly the world around him/her and equip him/her with the tools he/she needs to comprehend and use complex information and ideas. This will encourage them to learn to be curious individuals throughout life and in different situations. In order to develop critical thinking, it is necessary for children to be exposed to environments that encourage them to ask questions and express curiosity about their surroundings. This path, which can be summarized as the child's general curiosity about the world, nurtures the shaping of ideas, situations for exploration, and the generation of theories.

Therefore, as a starting point, the child should be curious about the world around them, constantly developing ways to explore ideas and the environment. The educational staff supports children to achieve their potential at every stage of development and fosters a desire for lifelong learning through clear guidance, structured questions, and appropriate program development.

Creativity is a comprehensive process that is not limited to art and is not something that only "some" people can do. Creativity is expressed in everything we do. It is the way we see the world, how we think and create ideas, and how we approach a problem to solve it. To express their creativity, children need to be able to read and understand the situation in their environment and understand the thoughts of others. Educational staff should discuss with the child and understand his/her learning processes as well as make the child see a situation, even if challenging, from different perspectives. Creating an appropriate environment that fosters critical thinking,



problem-solving skills, and creative learning is vital to a child's growth and development as an explorer. Among the essential aspects of designing a creative learning environment is the willingness and commitment of adults (educator, and parent/legal guardian) to listen to and accept the child's reactions, answers, and suggestions, and to ask the child to explain and justify his/her actions, answers, and reactions.

Creativity must be developed and enabled from early childhood to preserve the individuality of each child and to benefit from this uniqueness as a society.

Problem solving indicates the cognitive process that is applied to analyze a problematic situation and find a solution. It is a process that involves implementing deliberate steps related to a given situation or circumstance, to achieve a desired result.

Problem solving first begins with reflection and reasoning to take structured steps to resolve a complex situation, which cannot be achieved with an intuitive approach alone.

Problem solving in ages 0-3 begins when children explore the world around them through their senses. Babies quickly build thinking and motor skills that allow them to touch and play with objects, try out how things work, and find simple solutions. A baby reaching to grab a nearby toy shows early problem solving by changing movements or asking for help. This learning often occurs during and through play.

Children play with toys, try new things, and learn from success and failure. Adults help a lot by creating appropriate spaces, offering opportunities to solve problems, and providing assistance without imposing themselves.

Feeling safe is essential, because children who feel safe take more risks and keep trying. Words help children too. At a very early age, children express different needs, ask for things, and follow instructions. Playing with others and with adults teaches them how to solve problems together. Children learn to talk about and share their thoughts.

Supporting the development of patience, curiosity, and persistence in completing tasks builds strong skills for the child. Early problem solving creates confidence, a willingness to change, and perhaps even a lifelong love of learning new things.



Note to educators

Educators build an environment that fosters curiosity, exploration, and imagination. They provide children with open-ended materials, such as blocks, art materials, and natural objects, to inspire creative thinking and problem solving. Activities allow children to try out new ideas and reflect on the results, such as construction projects, role-play or storytelling. Children must ask questions and share their thoughts openly. Simple questions like "What do you think will happen if...?" or "How could we solve this problem differently?" help this process. Appreciate their efforts by cherishing their ideas and appreciating creativity, even if the results are not perfect. Educators lead group projects for children to collaborate, learn from different perspectives, and develop shared ideas. Group projects are very important.

Learning objectives for Competence 1:
Creativity and Critical Thinking

Ages 0-2 years old

- Children explore their environment using senses such as touch, sight, hearing and taste. They begin to connect the world around them with the knowledge they are gaining. This period helps them notice patterns, make distinctions, and notice rules. These simple observations are the first steps in their brain development. Using objects helps children develop fine and gross motor skills.
- They show curiosity by responding to new things, such as pointing or making sounds. When they see and respond to new objects or events, they show interest in learning. This curiosity helps greatly in their brain development by encouraging them to explore and try new things through different senses.
- Children solve simple problems during play, such as fitting blocks into a specific shape. Playing with toys that require adjustment or arrangement helps babies understand spaces and how things fit together. Success and failure in these games teach them to recover and try again.

Ages 3-4 years old

- Children begin to ask "why" questions about the world around them. Their questions show their natural curiosity and desire to understand how things happen. Asking questions helps them express their thoughts and participate in conversations, which positively affects the development of their minds.
- They experiment with open-ended materials, such as blocks, recycled materials, natural materials, and art materials. This type of play enables children to think creatively and try new ways of doing things. Free play supports individuality and helps build self-confidence to make choices.
- They solve simple problems on their own, like completing puzzles or building towers. These tasks teach children to be persistent and think logically. Solving easy problems improves their ability to cope with frustration and continue until the end.

Ages 5-6 years old

- Children generate new ideas and strategies for more complex problems during play or organized tasks. By using critical and creative thinking to solve problems, they find multiple solutions to a single challenge. This prepares them for real life, where flexibility and ingenuity are required.
- Children reflect on their actions and results. For example, they discuss why a solution worked or didn't work. Thinking about what they have done helps them understand themselves better. This step turns learning from mistakes into meaningful progress (learning from mistakes).
- Children work with friends on projects that require shared ideas and creativity. Group assignments teach them cooperative learning, as they share ideas and build teamwork. These projects help them learn to negotiate and value the contributions of others.



3.2 Competence for communication through verbal and non-verbal languages

Language skills (including expression through verbal and non-verbal language) are built in the first years of life. These skills encompass a broad field that does not end with the acquisition of a language in its phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects, but includes the ability to use communication to achieve learning related to different areas of development. At this age, language development is evident not only as a specific area that enables the development of a wide range of skills, but also as a deep connection to the development of thinking in particular.

Recognizing the importance of language in communication, in creating relationships with others, and in building knowledge, regardless of the aspect of language that is the object of analysis and interpretation, one must take into account the fact that language is used in social situations, adapting to defined social rules, which the child learns and masters with extraordinary speed.

Linguistic competence implies the willingness to select, use and master knowledge, skills and abilities in a given context, to confront and/or solve a given problem. In this sense, awareness (metacognition) and the adaptation of communicative languages to the context or situation come to the fore.

Since continuous learning in the early years focuses on play as the primary approach to learning, the foundations of a child›s development also stem from play. There can be different and fundamental experiences based on experimentation with creative languages. The languages that a child uses in the learning process reflect creative processes and should be valued as an experience that nurtures children›s desire to learn through exploration or experimentation.

Activities related to play, art, and experimentation are opportunities for creating multiple perspectives, creating synergies rich in possibilities. Listening, asking questions, reflecting, taking notes, experimenting, demonstration activities, making mistakes, and starting over are all open opportunities for building knowledge.

Children interact with each other and develop general skills through play and communication with peers.

Collaboration is essential for the child so that he/she can learn to develop verbal and non-verbal expression and articulation skills to increase self-confidence by expressing his/her feelings, thoughts, needs, interests, and requests. It is essential to take special care to encourage and foster interaction between children from an early age. This can be experienced during play, activities, challenges, exploration, and other everyday experiences. Building meaningful relationships is essential for the child, especially in Early Child-

hood Education Institutions as it gives him/her a sense of belonging and the opportunity to develop self-esteem. Play and interaction will increase his/her social skills and ability to build relationships with others. This will allow them to see the world from another person›s perspective. In this way, the child will learn to respect the views of others, guide their future behaviors, and find better and more diverse strategies when faced with different situations in everyday life.

Communication is an essential skill that a child acquires while developing relationships with peers, adults, educators, and the community around them. He/she develops verbal and non-verbal communication skills to express his/her feelings, thoughts, rights and requests. It is essential to take special care to encourage and foster interaction between children from an early age. The child acquires and develops communication and native language through relationships with their parents/legal guardians, other children, and educators. Educators must be aware of their importance and role and pay attention to the quality of the language they use with the child (the correct, accurate use of standard language that is understandable for the child›s age). Language can be modeled during play, research and exploration activities, and everyday experiences. The child should be given the opportunity to cooperate, interact and communicate in friendly, safe, trusting and natural environments as much as possible.

Communication is one of the competences that helps a child coexist and interact with others in various life situations, so it must be developed in an organized and systematic manner. To develop this competence, the child must rely on expressing his/her feelings and thoughts, expressing what is interesting to him/her, and analyzing what he/she does, thinks, feels, and shares.

In this context, attention should be given to the development of expressions in the mother tongue, non-verbal expressions, supporting the child in conversation, building full understanding and developing knowledge about the concepts of everyday life, as well as expressing oneself through speaking in a foreign language, in which the child shows interest.



Entertaining and playful activities help the child communicate freely and spontaneously about real and imagined topics. Special care must be taken when it comes to electronic communication because in the age of digitalization, children are constantly exposed to digital tools.

When developing communication competence, attention should be paid to respecting the opinions of others, listening to them, and taking turns when speaking.

The questions or ideas expressed by children, or problems they pose to solve are the best way to learn through communication. This means that the child plans and makes discoveries, provides explanations, solves and understands concepts in different and meaningful ways.

Expressive languages are important and essential in the education and development of the child, and represent crucial indicators of elements of the child's development such as: movement (fine motor skills), initiative, imagination, ability, the way in which he/she perceives and reflects the world, information on relevant topics, social and cultural context. Expressive language is also a good indicator of a child's emotional development.

The metaphor of ''the hundred languages of children'', taken from the "Reggio Emilia" approach, is an important metaphor for understanding the child's expression. Through a child's play and work, reality and his/her fantasy, science and imagination, heaven and earth, reason and dream come together. Creativity does not divide fantasy from the cognitive or learning process or emotions from rationality. The child should have the opportunity to work with expressive lan-

guage as a potential to learn and develop many emotional, interactive, sensory and intellectual skills in continuity and adapt to cultural and social reality.

The child is a builder of knowledge, which he shapes and elaborates through experience and play.

The duty of the early childhood education institution is to gradually develop the child's potential, not only to let him/her express creatively, but also to make them capable, through the interaction of "a hundred languages", to learn and be an active builder of knowledge. Communication methods (verbal, non-verbal and pre-verbal) should be used in a harmonized manner to facilitate relationships and communication with other interlocutors through a variety of languages and learning.

Preparing children for early reading begins with a language-rich environment. This environment nurtures their curiosity and builds basic skills. Love of books is very important.

Reading to children every day with expressive voices and engaging stories captures their attention and makes reading fun. This method introduces them to new words and improves their listening skills. Providing lots of books, such as picture books, rhyming stories, and interactive books, helps them explore and develop an interest in written language.

Speech is key to early reading. Conversations, asking open questions, and encouraging descriptions help develop vocabulary and understanding. Songs and rhymes support phonemic awareness by helping children hear the sounds in words. This is very important.

The gradual introduction of writing names or tracing letters connects spoken and written language. Story reading activities can include predicting story endings or retelling. These not only support understanding, but also improve sequencing and storytelling skills. A daily routine with reading time establishes habits for engaging with texts and stories at an early age.

Working with families is also essential. Sharing tips with parents on how to read with their children, how to play sound games, and have books at home ensures a lasting educational experience. Family visits to libraries expose children to additional reading materials. Combined strategies improve children's phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and early comprehension.

Cultivating a love of books, developing spoken language, building phonemic awareness, providing a language-rich environment, and developing fine motor skills prepare children for successful reading. Interactive activities and family efforts create a strong foundation for future reading success.

Note to educators

Educators must talk and interact with children to build speaking and body language skills. They should use simple words that are appropriate for the child's age and ask children to share their thoughts with words, hand movements, and facial expressions. Storytelling, singing, and role-playing can help children enrich their vocabulary, develop their storytelling skills, and encourage to express themselves and share ideas with others.

Educators should listen carefully and notice children's body signs, such as their movements or facial expressions. Group games where children listen, wait their turn, and respond to others teach them how people talk and cooperate with each other.

Children need opportunities to try different ways to express their feelings and ideas, such as painting, music, dancing, and roleplaying. These activities help children express emotions and thoughts in fun and creative ways.

Learning objectives for Competence 2:
Communication through verbal and non-verbal languages

Ages 0-2 years old

- Children use gestures and simple words to express their needs, such as pointing or uttering simple words. Early forms of communication, such as pointing or stuttering, create the foundation for language development. These simple exchanges help caregivers and children build connections through mutual understanding. This process is very important for the relationship and establishment of child-adult relationships.
- They imitate sounds and words to learn language. Repetition and copying are key to mastering the sounds and rhythms of speech. This stage allows children to practice word formation. Speaking clearly is essential.
- Children join in activities such as playing hide-and-seek or singing with actions. These interactions teach them social rules, how to wait their turn, and basic conversation points. Fun actions help children connect language with movements.

Ages 3-4 years old

- Children form simple sentences to express needs, ideas, or feelings. They begin to use sentences to share what they think, moving from using single words. This ability helps them communicate with others in groups, a very important skill. They also use this ability to share what they like or how they feel.
- They use nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, to aid communication. Understanding these signs helps children connect with others when speech is still developing.
- Non-verbal signs are essential for expressing feelings such as joy, frustration, or curiosity.
- They participate in group storytelling or role-playing games. These activities help children use their imagination and practice creativity. Role-playing allows them to create new stories and practice speaking and thinking skills. These skills are developed through these activities. Group stories teach cooperation and help children add ideas to what others share.

Ages 5-6 years old

- Children use detailed sentences to describe thoughts, feelings, and experiences. At this stage, they narrate events briefly and clearly, often including sequences and details. This skill supports school preparation and social communication.
- They participate in conversations with others, showing the ability to listen and respect turn-taking. Learning to listen and respond appropriately is key to friendships and the group/class environment. These conversations foster empathy and the ability to see things from different perspectives.
- They begin to experiment with storytelling, using their imagination to create stories with verbal and non-verbal fragments. Creative storytelling blends expressive skills and logical order, helping children share their ideas in fun ways. It also helps them use different ways of communication, such as gestures or drawings.

3.3 Socio-emotional competence

The first years of a child's life are a unique opportunity to promote healthy development. Scientific research highlights the importance of the first years of life for positive and negative experiences in shaping a child's cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional skills. Science has revealed that the powerful influence of early experience on brain development makes the first years of life a period of great opportunity, but also of high vulnerability for brain development.

From birth, children begin to develop skills that are essential for building healthy relationships and managing their emotions. Emotional and social development includes awareness of personal emotions, the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of others, and the development of behaviors that help create positive connections with others. These interactions include communication, physical movements (body language), conversation, playing with others, cooperation, conflict resolution, and other skills essential for future environmental adaptation.

Studies have now revealed that socio-emotional development is closely linked to cognitive development. Together, these build the foundation for developing relationships, coping with stressful situations, solving problems, controlling emotional outbursts, and many other skills.

Social behavior and building positive relationships are traditionally considered skills that develop naturally in a child. These skills develop and flourish first in warm family environments and continue in early education settings. Living in a trusting social environment increases the likelihood that a child will develop positive relationships and easily integrate into any social environment in the future.

An important part of emotional development is the ability to recognize and identify emotions. Children need to learn what emotions they feel and how to name them. Children often encounter difficulty finding the right words to express their feelings, which can lead to frustration and inadequate awareness and communication of emotions.



The child is capable of building and demonstrating emotional self-regulation (related to risk management and persistence), and is active in metacognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioral aspects within his/her learning process. Thus, self-regulation is a general term that also includes metacognition. Self-regulation is a skill that allows a child to manage emotions, behavior, and body movement when faced with a difficult situation. Self-regulation itself includes the management of various emotions (such as joy, sadness, anger, fear), negotiation skills, and problem-solving skills. But it should never be viewed as a single skill. It is actually an entirety of skills. At the center of these skills is the ability to control something - a behavior, a thought, an impulse, a movement, or a feeling.

Emotional and social self-regulation and interactions with others help children develop empathy, understand the perspectives of others, and build the skills needed to become part of a group. Building empathy means developing the ability to emotionally understand what others are feeling, see things from their perspective, and put yourself in their shoes. We can develop empathy in early childhood by modeling empathetic behavior ourselves, by identifying and talking about feelings, acknowledging the child's emotions, explaining how we are feeling, telling stories about feelings, and so on.

Educators reinforce positive social skills and encourage cooperative play in an emotionally supportive environment to shape positive and social behaviors. However, conflicts can occur even in the most positive, supportive, and open environments, and as such disrupt the child's routine and can lead to violence. To teach children conflict resolution strategies,

in addition to modeling positive behavior, we help them express their feelings verbally, role-play and practice conflict scenarios, share good conflict resolution practices with them through stories and fairy tales, teach them relaxation techniques, and so forth.

Socio-emotional competence also includes tolerance and acceptance of diversity - which refers to open attitudes and respect for the differences that exist between people. It means that the child respects and learns from others, values differences, does not stereotype, and is willing to socialize with all children without distinction. A child, regardless of his/her age, develops his/her values, to a large extent, by reflecting the values and attitudes of those who care for him/her.

Developing social skills and demonstrating positive relationships enables the child to develop on a healthy and stable socio-emotional trajectory and improves adjustment and positive achievements on an ongoing basis starting with the family, the ECE institution, and the community.

These skills include interpersonal skills, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, emotional intelligence, a sense of initiative or entrepreneurship, and creativity, etc.

Socio-emotional learning is key to a sense of self-efficacy, generating initiative and perseverance. This developmental component of the child includes the personal sense of independence, the ability to manage risk, and interaction with others. The child should be supported in the process of independence, taking initiative and managing the associated risks. This emotional and social development is closely linked to how they feel safe and supported in their environment, which directly impacts sustainable self-esteem and self-confidence.

Note to educators

Educators have a very important role in creating a safe and caring environment for children. They support feelings and friendships between children. Children learn to understand their emotions through stories, drawings, or conversations. For example, educators might say: "You seem upset; can you tell me why?" Educators show kindness and empathy, encouraging children to notice and respond to the emotions of others.

Group games teach children to share, take turns, and solve problems with the help of others. Children develop these skills during play. Practices like deep breathing or finding a quiet place help children calm down. This method is constantly encouraged.

Diversity must be cultivated in the classroom. Children learn to respect differences and work together. These lessons on inclusion are very valuable. Educators who model good social behaviors help children develop strong social skills.

Learning objectives for Competence 3:
Socio-Emotional Competence

Ages 0-2 years old

- Children show a basic understanding of emotions, such as laughing when they are happy or crying when they are sad. Recognizing feelings and responding to them helps children connect with caregivers and better understand emotions. This stage is the beginning of empathy and dealing with emotions.
- They identify familiar people and create strong connections. Safe attachments bring trust and a sense of security, which are very important for healthy emotional development. These connections encourage children to explore their world with confidence.
- They play alongside their peers in parallel play. Playing around other children introduces them to social environments without the stress of direct interaction. This is the first step towards more collaborative play.

Ages 3-4 years old

- Children identify and name basic emotions in themselves and others, such as happiness, sadness, or anger. This understanding helps them talk about feelings clearly and manage social interactions. Naming emotions helps reduce frustration during difficult moments. Emotions matter a lot.
- They share toys and take turns with friends during playtime. During these early steps toward cooperation, children learn how to think about the needs of others and develop good social habits. Sharing things helps create a sense of fairness and empathy.
- They practice self-control in simple situations, like patiently waiting their turn. This practice teaches them patience and helps them control impulsiveness, preparing them for organized group activities and team play. Self-regulation is very useful.

Ages 5-6 years old

- Children show understanding by responding appropriately to the feelings of others. Empathy creates strong friendships and helps children cooperate better. They begin to notice the needs of others, offer help, and empathize.
- Children avoid gender-based stereotypical emotional behaviors, such as “boys should be strong and never cry.”
- They collaborate with their peers to resolve disagreements with a little help. Problem solving teaches children to share feelings in a polite way and find a common solution. These lessons build important skills for collaborating and finding solutions.
- They show more independence in calming themselves when they feel anxious. Managing emotions independently strengthens self-confidence and prepares children for the challenges of school and for establishing friendships.

3.4 Competence in science, technology, and logic

Science and technology are indisputable factors of today's world. Technology underpins social and economic relations; therefore, universal access to this knowledge is necessary. By using technologies during early childhood education, everyday life can be supported by creating digital spaces as an enriching resource and tool for context transformation.

In early childhood education institutions as well as in everyday life, the use of digital communications has become a necessity of the time. We are experiencing a new "normality" in a sea of uncertainty. Cognizance of this need requires the use of technology not to replace the work done so far, but to use it when and in a way that is beneficial to the pedagogical process.

Using and experimenting with materials of different natures, shapes, and volumes enables children to gradually build conceptual thoughts and imagination. In early childhood education settings, the child may encounter transversal learning (cognition, categorization, selection, and planning).

Logical thinking should be encouraged through spontaneous research or exploration, and the educational staff should openly acknowledge and foster children's curiosity. The development of logical-mathematical competence in ECE is essential for establishing a strong foundation for mathematical skills and problem solving. Logical-mathematical concepts should be explored and identified in everyday life during and through situations where the child is the protagonist of exploration and the adult discovers or creates attractive situations for exploration by the children. Therefore, mathematics should not be understood as a discipline of norms and rules, but as experiences that are constantly evolving and in relationship with each other.

Play infers learning; the child learns through play. Educational content in early childhood education institutions is developed through play, which is defined as a principle in the



new Law on Early Childhood Education[1]. The child's spontaneous and self-organized play should be recognized and supported by educators. Play comes naturally to the child as from an early age he/she is drawn to and explores everything that surrounds him/her.

The child is entertained and at the same time develops during play. A child's logic and imagination are developed through play. The games a child plays have an essential role in his/her life and contribute significantly to the child's development. Play is a voluntary, fun activity based on the child's intrinsic motivation in which he/she actively engages. Through play, the child learns about the world and experiences different feelings; through it, the child's needs and interests are met. Through play, the child develops learning skills, which increases self-confidence and learning sustainability.

In early childhood education, play forms the basis for children's holistic development.

The importance of play in early childhood is essential to their growth, as it stimulates early brain development, improves understanding, encourages creative thinking, develops communication, enriches language and vocabulary, promotes self-control and emotional self-regulation, increases social competence and sensitivity, improves physical and mental health, and values the child's culture.

1 Law No. 08/L-153 on Early Childhood Education. Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo (2023). Available at: https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=79000

Note to educators

Educators must inspire learning by asking questions and exploring together. Children develop scientific thinking through play and experiments. Hands-on activities allow them to try things out for themselves. Children enjoy discovering why objects float or sink, planting seeds or building simple structures. Tools like magnifying glasses, ladders, and basic technology help make exploration feel fun and alive. Questions and predictions help children test ideas and think critically. A curious mindset is developed when children ask questions. Games and puzzles with patterns or sequences benefit their logical reasoning. Digital tools teach them accountability and creativity. Likewise, digital adventures also show a new way to document learning.

Learning objectives for Competence 4:
Competence in science, technology, and logic

Ages 0-2 years old

- Children discover why one thing leads to another, like pressing a button to listen music.
- Early cause-and-effect tests help children learn how actions change their world. They need these activities to help develop logical thinking.
- They interact with sensory-rich materials, like water play or stacking blocks. Sensory play allows children to use things and find ways to solve problems. This stage is very important for motor skills and develops a deep curiosity.
- They copy simple technology-related actions, such as pretending to use a phone. Observing and copying early actions helps children understand how equipment and tools are part of everyday activities.

Ages 3-4 years old

- Children ask simple questions to understand how things work. Inquiry-based learning improves their critical thinking and connects different ideas. This also fosters a love of learning and discovering new things.
- They experiment with patterns and sequences, like ordering colors, shapes, or numbers. These activities go a long way in building a strong foundation for mathematical skills and logical thinking. Recognizing patterns also develops flexible thinking.
- They use technology that is appropriate for their age, like educational apps, with supervision. Technology allows children to learn interactively, introducing them to the digital world and safe use practices for digital devices.

Ages 5-6 years old

- Children predict what might float or sink during experiments. Conducting practical experiments awakens curiosity and supports scientific thinking. Predicting outcomes allows children to learn how to test ideas. Understanding of simple physical concepts begins at this age.
- They solve logical problems by finding patterns, categorizing, and creating sequences. These problem-solving tasks help build reasoning skills. This is important for future success in math and science.
- They use tools like tablets and digital cameras to explore and capture learning moments. Creative use of technology improves exploration and presentation or documentation skills. This encourages a deeper interaction with their environment.

3.5 Competence for global citizenship

A child's thinking develops through interactions, exchanges, and dialogues. Early education for sustainable development enables the child to appreciate and respect the natural environment, to be responsible for the environment, to understand the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the earth, to interact with plants and natural materials in the environment. In this way, the child develops an understanding of biodiversity and understands the impact of human activity on the environment and nature. The child has an innate, natural awareness and competence towards cooperation, and this competence gradually transitions into individual recognition.

The child has an innate and unlimited cooperation with the nature and builds his/her knowledge much better when he/she relates it to the natural environment and ecology. We must keep in mind that natural elements are not opposed by the human element. The purpose of sustainability education has emerged as a response to growing concerns for human life, such as: earthquakes, climate change, global warming, drought, water scarcity, air pollution, food shortages, and environmental protection.

Focusing on climate sustainability in children's education begins with connecting children to nature. Activities like gardening, planting trees, and exploring outdoors help them become more aware of nature. Simple ideas about climate change and caring for the planet can be expressed through stories. These stories may include examples from Kosovo's nature. Learning by doing, such as recycling and reusing things during art activities and games, teaches children sustainable habits in a fun way. The class/group and kindergarten have created green environments using safe materials and reducing waste. This teaches children about sustainability every day.

Water and energy saving projects use games and songs. These keep them exciting and memorable for the children. Families participate by using recyclable lunch boxes or by going for walks and biking. Visits tofarms,



forests or rivers help children understand how nature works together and how people affect the environment.

In this competence, we consciously include the competences of global citizenship, widely understood as the basis of harmony with our human essence. 'Citizenship' has also become a fundamental part of early childhood education, which derives from the establishment of policies to their implementation in child care and education.

The assumption that one could not exist without the other has contributed to the spread of the concept of 'citizenship' for the child. By granting them participation rights, children are considered active and contributing members of the family, society, and community in which they live. These rights refer to the principle of self-determination and are considered equivalent to the civil rights of adults.

Sensitivity in early childhood is also open to the concept of gender equality. This is a crucial period in which the child develops gender identity, so exposure to stereotypical behaviors and attitudes should be avoided.

Being a victim of inequality or witnessing it can be internalized by the child, and he/she will reproduce this pattern later (reproductive mechanism). To change this dynamic of gender inequality, which is visible (as well as invisible) in many aspects, curricula and educational content have the potential to implement activities that promote respect for gender equality through educational means,

even in cases where the child perceives or experiences gender inequality in the family environment. For example, gender inequality can result when educators value one specific gender more than another, when certain games are attributed for a certain gender, or when there is a reduction in access for one gender or an overemphasis on one gender, etc.

Educational content should not transmit any of these values to ensure inclusiveness that serves the child's development. Extra care should be taken in using educational materials and toys that do not promote gender stereotypes.

Democratic development in early education refers to a philosophy and approach to education that emphasizes the child's active participation and decision-making at an early age. This approach is based on democracy, equality and respect for the individual. This is the period in which the child can develop in a democratic way the concept of who he/she is, to create the necessary value for democracy, as a guiding principle for the rest of his/her life.

Early Childhood Education institutions should be a democratic community to which all children have access and in which they feel they can actively influence decision-making processes based on their capacity and level of experience.

In a democratic early childhood education institution, the child is encouraged to express his/her opinions, make choices, and participate in the management of his/her group. Educators act as facilitators,guiding children as they explore, experiment, and learn through play and other hands-on activities. This approach recognizes that the child is a capable, competent individual and values his/her contribution to the learning community. Democratic Early Childhood Education institutions aim to create a positive and supportive environment that develops children's sense of self, respect for others, and social and emotional skills, preparing them for success in further education and various life situations.

Being a global citizen, as stated, means connecting with nature and the world around us. In this context, motor skills are extremely important.

Motor development involves increasing muscle coordination and movement skills in children. This development includes fine motor skills, such as writing or working with recycled materials, and gross motor skills, such as walking or jumping. Children begin with reflexes such as grabbing or sucking. These reflexes slowly become more controlled actions. As children grow, their motor skills improve, enabling them to do things like throw a ball or ride a bike. Genes, physical growth, and experiences all influence motor development. Children who play actively often show strong coordination and dexterity. Delayed motor development may indicate hidden health problems. Swift actions are very important. Physical education and play activities at ECEI support children's motor development. Motor development changes with the growth of a person's body and the surrounding environment.

Note to educators

Educators introduce values such as empathy, respect, and responsibility to help children grow as kind global citizens. Activities like collaborative art projects or group problem-solving assignments emphasize teamwork and collaboration. Children learn about shared goals through these activities. Caring for the environment involves children in simple sustainability habits like recycling, caring for plants, or reducing waste. Stories, songs, and cultural traditions from different countries teach children about diversity. Respecting changes is important. Children also discuss fairness and inclusion through real-life examples or role-play. These discussions help them think deeply about these ideas. Children's participation in group decisions demonstrates democratic principles. This approach helps children feel valued and creates a sense of responsibility.

Learning objectives for Competence 5:
Global Citizenship

Ages 0-2 years old

- Children begin to understand their environment through exploration with their senses. Experience with the natural and social parts of their world helps children learn the first things about life. This awakens curiosity and respect for everything that surrounds them.
- They participate in simple interactions with parents/legal guardians, developing a sense of inclusion. Basic routines like greetings teach children the foundations of social interactions and mutual respect.
- They watch and imitate actions in a group setting, such as waving or saying goodbye. Following the actions of the group allows children to begin to learn social norms and group identity.

Ages 3-4 years old

- Children participate in group activities and learn to share with their peers. Helping them in activities shows children the importance of teamwork. These activities begin to develop an understanding of what is right and what shared objectives are.
- They begin to understand simple ideas about the environment, such as caring for plants or recycling. Learning about sustainability from an early age develops a sense of responsibility for nature. These lessons form lifelong habits.
- They avoid or are not limited to gender-based stereotypical games.
- They notice differences in people and cultures through different stories and games.
- Understanding diversity teaches empathy and respect for different perspectives.

Ages 5-6 years old

- Children actively help with group choices in the classroom or play corners, such as choosing games or projects. Participating in decision-making activities builds self-confidence and gives a sense of responsibility. Children also discover the value of democratic actions.
- They understand basic concepts such as justice, equality, and protecting the environment. Discussing global issues helps children think deeply about their place on earth and supports responsible behavior.
- They respect and enjoy diversity by joining cultural traditions or using multiple languages. Encountering different cultures broadens children's perspectives and fosters inclusion. They see that diversity enriches communities.
- They show gender sensitivity and at the same time accept to play with other boys and girls.

Chapter IV

Pedagogical approach and curriculum implementation elements


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4. Pedagogical approach and curriculum implementation elements

4.1 Learning Environment

The learning environment in early childhood education institutions is essential, as are other factors such as parents/legal guardians, educators, peers, and the institution's professional management and support staff. The learning environment is adapted to serve the function of learning and teaching, and it means more than the physical space in which the child resides. It is the space in which the child grows and develops. For a good start, parents/legal guardians, educators, and the professional management and support staff should work together to transition naturally and gradually from the home environment to the Early Childhood Education Institution environment, where the child feels safe and ready to interact.

The child's interaction with the environment is also related to interaction with adults, peers, and the social circle. The environment in early education is also considered as the "third educator of the child".

The environment should be designed in such a way that every child within the educational group can play, explore, discover new things, communicate, and develop harmonious relationships with peers, adults, and the environment surrounding them.

The environment must be **appropriate and adaptable.** The child often feels the need to change it and adapt it to his/her explorations during entertaining, educational and exploration activities. This adaptation creates opportunities to foster curiosity and exploration. Through questions, proposals and **active dialogue,** educators help children realize their rights and at the same time intervene in the environment to enable the achievement of these rights.



The goal of the learning environment is to create situations that enable the child's full development, creating research opportunities where experiences are treated as a whole, rather than offering fragmented knowledge. The environment should certainly include tools and materials, especially **natural and recycled, structured and unstructured.**

The organization of the learning environment should reflect the ideas, values, attitudes and culture of the children and staff who live within it, so that the child can explore his/her different expressive languages.

Large open environments encourage movement and activities with the entire group, while small environments with different tools and materials create opportunities for play and interaction with smaller groups or individual work, for exploration and experimentation with materials and tools. A diverse environment encourages, creates different experiences and opportunities for the development of the child's full potential.

The external environment of the Early Childhood Education Institution (such as a park, kindergarten) should be understood as an extended space of the indoor environment and its use as manifold. The relationship with the outdoor environment is essential, where the child should stay in the outdoor playground and be free to discover the world around him/her. This is good for the mind and body.

The overall positive health effects of frequent outdoor play with a controlled/managed level of risk offers greater benefits than the health effects of avoiding outdoor play, despite perceived risks. Outdoor play supports social interaction and helps cultivate emotional understanding.

Scientific evidence recommends that children spend about **1 hour outdoors per day, every day and in every season,** making the necessary preparations in the environment and clothing. This period of time, like the rest of the day, should be well planned.

The external and internal environments of the early childhood education institution develop children's cognitive, emotional, and psychomotor skills. These environments can change and transform according to the child's developmental needs; for example, many activities can begin in indoor spaces and be moved to the institution's outdoor spaces. Depending on the project and how we enrich the environment, these principles are applicable to different spaces of the ECEI.

The internal and external environment should support the continuous expansion of children's knowledge. The organization of the internal and external environment of the ECE institution is elaborated extensively in the practical guide for organizing learning spaces, which helps in implementing the Early Childhood Education Curriculum.

4.2 Materials

In early childhood, sustainable education is essential and can be achieved by allowing children to explore their environment through play and free action.

Through activities, play, and exploration, children become aware of a new phenomenon or concept, giving them the opportunity to gain sustainable knowledge. To develop these capacities and carry out activities and explorations, materials are of particular importance. The diversity of materials is essential. For example, through manipulative play, children learn content and develop their imagination, creativity, motor skills, and senses in general. Natural materials are important and include things like stones, branches, chestnuts, nuts, hazelnuts, leaves of various sizes and shapes, etc. These materials allow children to learn about nature, become more attentive, to love nature and create a strong connection with it. Among other things, they help children learn the characteristics of each product and material. Wooden materials with different shapes enable manipulation while integrating developmental/curricular areas and achieving age-appropriate competences. Wooden materials allow children to learn through action, play, and exploration of shapes, sizes, features of objects, durability of the material, and other characteristics.

Recyclable/reusable materials such as bottles, caps, rollers, cardboard boxes, beads, buttons, and clothes comprise another option. By using recyclable materials, children learn about products, how they can be reused and not thrown away, what can be reused to make things for play, as well as express imagination and creativity, while contributing to the preservation of nature and sustainable development.

It is very important that the materials are presented aesthetically. Aesthetics is fundamental to children's learning process and should be considered when preparing a space for children's play and exploration. Presenting materials by color, length, or following a certain characteristic helps the child's learning process and should be an essential part of the educator's work. Similarly, presenting materials based on project ideas or research areas is very important for learning processes.



4.3 The role of the educator

In early childhood, **the role of adults** transforms from educator to co-creator and **co-explorer** with the child, thus supporting the **continuous educational process.** Children carry with them many thoughts, ideas, and curiosities, which are expressed through numerous questions but also theories or imaginative interpretations of various phenomena. This is very important when it comes to emphasizing the central role that the child has in the development of cognitive processes, understanding, and the construction of thoughts.

Listening should be understood as a process that implies complete concentration on the condition and activity of children. It means listening to or understanding child's various forms of expression, otherwise called "child languages" and it does **NOT** mean only recording but also interpreting the child's words or messages or conversing with the child.

One of the primary tasks of educators is to support the child in their learning process based on the child's needs and skills and with the aim of continuously developing the cognitive process and expanding the child's knowledge.

Understanding children's cognitive processes and ongoing interaction with children is important as it represents the way how the educator supports the child's knowledge. Detailed observations, reflections on the interests, needs, and challenges that children face are achieved **through sensitive** attention and dedication of educators. When the educator observes the child during their learning processes, listens to them, and pays attention to their actions, he/she understands through the child's listening, intuition, and clear statements. In this way, the educator also identifies specific areas that need to be further analyzed. It is essential to try and identify, preserve, and observe children's interests because they often represent new areas that open up to alternative knowledge.



The educator must translate child's actions into a summary analysis that is presented as a new reflection to be brought to the child's attention through activities deliberately planned by the educator. In this way, he/she will advance his/her previous theories, building new and more elaborate theories.

Updating activity plans based on child observation influences the evolution of educational projects, and this enables the child to extend within different horizons of knowledge without ever ending his/her curiosity, desire to experiment and to know the world.

Working with this approach means that curricular knowledge is implemented in a cross-cutting and interconnected manner rather than being separate from other knowledge areas.

The educator **acts as a facilitator** and creates a safe, stimulating, play-based environment for the child, where the child can experiment and explore the surrounding environment and beyond. **A friendly, safe and reliable environment** created by the educator is the key element for child's development, as it creates conditions that promote healthy and sustainable growth and learning. A friendly environment is a place where children feel welcome and accepted, creating a positive connection with the educator and peers, and expressing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas without fear of judgment. This encourages the development of self-confidence and critical thinking. **A safe environment** is a fundamental element for any child.

This includes not only physical safety, such as clean and protected environments, but

also emotional safety, as well as **helping children develop skills to manage stress.** Children in a safe environment are better able to face challenges and deal with their emotions. The educator **inspires** a sense of community in the group, creating a safe and supportive environment where children can learn and support each other. **A reliable environment and the creation of a bond of trust between the educator and the child** is an important step in creating an environment where children can grow and develop. Trust is also formed when rules and expectations are clear and fair. Children feel more secure and trustworthy when they have the opportunity to understand how they will be treated and what is expected of them. In this way, the educator **models** values such as respect, equality, cooperation and sensitivity in their interactions with children and aims to transfer these values to them.

Educators ensure **inclusion** by **drafting** child-centered pedagogical plans, based on the individual development, abilities, needs and interests of children. He/she selects and provides various materials for carrying out activities to achieve planned outcomes. The educator **identifies and reports** issues that may arise during activities related to the health and well-being of the child, as well as **documents** through various forms the process of children's development and learning. The educator **engages** in continuous learning and reflection on their practice, staying up-to-date with the latest research and best practices on early childhood education and its impact on child development. The educator **cooperates with teachers and professional staff** (educators, psychologists, pedagogues, speech therapists, etc.) inside and outside the institution to exchange best practices, challenges and difficulties encountered in their daily work.

They cooperate with parents\legal guardians during planning and implementation, making them part of the daily educational work to ensure the well-being, education, and comprehensive development of children.

4.4 Planning tools

It is essential to define the approach to organizing educational work, as well as curriculum development in practice.

To develop curriculum competences and make children›s learning process visible, it is necessary that we act and reflect through planning tools, which, on the one hand, support the design of activities, structure the work, generate ideas, doubts and areas for further educational work, and on the other hand, can build the conceptual platform that supports the documentation of processes implemented with and by children.

Planning tools represent one of the elements of work available to the educator; they match the need to describe and design curricular activities and enable the description of children›s learning processes through written language.

The use of such tools is what makes the early childhood education curriculum applicable. Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions must create their institutional identity, support ECE philosophies, and choose methodological approaches that accompany the ongoing processes of planning and implementation. They must necessarily be based on the principles and competences of this Curriculum and be in accordance with the legislation in force that supports early childhood development in Kosovo.

Work plans are typologies that represent a form of documentation for ECE institutions. These include the annual plan (conceived as a guide), which represents a working tool that outlines clear ideas, goals, opportunities and their visibility. It describes the objectives of ECE institutions, identifies possible educational and other strategies, tools, theories and processes that are integrated within ECE institutions. It presents the work and daily life that takes place within the ECE institution.

The annual plan can also serve as an opportunity for reflection and continuous study compared with previously implemented projects.

It supports the value of working with children, relationships between educators, and

general ideas about educational projects. The content of the plan is generated by listening to the child (their interests and curiosities), the educator, or considering the interests of the parents/legal guardians or the community.

The annual work plan should be considered as a guide for monthly and weekly plans, but it is not unalterable. It can be adapted depending on the interests and cognitive needs of the child, parents/legal guardians, community, or other external circumstances. The annual plan must be visible and displayed within visible areas of ECE institutions. This document serves as a working tool for educational staff, but at the same time it should serve as a guide for other professional collaborators (such as pedagogues, psychologists, speech therapists, inspectors, etc.).

Monthly plans represent the definition of thematic areas intended to be worked on during the month. The educator plans together with the child, based on his/her interests and needs. At the end of the month, educators review and interpret the observations to reflect on the concepts to be addressed the following month. The monthly plan aims to make the process of curricular progress visible and intelligible and to redefine the work scenario for the future.

Weekly plans specify educational activities resulting from monthly planning. In addition to defining the content of the topic or developmental project, weekly plans include defining the way to structure work within the educational space with the participation of the child, educator, and family.

Observation tools are essential for understanding the child›s learning processes, interests and sensitive issues to be explored during the project and represent the basis on which reflection on projects and planning processes can be grounded. Observing what the child does, including their actions, gestures, interventions and thoughts, is crucial in any curriculum planning and implementation.

Daily plan: is not exactly a planning tool and refers to the content of a predictable daily routine for children, based on a weekly plan. It is a form of documentation that records work with the child and daily life. It is essential to use language that is understandable and accessible to everyone, as it is one of the most used, most variable, and most accessible forms for the parent/legal guardian. The diary or documentation notebook should not be reductive, simplistic, or merely chronological in its narrative manner. For this reason, it is important that daily life in ECE institutions is understood and valued, constantly bringing the child›s potential back to the parent›s attention, in order to convey a strong image of the child towards a common culture for childhood.

4.5 Time management

The organization of daily time in early childhood education (ECE) institutions is related to the need to create harmony between the time and pace of the children and those of the institution. These two “paces” are often not well-balanced, and the institution must have the capacity to find a harmonious time in respect of children’s rights without disrupting organization. This requires a high level of cooperation.

The daily schedule should have a stable structure that allows the child to find stable points of reference and adapt to a recognizable, understandable and predictable time context (for the child). Attention to timing should also extend to transitions from one activity to another, ensuring that this is in line with the goals of the curriculum. All these must be taken into account when planning the organization of the educational program.

Some of the reasons why daily routines are important in Early Childhood Education (ECE) include:

Creating a sense of stability: In early childhood, a child develops better in environments where he/she feels safe and protected. Daily routines create a predictable and consistent schedule, which helps the child feel more comfortable and secure, because knowing what to expect at different times of the day reduces anxiety and provides a sense of stability.

Promoting self-regulation and independence: Daily routines provide opportunities for the child to develop self-regulation skills. By following a structured routine, the child learns to manage her/his time, move from one activity to another, and regulate her/his behavior. Consistent routines also foster independence, as the child becomes familiar with expectations and is empowered to engage in activities on their own.

Supporting social and emotional development: Routines provide opportunities for social interactions and emotional development. During routines such as breakfast meetings, mealtimes, or outdoor play, the child learns to take turns, share things, cooperate, and communicate with peers. Routines also provide moments for the educator to model and reinforce positive social behaviors, empathy, and emotional regulation.

Supporting cognitive development: Routines provide opportunities for cognitive development through repetition, rehearsal, and reinforcement. A daily structure helps the child learn and internalize concepts such as sequencing, time concepts, and cause-and-effect relationships. For example, a morning activity that follows a specific sequence (e.g., arrival, greetings, morning meeting) helps the child understand and predict the course of events. A reasonable allocation of time for reflection enables the child to take the necessary time to process and to become familiar with easy and complex concepts, and consolidate them through exploration, research, and continuous adaptation. In this regard, curricular activities should always reserve time for children to reflect on their experiences.

Encouraging a sense of responsibility: A harmonious daily flow helps children develop a sense of responsibility as they learn to participate in activities and look after their personal interests. Activities such as tidying up or cleaning up after play, washing hands before eating, or packing personal belongings cultivate a sense of responsibility and ownership. This supports the development of essential life skills and promotes a sense of belonging within the class or group community.

Supporting language and communication skills: The daily routine provides a context for language and communication development. Through daily activities, the child engages in conversations, follows directions, and participates in meaningful interactions with the educator and peers. The daily routine creates a platform for vocabulary development, language modeling, and strengthening communication skills.

Encouraging healthy habits: The daily schedule often includes activities that promote health and well-being. These may include regular hand washing, brushing teeth, healthy eating habits, physical exercise, and rest or sleep time. Practicing these routines consistently, helps the child develop healthy habits that contribute to his or her overall well-being.

Building a sense of order and time concepts: Routines help children understand the concepts of time, order, and sequencing. By experiencing daily routines, the child learns to recognize the order of events and understand the passage of time (e.g., morning, afternoon, evening). This basic understanding contributes to his cognitive development and the ability to organize his thoughts and actions.

Improving willingness to learn: Daily routines create an environment that supports a willingness to learn. When a child knows what to expect and feels secure in their daily routine, they are more open to educational experiences. A structured routine allows for a balanced combination of active engagement, rest, and focused learning, optimizing the child›s willingness and motivation to engage in educational activities.

Strengthening classroom/group management: The daily structure serves as the basis for effective class or group management. A well-structured routine helps educators manage transitions smoothly, maintain order, and allocate time effectively. This minimizes interruptions, reduces challenging behaviors, and creates a positive educational environment for both educators and children.

Overall, daily routines offer numerous benefits in early childhood education, contributing to a child›s emotional well-being, social development, cognitive growth, and readiness to learn. By creating a consistent and supportive time structure, educators create an optimal environment for the holistic development of young children.

ECE institutions and written routines: ECE institutions should have written routines adapted to different age groups and the form of ECE service provision, harmonized with the previously mentioned objectives. Some of the essential elements of daily routines can be found in "Practical Guide to Supporting the Implementation of the ECE Curriculum" along with models provided for different age groups.

Maximizing the value of time in the institution: The time children spend in an institution is valuable, and the way the educator uses it is of great importance. Therefore, activities must be planned efficiently. Since the main goal is to follow the interests, curiosity and cultural trajectory of the child, the educator must be prepared in advance (with contexts, examples, stimuli). Furthermore, he/she should use the time to analyze what the child proposes, processes, and creates.

For this reason, planning tools are essential and educators should learn to use them in their daily activities, rather than compiling them periodically. The sensible and simple practice of daily observation tools, weekly and monthly planning, and a comprehensive annual document for educational purposes is critically important for the development of educational activities.

When used properly, these tools can effectively capture the child›s processes and predict possible development or suggest new ideas to the child for an in-depth analysis of various phenomena. If used poorly, they can seem like a waste of time. In fact, they are extremely valuable if kept simple and capable of capturing important processes.

4.6 Educator-child dialogue

The educator should treat the child with the utmost impartiality, evaluating his/her behavior when possible or guiding the child on the best way to create social relationships. In any case, any type of verbal and non-verbal violence should be avoided, which are **prohibited** and profoundly harmful to child development.

Conversations with children and open questions

Every question the child asks is a quest to discover ongoing and cognitive knowledge. Every question an adult asks should stimulate curiosity and exploration in the child. This is achieved through direct (but open) questions and by providing context.

Questions stimulate thought and make the exploration process more accessible and relevant. In this sense, the educator must be able to read the possible ways, always leaving the child free to build his/her own way of learning.

Ultimately, these questions also serve to understand what the child thinks about an issue, as well as to stimulate new thoughts and gather his/her thoughts which should be incorporated into planning by educational staff.

Questions posed to the child are called general questions or open questions. They are divided into three types:

- Reflective
- Circular
- Strategic

For more information, please refer to the "Practical Guide to Supporting the Implementation of the ECE Curriculum".

During conversation, it is important that all children are allowed to participate. At the same time, the child should not be forced, and as such, the silence or individual way of participation of each child should be respected.

The conversation should be as natural as possible so that the child can experience this moment as best as possible, as an opportunity to



develop, but also to learn about teamwork, especially from a collective perspective. For this reason, it is essential to create dialogue situations even in small groups. In any case, the question-answer approach should be avoided (where educators ask numerous questions and the child is forced to answer).

Ways of reflection, in fact, arise in large groups, but it is precisely working in small groups that creates opportunities to delve deeper into an issue and to give the floor to those who are more shy or less communicative.

In order to debate and borrow concepts and knowledge from each other, the educator creates smaller groups of children to give them more time to explore and think.

4.7 Inclusion and inclusive approach

Child inclusion is a right articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as one of the general values of the Constitution of Kosovo. Promoting inclusion in early childhood education means valuing and respecting the diversity of all children and creating an inclusive educational environment that is welcoming and supportive for all, without distinction. This means that program content, plans (weekly and monthly plans as well as individual educational plans (IEPs), strategies and the educational environment support individual needs so that each child is able to develop her/his full potential.

Early childhood education institutions must create welcoming environments for all children so that they experience the best possi-

ble educational experience. Inclusion means including all the differences that children carry. It means creating opportunities for every child (and their families) to develop, helping them to be protagonists of the **educational** process. It is mandatory to use inclusive language without prejudice or stereotypes, avoiding the use of gender-specific pronouns or making assumptions about a child's ability based on his/her appearance or background.

Building relationships with families is an important process which entails learning about their values, beliefs, and traditions. The educator should ensure that families feel welcome in the group and encourage them to participate in early childhood education institutions.

Different learning strategies that respond to different learning abilities help the child easily feel part of a group/class system. The overall goal is to support children with disabilities by working with parents, professional staff, and specialists to develop and implement individual plans for them. The educator must provide the necessary support to help all children participate fully in class/group activities.

Early childhood education institutions should see children as an integrated and normal part of their work during early childhood education. The support and commitment of educational, professional, managerial, administrative staff, and community members are essential to ensure inclusive and group education for all children, regardless of their differences. To become agents of change and promoters of social inclusion, the educator must develop institutional capacities to work with diverse groups of children, to ensure participation, and to support development and learning.

Inclusion in early education is a multidimensional approach that aims to provide equal opportunities for all children, ensuring that they feel valued and supported in their development. This begins with recognizing the uniqueness of each child, appreciating their diverse abilities, cultural backgrounds, and learning styles. Inclusive education ensures that every child, regardless of their abilities, has access to quality learning experiences in environments that embrace diversity and promote participation.



The educator builds a sense of belonging by creating an environment where children feel accepted and respected, strengthening self-confidence and encouraging positive interactions with peers and educators. Inclusion is not just about physical presence in a group/class, but also about meaningful participation in all activities, ensuring that children are active contributors to their learning journey.

Educators have a crucial role in inclusion, as they must adapt educational methods to meet individual needs, using strategies that support different learning styles, while maintaining high expectations for all children.

Inclusive early childhood education prioritizes collaboration with families/legal guardians, recognizing them as key partners in the learning process and valuing their knowledge and contributions.

Professional development is essential for educators to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to create inclusive groups, preparing them to address challenges and implement best practices effectively. Inclusion also emphasizes the importance of cultivating relationships among peers, teaching children empathy, cooperation, and respect for differences from an early age.

