TSI PROJECT IN LOWER SAXONY

Building a framework for outcome-oriented early childhood education and care – Supporting young children's acquisition of socio-emotional competences, early literacy and numeracy, and facilitating their transition to primary education

Hannover | Aug. 22nd, 2024

Overview of the session

Introductions

Presentation of the TSI project in Lower Saxony

Discussion

About UNICEF

- UNICEF works in **over 190 countries** and territories to protect the rights of every child.

- UNICEF is **guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child** and strives to establish children's rights as enduring ethical principles and international standards of behaviour towards children.

- UNICEF mobilizes political will and material resources to support countries, ensure a "first call for children" and to build their capacity to form appropriate policies and deliver services for children and their families.

About UNICEF

- We support **child health and nutrition**, safe w**ater and sanitation**, quality **education, early childhood development,** skill building for youth and adolescents, and the **protection of children and adolescents** from violence and exploitation.

- UNICEF is committed to ensuring special protection for the most disadvantaged children – victims of war, disasters, extreme poverty, all forms of violence and exploitation, and those with disabilities.

German National Committee for UNICEF

- The German National Committee is based in Cologne and Berlin with approx. 200 employees

- 7,000 volunteers are engaged in 200 local UNICEF groups all over Germany

- The National Committee serves as the public face and voice of UNICEF in Germany.

Christian Schneider
Executive Director, German National Committee for UNICEF

German National Committee for UNICEF

- **Advocacy:** working with the federal government and parliament on children's rights in several policy fields (humanitarian aid and development, asylum and migration, family and social policy, UNCRC implementation)

- **Research:** Regular studies on the state of the implementation of children's rights and well-being in Germany

- **Domestic initiatives for children:** Child Friendly Cities Initiative, Child Rights Schools, Initiative for the protection of refugee children

German National Committee for UNICEF

- Since 2021 the German National Committee implements the **Child Rights School programme** in cooperation with the **Ministry of Education of Lower Saxony**. 42 elementary schools take part in the programme.

- The German National Committee implements the **Child Friendly Cities Initiative** in cooperation with **16 municipalities and cities in Lower Saxony**.

UNICEF guided by SDGs

- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015

- 17 Goals to build a greener, fairer, better world by 2030

- **Goal 4 – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.**

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.

UNICEF & the Convention on the Rights of the Child

- UN CRC – International Human Rights Treaty adopted by UNGA on Nov. 20, 1989

- Comprehensive set of rights for children (Survival rights, developmental rights, protection rights and participation rights)

- Profound impact on child rights globally, influencing laws, legislation, policy, budgets and investments

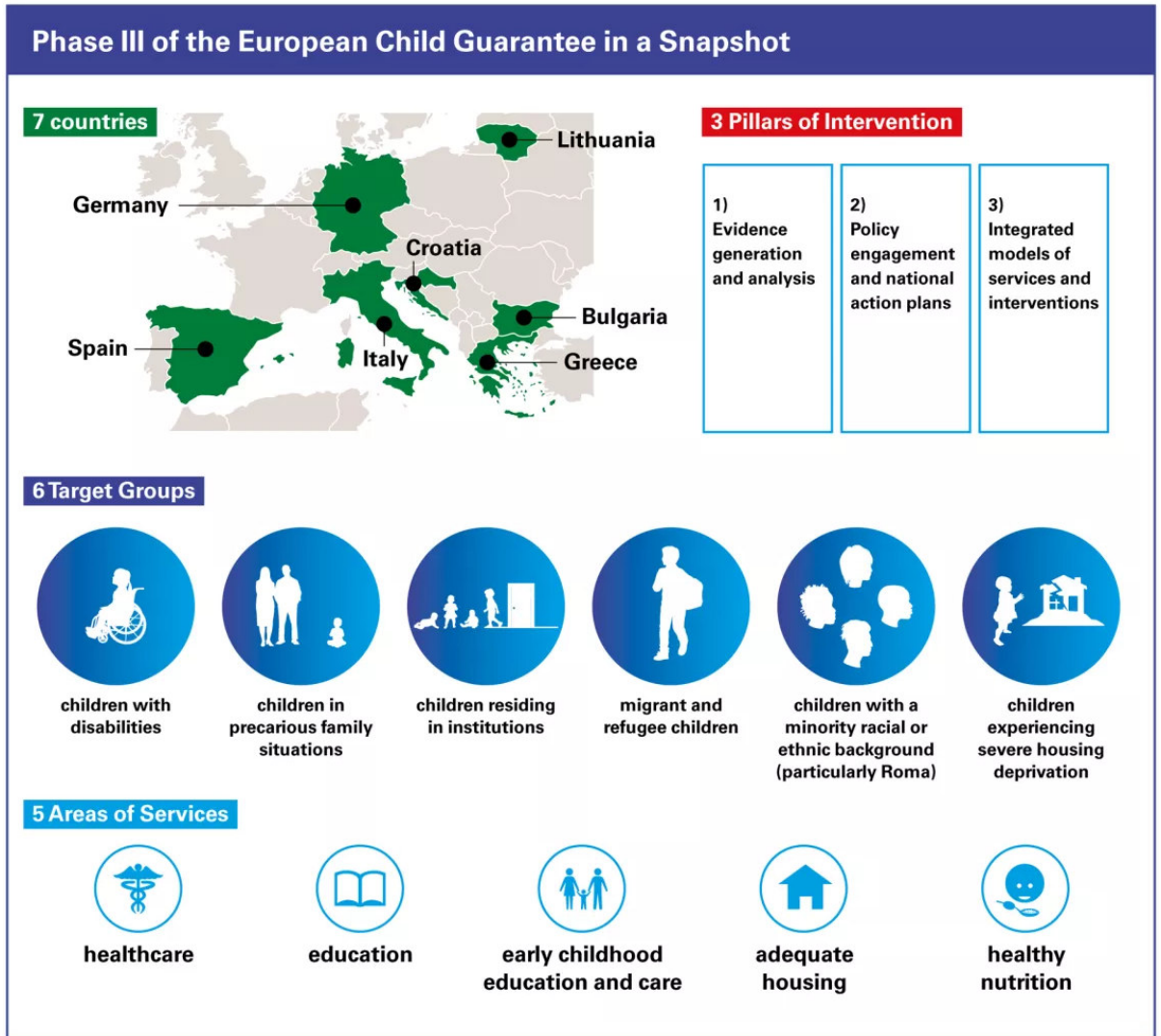- UNICEF – UN agency mandated to uphold and protect children's rights, everywhere, regardless