Accessible educational environments are another pillar of inclusion, with physical spaces, materials, and resources designed to meet the needs of all children, including those with disabilities. Finally, inclusion in early childhood education is supported by policies and practices that advocate for equity and inclusion at every level, ensuring a systematic commitment to providing opportunities for all children to thrive.

Through these principles, inclusion in early education becomes a powerful framework for nurturing a more just and empathetic society.

4.8 Family participation

Dialogue with families is an essential element of the educational process of early childhood education institutions and, in general, of the culture of education in this period. Families are part of educational activities and must take and maintain a strong role in the early education of their children.

Families are encouraged to participate through dialogue and exchange of ideas and resources, therefore, the educational institution should be a place of collective change and communication between individuals in a social system. This is an environment that welcomes diverse individuals who act together and share a journey of individual and collective growth: children, educators and parents.

Early childhood education institutions, as educational spaces, should be based on shared responsibility in the education of the child, recognizing the active and responsible role of each family in the education of their child. The educational journey begins with the family through the process of getting to know each other. Recognizing the parent as an "expert" for their child, especially in the initial period of attendance at the early childhood institution, means appreciating her/his role in companionship and safekeeping, as well as the gradual transition from the child's cognitive-emotional world within the family towards the development of other relationships that are formed within the educational institution.



This entails providing a space that encourages the contribution of parents/legal guardians, who collaborate with the ECEI and educational staff, creating a community around the child and where participants find meaning and purpose in participation. Talking about parental participation from this perspective, means asking the parent to be "part" of the educational process within the institution. This requirement is related to "action" in a "part" of the process and educational journey, thus bringing what people—girls/boys, women/men, mothers/fathers, legal guardians, grandparents, citizens—believe they can contribute to the context of early childhood education.

Sharing and building educational experiences with the parent/legal guardian, with the educator, but above all with oneself and with other children, also means bringing their perspective into an environment that values and pays attention to differences.

This involves everyone understanding the other's perspective accurately and considering different perspectives as an enrichment of discussions and ideas, rather than as a limitation. In this way, the engagement of parents/legal guardians is a form of taking a very active role in life at the ECEI, with a lot of

responsibility because engaging with the issue of early childhood education means taking responsibility for the future and interests of the community.

Participation in early childhood education institutions carries the concept of democracy as a way of life, thought, imagination, and as an act that projects the future.

Parenting constantly evolves throughout children's journey during early childhood education and beyond. The educator's task is also to encourage different types of participation, in which each family can identify the most appropriate ways for collaboration. Therefore, after the initial moments of mutual recognition between children, parents/legal guardians and the ECEI, it is useful to identify ways of interaction that take different forms depending on the topics addressed, the availability and skills of each.

The perspectives of educational teams play a primary role in building these collaborative processes, where the contribution from parents is extremely important. Therefore, it is useful to reflect as a team on the appropriate method for approaching the family context. The approach is strongly influenced by each educator's idea of the family in general terms and by their understanding of the different types of families that can be encountered. Finding appropriate strategies for each family means supporting the opinions of each participant in the dialogue, improving the approach, and making it more accessible to the family.

Ways of involving the family and honest relationships are further elaborated in the **"Practical Guide to Supporting the Implementation of the ECE Curriculum."**

Opportunities for parent participation in ECEIs, with a strong focus on collaboration and child-centered approaches, include:

Learning as a shared process:

- Sharing family traditions, stories, or professions to enrich class/group discussions.
- Collaboration on thematic projects where children explore real-world phenomena, using parental input to provide details from their daily lives.
- Providing opportunities for experiential learning, bringing in different materials or characters, such as demonstrating a profession, discussing a profession, or carrying out an outdoor activity.

Documentation and feedback

- Review of information and documentation of children's work placed in classrooms/groups or shared spaces, which reflect the children's journeys and educational experiences.
- Providing comments, suggestions on demonstrated work, or opinions on your child's behavior or extending learning at home.

Contributing with family stories or observations that complement and enrich the documentation, creating an uninterrupted connection between home and the ECE institution.

Workshop and dialogue

- Participation of parents/legal guardians in dialogues about pedagogy, through a professional and friendly approach, helping parents to better understand how children learn and how they can support this at home.
- Engaging parents/legal guardians in hands-on activities, such as art workshops or science explorations, reflecting children's experiences in preschool institutions.
- Sharing experiences with other parents in structured discussions, fostering a supportive community of children.

Collaboration on projects

- Assistance from parents/legal guardians in planning and implementing projects by sharing knowledge or providing resources (e.g., tools for a construction project or knowledge for a cultural exploration).

- Participation in project activities, such as assisting with research, accompanying on excursions, or assisting with class/group experiments.
- Participating as an audience for presentations of children's projects, offering encouragement and constructive feedback.

Contributions to the environment

- Providing natural or recycled materials for children to use in art or construction projects.
- Helping to organize outdoor play spaces or gardens, encouraging sustainability and connection with nature.
- Providing suggestions on how spaces can be reorganized or improved to reflect children's evolving interests and needs.

Community building

- Participating in cultural celebrations, festivals, or seasonal activities that bring families together and highlight diversity.
- Volunteering for community service projects or initiatives to improve the institution/school.
- Contributing to family evenings, preparing joint lunches, or parent-child activities that promote informal connections between families and staff.

Decision-making

- Parent councils that provide input into policies, curriculum focus, or community initiatives.
- Collaborative discussions with educators and administrators to align ECEI objectives with family and community needs.
- Regular forums where parents can express their opinions and suggest improvements.

Daily interactions

- Daily conversations during child drop-off or pick-up hours, allowing for information on the child's progress or challenges.
- Sharing observations about the child's behavior at home, which can inform and complement the education that occurs in the ECEI.
- Collaborating on individual plans to support the child's unique developmental needs, ensuring consistency between the home environment and the ECEI.

These opportunities are based on the belief that parents/legal guardians are co-educators, not simply passive observers. By engaging in meaningful ways, families help create a rich and dynamic learning ecosystem that nourishes not only children, but also the broader educational community. This approach values parents as co-educators, by recognizing their essential role in creating a rich and interconnected learning ecosystem

4.9 Transitions

The transition of children from family to Early Childhood Education Institutions, from group to group, from one institution to another, and from early education to primary education, are central aspects for promoting the child's development from an emotional and social point of view. Various actors are essential and responsible in defining and guiding the child through these stages in different life and learning contexts. The success of these processes depends on cooperation and the shared educational responsibilities between the child's various referring stakeholders. Therefore, it is necessary to establish effective measures, to identify and provide supportive ways for the family-institution relationship and vice versa, and to activate and develop communication networks as a resource for the family that, among other things, also encourages networking between different services in an area/region.

High-quality education and care play an important role in the holistic development of



the child, not only in learning and educational achievements - cognitive skills such as literacy (in their own way) and numeracy, social and emotional behavior and preparation for social relationships - but also for the long-term and sustainable impact on performance and participation in later stages of education. For this to happen, the educational system must be integrated and coherent. A child who transitions from an early childhood education institution to school, and who starts school positively, is more likely to perceive school as an important, safe and trustworthy place, to have a positive attitude towards learning and to have positive expectations for their own abilities and lifelong learning. However, this will only happen if the child's transition through the educational system is well-organized and harmonious.

The transition process must occur gradually; it should begin well before the child starts attending the school or institution and ensure that the child and family have a sense of belonging to the institution/school and that the educator understands and support this.

Successful transition

Commencing education in an Early Childhood Education institution involves the participation of the child and other participants, such as the family, the educational, professional and managerial staff of the institution. Therefore, successful transitions depend on the nature of relationships and communication between all participants involved in a child's early education. Children's friendships, relationships with peers, and relationships with their educators are vital.

Research shows that there are several essential processes that must be continuously developed in order for the transition to be successfully realized, such as:

- Policies that support new development structures and link education levels;
- Continuous professional development of educators, both at theoretical and practical level;
- Continuity of communication with the family environment and the community.

Transition and successful school start have been identified as factors that neutralize some social and economic advantages and promote learning sustainability.

A child who starts school positively is more likely to perceive school as an essential place, have a positive attitude towards learning, and develop positive expectations for their own skills that they develop throughout life.

Successful transition is vital for child's emotional well-being and cognitive development; transition can also facilitate the early integration of groups with different origins, becoming a necessary factor for inclusion. Positive transitions help to reduce the negative consequences of experiencing change, such as institution/school phobia, functional illiteracy, school dropout rates, etc., thus promoting equal opportunities at the time of starting compulsory education.

In the Practical Guide Supporting Implementation of Early Childhood Education Curriculum, practical strategies are explained and provided for the types of transitions, which are:

- Transition from home to ECEI (first days)
- Transition from home to ECEI and vice versa (every day)
- Daily transitions
- Transition to primary school

Chapter V

Documentation and assessment in the learning process

5



5. Documentation and assessment in the learning process

5.1. Assessment and Learning

Learning is a social and collaborative process. The competences presented in this curriculum are acquired by children through organized learning experiences, both in and outside ECE institutions. The curriculum is implemented by educational staff and the impact on children's learning depends on many factors, including pedagogical approaches and methodologies, the environment and materials, which are reflected in the assessment of children's progress. The assessment process should be continuous and coherent throughout the implementation of the entire curriculum. The IBE-UNESCO Glossary of Curriculum Terminology (2013) defines Assessment for Learning as "The assessment of a child's progress and achievements, the primary purpose of which is to support and enhance learning by adapting the educational process to meet the child's needs."

Typically, evaluation is a well-defined, determined, and intentional process, and should not be compiled and read as a judgment. This process involves tracking and observing, documenting and interpreting children's behavior, skills and experiences in order to help educators and parents/legal guardians make informed decisions that support the child's overall development. Assessment in ECE aims to help children reach their full potential by creating a supportive and tailored environment for their learning and development in all aspects. The purpose of assessment in early education is NOT to measure children's performance through standardized testing.

The purpose of assessment IS to observe and document their developmental moments, educational processes and interactions with the aim of supporting their full development in a way that is tailored and sensitive to individual needs.

To approach the complex concept of assessment, one must consider the context in which it will be conducted. To make sense of the concept of early childhood assessment, it is necessary to understand what early childhood education means.

Assessment is part of any quality early childhood education program. When educators conduct an assessment, they observe a child to obtain information about what he/she knows and what he/she can do.

Observing and documenting a child's work and performance on an ongoing basis enables an educator to gather various materials and forms for the child's development and learning. With this information, the educator can begin to make effective plans based on each child's needs.

Effective assessment also includes collaboration with the family, taking into account the contributions and perspectives of parents\legal guardians to better understand the child's development and progress. This assessment model also helps parents plan how they can help extend development and learning to their homes.

Assessment in ECE also helps in the early detection of potential challenges or difficulties in child's development, enabling referrals for early intervention and specialized support. This is essential to help children overcome any obstacles in the early stages of life.

Please refer to the Practical Guide Supporting Implementation of the ECE Curriculum.

It should be taken into account that children at an early age engage in reflection and self-assessment by building awareness about their learning. The educational staff support self-assessment in children by using various techniques, such as reflective discussions with

open questions in small groups, which aim to encourage children to think and elaborate on their experience, motives, and ways of the actions they have undertaken during the implementation of activities. This type of self-assessment is related to relevant situations and should not be generalized to assess the child's achievements. Educational staff include such reflective moments in their assessment of children.

5.2. Observation

Children are different and have different intellects, languages, and strategies for exploring and making sense of the world. The educator's job is to support their learning strategies and processes. It should be taken into account that there is no such thing as a completely objective observation. Therefore, observation is subjective and participatory. Even more so when it is done by educators who share experiences and stories with the child, and who, consequently, cannot have an objective and detached perspective.

Before starting the observation, it must be clear what the observation will focus on, as it is unimaginable that everything can be observed. Let's think about a young child's experience in learning and exploring new material. Educational staff can observe the use of the senses, hesitations and enthusiasm, what the child creates with new material, the child's observation of what his friends are doing and the relationships established between children who are doing the same thing, and much more.

Setting the purpose of the observation and sharing the purpose with other educational staff helps in better observation and documentation. The choice of the observation object should be made in harmony with the activity or project planned to be carried out. Educational staff observe children's learning processes and document them in various forms: by taking notes, transcribing children's dialogue, taking photographs and videos, or other forms apposite to the situation.

5.3. Pedagogical documentation

Documents are the basis for assessment. The documentation process is described as a compilation of "traces" of learning and "visible listening". The purpose of documentation is to make learning visible, which enables collaborative discussion and interpretation with others to develop an educational plan for further learning and experiences. Planning what to do next with children arises from the discussion and interpretation of documentation; in this way, pedagogical documentation contributes to a child-centered curriculum.

Pedagogical documentation is an essential tool for understanding the child›s learning processes and the essence of the educational process in Early Childhood Education Institutions. Documentation is understood as a didactic tool that identifies and makes visible the cognitive practices and processes of the child and the adult. These processes become visible by interpreting and sharing theories, knowledge, and opinions. ECE institutions provide a safe environment and a «good life» within it. Pedagogical documentation is a necessary tool to support constructive and reflective thinking and interpretation, therefore it is a tool that connects the educator, parent, and child at different levels. Documentation allows the assessment to be context-based, highlighting processes that affect all aspects of "living" in the ECE institution.

Assessment to demonstrate the progress and development of children›s thoughts and feelings is also a valuable tool for making educational staff aware of the limitations of their knowledge. Based on this awareness, educational staff, but also parents/legal guardians, can expand their understanding, improve their emotional response to the child›s learning processes, and deepen their sense of connection with children.

Each early childhood education institution can use different documentation methods, strategies and instruments, including:

- daily diaries,
- thematic projects,
- publications,
- photographic images,
- video recordings or similar.



Each documentation strategy allows parents/legal guardians to see some fragments of daily life in the ECE institution and to talk with their child about visible (documented) experiences.

5.4. Assessment documentation (frequency and form)

Educators should collect observations and documentation throughout the year and compile periodic assessments at the individual level for children, twice within the educational year. While observation and pedagogical documentation are ongoing processes and inform assessment, the documented assessment process, which includes completing the relevant forms and collaborating with parents/legal guardians, is carried out first in the middle of the school year, or after a sufficient period for observation and documentation (not less than three months), and second, at the end of the school year.

Periodic assessment requires educational staff to:

- Draft a document containing data for each competence and a description of the child's progress and challenges in the respective competence. The description should be clear and concise and should be linked to the documentation containing the relevant details.
- provide at least one piece of documentation (or part of documentation) for each competence the child has worked on. The documentation should include different moments from more than a single activity, from different time periods included in the assessment. It is not necessary for this assessment to be individual, but it can be part of the documentation of an educational project.

Models for drafting these documents can be found in the ECE Curriculum Implementation Guide.

In addition to periodic assessment, educational staff develop weekly summary reports for the respective educational group describing activities carried out during the previous week, including the competences intended to be developed, the progress and interests shown by children during the activities and the manner in which they were carried out, and displaying documentation that supports the report, such as dialogue sequences or children's reactions. During the compilation of the weekly report, educators share their experiences and observations at the group and child level. They also communicate and gain the experience of professional collaborators who support the educational process in the group. In this way, the report is more objective, more reliable, and based on reflection and documentation from all parties involved in the educational process.

These weekly summary reports are shared with the parents/legal guardians of the respective group at the end of each week.

Chapter VI

Curriculum Glossary



6. Curriculum Glossary

Accountability

In general terms, accountability can be defined as a process by which actors provide reasons for their actions against the backdrop of possible negative (or positive) consequences. The concept of accountability is particularly important in the context of decentralized education systems that encourage school autonomy, including decisions concerning the curriculum.

Early Childhood Education

Refers to the education of children to stimulate them to achieve their full potential from birth until the moment they enter the first grade of primary school.

Pre-primary education

Education typically designed for children from 3 years of age to the start of primary school. The educational properties of pre-primary education are characterized by interaction with peers and educators, through which children improve their use of language and social skills, and start to develop logical and reasoning skills.

Children are also introduced to alphabetical and mathematical concepts, and encouraged to explore their surrounding world and environment. Supervised gross motor activities (i.e. physical exercise through games and other activities) and play-based activities can be used as learning opportunities to promote social interactions with peers and to develop skills, autonomy and school readiness. Pre-primary education in Kosovo is an educational program for children aged five (5) years old, which is offered within the framework of primary school and Early Childhood Education institutions.

Morning meeting

It is the time that the group or class dedicates to a formal and informal conversation regarding what is happening in the institution, personal and collective events, as well as a time for reflection, co-planning, and analysis of documentation.

Documentation

Documentation makes the child's learning processes visible to inform educational actions and generate knowledge and research. Documentation is not carried out only for families, but rather for transparency to communicate and make accessible what happens within the educational service, which are the important moments of learning, relationship and discovery of the child who trusts us.

Documentation also means building a memory of educational experiences, confirming what we believe happened among children by trying to interpret possible events, and capturing invisible but significant aspects of childhood growth processes.

Education provided to children of a very early age

From newborns to six years old and whose mission is to educate and socialize them on the pillars of play and inclusion.

Also known in some parts of the world as elementary or basic education, this kind of education is provided in specialized educational institutions, formal or informal settings, with the facilitation and supervision of educators, caregivers or, in some cases (homeschooling), parents/legal guardians. They may be called Early Childhood Education institutions, community-based centers, private kindergartens, public-private kindergartens, centers for young children, or nurseries.

Introduction to the early childhood education institution/adaptation

The beginning of the educational/school year is the time when the child attends the educational institution for the first time, becomes familiar with the educational context, the educator, the educational environment, the time and organization, and finally with other children. Parents may stay partially in the institution to facilitate the recognition process.

Multidisciplinary approach

Interdisciplinary education involves the use and integration of methods and analytical frameworks from or related to multiple disciplines to examine a topic, problem, question, or address a topic. Interdisciplinary education uses disciplinary approaches to examine topics. However, it goes further: taking knowledge from various relevant disciplines and synthesizing their contribution to understand, as well as integrate these ideas into a more comprehensive and coherent analytical framework.

Multiple intelligences

With the theory of multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner demonstrates that there is not one single intelligence, but nine, which refer to equally independent brain structures. This means that an individual is intelligent in nine ways even if, in reality, the different parts of intelligence combine and complement each other.

Non-formal education

Non-formal education is the type of education that takes place outside the formal education curriculum. Non-formal learning activities are voluntarily and carefully designed to promote the personal, social and professional development of participants.

Numeracy

Numeracy is the ability to reason and apply simple numerical concepts. Basic numeracy skills consist of understanding basic mathematics such as addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

Observation

Observation is necessary for the educator to recognize, document, and interpret the child's educational processes in the educational context. This includes gathering elements to develop educational goals, create shared choices, and generate knowledge about learning processes.

Portfolio assessment

Assessment based on the systematic collection of child's work (such as written assignments, drafts, artwork, and presentations) that represents competencies, exemplary work, or the child's developmental progress. In addition to examples of their work, most portfolios include reflective statements prepared by learners. Portfolios are assessed for evidence of learner achievement with respect to established learning outcomes and standards.

Versatility

The ability to perform tasks and solve problems. (Source: CEDEFOP 2011). It is the ability, proficiency or dexterity to carry out tasks that come from education, training, practice or experience. It can enable the practical application of theoretical knowledge to particular tasks or situations. It is applied more broadly to include behaviours, attitudes and personal attributes that make individuals more effective in particular contexts such as education and training, employment and social engagement.

Inclusive education - Education is designed to facilitate learning by individuals who, for various reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods to participate and fulfill the learning objectives in an educational program.

Educational programs in disability education may follow a curriculum similar to that offered in the regular education system. However, they take individual needs into account by providing specific resources (e.g. specially trained personnel, equipment or space) and, if appropriate, modified educational content or educational objectives. These programs can be offered to the child individually within already

existing educational programs or as a separate class/group in the same or separate educational institutions. (Source: UIS 2012).

Social and emotional learning (SEL)

Learning how to manage feelings and relationships with others. This includes ways to also recognize emotions and to maintain positive relationships in developing sympathy and empathy. It involves the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that learners need to create positive relationships, build resilience, handle challenging situations, make appropriate decisions and care for others. Commonly it focuses on skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making. Recent advances in neuroscience have shed new light on the role of non-cognitive processes in human reasoning and consciousness, revolutionizing thinking concerning the role of feeling and intuition in solving novel problems. While the traditional view may have been that feelings interfere with an individual's ability to solve problems, this old adage failed to point out that in the absence of feeling an individual is unlikely to solve the problem at all. (Adapted from: Seel 2012)

Soft skills

Term used to indicate a set of intangible personal qualities, traits, attributes, habits and attitudes that can be used in many different types of jobs. As they are broadly applicable they are also seen as transferable

54skills, even if the idea of transferability is often questioned because individuals learn to perform tasks in particular contexts and may not be able to apply them to others. Examples of soft skills include: empathy, leadership, sense of responsibility, integrity, self-esteem, self-management, motivation, flexibility, sociability, time management and making decisions.

The term is also used in contrast to 'hard' skills that are considered as more technical, highly specific in nature and particular to an occupation, and that can be (generally) taught more easily than soft skills.

Spiral curriculum

Curriculum design (based on the ideas of the American psychologist Jerome Bruner) in which key concepts and topics are repeatedly presented over time in the context of new, broader and more complex learning experiences. It serves for consolidating pre-existent learning as well as broadening and exploring more in-depth the different learning content.

Standard(s)

A standard is a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose. (Source: Website of the International Organization for Standardization–ISO)..

Teaching

There are diverse approaches to teaching which also implicitly reflect the approach to learning. The didactic approach mainly entails lecturing and is typically teacher-centred and content-oriented, i.e. teaching as transmission where the learners are considered to be the passive recipients of information transmitted. Teaching can also be seen as supporting the process of learners' knowledge construction and understanding, building on what is already known by the learner and involving a learner-centred approach (i.e. teaching as facilitation). Another approach emphasizes the development of learners' cognitive processes and awareness and control of thinking and learning.

Time allocation

The amount of time to be devoted to instruction in a certain subject or discipline according to official regulations, requirements or recommendations. It should be distinguished from the time that is actually spent on learning.

Transdiscipline

Transdiscipline is an approach to knowledge that draws on cultural contributions from many fields to address challenges within our society. This approach combines ideas from different fields, creating knowledge that is useful in both theory and practice.

Transdiscipline completely transcends traditional boundaries between disciplines. It forms new ways of thinking, based on the interconnection between different cultural viewpoints. This approach supports the creation of integrated and sustainable solutions to complex problems using a comprehensive and innovative perspective.

Transdisciplinary approach

An approach to curriculum integration which dissolves the boundaries between the conventional disciplines and organizes teaching and learning around the construction of meaning in the context of real-world problems or themes.

Tutoring

Any activity offering a learner guidance, counselling or supervision by an experienced and competent professional. The tutor supports the learner throughout the learning process (at school, in training centres or on the job). Tutoring can cover: academic subjects to improve educational achievement; careers to ease transition from school to work; and personal development to encourage learners to make wise choices. (Source: CEDEFOP 2011).

Values

Culturally defined principles and core beliefs shared by individuals and groups that guide and motivate attitudes, choices and behaviour, and serve as broad guidelines for social life.

Well-being (in ECEI and in school)

Wellbeing in school contributes to learners' physical and psychological health and development. As such it is strongly connected to learning. It consists of cognitive, emotional, and physical components, i.e. a learner's thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.

Wellbeing in school generally involves: positive attitudes and emotions toward school in general; enjoyment in school; positive academic self-concept; absence of worries about school; absence of physical complaints in school; and absence of social problems in school. Wellbeing contributes to the maintenance of a positive basis for learning at school. On the other hand, learning is crucial for the occurrence of wellbeing because successful learning is an important source of enjoyment in school. Thus, wellbeing and learning in school are interdependent concepts which influence each other. (Source: Seel 2012).

Biodiversity

It is traditionally defined as the diversity of all forms of life on earth. It includes the number of species (living things), their genetic variations, and the interaction of these living forms within complex ecosystems. It is a fascinating world for children's explorations, which is explicitly addressed in the various skills proposed in our curriculum and which today, with the climate changes that are taking place, takes on even greater importance.

Discourses

We define discourse as the manifestation of one's thought as a single and individual act of linguistic communication. It is critical in building a child's personality, skills, and culture. The educator should support him/her through a correct and respectful conversation, without prejudice and social judgment. Conversation among children should become a daily part of the work within the ECEI, during meetings, in small group work, and at any other time when the child feels the need or right to talk.

Generation of stereotypes

A stereotype is a predetermined opinion about people or groups, which ignores the assessment of the individual case and results from a prior process of overgeneralization and oversimplification or a false deductive operation. We need to pay attention to the generation of stereotypes in kindergarten carefully avoiding judging the child and defin-

ing him/her through specific characteristics, and instead always trying to use open communication, capable of positively improving each of his/her characteristics.

Appraisal

In the process of educating children, it is essential that as adults we are able to appreciate each of their cultural processes and products and provide them with the best conditions to develop their curiosities and skills, individually and in groups. To value a person (and a child) means to place a person in a position to express and highlight all of his/her abilities and qualities, by entrusting him/her with an appropriate role and task. To value a child means to support him/her in his/her learning processes and encourage him/her in the face of difficulties, to help where he/she needs it and to ensure the right presence when he/she needs it.



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The early childhood education curriculum was piloted in 10 municipalities, in 13 early childhood education institutions and in 17 pre-primary classes. For the pilot phase, a report was also drafted with the findings of this process, which was included in the final Curriculum document.

The list of the working group engaged by decision of MESTI is presented with the aim of being closer to the users of this document and providing additional clarifications and answers to any questions, regarding the document as a whole or the practical guides that are part of the curriculum document for early childhood education, which directly contribute to the implementation of the curriculum.

Republika e Kosovës
Republika Kosova-Republic of Kosovo
Qeveria –Vlada-Government
Ministria e Arsimit, Shkencës, Teknologjisë dhe Inovacionit/
Ministarstvo Obrazovanja i Nauke,Tehnologije i Inovacija/Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

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V E N D I M

Për emërimin e grupit punues për hartimin e kurrikulës bërthamë për edukim në fëmijërinë e hershme

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1.22. Lulavere Behluli, Kordinatore e Programit te Edukimit, Save the Children, anëtare;
1.23. Remzije Krasniqi, Këshilltare për arsim dhe avokim, SOS fshati, anëtare;
1.24. Shukrije Lecaj, Kordinatore pedagogjike, Caritas, anëtare.

2. Vendimi hynë në fuqi me nënshkrimin e tij.

A r s y e t i m

Bazuar në dispozitat e cekura më lartë dhe nevojës për emërimin e grupit punues për hartimin e kurrikulës bërthamë për edukim në fëmijërine e hershme, u vendos si në dispozitiv të këtij vendimi.

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2. DAP/MASHTI;
3. Zyrës së SP/MASHTI;
4. Kabinetit të Ministres/MASHTI;
5. Arkivit të MASHTI.

Fadile Dyla

Zv. e Sekretares së përgjithshme në MASHTI





Republic of Kosovo
Ministry of Education and Science

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

Republic of Kosovo
Ministry of Education and Science

National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education in the Republic of Kosovo

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Për aprovimin e Kornizës Kombëtare për Sigurimin e Cilësisë në Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme

1. Aprovohet Korniza Kombëtare për Sigurimin e Cilësisë në Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme në Republikën e Kosovës, së bashku me dokumentet përcjellëse: Instrumenti për vlerësimin e brendshëm të cilësisë në institucionet e edukimit në fëmijërinë e hershme dhe Udhëzuesi për vlerësimin e brendshëm të cilësisë në institucionet e edukimit në fëmijërinë e hershme.

2. Dokumentet e përmendura në paragrafin 1 të këtij Vendimi plotësohen dhe përditësohen në vazhdimësi, në përputhje me nevojat e identifikuara nga vlerësimi i institucioneve gjatë zbatimit të tij.

3. Vendimi hyn në fuqi me nënshkrimin e tij.

A r s y e t i m

Duke u mbështetur në dispozitat e shënuara më lart, kërkesës së dt. 17.06.2026 të DEFH/DAP në MASH për aprovimin e Kornizës Kombëtare për Sigurimin e Cilësisë në Edukimin në Fëmijërinë e Hershme, së bashku me dokumentet përcjellëse, u vendos si në dispozitiv të këtij vendimi.

Vendimi i dorëzohet:
1. Kabinetit të Ministrit/MASH;
2. Zyrës së Sekretares së përgjithshme/MASH;
3. DEFH/DAP në MASH;
4. Drejtorive Komunale të Arsimit;
5. Arkivit/MASH.

Hajrulla Çeku

Ministër në detyrë në Ministrinë e Arsimit dhe Shkencës

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I

ACRONYMS 08

HOW TO READ AND USE THIS DOCUMENT 09

What is included in this document 09

Who uses the document, where and when 10

How to read the quality indicators 10

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE FRAMEWORK 14

1.1 What the Framework is and what it is for 14

1.2 To whom it applies and at which levels 15

1.3 The components of this document and how they interrelate 15

2. QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION 16

2.1 Definition of quality ECE and its importance 16

a) Structural quality 16

b) Process quality 17

c) Outcome quality 17

2.2 Quality in Kosovo within legislation and public policy 17

1) EU Quality Framework for ECEC (Council Recommendation 2019) 17

2) UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4.2) 18

3) European Commission Guidelines on Inclusion and Equity in ECEC (2022) 18

4) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) 18

2.3 Roles and responsibilities at all levels 19

2.4 Quality and quality assurance: the difference between them 21

2.5 Quality as a continuous process: internal and external assurance 22

2.6 The role of data and evidence in quality assurance 22

3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES 23

1) The child as a rights holder and active participant 23

2) Holistic development and well-being 24

3) Equity, inclusion and non-discrimination 24

4) Play as the main mode of learning 25

5) Partnership with families and communities 25

6) Quality as a continuous and reflective process 26

PART II

4. AREAS, STATEMENTS AND INDICATORS OF QUALITY 29

4.1 Leadership and financing 32

Introductory description 32

Quality statements 32

Quality indicators 33

4.2 Access - Introductory description 36

Quality statements 36

Quality indicators 37

PART II

4.3 Staff - Introductory description 40
Quality statements 42
Quality indicators 42
4.4 Curriculum and pedagogy - Introductory description 46
Quality statements 46
Quality indicators 47
4.5 Monitoring and evaluation - Introductory description 53
Quality statements 53
Quality indicators 54

PART III

5. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE CYCLE IN PRACTICE 58
5.1 Overview of the cycle: plan - implement - evaluate - improve 59
Why this approach matters 60
A cycle that brings all levels together 60
5.2 Internal self-evaluation at institutional level 62
Why self-evaluation matters 63
Self-evaluation as part of the continuous quality cycle 63
The role of leadership in fostering the right culture 63
Educators' self-reflection and professional engagement 64
What good practice in self-evaluation looks like 64
5.3 Monitoring and advisory visits at municipal level 65
5.4 External evaluation and inspection 65
The culture of external evaluation: support, not oversight 66
Benefits of a shared instrument 66
How inspectors build on self-evaluation 67
5.5 Development planning as a result of evaluation 68
How findings inform practice 68
How internal and external evaluation findings are brought together 68
Characteristics of an effective action plan 69
Monitoring progress and evaluating improvement 69
6. GLOSSARY 70
Sources 74
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 77
Working Group for the Development of the National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education in the Republic of Kosovo 78

ACRONYMS

EU	European Union
MED	Municipal Education Directorate
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (European Standards and Guidelines)
ECEI	Early Childhood Education Institution
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
UN	United Nations
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

How to read and use this document

This document, the National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the Republic of Kosovo, is the main reference for quality at the level of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Kosovo. The document articulates a shared national vision for quality ECE, defines what this quality looks like at every level of the system and provides the instruments to monitor, evaluate and continuously improve it.

The document is addressed to all those who have a role in the quality of ECE: policymakers at central level; authorities at municipal level; leaders and educational staff, professional associates and administrative and support staff in ECE institutions; inspectors; parents/legal guardians and other stakeholders with duties and responsibilities in processes related to quality in ECE. The language used throughout the document is deliberately clear, understandable and inclusive, not because the subject is simple, but because quality in early childhood education belongs to everyone and each of the above-mentioned parties has a real and distinct role in achieving it.

What this document contains

The Framework is organised into three substantive parts, all interconnected and designed to be read as a whole.

Section	Content and main audience
Part I: Introduction	The conceptual and contextual foundations: what this Framework is and what it does; what quality in ECE means and why it matters; the legal framework and policies in Kosovo and the international reference requirements; as well as the guiding principles and values that underpin the entire document. Essential text for all users to understand the purpose and logic of the ECE quality assurance system in Kosovo.
Part II: Quality Framework	The core: the quality matrix. For each of the five quality areas, it defines the quality statement and indicators (i.e. descriptors) at central, local/municipal and institutional level, together with an illustration of what good practice looks like. For every stakeholder, from MES to the leader of an ECE institution. The matrix sets out an aspirational goal for what quality could look like in their area of responsibility and how it could be observed and measured.
Part III: Quality Assurance Cycle	Quality assurance in practice: the plan–implement–evaluate–improve cycle, which brings together self-evaluation at institution level with external inspections under a shared vision of quality. The section is accompanied by a separate assessment instrument Annex which translates the institutional-level indicators from the quality matrix into a structured and practical tool for use in ECE institutions for self-evaluation and external assessment. It is designed for regular, team-based use by leaders and educational staff, professional associates and administrative staff, not only in preparation for inspection, but as part of the institution's continuous professional life. Of fundamental importance is the fact that inspectors use the same instrument when carrying out external evaluations. This common instrument is the shared language of quality in Kosovo at institutional ECE level, ensuring that internal reflection and external accountability are harmonised around identical standards and evidence.

Who uses the document, where and when

Different readers use this Framework in different ways, depending on their role. The table below provides practical guidance. All users are encouraged to read the full document at least once: understanding the full picture strengthens their capacity to use each part of the Framework effectively.

Reader	How to use this Framework
Policymakers at central level	Use this Framework as a normative reference for governance, financing, professional development and central-level reporting on ECE. The central-level quality indicators in Part II are more "descriptors" and identify the conditions and practices that characterise quality at system level. Use them to guide policy priorities, identify gaps and orient investments, rather than as a checklist for data collection.
Authorities at local level	Use the Framework to guide your specific responsibilities for the quality of ECE and to structure direct support processes for ECE institutions. Collect and review the self-evaluation results submitted by institutions in your municipality; use these data to identify local-level quality trends in ECE, to target support and to report to MES.
Management, educational staff, professional associates and administrative staff in ECE institutions	Use the document to reaffirm and align with the vision, context and values of quality ECE. Lead regular self-evaluation with the entire staff team using the Self-Evaluation Instrument and use the results to develop your institution's annual development plan. Share the findings with the municipality and the competent education directorate.
Inspectors	Use the national quality standards and the Evaluation Instrument to support ECE institutions in understanding and improving the quality of their services, ensuring full alignment between internal and external evaluation. Use institutions' regular self-evaluation exercises as a starting point and a stable basis for further deepening reflection and improvement.
Parents/legal guardians and other stakeholders	The Framework explains what Kosovo is committed to providing for every child in ECE, as well as what is expected from institutions.

How to read the quality indicators

Throughout Part II, the quality indicators are presented in two types and at three levels of governance: central, municipal and institutional. These are not indicators in the traditional sense of performance measurement. They serve to describe quality by defining the conditions and practices that constitute quality early childhood education at every level of the system. They are not a ready-made checklist for measurement and do not assume that a fully functioning monitoring and evaluation system already exists. Instead, the quality indicators provide a common reference, a picture of what quality looks like, which can guide reflection, planning and professional dialogue at every level and, gradually, can inform data collection and monitoring as the quality assurance system in Kosovo develops.

Part II (Quality Framework) of the document presents two types of indicators:

1) Structural indicators describe the basic conditions that enable the provision of quality ECE. They refer to the existence, regulation and resourcing of key system components, such as legal and policy frameworks, the allocation of duties and responsibilities, staffing requirements, financing mechanisms, curricula, standards, infrastructure and quality assurance systems. Structural indicators usually reflect what exists at a given point in time and are often verified through legislation, official documentation, administrative data or quantitative indicators (e.g. percentages, ratios, service coverage rates). By defining minimum requirements and system capacities, structural indicators establish the conditions in which quality ECE can be provided equitably and sustainably.

2) Procedural indicators focus on how ECE is implemented in practice. They reflect the processes, actions and interactions that take place over time, including leadership practices, pedagogical implementation, inclusive practices, cross-sectoral cooperation, engagement of parents/legal guardians, professional development, internal evaluation and the use of data for improvement of practices. Procedural indicators show how the quality of ECE functions in practice. They are assessed using documented practices, monitoring data, inspection results, observations in classrooms/groups or self-evaluations as evidence. These indicators make visible the way in which structural conditions are translated into meaningful experiences for children and families.

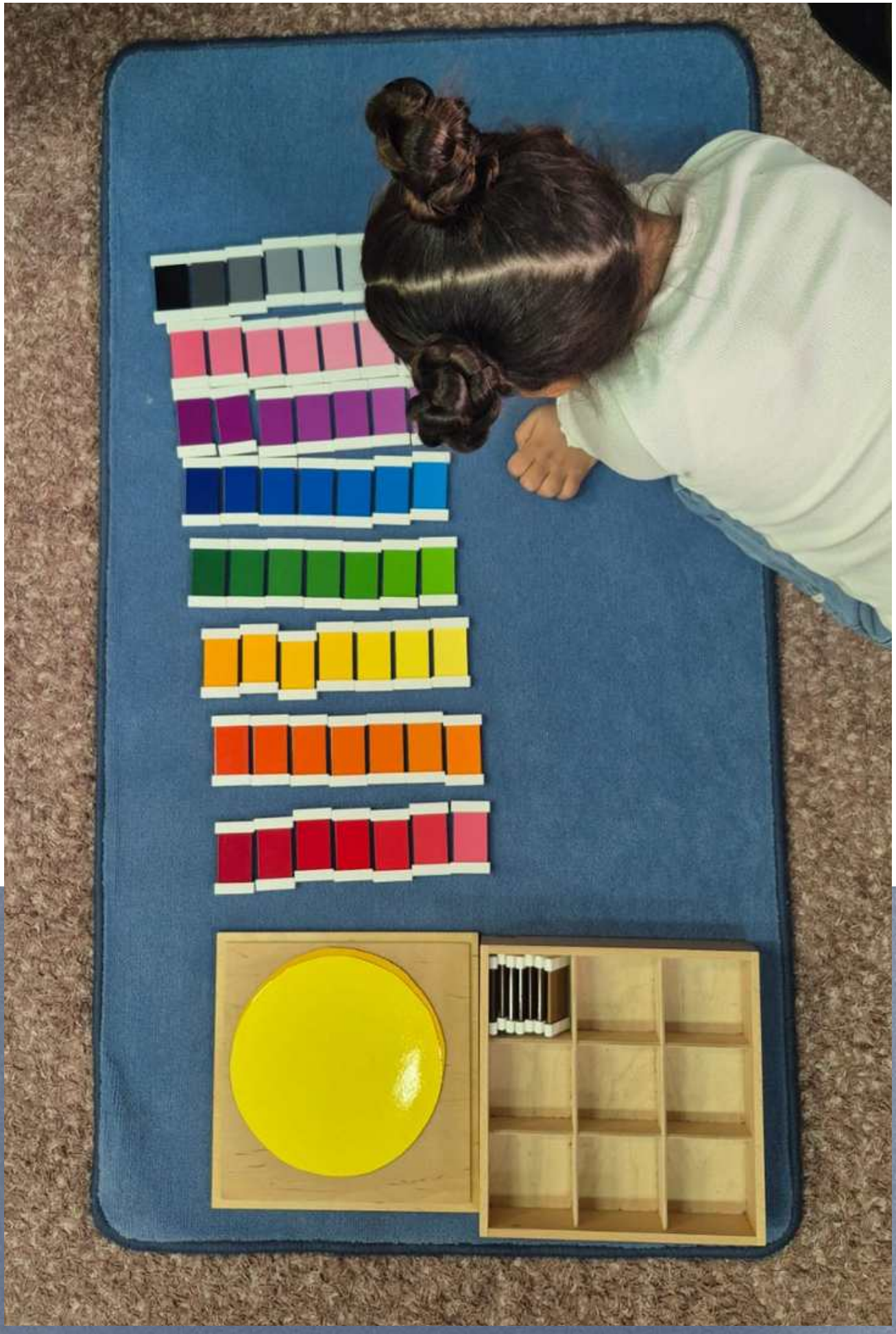
To improve clarity, coherence and usability, the indicators in this Framework have been developed using four approaches, which are applied consistently across all quality dimensions and levels of governance:

- Normative / declarative indicators, which articulate the expectations, principles or standards of the system (e.g. “The system ensures…”, “Policies define…”);
- Existence-based indicators, which verify whether certain frameworks, mechanisms, structures or tools exist and are operational;
- Quantified indicators, which use numerical measures (such as percentages, ratios or frequencies) to support monitoring and comparability over time;
- Process-oriented indicators, which describe the actions, implementation practices or repeated processes that contribute to quality.

Each indicator is formulated according to a predominant logic, avoiding the combination of several evaluation logics within a single indicator. This approach supports transparency in monitoring, facilitates alignment between policies, inspection and self-evaluation, and ensures that indicators can be assessed using appropriate data sources and methods.

Together, the distinction between structural and procedural indicators, as well as the uniform formulation logic applied throughout the Framework, provide a strong basis for evidence-based leadership or governance, accountability and continuous quality improvement in the ECE sector.

PART I
Foundation



1. Purpose and scope of the Framework

1.1 What the Framework is and what it is for

The National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education serves as a common national mechanism for defining, evaluating and continuously improving the quality of ECE provision for all children from birth to the age of six. It is the foundational framework for quality in ECE: the reference that shows every party in the system, from MES to the educator who opens the kindergarten door every morning, what quality looks like in their area of responsibility and what their contribution to ensuring it means.

Quality assurance, as understood in this Framework, focuses on processes, as well as on the conditions, practices and structures that make it possible to provide quality early childhood education. It asks questions such as: **Have the right conditions been created? Are we working in the right way?** This approach differs from monitoring and evaluation, which focus on measuring results and achievements, namely whether objectives have been met or whether indicators have changed. Quality assurance does not replace monitoring and evaluation; on the contrary, it precedes and supports them by creating the conditions that enable the continuous achievement of good results.

The Framework does three things simultaneously:

1) It presents the shared national vision for high-quality ECE in Kosovo, based on evidence, children's rights, the legal framework and national policies, as well as international research evidence on the factors that influence the quality and effectiveness of early childhood service provision.

2) It defines a clear structure for quality organised into five quality areas, each of which includes quality statements and quality indicators at central, municipal and institutional level, providing each level of the system with concrete standards to work towards, as well as clearly differentiated responsibilities. It articulates the quality in ECE to which Kosovo aspires through a system committed to continuous improvement and the best possible outcomes for every child.

3) The Framework firmly integrates quality assurance into everyday work practice by integrating self-evaluation, external evaluation and development planning within a single coherent document and a common set of instruments. The Framework makes continuous improvement the norm for every ECE institution in Kosovo, and not an exceptional response to the inspection process.

What this Framework is not? It is not a legal instrument, a ranking system, a punitive inspection checklist or a bureaucratic compliance exercise. It is also not simply a monitoring and evaluation document. Although it includes clear quality indicators that enable progress to be measured and evaluated, it goes beyond this by establishing common quality standards and guiding continuous improvement processes at all levels of the system.

1.2 To whom it applies and at which levels

This Framework applies to the entire ECE system in Kosovo. Quality in ECE is not the responsibility of any single institution, authority or professional. It stems from coherent and coordinated action at three interdependent levels: central, local and institutional. The Framework makes the responsibilities at each level clear.

Level	Responsibilities in the quality assurance system
Policymakers at central level	Define and communicate the legal and policy framework for ECE. Define national quality standards and coordinate their implementation. Ensure fair and needs-based financing. Train, engage and support inspectors. Collect and analyse national quality data. Report on the state of ECE to the government and development partners (as needed). Ensure that municipalities and institutions have access to the guidance, training and support needed to fulfil their responsibilities for quality.
Authorities at local level	Manage and oversee ECE institutions within their territory in accordance with the legal framework. Monitor quality and compliance with the defined quality standards. Provide practical support and guidance to institutions. Collect, validate and submit quality data to the central-level data system. Ensure cross-sectoral coordination between education, health, social protection and public services directorates, providing integrated support for children and families. They identify and address local barriers to access to services and create conditions for efficient institutional functioning and quality assurance in ECE.
Management, educational staff, professional associates, administrative staff, the Steering Council and the Parents' Council in ECE institutions	Provide ECE in accordance with national standards. Engage the entire staff team in the annual self-evaluation. Identify strengths and development priorities. Develop and implement annual improvement plans. Build genuine partnerships with families and the local community. Maintain the required documentation and submit quality data to the municipality or central institutions, depending on the form of service provision.

Inspectors and external evaluators are also key stakeholders in this system. They use the same quality standards and the same evaluation instrument as ECE institutions, a deliberate design choice that is explained in detail in Part III. Their role is not only to verify compliance, but also to support institutions in developing and maintaining a strong culture of reflection and self-evaluation.

1.3 The components of this document and how they interrelate

This Framework brings together three components that have been developed together, are based on five quality areas and are designed to be used in conjunction with one another. It is important to understand how these components interrelate before addressing any of them in depth.

Component	Purpose	Used mainly by
Narrative Framework (Parts I-III)	Establishes the vision, foundation, quality assurance cycle and operational guidance for the entire system. Explains why the standards exist, what they mean and how they relate to Kosovo's legal and policy context. Provides the rationale and logic for the matrix of quality indicators and the self-evaluation instrument for ECE institutions.	All parties at all levels

Component	Purpose	Used mainly by
Matrix of quality indicators (Part II, integrated into the five chapters by area)	Normative reference. Defines the structural and procedural quality indicators for all five areas at central, municipal and institutional level. Defines what quality looks like in each area of responsibility and identifies indirect (secondary) indicators for measurement.	MES, municipalities, inspectors, leaders of ECE institutions
Evaluation Instrument (Part III) and Assessment Instrument (attached Annex)	Connects institutional self-assessment with external assessment within a shared vision of quality. Turns the institutional-level indicators into a structured and practical evaluation tool. Used by ECE institutions for internal self-evaluation, and by inspectors for external evaluation, creating a unified language for quality assurance at institutional level.	Leaders, educational staff, professional associates and administrative and support staff in ECE institutions

Integrating all three components within a single document represents a deliberate policy choice, informed by international evidence. Scotland's quality improvement framework for Early Learning and Childcare, Australia's National Quality Standard, Croatia's Handbook for Self-Evaluation of Early Childhood and Preschool Education Institutions, Norway's Framework Plan and New Zealand's 'Te Whāriki' all show that quality assurance is most effective when the vision, standards and tools form a coherent whole, owned by the same professional community. When leaders and educators reflect on their practice using the same language and the same criteria as inspectors, and when national policy is based on the evidence generated by the institutions themselves, the system functions as a whole, rather than as a set of disconnected standards and responsibilities.

2. Quality in early childhood education

2.1 Definition of quality ECE and its importance

The first years of a child's life, from birth to the age of six, are the period of the fastest and most decisive development in human life. During these years, the brain develops at an exceptional pace, the foundations of language, cognition, social competence and emotional regulation are established, and experiences of safety and belonging influence the formation of the child's identity and the way in which the child engages in the learning process. Children's experiences in ECE institutions during this period have lasting and long-term effects on their later development.

Decades of international research show this clearly: High-quality ECE brings significant and long-term benefits for children. Children who experience quality ECE develop holistically, build social and emotional skills, resilience and critical and creative thinking, are more likely to enter school ready to learn, achieve the competencies defined in the curriculum, complete secondary education and, as adults, participate fully in society and the economy. Quality in ECE is not an isolated and unchanging process. It is best understood as a set of conditions and practices at the level of the child's daily life, the institution, the municipality and the national system, which together produce the best possible outcomes for children's development, learning and well-being. When discussing quality ECE, three interconnected dimensions are key:

a) Structural quality

Structural quality refers to the regulated inputs and conditions that make quality service provision possible, including the qualifications and training of educators, adult–child ratios, the physical space and its organisation, the availability of learning materials, governance structures, and the adequacy and stability of financing. Structural quality is the foundation: it establishes the

conditions in which good practice can take place and be sustained. It can be defined by law, regulated and monitored through data supported by documentary evidence.

Although structural quality is necessary, it is not sufficient on its own. Well-qualified staff in a well-equipped facility do not automatically produce quality experiences for children. What they produce depends on how those structural conditions are used, and on the pedagogical approach, daily interactions and emotional relationships established between educators and children.

b) Process quality

Process quality refers to what actually happens in the daily life of an ECE institution: the warmth, consistency and responsiveness of educator-child interactions; the quality of the emotional environment and the sense of belonging experienced by children; the intentionality and creativity of pedagogical practice; the richness of the play and exploration that children are supported to engage in; the extent of engagement with families and the community; and the reflective and collaborative culture of the staff team. Process quality is what children experience directly and is the dimension of quality most strongly and consistently associated with outcomes for children's development, well-being and learning.

Process quality depends heavily on professional skill, sound judgement and commitment. It is more difficult to regulate than structural quality and depends more on the working culture in each institution.

c) Outcome quality

Outcome quality refers to the results of ECE provision: children's development, learning, well-being and readiness to transition to primary school. The purpose of quality assurance is to improve structural quality and process quality, while outcomes reflect how effective both of these are. However, outcomes for the child are shaped by many factors beyond ECE provision, including family circumstances, health and previous experience.

This Framework focuses primarily on structural quality and process quality, because these are the dimensions on which institutions and the system can act directly. Where outcome data are available, they provide valuable context for quality improvement planning, but are not used as separate indicators of institutional quality.

2.2 Quality in Kosovo within legislation and public policy

Kosovo's quality assurance system is designed in clear alignment with international commitments and European quality standards. These frameworks complement and strengthen Kosovo's national legal context, providing comparable standards and shared principles that place Kosovo's ECE quality agenda within a broader European and global movement:

1) EU Quality Framework for ECEC (Council Recommendation 2019)

The Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, adopted by the European Union in 2019, sets the European benchmark for national ECE quality systems. It identifies five priority areas: Governance and Financing, Access, Staff, Curriculum, and Monitoring and Evaluation, as the organising axes of quality assurance frameworks, and calls on Member States and countries in the accession process to align their national approaches with them.

2) UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4.2)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires all signatories to ensure that, by 2030, all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. SDG 4.2 positions quality early childhood education and care as a global development priority, not only an education priority, recognising its role in reducing inequality, improving health and social outcomes, and building the foundations for lifelong learning.