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

unicef for every child
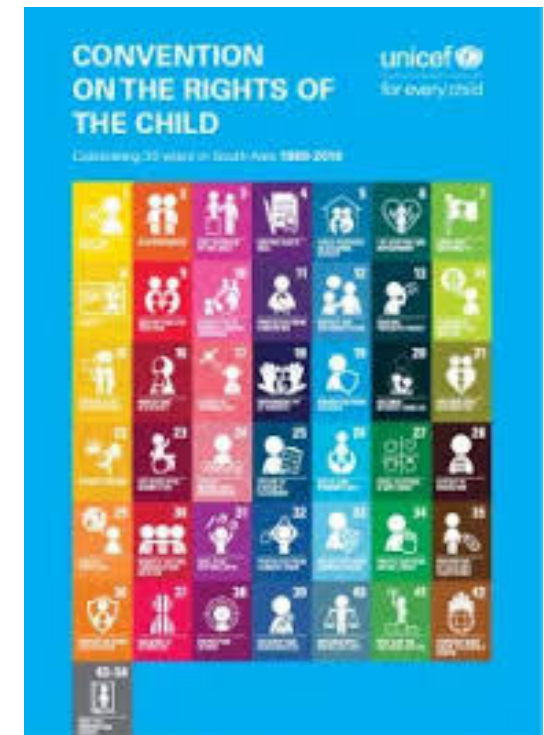
UNICEF's vision for the early years:
Ensuring the Best Start in Life, for every child
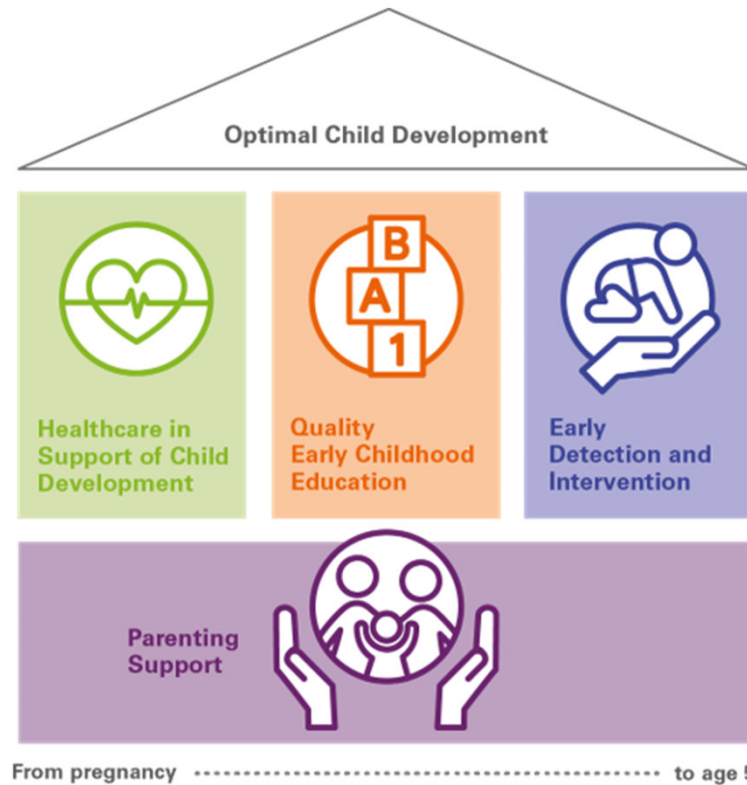
UNICEF's ongoing work in Europe

- Country programmes and development work in EU Member States (Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia)

- Significant advocacy efforts on child rights led by our National Committees

- Migration & Refugee Response work (Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland & Slovakia)

- Country programmes and development work in EU Accession & candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Ukraine)

- TSI Projects for designing reforms in ECEC

UNICEF & the EU CG

Phase III of the European Child Guarantee in a Snapshot

7 countries

- Lithuania
- Germany
- Croatia
- Spain
- Italy
- Bulgaria
- Greece

3 Pillars of Intervention

1) Evidence generation and analysis
2) Policy engagement and national action plans
3) Integrated models of services and interventions

6 Target Groups

- children with disabilities
- children in precarious family situations
- children residing in institutions
- migrant and refugee children
- children with a minority racial or ethnic background (particularly Roma)
- children experiencing severe housing deprivation

5 Areas of Services

- healthcare
- education
- early childhood education and care
- adequate housing
- healthy nutrition

UNICEF's work in Europe: Ukraine response in EU MS

Young children:
Play and early learning disruption

→ **Rapid expansion of ECEC – formal & non-formal**

Parents:
Disruption of stability provided by family units

→ **Support to mothers/caregivers on responsive caregiving (MHPSS, language skills, counselling)**

Workforce:
Unprepared workforce to support mothers & young children

→ **Enhancing capacities of front-line professionals working with young children in education & health + hiring Ukrainian ECD professionals**

Cross-cutting: Support for young CwD, developmental difficulties and delays and their caregivers (Early Childhood Intervention services e.g., speech therapists, counselors etc.)

UNICEF's work in ECEC globally

With its presence in more than 190 countries, UNICEF has played a critical role in elevating the ECEC agenda globally through high-caliber technical assistance to governments, continued high-level advocacy, and multi-stakeholder partnerships with international and national NGOs, the private sector, academic and research institutions.

UNICEF's ECEC work with governments

- Inclusive ECEC (CwD & delays)
- Skills for life (Social-emotional learning, green skills)

Strengthen quality & inclusion

- Diversified flexible provision
- Unlocking & leveraging public finance

Leapfrog Access

ECEC in ECA

Improve governance & coherence

Advocate & Convene

- Deliver & leverage technical support to expand coverage & quality of ECEC

- High-level convening & advocacy on key child rights' issues

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UNICEF's ECEC team supporting the LS TSI project

Dr. Ivelina Borisova,
UNICEF ECARO

Dr. Vidur Chopra,
UNICEF ECARO

Matilde Agostini,
UNICEF ECARO

Ana Janelidze,
UNICEF ECARO
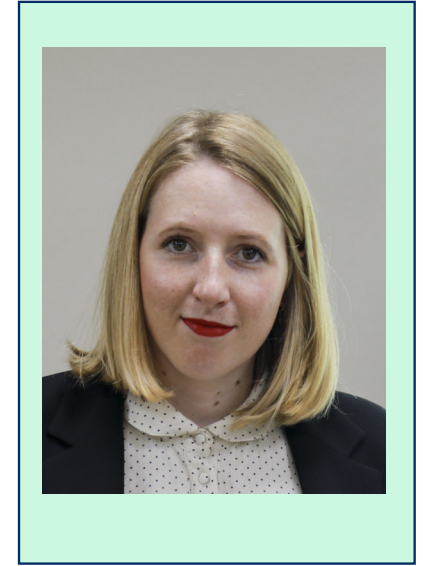
Jessica Brown,
UNICEF ECARO

About TSI projects in general

- MS requests technical support from DG REFORM to initiate a reform

- DG REFORM selects an institution to offer that technical support

- In this case, UNICEF as the provider of technical support, in collaboration with DG REFORM

- Defined project goals, timeline & purposes

UNICEF's work in ECEC in EU Member States: Projects supported under DG REFORM's TSI

- **Austria**: Improving framework conditions for better quality in early childhood education and care (2022-2024)

- **Bulgaria**: Setting up a national quality framework on early childhood education and care (2020-2022)

- **Bulgaria and Portugal**: Raising the quality of early childhood education and care by strengthening governance, monitoring, and evaluation (2024-2026)

- **Cyprus**: Supporting the expansion and strategic development of Early Childhood Education and Care (2022-2024)

- **Czech Republic**: Developing a comprehensive framework for the M&E of Early childhood education and care (2023-2025)

About the TSI Project in Lower Saxony

- Objectives and outcome of the project

- Key engaged parties and their roles

- Outputs and activities

- Project timelines

- Participatory approach and engagement of the stakeholders in Lower Saxony

Objectives of the TSI Project

- Support Lower Saxony in their efforts to design, develop and implement reforms, which could encourage investment, increase competitiveness, and assist in achieving sustainable economic and social convergence, resilience and recovery

Impact and Outcome of the Project

Impact (the expected long-term effect)

Children's acquisition of socio-emotional competences, early literacy and numeracy and their transition to primary education is supported through the development and implementation of a framework for outcome-oriented early childhood education and care in Lower Saxony.