3) European Commission Guidelines on Inclusion and Equity in ECEC (2022)

The 2022 European Commission Guidelines on inclusion and equity in early childhood education and care provide concrete guidance on how national systems can ensure that every child, including children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, children with special needs and children from minority or migrant communities, benefits from quality and inclusive services. The Guidelines emphasise universal design, targeted support, staff training in inclusive pedagogy and community outreach as systemic requirements, not optional add-ons.

4) European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG 2015)

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, although developed for the higher education context, have influenced the design of quality assurance architectures in many sectors, including early childhood. Their core principles, that internal and external quality assurance should be aligned, that self-evaluation should be genuine and evidence-based, that quality processes should serve improvement rather than compliance, and that results should be transparent and followed up with concrete actions, are directly applicable to early childhood education and care and have informed the overall design of the quality assurance cycle in Kosovo, as described in Part III.

Kosovo's national regulatory framework for quality rests on three key pillars, summarised in the table below. Together, these three pillars make up the quality architecture of the ECE sector in Kosovo. Laws and administrative instructions define the conditions that every institution must meet and every municipality must implement. The curriculum and supporting documents define the pedagogical vision: what children should experience and how educators and professional staff should work with them. This quality assurance framework, in turn, connects the two through a cycle of continuous improvement: by turning legal obligations and curriculum principles into shared descriptors of good practice, assessing how well they are being followed and supporting every part of the system to improve over time.

Pillar	Key instruments	What it covers for quality in ECE
Laws and administrative instructions	Law on Early Childhood Education: defines the right of every child aged 0-6 to ECE, defines institutional forms, governance responsibilities and provider obligations regarding quality, safety and inclusion. Law on Pre-University Education (No. 04/L-032): the general legal framework for Kosovo's education system; defines the roles of MES, municipal authorities and governing bodies; provides the legal basis for inspection, data collection and quality monitoring.	The legal and administrative framework defines the conditions for quality (i.e. what must exist) and the governance architecture through which quality is regulated, financed, monitored and reported at central and municipal level. The quality indicators in this Framework represent a balance between current legal requirements and aspirations beyond the current legal minimum, signalling the quality towards which Kosovo is working.

Pillar	Key instruments	What it covers for quality in ECE
	Administrative instructions, including those on licensing, staffing norms and inspection: regulate educator qualifications, staff-child ratios, physical space standards, licensing procedures and inspection frequency, as well as other cross-sectoral secondary legislation. The Education Strategic Plan and relevant national policy and strategy documents: define priorities for the expansion, quality improvement and governance of ECE, including Kosovo's commitments regarding EU accession.	
Curriculum for early childhood education	Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 0-6 (MES): The national foundation for the pedagogical approach to ECE in Kosovo defines the vision for children's holistic development, competencies, the play-based pedagogical approach, methodological guidance and principles for planning, observation, assessment of children's development and learning, and cooperation with families, for children aged 0-6 in ECE institutions.	The curriculum defines what quality looks like at the pedagogical core of ECE: what children should experience, how educators plan and interact with them, and how development and learning are documented and reflected on.
Quality Assurance Framework	This National Quality Assurance Framework (the present document): The nationally agreed system in Kosovo for defining, evaluating and improving the quality of ECE organises quality standards around five areas, with descriptors at national, municipal and institutional level. The Evaluation Instrument (Part III, Chapter 6): turns the institutional-level descriptors into a structured tool for internal self-evaluation and external evaluation, shared by institutions and inspectors.	The quality assurance framework defines how quality is collectively understood across the sector, how it is evaluated (through self-evaluation and external evaluation) and how results drive continuous improvement through the plan-implement-evaluate-improve cycle. It connects the legal basis and the curriculum into an operational system: a system in which every ECE institution regularly reflects on how well it is working, plans concretely what it needs to improve, and receives support and accountability from the local and central levels.

2.3 Roles and responsibilities at all levels

Quality in ECE is a shared responsibility, built through coherent and coordinated action by three interdependent levels of governance: central, municipal and institutional. Each level has specific responsibilities. National standards without municipal support remain ineffective directives. Municipal oversight without direction from the central level lacks coherence. Commitment at institutional level without system-level support is admirable, but fragile. Each level enables the others and quality, ultimately, is the product of cooperation among all three levels.

The table below presents the main responsibilities of each level and explains how they relate to quality and quality assurance.

This distribution of responsibility is not a bureaucratic formality: it reflects the reality that quality is produced in daily interactions at institutional level, while the conditions that make those interactions possible (i.e. sufficient resources, qualified staff, appropriate infrastructure, professional support, etc.) are created and maintained at national and municipal level.

Level	Main responsibilities
Policymakers at central level	**Set the conditions for quality across the system.** Approve and update the legal and regulatory framework for ECE. Define national quality standards and communicate them to municipalities and ECE institutions. Ensure adequate financing across the system. Recruit, train and engage inspectors. Collect, analyse and publish national data on quality. Report on ECE to the government and partners. Provide municipalities and institutions with the guidance, training and materials needed to fulfill their responsibilities for quality. MES does not exercise these responsibilities in isolation. At national level, quality development requires continuous cooperation with other ministries that have responsibilities in areas related to early childhood education, such as health, social protection and finance. This cooperation also includes faculties of education, research institutes and professional and civil society organisations working in this field. These partnerships support the development, review and dissemination of quality standards.
Municipal level	**Translate national standards into support and accountability at municipal level.** Manage and oversee ECE institutions within their territory in accordance with national standards. Provide additional financing alongside the budget allocated by the central level. Monitor quality and compliance through regular advisory and support visits. Provide practical guidance and support for professional development. Collect, validate and submit quality data to MES. Coordinate with health, social protection and community services to ensure integrated support for children and families. Identify and address local barriers to access and quality, particularly for marginalised communities.
Management, educational staff, professional associates, administrative staff, the Steering Council and the Parents' Council in ECE institutions	**Deliver quality in the daily life of the ECE institution.** Provide ECE in accordance with national and municipal-level standards. Engage the entire staff team in regular self-evaluation using the Evaluation Instrument. Identify strengths and development priorities and translate them into annual improvement plans. Build genuine and active partnerships with families and the local community. Maintain the required documentation and submit quality data to the directorate responsible for education. Ensure that children's rights, safety, well-being and learning remain at the centre of all institutional decisions.

Inspectors and external evaluators stand alongside these three levels as a distinct but integral part of the system. Their role is described in detail in Part III. In brief: they bring the shared quality framework into ECE institutions, support the strengthening of professionals' capacity for self-evaluation in ECE institutions and provide the independent external perspective required for accountability, working with the same standards and the same instrument as the institutions themselves.

Although the key parties within the ECE sector are presented above, quality ECE cannot be achieved by the ECE sector alone. The development, health and well-being of young children depend on a range of services and systems that go far beyond what any single institution can provide: primary health care and nutrition, social protection, family support, community services and, for children with special needs or developmental delays, specialised intervention and dedicated support. When these systems work in isolation, the quality of service provision for the child is reduced, regardless of the level of quality within each service-sector institution.

Cross-sectoral coordination refers to structured cooperation between education, health, social protection, child protection and community services to provide integrated and holistic support for children and families. It operates at several levels: at central level, through policy coherence and shared frameworks; at local level, through formal coordination mechanisms between local-level authorities and service providers; and at institutional level, through referral pathways, collaborative planning processes and community partnerships that individual ECE, health, child protection and social protection institutions build and maintain.

In Kosovo, the basis for cross-sectoral coordination is established by law. The Law on Early Childhood Education explicitly requires coordination between ECE institutions and health and social services for the benefit of children and families. The Early Intervention Framework and the national action plans for the inclusion of children with special needs provide further normative support. This Framework builds on the importance that Kosovo gives to cross-sectoral coordination and defines it as one of the integral elements of quality ECE and its quality assurance system.

2.4 Quality and quality assurance: the difference between them

Quality and quality assurance are interrelated, but distinct. Quality in ECE refers to what children actually experience, while quality assurance refers to the organised system of policies, standards, monitoring processes and improvement mechanisms through which a sector defines what quality should look like, assesses how well it is being achieved and promotes reflection and continuous improvement. Quality assurance is the infrastructure that makes quality more achievable, more sustainable and more equitable at all levels, through clear and shared standards that everyone understands; through self-evaluation that promotes honest reflection; through external evaluation that brings an independent perspective; and through development planning that turns reflection into concrete action.

Effective quality assurance systems share several defining characteristics:

- **Clear and shared standards**, drafted in accessible language, which cover all relevant dimensions of quality and are applicable at every level of the system, so that everyone, from a national policymaker to an educator in an ECEI, properly understands what they are working towards.
- **Strong internal self-evaluation** that enables institutions to assess their practice honestly, identify priorities and plan improvement, not only in anticipation of external review, but as a routine professional activity embedded in the institution's culture.
- **Coherent external evaluation** that uses the same standards and instruments as internal self-evaluation, so that inspection reinforces and extends the institution's own reflection, contributing to a culture of cooperation rather than adding a parallel process with different criteria, rooted in judgement and strict assessment.
- **A continuous improvement cycle** that links evaluation results with development planning, follow-up actions and review, so that evaluation leads to concrete change.
- **Proportionate accountability** that holds all levels of the ECE sector responsible for the quality provided.

What quality assurance is not: it is not a ranking system that divides institutions into good and bad. It is not a punitive mechanism that treats every gap as a failure. It is not a bureaucratic documentation process that wastes time on paperwork. Kosovo's National Quality Assurance Framework for ECE is built on a very specific premise: that quality assurance exists to help every ECE institution, whatever its current level of functioning, become better for the children it serves.

2.5 Quality as a continuous process: internal and external assurance

Quality is not a threshold to be reached and then maintained, but a process, based on a strong professional culture of honest reflection, cooperation and deliberate improvement.
In practice, continuous improvement requires a structured cycle: assessing the situation at a given point in time, identifying specific priorities, taking concrete action and then reassessing to understand what has changed. This commitment to continuous improvement is meaningful only when it operates through two coherent and aligned processes, namely: quality assurance within and by ECE institutions themselves and external quality assurance:

- **Internal quality assurance** is an ongoing process through which ECE institutions evaluate their practices. It is regularly led by the leader and all staff, is based on evidence from daily work (i.e. observations of children, planning documents, meeting minutes, feedback from families, etc.) and aims to identify concrete improvements. Internal quality assurance is not a process for fulfilling an obligation, but the embodiment of an approach rooted in continuous reflection.

- **External quality assurance** is the process through which parties outside the institution (i.e. the Education Inspectorate, Municipal Education Directorates and MES) evaluate quality, verify compliance with national standards and support quality improvement in ECE institutions. It includes formal inspection by the Education Inspectorate, regular monitoring and advisory visits by the MDEs, and the collection and analysis of national data by MES. External quality assurance serves two purposes at the same time: accountability, by ensuring that all institutions meet minimum quality standards, and continuous development, by supporting ECE institutions to improve beyond minimum quality standards.

In many systems, internal and external quality assurance operate as parallel processes, with different standards, different instruments and different languages of quality. This creates duplication, confusion and a harmful working dynamic, where ECE institutions treat inspections as high-stakes examinations and prepare for them differently from other evaluations.

Kosovo's quality assurance framework aims to define and establish approaches that avoid this duplication. **Internal and external quality assurance in this system share the same standards, the same quality descriptors and the same evaluation instrument.** When an inspector carries out an external evaluation, they use the Evaluation Instrument, the same instrument that the ECE institution has used for its own reflection. They start from the institution's most recent self-evaluation, review the evidence provided to verify the self-evaluation results, explore the improvement priorities that have already been identified and bring an independent professional perspective within a shared framework. External evaluation is not a substitute for self-evaluation: it is a second application of the same framework, enriching and supporting the institution in its efforts to reflect, always with the aim of providing support, not judgement.

2.6 The role of data and evidence in quality assurance

Quality assurance depends on evidence or supporting documentation. Without systematic and reliable information on the state of quality across the sector, it is impossible for institutions to reflect honestly, for municipalities to provide their support effectively, or for MES to make policy decisions based on the real situation on the ground. Evidence is not an optional feature of a quality assurance system and, in the context of this Framework, it operates at each of the three levels of governance:

- **At institutional level**, evidence includes notes from observations carried out during the educational process to document children's learning and development, planning documents and

curriculum records, minutes of staff meetings and professional development activities, data on enrolment, attendance and the profiles of children and families, feedback collected from families, and the documented results of the annual self-evaluation. This evidence is not collected primarily for external audiences. Its primary purpose is internal: it is the material through which self-evaluation teams make their work and practice visible to themselves, enabling the honest collective reflection from which improvement results.

- **At local level**, evidence includes aggregated/collected data submitted by ECE institutions, data on access, enrollment and quality trends across the municipality's institutions, as well as findings from inspection reports. Municipalities are expected to analyse this evidence actively and use it to identify where institutions need support, where systemic issues exist and require local policy responses, and how the ECE landscape in the municipality is developing over time.

- **At central level**, MES collects data from the entire system to monitor national trends in quality, identify gaps in the system, allocate resources fairly and report on the quality of ECE in Kosovo to the government and to development partners or international organisations and bodies. This national data overview, built from the self-evaluation and quality monitoring work of every institution and every municipality, is the evidence base for policy development and for demonstrating progress against Kosovo's commitments regarding EU accession.

The types of evidence that matter in this system range from quantitative to deeply qualitative. Some indicators in the quality matrix lend themselves to numerical measurement: enrollment rates, staff–child ratios, the percentage of educators with the required qualifications, and the frequency of professional development activities. Others are best evidenced through observation, documentation and professional dialogue: the quality of educator-child interactions, the inclusiveness of the learning environment and the degree of family engagement. Both types are legitimate and neither should be preferred over the other.

It is essential that evidence in this system is always in the service of improvement, not compliance. The question that should guide every evidence-collection activity at institutional, municipal or central level is not "what do we need to produce for the next inspection or report?", but "what do we need to understand in order to improve?"

3. Guiding principles and values

Every quality assurance system contains values. This Framework is rooted in the principles presented below, which guide the overall approach to quality assurance, the way evaluation results are interpreted, how improvement priorities are selected, how inspectors conduct their visits and how ECE institutions plan their development.

1) The child as a rights holder and active participant

Every child in Kosovo is a rights holder. This is a legal fact, based on Kosovo's commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and reflected in the Law on Early Childhood Education. Children have the right to education, to play, to safety, to have their voices heard and to service provision that supports their full development.

Quality in ECE is, at its core, about the fulfilment of these rights. A quality ECE institution is one that takes children's rights seriously in daily practice, where children are treated as active participants in their own learning, where their perspectives, choices and interests genuinely shape what happens in

the institution, and where adults listen and respond, rather than only instruct.

Recognising children as active participants also means taking their experiences and perspectives seriously as an important source of information and evidence. Observing how children engage, what attracts and motivates them, how they feel and how they respond, is one of the most important indicators for assessing the quality of the services provided to them. At the same time, this is also one of the most direct ways in which the level of quality of daily practice becomes visible.

2) Holistic development and well-being

Young children develop physically, cognitively, linguistically, emotionally and socially, and all these dimensions develop together, not sequentially or in isolation. An ECE institution that focuses narrowly on academic preparation misunderstands holistic development in early childhood. An institution that deals only with physical care and safety is also incomplete. High-quality ECE integrates education and care inseparably, attending to all dimensions of children's development through the pedagogical approach in practice, relationships with children, relationships among staff and with parents/legal guardians, and everyday environments.

It is essential to understand that children's physical and emotional safety are not merely necessary conditions, but must be realised in practice at all times, because learning cannot be achieved by a child who does not feel physically safe, who has experienced violence or abuse, or who does not trust the adults around them. In this context, ensuring safe environments, implementing clear child protection protocols, having clear referral systems and regularly training appropriate staff become integral parts of quality provision and, consequently, central to Kosovo's quality assurance system. This Framework treats children's well-being as a comprehensive concept that includes physical safety, emotional security, belonging and joy, and therefore fully integrates it into all areas of quality. This principle has direct implications for how quality is evaluated. This conveys a clear message that guides internal and external evaluation:

Early childhood education (ECE) provision cannot be considered quality provision if, while achieving good results in cognitive development, it neglects children's emotional well-being, social development, physical safety or protection.

3) Equity, inclusion and non-discrimination

Every child, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, language, religion, socio-economic status or place of residence, has the right to access high-quality ECE and to benefit from service provision adapted to their developmental level and individual needs. Equity in ECE does not mean treating all children identically: it means providing each child with what they specifically need to have a real opportunity to develop and progress.

In the context of Kosovo, this principle is particularly important. Children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities face barriers to inclusion and therefore have among the lowest ECE enrollment rates, while children with special needs or developmental delays often lack access to inclusive service provision with adequate resources. In this Framework, the quality indicators addressing inclusion, access and equity appear in all five areas of quality, to emphasise Kosovo's mission that these concepts are not a separate element, but a standard that every area of quality must meet. For this reason, this Framework encourages the sector to work actively to identify barriers, develop specific approaches targeting the equitable inclusion of vulnerable groups, guarantee a dedicated and effective framework for quality in ECE, and ensure the adequate allocation of the necessary financial, human and other resources.

4) Play as the main mode of learning

The importance of play as the primary way in which children learn is at the heart of Kosovo's ECE Curriculum. Play is not a break from learning or teaching, a reward for completing tasks or an activity children engage in when adults are not teaching them; it is the main way through which children make sense of the world. Play supports children in developing language and communication, building mathematical and scientific concepts, developing social and emotional competence, exercising creativity and imagination, and developing the skills of concentration, self-control and problem-solving, which are the foundation for later learning.



A quality ECE institution is one where play is actively protected, valued and enriched, where educators create environments that encourage exploration and curiosity, respond to play initiated by children themselves in ways that extend and deepen it, and resist external pressures to accelerate children towards formal academic activities before they are developmentally ready. This Framework reaffirms the concept that pedagogy is play-based, child-led and appropriate to children's level of development, and that the learning environment actively supports children's participation and independent exploration.

5) Partnership with families and communities

Children's development takes place in all the environments of their lives: at home, in the ECE institution, in the neighbourhood and in the community. Quality ECE recognises this reality and works

in genuine and sustained partnership with families, not only by informing them about what happens in the institution, but by actively involving them, listening to their knowledge and views about their children, drawing on their perspectives, experiences, cultures and traditions, and supporting continuity in learning and development between home and the institution.

Effective partnership with families is particularly important (and particularly challenging) for families from marginalised or minority communities, potentially because of language and cultural barriers or even limitations in access to public institutions, which create gaps for children and families. The importance of family involvement is deeply rooted in Kosovo's regulatory system for ECE, as well as in its Curriculum. For this reason, this Framework places the importance of collaborative relationships between ECE service providers and families at its core, as an element that must be actively pursued and maintained at all levels of the system. While ECE institutions are encouraged to pursue the active involvement of parents in the child's daily life, the system as a whole also reaffirms its readiness to guarantee high-quality services and transparency for families.

The collaborative approach is not limited to relationships with families, but extends more broadly into the community, requiring cross-sectoral cooperation to provide inclusive and structured services centred on children's well-being, regardless of the ministry under which the relevant services are organised. ECE institutions that connect with health services, social protection systems, cultural organisations and local community networks create richer environments for children and more integrated support for families.

6) Quality as a continuous and reflective process

Quality in ECE is not a state to be achieved and then maintained. It is a process: continuous, iterative and never complete. The most effective ECE institutions are not those that have achieved a static and fixed standard, but those with the strongest professional cultures of honest reflection, collaborative inquiry and continuous and deliberate improvement to create rich experiences for children.

This principle has several concrete implications in practice. It means that self-evaluation should be a regular professional activity, and should be genuinely reflective through an honest examination of what works, what does not work and what the evidence suggests should change. It means that evaluation results should always lead to follow-up action, turning findings into concrete next steps. This also means that external evaluation should follow the same logic and be understood as an additional opportunity for institutions to reflect, rather than as an examination requiring perfect performance simply to avoid punishment. Therefore, this Framework aims to promote this approach in both dimensions of quality assurance, ensuring that inspectors, through external evaluation, become the first supporters of ECE institutions.

Finally, this means that the Framework itself is also subject to the same principle. The quality standards presented here reflect the current best understanding of what makes early childhood education successful and high-quality; they are not final and unchangeable. As Kosovo's ECE system develops, as evidence grows and as practice improves, this Framework will be reviewed, refined and updated. The commitment to continuous improvement applies to the Framework just as much as to the institutions it serves.

PART II

Areas, statements and indicators of quality



4. Areas, statements and indicators of quality

Part II forms the substantive core of Kosovo's National Quality Assurance Framework. It turns the guiding principles and values set out in Part I into concrete and applicable standards for the entire ECE sector.

The Framework is organised around five areas of quality, each of which constitutes a distinct but interconnected dimension of ECE services: Leadership and financing; Access; Staff; Curriculum and pedagogy; and Monitoring and evaluation. These five areas have not been selected at random. They reflect the priorities identified in the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (2019) and are directly aligned with policies and legislation in Kosovo.

Each area matters for the quality of ECE in a specific way. Leadership and financing determine whether the system as a whole has the strategic direction, regulatory clarity and financial sustainability to provide quality for all children without distinction. Access ensures that quality provision actually reaches all children, including those most at risk of exclusion, and that families are treated as genuine partners in this process. Staff recognises that no quality framework can succeed without a competent, supported and stable workforce, with clear qualifications, appropriate working conditions and continuous and accessible opportunities for professional development. Curriculum and pedagogy address the substance of what children experience in ECE institutions and place this content within the framework of children's rights, play-based learning and holistic development. Finally, Monitoring and evaluation provide the evidence base and accountability mechanisms through which the system learns, adapts and improves, ensuring that quality is not a certification that occurs only at a given point in time, but a continuous process informed by evidence. Together, the five areas cover the full arc of quality: from the leadership and resource conditions that make quality ECE provision possible (Leadership and financing, Access), to the human and pedagogical conditions that turn it into reality in practice (Staff, Curriculum and pedagogy), through to the reflective processes that ensure sustainability and continuous improvement over time (Monitoring and evaluation).

The structure of Part II is consistent across all five areas. Each area opens with an introductory text explaining its scope, importance and connection with the broader framework. This is followed by quality statements, which are general commitments describing the desired state of quality in that area. The quality statements are made concrete through quality indicators, divided by level of governance (central, local and institutional) and by type of indicator (structural and procedural). Structural indicators describe the legal, regulatory and resource conditions that must exist, while procedural indicators describe the processes, practices and interactions that ensure quality services over time. Each area concludes with a brief example of what good practice looks like in concrete conditions, in order to give meaning to the indicators and support practitioners in implementing the Framework within their institutions.

How to read the indicators: In this Framework, the indicators are not a ready-made checklist for measurement and do not imply that a fully functioning monitoring and evaluation system already exists. Rather, they provide a shared reference, a description of what quality looks like, which can guide reflection, planning and professional dialogue at every level. Gradually, as Kosovo's quality assurance system develops, they may also serve as a basis for data collection and monitoring. For more information on the indicators contained in this document, please refer to the chapter "How to read this document" in Part I.

The summary table below provides an overview of the five areas of quality covered in this part of the Framework and the quality statements associated with each of them.

Area of quality	Quality statements
Area 1 **Leadership and financing**	• A coherent legal and governance framework defines the roles, responsibilities and accountability at central, municipal and institutional levels for ECE provision. • Leadership at all levels provides strategic direction for quality improvement and promotes a shared vision for ECE. • Financing mechanisms are transparent, equitable and sufficient to ensure sustainability, inclusion and continuous quality improvement. • ECE governance and regulatory frameworks ensure children's well-being, health and nutrition through clear standards, protective mechanisms and cross-sectoral coordination.
Area 2 **Access**	• Early childhood education guarantees equal and inclusive access for all children aged 0-6 years (ISCED 0), regardless of gender, disability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, language, religion or place of residence. • ECE services are sufficient in number, financially affordable and geographically accessible, ensuring that structural, financial and administrative barriers do not prevent participation. • Policies and programmes actively identify and address risks of exclusion, through targeted measures to gradually reduce to zero the number of children not participating in pre-primary education (age 5-6 years). • ECE environments promote respect, participation and positive relationships with children, families and the community. • Families are recognised as key partners in access and participation and are supported to engage meaningfully in ECE services.
Area 3 **Staff**	• ECE is provided by qualified staff in accordance with the legislation in force, recruited and employed according to transparent, merit-based and fair standards. • Pre-service preparation programmes for educational staff, performance appraisal and continuous professional development are coherent, aligned and high-quality, supporting inclusive and child-centred practice. • Staff policies and working conditions promote stability, cooperation and professional well-being.
Area 4 **Curriculum and pedagogy**	• There is a curriculum for ages 0–6 years (ISCED 0) that provides a shared pedagogical vision based on children's rights, holistic development, play and inclusion. • ECE institutions provide safe, healthy, inclusive and stimulating physical environments that support children's well-being, learning and development. Pedagogical practice is child-centred, has clear aims and is responsive to children's needs, interests and potential, based on observation, documentation and reflection. • Pedagogical practice in ECE promotes children's emotional well-being, safety and healthy development through warm and healthy relationships, inclusive environments and care routines that respond to their needs. • Assessment is formative and developmentally appropriate, supporting learning, inclusion and partnerships with families.

Area of quality	Quality statements
Area 5 **Monitoring and evaluation**	• The quality of ECE is assured through a harmonised system of internal and external evaluation, monitoring and inspection, which is aligned with shared quality standards and aims at continuous quality improvement. • Monitoring and evaluation support reflective practice and professional dialogue between and within institutions. • Data are collected and used responsibly to support policymaking, planning and continuous improvement, while protecting children's rights and privacy.

AREA 1
Leadership and financing

4.1. Leadership and financing

Introductory description

Leadership and financing is the foundational area of this Framework. It addresses the conditions without which no other dimension of quality can be reliably achieved or maintained, including the legal and governance framework that defines who is responsible for what across the ECE system; the strategic direction that aligns efforts and resources around a shared vision; and the financial mechanisms that determine whether it is possible for quality ECE services to be provided at scale, for all children and on an ongoing basis. The 2019 EU Quality Framework identifies this dimension as a structural pillar that supports all other dimensions of quality, since fragmented governance, unclear accountability and lack of sufficient financing are among the main obstacles to ensuring equal quality for all. In the context of Kosovo, this area is particularly important given the division of responsibilities for ECE between MES, municipalities and ECE institutions, as well as the ongoing development of the sector and expansion of services.

Leadership within the Framework is understood broadly, including national policy oversight, planning and guidance at municipal level, and management at institutional level. At all three levels, quality leadership does not mean only administrative compliance, but refers to providing clear strategic direction, promoting accountability and continuous improvement, ensuring transparent and participatory decision-making, and engaging staff, families and communities as partners. A key component of this dimension, of particular importance for the Kosovo context, is cross-sectoral cooperation to ensure coordinated action in education, health, social services and child protection.

Financing is not understood simply as a budgetary category, but as a policy instrument. Therefore, this area of quality examines not only whether sufficient financing exists, but also whether it is allocated appropriately, managed and reported transparently, and directed towards protecting children's rights and well-being.

Quality statements

- A coherent legal and governance framework defines the roles, responsibilities and accountability at central, municipal and institutional level for ECE provision.
- Leadership at all levels provides strategic direction for quality improvement and promotes a shared vision for ECE.
- Financing mechanisms are transparent, equitable and sufficient to ensure sustainability, inclusion and continuous quality improvement.
- ECE governance and regulatory frameworks ensure children's protection, health and nutrition through clear standards, protective mechanisms and cross-sectoral coordination.

Quality indicators

Central level	
Structural quality	• The legal and policy framework defines clear objectives, roles and obligations for the responsible bodies across the ECE sector. • There is a national plan or strategy, as well as quality standards for the ECE sector, which are updated as needed and developed based on the needs of the target population. • The annual state budget allocation for ECE is published every year and broken down, at least, by main expenditure categories (staff, operations, infrastructure, improvement). • The annual state budget allocation for ECE takes into account operational needs for the maintenance, improvement and/or expansion of ECE institutions and educational materials. • The legal framework defines standards for buildings, physical premises and the materials needed to implement ECE programmes. These standards ensure that kindergarten environments support children's health, safety, well-being, inclusion and holistic development, and that infrastructure requirements are aligned with the pedagogical principles of early education. • The national system of ECE provision is based on a child-centred and child rights-based approach, which ensures safe, supportive and inclusive learning environments, promotes children's dignity, well-being and holistic development, and clearly prohibits physical punishment, offensive or degrading disciplinary practices, violence, neglect, exploitation and all forms of abuse. • Staff–child ratios are regulated by law and promote children's development, learning and well-being. • The national system and legal framework define the health, safety and child protection requirements applicable to ECE, and compliance requirements are integrated into quality assurance processes. • The national legal and regulatory framework defines institutional cooperation between ECE and health and social services, including referral protocols, and this mechanism is operational.
Process quality	• Regular coordination meetings are held between the responsible ministries and other partner entities, enabling continuous information exchange and joint decision-making.

Local level	
Structural quality	• Municipalities have an action plan for ECE, with clearly defined objectives and indicators. Municipalities publish an annual budget for ECE and report the municipal share of capital investment in ECE as a percentage of the municipal-level budget. • Clear, transparent and accountable financial management practices are in place to support ECE institutions. Functional child protection mechanisms and clear referral procedures exist and are accessible to ECE institutions. • Percentage of ECE institutions that have been planned, built, renovated, licensed and maintained in accordance with national infrastructure standards, urban and safety requirements, and environmental criteria, in order to ensure a safe, inclusive and functional environment for children.

	• The municipality establishes and implements formal cross-sectoral coordination with ECE institutions, health services, and protection and social services, including regular information exchange. • ECE institutions comply with the legal child–educator ratios and have sufficient staff to guarantee children's safety and supportive, caring relationships.
Process quality	• The municipality reviews its ECE-related indicators in the local action plan every year, according to local-level needs. • Relevant local services (education, social services, health, etc.) cooperate effectively in the planning and provision of ECE services through regular information exchange and joint action. • Number of cross-sectoral coordination meetings held each year, including joint actions.

Institutional level	
Structural quality	• Clear roles for management and coordination are defined, together with the relevant qualification and training requirements, in accordance with national legislation. • The institution has an annual development plan, aligned with the Quality Framework, which defines the main priorities and actions for implementation. Annual expenditure or budget execution is documented by the institution and broken down by main categories (staff, learning materials, maintenance, support for inclusion, etc.). • The institution has formally established the Steering Council and the Parents' Council, which operate on the basis of internal rules or terms of reference defined and approved by the responsible representatives.
Process quality	• The institution's leadership provides strategic direction, supports professional responsibility and promotes a culture of reflection, accountability and continuous quality improvement. • Internal decision-making processes function transparently, with clear responsibility for the use of resources and authority. • Leadership ensures the participation of staff and families in planning and implementing quality improvement measures through consultations and documented processes of cooperation and joint decision-making (e.g., staff meetings, agreed actions, joint improvement projects). • Structured mechanisms for communication, consultation and reporting with parents are implemented, enabling families to contribute to matters that affect life within the ECE institution and ensuring accountability. • Progress against the institution's development plan is reviewed at least once a year and documents the adjustments made based on evidence.

What good practice looks like

At central level, good practice means that the legal and policy framework governing ECE is coherent, up to date and fit for purpose. National quality standards exist, are reviewed periodically and are accompanied by guidance for their implementation, which helps municipalities, inspectors and institutions turn them into action. Budget allocations for ECE are published transparently, broken down by expenditure category and sufficient to support not only day-to-day operation, but also infrastructure improvement, workforce development and support for inclusion. Cross-sectoral coordination takes place regularly and is documented, while its results are reflected in policy alignment in the areas of education, health and social welfare.

At municipal level, good practice looks like sustained, evidence-based planning. The Municipal Education Directorate has a current action plan for ECE, reflecting municipal-level needs, including data on participation rates, infrastructure gaps and workforce distribution. Cross-sectoral cooperation is also key at this level of education. In a well-functioning municipality, formal mechanisms exist for education, health, social protection and child protection services to share information, coordinate responses and plan together, especially to ensure that the most vulnerable children and families are identified and supported. Referral pathways are clearly communicated to ECE staff and activated immediately when children show signs of developmental risk or difficulties in the family. No child is left out of attention because of a lack of coordination between systems.

In an institution where the quality of leadership and financing is strong, governance is visible, purposeful and unified. The leader does not lead alone: he/she leads together with the team. Strategic priorities are defined collaboratively through an annual development planning process, based on self-evaluation findings, staff reflections and family input, including through the establishment of an active and engaged parents' council. The plan is not a bureaucratic formality kept in a drawer: it is a living document, displayed in the staff room, reviewed in team meetings and adapted whenever the evidence suggests that a different course of action is needed. In financial terms, the institution operates transparently and on the basis of defined objectives or targets. Expenditure is documented and categorised, with clear lines of accountability to the municipality (for non-private forms of provision). The leader and staff understand how resources are allocated and why, while families are informed about the financial organisation of the services their children receive. Where subsidy schemes exist, they are actively communicated to families entitled to benefit from them, while staff are supported in their role in facilitating access for families and children facing financial barriers.

4.2 Access | Introductory description

In the context of Kosovo, access is an area of particular urgency. Despite considerable progress in expanding ECE provision, enrollment rates (especially for children under the age of three, children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and children with special needs or additional support needs) remain a challenge; geographical inequalities between urban and rural settlements persist, while the financial cost of participation in ECE continues to be a barrier for low-income families. For this reason, access constitutes the area of equity in this Framework and starts from the understanding that a legal right is certainly a necessary starting point, but is not sufficient. A child who lives far from the nearest ECE institution, whose family cannot afford the fees, who does not see their language or culture reflected in the institution, or who faces physical barriers or exclusionary and discriminatory attitudes from the outset, does not have real and meaningful access to ECE services. This area is concerned with the systematic removal of these barriers at every level of the system.

Access in this Framework is understood as comprising three interconnected dimensions:

1) Structural access: whether there are sufficient ECE places, in the right locations, at affordable cost and in facilities that are physically accessible for children with special needs.

2) Inclusive access: whether the ECE environment itself (i.e. pedagogy, relationships, routines, language, etc.) welcomes all children and families, including those from minority communities or in situations of vulnerability.

3) Proactive access: whether the system continuously identifies children who are not participating and takes targeted action to reach them.

As the first and most important environment in a child's life, the family has a central role in this area. Building trust with families, overcoming cultural and language barriers, and ensuring that representative parent structures are functional and meaningful rather than merely formal are all essential elements of a quality approach addressed by this area.

Access is also visibly linked, throughout this area, with child protection and well-being. Institutions that are accessible in the full sense are those where every child feels safe, respected and protected, where clear protective policies exist, where staff are trained to identify and respond to risk, and where the institution functions as a reliable and stable point in the life of every child and family it serves.

Quality statements

- Early childhood education guarantees equal and inclusive access for all children aged 0-6 years (ISCED 0), regardless of gender, disability, socio-economic background, ethnicity, language, religion or place of residence.

- ECE services are sufficient in number, financially affordable and geographically accessible, ensuring that structural, financial and administrative barriers do not prevent participation.

- Policies and programmes actively identify and address risks of exclusion, through targeted

measures to gradually reduce to zero the number of children not participating in pre-primary education (age 5-6 years).

- ECE environments promote respect, participation and positive relationship with children, families and the community.
- Families are recognised as key partners in access and participation and are supported to engage meaningfully with ECE services.

Quality indicators

Central level	
Structural quality	• The legal and regulatory framework guarantees every child's right to inclusive, non-discriminatory and quality ECE, with proactive mechanisms to identify and respond to individual needs, including support measures for children with special educational needs. • The legal and regulatory framework explicitly identifies children at risk of exclusion and defines dedicated measures to promote their inclusion in ECE services. • Percentage of children aged 0–6 years (ISCED 0) who regularly participate in ECE (by age group, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level, disability status or special educational needs, and type of service). • Percentage of children aged 0–2 years who regularly participate in ECE (by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level, disability status or special educational needs, and type of service). • Percentage of children aged 3–5 years who regularly participate in ECE (by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level, disability status or special educational needs, and type of service). • Percentage of children who regularly participate in pre-primary programmes (5–6 years) (by gender, ethnicity, beneficiary status under the Social Assistance Scheme (SAS), disability status and form of service provision). • Percentage of children aged 0–6 years attending ECE services exempt from payment. • National policies ensure the existence of formal mechanisms for collective parent representation in ECE institutions, supporting the structured participation of parents/legal guardians beyond individual communication with staff.
Process quality	• Formal national mechanisms exist for cross-sectoral coordination between education, health, social protection and the municipal level to identify and support children who do not participate in ECE.

Local level	
Structural quality	• The municipality analyses and validates data on children's inclusion in ECE by form of provision. • Percentage of institutions that comply with the relevant administrative instruction regulating the educator–child ratio. • The municipality reports the number of professionals engaged in ECE according to the profiles defined by the legislation in force. Local authorities establish coherent and accountable mechanisms for the collective representation of parents/legal guardians in ECE, linking Parents' Councils at institutional and municipal level and ensuring that issues raised by parents can inform decision-making at municipal level in education.
Process quality	• Percentage of new ECE institutions built or adapted in accordance with ECE infrastructure standards. • Percentage of participating children who benefit from fee reductions, exemptions or subsidies for low-income families and marginalised communities to enrol in ECE. • Number of annual campaigns or activities undertaken to expand access and inclusion for all children in ECE.

Institutional level	
Structural quality	• Annual number of children enrolled (by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic level, disability or special educational needs). • Annual number and percentage of children receiving monthly subsidies to cover participation in ECE programmes. • The structure of the institution is suitable for enabling access for children with educational disabilities. • ECE institutions have approved and implement formal policies on child protection, safety and behaviour guidance in ECE institutions, which prohibit physical punishment, offensive or degrading disciplinary practices, political indoctrination and all forms of abuse, in accordance with legal obligations and children's rights.
Process quality	• Staff ensure the meaningful participation of all children in the educational programme. • Staff interact with children individually and in groups in ways that are appropriate to children's developmental level and based on individual interests and needs, in order to promote health, development and learning. • Staff apply communication and engagement practices that are responsive to the culture, traditions and context of families. • The institution systematically monitors participation and can identify children at risk of dropping out because of access barriers, such as transport, affordability, capacity or the quality of services. • Pedagogical plans are child-centred, based on children's developmental level, abilities, needs and individual interests.

What good practice looks like

At central level, good practice means that the legal and financial framework actively creates the conditions for equal access to ECE services. This means that fee subsidy mechanisms are funded at a level that makes them genuinely useful for families; that minimum infrastructure standards reflect the needs of children with special educational needs; that data systems make it possible to track who is being reached and who is not; and that policy targets are set to close participation gaps. This also means that the national legal framework clearly emphasises that child protection policies are not optional, that their implementation is monitored and that the system is accountable for ensuring a safe environment that respects the rights of all children in Kosovo, especially those in situations of vulnerability.

At municipal level, good practice in access is based on data. The municipality tracks enrollment broken down by age group and form of service provision and uses these data to identify where the largest gaps are and to direct investments accordingly. Financial support is available and meaningful for families in need, while infrastructure decisions (e.g. new buildings, renovations, transport lines, etc.) are guided by access needs, not only by administrative convenience.

An institution where the quality of access is strong looks both outward and inward. The environment and welcome it offers are intentional: the building is physically accessible, communications regularly reach families, staff engage with cultural sensitivity, and there are clear, dignity-respecting procedures for accessing subsidies and fee waivers for families facing financial barriers. Family engagement is substantive and not symbolic, with a functional Parents' Council that reflects the diversity of the community it represents and with participation opportunities varied enough to be accessible to families with different schedules and circumstances. Families are welcomed into learning spaces, consulted on matters that affect daily life in the institution and kept genuinely informed. At the foundation of all this is a commitment to the meaningful participation of every child, with pedagogical plans that respond to the needs of all children, and with staff who interact with children in ways appropriate to the developmental level, abilities and interests of each child.

An institution with high-quality access to services understands that its commitment is not limited only to the environment, but has leadership and staff who systematically monitor who is enrolled, who is attending and who is absent, disaggregating the data by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and disability, to show whether the institution is actually reaching the children it should reach. When barriers emerge, the institution and the municipality join forces and coordinate with social and health service providers on concrete action to reach families who do not have access to services.

4.3 Staff | Introductory description

According to Kosovo's quality assurance framework, staff are critical. Everything else described in this document (e.g. a coherent curriculum, an inclusive environment, effective partnerships with families, a culture of continuous improvement, etc.) ultimately depends on the quality of the people who work directly with children every day. No governance structure, however well designed, and no physical environment, however stimulating, can replace a knowledgeable, reflective and responsive professional educator who is genuinely committed to every child under their care. What matters is not simply whether staff have formal qualifications, but whether those qualifications have equipped them with pedagogical knowledge, an understanding of child development and the reflective capacity to continuously adapt their practice according to children's developmental needs and the environment in which they work.

While staff academic qualification is a basic prerequisite, it must be advanced through continuous professional development, supported by strong institutional leadership and renewed through a professional culture of cooperation and continuous self-reflection.

This area addresses staff quality in three interconnected areas:

1) qualification and recruitment, ensuring that each individual who works directly with children meets the professional standards defined under the legislation in force and is recruited through transparent, merit-based processes;

2) professional development, ensuring that qualification is the starting point for career-long learning, supported by functional national systems for continuous professional development and performance appraisal;

3) working conditions and well-being, recognising that overburdened or professionally isolated staff cannot sustain the quality of attention that young children require.

Across all three areas, Kosovo's commitment to inclusive practice is reflected. All children, including those with special educational needs, developmental difficulties, language differences or social and emotional needs, have the right to be provided with services that respond to their individual needs. This places specific demands on staff in terms of training, early identification of developmental risk, collaborative work with specialists, and communication across cultural and language differences.

Finally, this area understands that staff quality is the responsibility of the national ECE system, not only an individual responsibility. The professional performance of an educator is shaped by the quality of their initial training, the support they receive from the leader and the municipality, and the broader professional culture in which they work. Therefore, accountability for staff quality lies at every level: central, local and institutional.



Quality statements

- ECE is provided by qualified staff in accordance with the legislation in force, recruited and employed according to transparent, merit-based and fair standards.
- Pre-service preparation programmes for educational staff, performance appraisal and continuous professional development are coherent, aligned and high-quality, supporting inclusive and child-centred practice.
- Staff policies and working conditions promote stability, cooperation and professional well-being.

Quality indicators

Central level	
Structural quality	• The legal and regulatory framework for ECE clearly defines the process for educator performance appraisal and articulates the roles and responsibilities between central government and the municipal level. • The national legal and regulatory framework: The administrative instruction ensures that the recruitment and appointment of ECE staff and leaders are transparent, merit-based and non-discriminatory, with defined requirements for qualification, integrity and suitability, and national oversight mechanisms. • The national legal and regulatory framework clearly defines teaching standards and the requirements and modalities for university education, professional development and performance appraisal. • The national legal and regulatory framework clearly defines working hours, including the ratio between educational work time and planning time for early childhood educators, including time for planning, reflection and cooperation with families. • Continuous professional development is a mandatory legal requirement, linked to licensing and career advancement, needs-based, high-quality and provided through legally and professionally regulated mechanisms. Percentage of state funds, including at municipal level, and development partner funds allocated to professional development activities organised at national level. • Percentage of ECE staff in the private and public sectors who participate in professional development activities and learning programmes. • National system for educator performance appraisal that is legally regulated, mandatory and aligned with professional standards and licensing requirements, and regulated through official procedures, instruments or guides. • There is an annual plan defining the internal and external appraisal of educator performance. • The national system for educator licensing and careers is legally established and functional, regulating education as a profession and defining the stages of entry and career advancement.
Process quality	———

Municipal level	
Structural quality	• The municipality ensures that the recruitment, appointment and employment of ECE staff and leaders are carried out in accordance with the legislation in force and transparently, in line with national standards and workforce planning priorities. • Municipal structures and procedures exist for implementing national regulations on educator licensing, induction, performance appraisal and professional development in all ECE institutions. • Percentage of ECE staff who meet qualification requirements, broken down by role. • Percentage of ECE staff holding valid professional licences. • Municipal structures exist that plan, provide, coordinate and monitor professional development programmes for ECE staff. • Municipal mechanisms support ECE institution-based professional development, including organisational, technical and financial support, aligned with national requirements for licensing and continuous professional development. • There is a defined municipal-level system for identifying professional development needs based on national regulatory documents for ECE. • The municipality provides professional development opportunities for ECE staff that address identified professional development gaps. • Percentage of staff who have completed the required professional development activities, according to national regulations on professional standards for ECE. • There is an annual plan defining the internal and external appraisal of educator performance. • There is a municipal team responsible for educator performance appraisal, with clear roles and mechanisms for cooperation with ECE institutions and the Education Inspectorate.
Process quality	• National regulations on licensing, entry into the profession, performance appraisal and professional development are implemented consistently in ECE institutions, with municipal oversight ensuring compliance and corrective action where necessary. • Internal appraisal of educator performance is implemented in ECE institutions, with municipalities cooperating with the Education Inspectorate during external appraisals, ensuring uniform implementation of procedures. • The department responsible for education in the municipality actively supports ECE leaders in planning and carrying out the internal appraisal of educator performance through guidance, support instruments and professional assistance. • The results of educator performance appraisals are analysed at kindergarten and municipal level to identify strengths, weaknesses and priority areas for improvement. • Appraisal findings systematically inform municipal professional development planning. Municipal plans for professional development of ECE staff are aligned with the results of internal and external evaluation of ECE institutions. • Municipal authorities monitor and report annually to MES on professional development activities, including participation, areas of focus and alignment with national priorities. • Municipal decisions on ECE staffing are implemented in accordance with workforce needs, demand for services and available resources, ensuring stability, professional competence and continuity in service provision.

Institutional level	
Structural quality	• Percentage of newly employed staff who have attended training on child protection and violence prevention. • Percentage of staff who have attended refresher training on child protection and violence prevention. • Percentage of staff trained in inclusive pedagogy in ECE, early identification of developmental needs and difficulties, and referral pathways and processes for early intervention services. • The institution has professional associates who are part of the staff on a fixed-term basis. • Percentage of staff who meet the necessary qualification/licensing requirements, broken down by role. • Percentage of newly employed staff who participate in the mandatory one-year induction training. • Staff turnover rate (% of educators leaving within recent years, broken down by type of staff). • The institution demonstrates compliance with the legally required staff–child ratios during working hours. • Number of daily hours used by staff within the institution for planning, reflection, assessment and cooperation with families, according to the requirements set out in the legislation in force. • The ECE institution establishes the team for staff performance appraisal within the institution.
Process quality	• The ECE institution promotes a professional culture of reflection and continuous improvement, supported by performance review and professional learning opportunities. • A positive team environment promotes professional cooperation, mutual support and constructive discussions. • The assessment of professional development needs is carried out at least every 2 years. • The annual professional development plan is prepared in coordination with the institution's leader and in accordance with the ECEI needs assessment, strategic priorities, national competencies for ECEI staff and performance appraisal, and is submitted to the municipality or MES, depending on the form of organisation of the institution. • Number of annual professional development activities organised in the institution (including the number of hours) that are needs-based, broken down by type (internal training, peer learning, mentoring, workshops). • Percentage of staff who have participated in the required hours of professional development (both external and institution-based). • Learning from professional development activities results in documented improvements in practice, evidenced through internal or external observation or self-reflection. • Percentage of educational staff and professional associates appraised each year. • Number of individual improvement or professional development plans prepared after performance appraisal. • Number of educators benefiting from targeted support measures (counselling, mentoring, additional training) following appraisal results. • The institution prepares and submits to the municipality an annual report on the internal appraisal of educator performance, including: the number of educators appraised, a summary of strengths and areas for improvement, and links with professional development priorities.

What good practice looks like

At central level, the conditions for staff quality are supported by a complete legal and regulatory framework, which includes qualification standards that are ambitious but achievable, a licensing and career development system that is implemented consistently, a mandatory continuous professional development structure that provides relevant and high-quality programmes aligned with the priorities of the curriculum and the quality framework, and a performance appraisal system whose clear purpose is improvement, not oversight. The national system also aims to ensure workforce sustainability, by regulating staff–child ratios, monitoring staff attrition/turnover rates and tracking participation in continuous professional development, as well as by developing policies and strategies that ensure the stability and continuity of professional staff in ECE.

At municipal level, good practice means more than simply verifying that staff have the required academic credentials. The municipality plans, coordinates and monitors professional development in all institutions under its responsibility, ensures that training opportunities address identified gaps and actively supports institution leaders in carrying out internal performance appraisals. Findings from appraisals inform the municipal professional development plan, instead of remaining in unimplemented individual files.

At institutional level, professional learning is an integral part of the normal rhythm of life in the ECE institution. Staff meet regularly not only to carry out administrative tasks, but also to reflect together on their practice by discussing observations of individual children, sharing elements from activities carried out and planning and identifying responses to issues raised. These conversations are the cornerstone of a sustainable professional culture. The leader plays a central role in maintaining this culture by creating time for individual professional conversations, using the annual performance appraisal as a genuine dialogue rather than as a process that measures compliance, and ensuring that performance appraisal findings are reflected in individual development plans that are followed up continuously. New staff enter a structured one-year induction process in the institution, with mentoring and clear guidance. Across the team, training in inclusive pedagogy, early identification of developmental difficulties, and referral pathways and processes is not an additional task, but a basic professional expectation that must be met.

What ultimately distinguishes a high-quality staff area from one that merely meets the defined quality standards is the culture of professional development it inspires in the institution. In an institution where staff quality is truly high, educators feel professionally valued, intellectually engaged and mutually accountable. They talk about children with curiosity and care, seek comments and suggestions instead of avoiding them, and see learning and continuous professional development not as an obligation, but as a natural expression of what it means to fulfil the role and mission of an educator.

AREA 4
Curriculum and pedagogy

4.4 Curriculum and pedagogy | Introductory description

Curriculum and pedagogy is the area that speaks most directly to children's daily experience in ECE institutions. While the other areas address the conditions that make quality possible, this area addresses the content of ECE services: what children actually encounter every morning, what is offered to them, how educators interact with them and how early learning or education is understood, supported and communicated to parents/legal guardians.

Kosovo's national ECE curriculum for ages 0–6 years provides the pedagogical foundation for this area of quality. It articulates a vision of early education that is play-based and child-centred, grounded in children's rights and the science of early development, where children are active constructors of knowledge, play is the main mode of learning and holistic development across the cognitive, social, emotional, physical and creative dimensions is the clear goal. This Framework treats the curriculum not as an external requirement with which there must be compliance, but as a shared professional language through which the ECE community in Kosovo articulates what it believes about children and the purpose of early education.

Pedagogy in this area is understood as intentional, reflective and continuously refined professional practice. The educator does not simply carry out activities: they observe, listen, document and respond. They plan with clear aims, but are ready to follow children's interests when they emerge, creating an environment (physical, emotional and relationship-based) in which every child feels safe enough to explore and engage in play and activities. Routine moments are treated as intentional opportunities to provide care and learning opportunities, not simply as pauses between structured activities. The physical learning environment is understood not as the background to pedagogy, but as an active element of it. The organisation of space, availability of materials, access to outdoor spaces and quality of sensory stimulation inside the room determine what children can do, how they feel and what they learn. A well-designed ECE environment conveys to children the message that the space belongs to them.