Outcome (the expected short-term effect)

The authorities in Lower Saxony adopt a framework for outcome-oriented competence development in early childhood education and care to systematically support the acquisition of social-emotional competences, early literacy and early numeracy, and to facilitate the transition to primary education.

Project Coordination and Management

Advisory Group		
Ministry of Education of Lower Saxony	**Core project technical team**	
	Ministry of Education of Lower Saxony	**Stakeholder Group (SG)**
European Commission (DG REFORM)	European Commission (DG REFORM)	SG gathering roughly 35 representatives with a broad perspective of the ECEC system in Lower Saxony. The SG consists of **three thematic subgroups** focused on:
UNICEF	UNICEF	• Providers • ECEC staff qualifications • Transition between ECEC and primary schools,
	Research Institute, international consultants	

Stakeholders from Lower Saxony and Germany to be involved in the TSI project

- **JFMK** (National Conference of Ministers responsible for youth and elementary education)

- **KMK** (National Conference of Ministers responsible for school education)

- **Inspection** on the level of federal state, municipalities and ECEC providers

- **Municipal** authorities

- **Associations** of ECEC providers

- **ECEC providers** (public and private)

- **Primary schools**

- **Institutions** in further vocational and tertiary education **which train ECEC staff**

- **Children, their parents and pedagogues**

The 3 stages of the TSI project & the role of stakeholders

Evidence

Design

Implementation
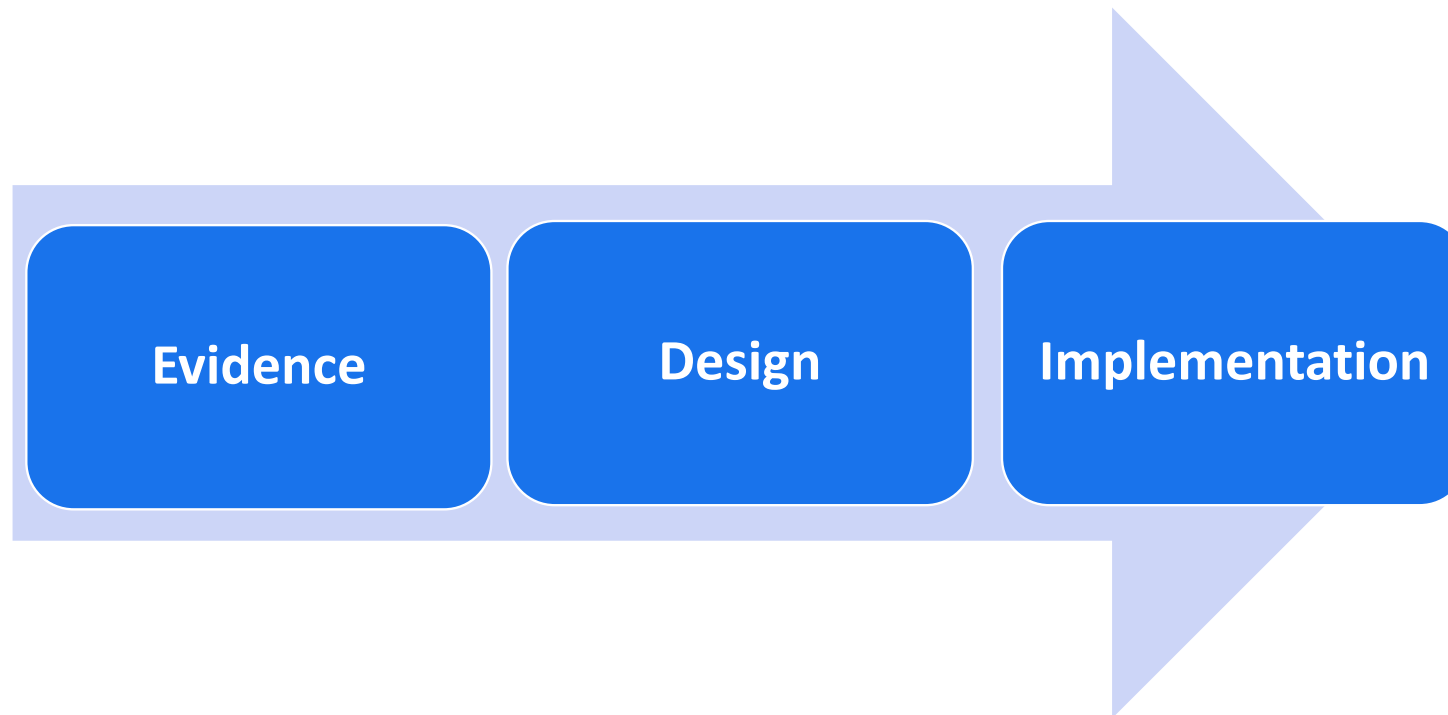
Output 1: Inception report & communication tools

- **Project inception report:**
  - Description of the methodological approach to reach the project objectives
  - A detailed mapping of the project stakeholders
  - The project work plan
  - The agreed procedure for validation of outputs
  - An analysis of possible risks impacting the project and related mitigating measures, as well as the final logical framework

- **Communication tools:** initial project factsheet and project description summary.