Assessment in this area of quality is formative and developmental, rooted in individual and team reflection. The purpose of assessment is to support learning, not to judge or rank children by their achievements. Observation-based assessment makes learning visible and enables educators to plan responsively to children's needs, interests and potential, and is also the basis for identifying children who may need additional support through early identification, referral and cooperation with specialised services.

Quality statements

- There is a curriculum for ages 0–6 years that provides a shared pedagogical vision based on children's rights, holistic development, play and inclusion.

- ECE institutions provide safe, healthy, inclusive and stimulating physical environments that support children's well-being, learning and development. Pedagogical practice is child-centred, has clear aims and is responsive to children's needs, interests and potential, based on observation, documentation and reflection.

- Pedagogical practice in ECE promotes children's emotional well-being, safety and healthy development through warm and healthy relationships, inclusive environments and care routines that respond to their needs.

- Assessment is formative and developmentally appropriate, supporting learning, inclusion and partnerships with families.

Quality indicators

	Central level
Structural quality	• Existence of a national curriculum for Early Childhood Education (0–6) that is play- and competence-based, child-centred, supports holistic development (cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, creative) and promotes key principles such as learning through play, inclusion and non-discrimination, gender equality, interculturalism, sustainability and global citizenship. • The curriculum is in line with the relevant legal requirements, including the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, EU principles on ECE quality and international quality standards in ECE. • Pedagogical documentation ensures uniform implementation and continuity between the early education level (ISCED 0) and primary education and is supported by guidance for implementing the ECE curriculum, which includes practical measures to facilitate the work of ECE professionals. • The ECE curriculum is reviewed as needed and the date of the last review and the review cycle are documented. • Thematic guides exist to support curriculum implementation in practice. • University education programmes for ECE include compulsory subjects related to the curriculum. • Percentage of accredited training programmes for pre-service and in-service ECE professionals that are aligned with the national ECE curriculum. • The legal framework clearly defines and regulates assessment of children in ECE as formative, observation-based and non-standardised, and as used to support learning, planning, inclusion and early intervention for children with developmental difficulties or special educational needs. • There is a national legal act regulating the pedagogical assessment of children with special needs. • Specific methodological guidelines exist for the pedagogical assessment of children with special educational needs, developed by MES and regularly updated. • The national legal and regulatory framework for ECE defines and supports systematic mechanisms for the early identification of developmental difficulties and special educational needs and for the provision of specialised cross-sectoral, family-centred services, in line with the best interests of the child.
Process quality	—

Municipal level	
Structural quality	• There is a municipal function or unit responsible for the ECE sector, including curriculum and pedagogical support (broken down by profile and qualifications). • Number of basic and supplementary sessions organised for ECE institutions on the ECE curriculum each year and the percentage of staff participating in at least one annual session. • There is a permanent team for the pedagogical assessment of children with special educational needs, established at municipal level, with a defined mandate and continuity of operation, according to the composition defined by the legislation in force. • Municipal mechanisms exist to consult and involve children and families in educational and pedagogical activities. • Annual frequency of these meetings held with children and families on ECE matters. • Mechanisms and the division of responsibilities at municipal level support transitions (home–ECE–school), including designated coordination roles and guidance for institutions. • Rate of children transitioning from early education to first grade.
Process quality	• Number and percentage of institutions receiving at least one support or mentoring visit with a pedagogical/curricular focus each year. • Municipal authorities facilitate effective cross-sectoral coordination between ECE, health and social services, and support clear referral pathways and the availability of services to ensure rapid responses, based on the best interests of the child, for children identified with developmental difficulties or special educational needs. • The municipality actively supports and oversees the functioning of ECE Parents' Councils in ECE institutions under municipal responsibility, providing coordination, guidance and support for implementing priority improvement actions, and responding fairly and promptly to issues, recommendations and proposals raised by parents.

Institutional level	
Structural quality	• ECE institutions demonstrate compliance with infrastructure, safety and hygiene standards, providing a safe, inclusive and child-friendly environment that ensures equal opportunities and supports the well-being of all children. • ECE institutions provide safe, balanced and age-appropriate food, in accordance with national health standards and food menus in ECE institutions. • Appropriate supporting instruments and guidance exist for regular pedagogical planning. • Periodic pedagogical plans, both annual and monthly, are shared with parents/legal guardians and displayed within ECE institutions, aligned with the national ECE curriculum. • Educational staff carry out pedagogical planning, observation, documentation, assessment and development, in accordance with curriculum guidelines. • Indoor and outdoor learning environments and educational materials are available, inclusive and age-appropriate, enabling the implementation of pedagogical and curriculum guidelines. • Educational materials and resources reflect children's cultural, linguistic and family diversity, interests and characteristics.

	• Average number of weekly hours dedicated by staff to pedagogical planning, documentation and communication of weekly activities with parents/guardians. • Number of monthly staff meetings that enable learning and exchange of experiences among colleagues and reflection on the curriculum and pedagogical practices. • Pedagogical documentation is generated systematically, displayed and kept in children's portfolios to capture their learning experiences and trajectories, in accordance with the ECE curriculum guidelines. • Supporting instruments and guidance exist for implementing observation, formative assessment and procedures for maintaining confidentiality. • Number of documented pedagogical assessments carried out for each child per year. • Percentage of children covered by at least 2 pedagogical assessments per year. • Number of annual meetings with families to discuss children's individual development and learning. • Number of pedagogical projects implemented jointly with parents and the community each year. • Number of daily hours that children spend in the institution's outdoor environments, which support curriculum principles, with inclusive materials available and encouraging exploration. • There is sufficient availability of the human resources and materials needed to enable an appropriate educational/pedagogical response for children with special needs, according to the legal framework and national regulations. • Different options are offered for family participation (meetings, events, pedagogical projects, volunteering, decision-making bodies) in the educational process. • Number and type of activities per class/group that include family participation and the number of families participating.
Process quality	• The national ECE curriculum is implemented in daily practice in learning environments that are safe, inclusive and stimulating, supporting exploration, play, movement and interaction through educational work that is play-based, child-centred and responsive to children's interests, abilities and needs. • The educator acts as a facilitator and creates a safe, stimulating and play-based environment for the child, where the child can experiment and explore the surrounding environment and beyond. • Staff actively support children's initiatives and participation during daily learning activities and experiences. • Education in the outdoor environment is planned and implemented every day, offering varied and challenging experiences, with supervision that encourages exploration. • The care routine is sensitive to children's individual rhythms, especially for newborns and younger children. • The care routine (food, hygiene, rest) is used intentionally as a learning opportunity. • Pedagogical planning and practice are child-centred and responsive to children's interests, experiences, culture and everyday contexts, supporting holistic development in accordance with the national ECE curriculum. • Pedagogical planning is carried out regularly and is based on systematic observation, documentation and knowledge of children's development and interests. • Percentage of children with special needs who have documented individual education plans.

	• Documentation shows that children's ideas and interests effectively influence pedagogical planning. • Pedagogical documentation uses different and appropriate methods (observations, photographs, children's work, children's stories, etc.). • The institution promotes cooperation among children, staff and families in curriculum implementation and documents family engagement in early education. • Families report that documentation helps them understand and support their child's development and learning. • The institution integrates education on child protection and children's rights into daily practice, administrative processes and age-appropriate learning activities, engaging staff, children and families. • Families can enter learning spaces flexibly and appropriately, adapted to family needs and group dynamics.



What good practice looks like

At central level, the curriculum is a living document, not a static requirement. It is accompanied by thematic implementation guides that support professionals in their daily work, and is integrated into pre-service and in-service preparation programmes and training programmes, with the expectation that all accredited programmes are aligned with it. The national framework clearly describes what is meant by formative and developmental observation-based, non-standardised assessment, in the service of learning and to support planning, and not to judge or rank children by their achievements. For children with special educational needs, a dedicated legal and methodological framework regulates pedagogical assessment, with specific guidelines developed and regularly updated by the relevant ministry of education. At central level too, policy defines systematic mechanisms for the early identification of developmental difficulties and disabilities and for the provision of specialised cross-sectoral, family-centred services, in line with the best interests of the child. At municipal level, good practice in the quality implementation of curriculum and pedagogy is achieved through active professional support for ECE institutions. A dedicated municipal function or unit is responsible for curriculum and pedagogical support for the staff of ECE institutions, through dedicated monitoring visits (at least one for each institution per year) and the delivery of dedicated sessions on curriculum implementation. It also supports the transition to primary school through clear coordination mechanisms and guidance for institutions.

Finally, the municipality also oversees a permanent team for the pedagogical assessment of children with special educational needs, bringing together cross-sectoral services, institution staff and families in meaningful and child-oriented discussions aimed at identifying concrete solutions centred on the best interests of the child.

The learning environment itself is organised in accordance with this pedagogical approach. Materials are accessible and arranged in a way that encourages children's exploration and independent action. Indoor and outdoor spaces are safe, inclusive and stimulating for their development.

Time and activities outdoors are planned and carried out every day, offering children different opportunities for movement, exploration, discovery and age-appropriate risk-taking. Educational materials and the learning environment reflect the cultural, linguistic and family diversity of the children in the group. In this context, planning has a key role and is developed as a shared and reflective process. With the support and encouragement of the institution's leadership, staff meet regularly, preferably every week, to review observations, discuss the development and interests of each child, and plan the activities and pedagogical environment for the period ahead.

Planning documents serve as flexible guides and clearly show the link between the interests, ideas and needs expressed by children and the way educators respond to them in practice. In this way, children's interests and ideas genuinely influence what takes place every day in the institution. Assessment is part of daily practice. Each child's learning and development are documented through observations, photographs and examples of their work, which are kept in portfolios and regularly updated. Families meet with their child's educator at least twice a year to discuss the child's development together, in the form of an open and collaborative dialogue, not merely as one-way information-sharing. For children with special needs or additional support needs, individual education plans are developed in cooperation with families and the relevant specialists.

The institution also integrates children's rights and protection into daily practice and the organisation of institutional life, involving families as genuine partners in the learning process and offering different forms of participation adapted to different family circumstances and needs.



AREA 5
Monitoring and evaluation

4.5 Monitoring and evaluation | Introductory description

Monitoring and evaluation is the area that closes the quality assurance cycle. The previous four areas describe what quality ECE services should look like in terms of governance, access, staff and pedagogy. This area addresses how the system knows whether this quality is being achieved, how it learns from the evidence it collects and how it uses those findings to improve. Without strong monitoring and evaluation, commitments to quality remain aspirational; with them, they become a dynamic process of continuous improvement.

This area serves two distinct but complementary purposes:

1) Accountability: ensuring that institutions, municipalities and the central level are able to demonstrate whether they are meeting the quality standards to which they have committed.
2) Development: supporting each part of the system to clearly understand its own level of performance, realistically identify priorities and plan improvements in a well-organised way.

When monitoring and evaluation are well designed, they strengthen both at the same time.
Kosovo's quality assurance system reflects a deliberate commitment to alignment between internal and external evaluation. Self-evaluation by institutions and formal inspection by the Education Inspectorate use the same quality standards and the same evaluation instrument. This is not a technical detail, but a deliberate and very important choice that ensures inspection reinforces, rather than interrupts, the institution's own reflective practice, and that evidence generated at institutional level can be meaningfully aggregated/collected at a higher level.

Data in this area are understood broadly, including quantitative measures such as enrollment rates and staff qualification levels, as well as qualitative evidence such as observation notes, self-evaluation records and feedback from families. Both matter and neither is sufficient on its own. The system's capacity to collect, interpret and act on data at all three levels is itself an indicator of quality. A system that cannot see itself clearly cannot improve.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation must be carried out in ways that respect children's rights, dignity and family privacy. Data on children are generated in contexts of trust and their use must always be proportionate, purposeful and protective, from the way the educator documents observations in a child's portfolio to the way MES aggregates and reports national data on quality.

Quality statements

- The quality of ECE is assured through a harmonised system of internal and external evaluation, monitoring and inspection, which is aligned with shared quality standards and aims at continuous quality improvement.

- Monitoring and evaluation support reflective practice and professional dialogue between and within institutions.

- Data are collected and used responsibly to support policymaking, planning and continuous improvement, while protecting children's rights and privacy.

Quality indicators

Central level	
Structural quality	• National policies and legal frameworks promote a culture of internal and external evaluation aimed at quality improvement. • There is a unified national quality assurance framework for the ECE sector, including indicators for structural and process quality. • There is a national database for quality assurance in the ECE sector (0–6 years), enabling the production of annual national reports using standardised indicators. • Standardised data-collection instruments exist that enable the collection of essential data at institutional level for all relevant areas of quality. • Percentage of institutions that carry out annual self-evaluation using nationally approved indicators, in accordance with national regulations. • The number of inspectors trained and qualified to evaluate structural and process quality in ECE is reported every year. • Percentage of ECE institutions that undergo external evaluation in each academic year.
Process quality	• Inspectorates (education, health, welfare) support, oversee and monitor the implementation of child protection programmes in ECE institutions. • Evidence that the data collected are used effectively to inform policies and decisions on ECE governance and financing.

Municipal level	
Structural quality	———
Process quality	• Municipalities support the leadership of ECE institutions in planning and implementing internal evaluation of ECE institutions. • Percentage of ECE institutions supported each year in self-evaluation and quality improvement planning in the institution. • Percentage of ECE institutions supported every 4 years in self-evaluation and quality improvement planning in the institution.

Institutional level	
Structural quality	• The ECE institution keeps the administrative and pedagogical records required by the legislation and regulations in force to enable external evaluation and data reporting. • The institution keeps clear records related to internal organisation and the use of resources for ECE service provision.
Process quality	• The ECE institution, in any form of provision, carries out internal self-evaluation at least once a year, keeps documentation of evidence and identified improvement actions, and systematically sends these data to the inspectorate and the relevant municipal education directorate for data collection, processing and use.

	• The results of self-evaluation are used to set priorities, implement targeted improvement actions and review progress, with documented evidence of changes. • Families/legal guardians, and where possible also children, are included in feedback processes, and the institution documents how this feedback has been incorporated into the implementation of quality improvement actions. • The results of evaluation and self-evaluation are shared and discussed with all stakeholders, including families.

What good practice looks like

At central level, the monitoring and evaluation system is based on a harmonised and unified quality assurance framework, applicable to all institutions and forms of ECE provision. A national database enables the preparation of annual reports using standardised indicators, based on data submitted by municipalities and ECE institutions and aggregated or grouped by geography, type of institution and age group.

Standardised data-collection instruments ensure that what is measured at institutional level is comparable at national level. The system tracks both service coverage and progress in coverage and service quality, and the data collected are used to support the development of policies and regulations in the field of ECE. When evidence shows that a particular area is performing poorly across the system, MES responds with targeted investments, revised guidance or revised regulatory requirements. The quality assurance system is not a passive documentation process: it is the very core of continuous improvement.

At municipal level, good practice means that self-evaluation data submitted by ECE institutions under the municipal mandate are actively analysed and do not simply pass through a mechanical archiving process. Municipal directorates identify patterns across their ECE institutions (e.g. areas of quality with strong performance, challenges shared by several institutions, institutions that may need more intensive support, etc.) and use this analysis to shape their planning, including support visits to ECE institutions, priority areas for staff professional development and the allocation of financial and human resources. Municipalities support the leaders of ECE institutions in planning and implementing internal self-evaluation, and ensure that cross-sectoral inspectorates (education, health and social welfare) coordinate the monitoring of child protection and safety in ECE institutions.

At institutional level, the quality of monitoring and evaluation is most visible not in the annual self-evaluation cycle, but in the moments of continuous reflection that become part of the work of educational staff and make that cycle meaningful. ECE institution leaders encourage regular team reflection, while staff are motivated to exchange, discuss and review work practices in order to adapt them as well as possible to children's needs. In general, leadership can be considered successful if it manages to create an environment where the continuous collection of data through reflections and observations is perceived as an encouraging opportunity to do things better, and not as an administrative process and requirement. For this reason, observations are recorded regularly throughout the year, planning documents refer to findings from observations and team meetings include a standing item on findings from observations. When something is not working, the team should ask why this is happening instead of making assumptions about the person in charge.

When the annual self-evaluation is carried out, it is based on the evidence collected, as a process led by the leader but owned by the whole team, and is genuinely used to produce a clear picture of strengths and priorities, not a favourable presentation for external audiences. The resulting development plan is specific, naming priorities, defining responsibilities and timelines for achieving them, while progress against the plan is reviewed at regular intervals, not only in the next annual self-evaluation cycle. Administrative and pedagogical records are maintained in ways that enable external evaluation and data reporting at municipal level (for institutions under the municipal mandate) and at central level. Families and, where appropriate, children provide their perspectives on the development plan, while the institution clearly documents how this feedback has informed and been reflected in quality improvement actions in the ECE institution. Findings from evaluation and self-evaluation are shared and discussed with all stakeholders, including families, as part of regular work practice.



PART III

Quality assurance cycle

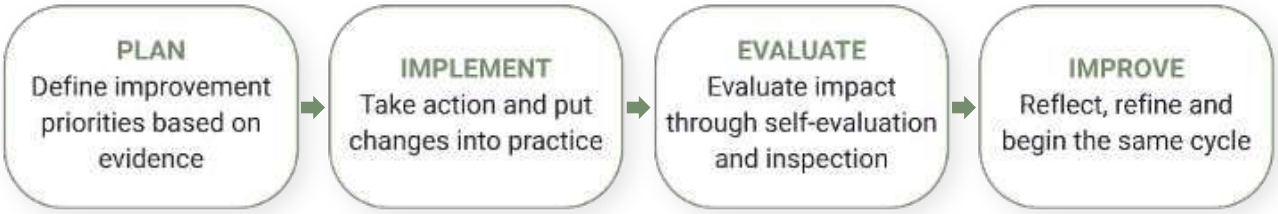
Parts I and II of this Framework have established the conceptual foundation, guiding principles, areas of quality and detailed standards that define what quality ECE looks like across Kosovo's ECE system. Part III brings all these dimensions together by describing how quality assurance works in practice, how institutions, municipalities and central-level actors in Kosovo use these standards to reflect, evaluate, act and continuously improve quality through a shared cycle of evaluation and development. Attached to this document is the Annex of the Instrument for the Assessment of Early Childhood Education Institutions.

This part of the Framework describes the roles, processes, tools and timelines through which quality assurance is brought to life at institutional level, and explains how internal self-evaluation and external evaluation are connected within a unified and coherent system.

5. The quality assurance cycle in practice

5.1 Overview of the cycle: plan - implement - evaluate - improve

Quality assurance in Kosovo's ECE system is organised around a continuous four-stage cycle. This cycle is not a bureaucratic sequence that begins and ends with inspection, but a reflection of the professional culture of a quality institution.



The four stages work together as follows:

1) Plan: At the beginning of each institutional year, the ECE institution reviews the results of the previous year's self-evaluation, consults its three-year development plan and identifies the priorities it will work on in the year ahead. Planning is the stage in which evidence from evaluation is turned into concrete commitments: what will be done, by whom, by when and with what resources. Planning documents are not archived and forgotten: they are a working reference for the whole team throughout the year.

2) Implement: Priority improvements are implemented in practice. This is the longest stage, as it extends throughout the educational year, and is where the real work of quality improvement takes place. Implementation requires attention from leaders, professional support, adequate resources and a culture in which staff feel safe to try new approaches, reflect on what works and adjust direction when necessary.

3) Evaluate: At the end of the educational year, the institution carries out the annual self-evaluation, collecting evidence from across the year to assess honestly where it stands against the shared quality standards. External evaluation by the Education Inspectorate uses the same instrument and the same standards, bringing an independent professional perspective to the evidence. Together, internal and external evaluation produce a clear, evidence-based picture of the institution's strengths and priorities.

4) Improve: The cycle closes and begins again. Findings from evaluation are used to update the three-year development plan, refine the annual work plan and inform decisions on professional development, resources and organisational priorities. Improvement means both building on strengths and addressing gaps, treating the whole cycle as an opportunity to grow, not as a test to be passed.

The strength of the cycle lies in its continuity: each year's results inform the following year's priorities, gradually building an ever stronger foundation of quality.

Why this approach matters

Kosovo's decision to anchor its quality assurance system in a continuous improvement cycle, rather than in a "compliance and inspection" model, reflects an evidence-based understanding of how quality develops in ECE institutions, as well as a value-based commitment to treating educators and leaders as professionals, not as parties under supervision.

International evidence consistently shows that quality in ECE is not created by external pressure alone. Inspection cannot, by itself, increase the quality of daily interactions between educators and children, deepen the professional culture of a staff team, or sustain improvements once inspectors have left the building. What sustainable quality improvement requires is a professional community that has embraced the purpose of quality, developed the habits of honest reflection and evidence-based planning, and built the collective capacity to continue improving over time.

The plan–implement–evaluate–improve cycle is the structural expression of this understanding. When it works well, it turns quality assurance from something that happens to institutions periodically and is externally driven into something that institutions do for themselves: an ongoing professional conversation about what they are doing, why they are doing it and how to do it better. External evaluation then becomes a contribution to that ongoing conversation, not an interruption of it.

This approach also serves equity. A quality assurance system that depends only on periodic inspection will, in practice, produce uneven improvement. A cycle-based system, by contrast, requires every institution to develop its own internal capacity for reflection and improvement. It is precisely the institutions with the greatest needs that benefit most from a system in which quality improvement is a year-round professional activity, supported by a municipality that advises them regularly and by an inspectorate that builds on the institution's own work, rather than replacing it.

A cycle that brings all levels together

The quality assurance cycle is not the exclusive responsibility of ECE institutions. It is a shared effort, in which each level of the system has a distinct and essential role, and where the actions of each level have their full effect only when they are aligned with the other levels and support one another.

Institutions cannot improve sustainably without professional support from their municipality, the training and engagement of qualified inspectors from the central level, and a regulatory environment that creates the conditions for quality. Municipalities cannot support institutions effectively without national quality standards as a reference and without inspection data to contextualise their priorities. And national policy cannot respond to the realities of practice without the evidence generated by self-evaluation at institutional level and monitoring at municipal level.

The table below illustrates how each of the three levels and the inspectorate contribute to the shared cycle, and how their contributions are interconnected.

Level / party	Responsibilities in the quality assurance cycle	How this level is connected to the shared cycle
Management, educational staff, professional associates, administrative staff, and the Steering Council and Parents' Council in ECE institutions	• Lead the annual self-evaluation using the shared evaluation instrument. • Engage the entire staff team in honest, evidence-based reflection. • Develop and implement the annual improvement plan. • Share results with staff and families. • Maintain the documentation required to support external evaluation.	Self-evaluation drives the institution's own improvement cycle. Inspection is based directly on the evidence from self-evaluation.
Municipal-level authorities	• Facilitate professional development aligned with identified gaps. • Ensure the availability of appropriately qualified staff in institutions, including staff qualified to work with children with special educational needs. • Support institutions in complying with national regulations on licensing, induction, performance appraisal and professional development. • Provide guidance and assistance to institutions in carrying out internal appraisal of educator performance. • Coordinate with the Education Inspectorate.	Action at municipal level is based on the priorities and needs identified by institutions during self-evaluation and creates the conditions for institutions to act on them as part of their improvement plan. Municipal data analysis identifies trends across different institutions and serves as the basis for policy responses at municipal level.
Policymakers at central level	• Develop and maintain the Framework and the shared evaluation instrument. • Periodically review and update the Framework. • Train and engage inspectors. • Collect and publish national data on quality.	National standards and the shared instrument ensure that institutional-level reflection and external inspection speak the same language about quality. National data provide information on policies and resource allocation.

5.2 Internal self-evaluation at institutional level

Internal self-evaluation is the cornerstone of Kosovo's quality assurance system. It is the process through which institutions take ownership of quality in their own setting: by honestly reviewing their practice, identifying what is working well, understanding where improvement is needed and planning concrete actions to move forward. Self-evaluation is not an exercise carried out for external audiences: its primary purpose is internal and concerns professional learning and improvement of the institution itself.

> Self-evaluation is a systematic process through which an ECE institution reviews its structures, procedures and practices against agreed quality standards. This process includes collecting evidence, reflecting on what this evidence tells the team, making honest judgements about where they stand and identifying real actions for improvement. Unlike external evaluation, which is carried out by inspectors or other external bodies, self-evaluation is led and owned by the institution and its team.

Detailed practical guidance on how to carry out self-evaluation, including the composition of the self-evaluation leadership team, the selection of groups, recommended modalities, the scoring system and the step-by-step process flows, is provided in the Guidelines for Self-Evaluation in Early Childhood Education Institutions, included in the Appendices to this Framework. The self-evaluation tool itself, against which institutions carry out their annual review, is also attached as an Appendix. This section of the Framework focuses on the conceptual basis of self-evaluation and on the professional culture of which it should become part.

Why self-evaluation matters

- It promotes a culture of reflection and continuous improvement, directing attention not only to carrying out daily tasks, but to the ways in which work can be done better and better;
- strengthens professional dialogue and teamwork, creating space for structured conversations that build a shared understanding of what quality means in practice;
- identifies real strengths on which to build, recognising that quality improvement is not only about fixing problems and shortcomings, but also about valuing and disseminating good practices;
- reveals areas requiring attention before they become problems, enabling institutions to address small gaps or emerging challenges early, while they are still manageable;
- guides practical, evidence-based planning, giving institutions the information they need to set meaningful priorities, instead of guessing where to focus;
- prepares the institution for external evaluation: when staff are already familiar with the evaluation instrument and have used it for honest reflection, inspection becomes a continuation of work already under way, not a new process requiring a different kind of preparation;
- supports accountability and transparency towards families, municipal-level authorities and other stakeholders, demonstrating that the institution takes quality seriously.

Self-evaluation as part of the continuous quality cycle

Self-evaluation is not a one-off event. It is part of a continuous quality cycle that links planning, action, monitoring, reflection and improvement. Institutions should carry out a full self-evaluation at least once a year, at the end of the educational\school year, before planning for the following year begins. This sequencing and frequency create a natural and productive link between reflection and planning: improvement priorities are based on evidence from the year just completed, and are not inherited from the previous year's plan without critical review.

While the annual self-evaluation is the formal anchor of the quality cycle, the evaluation instrument is a living resource that responds to the needs of children and educational staff. Institutions are encouraged to draw on specific sections of the tool between annual cycles (e.g. to monitor the progress of a particular practice identified as a development priority, to follow up on concerns raised by families or staff, or to check how implementation of a new approach is developing). This continuous and flexible use of the instrument should complement, not replace, the formal annual self-evaluation.

The results of self-evaluation directly inform the institution's three-year development plan and annual work plan, inform professional development planning for staff, guide decisions on resources and priorities, and provide a comparative baseline against which progress is measured over time. An institution that carries out self-evaluation conscientiously builds, year by year, an increasingly clear and honest picture of its own quality, as well as an increasingly strong foundation for improvement.

The role of leadership in fostering the right culture

The quality of an institution's self-evaluation depends, more than on any other single factor, on the quality of its leadership. A leader who treats self-evaluation as an administrative obligation to be fulfilled will generate a superficial process that does not produce useful results. A leader who treats self-evaluation as a genuine opportunity for professional growth and institutional improvement will generate something entirely different: an honest and collective review of the institution's practice that the whole team sees as meaningful and motivating.

The leader's role in the self-evaluation process is not primarily managerial: it is cultural. The leader's most important contribution is to model the attitude and approach they want to see in the team. This means being willing to openly acknowledge that there are areas that are still not working as well as they should. It also means involving staff in honest dialogue about the institution's challenges, but also its successes. Self-evaluation findings, including those that may be uncomfortable, should be treated as valuable information requiring action and improvement, not as problems to be minimised or bypassed.

At the same time, the leader should continuously promote quality improvement as a shared professional effort, not as a process aimed at assessing or judging individuals.

Leadership also means creating the structural conditions in which good self-evaluation can take place: allocating adequate time to carry out the process and ensuring that all staff understand why it matters and how it works in practice. It is also important that educators are actively involved in collecting evidence and in the reflection process, rather than simply being invited to approve conclusions drawn by others. Another key element is the continuous and systematic follow-up of improvement actions arising from self-evaluation. When the leader can demonstrate that self-evaluation has brought concrete changes to the institution's practice, it builds trust among staff and strengthens motivation to engage in the process. This makes the next self-evaluation cycle even more useful and productive.

Educators' self-reflection and professional engagement

While the self-evaluation leadership team coordinates and oversees the process at institutional level, the quality of self-evaluation ultimately depends on the honesty and engagement of each individual staff member. Educators in particular are at the heart of the process, and effective self-evaluation requires them to approach their practice with genuine curiosity and an open but critical mind. This means moving towards the question "how well is what I am doing actually working for the children in my group? What could I do differently? What evidence do I have?". This means being willing to share that reflection honestly with colleagues, in team discussions and bilateral conversations with pedagogical staff, without defensiveness or feeling driven to demonstrate competence.

Educators' self-reflection is strengthened when they have opportunities and structured space to analyse their professional practice. This includes organising regular team meetings, where discussion focuses on pedagogical practice and professional development, not only on administrative issues. Educators should also have access to the self-evaluation instrument before formal discussions take place, so that they can become familiar with the relevant indicators and reflect on their work. The opportunity to review their documentation and materials as evidence of professional practice also plays an important role. Furthermore, it is essential that educators feel confident that their reflections and assessments will be treated constructively by the leadership team and used to support improvement of practice, not as a basis for criticism or individual appraisal.

The culture of educators' self-reflection, on which self-evaluation depends, cannot be developed in a day. It is built gradually, over successive self-evaluation cycles, as staff experience the process as genuinely useful. The Guidelines in the Appendices provide practical support for educators involved in this process for the first time.

What good practice in self-evaluation looks like

An institution where self-evaluation is genuinely embedded in institutional life can be recognised long before the formal annual self-evaluation cycle begins. The habits of reflection, evidence collection and professional dialogue that make self-evaluation productive are not activated once a year: they are the core of daily professional work.

In practice, this means educators regularly observing children's engagement and documenting what they notice; team meetings that regularly include discussions on what observations and data collected during the week or month show; a physical environment and a planning culture that clearly reflect children's interests, needs and development, guiding the preparations and activities organised by educators; and a leader who regularly asks "what do the observations and evidence we have collected tell us?".

When the annual self-evaluation comes in this kind of institution, it is not an interruption of the work, but a deepening of it: a more structured and more comprehensive version of the reflection the team has carried out throughout the year. The evidence base is already largely available. The team's decisions on specific indicators are based on a year of accumulated observations and discussions, not on impressions formed in haste. The development plan resulting from self-evaluation identifies priorities that staff consider real and important, because they arise from their daily experiences and practices.

The results of self-evaluation are credible because they are supported by genuine evidence. When an external inspector then uses the same instrument to carry out their evaluation, the institution's self-evaluation provides a meaningful starting point, a document that the inspector and the institution's leadership can review together, agree or disagree on professionally, and on this basis build further steps for development and improvement.

5.3 Monitoring and advisory visits at municipal level

Municipalities play a central and indispensable in the cycle of quality assurance in Kosovo. They are the level of the system closest to ECE institutions and the main mechanism through which national quality standards are translated into support, guidance and accountability at municipal level.

Monitoring and advisory support at municipal level differs from external inspection. While inspection is a formal external evaluation carried out by the Education Inspectorate at defined intervals, municipal monitoring and advisory support is a continuous process of professional support and developmental oversight carried out throughout the year. Its purpose is to help ECE institutions understand and implement quality standards and identify and address emerging challenges before they become entrenched.

In practice, monitoring and advisory support at municipal level should include:

- regular advisory visits to each ECE institution, at least once a year, with greater frequency for institutions that need more intensive support, including at least one visit with a dedicated focus on pedagogical and curriculum mentoring;
- analysis of the level of quality in all institutions under the municipality's responsibility, identifying areas where they show good results, challenges that continue to be present, institutions that need additional support, and municipal-level trends requiring intervention or policy-level measures: support for institutions in complying with national regulations on staff licensing, induction, performance appraisal and professional development, including guidance and active assistance for institution leaders in planning and carrying out internal appraisal of educator performance;
- facilitation of professional development opportunities aligned with gaps identified through self-evaluation results, ensuring that the training offer responds to real needs and is not generic;
- ensuring the availability of qualified staff according to the legislation in force in all institutions, including personnel qualified to work with children with special needs;
- coordination with the Education Inspectorate before and after formal external evaluations, ensuring continuity between municipal support and inspection results;
- cross-sectoral coordination with health, social protection and child protection services, ensuring that quality assurance extends across the full range of conditions that affect children's well-being and that referral pathways are functional and accessible to all ECE institutions.

Municipal authorities collect, validate and submit quality data to MES every year. The completeness, accuracy and timely submission of these data are themselves indicators of quality: a municipality that does not maintain a clear and up-to-date picture of the quality it oversees cannot fulfil its responsibilities in the quality assurance system and chain.

5.4 External evaluation and inspection

External evaluation is carried out by the Education Inspectorate. It is a formal and independent evaluation of the quality of an institution, carried out using the same evaluation instrument and the same quality standards as the institution's own self-evaluation. This alignment is not only a technical detail: it is the defining feature of Kosovo's quality assurance architecture, reflecting a deliberate commitment to a unified language of quality shared by institutions and the external bodies that evaluate them.

The culture of external evaluation: support, not oversight

The way external evaluation is understood and carried out matters just as much as the instrument it uses. Kosovo's quality assurance system is built on a clear commitment: inspection exists to help institutions improve, not to catch them out. This principle should be visible in every aspect of how inspectors prepare for their evaluations, carry them out and follow up on them.

An inspector who approaches their role primarily as an enforcer of compliance, looking for gaps to record, unmet standards and missing evidence, will create defensiveness, anxiety and, ultimately, a performative culture rather than a reflective one in the institutions they visit. Institutions will learn to present themselves well for inspection, rather than using inspection as an opportunity for honest professional dialogue. The results will give the inspector and the system less information about the real quality of early childhood education provision than a genuine and well-developed self-evaluation process.

An inspector who performs their role as a professional partner and constructive critic, bringing external experience and an independent perspective, engaging in open and meaningful dialogue about professional practice, valuing and recognising the aspects the institution does well, and working with leaders to identify areas where further improvement is needed, creates an entirely different process. These interactions encourage evaluations that are more honest, more objective and, consequently, more useful for quality improvement. As a result, the institution gains a clearer understanding of its strengths and development priorities, while the municipality and the national system obtain data that reflect the real quality of practice, not quality presented only for evaluation purposes. Kosovo's Inspectorate aims to reflect this approach in its own working practice. This means that inspectors should be prepared not only to use the evaluation instrument, but also to develop the professional skills associated with supportive dialogue, providing constructive feedback and encouraging reflection on practice. Inspection reports should also have a developmental character, in addition to their evaluative function. They should recognise and value the institution's achievements, place areas for improvement in the appropriate context and provide clear and actionable recommendations that encourage concrete action and commitment to improvement. In this way, institutions should experience inspection not simply as an evaluation process, but as an opportunity for professional development, emerging from it stronger and with a clearer understanding of the next steps for advancement.

Benefits of a shared instrument

The decision to use the same evaluation instrument for both internal self-evaluation and external evaluation is one of the most important choices in the design of Kosovo's quality assurance framework. The benefits of this approach extend across the whole system. For institutions, using the same instrument means that self-evaluation and inspection speak the same language of quality. Educators and leaders who have engaged seriously with the evaluation tool in their self-evaluation process are already familiar with its indicators, its measurement scales and the evidence it requires. Inspection does not introduce an unfamiliar set of criteria: it applies the same framework that the institution has used to examine itself. The quality culture developed by self-evaluation, the habit of collecting evidence, making honest judgements and identifying priorities, is precisely the culture that makes external evaluation productive.

For inspectors, the shared instrument provides a common reference that makes the relationship between the institution's self-evaluation and the external evaluation clear and easy to follow. Instead of starting from scratch, the inspector starts from the institution's own description of its quality, reviewing the evidence collected, the judgements made and the priorities identified, and bringing an independent perspective to the review. Agreements and disagreements between the institution's self-evaluation and the inspector's independent judgement are equally valuable as information. Agreements increase confidence in the reliability of the self-evaluation process, while major differences indicate areas where institutional self-reflection may need to be deepened further.

For the quality assurance system as a whole, the shared instrument means that data generated through self-evaluation and data generated through external evaluation are directly comparable. This comparability enables the analysis of patterns across the system: for example, it identifies whether there are quality dimensions where self-evaluation scores consistently differ from external scores, suggesting systematic overestimation or underestimation by institutions, areas where the instrument itself needs review, or areas where inspectors need additional training.

How inspectors build on self-evaluation

The relationship between self-evaluation and external evaluation is not simply repetition or replacement, but a way to deepen the understanding of quality. The inspector's task is not to carry out externally the same evaluation that the institution has carried out itself, using the same methods and reaching the same conclusions. On the contrary, they should complement the institution's work by bringing an independent and professional evaluation that enriches the existing analysis. In preparing for an external evaluation, the inspector reviews all the institution's most recent self-evaluation documentation: completed evaluation forms, the evidence base, the action plan, and any other relevant reports from municipal advisory visits. This preparation is not simply a formality, but the foundation of a good and productive inspection visit. An inspector who enters an institution without seriously studying its self-evaluation immediately loses one of the most important sources of information available to them.

During the visit, the inspector uses the self-evaluation as a working document. For each area and subcategory of quality, they take into account the evaluation made by the institution itself, review the evidence on which that evaluation is based and then provide their independent judgement, using the same evaluation scale. When the institution has rated itself at Stage 3 for a particular practice, the inspector carefully analyses the evidence to see whether it supports that rating, whether the institution may have underestimated its own development, or whether there are important aspects of the indicator that have not been fully reflected in the self-evaluation.

Professional conversations with the leader, educators and other staff are not simply an addition to this process, but an essential part of it. They enable the inspector to understand the quality of the institution from within, the context in which it operates, the constraints it faces, the progress achieved, and the challenges that remain. In this way, the inspector brings an external perspective that enriches, rather than simply replaces, the institution's own description.

After the visit, the evaluation report should be structured in a way that clearly connects with the institution's self-evaluation: showing where the external evaluation confirms the institution's judgement, where it identifies strengths that may have been underestimated, and where it presents a different perspective from that of the institution itself. Recommendations should be concrete, realistic and actionable — not simply a general list of areas for improvement, but clear and well-considered steps, based on the institution's context and development path.

What good inspection practice looks like:

Before the visit, the inspector reads the institution's self-evaluation in full, identifies areas of alignment and areas where there may be differences, and plans observations and professional conversations on that basis.

During the visit, the inspector treats the leader and educators as professional partners in evaluating quality. Observations are carried out with a clear purpose and without interfering in the process, while conversations are exploratory rather than investigative in nature. They recognise and value strengths just as clearly as areas that need improvement.

After the visit, the report is prepared with a developmental approach, with concrete recommendations supported by evidence from both the self-evaluation and the inspector's observations. In this way, the inspection process results in a clearer and deeper understanding of quality, as well as clear and realistic steps for further improvement.

5.5 Development planning as a result of evaluation

Evaluation, whether internal or external, has value only when it results in concrete action. The development plan is the instrument through which the plan - implement - evaluate - improve cycle becomes concrete: it turns evaluation findings into specific, resourced and time-bound commitments on which the institution will act within the same year. Without this conversion, evaluation remains a description of quality, not a driver of it.

How findings inform practice

The most important question to ask at the end of each self-evaluation is not "what score did we achieve?", but "what do our evidence tell us about the way we work and what should we do differently?" Self-evaluation findings should be actively interpreted, not simply recorded.

In practice, this means reviewing scores across the dimensions and subcategories of quality to identify patterns: which areas of the institution's work are strongest, which need more attention, whether there are compliance requirements that have not yet been met, and whether there are practices that are emerging and developing but are not yet stable. However, the purpose of self-evaluation is not to produce a number, but to create understanding, and this understanding should be translated directly into change in practice. Therefore, institutions should ensure that self-evaluation findings are discussed at the level of concrete practices, in team meetings, in individual conversations with educators and in discussions with the Parents' Council, and not merely summarised in a development planning document. The most sustainable quality improvements come from changing the way educators understand and interpret their practice, not from action plans that remain only in files.

How internal and external evaluation findings are brought together

One of the most valuable moments in Kosovo's quality assurance cycle is the bringing together of internal self-evaluation findings with those of external evaluation, creating a shared picture of the institution's quality. When both processes use the same instrument and provide comparable judgements, they offer a richer and more reliable basis for development planning than either process on its own.

When self-evaluation and external evaluation are largely aligned, institutions can act with greater confidence on improvement priorities, knowing that their analysis has also been supported by an independent professional perspective. In this case, the development plan is built on a strong foundation, while the institution's leaders can communicate priorities to staff, families and the municipality from a position of shared understanding.

When self-evaluation and external evaluation do not align, this difference itself constitutes valuable information. If external evaluation identifies strengths that the institution has not sufficiently valued in its self-evaluation, this is an opportunity for the institution to review the evidence and the way it interprets it, and perhaps to learn more from good practices it has taken for granted.

In cases where external evaluation indicates lower levels of quality than the institution's self-evaluation, this is a more challenging signal, but an equally important one. It indicates areas where self-reflection may have been influenced by familiarity with practice, by a tendency towards more positive self-evaluation, or by an incomplete understanding of the requirements of the quality standard in practice.

Both types of difference, when addressed with professional honesty and mutual respect, strengthen the quality assurance system. When the inspector observes discrepancies between the institution's self-evaluation and their own findings, they have a responsibility to discuss this openly with the institution's leaders, explain their reasoning, listen to the institution's perspective and reach a shared, well-argued understanding of the state of quality and the areas requiring improvement. This kind of

professional dialogue lies at the heart of an effective quality assurance system. The three-year development plan and the annual work plan.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions in Kosovo maintain two interconnected planning documents. The three-year development plan defines the medium-term direction of quality improvement: the priority areas on which the institution will focus over the three years, the main goals for each area, and the indicators through which progress is measured. This plan is reviewed and updated every year on the basis of self-evaluation results, so that it reflects the current state of the institution's quality.

The annual work plan turns the three-year priorities into concrete actions for the year ahead. It clearly defines what will be done, who will do it, with what resources and by when. The annual plan is the main instrument for implementing the quality cycle: it serves as a reference point for tracking progress during the year, as a basis for team discussions on implementation, and as the starting point for the following year's self-evaluation.

Both planning documents are developed collaboratively, with meaningful staff input and in consultation with families.

Characteristics of an effective action plan

An effective action plan arising from the combined findings of self-evaluation and external evaluation should:

- identify a manageable number of priority areas (no more than three to five), where improvement will have the most significant positive impact on children's learning, well-being and development;
- specify concrete and achievable actions, rather than broad aims;
- assign clear responsibilities, naming the person or role accountable for each action;
- define realistic timelines, recognising that some actions can be completed quickly, while others require sustained effort over several months or a full year;
- balance immediate and achievable "quick wins" with longer-term development priorities that require deeper cultural or structural change;
- be clearly linked to the three-year development plan and the annual work plan, ensuring that priorities are supported with the necessary resources and followed up and evaluated within the institution's regular planning cycle, and include the recommendations from the most recent external evaluation report, so that the perspectives of internal and external evaluation are reflected in the institution's improvement priorities;
- be reviewed and updated at regular intervals, not only at the next annual self-evaluation, so that progress is tracked and adjustments are made whenever necessary.

Monitoring progress and evaluating improvement

Development planning does not end with drafting a plan. The leadership team should track progress throughout the year through regular monitoring, drawing on the relevant parts of the evaluation instrument to track specific areas and documenting the changes made, so that evidence of improvement is available for the next annual self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation and development planning should also serve as opportunities to recognise and value the progress achieved. When a practice moves from Stage 2 to Stage 3, when an unmet requirement is closed, or when a challenge is successfully addressed, this should be recognised, shared with staff and communicated to families. Evaluation of progress strengthens the professional culture of continuous improvement and reminds all actors of the importance of the quality assurance process.
The results of self-evaluation, together with the action plan arising from it, should be shared transparently with staff and the Parents' Council. Likewise, once received, the external evaluation report should be discussed with the whole team and its recommendations integrated into the development plan. Transparency about quality, including areas where work is still needed, is not a weakness, but evidence of a healthy professional culture.

6. Glossary

Early Childhood Education (ECE) - Refers to the education of children to stimulate them in reaching their full potential from birth until they enter first grade in primary school.

Pre-primary Education - Is an educational programme for children aged five (5) years, provided within primary schools and Early Childhood Education institutions.

Early Childhood Education Institutions (ECEI) - Means all preschool institutions and primary schools that provide preschool and pre-primary education.

Preschool Institution – Is an institution that provides early childhood education for children from 9 months of age until children enter primary school to attend pre-primary education or first grade.

- **Public Early Childhood Education institutions** - Means an institution financed from the budget of the Republic of Kosovo and managed by the Municipal Education Directorates (MDE).

- **Private Early Childhood Education institutions** - Means an institution financed and managed by legal entities and natural persons.

- **Early Childhood Education institutions with public-private partnership** - Means institutions established with mixed capital determined by agreement between the public authority and the legal entity, according to the legislation in force.

- **Early Childhood Education institutions organised within central and local institutions and various corporations** - Is an alternative form that means the provision of Early Childhood Education services that are established/licensed and managed by central or local institutions or various corporations, depending on the founder. They are adapted within the above-mentioned facilities or separately, within the space where they operate, which meet the conditions provided for under the legislation in force and as such serve the inclusion of children and staff employed in these institutions, and beyond.

- **Community-based Early Childhood Education institutions** - Means the provision of early childhood education services organised and managed by the community in agreement with the municipality and in accordance with standards approved by the competent institutions. These may be established within school facilities as well as outside them.

National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education for Children aged 0–6 years in the Republic of Kosovo - The Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the fundamental document on the basis of which educational activity is organised in Early Childhood Education institutions. The role of the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education document is to support the child's all-round development and to support and guide work in Early Childhood Education Institutions in all forms of organisation.

Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education – A continuous process aimed at creating, maintaining and improving the conditions, practices and structures that enable the provision of quality early childhood education.

Monitoring and evaluation in Early Childhood Education - The systematic process of measuring and evaluating implementation, progress and results to inform decision-making and the improvement of policies and practices.

Matrix of quality indicators - For each of the five areas of quality in the Framework, the matrix defines the quality statement and indicators (i.e. descriptors) at central, local/municipal and institutional level, together with an illustration of what good practice looks like. For each stakeholder, from MES to the leader of an ECE institution, the matrix defines an aspirational goal for what quality could look like in their area of responsibility and how it could be observed and measured.

Equity, inclusion and non-discrimination – Is a rights-based concept of quality education that emphasises equity or equal opportunities in access and participation and responds positively to the individual needs and competencies of all children without distinction. This means that programme content, methodologies, strategies and infrastructure are aligned with children's individual needs so that each child can develop their potential to the maximum;

Special educational needs – Children's needs that require additional or adapted support in early childhood education, to enable full participation, learning and development together with peers. These may relate to development, learning abilities, language, behaviour, or physical, sensory or other barriers that affect the learning process.

Central level – The level of governance that defines the legal framework, policies and national quality standards for ECE and coordinates their implementation. It ensures needs-based financing, supports and trains inspectors, and collects and analyses data on quality at national level. It also ensures that municipalities and institutions have the guidance, training and support needed to implement the standards.

Local level – The municipal level that oversees and supports ECE institutions in implementing national quality standards. It monitors quality, provides practical guidance, collects and reports data, and ensures cross-sectoral coordination and the addressing of barriers to access and quality in services. The role and responsibilities of the local level in the field of ECE include public, public-private and community-based ECE institutions.

Institutional level – Early childhood education institutions that provide ECE services in accordance with the legislation in force, the curriculum and standards, and that carry out self-evaluation, plan improvement, cooperate with families and the community, and keep and report data on quality.

ECEI environments - Indoor and outdoor spaces in ECE institutions, including not only the physical environment, but also interactions with educators, parents/guardians, peers and staff. It is a safe environment adapted for learning through play, exploration, communication and the development of relationships, which supports the child's development and well-being and is often considered the "third educator".

Individual Education Plan (IEP) - Is an official pedagogical document prepared for children with special educational needs, for whom the assessment and support team for different developmental areas has made a decision on education with special needs.

Municipal team for pedagogical assessment – Is an assessment and support team established and organised by municipalities to respond to the requests and needs of educational institutions in order to ensure inclusive education.

Self-evaluation of the ECE institution – Self-evaluation is a systematic process through which the ECE institution reviews its structures, processes and practices in relation to the quality standards defined in legislation and regulatory documents. It includes collecting evidence, reflecting on what this evidence shows, making honest judgements about the current situation in the ECEI and identifying actions for improvement.

External evaluation of the ECE institution - External evaluation is carried out by inspectors of the Education Inspectorate. It is a formal and independent evaluation of the quality of an institution, carried out using the same evaluation instrument and the same quality standards as the institution's own self-evaluation.

Holistic development and well-being – The full development of the child in physical, cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional and personality terms, promoting health, safety, well-being, active learning through play, the development of values, personal awareness and interpersonal relationships. This approach supports the child's participation, the development of responsibility towards oneself, others and the environment, participation and safe relationships with the family, and the identification and development of each child's needs and potential.

Learning through play - A play-based early education approach supports children's development based on their needs, promotes language and communication development and enables educational staff to translate the curriculum into play activities.

Identification in early childhood – refers to the process through which risk or developmental difficulties are identified, including disabilities and developmental delays in the early childhood years.

Structural quality – Refers to the conditions and resources that create the basis for providing quality early childhood education, such as policies, legislation, financing, infrastructure, standards, curriculum and staff.

Process quality – Refers to the way early childhood education is implemented in practice, through interactions, pedagogical practices, leadership, cooperation with families and children's daily experiences.

I**ndicator** – Provides a common reference, a picture of what quality looks like, which can guide reflection, planning and professional dialogue at every level and which, gradually, can inform data collection and monitoring as Kosovo's quality assurance system develops.

Measurement – Is the method in which we evaluate quality indicators. There are two types of measurement used in the internal evaluation process of ECE institutions, including Yes/No assessment (for compliance-based indicators - things that exist or do not exist, have been developed or have not been developed) and the five (5)-point development scale (for process-quality indicators - things that develop over time and can be implemented at different levels of quality and sustainability).

Mentoring and advisory support in ECE - A continuous process of professional support that helps institutions and educators improve their practice, understand and implement the curriculum and quality standards, and identify and address difficulties in daily work in a timely manner.

Development plan – Defines the priorities of the educational institution based on the opportunities, circumstances and specific features of the educational institution and is prepared by the leaders of the ECE institution for their leadership mandate.