Output 2: Report on relevant good practice from other European countries

- The report is intended to provide Lower Saxony with examples of good or promising practice from European systems that can serve as a blueprint for analysing the "As-is" state of ECEC in Lower Saxony and to inform the building of a framework as a basis for reforms in Lower Saxony.

- Peer-to-peer learning from other EU Member States through online peer exchanges and in-person learnings

- In-person workshop of at least two days in Lower Saxony for the purpose of peer learning and exchanges with international experts and members of the Stakeholder Group.

Output 3: "As-is" analysis

"As-is" analysis of current practice on the systematic support of competence development in early childhood education and care and the transition to primary education in Lower Saxony

- How can current knowledge, attitudes, practices and approaches be instrumental in systematically supporting competence development as part of an outcome-oriented pedagogy in ECEC settings in Lower Saxony?

- Competences (actual and required) of pedagogues and setting leaders to systematically support young children's acquisition of socio-emotional, early literacy and numeracy competences, and to facilitate their transition to primary education.

- Analysis through: Desk review, primary data collection from settings and stakeholders, consultations with the project Stakeholder Group.

Output 4: Report with consolidated recommendations

- Consolidated recommendations based on the evidence ("As-is" analysis and Good practice report)
  - The report will inform the development of subsequent outputs, in particular the Framework and the Final recommendations

- Consultations with Stakeholder Group for feedback on what is needed to implement the recommendations.

Output 5: Framework for supporting outcome-oriented competence development in ECEC & facilitating the transition to primary education

The Framework will be designed as a **benchmark** for delivering outcome-oriented ECEC across all levels of the ECEC system and as a **practical guide** for ECEC staff on planning and evaluating learning environments, reflecting on children's progress and by devising strategies and interventions designed to support the acquisition of these competences in elementary education and children's transition to primary school.

- Descriptions of concise **early learning and development standards (ELDS)**

- **Recommended strategies, measures and pedagogical approaches** for children to achieve early learning and development standards

- A **tool for self-evaluation** for the leadership and staff of ECEC settings

Output 5: Framework – Key elements

- A description of **key milestones** of child development in the areas of **socio-emotional development, early numeracy and early literacy**;

- **Measures that have to be implemented by leadership and pedagogical staff** to ensure that the pedagogy will be effective to reach the maximum outcome according to a child's potential, including instruments for child observation and team-based reflection;

- **Approaches and instruments** for systematic planning of how to support every individual child to reach key developmental milestones in elementary education.

- Approaches to facilitate **a smooth transition** to and through primary school; and,

- **Strategies to work with parents** and caregivers as partners for the goals to strive for.

UNICEF's work on Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS)

ELDS reflect expectations for the learning and development of young children, from birth to age 8, across several domains of development.

Accompanied with recommended strategies to support outcomes

Country examples: Romania, North Macedonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan

Nearly 60 countries have developed some version of ELDS with UNICEF support

Physical well-being and motor development

Cognition

Social-emotional development

Language and literacy

Approaches to learning

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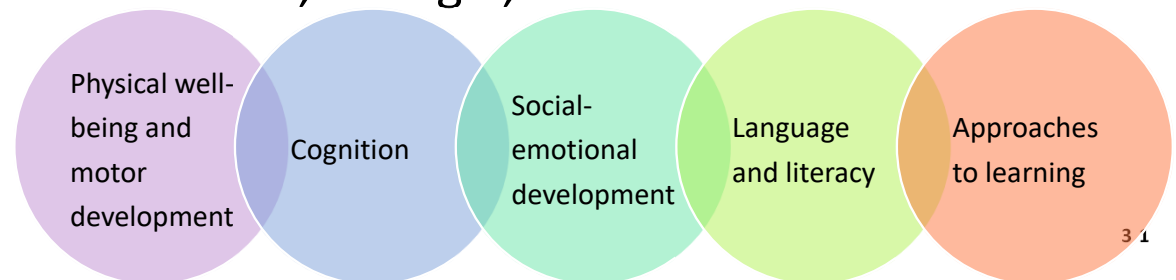
UNICEF's work on ECEC to School transitions

- Ready children, focusing on children's learning and development.

- Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children.

- Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.