Annual work plan - Means the definition of educational content and the manner of its implementation, prepared by the educator in cooperation with professional associates, based on the curriculum and the institution's development plan approved by the Steering Council of the Early Childhood Education institution before the start of the new educational year.

Steering Council – Is the body responsible for the governance of the educational or training institution. The equivalent structure of the Steering Council refers to bodies that have the same competencies and responsibilities as the Steering Council.

Parents' Council in the ECEI – A representative body of parents in the ECE institution, which cooperates with the institution to improve the quality of children's education and development, and to create a safe, supportive and appropriate environment for learning through play.

Educational personnel - Means a qualified person employed in Early Childhood Education institutions in the organisation of the education process.

- **Educator** - Means a person qualified according to the legislation in force, employed to provide services in early childhood education institutions.
- **Support educator** - The support educator provides professional support to a person.

Professional associate – means the educational/training service provided by professional associates including, but not limited to: the pedagogue, psychologist and speech therapist, with the aim of improving and advancing the work of the early childhood education institution;

Management staff - Means personnel who manage Early Childhood Education institutions at leadership level.

Administrative staff – Means personnel engaged in administrative work in Early Childhood Education institutions.

Technical staff - Are cooks, assistant cooks and maintenance personnel.

Assistant - Means a qualified person who assists and cares for children with special needs during their stay in early childhood education services.

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The working group engaged by decision of MES remains available and close to the users of this document, to provide additional clarifications and answers to any questions concerning the document as a whole, including the implementation of internal and external evaluation of ECE institutions, as provided for in this Framework.

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GUIDELINES FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

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GUIDELINES FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

This Guidelines document is an annex derived from the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education in the Republic of Kosovo. As such, it serves early childhood education professionals working in Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions by providing practical guidance for implementing internal quality assessment within their ECE settings.

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 05

2. WHAT IS SELF-ASSESSMENT AND WHY IT MATTERS 05

2.1. What is self-assessment? 05

2.2. Why is self-assessment important? 05

3. STRUCTURE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL 06

3.1. Overall organisation 06

3.2. The structure of each assessment item 07

3.3. Understanding evidence and verification sources 08

4. FREQUENCY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT 09

4.1. Annual self-assessment cycle 09

4.2. Flexibility for ongoing monitoring 09

5. IMPLEMENTING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT 09

5.1. Appointment of a self-assessment lead team 09

5.2. Scope – Which groups should be assessed? 10

5.3. Scope – Which staff should be included? 11

5.4. Principles and modalities for conducting self-assessment 12

5.5. Plenary reflection and dialogue with all staff 14

5.6. Dialogue with families and the Parents' Council 15

6. SCORING: HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS 16

6.1 The scoring method: Percentage-based scoring 16

STEP 1: Convert each item to a percentage 16

STEP 2: Calculate your subcategory score 17

STEP 3: Calculate your quality dimension score 18

STEP 4: Calculate your overall setting score 19

6.2. Interpreting your scores 20

6.3. Using your scores to set improvement priorities 21

Practical tips for scoring 21

Scoring as part of continuous improvement 22

6.4. Follow-up and ongoing monitoring 22

7. CONCLUSION 23

Annex 1 - QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: SCORING YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT 24

1. INTRODUCTION

These guidelines support early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings in Kosovo to carry out meaningful and constructive self-assessment using the ECEC Quality Assurance Tool. They are designed to help directors, pedagogues, educators, collaborators and other staff engage in structured reflection on their practice, identify areas of strength and development, and guide quality improvement planning in a spirit of continuous learning and professional growth.

Self-assessment is not an administrative exercise or a test. It is an opportunity for your team to step back from daily routines, look thoughtfully at what you are doing well, understand where you can improve, and plan concrete actions that will benefit the children and families you serve.

2. WHAT IS SELF-ASSESSMENT AND WHY IT MATTERS

2.1. What is self-assessment?

Self-assessment is a systematic process through which your ECEC setting examines its own structures, processes, and practices against agreed quality standards established in legislation and regulatory documents. It involves gathering evidence, reflecting on what that evidence tells you, making honest judgements about where you stand, and identifying realistic actions for improvement.

Unlike external evaluation, which is conducted by inspectors or other external bodies, self-assessment is led and owned by your setting. It is an internal process that belongs to you and your team.

2.2. Why is self-assessment important?

Self-assessment matters because it:

- **a) Promotes a culture of reflection and continuous improvement**
  When self-assessment becomes part of your regular practice, it encourages everyone in the setting, from the director to classroom educators to support staff, to think critically and constructively about their work. It shifts the focus from "getting through the day" to "how can we do this better?".

  b) Strengthens professional dialogue and teamwork
  Self-assessment creates space for structured conversations among colleagues. It helps staff see their work through different perspectives, learn from each other, and build shared understanding of what quality means in practice.

  c) Identifies real strengths to build on
  Quality improvement is not only about fixing problems. Self-assessment helps you recognise and celebrate what you are already doing well, so you can build on those strengths and share good practices across your setting.

  d) Reveals areas that need attention, before they become problems
  By regularly looking at your practice with honesty and care, you can identify small gaps or emerging challenges early, when they are still manageable, rather than waiting for external inspectors to point them out.

e) Guides practical, evidence-based planning
Self-assessment gives you the information you need to set meaningful priorities for your annual work plan and three-year development plan. Instead of guessing what to focus on, you make decisions based on real evidence from your own setting.

f) Prepares you for external evaluation
When your team is already familiar with the assessment tool and has used it to reflect on your practice, external inspections feel less like an exam and more like a continuation of the work you are already doing. There are no surprises, because you are using the same criteria and the same language.

g) Supports accountability and transparency
Self-assessment demonstrates to families, municipal authorities, and other stakeholders that your setting takes quality seriously and is committed to honest reflection and continuous improvement.

Self-assessment is not a one-off event. It is part of an ongoing quality cycle that connects planning, action, monitoring, reflection, and improvement. When done well, self-assessment:

- Feeds into your three-year development plan and annual work plan revisions
- Helps you set realistic improvement priorities
- Guides professional development planning for staff
- Informs decisions about resources, staffing, and curriculum
- Provides a baseline against which to measure progress over time

3. STRUCTURE OF THE ASSESSMENT TOOL

The assessment tool you will use for self-assessment is the same tool that external inspectors will use when they visit your setting. This deliberate alignment ensures that everyone, staff, leadership, inspectors, and families, shares a common understanding of what quality means and how it is measured.

3.1. Overall organisation

The assessment tool is organised into five main quality dimensions that reflect the key areas of quality in early childhood education and care:

a) Leadership and Funding – How your setting is led, governed, and resourced
b) Access – How children and families access and participate in your provision
c) Staff – Qualifications, professional development, and working conditions
d) Curriculum and Pedagogy – What and how children learn, how parents/caregivers are involved, and the environments that support them
e) Monitoring and Evaluation – How your setting tracks, reflects on, and improves its work

Each quality dimension is broken down into thematic subcategories that group related aspects of practice together in a logical way. For example, under "Curriculum and Pedagogy," you will find subcategories such as "Curriculum framework and planning," "Pedagogical approaches and learning organisation," "Learning environment and resources," and "Family engagement and communication."

Within each subcategory, you will find a set of assessment items (also called indicators). These are clear, concrete statements that describe what is expected in terms of structures, processes, or practices at your setting.

3.2. The structure of each assessment item

Every assessment item in the tool is presented in the same way, using four columns:

1. Indicator

This column contains the assessment item itself: a clear statement describing what should be in place or how developed a practice should be. For example:

> "The ECEC institution has a Governing Council that is formally established and functions in line with applicable regulations."
>
> "Educators create a warm, calm, and emotionally safe environment where children feel accepted and valued."

Indicators are written in plain, operational language so that everyone, educators, leaders, and inspectors, can understand them in the same way.

Below each indicator, you will see **verification sources**—these tell you what types of evidence you should look at to assess whether the indicator is met. Verification sources might include policies, plans, meeting minutes, observations, portfolios, communication records, or professional dialogue with staff. Be careful, the list is not exhaustive, it is rather meant to give you a general indication of where to look and what to look for, but you may have additional suggestions!

2. Measurement

This column tells you **how to assess** the indicator. There are two types of measurement used in the tool:

a) Yes / No assessment

This is used for compliance-based items—things that either exist or do not exist, are in place or are not in place. For example:

> "The setting has a written child protection policy." → Yes or No
> "The annual work plan is approved by the Governing Council before the beginning of the school year." → Yes or No

If the answer is "Yes," the requirement is met. If the answer is "No," it means the requirement is not met and needs to be addressed.

b) 5-point development scale

This is used for practice-quality items—things that develop over time and can be implemented at different levels of quality and consistency. The scale has five stages:

> **Stage 1 – Not yet developed**: The practice is not in place or is only minimally present. There is little or no evidence of systematic implementation.
> **Stage 2 – Partially developed**: The practice exists in some form, but implementation is inconsistent, informal, or limited in scope.
> **Stage 3 – Developed**: The practice is in place and generally implemented. Basic expectations are met, though consistency or depth may vary.
> **Stage 4 – Well developed**: The practice is consistently implemented and functions effectively. It contributes positively to the quality of provision.
> **Stage 5 – Fully developed**: The practice is embedded in daily work, regularly reviewed, and continuously improved. Clear evidence shows its positive impact.

The 5-point scale recognises that quality develops progressively. It is not about judging you harshly: it is about helping you understand where you are on a journey and what the next step forward might look like.

3. Result

This column is where you record the outcome of your assessment. Depending on the measurement type, you will:

- Check "Yes" or "No"
- Circle or check one of the five development stages (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)
- Fill in a number or percentage where required

The result column is not for long explanations: it is for clear, concise recording of your judgement.

4. Priority actions

This is one of the most important columns in the tool. For each indicator, you should identify **concrete actions** to:

- Address gaps where requirements are not met (e.g., if something is "No" when it should be "Yes")
- Strengthen partially developed practices (e.g., moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3)
- Consolidate and further improve well-developed practices where relevant (e.g., ensuring Stage 4 practices remain strong or progress to Stage 5)

Priority actions should be:

- **Realistic** – something your setting can actually do, given your resources and context
- **Specific** – clear enough that everyone knows what needs to happen
- **Time-bound where possible** – with an indication of when the action should be completed (e.g., "within 1 year," “within 2 years,” "within 6 months," "ongoing")
- **Linked to your development planning** – connected to your annual work plan or three-year development plan

Priority actions are not about blame or criticism. They are about making your good work even better.

3.3. Understanding evidence and verification sources

Every indicator in the tool specifies what types of evidence should inform your assessment. This ensures that your judgements are not based on assumptions or impressions, but on real, observable information.

Evidence might include:

- **Documents**: policies, procedures, plans, meeting minutes, records, reports
- Observations: watching what happens in practice—how educators interact with children, how routines unfold, how spaces are organised
- **Portfolios and pedagogical documentation**: children's work, photos, project records, learning stories
- **Communication records/Minutes of meetings**: emails, newsletters, notices to families, feedback forms
- **Professional dialogue and minutes of meetings**: conversations with staff, educators, leadership, or specialists

When you conduct self-assessment, you should actively gather and review this evidence. It is not enough to think, "We probably do this." You need to be able to say, "Here is the evidence that shows we do this."

4. FREQUENCY OF SELF-ASSESSMENT

4.1.Annual self-assessment cycle

Your setting should conduct a full self-assessment **at least once per year**. This annual self-assessment should be completed at the **end of the academic year**, before you begin planning for the next year. This timing allows you to:

- Reflect on the year that has just passed
- Identify what worked well and what needs improvement
- Use the results to inform your updated three-year development plan and your annual work plan for the coming year
- Report findings to the municipality to inform budget planning on specific improvements needs

By conducting self-assessment at the end of the year, you create a natural link between reflection and planning, ensuring that your development priorities are based on evidence rather than guesswork.

4.2.Flexibility for ongoing monitoring

While a full self-assessment should be completed annually, **the tool can and should be adapted to your setting's needs** for ongoing reflection and monitoring throughout the year.

For example:

- If a particular group is struggling with certain aspects of practice (e.g., outdoor play routines, transitions, or documentation), you might use relevant sections of the tool to monitor progress every few months.
- If you have introduced a new pedagogical approach or resource, you might use specific indicators to check how implementation is developing over a shorter timeframe (e.g., every six months).
- If concerns have been raised about a specific area (e.g., family engagement, learning environments), you might focus on those subcategories more frequently to track improvement.

This ongoing use of the tool should be in addition to the annual self-assessment, not instead of it. Think of it as continuous quality monitoring between your formal annual reflection cycles.

The key principle is that the tool is a living resource, not something you take out once a year and then put back on the shelf. Use it actively to support your setting's continuous improvement.

5. IMPLEMENTING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment is most effective when it is approached as a collaborative, inclusive, and structured process. The following modalities will help ensure that self-assessment is thorough, fair, and meaningful.

5.1.Appointment of a self-assessment lead team

Every setting should establish a self-assessment lead team to coordinate and oversee the self-assessment process. This team is responsible for:

- Planning the self-assessment timeline and activities
- Deciding which groups and staff will be involved
- Organising evidence collection and review
- Facilitating reflection sessions and discussions
- Compiling results and preparing the self-assessment report
- Leading the development of the action plan based on results

Composition of the lead team

The self-assessment lead team should include at minimum:

- **The principal (director)** – overall leadership and accountability
- **The head pedagogue** – pedagogical leadership and expertise
- **Two educators** – one from age groups 0-3, and one from age groups 3-6 (Please make sure that the educators are not the same of the groups being assessed for the year. We need to avoid potential conflict of interest!)
- **A representative from the Parents' Council** – family perspective and community voice
- **One administrative staff (where applicable)** – operational and resource management perspective
- **Professional associate (where applicable)** – expertise in areas such as inclusion, child protection, or disabilities

The team should be **small enough to function efficiently** (typically 5–7 people) but **diverse enough to represent different perspectives** within your setting.

Selection of team members

- The principal and head pedagogue are automatically part of the team by virtue of their roles.
- The Parents' Council should select its own representative through a transparent process (e.g., by vote or consensus among council members).
- Educators and other staff members can be appointed by the principal in consultation with the team, or selected through staff discussion. It is important to choose people who represent age-groups accordingly, are respected by their colleagues, have a constructive attitude, and are willing to invest time in the process.

Avoiding conflicts of interest

Members of the lead team should be able to participate in self-assessment with objectivity and openness. If there are concerns that a team member might have a conflict of interest (e.g., a personal grievance with a colleague, a vested interest in a particular outcome), this should be discussed transparently and, if necessary, addressed by adjusting team composition.

5.2. Scope – Which groups should be assessed?

Self-assessment should give you a representative picture of quality across your entire setting. Ideally, **all groups in your setting should be included in the self-assessment**. However, depending on the size of your setting and practical constraints, you may need to select a representative sample of groups.

Principles for selecting groups:

1. **Coverage**: The groups selected should cover at least 60% of all groups in your setting.
2. **Representation by age group**: The sample must include at least one group from each age group present in your setting (e.g., if you have groups for 0–2 years, 2–3 years, 3–4 years, 4–5 years, and 5-6 years, you must include at least one group from each of these age ranges).
3. **Random selection**: Groups should be selected randomly by the lead team, not based on which groups are performing well or poorly. This ensures objectivity and fairness.
4. **Additional groups for specific concerns:** If the lead team has objective, documented concerns about a particular group (e.g., high staff turnover, frequent behaviour incidents, low family satisfaction), that group may be selected in addition to the 60% sample, not in place of a randomly selected group. Any decision to include a group on this basis should be documented and justified with clear evidence.

5. **Rotation over time**: The groups selected for self-assessment should change from year to year. However, every four years, all groups in the setting must have been assessed at least once. This ensures comprehensive coverage over time while keeping the annual workload manageable.

Example:

1. Your setting has 10 groups in total.
2. 60% of 10 = 6 groups minimum.
3. Your age groups are: 0–2 years (2 groups), 2–3 years (2 groups), 3–4 years (3 groups), 4–5 years (2 groups), 5–6 years (1 group).
4. You randomly select: 1 group from 0–2 years, 1 group from 2–3 years, 2 groups from 3–4 years, 1 group from 4–5 years, and 1 group from 5–6 years = 6 groups (60%).
5. You also have concerns about one specific group in the 3–4 age range due to recent staffing changes, so you include it as a 7th group.
6. Next year, you select a different random sample of 6 groups (ensuring each age range is represented), and over four years, all 10 groups will have been assessed.

What does it mean to assess a group?

Assessing a group means looking at indicators that relate specifically to pedagogical practice, learning environments, routines, documentation, and child outcomes within that group. For example:

- Observations of how educators interact with children
- Review of planning documents and child portfolios for that group
- Assessment of the learning environment (indoor and outdoor spaces, materials, layout)
- Review of how routines and transitions are organised
- Evaluation of family communication and engagement practices for that group

Some indicators in the tool apply to the setting as a whole (e.g., governance structures, professional development systems, staffing ratios) and do not need to be assessed separately for each group.

However, please note that when filling the self-assessment tool, this needs to be done cumulatively for all groups, not individually.

5.3. Scope – Which staff should be included?

All staff in the setting should be part of the self-assessment every 4 year. This includes:

- Educators
- Assistants
- Head pedagogue and other pedagogical leaders
- Specialist staff (psychologists, pedagogues, inclusion specialists)
- Administrative staff
- Support staff (kitchen, cleaning, maintenance, etc.)

Why include all staff?

Quality in ECEC is a team effort. While some indicators focus specifically on the work of classroom educators, many others relate to leadership, resource management, professional development, communication, and collaboration across the setting. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone's perspective matters.

Including all staff in self-assessment also:

- Promotes a shared sense of ownership and responsibility for quality
- Ensures that different viewpoints and experiences are heard
- Helps identify support needs and professional development priorities for all staff, not just educators
- Builds a culture of collective reflection and continuous improvement

How are staff involved?

Staff participation in self-assessment can take different forms, depending on the indicator being assessed:

Individual reflection: Some staff may complete self-assessment forms or reflection tools on their own (e.g., reflecting on their own professional development, classroom practice, or communication with families).

Group or team reflection: Staff may participate in facilitated group discussions to assess specific indicators (e.g., how well the setting supports family engagement, how effectively professional development is planned and implemented).

Providing evidence: Staff contribute evidence such as planning documents, portfolios, communication records, or meeting minutes that the lead team reviews as part of the assessment.

Being observed: Educators and other pedagogical staff may be observed in their practice as part of gathering evidence for certain indicators.

Participating in feedback meetings: All staff should have the opportunity to discuss self-assessment results and contribute to action planning.

5.4. Principles and modalities for conducting self-assessment

Self-assessment is not a one-person job, and it is not a box-ticking exercise. It should be approached as a collaborative, reflective process that uses a range of methods to gather evidence, assess practice, and engage the whole team in meaningful dialogue.

Core principle: Reflection, not judgement

The purpose of self-assessment is **to learn and improve, not to judge or blame**. The lead team should actively foster an atmosphere of openness, honesty, and constructive reflection. Staff should feel safe to acknowledge areas where practice is not yet where it needs to be, confident that the response will be support and improvement planning, not criticism or punishment.

Flexibility in approach

While these guidelines provide a recommended structure, **each setting and each lead team has the autonomy to decide the best ways to approach self-assessment,** taking into account:

- The size of the setting
- The number of staff and groups
- The availability of time and resources
- The culture and working relationships within the setting
- Previous experience with self-assessment

What matters most is that the process is:

- **Evidence-based:** Judgements are informed by real evidence, not assumptions
- **Inclusive:** All relevant voices are heard
- **Structured:** The process is planned and systematic, not rushed or haphazard
- **Transparent:** Everyone understands how the process works and what it is for
- **Action-oriented:** Results lead to concrete improvement actions

Recommended modalities

To ensure thoroughness and inclusiveness, self-assessment should ideally include a combination of the following modalities:

1.Individual reflection

Some indicators are best assessed through individual reflection by the person or people directly responsible for that area of work. For example:

- **The principal** may independently complete sections related to governance, leadership structures, and resource management.
- **Educators** may individually reflect on their own professional development, classroom planning, or use of observation and documentation.
- **Specialist staff** may reflect on their own contributions to inclusion, child protection, or family support.

Individual reflection can be supported by:

- Providing staff with clear self-assessment templates or guiding questions
- Allowing time for staff to review relevant evidence (e.g., their own planning documents, professional development records, feedback from families)
- Encouraging honest, critical reflection rather than superficial answers

2. Lead team-level reflection

The lead team should meet regularly throughout the self-assessment process to:

- Plan the overall process and timeline
- Review evidence collected from across the setting
- Discuss findings and emerging themes
- Make collective judgements on indicators that require a whole-setting perspective
- Identify priority areas for action
- Prepare for plenary discussions with all staff

Lead team meetings should be **documented** (e.g., through minutes or notes) so there is a clear record of decisions made and evidence considered.

3. Observations

Many indicators in the tool can only be assessed through direct observation of practice. For example:

- How educators interact with children during play and routines
- How learning environments are organised and used
- How transitions are managed
- How mealtimes are conducted
- Whether children have access to appropriate materials and outdoor play

Observations should be conducted by the lead team and should be:

Planned: The lead team should decide in advance which groups or spaces will be observed, when, and by whom.
Structured: Use the indicators and verification sources in the tool to guide what you are looking for.
Non-intrusive: Observations should be conducted in a way that minimises disruption to children and staff. The purpose is to see practice as it normally unfolds, not to create an artificial "performance."
Documented: Take brief notes during or immediately after observations to capture what you saw. These notes become part of your evidence base.

4. Review of documentation and records

Self-assessment requires reviewing a wide range of documents and records to verify whether requirements are met and how well practices are implemented. This includes but is not limited to:

- Policies, procedures, and internal regulations
- Annual work plans and three-year development plans
- Meeting minutes (Governing Council, staff meetings, pedagogical meetings, Parents' Council)
- Professional development plans and records
- Staff timetables and schedules
- Curriculum planning documents (annual, monthly, weekly)
- Child portfolios and pedagogical documentation
- Communication records with families
- Attendance and participation records
- Incident and safeguarding records
- Financial and resource management records

The lead team should organise this review systematically, ensuring that:

- Documents are available and accessible
- Different team members review different types of documentation to share the workload
- Findings are recorded clearly so they can inform the overall assessment

5. Bilateral discussions with pedagogues

In addition to observations, several indicators in the tool may require bilateral discussion with pedagogues, including pedagogues of the groups being assessed. It is important that the self-assessment process is framed as an opportunity for joint discussion, rather than an exam on performance. Make sure you take the time to hear your pedagogues out, they know the context and the groups they work with so you can help each other out!

5.5. Plenary reflection and dialogue with all staff

At least **two plenary sessions** should be held with all staff. The general objective of such convenings is to invite feedback, questions, and additional perspectives, ultimately building shared ownership of the self-assessment. The lead of the assessment team should make sure staff feels like they are an integral part of the effort to strengthen quality of the setting, rather than sitting an exam, waiting to be evaluated.

The first plenary session should be organized ahead of starting the self-assessment to discuss the process, ensuring its transparency. Everyone should have a clear understanding of the objectives, the rationale behind each decision, as well as an overview of different roles and responsibilities. The second plenary session should then be organized at the end of the process to present its key results (what is working well, what needs improvement), engage staff in identifying priority actions and improvement strategies, contributing to shared ownership of the resulting action plan.

Additional, ad hoc plenary sessions may be organized as part of the self-assessment by the lead team if deemed important to discussed in a dedicated manner:

- Indicators that reflect whole-setting culture and practice (e.g., teamwork, professional learning culture, communication with families)
- Areas where staff input is essential to understanding context and identifying realistic solutions
- Building trust and transparency around the self-assessment process

5.6. Dialogue with families and the Parents' Council

While self-assessment is primarily an internal process, **engaging families** can provide valuable insights. Families should be informed that self-assessment is taking place and understand its purpose. Transparency builds trust and reinforces that self-assessment is about improvement, not secrecy or defensiveness.

A representative from the Parents' Council will be part of the lead team, but s/he may decide, in accordance with the team, to include families further, particularly for indicators related to:

- Family communication and engagement
- Accessibility and responsiveness to family needs
- Quality of information shared with families
- Family satisfaction with the setting

The Parents' Council representative may, in agreement with the lead team, liaise regularly with the Parent's Council to gather their perspectives on selected topics, review feedback already collected from families (e.g., through satisfaction surveys, suggestion boxes, or informal conversations), or conduct targeted consultations with families on specific topics, if appropriate.

Putting it all together: A suggested process flow

Here is an example of how a setting might organise its self-assessment process:

Step 1: Planning and preparation
- Lead team meets to plan the self-assessment timeline, assign responsibilities, and agree on which groups will be assessed
- The first plenary session is organized, where staff are informed that self-assessment will take place, what it involves, and why it matters
- Parents are informed that self-assessment is scheduled
- Key documents and records are gathered and organised for review

Step 2: Evidence collection
- Lead team members conduct observations in selected groups
- Documents are reviewed systematically (policies, plans, records, portfolios, communication materials)
- Lead team meets to discuss initial findings and identify any gaps in evidence

Step 3: Collaborative reflection
- Lead team meets to synthesise evidence, discuss findings, and make preliminary assessments on indicators
- Bilateral or team-level reflection sessions are held on specific subcategories (e.g., curriculum planning, family engagement, professional development)

Step 4: Plenary discussion and finalisation
- Plenary session with all staff to discuss findings, confirm assessments, and identify priority actions
- Lead team finalises the self-assessment report and action plan based on staff input
- Results are documented and prepared for integration into the updated development plan and/or annual work plan

Step 5: Communication and next steps
- Self-assessment results and action plan are shared with the Governing Council, Parents' Council, and all staff, as well as with the municipality
- Timelines and responsibilities for implementing priority actions are agreed
- Relevant results are communicated to families in an accessible format

This is only an example and can take place over the course of several days or weeks. Your setting may need more or less time, depending on size, staffing, and context. The important thing is to allow enough time to do the process properly, without rushing.

6. SCORING: HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Self-assessment is not only about reflecting on your practice, it is also about measuring where you stand against agreed quality standards. This section explains how to calculate your self-assessment scores in a simple, transparent, and meaningful way.

The scoring system is designed to be straightforward enough for any setting to calculate without specialized tools, while still providing accurate, comparable, and useful results. The same scoring system is used for both self-assessment and external evaluation, ensuring consistency and fairness.

Why scoring matters

Calculating your self-assessment score helps you to:

- Understand your overall level of quality and compliance in concrete terms
- Identify which quality dimensions and subcategories are strengths and which need attention
- Track improvement over time by comparing scores from year to year
- Demonstrate accountability and transparency to families, staff, and authorities
- Set realistic, evidence-based targets for quality improvement

6.1. The scoring method: Percentage-based scoring

The assessment tool uses a weighted percentage system. This means that every item in the tool, whether it is a Yes/No item or a 5-point development scale item, is converted to a percentage score. These percentages are then averaged to give you subcategory scores, dimension scores, and finally an overall setting score.

This system recognizes that quality develops progressively over time. It gives credit for practices that are partially in place or developing, while still rewarding settings that have reached higher levels of quality.

STEP 1: Convert each item to a percentage

For Yes/No items:

• **If you answered Yes** → the item scores **100%**
• **If you answered No** → the item scores **0%**

This is straightforward: either the requirement is met (100%) or it is not met (0%). There is no middle ground for compliance-based items.

For 5-point development scale items:

Each stage of development corresponds to a specific percentage:

Stage	Description	Percentage Score
Stage 1	Not yet developed	0%
Stage 2	Partially developed	25%
Stage 3	Developed	50%
Stage4	Well developed	75%
Stage 5	Fully developed	100%

This scale reflects the understanding that quality develops progressively. Stage 3, where basic expectations are met, is worth 50%, acknowledging that reaching this level represents meaningful progress and compliance with fundamental standards. Stages 4 and 5 reward settings that have gone beyond basic expectations to achieve consistently high-quality practice.

In the “Result” column of the tool, percentages have already been associated with each result. For example, when marking stage 3 of any given, you will be able to see that it translates into a 60% percentage score.

STEP 2: Calculate your subcategory score

Once you have filled out all items in a subcategory, you calculate the subcategory score by following these steps:

1. **Add up all the percentage scores for the items in that subcategory**
2. **Divide the total by the number of items in the subcategory**
3. **The result is your subcategory score (expressed as a percentage)**

Each subcategory in the assessment tool includes a scoring calculation box where you can record your item scores and calculate the subcategory score. This helps you work through the calculation systematically without getting lost.

EXAMPLE

Imagine you are assessing the "Leadership and funding" quality dimension, and more specifically Subcategory A: Leadership body and formal decisions, which has 3 items. While doing the exercise you mark as below:

Indicator	MEASUREMENT	RESULT	PRIORITY ACTIONS
The ECEC institution has a Governing Council that is formally established and functions in line with applicable regulations. **Verification:** statutes, meeting minutes	Yes / No	✓ Yes: 100% □ No: 0%	
The Annual Work Plan is approved by the Governing Council before the beginning of the school year. **Verification:** approved work plan	Yes / No	✓ Yes: 100% □ No: 0%	
The institution's vision and mission are referenced in planning, decision-making and daily practices. **Verification:** plans, meeting minutes	5-point scale	□ 1: 0% □ 2: 25% ✓ 3: 50% □ 4: 75% □ 5: 100%	

Step A: Add up all item scores:
100 + 100 + 50 = **250**

Step B: Divide by the number of items (3 items in this subcategory):
250 ÷ 3 = **83.3%**

Subcategory A score = 83.3%

This means that Subcategory A: Leadership body and formal decisions is performing at 83.3%, a very good level of quality.

STEP 3: Calculate your quality dimension score

Once you have calculated scores for all subcategories within a quality dimension, you calculate the dimension score by following these steps:

- **Add up all the subcategory scores within that dimension**
- **Divide the total by the number of subcategories in the dimension**
- **The result is your dimension score (expressed as a percentage)**

At the end of each quality dimension in the assessment tool, there is an overall dimension scoring box where you record all your subcategory scores and calculate the dimension score.

EXAMPLE

Let's calculate the overall score for the Leadership and Funding dimension, which has 5 subcategories:

Subcategory A: Leadership body and formal decisions = 83.3%
Subcategory B: Leadership culture, staff engagement = 70.0%
Subcategory C: Resource management and sustainability = 62.5%
Subcategory D: Child protection and wellbeing = 90.0%
Subcategory E: Infrastructure, premises, standards = 55.0%

Step A: Add up all subcategory scores:
83.3 + 70.0 + 62.5 + 90.0 + 55.0 = **360.8**

Step B: Divide by the number of subcategories (5 subcategories):
360.8 ÷ 5 = **72.2%**

Leadership and Funding dimension score = 72.2%

This means that overall, your setting's Leadership and Funding dimension is performing at 72.2%, which falls within the "good quality" range.

STEP 4: Calculate your overall setting score

After you have completed the self-assessment for all five quality dimensions and calculated their scores, you are ready to calculate your overall setting score. This is the single number that represents your setting's overall level of quality and compliance.

Follow these steps:
- **Add up the scores for all five quality dimensions**
- **Divide the total by 5 (the number of dimensions)**
- **The result is your overall setting score (expressed as a percentage)**

At the end of the assessment tool, there is a final scoring page where you record your five dimension scores and calculate your overall setting score.

EXAMPLE

Imagine your setting has completed all five quality dimensions and calculated the following dimension scores:

Dimension 1: Leadership and Funding = 72.2%
Dimension 2: Access = 65.0%
Dimension 3: Staff = 68.5%
Dimension 4: Curriculum and Pedagogy = 71.0%
Dimension 5: Monitoring and Evaluation = 58.0%

Step A: Add up all dimension scores:
72.2 + 65.0 + 68.5 + 71.0 + 58.0 = **334.7**

Step B: Divide by 5 (the number of dimensions):
334.7 ÷ 5 = **66.9%**

OVERALL SETTING SCORE = 66.9%

This setting has achieved an overall score of 66.9%, which falls within the "good quality" range.

6.2. Interpreting your scores

Once you have calculated your overall setting score, you need to understand what it means. The following table provides a clear interpretation framework:

Score Range	Quality Level	What This Means
0–24%	Building foundations	Your setting is in the early stages of quality development. This is your starting point, not a failure. Focus on establishing fundamental structures and practices. With targeted support and a clear action plan, meaningful progress is achievable. Every setting that is now excellent started somewhere: this is your beginning.
25–49%	Developing quality	Well done, you have met the minimum compliance threshold and established important foundations. Your setting is on a positive trajectory. Now is the time to build on these foundations and strengthen practices that will make a real difference for children and families. You are moving in the right direction.
50–74%	Good quality	Your setting demonstrates good overall quality. This is an achievement to celebrate with your team. Most practices are well established and contributing positively to children. With continued focus on your identified priorities, you can reach even higher levels of excellence.
75–89%	Very good quality	Excellent work! Your setting demonstrates very good quality across most areas. Your practices are consistently strong and making a meaningful difference to children. You are approaching exemplary practice. Continue to reflect, refine, and share your expertise with others.
90–100%	Excellent quality	Outstanding! Your setting demonstrates excellent quality and exemplary practice. You have created an environment where children thrive and families feel truly supported. Your commitment to continuous reflection and improvement is evident. Consider how you can share your expertise and inspire other settings, but make sure to keep up the good work!

6.3. Using your scores to set improvement priorities

Your self-assessment scores are not just numbers, they are tools to help you understand where to focus your improvement efforts. Here is how to use your scores strategically:

1. Look at dimension-level scores

Compare your scores across the five quality dimensions. Which dimensions are strongest? Which are weakest? This helps you identify broad areas of focus. For example, if your Curriculum and Pedagogy score is 75% but your Monitoring and Evaluation score is 45%, you know that M&E should be a priority area.

2. Drill down to subcategory-level scores

Within each dimension, look at the subcategory scores. Even if a dimension overall is strong, there may be specific subcategories that need attention. For example, your Staff dimension might score 70% overall, but the subcategory on "Induction and mentoring of new staff" might only score 40%. This tells you exactly where to direct your efforts.

3. Identify patterns across items

Look at which types of items you are scoring lowest on. Are you struggling more with Yes/No compliance items (structures, policies, procedures) or with 5-point development scale items (quality of practice)? This helps you understand whether your challenges are primarily structural/ administrative or pedagogical/relational.

4. Balance "quick wins" and "long-term development"

Some gaps can be addressed quickly (e.g., creating a missing policy, organizing a required meeting). Others require sustained effort over time (e.g., developing a culture of pedagogical documentation, strengthening family engagement). Your action plan should include both types of actions so you can see progress quickly while also working toward deeper quality improvement.

5. Set realistic targets

Do not try to improve everything at once. Focus on 3–5 priority areas where improvement will have the biggest impact on children and families. Set a realistic target score for next year's self-assessment. For example, if your overall score is 55%, a realistic target might be 62–65% for the following year, rather than jumping to 85%.

Practical tips for scoring

Use a calculator or spreadsheet
While the arithmetic is simple (addition and division), a calculator or spreadsheet will help you avoid errors and make the process faster.

Round to one decimal place
For consistency and simplicity, round all scores to one decimal place (e.g., 67.3% rather than 67.28%).

Complete scoring as you go
Calculate subcategory and dimension scores as you complete each section of the assessment, rather than leaving all the scoring until the end. This makes the process less overwhelming and helps you spot patterns early.

- **Keep your calculations transparent**
- Record all your working (totals, divisions) clearly in the scoring boxes. If someone (e.g., an inspector, a colleague, the Governing Council) asks to see how you arrived at your score, you should be able to show them exactly how it was calculated.

Scoring as part of continuous improvement

Remember: the score itself is not the goal. The goal is continuous improvement in the quality of care and education you provide to children. Your self-assessment score is simply a tool: a clear, objective measure that helps you understand where you are, celebrate your progress, and focus your efforts on the areas that matter most.

Over time, as you conduct self-assessment year after year, you will see your scores change. Some years you may see significant gains; other years progress may be slower. What matters is that you are reflecting honestly, acting on what you learn, and steadily moving toward higher quality for the benefit of every child in your care.

6.4. Follow-up and ongoing monitoring

Self-assessment is not complete when the report is written. **The real value of self-assessment lies in what happens next,** in the actions you take and the improvements you make as a result.

Identifies priority areas for improvement
You cannot work on everything at once. Focus on the most important gaps or weaknesses, or on areas where improvement will have the biggest impact on children's learning and wellbeing.

Sets specific, achievable actions
What exactly will you do? Be concrete. For example, instead of "improve documentation," specify "introduce monthly peer review of portfolios" or "provide training on documentation tools."

Assigns responsibilities
Who will lead each action? Who else needs to be involved?

Sets realistic timelines
When will each action be completed? Some actions can be done quickly; others will take several months or an entire year.

Links to development planning
Ensure that priority actions are integrated into your three-year development plan and annual work plan, so they are resourced and monitored as part of your regular planning cycle.

Monitoring progress
You should monitor progress on your action plan throughout the year. This might involve:

Regular check-ins by the lead team (e.g., quarterly or every six months) to review what has been done and what still needs attention

Using relevant sections of the assessment tool to monitor specific areas more frequently (as discussed in Section 3 on frequency)

Documenting changes made so you have evidence of improvement when you conduct the next annual self-assessment

SPECIAL CASES: SUPPORTING GROUPS WITH SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

If a particular group scored low in some areas during self-assessment, you can use the tool to **monitor development in that group more regularly**, for example, every six months or once per term.
This focused monitoring should:

- Be framed as support, not punishment. The goal is to help the group improve, not to single it out for criticism
- Use the same indicators and scales as the annual self-assessment, so progress can be tracked consistently
- Involve targeted support actions (e.g., additional mentoring, professional development, resources, or leadership attention)
- Be **in addition** to the following year's self-assessment, not instead of it

Regular monitoring helps ensure that challenges are addressed proactively and that improvements are sustained over time.

Celebrating progress

Self-assessment should also be an opportunity to **recognise and celebrate progress**. When you see improvement, whether a practice has moved from Stage 2 to Stage 3, or a persistent gap has been closed, acknowledge it. Share successes with staff, families, and the Governing Council. Celebrating progress reinforces a culture of continuous improvement and motivates everyone to keep working toward quality.

7. CONCLUSION

Self-assessment is a powerful tool for quality improvement, but only if it is approached with honesty, openness, and a genuine commitment to learning. These guidelines are designed to support you in conducting self-assessment in a way that is thorough, fair, and meaningful, not as a bureaucratic obligation, but as an opportunity to reflect deeply on your work and make it even better for the children and families you serve.

Remember:

- Self-assessment is about growth, not judgement
- It is a collaborative process, not a test
- It should be evidence-based, inclusive, and transparent
- The real value lies in the actions you take and the improvements you make

Your setting's commitment to self-assessment demonstrates professionalism, accountability, and a deep respect for the importance of quality in early childhood education and care. By engaging fully in this process, you are investing in the present and future wellbeing of every child in your care.

We wish you success in your self-assessment journey and look forward to seeing the positive impact it will have on your setting.

ANNEX 1 - QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE: SCORING YOUR SELF-ASSESSMENT

STEP 1: CONVERT EACH ITEM TO A PERCENTAGE	
YES/NO ITEMS	5-POINT SCALE ITEMS
YES = 100% No = 0%	Stage 1 (Not yet developed) = 0% Stage 2 (Partially developed) = 25% Stage 3 (Developed) = 50% Stage 4 (Well developed) = 75% Stage 5 (Fully developed) = 100%
1. Convert each item in the subcategory to a percentage (using Step 1) 2. Add up all the percentages 3. Divide by the number of items in that subcategory **EXAMPLE:** Subcategory A has 3 items: Item 1 (Yes) = 100%, Item 2 (No) = 0%, Item 3 (Stage 4) = 75% Calculation: (100 + 0 + 75) ÷ 3 = 175 ÷ 3 = 58.3%	
Subcategory A Score = 58.3%	
Rezultati i nënkategorisë A = 58.3%	
STEP 2: CALCULATE YOUR QUALITY DIMENSION SCORE	
1. Complete Step 1 for all subcategories in the dimension 2. Add up all the subcategory scores 3. Divide by the number of subcategories	
EXAMPLE: Leadership & Funding has 5 subcategories: A=58.3%, B=65%, C=70%, D=80%, E=55% Calculation: (58.3 + 65 + 70 + 80 + 55) ÷ 5 = 328.3 ÷ 5 = 65.7%	
Leadership & Funding Dimension Score = 65.7%	
STEP 3: CALCULATE YOUR OVERALL SETTING SCORE	
1. Complete Step 2 for all 5 quality dimensions 2. Add up all 5 dimension scores 3. Divide by 5	
EXAMPLE: Leadership=65.7%, Access=60%, Staff=72%, Curriculum=68%, M&E=55% Calculation: (65.7 + 60 + 72 + 68 + 55) ÷ 5 = 320.7 ÷ 5 = 64.1%	
Overall Setting Score = 64.1%	
INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE:	

Score Range	Quality Level
0-24%	Building foundations
25-49%	Developing quality
50-74%	Good quality
75-89%	Very good quality
90-100%	Excellent quality

Republika e Kosovës

Republika Kosova-Republic of Kosovo

Qeveria – Vlada – Government

Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës/ Ministarstvo Obrazovanja i Nauke / Ministry of Education and Science

INSTRUMENT FOR INTERNAL QUALITY EVALUATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

This instrument is an Annex document deriving from the National Framework for Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Education in the Republic of Kosovo. The instrument for evaluating early childhood education institutions is an essential element within the third part of the National Framework for Quality Assurance in ECE, which transforms the institutional-level indicators from the quality matrix into a structured and practical tool for use in ECE institutions for self-evaluation and external evaluation. As such, the instrument for self-evaluation of ECE institutions serves early education leaders and professionals in the practical implementation of internal quality evaluation in their ECE settings. The Guide for internal quality evaluation is a supporting annex for carrying out the evaluation and completing the self-evaluation instrument.

The document was developed with the support of **UNICEF in Kosovo**.

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Table of Contents

I. Evaluation Instrument – Structure, content and use 5
i. Purpose of the evaluation instrument 5
ii. General structure of the instrument 5
iii. General information on the Early Childhood Education Institution (ECE institution) 9
1. Leadership and Financing A. Governing body and decision-making 10
B. Leadership culture, staff engagement and partnerships 10
C. Resource management and sustainability 12
D. Child protection and well-being 12
E. Infrastructure, premises and technical standards 15
2. ACCESS 17
A. Enrolement and non-discrimination 17
B. Monitoring participation 18
C. Involvement of parents/legal guardians 19
D. Leadership and participation – Parents' Council 21
3. STAFF 22
A. Qualification, licensing and compliance 22
B. Entry into the profession and mentoring of new staff 23
C. Performance evaluation 24
D. Professional development (individual requirements) 27

E. ECE institution-based professional development 28
F. Employment conditions and workforce monitoring 29
F. Child protection and well-being 30
4. CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY 31
A. Curriculum and planning 31
B. Pedagogical approach and organisation of learning 33
C. Time, routines and transitions 36
D. Learning environment 38
E. Physical spaces and their planning 41
F. Food and the mealtime environment 42
G. Inclusion 44
H. Observation, documentation, reflection and pedagogical assessment 47
I. Pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities 49
J. Family engagement and communication 51
5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION 52
A. Documentation, records and data management 52
B. Internal self-evaluation process 53
C. Inclusion and communication with stakeholders 54

I. Evaluation Instrument – Structure, content and use

i. Purpose of the evaluation instrument

This evaluation instrument supports quality assurance at institution level in early childhood education (ECE). This instrument is designed to be used both for internal self-evaluation by ECE staff and for external evaluation by education inspectors, with the clear aim of creating a shared, transparent and coherent understanding of quality expectations, evaluation criteria and follow-up actions. The instrument aims to:

- support structured reflection on practice;
- promote a culture of continuous reflection based on teamwork;
- identify strengths and areas for development;
- guide priority actions for quality improvement at institution level;
- strengthen coherence between internal self-evaluation and external monitoring and inspection processes;
- support evidence-based dialogue between educators, leadership, inspectors and other stakeholders.

ii. General structure of the instrument

The evaluation instrument is organised according to quality dimensions that reflect the key areas of quality in early childhood education. Each quality dimension is further divided into thematic subcategories that group interrelated aspects of practice in a logical and functional way. Within each subcategory, a set of evaluation elements describes concrete expectations relating to structures, processes and practices at institution level.

Each evaluation element is presented in a structured template with the following columns:

1. Indicator

The indicator column contains the evaluation element itself. Each element is formulated as a clear, observable and assessable statement which describes either:

- the existence of a required structure, document or procedure; or
- the quality and level of development of a pedagogical or organisational practice.

The indicators are intentionally written in simple and operational language to support a shared understanding among different users (educators, leaders, inspectors).

2. Measurement

The measurement column defines the evaluation scale to be used for each indicator. Depending on the nature of the element, this will be:

- a Yes / No evaluation; or
- a 5-level developmental scale.

In some cases, this column also includes an additional compliance measurement (for example, the number of hours, the number of meetings or percentages). These quantitative measurements complement the qualitative judgement and strengthen objectivity and comparability.

3. Result

The result column is used to record the evaluation conclusion.
This column is not intended for long narrative descriptions, but for a clear and concise record of the evaluation judgement.

4. Priority actions

The priority actions column directly links the evaluation result with quality improvement. For each element, users are expected to identify concrete actions to:

- address gaps when requirements are not met;
- strengthen partially developed practices;
- consolidate and further improve well-developed practices, where necessary.

Priority actions should be realistic, time-bound where possible, and linked to the institution's development planning processes.

Sources of verification and evidence

Under each indicator, the template identifies one or more sources of verification. These indicate the types of evidence that should be used to inform evaluation judgements. Sources of verification may include:

- institutional policies, procedures and plans;
- pedagogical planning documents;
- records, reports and meeting minutes;
- staff schedules and work plans;
- observations of practice and learning settings;
- children's portfolios and pedagogical documentation;

• records of communication with families;
• professional dialogue with educators and leadership.

Evaluation judgements should always be based on evidence. In self-evaluation, evidence supports reflective discussion within the team. In external evaluation, it ensures transparency, consistency and fairness.

Types of evaluation elements
The instrument includes two main types of elements:

1. Elements based on compliance and existence
These elements verify whether mandatory or expected structures, documents or procedures are in place, in accordance with legal or regulatory requirements or agreed system standards. They are evaluated using the Yes / No scale: a "Yes" indicates that the requirement has been met; a "No" indicates that the requirement has not been met and requires follow-up actions.

2. Elements of practice quality and continuous development
These elements evaluate how well a practice is implemented and how developed it is in day-to-day work. They focus on quality, consistency and effectiveness, not only on existence. These elements are evaluated using the 5-level developmental scale.

Use of the 5-level developmental scale
For elements that evaluate the quality of practice, a 5-level developmental scale is used. This scale reflects the understanding that quality develops progressively over time. It supports both self-reflection and evidence-based external evaluation by describing stages of development rather than judging performance.

Level 1 – Not yet developed
The practice is not in place or is present only minimally. There is little or no evidence of systematic implementation.

Level 2 – Partially developed
The practice exists in some form, but implementation is inconsistent, informal or limited in scope.

Level 3 – Developed
The practice is in place and is generally implemented. Basic expectations are met, although consistency or depth may vary.

Level 4 – Well developed
The practice is implemented consistently and functions effectively. It contributes positively to the quality of provision.

Level 5 – Fully developed
The practice is integrated into day-to-day work, reviewed regularly and continuously improved. Clear evidence demonstrates its positive impact.

Evaluation and follow-up actions
Evaluation should be understood as a tool for learning and improvement. Results should always be interpreted in context, taking into account the specific institution, the children, the staff composition and the resources.

The identification of priority actions is a key element of the instrument. It ensures that evaluation leads to concrete follow-up actions, continuous reflection and sustainable quality development, rather than remaining a one-off compliance exercise.

iii. General information on the Early Childhood Education Institution (ECE institution)

Name of the ECE institution	
Date of conducting the ECE institution evaluation	
Composition of the team that conducted the ECE institution evaluation	
Year of establishment of the ECE institution	
Possession of a valid operating licence (if applicable)	
Number of staff in the ECE institution by profile	
Organisation of the information meeting for all staff before conducting the ECE Evaluation	
Organisation of the summary meeting for all staff on the findings from the ECE evaluation process	

1. Leadership and Financing

A. Governing body and decision-making

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
1. The early childhood education institution (ECE institution) has an officially established Governing Board. **Verification:** Establishment decision	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
2. The Governing Board of the ECE institution functions in accordance with the regulations in force. **Verification:** At least 4 meetings within one educational year – meeting minutes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
3. The development plan of the ECE institution is approved by the Governing Board before the start of the academic/educational year. **Verification:** Approved development plan	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

B. Leadership culture, staff engagement and partnerships

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
4. The director has established mechanisms that enable staff to provide feedback during the	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

preparation of the development plan. **Verification:** plans, meeting minutes				
5. The annual plan contains the activities and timelines for implementing institution-based professional development **Verification:** Annual plan	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
6. The ECE institution's professional development plan is based on the individual professional development plans of the staff. **Verification:** Individual professional development plans, the ECE institution's professional development plan	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
7. The leadership recognises good staff performance and addresses staff concerns fairly. **Verification:** Staff performance evaluations, meeting minutes, complaints/suggestions addressed.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
8. The management has formal mechanisms for involving parents in decision-making. **Verification:** Decision establishing the Parents' Council, meeting minutes.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

C. Resource management and sustainability

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
9. The ECE institution keeps updated inventory records. **Verification:** Inventory register, minutes of the meetings of the inventory commission	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
10. The institution monitors the quantities of materials consumed in order to rationalise and plan expenditure appropriately **Verification:** Consumable materials register, requests for the supply of materials	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
11. The institution promotes the reuse and recycling of materials. **Verification:** Documentation from projects and communication with families and the community, observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

D. Child protection and well-being

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
12. The institution implements the child protection policy.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

Verification: Staff training, response protocols, sessions with parents/legal guardians.				
13. The institution has displayed instructions for staff on conduct prohibiting mistreatment and on response and reporting procedures in the event of violations. **Verification:** Documentation of the displayed instructions	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
14. The institution documents and reports all concerns related to the protection, safety and neglect of children in accordance with the policy. **Verification:** Correspondence, documentation of concerns.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
15. The institution cooperates with child protection, health and social services when risks are identified. **Verification:** Correspondence; records of cases or referrals.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

16. The institution organises periodic awareness-raising activities for families and with the community regarding child protection. **Verification:** Documentation of activities, promotional materials.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
17. Children are not photographed or recorded without the written consent of parents/legal guardians. **Verification:** Consent forms.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
18. Photographs or recordings made with the consent of parents/legal guardians are published only if they do not contain content that violates the child's dignity. **Verification:** Documentation of photographs and publications, parental consents.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
19. Measures have been put in place to protect children from harmful audio, media and digital content.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

Verification: ECE institution policies; observation.				