Ready children

SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Ready Parents

Ready schools
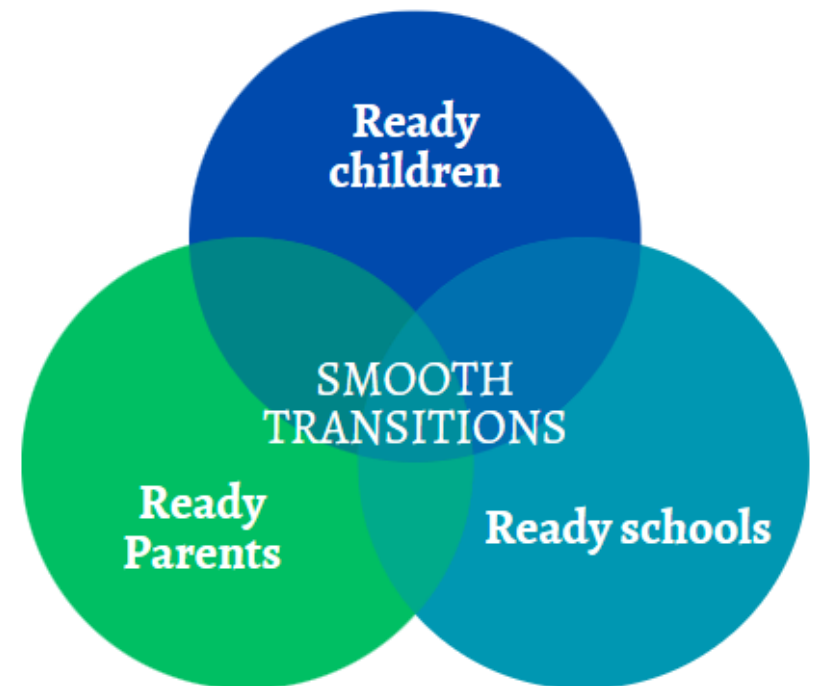
Output 6: Piloting of the Framework and updated Framework

- UNICEF will conduct a pilot in 10-15 settings, selected **purposefully and who volunteer**, to validate the feasibility of the Framework in the local context and to evaluate its components and implementation processes on a smaller scale before state-wide adoption in Lower Saxony

- Framework will be updated based on the synthesized findings.

Output 7: Report with final recommendations for implementation and dissemination of the framework by the State authorities

This report will be designed to guide Lower Saxony on the additional reforms, support and interventions that will be required to:

- implement the Framework successfully across the State,

- strengthen ECEC conditions in Lower Saxony in line with their priority of improving education outcomes of elementary education and to facilitate a smooth transition to primary school.

Focus on systems-level adjustments for Recommendations
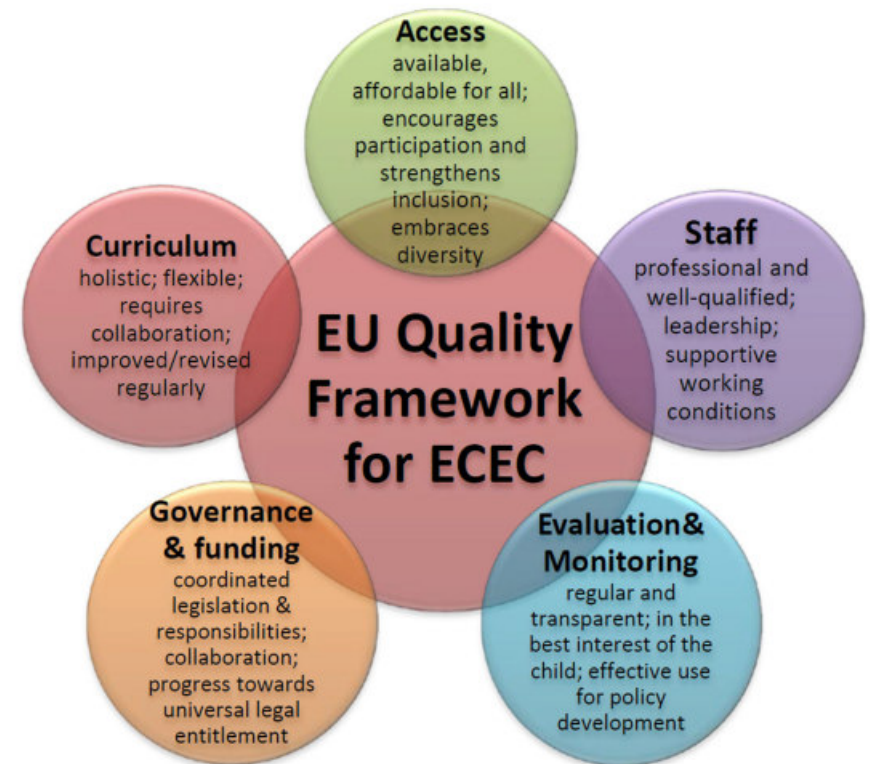
Project Timeline: September 2024 – August 2026

Indicative timetable

Result	The month of the implementation period																							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Inception Phase	■	■	■																					
"As-is" Analysis			■	■	■	■	■																	
Good practice study		■	■	■	■	■	■																	
Consolidated recommendations								■	■	■	■													
Developing Framework										■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Piloting the Framework																■	■	■	■	■	■	■		
Final recommendations on implementation																			■	■	■	■		
Project closing																						■	■	■

Learnings from projects on effective engagement

- Building trust and an open communication channels with key stakeholders, including all types of settings/service providers

- Consistent, timely communication on steps and timelines

- Co-creation & validation are important pre-cursors to long-term success

- Defining roles and responsibilities, clarity of purpose

- Establishing open environments for constructive, collegial discussions with the joint vision in mind

- Healthy mix of pragmatism & ambition: What can the project achieve immediately versus what is for future engagement and long-term change

Some guiding reflections for the panel

- What opportunities do you see? What about this work is exciting & promising?