E. Infrastructure, premises and technical standards

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
20. The ECE institution building enables the safe evacuation of all children. **Verification:** Floor plans displayed as visible maps in the ECE institution; emergency exits, signage, and evacuation plans with allocation of staff responsibilities.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
21. Children have access to safe outdoor play areas. **Verification:** Observations, pedagogical documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ ☐3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
22. Outdoor areas are securely enclosed and meet safety standards. **Verification:** Visual inspection; measurement.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

23. Indoor activity rooms provide sufficient space for each child and comply with group size limits under the applicable administrative instruction. **Verification:** Observation; measurement.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
24. Rooms meet the requirements for temperature, hygiene, natural lighting and ventilation in accordance with applicable legislation. **Verification:** observation, sanitary approval.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
25. Sleeping rooms/areas meet the requirements for space, temperature and distance (if any). **Verification:** Measurement; observation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
26. The kitchen (if any) and dining areas meet the requirements for space and hygiene.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

Verification: Observation; sanitary approval.				
27. The ECE institution premises are physically accessible and suitable for children with disabilities. **Verification:** Observation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
28. The organisation of the space enables full continuous visual observation of children. **Verification:** Observation; floor plans.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

2. ACCESS

A. Enrolement and non-discrimination

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
29. Admission criteria are applied in a non-discriminatory manner, in accordance with applicable legislation. **Verification:** Admission criteria, enrollment lists, documentation, complaints register.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
30. The institution applies a non-discriminatory and culturally responsive approach when communicating with families	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

to support equal access to and participation in the ECE institution and ECE institution activities for all children and families. **Verification:** Communication materials, staff responses with staff, list of children from the community.				

B. Monitoring participation

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
31. The institution monitors children's attendance and participation and can identify children at risk of disengagement due to access-related barriers (e.g., transport, costs, disabilities). **Verification:** Children's records with family data, staff interviews, list of admitted children, and attendance register	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
32. Measures are taken to address prolonged absence or disengagement, in cooperation with the parents of 5-year-old children. **Verification:** Records of actions – discussions with parents or referral to relevant institutions, case notes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐5		

33. The institution's development plan includes targeted objectives or actions for the inclusion of children. **Verification:** ECE institution development plan..	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

C. Involvement of parents/legal guardians

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
34. The institution cooperates with parents/legal guardians to develop support strategies (as needed) during the adaptation phase for children who have just started kindergarten or are transitioning to primary school. **Verification:** Meeting minutes; adaptation plans; information sheet, information from parents/legal guardians.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
35. Families are allowed to enter the ECE institution premises flexibly and according to a	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

plan/schedule defined under the internal regulation. **Verification:** Observation; internal guidelines, internal regulation.				
36. The institution undertakes initiatives to carry out activities in the community (visits, cleaning, environmental improvement, etc.). **Verification:** Project documentation.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
37. Community members are invited to contribute through voluntary engagement. **Verification:** Internal regulations, invitations; activity records or pedagogical documentation/photos of the presence of the community/volunteers in carrying out the activity.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

D. Leadership and participation – Parents' Council

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
38. The Parents' Council (or equivalent body) has been formally established at institution level. **Verification:** Formal decision; council records.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No	Yes. Copy of the minutes, decision, and list of signatures attached.	
39. The Parents' Council operates on the basis of written internal rules or terms of reference, with a time-limited mandate. **Verification:** Internal regulations; terms of reference.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
40. Measures exist to prevent conflicts of interest within the Parents' Council. **Verification:** Declarations; internal regulations.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
41. The Parents' Council is consulted on issues related to the learning environment, well-being and the day-to-day functioning of the institution.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

Verification: Meeting minutes, records of consultations or meetings related to pedagogical work in the ECE institution.				
42. The Parents' Council communicates information to the wider parent community. **Verification:** Communication records, meeting minutes.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
43. Feedback and concerns raised by parents/legal guardians are documented and taken into consideration by the institution. **Verification:** Data collected from parents/legal guardians, meeting minutes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

3. STAFF

A. Qualification, licensing and compliance

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
44. All employed staff possess qualifications in accordance	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

with the applicable legislation on professional staffing norms in education. **Verification:** Staff records.				
Compliance measurement: • Educators for ages 0 to 3: • Educators for ages 3 to 6: • Assistants for Children with Disabilities (CWD): • Professional associates: • Administrative staff: • Technical staff:				
45. The institution also has professional associates on staff (e.g., psychologists, pedagogues, support specialists) as part of its permanent staff. **Verification:** Staff contracts, staff list.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

B. Entry into the profession and mentoring of new staff

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
46. Newly employed educators participate in a one-year probationary (induction) phase. **Verification:** Career entry plans, one-year employment contract, minutes of feedback from monitors.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
Compliance measurement: Number of newly employed educational staff/professional associates who complete the induction phase:				

47. The management has established peer mentoring mechanisms, through which experienced educators support newly employed staff. **Verification:** Action plan for mentoring among staff; observation forms.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
Compliance measurement:				

C. Performance evaluation

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
48. The institution plans and conducts internal staff performance evaluation every year, following the applicable standards and procedures. **Verification:** Evaluation plans, evaluation documentation.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
Compliance measurement: • Number and percentage of educators evaluated each year: • Number and percentage of assistants evaluated each year: • Number and percentage of professional associates evaluated each year:				
49. An evaluation team has been formally established, including the director/deputy director, quality coordinator, head of professional activity, educator in the field/subject, psychologist/pedagogue.	Yes / No	Yes ☐ No		

Verification: Meeting records, records of team composition.				
50. Educators are counselled and monitored on an ongoing basis. **Verification:** Monitoring records, observation records, individual mentoring discussions.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
Compliance measurement: • Average number of classroom observations each year: a) For educators: b) For assistants: c) For professional associates:				
51. Observation protocols are followed during the performance evaluation process. **Verification:** Observation records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
52. Completed evaluation forms are available for each evaluated staff member. **Verification:** Evaluation forms.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
53. All evaluated staff members participate in meetings with documented written feedback after the performance evaluation. **Verification:** Minutes of feedback meetings.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

Compliance measures: • Number of staff members (educators, assistants, professional associates) who receive meetings with documented feedback after the performance evaluation:				
54. Individual professional development plans are prepared for all evaluated staff in cooperation with the director/leader, describing targeted support measures (e.g., training, mentoring, additional training). **Verification:** Individual plans, training records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
Compliance measures: • Number of individual professional improvement plans prepared:				
55. Staff with insufficient performance are re-evaluated after the end of the given period. **Verification:** evaluation forms.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
56. A report on the internal performance evaluation is prepared every year, presenting the number of staff evaluated, a summary of strengths and areas for improvement, as well as links to professional development priorities. **Verification:** annual report.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

57. The report on the internal evaluation, with the findings and professional development needs, is submitted every year to the MUNICIPALITY. **Verification:** evidence of submission, emails.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

D. Professional development (individual requirements)

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
58. Staff complete the professional development hours required under the applicable administrative instruction on the professional development of teachers. **Verification:** professional development certificates, training records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
Compliance measures: Type of Professional Development: **Number of staff members (educators, assistants, professional associates) who have completed the required hours:** Accredited: ECE institution-based:				
59. Professional development activities are linked to the identified needs arising from	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

evaluation or professional reflection. **Verification:** professional development plans.				

E. ECE institution-based professional development

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
60. The institution has an annual plan for institution-based professional development and exchange of experience, prepared and implemented according to identified needs. **Verification:** professional development plan.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
61. The professional development plan is approved by the institution's Governing Board. **Verification:** approval minutes.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
62. The professional development plan is aligned with the institutional calendar, ensuring dedicated days for PD. **Verification:** ECE institution calendar, session minutes, session materials.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
Compliance measurement: Annual number of institution-based activities: **a) Internal training** Number of hours:				

b) Peer learning Number of hours: **c) Mentoring** Number of hours: **d) Wrokshops** Number of hours:				
63. Educators participate in professional discussions on a monthly basis. **Verification:** meeting minutes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

F. Employment conditions and workforce monitoring

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
64. The institution respects the educator-child ratio by age group, based on applicable legislation. **Verification:** attendance records, group composition lists, staff schedules, records for support educators or assistants for children with disabilities	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
65. The ECE institution provides a dedicated space for planning, reflection, evaluation and cooperation with families to be carried out within the institution. **Verification:** Observation of the space.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

66. The ECE institution monitors the staff resignation/turnover rate. **Verification:** Staff records.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
Compliance measurement: • Number of staff replaced during the last year:				

F. Child protection and well-being

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
67. All ECE institution staff receive initial and refresher training on child protection and violence prevention. **Verification:** training records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
68. At least one staff member is assigned to coordinate child protection activities and cooperation with protection, health and social services when risks are identified. **Verification:** appointment records; documentation of coordination with other services.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

4. CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

A. Curriculum and planning

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
69. The institution implements the ECE curriculum approved by the relevant ministry of education. **Verification:** observation, register of staff trained on the new ECE curriculum.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
70. The pedagogical approach to curriculum implementation is documented and is in accordance with the guide for curriculum implementation. **Verification:** records of adaptations.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
71. Monthly or weekly plans specify the activities and targeted competencies and show links to children's interests, needs, wishes and observations, are visible in the institution, and are shared with parents/guardians.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

Verification: monthly, weekly plans; communication records.				
72. Educators plan themes that arise from children's interests, in accordance with curriculum competencies. **Verification**: planning documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
73. Educators are independent and flexible in managing the time allocated to activities and daily routines based on children's needs and interests, e.g., based on children's interest in extending a particular activity, they decide to shorten the time for the following activity. **Verification**: observation, project documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
74. Activities and activity materials reflect diversity (gender, abilities), inclusion and different cultures. **Verification**: activity plans; materials.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

75. The pedagogical approaches used by educators incorporate contemporary pedagogical methodologies, in line with curriculum requirements. **Verification:** Observation, planning, project documentation.				
76. The curriculum is implemented in accordance with the developmental characteristics of children at different ages. **Verification**: observations; planning.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ ☐5		

B. Pedagogical approach and organisation of learning

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
77. Educators use different forms during curriculum implementation, providing opportunities for communication and interaction in a large group (joint meeting), in small groups, in pairs and through individual work according to children's needs.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		

Verification: observations; planning, documentation.				
78. A balance is ensured between group activities and individual free play. **Verification**: weekly/monthly plans; observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
79. Children are free to explore, experiment and adapt activities according to their interests. **Verification**: observations, documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
80. Educational activities are play-based and organised around children's interests and exploration, to help develop children's imagination and initiative. **Verification**: observations; planning records, children's portfolios.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
81. Activities incorporate different competencies and encourage communication among children for problem-solving, exploration, creativity,	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		

decision-making, independence and self-confidence. **Verification**: observations, planning, documentation of projects/themes.				
82. Educators provide a rich language environment (weekly stories, songs, books) and integrate activities into each weekly plan to strengthen vocabulary and develop language and communication (such as reading, stories, role play). **Verification**: materials, observations, planning, documentation of projects/themes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
83. Educators provide sufficient opportunities for children to express themselves verbally and non-verbally. **Verification**: observations, planning, documentation of projects/themes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
84. Child protection issues are integrated into planning and	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

implemented during daily routines. **Verification**: observation, documentation				
85. Educators intentionally support children in recognising and naming emotions and in developing calming/relaxation strategies through tools such as stories, discussions, role play, the calm corner and modelling. **Verification**: observations, documentation	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
86. Children actively participate in planning and decision-making (when age-appropriate) for carrying out activities/play. **Verification**: observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

C. Time, routines and transitions

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
87. Daily routines (play, arrival, meals, hygiene, rest, transitions between activities) are predictable for children and are	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

used intentionally as opportunities to learn, interact and build relationships. **Verification**: observations; routines.				
88. Daily routines are adapted to the age groups and support the holistic development of children. **Verification**: routine documentation.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
89. Educators provide flexibility within routines to respond to children's rhythms, needs and emotional states. **Verification**: observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
90. Transitions between activities are planned, calm and predictable, using songs, signals or rituals appropriate to the children's age. **Verification**: observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
91. Families are invited to contribute information on children's interests, cultural background, routines and	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

transitions, and this information is reflected in practice. **Verification**: communication records, materials in the kindergarten (displayed).				

D. Learning environment

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
92. Educators create a supportive, calm and emotionally safe environment where children feel accepted and valued. **Verification**: observations, pedagogical documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
93. The environment encourages independent play and imagination through varied materials displayed for children and accessible to all children, regardless of ability. **Verification**: observations, pedagogical documentation	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		

94. Indoor spaces support movement, play and activities in small and large groups. **Verification**: observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
95. Visual materials for good space management are visible in the relevant areas, including: schedules, rules, various guidance for orientation and appropriate behaviour and actions, etc. **Verification**: observations, displayed materials/documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
96. Rooms are divided into learning corners (e.g., construction, role play, art, reading), organised by staff with clear purposes depending on the requirements of the pedagogical approach applied by the ECE institution **Verification**: documentation from observations (photographs, projects).	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
97. Dedicated spaces and equipment for gross and fine motor development are	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

available to children indoors and outdoors. **Verification:** equipment inventory, observation.				
98. There is an appropriate (or adapted) space where children can rest, relax or sleep during the day. **Verification**: room planning; observation.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
99. A range of age-appropriate materials is available, including natural materials, recycled materials and multipurpose materials. **Verification**: materials inventory.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 X4 ☐ 5		
100. Children are taken outdoors every day, in all seasons. **Verification**: daily routines; observations.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
101. The kindergarten outdoor environment has sufficient space	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

and play equipment that support children's holistic development. **Verification**: equipment inventory; observations.				

E. Physical spaces and their planning

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
102. Educators have dedicated spaces for collegial cooperation. **Verification**: visual inspection.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
103. There is a designated space for meetings and consultations with parents. **Verification**: organisation of the space, schedules.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
104. Children have easy access to toilets and there is space for changing children, adapted to their age and ensuring the child's privacy. **Verification**: visual inspection; room planning.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

F. Food and the mealtime environment

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
105. Menus are planned by age group in accordance with the guide on nutrition in ECE institutions. **Verification**: menus.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
106. Menus include all meals and the main food groups every day, according to the guide on nutrition in ECE institutions. **Verification**: menus.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
107. Children's specific diets are documented in their personal files. **Verification**: children's files.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
108. Food is stored, prepared and served in accordance with food safety and hygiene standards. **Verification**: observation, inspection reports.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
109. Meals are organised in a calm, friendly and age-appropriate	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		

environment and are part of the learning process. **Verification**: observation.				
110. Children are supported to feed themselves from the outset. **Verification**: observation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
111. At least one staff member eats the same meal as the children during mealtimes and models healthy eating behaviour. **Verification**: observation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
112. Staff consistently respect children's hunger and satiety cues and do not use forced feeding practices. **Verification**: observation.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
113. Weekly menus are clearly displayed, accessible to families and regularly updated. **Verification**: display on visible walls/corners in the ECE institution.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

G. Inclusion

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
114. Staff use inclusive language, without stereotypes or discriminatory comments. **Verification**: observation, pedagogical plans, minutes of meetings with families.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
115. Educators implement individualised pedagogical strategies and methods for children with disabilities, in cooperation with professional associates and the family. **Verification**: Individual Education Plans (if any), pedagogical plans, meeting minutes.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
116. Appropriate materials and resources are available to support the inclusion and learning of children with disabilities, in accordance with applicable legislation. **Verification**: materials inventory.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

117. The institution has mechanisms and capacities for the early identification of disabilities and developmental delays. **Verification**: employed specialists, helplines, procedural documentation, staff training.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
118. The ECE institution ensures individual access to early childhood interventions. **Verification**: individual early intervention plans; pedagogical plans.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
119. The ECE institution ensures collaborative planning when developing individual plans for children with disabilities and/or developmental delays. **Verification**: individual plans, meeting minutes.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
120. At least one staff member has received training or guidance on inclusive pedagogy, early identification of developmental needs, referral pathways and processes.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

Verification: training records.				
121. The institution follows clear procedures for referral to early childhood intervention, health or social services when developmental risks are identified. **Verification**: policies, procedures.	Yes / No / Partially	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
122. Educators consult guardians on referrals and early interventions when developmental delays are suspected. **Verification**: communication records.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
123. The institution has specific programmes to support children from marginalised groups, ensuring equity in access to learning. **Verification**: meeting minutes, pedagogical planning, pedagogical documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
124. Procedures exist to address inappropriate behaviour or abuse affecting children.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

Verification: ECE institution policies/regulations; procedures.				

H. Observation, documentation, reflection and pedagogical assessment

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
125. The educator regularly observes the process of children's development and learning and documents it through different forms (e.g., photographs, notes, projects, diaries), which are kept in children's individual portfolios. **Verification**: children's portfolios; documentation.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
126. Observations of children inform the planning of pedagogical initiatives and activities. **Verification**: monthly, weekly plans.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
127. Clear procedures exist to ensure the confidentiality and protection	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

of children's personal and developmental data. **Verification**: policies; procedures.				
128. Pedagogical documentation is visible in the institution (panels, displays), is updated regularly and is used as a tool for reflection, not only for record-keeping. **Verification**: displays; observations.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
129. Weekly summary reports are prepared and shared with families. **Verification**: summary reports, communication records (email, communication groups).	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
130. Periodic assessment at the individual child level is carried out twice a year, with the involvement of parents/legal guardians. • First assessment: mid-year (after ≥ 3 months of observation). • Second assessment: end of year. Verification: assessment records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		

Compliance measurement: Percentage of children who have at least two documented pedagogical assessments per year:				
131. The assessment is narrative/descriptive in text and includes all curriculum competencies. **Verification**: assessment reports.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
132. All documentation related to assessment is kept in the child's file. **Verification**: files.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

I. Pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
133. In the event of doubts or indications raised by the educator regarding developmental delays or disability, meetings/discussions are held with parents/legal guardians. **Verification:** Discussion minutes	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

134. With the consent of parents/legal guardians, the ECE institution requests a pedagogical assessment for children with disabilities by submitting the official reporting form and the monitoring report. **Verification**: completed reporting forms; monitoring reports.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		
135. The institution cooperates with the municipal pedagogical assessment team. **Verification**: correspondence; meeting minutes.	Yes / No / Partially	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		
136. Educators provide information and participate in the pedagogical assessment process. **Verification**: assessment records; interviews.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
137. Recommendations from the pedagogical assessment are documented in the child's file. **Verification**: children's files.	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No		

J. Family engagement and communication

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
138. Educators cooperate with guardians in planning, implementation, documentation, projects and activities (where possible). **Verification**: project documentation; communication records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐5		
Compliance measurement: Number of pedagogical projects carried out in cooperation with parents/legal guardians per year:				
139. The institution collects feedback from families on whether the pedagogical documentation clarifies their child's development and learning . **Verification**: information collection forms; records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
140. At least two annual meetings are held with parents/legal	Yes / No	☐ Yes ☐ No	.	

guardians to discuss the child's development and learning. **Verification:** meeting minutes.				
Compliance measurement: Number of meetings held with legal guardians/parents to discuss the child's development and learning during the year:				

5. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A. Documentation, records and data management

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
141. The ECE institution keeps updated administrative records on: • children's enrolment, participation, engagement and transitions; • the internal organisational structure, roles and responsibilities; • staff. **Verification:** Administrative records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

142. The ECE institution demonstrates regular financial auditing practices. **Verification:** Audit reports	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

B. Internal self-evaluation process

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
143. The ECE institution conducts an internal self-evaluation at least once a year. **Verification:** Self-evaluation reports.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
144. The self-evaluation process is documented and includes clear sources of evidence (e.g., observations, document review, feedback). **Verification:** Self-evaluation documentation; annexes with evidence.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
145. Action plans linked to the self-evaluation results are developed and documented, including improvement priorities, responsibilities and timelines.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

Verification: Action plan.				
146. Evaluation and self-evaluation results are shared with staff and discussed collectively to support reflection and improvement. **Verification:** Staff meeting minutes; presentations.	Yes / No	☐ Po ☐ Jo		
147. The summary report with the self-evaluation findings is shared with parents/legal guardians. **Verification:** Documentation of sharing	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		

C. Inclusion and communication with stakeholders

Indicator	Measurement	Result	Comments	Priority measures
148. Families are invited to provide comments on the quality of service provision through structured and documented mechanisms. **Verification:** Feedback tools; records.	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5		
149. Where appropriate, children's views and experiences are taken	5-level evaluation	☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐4 ☐ 5		

into account as part of the feedback or evaluation process. **Verification:** Documentation of consultations with children; observations.				

Republic of Kosovo
Ministry of Education and Science

Early Childhood Education Quality Assurance Reform

Assessment of Compliance of Early Childhood Education Institutions with the National Quality Assurance Framework

Technical Report for Reform Agenda Reporting

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June 2026

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **5**

1. INTRODUCTION AND REFORM AGENDA CONTEXT **7**

1.1 Purpose of the report 7
1.2 Reform Agenda context 8
1.3 Why early childhood education quality matters for reform 8
1.4 Reporting/evaluation question 11

2. POLICY, LEGAL, CURRICULUM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK **13**

2.1 Legal basis for early childhood education quality 13
2.2 National Quality Assurance Framework 13
2.3 The five dimensions of quality 14
2.4 Early Childhood Education Curriculum and pedagogical reform 15
2.5 Child protection, professional development and inclusive assessment 16
2.6 Alignment with the EU Quality Framework 17

3. PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK **18**

3.1 Overview of the development process 18
3.2 Piloting and refinement of the assessment instrument 20

4. METHODOLOGY **21**

4.1 Assessment design 21
4.2 Unit of analysis, coverage and denominator 22
4.3 Eligibility criteria and sample rationale 22
4.4 Data sources 23
4.5 Assessment instrument 24
4.6 Scoring model 24
4.7 Aggregation approach 24
4.8 Data analysis 25
4.9 Interpretation bands 25
4.10 Data cleaning and limitations 26
4.11 External document-based verification 27

5. NATIONAL RESULTS **28**

5.1 Reform Agenda compliance result 28
5.2 National descriptive statistics 29
5.3 Distribution by quality category 30
5.4 Results by institution type 31
5.5 Data-entry/inputter consistency 32
5.6 Municipality-level patterns 32

6. RESULTS BY QUALITY DIMENSION **33**

Leadership and financing 34
Access 35
Curriculum and Pedagogy 36
Staff 37
Monitoring and Evaluation 38

7. SUBCATEGORY AND INDICATOR-LEVEL FINDINGS **40**

7.1 Highest scoring subcategories 40
7.2 Lowest scoring subcategories 42
7.3 Highest scoring indicators 45
7.4 Lowest scoring indicators 47
7.5 Cross-cutting analytical patterns 50

8. VERIFICATION, DATA QUALITY AND RELIABILITY **52**

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS **54**

10. RECOMMENDATIONS **60**
10.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MES 60
10.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MUNICIPALITIES / MUNICIPAL EDUCATION DIRECTORATES 61
10.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECEI/KINDERGARTENS 62
10.4 PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS 63
REFERENCES **65**
ANNEXES **66**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the national assessment of compliance of early childhood education institutions (ECEI/kindergartens) in the Republic of Kosovo with the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education (ECE). It is prepared to support Reform Agenda reporting and to inform the next phase of quality assurance implementation in the ECE sector.

The Reform Agenda milestone is explicit: at least 80% of all early childhood education and care institutions should comply with at least 40% of the Quality Assurance Framework by June 2026[1] (Government of Kosovo, 2024). In total, 164 ECEI/kindergartens completed the self-assessment process. However, in four cases, the supporting verification documentation was largely missing, which meant that the reported self-assessment scores could not be reliably verified. These four cases were therefore excluded from the analytical dataset. The final analytical denominator used in this report is N = 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens, with each institution counted once.

Using the agreed 0-100% scoring conversion model, 147 of 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens reached or exceeded the 40% compliance threshold. This corresponds to 91.9% of assessed institutions and therefore exceeds the Reform Agenda target of 80%. The national mean overall score was 65.50% (SD = 16.44), with a median of 66.34%. Scores ranged from 13.07% to 98.52%, showing substantial variation across institutions.

The assessment was based on institutional self-assessment and external review of submitted supporting documentation. It did not include direct observation of practice, field visits to all institutions, interviews with staff or families, or independent assessment of daily educator-child interactions. The findings should therefore be interpreted as a verified documentary compliance baseline against the National Quality Assurance Framework, rather than as a direct external assessment and inspection of all dimensions of institutional practice. This distinction is important because some lower scores may reflect weak documentation or limited evidence submission, while some higher scores may reflect documented formal compliance rather than fully embedded practice.

Despite the high level of compliance with the quantitative threshold, which indicates progress in establishing the national architecture for ECE quality assurance, the maturity of quality assurance practice remains uneven. The assessment shows that the next stage of reform should focus on institutionalizing the full quality cycle, with particular attention to the Monitoring and Evaluation dimension. This includes evidence-based self-evaluation, documented improvement planning, municipal and central-level review, as well as curriculum and staff dimension standards on staff development, child protection implementation, and

[1] *The original timeline for the milestone was June 2025. However, because the National Quality Assurance Framework had not yet been developed at that point, implementation entered the additional reporting period, with June 2026 used as the applicable reporting date for this assessment.*

pedagogical assessment and support for children with special educational needs. Strengthening these processes is essential for ensuring that quality assurance leads to more responsive teaching, inclusive practices, developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and continuous improvements in the quality of interactions and care that children experience in ECE settings.

The highest scoring areas of performance are mostly structural and organisational. *Leadership and Financing* was the highest-performing dimension, followed by *Access* and *Curriculum* and *Pedagogy*. High-scoring indicators include governing board establishment, menu planning, nutritional provision, basic infrastructure and selected safety-related requirements. These findings suggest that (based on submitted documentation and verification evidence) many institutions have established key formal and operational conditions for quality.

The lowest scoring areas are those that require systematic reflection, documentation and feedback loops. *Monitoring and Evaluation* was the lowest ranking dimension. The lowest scoring subcategory was the internal self-evaluation process. The lowest ranking indicators related to annual self-evaluation, evidence-based documentation of self-evaluation, action plans linked to self-evaluation findings and reporting to municipalities. These findings are directly relevant to the sustainability of the quality assurance system because they determine whether institutions can continue improving after the Reform Agenda milestone is reported.

The recommendations therefore distinguish between achievement of the Reform Agenda milestone and consolidation of the reform. The assessment provides evidence on the extent to which early childhood education institutions comply with the minimum threshold of the Quality Assurance Framework and supports monitoring of the Reform Agenda milestone indicator. At the same time, the findings should inform the next steps required for the development of a second-phase implementation plan focused on self-evaluation, municipal review, digital evidence management, differentiated support for lower-performing institutions, and the integration of quality findings into professional development and inspection planning.

1. INTRODUCTION AND REFORM AGENDA CONTEXT

Early childhood education in Kosovo is undergoing an important phase of reform and expansion. Recent legal, curriculum and quality assurance developments have created a stronger foundation for improving access, inclusion and quality in services for young children. At the same time, the sector continues to face challenges related to uneven access, differences in institutional capacity, variation across public, private and other forms of provision, and the need to ensure that expansion is accompanied by consistent quality standards.

In this context, investment in early childhood education is not only an access priority, but also a quality and equity priority. As Kosovo continues to expand provision, the education system requires reliable evidence on the extent to which institutions meet agreed national quality standards *and, on the areas,* where further support is needed. The present assessment therefore provides both a Reform Agenda reporting result and a baseline for future policy planning, including the next phase of education sector reform and the development of the new Education Strategy 2027–2031.

1.1 Purpose of the report

This report is designed as a policy and technical reporting document for the Government of Kosovo, MES and relevant partners supporting early childhood education reform. Its immediate function is to provide an evidence base for reporting progress against the Reform Agenda milestone on early childhood education quality. Its broader function is to translate the assessment results into policy-relevant findings and recommendations for the next phase of quality reform and assurance implementation, with particular relevance for the development of the new Education Strategy 2027–2031.

The report assesses whether the national compliance threshold has been met, but it deliberately goes beyond a binary compliance conclusion. A quality assurance framework is not only a measurement tool; it is a mechanism for creating a shared language of quality, aligning internal and external assessment, and linking evidence to improvement. For this reason, the analysis examines national scores, quality categories, dimensions, subcategories, indicators, institutional variability, municipality-level patterns and data quality considerations.

The report is intended to be used by MES for Reform Agenda reporting, evidence-informed policy development, strategic planning, and the identification of priorities for future quality improvement in the ECE sector; by municipalities for planning, targeted support and monitoring; by institutions for reflection and improvement planning; and by development partners for aligning technical assistance with demonstrated system needs.

1.2 Reform Agenda context

Kosovo's Reform Agenda under the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans includes a dedicated education reform pathway under human capital development. Within this pathway, early childhood education is treated as both an access agenda and a quality agenda. The Reform Agenda links increased enrolment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) with improvements in quality assurance, recognising that expansion without quality safeguards would be insufficient for child development and social equity outcomes (Government of Kosovo, 2024).

The Reform Agenda sets a specific milestone: at *least 80% of all ECEC institutions* should comply with at least *40% of the quality assurance framework* by June 2026.[2] It also identifies future steps, including increased enrolment of children aged 0-2 and 3-5 and assessment of private ECEC institutions according to the quality assurance framework by 2027 (Government of Kosovo, 2024). This means the present assessment is not an isolated reporting exercise. It is the first measurable step in a longer reform trajectory that combines quality assurance, access expansion, institutional capacity and accountability. The Reform Agenda also highlights the role of municipalities and the Education Inspectorate in ensuring implementation. This is consistent with the logic of the National Quality Assurance Framework: quality is generated at institutional level but enabled, supported and validated at municipal and central levels. The assessment therefore provides evidence not only about individual institutions but also about the readiness of the system to operate a national quality assurance cycle.

1.3 Why early childhood education quality matters for reform

Early childhood education is central to Kosovo's Reform Agenda because it sits at the intersection of child development, equity, human capital formation and long-term social and economic development. The early years are a period of rapid development in which children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, physical and self-regulation capacities are shaped by the quality of relationships, environments and learning opportunities around them. For this reason, early childhood education is not only a preparatory stage before school; it is the first level of the education system and one of the most important public investments in lifelong learning.

International evidence is clear that access alone is not sufficient. The benefits of early childhood education and care depend strongly on the quality of the service provided. The Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems emphasises that investment in early childhood education is beneficial only when services are high-quality, accessible, affordable and inclusive. It also warns that low-quality provision can have negative effects on children and society as a whole (Council of the European Union, 2019). This is particularly important for Kosovo as the country expands access to early childhood education.

[2] *The original timeline for the milestone was June 2025. However, because the National Quality Assurance Framework had not yet been developed at that point, implementation entered the grace period, with June 2026 being the end of the grace period for reporting on the compliance with ECE quality assurance framework.*

Expansion without quality assurance would risk increasing enrolment without ensuring that children experience safe, inclusive, developmentally appropriate and stimulating environments.

Quality in early childhood education has both structural and process dimensions. Structural quality refers to the conditions that enable good provision: governance, financing, infrastructure, staff qualifications, educator-child ratios, curriculum, safety standards, documentation systems and monitoring mechanisms. Process quality refers to children's daily experiences: how educators interact with children, how play and learning are organised, how children's interests are observed and supported, how families are engaged, and how inclusion and wellbeing are ensured in everyday practice. OECD evidence highlights that process quality is the most direct driver of children's development, learning and wellbeing, while structural conditions create the enabling environment for such quality interactions to occur (OECD, 2021).

This distinction is important for interpreting the Kosovo assessment results. Strong performance in governance, infrastructure, nutrition or formal planning shows that many institutions have established essential foundations for quality. However, the deeper test of reform is whether these foundations translate into consistent child-centered pedagogical practice, inclusive participation, child protection, professional reflection, evidence-based planning and continuous improvement. The lowest ranking areas identified in this assessment (especially internal self-evaluation, documentation of evidence, action planning, reporting to municipalities, child protection training and pedagogical assessment of children with special educational needs) are precisely the areas that determine whether quality assurance becomes an embedded institutional routine rather than a one-time reporting exercise.

From an equity perspective, quality matters because children do not enter early childhood education with the same starting conditions. Children from low-income households, rural areas, minority communities, children with special educational needs, children with developmental delays and children experiencing family or social vulnerability may benefit strongly from high-quality early childhood services, but they may also be most harmed by weak or exclusionary provision. A quality assurance framework therefore has an equity function: it makes visible whether institutions are not only open to children, but also able to respond to their diverse needs, protect their wellbeing, engage families and coordinate support when additional services are required.

In the Kosovo context, early childhood education quality is also closely linked to the implementation of the new legal and curriculum framework. Law No. 08/L-153 on Early Childhood Education establishes the right of all children to quality, inclusive early childhood education and defines responsibilities for organisation, functioning, oversight, monitoring and quality standards. The National Quality Assurance Framework operationalises these legal commitments by translating them into dimensions, subcategories and indicators that can be assessed, verified and improved across three levels of institutional, municipal, and central governance. The early childhood education curriculum further strengthens this reform direction

by emphasising holistic development, play-based pedagogy, child-centred planning, observation, documentation and cooperation with families.

Quality assurance is therefore not an administrative add-on to the reform. It is the mechanism through which Kosovo can ensure that legal and curriculum reforms are implemented in practice. It provides a common language for institutions, municipalities, the Ministry and partners; it clarifies what quality means; it defines what evidence should be available; and it links assessment results to improvement planning. Without such a mechanism, quality would remain difficult to monitor and unevenly interpreted across institutions and municipalities.

The Reform Agenda milestone gives this quality agenda a measurable policy target: at least 80% of early childhood education and care institutions should comply with at least 40% of the Quality Assurance Framework by June 2026. This target is important because it establishes a national baseline for system readiness. At the same time, the threshold should be understood as a minimum compliance milestone, not as the final objective of the reform. Reaching the threshold shows that the sector has made progress in aligning institutions with the Framework. Sustaining the reform will require moving beyond minimum compliance toward consistent understanding of quality and implementation, stronger documentation, better professional support and regular quality improvement cycles centered around children, their families, and educators.

Quality also matters for Kosovo's broader human capital agenda. Recent World Bank analysis highlights the importance of expanding access to quality early childhood education in Kosovo as an investment in children's long-term learning, productivity and wellbeing, as well as in wider economic growth (World Bank, 2026). In this sense, the quality assurance assessment is relevant not only for education policy, but also for social inclusion, labour market participation, gender equality and long-term development. High-quality early childhood education supports children's readiness for school, enables families—especially mothers—to participate more fully in employment and contributes to a stronger foundation for future skills development.

For these reasons, the findings of this assessment should be read in two ways. First, they provide evidence for Reform Agenda reporting by showing whether Kosovo has met the required compliance milestone. Second, they provide a diagnostic baseline for the next phase of reform. The assessment identifies where the system is stronger and where investment, technical assistance and institutional support are most urgently needed or bear potential for lasting improvement. The central policy implication is that Kosovo should now shift from proving that a minimum threshold has been achieved to building a sustainable quality assurance culture across all early childhood education institutions.

1.4 Reporting/evaluation question

This report answers one primary Reform Agenda reporting question and several secondary quality-development questions. The primary question determines whether Kosovo has met the quantitative milestone required for Reform Agenda reporting. The secondary questions help interpret what the result means for the next phase of early childhood education quality reform.

The primary reporting question is:

Has Kosovo met the Reform Agenda milestone that at least 80% of assessed ECEI/kindergartens comply with at least 40% of the National Quality Assurance Framework?

This question is answered through the national compliance calculation presented in Section 5. The calculation uses the final analytical denominator of 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens and applies the 40% minimum compliance threshold to each institution's overall score. The result provides the basis for determining whether the Reform Agenda target has been achieved.

However, the report does not stop at this threshold question. A national quality assurance framework is intended not only to confirm compliance, but also to identify strengths, weaknesses and priorities for continuous improvement. For this reason, the report also addresses four secondary analytical questions:

1. **What is the national profile of institutional quality across the five dimensions of the National Quality Assurance Framework?**

   This question examines how assessed institutions perform across Leadership and Financing, Access, Staff, Curriculum and Pedagogy, and Monitoring and Evaluation. It helps identify whether quality is balanced across the system or concentrated in specific areas.

2. **Which areas of quality are strongest, and which areas require targeted reform support?**

   This question is addressed through dimension-level, subcategory-level and indicator-level analysis. It distinguishes between areas where institutions show stronger formal or operational compliance and areas where additional policy, municipal or professional support is needed.

3. **What does the evidence suggest about the maturity of Kosovo's internal self-evaluation and external document-based verification cycle?**

   This question is central to the sustainability of the reform. It examines whether institutions are only completing assessment forms, or whether they are beginning to use

evidence, reflection, documentation, action planning and municipal reporting as part of a continuous quality improvement cycle.

4. **What actions should MES, municipalities and institutions prioritise in the next phase?**

   This question translates the findings into practical recommendations. It focuses on how the assessment results should inform national policy, municipal monitoring, institutional improvement planning, professional development, child protection, inclusion and future digitalisation of the quality assurance process.

Together, these questions allow the report to serve two purposes. First, it provides a clear answer for Reform Agenda reporting. Second, it uses the assessment evidence as a diagnostic baseline for strengthening the quality assurance system beyond the minimum compliance milestone.

2. POLICY, LEGAL, CURRICULUM AND QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

2.1 Legal basis for early childhood education quality

The development of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education is grounded in both Kosovo's strategic education priorities and its legal framework for early childhood education. A key strategic basis is the Education Strategy 2022–2026, which identifies early childhood education as a priority area and, under Specific Objective 1.2, explicitly foresees the development and implementation of a framework for assessing quality in early childhood education institutions. This strategic commitment provided the policy mandate for establishing a common national approach to defining, assessing and improving quality in ECE.

Law No. 08/L-153 on Early Childhood Education is the core legal basis for the current reform. The law defines early childhood education as the stimulation of children's full potential from birth until entry into grade one and applies to children from birth to age six. It requires quality, inclusive early childhood education in all forms of organisation and defines responsibilities for organisation, functioning, oversight, financing, inspection, monitoring and the establishment of quality standards (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2023).

The law is particularly relevant for the quality assurance assessment because it does not treat quality as a voluntary institutional aspiration. It establishes the right of all children to quality inclusive education, health, wellbeing and protection; it requires integrated services; and it mandates mechanisms for establishing, monitoring and implementing quality standards at all levels. The assessment instrument operationalises these legal requirements into observable institutional indicators.

The guiding principles in the law also align with the Framework's quality logic: universal right to education, the best interest of the child, child participation, play-based education, holistic development, equal opportunities, non-discrimination, inclusion, diversity, prevention of violence, responsibility and accountability. These principles are reflected across the five quality dimensions and are particularly visible in indicators on access, child protection, inclusion, family engagement and monitoring.

2.2 National Quality Assurance Framework

The National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education in Kosovo is the main national reference for quality in ECE. It articulates a shared national vision of high-quality ECE, defines what quality looks like across levels of the system and provides tools to assess, monitor and improve quality over time (MESTI, 2026a).

The Framework brings together three connected components: a narrative framework that sets the vision and rationale; a matrix of quality indicators across five dimensions and three

levels of governance; and an assessment instrument that translates institutional-level indicators into a structured self-evaluation and external assessment tool. This architecture is important because it prevents a fragmented quality system in which policy, inspection and institutional reflection use different language or criteria.

The Framework explicitly distinguishes between structural indicators and process indicators. Structural indicators refer to conditions, resources, documents, standards, regulations and systems that enable quality. Process indicators refer to what happens in practice over time, including leadership practices, pedagogical implementation, inclusion, family engagement, professional development and the use of data for improvement (MESTI, 2026a).

The results of this assessment confirm the importance of that distinction: many structural areas are relatively strong, while several process and quality-cycle areas remain weak.

2.3 The five dimensions of quality

The assessment is organised around five dimensions that mirror the National Quality Assurance Framework and align with the EU Quality Framework for ECEC (Council of the European Union, 2019; European Commission, 2025)

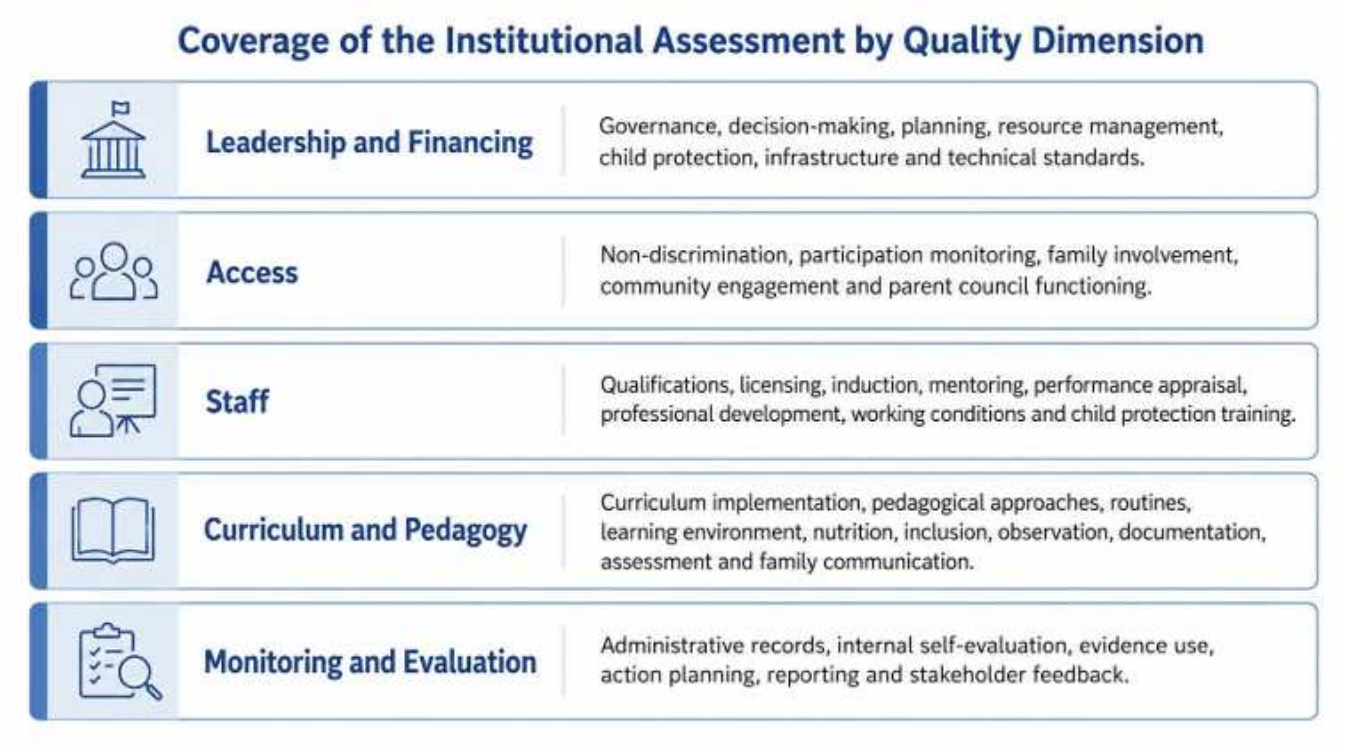


Figure 2.1. Coverage of the Institutional Assessment by Quality Dimension.

2.4 Early Childhood Education Curriculum and pedagogical reform

The quality assurance framework is closely connected to the curriculum reform in early childhood education. The Framework describes the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 0-6 as the national pedagogical foundation for ECE in Kosovo. It defines the vision for holistic child development, play-based pedagogy, competences, planning, observation, assessment of children's development and learning, and cooperation with families (MESTI, 2026a).

The curriculum is therefore not only a pedagogical document; it is part of the national quality architecture. Indicators in the Curriculum and Pedagogy dimension assess whether institutions implement the approved curriculum, document pedagogical approaches, connect planning to children's interests and needs, support play and exploration, use varied forms of interaction and document children's development through observation and portfolios. Public reporting on the new curriculum has emphasised its child-centred, inclusive and play-based orientation, including holistic development, wellbeing and twenty-first-century competences.

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) Curriculum was officially approved on 17 April 2025. Alongside the curriculum, four practical implementation guides were approved to support educators and institutions in translating the curriculum into practice. These guides cover: (i) Learning Theories, (ii) Practical Guidance for Curriculum Implementation in Early Childhood Education, (iii) Children's Social and Emotional Development, and (iv) Organization of the Educational Environment in Early Childhood Education Institutions and Pre-primary Classes.

Prior to its nationwide implementation, during 2024 the curriculum was piloted in 10 municipalities across 13 preschool institutions and 17 pre-primary classes. To support the piloting process, 11 trainers were prepared and assessed, who subsequently delivered training to 236 participants. The trained cohort included educators (84%), professional staff members (6%), directors of preschool institutions (5%), and officials from Municipal Education Directorates (5%). The training programme was based on the curriculum framework and the four practical implementation guides, ensuring that educators and institutional leaders developed a shared understanding of child-centred pedagogy, play-based learning processes, development of competences, with additional resources on social-emotional development, and the creation of enabling learning environments.

The piloting process provided valuable evidence for refining implementation approaches and strengthening institutional readiness for nationwide roll-out. Following the approval of the curriculum, preparations are underway for its phased implementation across the Early Childhood Education sector.

The curriculum establishes a common vision of quality at the pedagogical level by defining what children should experience in early learning settings, how educators plan and interact with children, and how children's development and learning are documented, assessed, and reflected

upon. To ensure coherence between curriculum implementation and quality improvement efforts, the principles, pedagogical approach, and key competencies promoted by the curriculum are reflected in the Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education.

The Quality Assurance Framework complements the curriculum by defining how quality is understood, monitored, and continuously improved across the sector through self-evaluation and external evaluation processes. The framework incorporates indicators related to curriculum implementation, pedagogical practice, learning environments, child well-being, and professional development, thereby enabling institutions to assess the extent to which curriculum objectives are being achieved in practice.

This alignment creates a direct link between curriculum roll-out and quality assurance assessment. Evidence generated through self-assessment and external document-based verification informs institutional improvement planning and supports the continuous improvement cycle of plan–implement–evaluate–improve. In this way, the legal framework, curriculum, and quality assurance mechanisms function as an integrated system, ensuring that every Early Childhood Education institution regularly reflects on its performance, identifies priorities for improvement, and receives both support and accountability from local and central education authorities.

2.5 Child protection, professional development and inclusive assessment

The Framework and the instrument also draw on related policy instruments. The Child Protection Policy for pre-university education establishes the obligation of institutions and staff to create safe environments, prevent violence, identify risks and cooperate with social, health and justice services when institutional competence is exceeded (MESTI, 2023a). This policy context is directly relevant to indicators on child protection, reporting procedures, consent for photographs, protection from harmful content and staff training.

Professional development is another important policy link. Administrative Instruction No. 12/2023 regulates approval criteria and procedures for professional development programmes for teachers and education workers, including educators and other pre-university education staff (MESTI, 2023b). This supports the Staff dimension, especially indicators on professional development planning, institution-based professional learning and alignment between evaluation findings and development needs. In broader context, the professional development system in Kosovo's pre-university education system is closely linked to the licensing scheme for teachers (Administrative Instruction 14/2023) whereby it lays out a model of professional development that is partly provided by external providers and partly organized at school level. In addition, as part of the development of secondary legislation deriving from Law No. 08/L-153 on Early Childhood Education, specific administrative instructions regulating the professional development of educational and professional staff in early childhood education are currently in process.

Inclusive education and pedagogical assessment are also embedded in the legal and administrative framework. The 2017 administrative instruction on professional assessment of children with special educational needs establishes municipal assessment teams and procedures for pedagogical evaluation. This is relevant to weaker assessment findings concerning cooperation with municipal pedagogical assessment teams and documentation of recommendations for children with special educational needs or developmental delays.

2.6 Alignment with the EU Quality Framework

The EU Quality Framework for ECEC includes ten quality statements structured around five areas: access; staff; curriculum; monitoring and evaluation; and governance and funding (Council of the European Union, 2019). Kosovo's framework follows the same architecture, making the assessment relevant not only for domestic quality improvement but also for EU-oriented reform reporting.

The Council Recommendation emphasises that quality frameworks should support inclusive and affordable access, professional staff, appropriate curricula, monitoring and evaluation, and adequate governance and funding. It also calls for robust child protection and safeguarding policies within ECEC systems (Council of the European Union, 2019). These themes are reflected directly in Kosovo's instrument.

This alignment strengthens the credibility of the Reform Agenda indicator. The 40% threshold is national, but the dimensions and logic of the Framework are comparable to the European reference framework. Kosovo's result can therefore be read as progress toward a nationally contextualised but EU-aligned quality assurance system.

3. PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE NATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

3.1 Overview of the development process

The National Quality Assurance Framework and the institutional assessment instrument were developed as part of a broader reform effort led by MES with technical support from UNICEF and engagement of national stakeholders. The process was designed to create a coherent quality assurance system rather than a standalone checklist. This coherence is visible in the way the narrative framework, quality indicators and assessment instrument are linked around the same five dimensions.

Based on the documentation available to the analysis team, the process included development of the Framework and instrument, review with the MES-led national Working Group, piloting of the instrument in one public kindergarten in Prishtina and subsequent revision of the instrument before wider use. The finalized Framework and instrument were then used by MES to train and support ECE institutions in implementing the institutional self-evaluation process (MESTI, 2026c).

Draft development sequence

Step	Process element	Description to be confirmed/refined
Step 1	Conceptual alignment	Definition of the national quality assurance logic, alignment with legal framework, curriculum, EU Quality Framework and national reform priorities.
Step 2	Framework drafting	Development of the narrative Framework, quality statements and indicators across central, municipal and institutional levels.
Step 3	Instrument development	Translation of institutional-level indicators into a practical self-evaluation and external assessment instrument.
Step 4	Piloting	Pilot application in one public kindergarten in Prishtina; pilot results and user experience informed instrument revision.
Step 5	Working Group review	Review with the Working Group responsible for the Framework and instrument, including technical and operational refinements.
Step 6	Training and roll-out	Use of the completed instrument as an implementation guide during training and assessment by other ECEI institutions.
Step 7	Data collection and verification	Institutional self-assessment followed by review of submitted evidence and verification of scores where documentation did not support reported performance.

The Ministry of Education and Science established a dedicated working group for the development of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education, including the internal quality evaluation instrument and accompanying implementation guidance. The development of the framework took place as part of broader ECE reforms, and in response to commitments under Kosovo's Reform Agenda and the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan. The framework aims to operationalize quality assurance in ECE in alignment with

curriculum principles, pedagogical standards, and European and international quality assurance frameworks.

The working group was established by MES decision on 3 October 2025 and expanded on 27 November 2025 with additional members from the Faculty of Education, University of Pristina. The group was co-chaired by the Head of the Department for Pre-University Education and the Head of the ECE Division at MES. Membership included representatives from the MES Departments for EU Integration and Donor Coordination, Digitalization, Department for Private Education, Legal Department, Education Inspectorate, Institute of Pedagogy, municipal education officials, development partners (UNICEF and World Bank), and four academic experts from the Faculty of Education.

The working group held eight (8) technical working sessions between 10 October 2025 and 28 May 2026. These sessions focused on defining the framework architecture, quality domains and indicators, and developing the internal evaluation instrument and implementation guidance.

UNICEF, as a long-standing strategic partner in the ECE reform process, provided continuous technical support throughout the development of the framework. In this context, MES, with UNICEF support, engaged both international expertise to ensure methodological robustness, alignment with international quality assurance approaches, and coherence with national reform priorities.

An iterative development process was applied, with continuous inputs from the working group ensuring progressive refinement of all instruments.

The sample for national application of the self-evaluation process was defined by MES using the methodology described in Section 4, and in line with the approach and commitments set out in Kosovo's Reform Agenda submission. The sample covered approximately 80% of ECE institutions nationwide.

In early May 2026, MES organized a national training for directors of 160 ECE institutions, introducing the framework, self-evaluation instrument, and implementation guidance.

To support implementation, MES established, through formal decision, a support group of 21 trained members to assist institutions during the self-evaluation process. In addition, eight master's-level students from the Faculty of Education were engaged to support the analysis of self-evaluation documentation submitted by institutions.

All participating ECE institutions were provided with technical guidance and sufficient time to complete the self-evaluation process, including submission of supporting evidence aligned with the defined quality domains and criteria.

On 17 June 2026, the Minister of Education signed the submission request for approval of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Early Childhood Education and its accompanying instruments, including the internal quality evaluation instrument and implementation guidance.

3.2 Piloting and refinement of the assessment instrument

Following the development of the institutional assessment instrument, the instrument was tested through a structured field-based validation exercise in one public kindergarten in Prishtina during April 2026. The purpose of the exercise was to test the clarity, usability and feasibility of the instrument in a real institutional context, including the interpretation of indicators, the use of the scoring scale, the identification of evidence and the practical organisation of the assessment process.

Following the pilot, the instrument was reviewed together with the Working Group responsible for the development of the National Quality Assurance Framework. The review focused on improving the clarity of indicators, strengthening consistency between the Framework and the assessment instrument, and ensuring that institutions could understand the type of evidence required for each indicator. The completed pilot version of the instrument was then used as a supporting guide during training and implementation, helping other ECEI institutions to understand how the assessment should be completed and how evidence should be documented.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Assessment design

The assessment was designed as a national compliance and quality profiling exercise. It combined institutional self-assessment with external review of submitted verification documentation. Institutions completed the self-assessment instrument and submitted supporting documentation for the relevant indicators. The submitted evidence was then reviewed externally to assess whether the reported scores were sufficiently supported by documentation. This design reflects the Framework's central principle that internal quality assurance and external quality assurance should use the same standards, the same instrument and the same evidence logic.

The assessment was not designed as a punitive ranking of institutions. It was designed to determine the extent to which assessed institutions meet the Reform Agenda threshold and to identify system-level patterns that can guide policy support, municipal monitoring and institutional improvement planning.

The assessment was also designed to respond directly to the Reform Agenda milestone for early childhood education, which requires that at least 80% of all Early Childhood Education Institutions comply with at least 40% of the National Quality Assurance Framework. The original milestone date was June 2025; however, because the National Quality Assurance Framework had not yet been developed at that point, implementation entered the additional grace period for reporting, with June 2026 used as the applicable reporting date for this assessment. This milestone is situated within Policy Area 4: Human Capital, specifically the education sector, and forms part of the broader reform commitments defined under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans.

For the purpose of this assessment, the starting reference point was the Reform Agenda/EMIS-SMIA baseline of 188 preschool institutions. At the time the Reform Agenda was drafted, 174 of these institutions were located in urban areas and 129 were private institutions. Building on this baseline, MES compiled and updated list of all operational public, private, public-private, community-based ECE institutions to ensure that at least 80% of operational and licensed ECEI with operational maturity were assessed against the nationally agreed quality standards. Based on the agreed eligibility criteria, including operational maturity and relevance to the quality assurance assessment, **164** institutions were deemed eligible and completed the self-assessment process. During the subsequent verification and data quality review, **four** institutions were excluded because the majority of the required supporting documentation was missing, making it impossible to verify compliance with the assessment protocol or to validate the self-reported scores against the evidence requirements of the assessment instrument. The final analytical dataset therefore includes 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens, with each institution counted once.

For the implementation of the assessment, each preschool institution individually completed the self-assessment, compiled the required supporting documentation, and submitted signed hard copies of the assessment package to the Division for Early Childhood Education or the Division for Private Education at the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), as appropriate. The Ministry subsequently transferred all documentation to the Faculty of Education at the University of Pristina, where designated staff were responsible for the secure receipt, registration, storage, and safeguarding of the documents prior to their verification and analysis.

4.2 Unit of analysis, coverage and denominator

The unit of analysis in this report is one assessed ECEI/kindergarten. Although 164 institutions completed the self-assessment process, four cases were excluded from the final analytical dataset because the supporting verification documentation was largely missing. The final analytical denominator is therefore N = 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens.

Each institution is assessed for the purpose of calculating national, dimension-level, subcategory-level and indicator-level results. This approach is consistent with the Reform Agenda indicator, which refers to the share of institutions meeting the minimum compliance threshold, not to the number of forms, files or submissions received.

4.3 Eligibility criteria and sample rationale

The eligibility logic explains the movement from the initial Reform Agenda/EMIS-SMIA baseline to the institutions included in the assessment. The assessment did not treat all listed institutions as automatically eligible; it applied criteria related to operational maturity, availability of sufficient institutional evidence and inclusion in the relevant public, private and public-private assessment frames.

To ensure the validity, comparability and reliability of the assessment results, the institutional coverage was defined using an eligibility criterion based on operational maturity. Only Early Childhood Education Institutions that had completed at least one full year of operation were included in the assessment. This criterion was applied because the standards and indicators in the National Quality Assurance Framework and the internal assessment instrument require evidence generated over a sufficient period of institutional functioning. Such evidence includes planning documents, implementation records, monitoring evidence, internal review practices, professional development documentation and evidence of institutional improvement processes.

Operational maturity was used as a methodological consideration in defining the assessment frame because several indicators require evidence generated over an annual cycle of planning,

implementation, monitoring and review. Recently operationalised institutions may have had less opportunity to develop the regulatory and operational documents required by the Framework or to document institutional processes over a full annual cycle. Their inclusion would have therefore affected comparability, as lower scores would reflect institutional start-up conditions and limited documentation history rather than the actual quality or maturity of provision.

For the public sector, the assessment frame was based on the official operational list of public Early Childhood Education Institutions published by MES in the Annual Statistical Report 2024/2025, and the list provided by the Division for ECE within MES, which identifies 69 public ECE institutions. Newly established public institutions that were still in the process of functionalisation were excluded from the assessment frame, as they were still completing key institutional capacities, including staffing, organisational infrastructure and staff training. This eligibility rule improves methodological fairness and comparability. Including very new institutions would risk underestimating quality due to missing evidence rather than weak practice. It would also introduce a bias into the Reform Agenda result because the Framework assesses institutional systems that develop over time.

For the private and public-private sector, MES identified institutions with valid licences/in process of re-licensing during the assessment implementation period. From the total number of licensed private and public-private institutions, institutions were included in the assessment only if they met the same operational maturity criterion of at least 12 months of functioning. The final list of private and public-private institutions included in the assessment is provided in Annex.

The distribution by provider type in the analytical dataset is not directly comparable with the provider distribution in the Reform Agenda baseline because the two use different classification and inclusion logics. The Reform Agenda baseline reports a broad public/private distribution, while the assessment dataset distinguishes public, private, public-private and other/community-based forms of provision where relevant. In addition, the analytical dataset reflects participation in the self-assessment process and availability of sufficient verification evidence. Differences between the baseline provider distribution and the assessment dataset should therefore be interpreted as a function of eligibility, participation, classification and verification requirements, rather than as a contradiction in the data.

4.4 Data sources

The report uses five types of evidence:

1. Assessment dataset with institution-level scores, dimension scores, subcategory scores and indicator-level scores (Cleaned analytical dataset used for descriptive statistical analysis)
2. National Quality Assurance Framework and institutional assessment instrument.
3. Scoring model and interpretation bands provided for the assessment.
4. MES methodological instructions on sample selection, piloting, roll out, and verification.

5. Relevant legal, policy and international reference documents, including the Law on Early Childhood Education, Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026, EU Quality Framework, OECD quality evidence and Kosovo Reform Agenda.

4.5 Assessment instrument

The assessment instrument contains 149 indicators organised under five dimensions and 29 subcategories. Indicators include binary compliance items and developmental quality items. Binary items assess whether a structure, document or procedure exists; developmental items assess how well a practice is implemented and embedded.

The instrument also identifies verification sources for each indicator. These include policies, procedures, plans, meeting minutes, pedagogical planning documents, child portfolios, records, observation evidence, communication with families and professional dialogue. This evidence logic is central to the credibility of the assessment.

4.6 Scoring model

All indicators were converted into a common 0-100% scale using the scoring model provided for the assessment.

Table 4.1. Scoring conversion model.

Original response	Converted value
Yes	100%
No	0%
Partly	50%
Level 1	0%
Level 2	25%
Level 3	50%
Level 4	75%
Level 5	100%

4.7 Aggregation approach

The assessment used a hierarchical aggregation model. Indicator scores were averaged into subcategory scores. Subcategory scores were averaged into dimension scores. Dimension scores were averaged into the overall institution-level score. This approach follows the logic of the scoring example: it prevents large subcategories from disproportionately dominating the score and gives each dimension a clear analytical value.

The Reform Agenda compliance threshold was applied to the overall institution-level score. A record was classified as meeting the threshold if its overall score was equal to or greater than 40%.

4.8 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical procedures. The cleaned assessment dataset was analysed in Microsoft Excel and cross-checked in IBM SPSS Statistics to ensure consistency of calculations. The analysis focused on calculating national compliance with the Reform Agenda threshold, overall institution-level scores, dimension-level scores, subcategory-level scores and indicator-level scores.

For each assessed ECEI/kindergarten, converted indicator scores were aggregated into subcategory scores, subcategory scores into dimension scores, and dimension scores into an overall institutional score. The 40% Reform Agenda compliance threshold was then applied to the overall institutional score. Institutions with an overall score equal to or above 40% were classified as meeting the minimum compliance threshold, while institutions below 40% were classified as not meeting the threshold.

The analysis produced frequencies, percentages, means, medians, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values. Results were examined nationally and by quality dimension, subcategory and indicator. Additional descriptive comparisons were conducted by institution type, municipality and data inputter. Municipality-level results were interpreted cautiously, particularly where the number of assessed institutions per municipality was small.

No inferential statistical testing was applied because the purpose of the assessment was not to test causal relationships or estimate population parameters through a probability sample. The purpose was to provide a verified descriptive profile of assessed institutions, determine whether the Reform Agenda compliance threshold was met, and identify priority areas for future quality improvement.

4.9 Interpretation bands

Table 4.2. Quality interpretation bands.

Score range	Interpretation
0-25%	Needs significant improvement
25-49%	Quality development / minimum compliance
50-74%	Good quality
75-89%	Very good quality
90-100%	Excellent quality

4.10 Data cleaning and limitations

The dataset was reviewed for denominator consistency, missing categories and implausible coding. During this process, entries were reconciled so that the final analytical dataset included 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens.

The assessment is based primarily on submitted documentation and recorded scoring. It does not replace direct external assessment and inspection of all institutions. Some quality dimensions, especially process quality and pedagogical interaction, are difficult to verify fully through documentation alone. For this reason, the results should be used as a national quality assurance baseline, not as a definitive judgement on all aspects of day-to-day practice. In future assessment cycles, the self-assessment process should build on the lessons learned from this first implementation and be further strengthened through enhanced support from central and local authorities, including targeted field visits, verification of submitted evidence, and the collection of perspectives from key stakeholders at the institutional level.

Because this was the first national cycle of self-assessment using the new Framework, the analysis cannot always distinguish fully between lack of implementation, weak documentation, incomplete evidence submission and, in some indicators, limited applicability to the institution's current enrolment profile. This is particularly relevant for indicators related to children with special educational needs, child protection procedures, internal self-evaluation and municipal reporting. Future cycles should refine scoring guidance, including the use of "not applicable" categories where appropriate, to improve comparability and interpretation.

A specific limitation concerns documentation quality. During the verification process, some institutions had to be contacted because the submitted documentation was incomplete or unclear. In some cases, procedures or practices may have existed, but the documentation was insufficient, incomplete or not organised in a way that allowed reliable verification. This distinction is important: lower scores may sometimes reflect weak documentation practices as well as weak implementation. The process therefore also served as a learning experience for institutions by clarifying what type of evidence is required for future self-evaluation and external assessment cycles.

Another limitation concerns cases where several kindergartens within the same municipality operate under one management structure. In such cases, similar or identical assessment responses were encountered for few institutions, more specifically on quality dimensions related to governance, leadership, monitoring, reporting and institutional management. Future assessment cycles should clarify how branches, satellite institutions or

multiple service units under one management structure should be assessed, documented and reported.

The assessment was also conducted during a period in which key elements of the ECE reform architecture were still being consolidated. The new ECE curriculum has been approved and piloted, but Kosovo-wide roll-out through systematic training, mentoring and implementation support is still ongoing. Similarly, administrative instructions deriving from the new Law on Early Childhood Education, including those related to professional development and other implementation mechanisms, are still under development. Some weaker results should therefore be interpreted in light of the fact that institutions are being assessed against a new quality architecture while curriculum implementation, secondary legislation and institutional support systems are still being fully operationalised.

Future assessment cycles should strengthen the methodology by combining document-based verification with field visits, direct observation, interviews with institutional staff and families, and structured review by trained inspectors or authorised external evaluators. This would provide a fuller picture of both documented compliance and lived institutional practice.

4.11 External document-based verification

To increase the reliability of the self-assessment process and strengthen quality control mechanisms, an external document-based verification process was implemented. External document-based verification was treated as an essential component for validating self-assessment results and for ensuring that the assessment criteria were applied consistently across institutions.

The external document-based verification covered the full analytical dataset of 160 ECEI/kindergartens, meaning that 100% of the cases included in the final analysis were subject to review of submitted self-assessment reports and supporting documentation. The verification was conducted by an external team composed of eight junior researchers who were trained on the National Quality Assurance Framework, the assessment instrument, the scoring model and the evidence requirements. The team worked in four pairs to strengthen consistency, objectivity and reliability in the interpretation of documentation.

The review examined whether the evidence submitted by each institution was sufficient to justify the reported level of performance for each relevant indicator. Where the supporting evidence did not justify the level reported by the institution, the verification team revised the score and, where necessary, lowered the level of performance to align the final score with the available evidence.

Where documentation was incomplete or unclear, selected institutions were contacted to provide additional clarification or missing evidence. This was important because, in some cases, procedures or practices appeared to exist, but documentation was incomplete or not

sufficiently organised for verification. This aspect of the process served not only as a quality-control mechanism, but also as learning experience for institutions, helping them better understand the type of evidence required for future self-evaluation and external assessment cycles.

The verification process strengthened the credibility of the findings by reducing the risk of over-reporting and by ensuring that the final assessment results reflected documented institutional practice rather than self-reported claims alone. It also reinforced the principle embedded in the National Quality Assurance Framework that quality assurance should be evidence-based, transparent and linked to continuous improvement.

At the same time, the verification process had limitations. It was based primarily on submitted documentation and did not include direct observation or field visits to all institutions. As a result, some aspects of quality could not be fully assessed through documentation alone. These limitations should be addressed in future cycles through clearer evidence guidance, stronger institutional preparation, digital evidence submission, and external evaluation by trained inspectors or authorised external evaluators.

5. NATIONAL RESULTS

5.1 Reform Agenda compliance result

The main Reform Agenda finding is that 147 of 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens reached or exceeded the 40% compliance threshold. This equals 91.9% of assessed institutions and therefore exceeds the required 80% threshold. Thirteen institutions, or 8.1%, remained below the 40% threshold.

This result provides a strong basis for reporting that the Reform Agenda quantitative milestone has been met. The result should be accompanied by the methodological note that the final analytical denominator is 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens after reconciliation of duplicate/additional entries.

Table 5.1. National headline indicators.

Indicator	Result
Assessed records	160
Institutional coverage	160 ECEI/kindergartens
Records ≥40% threshold	147
Records below threshold	13
Compliance rate	91.9%
Mean overall score	65.50%
SD	16.44
Median	66.34%
Range	13.07% – 98.52%

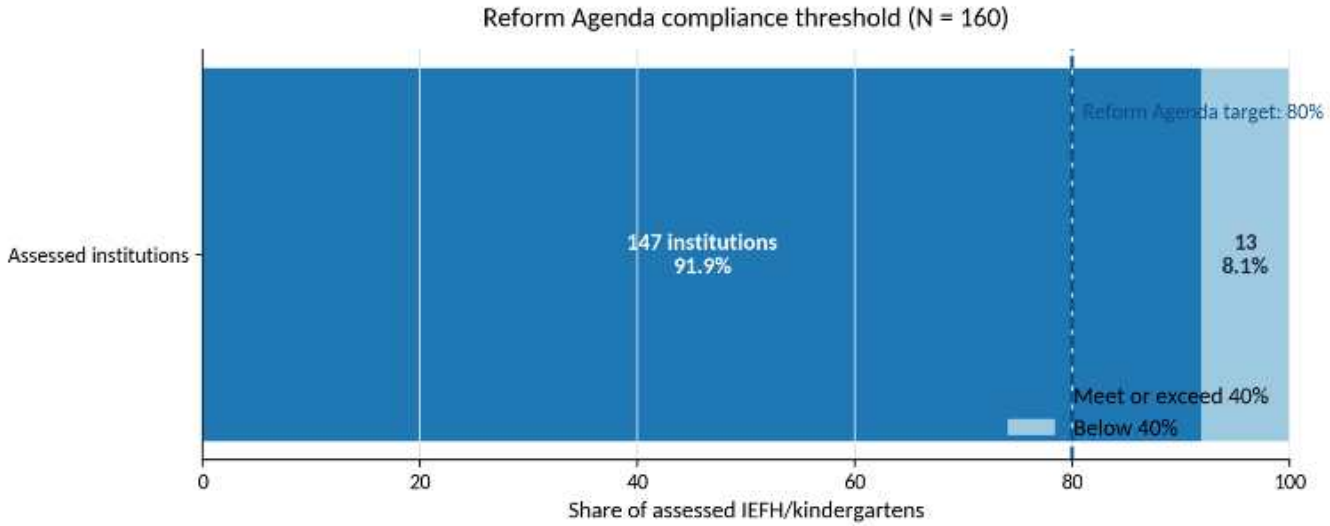


Figure 5.1. Reform Agenda compliance threshold.

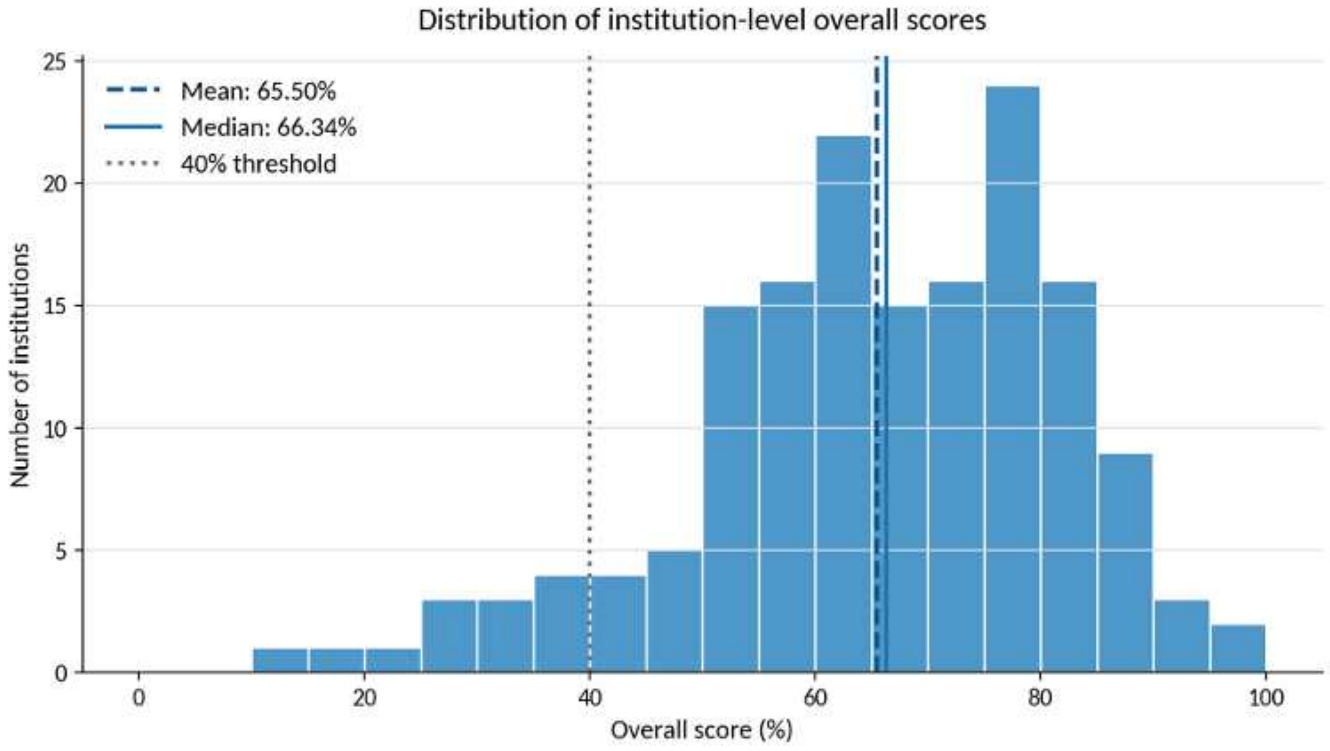


Figure 5.2. Distribution of overall institution-level documented compliance scores.

5.2 National descriptive statistics

The national mean overall score was 65.50%, corresponding to the 'good quality' category. The median was 66.34%, showing that the centre of the distribution is close to the

mean. The standard deviation was 16.44, indicating substantial variation across assessed institutions.

The lowest recorded overall score was 13.07% and the highest was 98.52%. This wide range confirms that Kosovo's ECE sector is not homogeneous. Some institutions are already close to implementation of the Framework, while others require intensive support to establish basic quality assurance practices.

5.3 Distribution by quality category

Table 5.2. Distribution by quality category.

Quality category	N	% of assessed records
Need significant improvement	3	1.9%
Minimum compliance	19	11.9%
Good quality	84	52.5%
Very good quality	49	30.6%
Excellent quality	5	3.1%

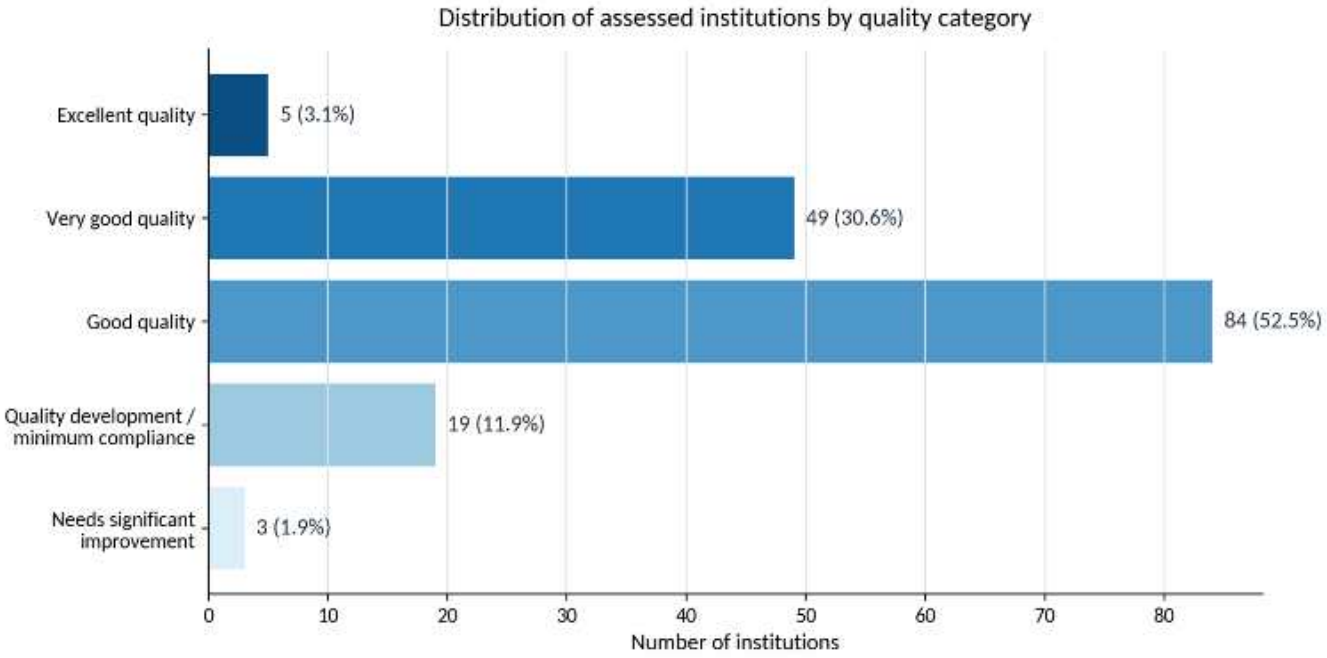


Figure 5.3. Distribution of assessed records by quality category.

Most assessed institutions fall into the 'good quality' or 'very good quality' categories. Specifically, 84 institutions (52.5%) were classified as good quality and 49 institutions (30.6%) as very good quality. Five institutions (3.1%) reached excellent quality.

At the lower end, three institutions (1.9%) required significant improvement and 19 institutions (11.9%) fell into the quality development category. The practical meaning is that only

a small share is far below the quality threshold, but a larger group still needs structured support to move from minimum compliance toward stable quality assurance practice.

5.4 Results by institution type

Table 5.3. Results by institution type.

Institution type	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max	≥40%
Public Private	7	77.82%	12.91%	52.59%	91.22%	7/7 (100.0%)
Public	54	66.84%	14.62%	31.80%	98.52%	51/54 (94.4%)
Private	95	64.00%	17.61%	13.07%	96.98%	85/95 (89.5%)
Unspecified in the self-assessment report	4	61.43%	3.92%	56.15%	65.64%	4/4 (100.0%)

The institution-type analysis should be interpreted cautiously because a small number of institutions have missing or unclear type coding. Public-private institutions show the highest average in the dataset, but the group is small (n = 7). Public institutions have a mean score of 66.84%, while private institutions have a mean score of 64.00%. The difference is not large enough to support a strong policy conclusion without further statistical testing and verification of coding.

The more important policy point is that both public and private provision need to be integrated into the same national quality assurance cycle. The Reform Agenda includes a future milestone on assessing private ECEC institutions according to the quality assurance framework by 2027, making private-sector quality assurance a continuing priority.

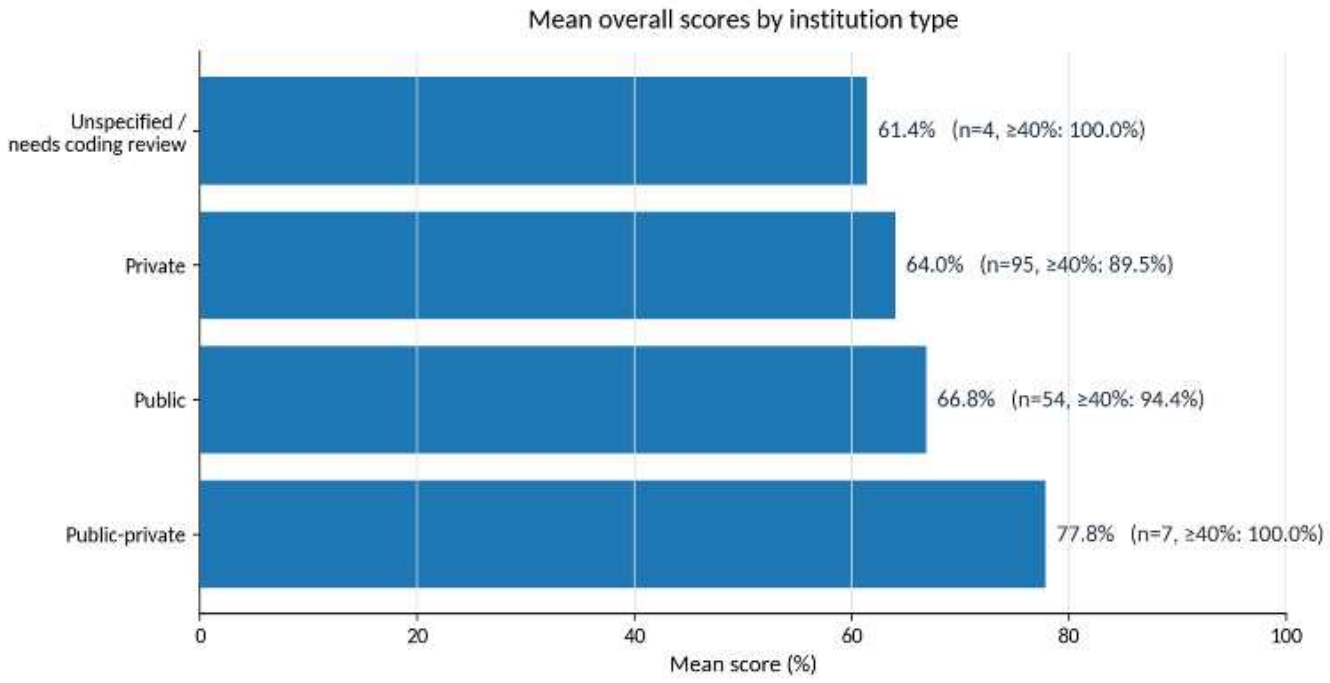


Figure 5.4. Mean score by institution type.

5.5 Data-entry/inputter consistency

The mean scores across the three inputters are very similar, ranging from 64.95% to 66.16%. This suggests that there is no visible major systematic scoring difference across inputters at the aggregate level. The standard deviations differ, with Inputter 3 showing the widest score range, but this may reflect the institutions assigned rather than inputter bias.

Table 5.4. Comparison across data inputers.

Inputer	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Inputer 1	54	66.16%	16.90%	17.20%	98.52%
Inputer 2	60	65.11%	14.46%	24.69%	96.98%
Inputer 3	46	65.23%	18.53%	13.07%	92.73%

5.6 Municipality-level patterns

The municipality-level analysis reveals meaningful variation, but it should be interpreted with caution because many municipalities have only one or two assessed institutions, depending on the availability and participation of public, private and other forms of ECEC provision. The municipal mean scores presented below are aggregate scores for all assessed ECEI/kindergartens within the municipal sample, regardless of provider type. This means that the averages may include public, private, public-private and other/community-based forms of provision, depending on the composition of the assessed institutions in each municipality. For this reason, the tables below present municipalities with at least three assessed institutions. They are not intended as a public ranking; they are an internal management tool for identifying where targeted support, additional verification or peer learning may be useful.

Among municipalities with at least three assessed institutions, municipality-level mean scores were grouped using a descriptive threshold of 65%. Municipalities with a mean score of 65% or higher are presented as higher-scoring municipalities, while those below 65% are presented as municipalities requiring closer follow-up. This threshold is used only for descriptive analysis and should not be interpreted as an official classification or ranking. The results should also be interpreted with caution because municipal averages combine all assessed provider types within each municipality and, in some municipalities, the number of assessed institutions remains small.

Table 5.5. Municipalities with n≥3 and mean score ≥65%..

Municipality	n	Mean	SD	≥65%
Istog	4	77.19%	5.27%	4/4
Prizren	7	74.11%	6.02%	7/7

Peje	9	73.76%	15.00%	9/9
Suhareke	3	72.89%	9.61%	3/3
Vushtrri	4	69.89%	13.17%	4/4
Lipjan	4	68.16%	6.95%	4/4
Prishtine	51	66.86%	17.64%	48/51
Gjilan	7	67.40%	16.13%	6/7

Table 5.6. Municipalities with n≥3 and mean score <65%.

Municipality	n	Mean	SD	≥65%
Gjakove	4	44.68%	10.58%	3/4
Mitrovice	3	48.14%	31.83%	2/3
Ferizaj	14	57.90%	20.81%	10/14
Drenas	4	59.23%	14.52%	3/4
Fushe Kosove	7	60.48%	20.40%	5/7

These municipal patterns should be used for planning and follow-up, not for public ranking. Differences may reflect variation in institutional maturity, provider mix, documentation quality, municipal support, sample size and the availability of evidence during verification. Before final use, municipality names should be standardised in the dataset to avoid duplicate rows caused by spelling differences.

6. RESULTS BY QUALITY DIMENSION

Dimension-level results provide the clearest view of system strengths and weaknesses. They show that Kosovo's ECE institutions perform substantially better on structural and operational dimensions than on the monitoring and evaluation dimension.

Table 6.1. Dimension-level results.

Dimension	n	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max	Records ≥40%	Interpretation
Leadership and financing	160	77.70	15.67	80.73	20.57	100.00	156/160 (97.5%)	Very good quality
Access	160	74.41	20.14	76.30	10.42	100.00	148/160 (92.5%)	Good Quality
Curriculum and Pedagogy	160	70.07	16.83	73.13	20.71	97.06	150/160 (93.8%)	Good Quality
Staff	160	58.79	19.88	61.82	3.57	98.57	125/160 (78.1%)	Good Quality

Monitoring and Evaluation	160	46.51	22.46	45.00	0.00	100.00	91/160 (56.9%)	Needs improvement

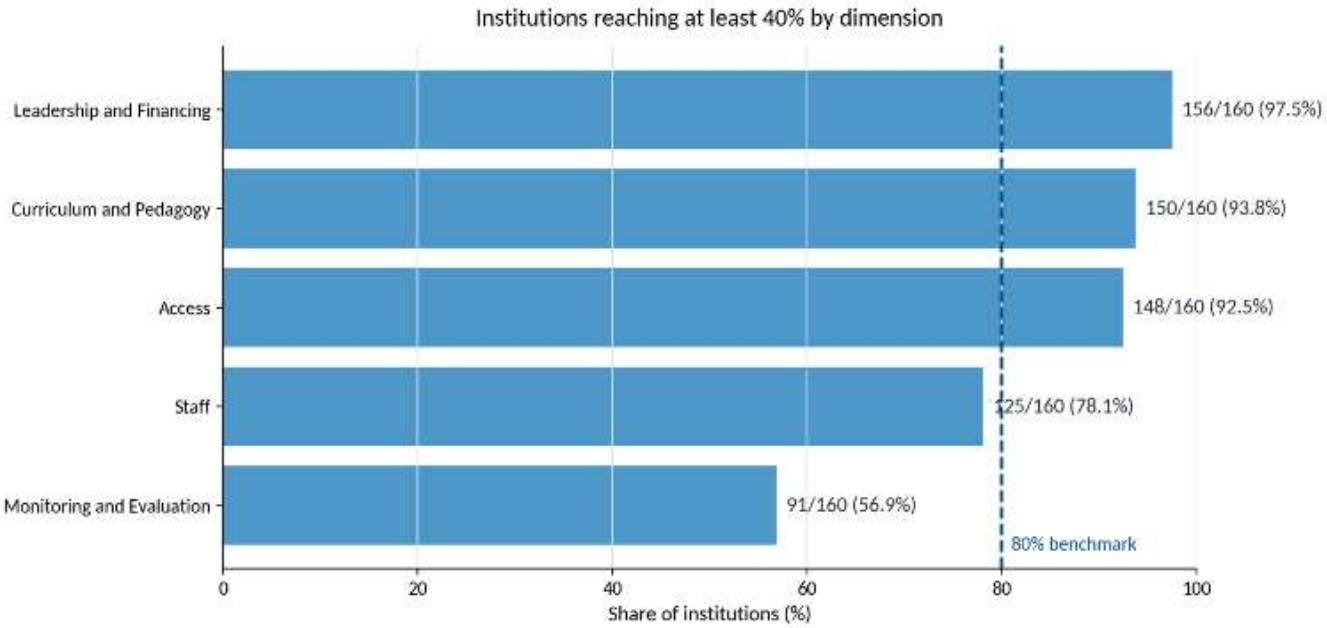


Figure 6.1. Mean documented compliance score by dimension.

Leadership and financing

Leadership and Financing is the strongest-performing dimension, with a mean score of **77.70%**, placing it in the **very good quality** interpretation band. This indicates that many assessed ECEI/kindergartens have established the formal and organisational foundations required for institutional quality. These include governance structures, decision-making bodies, annual planning processes, resource management routines, infrastructure-related requirements and basic technical standards.

This finding is significant because leadership and financing create the enabling conditions for all other areas of quality. Institutions with functioning governance bodies, clear plans, defined responsibilities and basic resource-management systems are better positioned to organise provision, support staff, communicate with families and respond to regulatory requirements. In this sense, the strong score in this dimension suggests that Kosovo's ECE sector has made meaningful progress in establishing the structural base of quality assurance.

At the same time, the result should not be interpreted as evidence that all aspects of leadership are equally mature. The dimension includes both formal governance indicators and more demanding implementation indicators, including those linked to child protection,

wellbeing and institutional responsibility. The assessment shows that formal and visible structures tend to score higher than indicators requiring systematic implementation, documentation and follow-up. This means that many institutions may have the required bodies, plans or physical conditions in place, while still needing support to ensure that these structures function as active mechanisms for quality improvement.

A further consideration is the likely variation in the quality and rigour of governance documentation submitted by institutions. While many institutions were able to provide evidence of formal governance structures, the assessment process also indicates that documents may differ in format, completeness, regularity and practical use. For example, institutions may have governing bodies, annual plans or decision-making records, but the extent to which these documents are standardised, updated, evidence-based and actively used for institutional improvement may vary across institutions and municipalities.

This suggests that the strong score in Leadership and Financing should be interpreted as evidence of progress in establishing governance structures, but not necessarily as evidence of uniformly strong governance practice. Strengthening this area requires clearer expectations and practical guidance from central and local authorities on the functioning of governance mechanisms, including the role of governing boards, documentation of decisions, use of self-evaluation evidence, links with annual planning and follow-up of quality improvement priorities. Municipalities and MES should support institutions with templates, guidance, regulatory clarification and capacity-building so that governance structures become active mechanisms for quality assurance rather than formal compliance requirements only.

The policy implication is that the next phase should move beyond confirming the existence of governance structures toward strengthening their functionality. Governing boards, directors and institutional leadership teams should be supported to use assessment findings, self-evaluation evidence and child wellbeing data as part of regular decision-making. Leadership should also be linked more clearly to professional development, safeguarding, inclusive practice and institutional improvement planning. In this way, the strength of this dimension can be used as a platform for improving weaker areas of the Framework.

Access

Access is the second strongest dimension, with a mean score of **74.41%**, placing it in the **good quality** category and close to the threshold for **very good quality**. This dimension covers non-discrimination, registration and admission practices, participation monitoring, family involvement, community engagement and the functioning of parent councils. The relatively strong result suggests that many institutions have established basic mechanisms for enrolling children, engaging families and supporting participation.

This is an important finding from both a rights-based and equity perspective. Access in early childhood education is not only about whether children are formally enrolled. It also

concerns whether enrolment and participation are organised in a fair, transparent and inclusive way, whether families receive information, whether parent bodies function, and whether institutions make efforts to involve children and families from different backgrounds. In this sense, the Access dimension reflects the extent to which institutions are open, responsive and connected to the communities they serve.

However, the dimension also shows variation across institutions. Although 148 of 160 institutions met or exceeded the 40% threshold in Access, 12 institutions remained below this threshold. This indicates that inclusive and equitable access is not yet evenly developed across the sector. The variation may reflect differences in institutional maturity, municipal support, documentation practices, parent engagement mechanisms, or the capacity of institutions to monitor participation systematically. It may also reflect differences between institutions that have formal access procedures and those that actively use participation data to identify and address barriers.

At system level, these results may also point to the need for complementary national policies and mechanisms that support the consistent implementation of equitable enrolment and participation measures across municipalities and providers. These may include clearer by-laws, operational guidance, financing mechanisms, subsidies, vouchers or other support measures that help ensure that children from vulnerable groups can access and participate meaningfully in early childhood education. Therefore, Access should remain a reform priority even though it is one of the stronger-performing dimensions.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum and Pedagogy has a mean score of **70.07%**, placing it in the **good quality** category. This is a broad and multidimensional area of the Framework. It includes curriculum implementation, pedagogical approaches, daily routines, learning environments, play and exploration, nutrition, inclusion, observation, documentation, assessment and communication with families. The score suggests that many institutions have established important elements of pedagogical provision, especially in areas that are more visible and easier to document, such as physical spaces, routines, nutrition and general learning environments.

This result is encouraging because curriculum and pedagogy are central to children's daily experiences. A quality curriculum is not implemented only through formal planning documents; it is enacted through interactions, play, observation, responsiveness to children's interests and needs, and the organisation of meaningful and inclusive learning environments. The relatively strong score in this dimension suggests that many institutions are aligned with core expectations of the early childhood education curriculum and the Quality Assurance Framework.

At the same time, the internal pattern within this dimension shows important weaknesses. Stronger performance is visible in areas such as physical spaces, mealtime routines and general pedagogical organisation, while weaker performance is concentrated in inclusion-

related practices and pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities. This distinction is important. It suggests that institutions may be better prepared to demonstrate general pedagogical organisation than to document differentiated, individualised and inclusive support for children with additional developmental or educational needs.

The findings therefore point to a need for deeper and more sustained pedagogical support. The new ECE curriculum has established an important national pedagogical direction, but its Kosovo-wide implementation through systematic training, mentoring and follow-up support is still at an early stage. This means that some of the inconsistencies observed in Curriculum and Pedagogy should be interpreted in light of the fact that institutions are implementing the Quality Assurance Framework while curriculum roll-out is still being consolidated.

For this reason, curriculum implementation and quality assurance should be advanced in parallel. Institutions should be supported through mentoring, professional development and practical tools for observation, documentation, child assessment and inclusive planning. They should also be supported to connect curriculum planning with evidence about children's development and learning, rather than treating planning as a formal administrative requirement. Stronger cooperation with municipal pedagogical assessment teams is also needed, especially for children with special educational needs, developmental delays or other support needs.

The Quality Assurance Framework can serve as a mechanism for monitoring how the curriculum is translated into institutional practice, while curriculum training and mentoring can directly address weaker indicators identified through the assessment. This parallel implementation is essential for ensuring that curriculum reform leads to observable improvements in daily pedagogical practice, inclusion, documentation and children's learning experiences.

Staff

The Staff dimension has a mean score of **58.79%**, which places it in the **good quality** category but indicates substantial room for improvement. This dimension includes qualifications, licensing, induction, mentoring, performance appraisal, professional development, working conditions, workforce monitoring and child protection training. Compared with Leadership, Access and Curriculum and Pedagogy, the Staff dimension is clearly weaker, suggesting that workforce-related systems are not yet consistently developed across institutions.

This finding is highly policy-relevant because staff quality is one of the strongest enabling conditions for process quality in early childhood education. International evidence emphasises that children's experiences are strongly shaped by the competence, stability, working conditions and professional support available to educators and other staff (OECD, 2021). Structural requirements such as staff qualifications and ratios matter, but they are not sufficient on their own. Educators also need induction, mentoring, opportunities for professional learning, performance feedback and support to implement inclusive and child-centred practice.

The assessment results suggest that some formal staffing requirements are relatively well established, while more developmental aspects of workforce quality are weaker. Subcategories related to performance appraisal, entry into the profession, mentoring of new staff, professional development and child protection training require particular attention. These are not minor administrative issues. They determine whether staff are supported to improve their practice, respond to children's needs and interests, protect children from harm and implement the curriculum effectively.

The low performance of child protection-related staff indicators is especially important. Child protection is not only a policy obligation; it requires trained staff, clear procedures, documentation, referral pathways and regular reinforcement. If staff do not receive initial and refresher training on child protection and violence prevention, institutions may be less prepared to identify, prevent and respond to risks affecting children's safety and wellbeing.

The next phase of reform should therefore link staff development directly to the results of self-evaluation and external document-based verification. Professional development should not be planned generically. It should respond to verified gaps in the Framework, particularly in child protection, inclusive pedagogy, observation and documentation, assessment of children with disabilities, family communication and evidence-based improvement planning. Municipalities and MES should also consider how to strengthen institution-based professional development, so that reflective learning becomes part of everyday practice rather than only external training attendance. While MES has an established framework of regulating professional development in preuniversity education which also enables provision of institution based-professional development, dedicated standards for professional qualification and development in line with legislative and curriculum reforms and sustained funding mechanisms for quality development and assurance are still lacking.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation is the weakest dimension, with a mean score of **46.51%**. It is the only dimension that falls in the **quality development / minimum compliance** band. At the level of dimensions, tt also has the largest number of institutions below the 40% threshold, with **69 of 160 institutions** scoring below the minimum compliance level. This makes Monitoring and Evaluation the most important systemic weakness identified by the assessment.

This result is highly significant because monitoring and evaluation are the core of the quality assurance cycle. A quality assurance framework can only become sustainable if institutions regularly assess their own practice, collect evidence, document findings, prepare improvement plans, discuss results with staff, communicate relevant findings to families and report to municipal authorities. Without these routines, quality assurance risks remaining a one-time compliance exercise rather than becoming an institutional culture of reflection and improvement.

The low score in this dimension suggests that internal self-evaluation is not yet institutionalised across many ECEI/kindergartens. The weakest subcategory in the full assessment is the internal self-evaluation process, and several of the weakest indicators are directly related to annual self-evaluation, documentation of evidence, action planning and reporting to municipalities. This pattern shows that the challenge is not only technical scoring. It is the limited integration of self-evaluation into annual institutional planning and municipal quality management.

The findings also suggest that documentation and evidence use remain underdeveloped. Institutions may engage in some forms of reflection or informal problem-solving, but many do not yet document these processes in a way that can support verification, accountability or improvement planning. This creates a gap between practice and evidence. It also weakens the ability of municipalities and MES to monitor quality trends and provide targeted support.

The policy implication is clear: Monitoring and Evaluation should be the central priority of the next reform phase. MES should establish a clear annual self-evaluation calendar, standard templates for evidence collection and reporting, guidance for action planning, and municipal procedures for reviewing institutional self-evaluation reports. Municipalities should be supported to act as the "middle layer" of quality assurance by validating reports, identifying common weaknesses, supporting institutions and connecting findings to professional development and inspection planning.

Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation would also improve the reliability of future Reform Agenda reporting. The current assessment provides a baseline, but future cycles should show whether institutions are using the Framework repeatedly and whether scores improve over time. In this sense, the weakest dimension is also the most strategic: if Kosovo strengthens monitoring and evaluation, it will also strengthen the sustainability of all other dimensions of quality.

7. SUBCATEGORY AND INDICATOR-LEVEL FINDINGS

The subcategory and indicator-level analysis provides a more detailed understanding of the national results. While dimension-level scores show the broad pattern of institutional quality, subcategory and indicator results show more specifically where implementation is more advanced and where the quality of provision remains fragile. This level of analysis is especially important for planning the next phase of reform because it identifies the specific institutional practices, documentation requirements and support needs that should be prioritised by MES, municipalities and ECEI/kindergartens.

The overall pattern is clear. Higher scores are concentrated in areas that are more visible, more regulated or easier to verify through formal documents and physical observation. Lower scores are concentrated in areas that require more complex institutional routines and system-level support, such as self-evaluation, evidence use, professional reflection, action planning, inclusive assessment, child protection training, follow-up of staff performance and the systematic monitoring of equitable access and participation. This suggests that many institutions have made progress in establishing the structural foundations of quality, but need further support to strengthen process quality, inclusive and equitable participation, and the deeper quality assurance cycle that is essential for children's development and learning outcomes.

7.1 Highest scoring subcategories

The highest scoring subcategories are concentrated in governance, physical environment, infrastructure, pedagogical organisation, nutrition, working conditions and basic access. This pattern confirms that many institutions have established visible structures and operational routines required by the Framework. These are important achievements because they represent the foundations on which more complex quality improvement processes can be built.

Table 7.1. Ten highest-scoring subcategories.

Dimension	Subcategory	Mean	Median	Below 40%
Leadership and Financing	*E. Infrastructure, environments and technical standards*	83.82%	88.19%	3/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*E. Physical spaces and their planning*	83.18%	100.00%	16/160
Leadership and Financing	*A. Governing body and decision-making*	83.07%	91.67%	10/160
Staff	*F. Employment conditions and workforce monitoring*	82.45%	100.00%	14/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*B. Pedagogical approach and organisation of learning*	82.22%	87.50%	6/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*F. Nutrition and the mealtime environment*	81.87%	86.11%	8/160
Access	*A. Registration and non-discrimination*	81.41%	87.50%	14/160
Leadership and Financing	*C. Resource management and sustainability*	81.25%	91.67%	14/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*D. Learning environment*	78.24%	80.00%	3/160
Access	*C. Involvement of parents/legal guardians*	77.70%	81.25%	14/160

As seen in table 7.1 above, the highest-scoring subcategory is **Infrastructure, environments and technical standards** under Leadership and Financing, with a mean score of 83.82%. Based on submitted documentation and verification evidence, most institutions were able to demonstrate compliance with basic infrastructure and technical requirements. The low number of institutions below 40% in this subcategory, only 3 out of 160, suggests that the majority of assessed institutions have reached at least a minimum level of compliance in this area. This is particularly important in early childhood education, where physical safety, hygiene, space, ventilation, supervision and organisation of environments are directly linked to children's wellbeing and daily experience.

The second highest scoring subcategory is **Physical spaces and their planning** under Curriculum and Pedagogy, with a mean score of 83.18% and a median of 100.00%. The high median suggests that many institutions achieved full or near-full compliance on this subcategory, although 16 institutions remained below 40%. This means that while the overall performance is strong, there are still some institutions where physical space planning requires targeted attention. The result confirms that the learning environment is one of the more developed aspects of institutional quality, but it should still be monitored to ensure that both internal and external spaces are not only physically adequate, but also pedagogically meaningful, inclusive and responsive to children's developmental needs.

The high result for **Governing body and decision-making** is also important. With a mean score of 83.07%, this subcategory suggests that many institutions have established formal

governance structures. This is a positive sign for system readiness because institutional governance is essential for planning, accountability, family participation and implementation of quality standards. However, the presence of a governing body should not be interpreted as sufficient on its own. The next stage should examine whether governing bodies meet regularly, use evidence, discuss quality findings, approve improvement plans and participate meaningfully in institutional development.