- What considerations are important to be mindful of as we move forward?

- Who are we missing in the WG? Whom else would you like to see be a part of the WG?

- How can we make the framework concrete, practical and useable ultimately for educators & leaders?

- How do we model effective collaboration & engagement in the project structure?

Thank you!

What do ELDS contain?

Domain: Specific area of child's developmental progress and growth

Indicator: Quantifiable measurement to gauge progress & development

Standard: Statements that clarify expectation of achievement of skills & knowledge

Benchmark: Observable things that the child can do

DOMAIN 1: LANGUAGE & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT		
Domain 1, Standard 1: Children will develop skills in listening and understanding language		
Indicator	**How to measure/Benchmark**	**Preparatory Learning Activities**
Child is able to follow directions that involve a two or three step sequence of actions	e.g., ask the child to (1) get an article of clothing; (2) put it on/wear it; and (3) proceed to a certain location, like the entrance to the room (if outdoors to a tree)	i. Give oral directions and play a game like "caregiver says" ii. Make the children give simple directions to each other
Child demonstrates an understanding of the message in a conversation	Sing a nursery rhyme to the child that entails doing activities, like pointing to body parts. Ask the child to respond to your rhyme by acting/doing the activities.	i. Guide the child to listen for specific information in conversation with others. ii. While listening to the radio discuss the content with child
Child demonstrates a gain in information by listening	Engage the child in a conversation. See if the child is able to extend an idea expressed by you.	While telling a story or reading a book guide the child through the development of the idea of the story.

Source: Kagan & Britto (2005)
https://itacec.org/ece/document/learning_resources/2017/Process-Guidelines-for-development-of-ELDS-UNICEF.pdf

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Stages of developing ELDS

Advocacy

Drafting

Validation

Endorsement
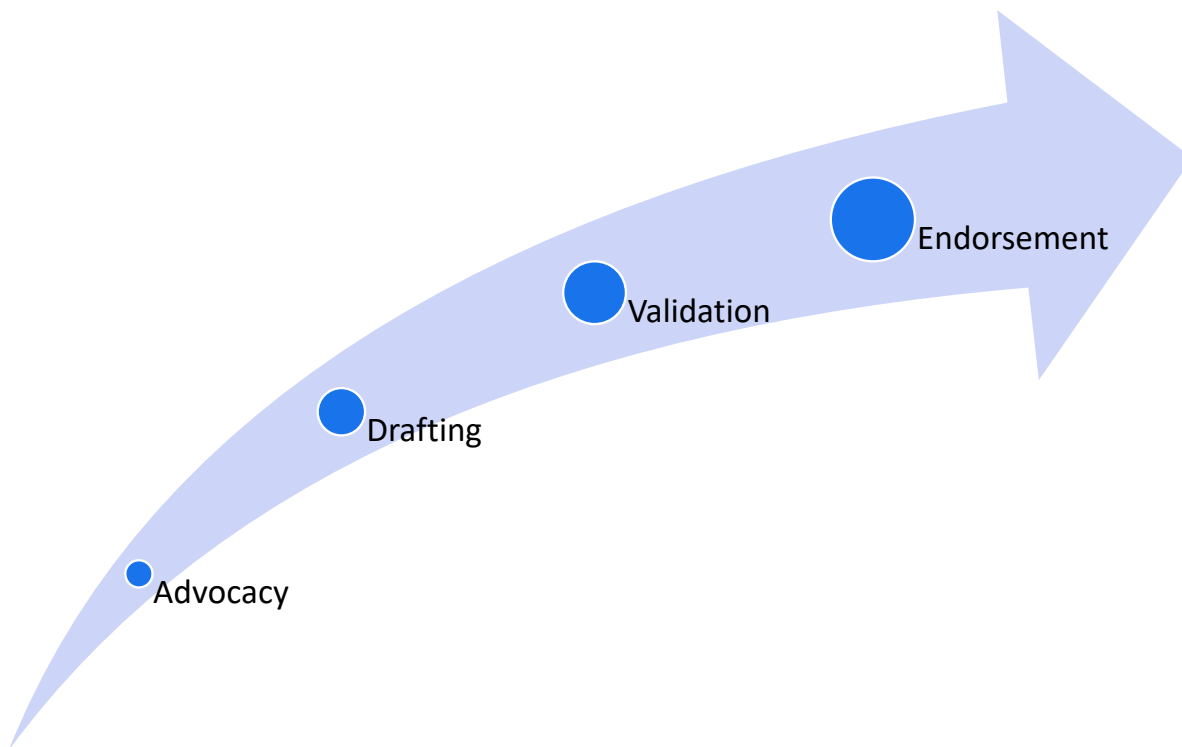
- Establish a WG/advisory council