Several of the highest scoring subcategories are located within Curriculum and Pedagogy, including **Pedagogical approach and organisation of learning**, **Nutrition and the mealtime environment**, and **Learning environment**. These results suggest that many institutions have established daily routines and pedagogical arrangements that are visible in practice and can be verified through observation, planning documents or institutional records. The high scoring performance in nutrition and mealtime environment is particularly notable because nutrition is both a health and process quality issue in early childhood education. It reflects not only food provision but also institutional attention to children's wellbeing, routines and care.

The presence of **Registration and non-discrimination** among the highest scoring subcategories is also encouraging. It suggests that many institutions have basic admission and access procedures in place. From a reform perspective, this is essential because expanding early childhood education must be accompanied by fair, equitable and non-discriminatory participation. However, 14 institutions remained below 40 and results should be interpreted alongside weaker findings in inclusion, stakeholder communication and pedagogical assessment. Institutions may have relatively strong formal access procedures while still requiring support to ensure that participation is fully inclusive and respectful for children with disabilities, developmental delays, minority backgrounds or other vulnerabilities.

Overall, the highest scoring subcategories show that Kosovo's ECEI/kindergartens have made progress in establishing foundational conditions for quality. These include physical infrastructure, governance, planning, basic access, learning spaces, nutrition and certain working conditions. These strengths should be recognised and used as entry points for further reform. The next challenge is to ensure that these structural strengths are connected to deeper quality processes, including self-evaluation, professional development, inclusive pedagogy and evidence-based improvement planning.

7.2 Lowest scoring subcategories

The lowest scoring subcategories show where the quality assurance system requires the most urgent attention. The lowest-scoring areas are not random. They are concentrated in processes that require institutions to collect evidence, reflect on practice, document findings, plan improvements, engage stakeholders and coordinate with external support systems. These are also areas that are closely linked to the implementation of the quality assurance process for the first time in early childhood education. In the past, internal self-evaluation in ECE was not supported by a sufficiently specific legislative and regulatory basis, nor by a consolidated cycle

of guidance, documentation, municipal review and follow-up support. The findings should therefore be interpreted not only as institutional weaknesses, but also as evidence of an emerging system that now requires clearer regulation, practical tools and sustained support. This suggests that the main challenge is not only compliance with formal requirements, but the development of a functioning quality culture.

Table 7.2. Ten lowest-scoring subcategories.

Dimension	Subcategory	Mean	Median	Below 40%
Monitoring and Evaluation	*B. Internal self-evaluation process*	22.88%	10.00%	117/160
Staff	*F. Child protection and wellbeing*	42.03%	50.00%	70/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*I. Pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities*	45.68%	45.00%	66/160
Monitoring and Evaluation	*C. Inclusion and communication with stakeholders*	47.42%	50.00%	70/160
Staff	*C. Performance appraisal*	49.38%	53.75%	51/160
Staff	*B. Entry into the profession and mentoring of new staff*	50.39%	50.00%	64/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*G. Inclusion*	52.14%	52.27%	59/160
Staff	*D. Professional development — individual requirements*	52.50%	50.00%	69/160
Staff	*E. ECEI-based professional development*	57.77%	62.50%	55/160
Curriculum and Pedagogy	*J. Family engagement and communication*	61.61%	66.67%	45/160

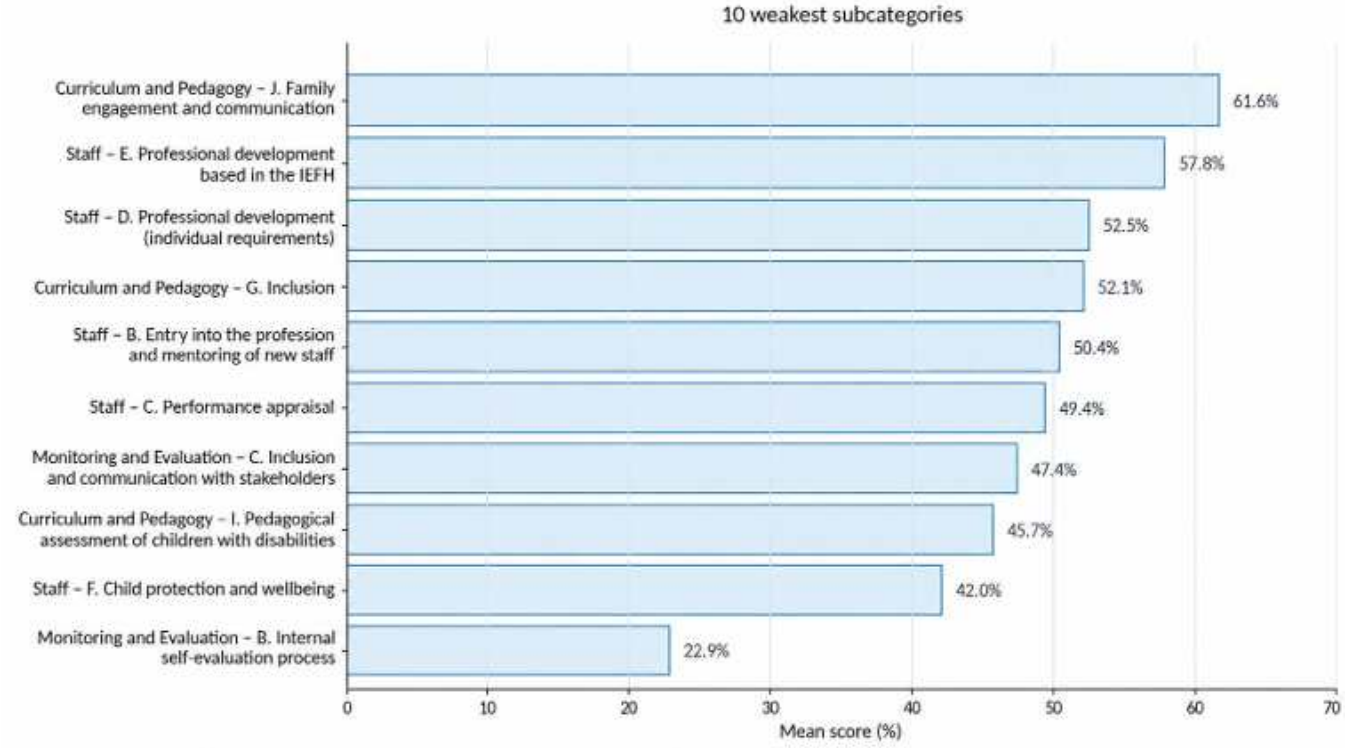


Figure 7.1. Ten lowest-scoring subcategories.

As seen in Table 7.2 and Figure 7.1 above, the lowest scoring subcategory by far is **Internal self-evaluation process**, with a mean score of 22.88% and 117 of 160 institutions below 40%. This is the most serious finding in the subcategory analysis. It indicates that the majority of assessed institutions have not yet institutionalised regular, evidence-based self-evaluation. The very low median of 10.00% further shows that this is not a weakness affecting only a small group of outliers; it is a widespread system-level gap. Since self-evaluation is the core mechanism through which institutions identify strengths, weaknesses and improvement priorities, this finding has direct implications for the sustainability of the Quality Assurance Framework.

The second lowest scoring subcategory is **Child protection and wellbeing** under Staff, with a mean score of 42.03% and 70 institutions below 40%. This is a critical finding because child protection is both a legal and ethical obligation. The result suggests that institutions may have some formal policies or procedures in place, but implementation, documentation, staff training and follow-up are not yet consistent. This area requires urgent attention because quality in early childhood education cannot be separated from children's safety, wellbeing and protection from harm.

The third lowest scoring subcategory is **Pedagogical assessment of children with special needs**, with a mean score of 45.68% and 66 institutions below 40%. This indicates substantial gaps in inclusive assessment practices and cooperation with specialised or municipal support structures. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution. In some ECEI/kindergartens, low or zero scores may reflect the fact that the institution did not have any currently identified or enrolled children with special educational needs at the time of assessment, rather than the complete absence of inclusive assessment procedures or support capacity.

At the same time, the finding remains important because all institutions should have basic readiness to identify children's developmental and learning needs, communicate with families, document concerns appropriately and cooperate with municipal pedagogical assessment teams or other support structures when needed. Future assessment cycles should clarify how indicators related to children with special educational needs should be scored in institutions where no such children are currently enrolled, including whether a "not applicable" option or separate readiness indicator is needed. This would help distinguish between lack of need in the current enrolment profile and lack of institutional preparedness for inclusive support.

Another low-scoring area is **Inclusion and communication with stakeholders** under Monitoring and Evaluation. This subcategory has a mean score of 47.42%, with 70 institutions below 40%. This indicates that many institutions do not yet consistently communicate assessment findings, gather feedback, involve stakeholders or use information from families and communities as part of quality improvement. This is important because quality assurance should not be an internal administrative process only; it should involve parents/legal guardians, staff, municipalities and, where appropriate, other services.

Several staff-related subcategories also appear among the lowest scoring: **Performance appraisal**, **Entry into the profession and mentoring of new staff**, **Professional development — individual requirements**, and **ECEI-based professional development**. Together, these results point to a broader workforce development issue. Institutions may meet some basic staffing requirements, but systems for supporting staff growth, monitoring performance, mentoring new staff and linking professional development to identified needs remain underdeveloped. This is a key policy issue because staff capacity is central to process quality and to the implementation of curriculum, inclusion and child protection requirements.

The presence of **Family engagement and communication** among the lowest-scoring subcategories also deserves attention. Although the score is higher than the other low-scoring areas, 45 institutions remain below 40%. Family engagement is a core element of early childhood education quality. Weaknesses in this area may limit institutions' ability to build trust, support children's development across home and institution, communicate progress and involve families in improvement processes.

Overall, the lowest scoring subcategories point to the same conclusion: the next stage of reform should focus less on whether institutions can show that basic structures exist, and more on whether they can demonstrate continuous, evidence-based quality improvement. Self-evaluation, safeguarding, inclusive assessment, staff development and stakeholder and family communication should become priority areas for technical assistance, municipal support and future monitoring. These areas are also associated with dimensions for which dedicated and practical ECE-specific secondary legislation, implementation guidelines, or supporting instruments remain limited or under development. While the new ECE curriculum addresses several of these components, the assessment results suggest that its implementation is still at an early stage and has not yet translated into consistent practice across institutions. At the same time, the ongoing development of by-laws and other regulatory instruments deriving from the Law on Early Childhood Education is critical for providing clearer standards and operational guidance in these quality areas.

7.3 Highest scoring indicators

The ten highest-scoring indicators provide a useful picture of where institutions are most consistently able to demonstrate compliance and commitment to quality provision. These indicators are mainly related to nutrition, formal governance, physical conditions, supervision, consent procedures, educator-child ratios and basic planning. They are important because they represent the visible and verifiable foundations of institutional quality. They also indicate that the existence of legal and regulatory frameworks providing guidance to ECE institutions in these respective areas has been accompanied by efforts at both the municipal and institutional levels to strengthen service provision across these dimensions.

The highest scoring indicator is the planning of menus according to age groups in line with the nutrition guide for ECEI, with a mean score of 93.44%. This indicates a high level of

institutional compliance with age-appropriate nutrition planning. The related indicator on menus including daily meals and main food groups also scores very highly, at 91.72%. Together, these results suggest that nutrition-related standards are among the most consistently implemented areas across assessed institutions. This is a positive finding because nutrition is directly connected to health, wellbeing, routines and care quality in early childhood education.

The second highest scoring indicator concerns the formal establishment of a Governing Board, with a mean score of 93.12%. This is an important structural achievement. It suggests that the governance architecture required by the quality framework is present in most assessed institutions. However, as with other structural indicators, the existence of a governing body should be considered a starting point rather than a full measure of governance quality. Future quality assurance cycles should examine the functioning of these bodies, including meeting frequency, use of evidence, participation in planning and follow-up of assessment findings.

The high scores for room conditions, visual supervision and indoor spaces indicate that many institutions meet basic requirements for safe and functional environments. The indicator on rooms meeting requirements for temperature, hygiene, natural lighting and ventilation scored 90.78%, while the organisation of space enabling continuous visual supervision scored 90.62%. These results are significant because safety, supervision and suitable physical conditions are non-negotiable elements of quality in early childhood education.

The indicator on written consent for photographing or recording children also scores highly, at 89.22%. This suggests that many institutions are aware of and able to document basic child protection and privacy procedures. This is an important strength. However, it should be interpreted alongside weaker findings on broader child protection training and safeguarding implementation. In other words, institutions appear stronger on specific consent-related documentation than on the wider staff capacity and procedural systems required for child protection.

The indicator on educator-child ratios also appears among the strongest, with a mean score of 89.06%. This is important because ratios are a key structural condition for safety, supervision, interaction quality and responsive pedagogy. However, ratios alone do not guarantee process quality. They create conditions that make quality more possible, but their impact depends on staff preparation, pedagogical competence and institutional support.

The high-scoring indicator on the annual plan including activities and timelines for professional development is also relevant. It suggests that many institutions include professional development in planning documents. However, this should be read together with lower scores in staff development subcategories. The issue may not be whether professional development appears in plans, but whether it is based on evidence, linked to performance appraisal and self-evaluation findings, implemented systematically and followed up.

Overall, the highest scoring indicators confirm that many institutions have achieved compliance in areas that are concrete, visible and easier to verify. These areas include menus, governance bodies, physical conditions, supervision, ratios, consent and food safety. The policy message is positive but nuanced: Kosovo has made progress in establishing core institutional conditions, but these strengths should now be connected to deeper practices of reflection, inclusion, safeguarding and professional learning.

Table 7.3. Ten highest-scoring indicators.

Dimension	No.	Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Curriculum and Pedagogy	105	Menus are planned according to age groups in line with the nutrition guide for ECEI	93.44%	Excellent quality
Leadership and Financing	1	The Early Childhood Education Institution (ECEI) has a formally established Governing Board	93.12%	Excellent quality
Curriculum and Pedagogy	106	Menus include all daily meals and the main food groups according to the nutrition guide	91.72%	Excellent quality
Leadership and Financing	24	Rooms meet requirements for temperature, hygiene, natural lighting and ventilation in accordance with legislation	90.78%	Excellent quality
Leadership and Financing	28	The organisation of space enables continuous full visual supervision of children	90.62%	Excellent quality
Curriculum and Pedagogy	94	Indoor spaces support movement, play, and activities in small and large groups	89.38%	Very good quality
Leadership and Financing	17	Children are not photographed or recorded without the written consent of parents/legal guardians	89.22%	Very good quality
Staff	64	The institution respects the educator-child ratio by age group, based on legislation	89.06%	Very good quality
Leadership and Financing	5	The annual plan includes activities and timelines for implementing professional development	88.91%	Very good quality
Curriculum and Pedagogy	108	Food is stored, prepared and served in accordance with food safety standards	88.68%	Very good quality

7.4 Lowest scoring indicators

The ten lowest-scoring indicators identify the most specific weaknesses in the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework. These indicators are especially important because they show where institutional practice is least developed and where the next phase of support should be concentrated.

The lowest-scoring indicator is the annual submission of the internal evaluation report, including findings and professional development needs, to the municipality. The mean score is

only 17.50%. This is a major system-level finding, but it should be interpreted in light of the fact that the National Quality Assurance Framework was only recently developed and that the annual internal self-evaluation and municipal reporting cycle has not previously been institutionalised in ECE.

The result therefore suggests that, before the introduction of the Framework, many ECEI/kindergartens either did not conduct internal self-evaluation in a systematic way or, where they did carry out internal reflection or planning processes, these were not formally linked to municipal reporting, review and follow-up. As a result, the link between institutional self-evaluation and municipal quality management is still emerging. If municipalities do not regularly receive and review internal evaluation reports, they cannot identify common needs, validate institutional findings, support improvement planning or use data for local quality monitoring. The finding therefore points to the need for a clearly regulated annual quality assurance cycle, including institutional self-evaluation, submission of reports to municipalities, municipal review, feedback to institutions and follow-up support.

The next three lowest scoring indicators are all part of the internal self-evaluation cycle: conducting an internal self-evaluation at least once a year, documenting the process with clear evidence, and developing action plans linked to self-evaluation results. These indicators score between 18.12% and 19.69%, all within the “needs significant improvement” band. This confirms that internal self-evaluation is the most underdeveloped component of the quality assurance system.

This concentration of low scoring indicators is analytically important. It suggests that the main gap is not only that institutions lack individual documents, but that the full cycle of quality assurance is emerging. A functioning quality cycle requires institutions to assess themselves, collect evidence, analyse findings, discuss results, prepare action plans, assign responsibilities, report to municipalities and monitor progress. The data show that many institutions are not yet doing this consistently.

The low score for sharing self-evaluation findings with parents/legal guardians also matters. Quality assurance should not be limited to internal staff or administrative reporting. Families are key stakeholders in early childhood education, and they should receive accessible information about institutional priorities and improvement efforts. Low score in this indicator suggests that transparency and family engagement in quality improvement remain underdeveloped.

The indicator on cooperation with the municipal pedagogical assessment team also scores low, at 27.83%. This is particularly important for inclusion. Children with developmental delays or other support needs often require coordinated assessment and support across institutional, municipal and professional services. Weak cooperation with municipal assessment teams may delay identification, reduce the quality of support plans and leave institutions without sufficient guidance for inclusive practice.

The low score for re-evaluation of staff with unsatisfactory performance also points to a gap in performance management. Performance appraisal systems are meaningful only if they lead to follow-up, support and, where necessary, re-evaluation. Without this cycle, performance evaluation risks becoming a formal requirement rather than a tool for improving staff practice.

The indicator on sharing evaluation and self-evaluation results with staff and discussing them collectively also scores low. This finding is important because staff discussion is the mechanism through which data become professional learning. If results are not discussed collectively, self-evaluation remains an administrative exercise and does not lead to shared reflection or improvement in practice.

The two final low scoring indicators, concerning documentation of the pedagogical approach for curriculum implementation and staff training on child protection and violence prevention, point to two additional priority areas. Curriculum implementation requires documented pedagogical planning aligned with national guidance, while child protection requires regular staff training and reinforcement. Weaknesses in these indicators show that institutions need practical support to translate national policy and curriculum expectations into daily professional routines.

Overall, the lowest scoring indicators show that the most urgent reform needs are concentrated in self-evaluation, municipal reporting, evidence documentation, action planning, inclusive assessment, performance follow-up, curriculum documentation and child protection training. These are not isolated technical weaknesses. They are the core mechanisms through which quality assurance becomes sustainable.

Table 7.4. Ten lowest-scoring indicators.

Dimension	No.	Indicator	Mean	Interpretation
Staff	57	The internal evaluation report, including findings and professional development needs, is submitted annually to the municipality	17.50%	Needs significant improvement
Monitoring and Evaluation	143	The ECEI conducts an internal self-evaluation at least once a year	18.12%	Needs significant improvement
Monitoring and Evaluation	144	The self-evaluation process is documented and includes clear sources of evidence, such as observations, document review and feedback	18.44%	Needs significant improvement
Monitoring and Evaluation	145	Action plans linked to self-evaluation results are developed and documented, including priorities for improvement, responsibilities and timelines	19.69%	Needs significant improvement
Monitoring and Evaluation	147	The summary report of self-evaluation findings is shared with parents/legal guardians	25.31%	Quality development

Curriculum and Pedagogy	135	The institution cooperates with the municipal pedagogical assessment team	27.83%	Quality development
Staff	55	Staff with unsatisfactory performance are re-evaluated after the end of the specified period	29.81%	Quality development
Monitoring and Evaluation	146	Evaluation and self-evaluation results are shared with staff and discussed collectively to support reflection and improvement	31.92%	Quality development
Curriculum and Pedagogy	70	The pedagogical approach for curriculum implementation is documented and aligned with the curriculum implementation guide	32.12%	Quality development
Staff	67	All ECEI staff receive initial and refresher training on child protection and violence prevention	32.59%	Quality development

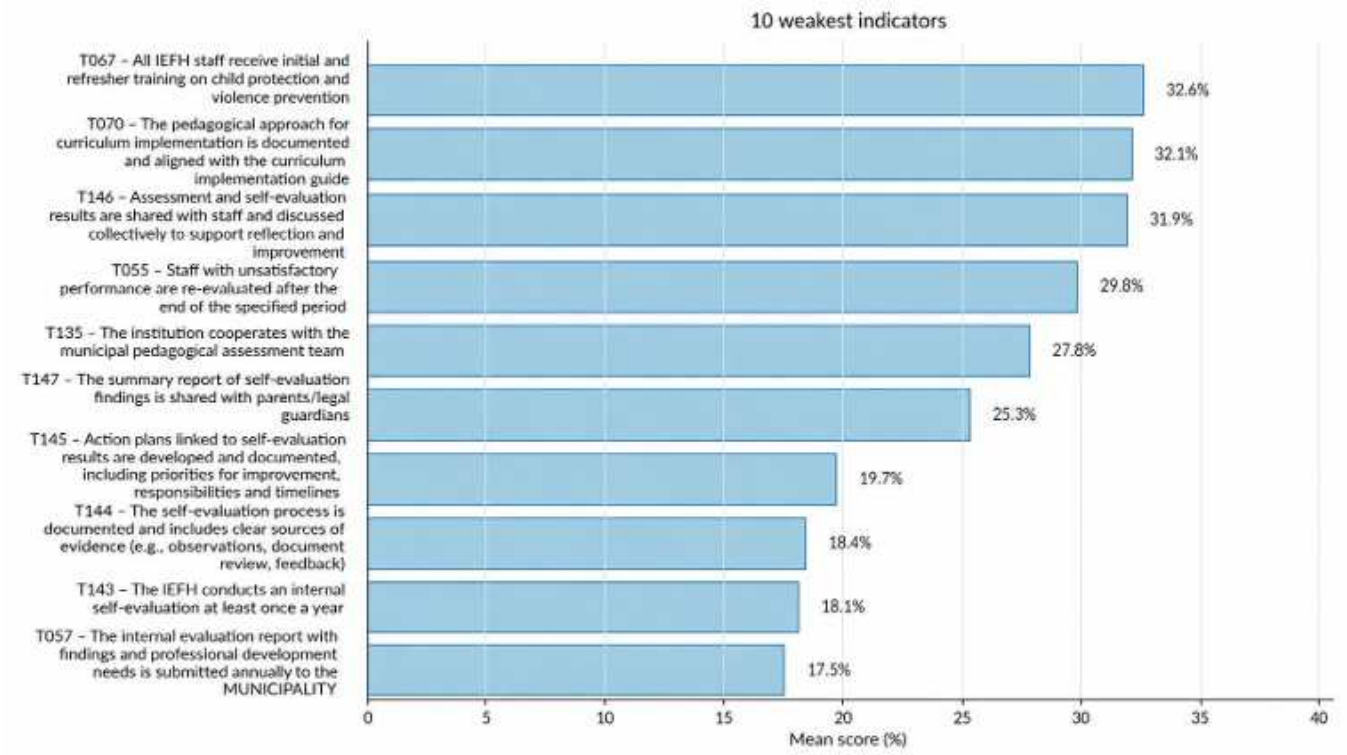


Figure 7.2. Ten lowest-scoring indicators.

7.5 Cross-cutting analytical patterns

Across subcategories and indicators, three cross-cutting patterns emerge.

First, **formal structures are stronger than quality-cycle routines**. Institutions tend to score higher on indicators related to governing bodies, menus, infrastructure, ratios, physical spaces and basic planning. These areas are more visible, more regulated and easier to verify. By

contrast, institutions score much lower on annual self-evaluation, evidence documentation, action planning, reporting to municipalities and collective discussion of results. This shows that the structural layer of quality is more developed than the reflective and improvement-oriented layer.

Second, **documentation and evidence are weaker than formal compliance**. Several low-scoring indicators require institutions to demonstrate not only that an activity exists, but that it is documented, evidence-based and followed up. This suggests that some institutions may be engaging in practices informally but are not documenting them sufficiently, while others may not yet be implementing them consistently. In both cases, weak documentation reduces the credibility of self-evaluation and makes it difficult for municipalities or external reviewers to verify institutional quality. Overall, with the first cycle of assessment, it cannot be determined to what extent low scores reflect lack of implementation, lack of documentation, or both. In terms of the quality of provision for children, weak documentation also limits opportunities for evidence-based collegial discussions, professional reflection, and the sharing of good practices.

Third, **inclusion and safeguarding require targeted support**. Weaknesses in pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities, cooperation with municipal assessment teams, inclusive pedagogical planning, child protection training and family communication show that institutions need more structured support in responding to children with diverse needs and protection concerns. These areas require professional judgement, cross-sectoral cooperation and clear institutional procedures. They cannot be strengthened only through forms or checklists. These areas also reflect the fact that supporting by-laws, guidance, tools, and implementation support are still being developed, and curriculum implementation is at an early stage.

A fourth pattern is also visible: **staff development is not yet sufficiently connected to quality assurance findings**. Although professional development appears in some planning indicators, weaker scores in performance appraisal, mentoring, institution-based professional development and child protection training suggest that staff development is not yet consistently driven by verified institutional needs. This should also be interpreted in relation to the previous absence of a specific legal and regulatory basis for the professional development of educational and professional staff in early childhood education. As a result, institutions have not had a consolidated ECE-specific framework linking staff appraisal, mentoring, professional learning, child protection training and institutional quality improvement. The new Law on Early Childhood Education creates an important basis for addressing this gap. The administrative instructions deriving from the law, including those related to the professional development of ECE staff, are expected to be developed during the coming period. This creates an opportunity to ensure that professional development is systematically linked to quality assurance findings. The quality assurance process should become a mechanism for identifying professional learning priorities at institutional, municipal and national levels, and for aligning training, mentoring and support with verified needs.

Finally, the findings show that **municipalities are central to the next phase of implementation**. The weakest indicator concerns reporting internal evaluation findings to municipalities. This means that the "middle layer" of the quality assurance system is not yet fully functioning, particularly considering that municipalities have not previously had a clearly established requirements, procedures, or reporting mechanisms for reviewing institutional self-evaluation reports for ECEI in their scope of authority. Municipalities need to receive, review, validate and use institutional self-evaluation reports. Without this link, national quality assurance will remain dependent on periodic assessment exercises rather than becoming a regular improvement cycle.

The subcategory and indicator findings show that Kosovo has established many of the basic foundations of a comprehensive ECE quality system. While the new ECE legislation and curriculum represent important achievements, their consistent application in practice across levels is in early stages; therefore, institutional quality and the quality assurance cycle itself still requires consolidation. The next phase should focus on embedding annual self-evaluation, strengthening evidence use, improving municipal and MES review, linking results to professional development and supporting institutions in inclusion and child protection. This is the shift required to move from minimum compliance toward sustainable quality improvement.

8. VERIFICATION, DATA QUALITY AND RELIABILITY

verification process adds credibility to the assessment because it means that institutional self-assessment scores were not accepted only as self-reported claims. Submitted scores were reviewed against the available supporting documentation, and scores were adjusted where the documentation did not justify the reported level of performance. In this way, verification strengthened the consistency of interpretation across institutions and reduced the risk of unsupported over-reporting.

At the same time, the verification process should be understood as document-based verification, not as a full external inspection or direct assessment of daily practice. The assessment did not include systematic field visits to all institutions, direct observation of educator-child interactions, interviews with staff or families, or independent assessment of the lived experience of children in ECE settings. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as a verified documentary compliance baseline against the National Quality Assurance Framework, rather than as a comprehensive judgement on all dimensions of institutional quality.

This distinction is important for interpreting both high and low scores. Higher scores indicate that institutions were able to provide documentation supporting compliance with relevant indicators. They do not necessarily prove that all practices are fully embedded in everyday routines. Lower scores may indicate weak implementation, but they may also reflect incomplete documentation, unclear evidence organisation, limited experience with self-evaluation, or, in some cases, limited applicability of specific indicators to the institution's current enrolment profile.

The first assessment cycle therefore has a dual function. It provides a reportable Reform Agenda result, but it also serves as a learning process for institutions, municipalities and MES. It

clarifies what type of evidence is expected, how self-evaluation should be documented, and how institutional findings should be linked to action planning, municipal review and future external evaluation.

Future cycles should strengthen reliability through clearer evidence guidance, standardised templates, digital evidence submission, improved scoring guidance, and the introduction of “not applicable” options where appropriate. They should also combine self-assessment and document review with external evaluation by trained inspectors or authorised external evaluators, including field visits and direct observation where feasible. This would allow Kosovo to move from verified documentary compliance toward a more comprehensive assessment of both structural and process quality in early childhood education.

9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Reform Agenda milestone has been met, exceeding the indicated target but system maturity remains uneven. The assessment indicates achievement of the Reform Agenda milestone, with 147 of 160 assessed ECEI/kindergartens, or 91.9%, meeting or exceeding the 40% compliance threshold. This result is above the Reform Agenda requirement that at least 80% of institutions should comply with at least 40% of the National Quality Assurance Framework. It therefore provides a positive and reportable finding for this stage of early childhood education quality reform.

This is an important achievement. It shows that a large majority of assessed institutions are able to demonstrate at least basic alignment with the National Quality Assurance Framework. It also shows that Kosovo has moved from policy development to practical implementation: institutions have used the assessment instrument, evidence has been reviewed, results have been generated and a national baseline is now available.

The result should be interpreted in relation to the stage of reform and the purpose of the Reform Agenda milestone. The 40% compliance threshold represents an initial implementation benchmark for the National Quality Assurance Framework, not a full-quality standard. Meeting this threshold indicates that institutions have demonstrated a minimum level of compliance with the Framework sufficient for Reform Agenda reporting at this stage. It does not, however, mean that quality assurance is fully institutionalised across the sector or that all dimensions of quality are equally developed.

The distribution of scores provides important guidance for the next phase of reform. Most assessed institutions fall within the good or very good quality categories, while relatively few reach the excellent category. At the same time, 13 of 160 institutions remain below the 40% threshold and require targeted support. Therefore, the main policy implication is that Kosovo has achieved the initial Reform Agenda milestone, while the next phase should focus on consolidating the full quality assurance cycle, strengthening weaker dimensions and supporting institutions that remain below the minimum threshold.

The overall distribution of results appears broadly consistent with the current stage of ECE reform in Kosovo. Given that several areas assessed by the Framework relate to processes that are either newly introduced—such as those associated with the implementation of the new curriculum—or still lack a fully developed regulatory and implementation framework, substantially higher average scores would be difficult to reconcile with existing system conditions. In this sense, the results provide a credible picture of both progress achieved and remaining gaps, while also helping to identify priority areas for future policy, regulatory, and programme action.

The policy message is therefore balanced. Kosovo can credibly report that the Reform Agenda milestone has been met, while also recognising that the next phase of reform must focus

on depth, consistency and sustainability. The main challenge is no longer only whether institutions can reach a minimum compliance level. The next challenge is whether institutions, municipalities and central authorities can use the Framework as a living quality assurance system that supports continuous improvement.

From compliance to continuous improvement

The assessment findings show a clear distinction between formal compliance and continuous quality improvement. The strongest results are found in areas where institutions can demonstrate visible, formal or easily verifiable compliance: governing bodies, menus, infrastructure, hygiene, indoor spaces, staffing ratios, supervision and basic organisational structures. These are essential components of quality and should be recognised as genuine progress.

At the same time, early childhood education quality depends not only on whether structures exist, but on how they function in daily practice. High-quality provision is shaped by interactions between educators and children, responsiveness to children's needs, inclusive pedagogical practice, engagement with families, staff reflection and the use of evidence to improve institutional routines. These areas are more difficult to document and more demanding to implement consistently.

The lowest results point directly to the missing link between assessment and improvement. Internal self-evaluation, documentation of evidence, action planning, reporting to municipalities and MES, and sharing results with staff and families are the mechanisms through which institutions learn and improve. Without these mechanisms, quality assurance risks becoming a one-time reporting exercise rather than an embedded professional culture.

This finding has important implications for the next phase of reform. The system should not treat the current assessment as the end of the reform process. Instead, it should be treated as the first national baseline for the implementation of the National Quality Assurance Framework in early childhood education. The next stage should focus on helping institutions repeat the self-evaluation cycle annually, collect better evidence, prepare realistic action plans, monitor progress and use findings to guide professional development, municipal support and central-level planning.

The next phase should also include the development and implementation of external evaluation, to be carried out by trained education inspectors as part of the external quality assurance process. This will be important for complementing institutional self-evaluation with independent review, strengthening accountability and ensuring greater consistency in how quality standards are interpreted and applied across institutions.

The findings also show that several core elements of the quality assurance cycle have not previously been sufficiently regulated or integrated into ECE governance and management

processes. These include institutional self-evaluation, the role of municipalities in coordinating, reviewing and supporting self-evaluation, the role of the central level in providing guidance and oversight, and the mechanisms for reporting and following up on results. As a result, many institutions are implementing these processes for the first time. The next phase should therefore focus on consolidating the full quality assurance cycle through clear regulation, practical guidance, digital tools, municipal and central-level review mechanisms, and sustained support to institutions.

Staff development as a quality lever

The Staff dimension is one of the most important areas requiring policy attention. The results show that workforce-related systems are less developed than governance, access and some curriculum-related areas. Weaknesses are visible in performance appraisal, induction and mentoring, institution-based professional development, individual professional development planning and child protection training.

This matters because staff quality is central to process quality in early childhood education. International evidence emphasises that staff preparation, working conditions, leadership and ongoing professional development are key factors shaping children's daily experiences in early childhood education and care (OECD, 2021). In the Kosovo context, the assessment results suggest that professional development should be more systematically connected to the Quality Assurance Framework and it should move beyond a one-off type activity.

Institutions should not plan professional development generically. Training and mentoring should respond to verified gaps identified through self-evaluation and external document-based verification. For example, if an institution scores low on child protection training, inclusive assessment, pedagogical documentation or family engagement, these findings should directly inform the institution's professional development plan. Similarly, municipal and national professional development priorities should be based on aggregated assessment findings, not only on broad policy priorities.

The assessment also shows that staff development should not be limited to individual training attendance. It should include mentoring, peer learning, reflective discussion, performance feedback, observation of practice and follow-up after training. This is strongly linked to adequate support for curriculum implementation, child protection, inclusion and documentation of children's development. These areas require sustained professional support rather than one-off training events.

Inclusion and child protection as reform priorities

The findings indicate that inclusion and child protection require stronger implementation support. Low scores in pedagogical assessment of children with disabilities, cooperation with municipal pedagogical assessment teams and child protection training are especially significant because they affect children who may already be at greater risk of exclusion or vulnerability.

Kosovo's legal and policy framework is explicit about inclusion, non-discrimination, child protection and cooperation with health, social and other relevant services. However, several of these areas are still being operationalised through the development of implementation guidance and practical tools, meaning that institutions are working in a context where expectations are defined but not yet fully supported by detailed operational mechanisms and sufficient funding mechanisms. The challenge is therefore not only institutional practice, but also system readiness for implementation. Institutions need qualified and trained staff, clear procedures, documented referral pathways, regular communication with families, cooperation with municipal teams and evidence of follow-up.

The low score on cooperation with municipal pedagogical assessment teams is particularly important. Children with disabilities, developmental delays or additional support needs require timely identification and coordinated support. If institutions do not cooperate consistently with municipal assessment structures, children may not receive appropriate support early enough. This weakens both inclusion and quality.

Child protection findings also require attention. Some specific child protection-related practices, such as written consent for photographs, score highly. However, broader staff training on child protection and violence prevention scores much lower. This means that institutions may be better at documenting specific consent procedures than at ensuring that all staff are prepared to prevent, identify and respond to child protection concerns. The next phase should therefore strengthen child protection as a whole-institution practice, not only as a set of isolated documents.

Municipalities as the missing middle of quality assurance

The assessment confirms the central role of municipalities in Kosovo's quality assurance system, particularly for forms of organizations of ECEI under their direct scope of authority. Institutions can complete self-evaluation, but municipalities are needed to review reports, validate findings, identify local patterns, provide feedback, connect institutions to support and report aggregated information to the central level.

The lowest scoring indicator in the dataset concerns the submission of internal evaluation reports to municipalities for non-private forms of ECEI. However, it should also be interpreted in light of the fact that institutional self-evaluation is a relatively new component of the quality assurance system. Until recently, self-assessment was not established as a specific regulatory

requirement, and no systematic mechanism existed for municipalities to receive, review, and use self-evaluation findings. As a result, the link between institutional self-evaluation and municipal quality management is not yet functioning consistently. If municipalities do not receive and review self-evaluation reports, the quality assurance system remains incomplete. Institutions may assess themselves, but the findings do not necessarily become part of municipal planning, professional development or support.

Municipalities should therefore be seen as the "middle layer" of the quality assurance system for ECEI in their scope of authority. They are close enough to institutions to understand local realities, but they also have responsibility for monitoring, support and coordination. Strengthening municipal capacity is essential for moving from national assessment to continuous implementation.

This requires practical systems. Municipalities need clear procedures for receiving institutional reports, reviewing evidence, providing feedback, identifying training needs and monitoring improvement plans. They also need standard templates and guidance from MES so that the review process is comparable across municipalities. Without this, quality assurance may be implemented unevenly and depend too much on local capacity or individual initiative.

Implications for future investment and prioritisation

Kosovo has exceeded the 80%/40% Reform Agenda milestone using the endorsed assessment framework. This provides a credible basis for reporting progress under the Reform Agenda.

For donor and reform management, the deeper findings are equally important. Kosovo now has a baseline that identifies where investment and technical assistance should go next. The assessment does not only show that the milestone has been met; the assessment also provides a clear evidence base for prioritising future investments, technical assistance, and policy action. At the same time, it highlights that several of these areas are linked to reforms that are still in the process of being implemented, including the operationalisation of secondary legislation, the rollout of the new curriculum, and the establishment of fully functioning quality assurance routines at institutional and municipal levels.

The strongest case for future support is in five areas: annual self-evaluation routines, evidence documentation, municipal review and validation processes, staff development and inclusive/child protection practices. These are precisely the areas that make quality assurance sustainable beyond the first reporting cycle. Development partners can play and important role by supporting the development and integration of practical guidance, training programmes, tools and digital systems and verification procedures that institutionalise these routines.

The findings suggest that future support should prioritise implementation and system strengthening rather than further framework development alone. The Framework and

instrument now exist. The priority is to help institutions and municipalities use them well, consistently and repeatedly.

Overall interpretation

The assessment shows that Kosovo's ECE quality assurance reform has reached an important implementation milestone. Over recent years, Kosovo has established key elements of a comprehensive quality framework for early childhood education, including the Law on Early Childhood Education, the introduction of a new holistic and play-based curriculum, and the recent development of a national quality assurance framework and assessment instrument. Furthermore, the quality assurance framework has a structured instrument, a scoring model, a verified dataset and a deriving national result from the first cycle of implementation. These are significant achievements. At the same time, the findings show that the quality assurance system is still at an early stage of institutionalisation. Structures are more developed than quality-cycle routines. Documentation is weaker than formal compliance. Equitable and meaningful inclusion, child protection and staff development require targeted support. Municipal and MES review and follow-up are not yet consistently embedded.

The central conclusion is therefore not simply that Kosovo has met the Reform Agenda target. The more important conclusion is that Kosovo now has an evidence-based starting point for the next phase of reform. The priority should be to complete the entirety of quality framework components, roll out the new curriculum, and consolidate the quality assurance cycle so that assessment leads to reflection, reflection leads to planning, planning leads to action and action leads to measurable improvement over time.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are divided into **strategic recommendations** and **operational recommendations**. Strategic recommendations refer to system-level decisions, policy direction and institutional responsibilities. Operational recommendations refer to practical actions that should be implemented in the next phase.

10.1 Recommendations for MES

Strategic recommendations

- MES should treat the current assessment as the first national baseline for ECE quality assurance. The results should not be used only for Reform Agenda reporting; it should also become the basis for targeted actions on a comprehensive ECE quality reform and a second-phase Quality Assurance Implementation Plan.
- MES should prioritise finalisation and operationalisation of secondary legislation and implementation guidance deriving from the Law on ECE, particularly in areas related to inclusion, child protection, governance, staff development and pedagogical standards.
- MES should develop a second-phase implementation plan focused on the weakest areas identified by the assessment: internal self-evaluation, evidence documentation, action planning, reporting to municipalities, child protection training, inclusive pedagogical assessment, staff development and municipal validation.
- MES should ensue coherent roll out and implementation of the ECE curriculum and continue trainings for the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework as interconnected instruments, supported by professional development mechanisms and inspection. These should not operate as separate reform streams. Curriculum implementation, staff development and inspection should all use the findings from the Quality Assurance Framework.
- MES should ensure that all forms of ECE service provision (i.e. public, private, public-private, and community-based institutions) are fully integrated into future quality assurance cycles. This is especially important given the Reform Agenda's future focus on assessment of private ECEC institutions.
- MES should move gradually toward a digital quality assurance system that enables institutions to complete self-evaluation, upload evidence, generate action plans, submit reports to municipalities and support national dashboard reporting.
-

Operational recommendations

- Finalise and disseminate secondary legislation and implementation guidelines under the Law on ECE, with clear operational standards for institutions and municipalities.
- Establish an annual implementation cycle aligning curriculum implementation, workforce development and quality assurance.
- Issue an annual self-evaluation calendar for all ECEI/kindergartens, aligned with the institutional planning cycle and municipal reporting timelines.
- Building on international best pracitices adapted to the Kosovo needs, develop guidance and standard templates for institutional self-evaluation reports, evidence logs, action plans and municipal and MES feedback.
- Prepare detailed guidance for institutions on how to collect and organise evidence for each indicator.
- Use the assessment results to define national professional development priorities for the next 12–24 months and functionalize a central guideline for professional development of staff that can be organized institution based and through engaging external expertise.
- Based on defined priorities, develop targeted training programmes on curriculum implementation and domains deriving from the self-assessment cycle, including internal self-evaluation, evidence documentation, action planning, child protection.
- Develop a targeted support package for institutions below the 40% threshold and for institutions with low scores in Monitoring and Evaluation.
- Repeat the national assessment periodically to measure progress against the baseline and track whether the quality assurance cycle is becoming institutionalised.

10.2 Recommendations for municipalities / Municipal Education Directorates

Strategic recommendations

- Municipalities should be positioned as the operational middle layer of the quality assurance system, particularly for ECEI in their remit. Their role should go beyond collecting reports. They should review evidence, validate institutional findings, identify common weaknesses, provide feedback and connect institutions with support.
- Municipalities should use the assessment results for differentiated support. Institutions with lower scores should receive more intensive follow-up, while higher-performing institutions can be used for peer learning and sharing of good practice.
- Municipalities should integrate ECE quality assurance findings into municipal education planning for adequate financing and human resource availability. Self-evaluation results should inform municipal professional development priorities, resource planning, support visits and coordination with other services.
- Municipalities should strengthen financial planning and budgetary arrangements for early childhood education institutions. Where legally and fiscally feasible, municipalities should

create greater institutional-level financial autonomy and budget execution flexibility for ECEI/kindergartens, so that institutions can respond more effectively to quality improvement needs identified through self-evaluation. This may include clearer procedures for small-scale improvement expenditures, maintenance, learning materials, professional development and other operational needs linked to quality assurance findings.

- Municipalities should strengthen cross-sectoral coordination with health, social welfare and child protection services. This is especially important for children with disabilities, developmental delays, safeguarding concerns or family vulnerabilities.

Operational recommendations

- Assign municipal focal points responsible for integrated ECE system implementation, including quality assurance.
- Establish a municipal procedure for reviewing and providing feedback on institutional reports covering curriculum implementation, workforce development and quality assurance.
- Create a municipal register of institutional performance, action plans and follow-up status.
- Conduct regular monitoring visits on curriculum implementation, inclusion, and child-wellbeing, that are not limited to compliance.
- Provide written feedback to institutions across curriculum, staff development, self-evaluation reports and improvement plans.
- Organise municipal-level workshops on the weakest areas identified by the assessment, especially self-evaluation, documentation, inclusion and child protection.
- Support institutions in documenting evidence rather than only completing scores.
- Create peer-learning groups between higher-performing and lower-performing institutions.
- Monitor implementation of institutional improvement plans at least once per year.
- Report aggregated municipal findings to MES using a standard template.

10.3 Recommendations for ECEI/kindergartens

Strategic recommendations

- Each institution should treat self-evaluation as part of its regular quality culture, not as a one-time reporting requirement. The purpose of self-evaluation should be to improve children's experiences, strengthen professional practice and guide institutional planning.
- Institutions should connect self-evaluation directly to annual planning and professional development. Weak indicators should become priorities in the institution's improvement plan and staff development plan.

- Institutions should strengthen evidence-based decision-making. Scores should not be assigned based on impressions alone. They should be justified through documents, observation, portfolios, meeting minutes, records, feedback and other relevant evidence.
- Institutions should strengthen family engagement as partners in curriculum implementation, inclusion, and in quality improvement. Parents/legal guardians should receive accessible information on key findings and planned improvements, especially where issues affect children's wellbeing, inclusion or participation.
- Institutions should treat child protection and inclusion as whole-institution responsibilities. These areas should not depend only on one staff member or on formal documents. They require trained staff, clear procedures and regular follow-up.

Operational recommendations

- Conduct a full internal self-evaluation at least once per year using the national instrument.
- Use observation, documentation and reflection to support curriculum implementation, child-centred pedagogy, and continuous assessment in collaboration with families.
- Establish an internal self-evaluation team that includes institutional leadership, educators, professional staff and parent representation where appropriate.
- Create an evidence folder or digital evidence archive organised by dimension, subcategory and indicator.
- Collect and collectively reflected on available evidence before assigning scores.
- Prepare an annual quality improvement plan based directly on self-evaluation results.
- Assign responsibilities and timelines for each improvement action.
- Discuss self-evaluation findings with staff and use them for collective reflection.
- Share key findings and improvement priorities with parents/legal guardians in an accessible and non-stigmatising way.
- Use weak indicators to plan professional development, mentoring and peer learning.
- Strengthen documentation of child protection procedures, consent forms, referral pathways and staff training.
- Ensure that children with disabilities or developmental delays have documented assessment, support and referral pathways.
- Monitor progress on the improvement plan during the year and update it where needed.

10.4 Priority actions for the next 12 months

- The next phase should include preparation for external evaluation of ECEI/kindergartens by the Education Inspectorate, following adequate training of inspectors on the National Quality Assurance Framework, the assessment instrument, evidence requirements and interpretation of quality standards. External evaluation should build on institutional self-evaluation rather than replace it, using the same standards and evidence logic to strengthen accountability, comparability and improvement planning.

- MES should also finalise the secondary legislation and implementation guidance deriving from the new Law on Early Childhood Education, including administrative instructions related to professional development and other quality assurance mechanisms. These should clarify the roles of institutions, municipalities, MES and the Inspectorate in annual self-evaluation, review, reporting, follow-up and external evaluation.
- Curriculum implementation should be advanced in parallel with quality assurance implementation. Since the new ECE curriculum has not yet been rolled out Kosovo-wide through systematic training, mentoring and follow-up support, the next phase should ensure that curriculum training, mentoring and institutional support are directly linked to the weaker Curriculum and Pedagogy indicators identified by the assessment.

Table 11.1. Priority actions for the next implementation cycle.

No.	Priority action	Level	Lead	Timing
1	Issue the annual self-evaluation calendar for all ECEI/kindergartens	Strategic/ operational	MES	Next academic year
2	Develop standard templates for self-evaluation reports, evidence logs and action plans	Operational	MES, UNICEF	Within 3–6 months
3	Assign municipal ECE quality assurance focal points	Operational	Municipalities/ MEDs	Within 3 months
4	Train municipal focal points on evidence review and feedback	Operational	MES, UNICEF, municipalities	Within 6 months
5	Provide targeted support to institutions below 40%	Operational	MES, municipalities	Within 6 months
6	Launch training modules on self-evaluation, documentation, inclusion and child protection	Operational	MES, UNICEF, training providers	Within 6–12 months
7	Develop a digital reporting template or pilot digital platform	Strategic/operational	MES with partners	Within 12 months
8	Use assessment findings to define national professional development priorities	Strategic	MES	Within 12 months
9	Establish annual municipal reporting to MES on institutional self-evaluation results	Operational	Municipalities/MEDs	Within 12 months
10	Plan the next national assessment cycle based on the 2025 baseline	Strategic	MES	Within 12 months

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ANNEX

No.	Municipality/ Region	Name of institution	Email	Contact number	Form of organization
		“Gëzimi ynë ”			
		“Shpresa jonë”			
		“Lulet e jetës”	_____		
		“Ardhmeria jonë”	_____		
		“Pëllumbat e paqes”	_____		
		“Pëllumbat e paqes”			
		“Pëllumbat e paqes”			
		“Xheve Lladrovci ”			
		“G. Tërbeshi” –	_____		
		“G. Tërbeshi”	_____		
		“G. Tërbeshi”Orize			
		“G. Tërbeshi” Shishman			
		“G. Tërbeshi” Bishtazhin			
		“G. Tërbeshi” Rugove			
		“G. Tërbeshi” Novoselle			
		“G. Tërbeshi” Rezine			
		“Ardhmëria I”			

		“Ardhmëria II”	_____		
		“ Integj”			
		“Dardania”			
		“Filizat”			
		“Gëzimi Ynë”			
		“Ardhmëria e jonë”			
		“Albiona Asllani”			
		“Agimi”			
		„IP. Ardhmeria’’			
		QEAP„Qerdhja’’ Lipjan			
		QEAP„Qerdhja’’			
		“Rrita jonë”			
		“Gëzimi ynë”			
		“Gëzimi ynë”			
		“Foleja 1“			
		“Foleja 2“			
		“Foleja 3“			
		“Ardhmëria”			
	–	“Ardhmëria”			

		“Ardhmëria”			
		“Nëna Zahide’’			
		“Zërat e Ëmbël”			
		“Armela1”			
		“Zambaku”			
		“Fluturat”			
		“Fluturat”			
		“Fluturat”			
		“Fluturat”			
		“Fluturat”			
		“Tulipanët”			
		“Ardhmënia”			
		“Buzëqeshja”			
		“Dielli”			
		“Fatosat”			
		“Gëzimi Ynë”			
		“Lulevera”			
		“Xixëllonjat”			
		“Yllkat”			

		“Zerat e Embel”			
		“Botanika”			
		“Shkronjat”			
		“Zogjtë”			
		“Ngjyrat”			
		“Ketrushët”			
		“Milingonat”			
		“Cicërrimat”			
		“Shtëpia Magjike”			
		“SOS Kopshti i ri”			
		“Fillesa “			
		“ Kids Academy”	_____		
		“Kids Academy Junior”	_____		
			_____		
			_____		
		“Dielli 2”	_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
			_____		
		“Borëbardha”	_____		
		“Kopshti i ëndrrave 5”	_____		

		“Driola”			
		“Zgjimi”			
		“Ardhmëria Jonë”			
		“Diakonie Training Center”			
		“Bardha Akademi”			
		“Lapsi”			
		“Cambridge Kids”			
		“Kids Club”			
		“DaySchool Prishtina”			

		“Kinder House"			
		“Tung Mami”			
		“Let Center”			
		“Bleta”			