- Each stage entails a series of decision-points

- Drafting is iterative & entails multiple rounds of discussion, reflection & revision

- Standards must be scientifically based, linked to quality of ECEC & socio-culturally adapted

Country example: ELDS is Romania

- First EU country to develop ELDS

- ELDS initially developed in 2006

- Entire ECEC professional workforce trained on how to use & implement ELDS

- Parents also trained to understand ELDS & strengthen parenting skills & practices

- ELDS revised & upgraded in 2023

Supporting School Readiness and Transitions

UNICEF Conceptual Framework (2012):

Ready children, focusing on children's learning and development.

Ready schools, focusing on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children.

Ready families, focusing on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development and transition to school.
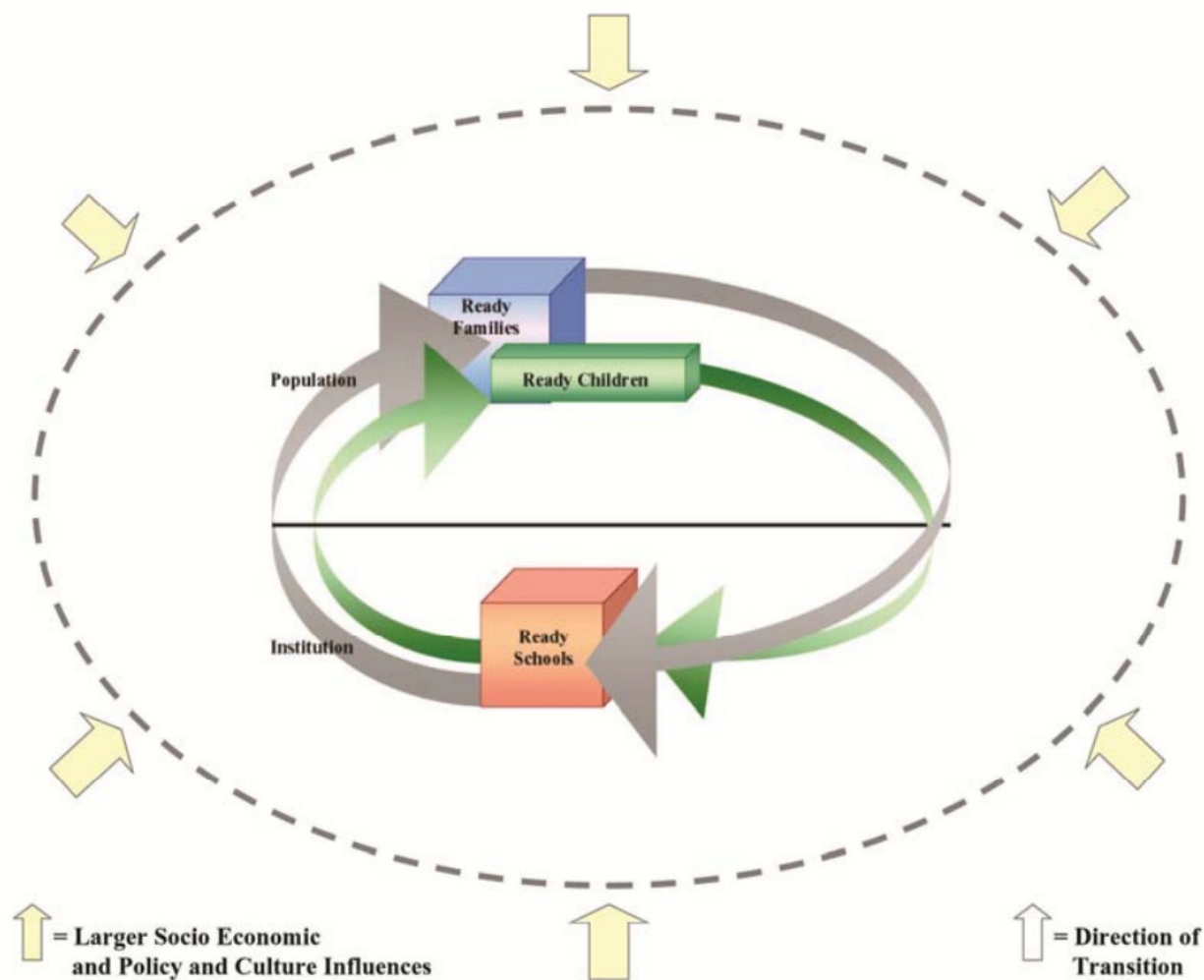

Figure 1: Building Competency/Capacity for Transition to School