DESCRIPTION OF ECE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM - GUIDANCE NOTE

Enhancing Quality Assurance Systems for Early Childhood Education in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

I. Objective: To develop a detailed note intended to provide a guide to MENA countries looking to develop or improve their national quality assurance systems for early childhood education (ECE)\(^1\).

II. Target Audience: The primary audience for this note will be high-level officials from Ministries of Education in MENA countries, entrusted with improving the quality of ECE in their respective countries. The note may also benefit development partners working alongside these Ministries.

III. Description: The note will comprise three sections, covering each of the following elements of a quality assurance system for ECE.

Section 1: Quality Standards: Standards are a means to ensure the quality of the education young children receive in ECE environments. They comprise a set of requirements—related to, for instance, the interactions and dynamics within a classroom, the pedagogical plans that guide learning, school personnel, the physical environment, and learning outcomes—that an ECE center is mandated to meet. In this sense, quality is measured by the degree to which centers fulfill such established criteria or principles. The standards approach in assuring quality implies that quality can always be further improved, especially when standards are framed along a quality continuum.

Countries in MENA have already made important strides in instituting ECE quality standards, but most have significant room for improvement. A recent World Bank assessment of 14 countries in the region found that four have no ECE quality standards or virtually no quality standards: Algeria, Djibouti, Libya, and Morocco. Five countries were found to have some standards or official guidelines corresponding with standards, but stand in need of substantial revisions or upgrades to their standards: Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Tunisia, and the West Bank and Gaza\(^2\). In these countries, standards are generally better developed in relation to the physical environment of ECE centers and less developed in relation to the process dimensions of quality (e.g., the dynamics within a classroom). Five countries appear to have relatively robust standards: Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Even among this latter category, however, there are often important gaps in comprehensiveness of standards—for instance, with regard to requirements for learning outcomes, teacher standards, and uniform application for public and private facilities—as well as substantial room to streamline the standards.

The guidance note will provide:

1.1 Research evidence on the key aspects of quality that should be included in the standards

1.2 A framework that can be used in two ways:

a. In cases in which a country does not have standards or is seeking to significantly

\(^1\) The focus of the majority of ECE expansion in the region is center-based, specifically kindergarten programming in two levels—KG1 and KG2 for four- to six-year-olds.

\(^2\) However, a process of overhauling Kuwait’s standards is currently quite advanced.
revise/update its standards, the framework can be used as a template / strong starting point, subject to adaptation, for the development of clear and practicable quality standards, grounded in the latest research on early learning.

b. In cases in which a country has established standards, the Ministry of Education may wish to carry out a comparison with the framework in order to ensure that all key domains are covered and that their standards are clear, robust, and practicable. Such an analysis may point to ways in which existing standards might need to be refined—perhaps by adding or removing certain elements, and perhaps restructuring the standards to make them more easily usable.

1.3 Implementation steps and key considerations, particularly for countries that wish to adapt the framework for the development of their standards (e.g., implementation plan, timeline, example of stakeholders to convene, and how to convene them)

1.4 Additional resources (e.g., hyperlinks to relevant quality standards developed in other countries), and short boxes documenting the experience of other countries, including MENA, in the development of quality standards.

Section 2: Mechanisms for Monitoring. These refer to the tools and procedures in place for the regular assessment of quality in ECE centers and young children’s learning—as defined by the quality standards.

ECE monitoring systems in MENA generally seem to lack structure and clarity. For instance, a recent World Bank assessment of 14 countries in the region found that few appear to have a designated public authority in charge of monitoring the quality of public and/or private ECE provision. Only a fraction of countries has supervisors tasked with conducting regular visits to kindergartens, but these may be overstretched and without clear plans for follow-up. The study was only able to find one country, Qatar, with a clear set of procedures for external evaluation visits conducted every one to four years. With regards to private provision, most countries have unavailable, unclear, or deficient procedures for the registration of private ECE facilities, and only a few countries have comparable monitoring procedures for public and private facilities.

The guidance note will provide:

2.1 A reference set of monitoring tools that can be used in two ways:

a. In cases in which a country does not have tools to regularly assess quality in ECE centers and children’s learning, or is seeking to significantly revise/update its tools, this reference set can be used as a template / strong starting point, subject to adaptation, for the development of robust and implementable tools, grounded in the latest research on early learning.

b. In cases in which a country has developed tools, the Ministry of Education may wish to carry out a comparison with the reference set of instruments in order to ensure that all key domains and considerations are taken into consideration.

2.2 Key considerations for establishing or strengthening monitoring procedures (e.g., processes related to registration, licensing, development of schedules and plans for external visits, training of new and veteran supervisors, uniformity between monitoring of public and private facilities)

2.3 Implementation steps, particularly for countries wishing to adapt the reference set of
tools and integrate it in their monitoring system (e.g., implementation plan, timeline, example of stakeholders to convene, and how to convene them)

Section 3: Mechanisms for ensuring compliance and promoting continuous quality improvements. These include a set of incentives for assisting ECE centers to meet quality requirements and assure that young children are provided with increasingly enriching ECE experiences.

With most MENA countries lacking the necessary monitoring mechanisms to regularly assess ECE quality, efforts towards promoting continuous quality improvements operate in the dark. Anecdotal accounts suggest that, even among countries that monitor some aspects of quality, little to no action is taken if ECE centers are found to be uncompliant with standards, let alone to incentivize them to continuously improve along a quality continuum.

The guidance note will provide:

3.1 **Concrete examples** of incentives systems that countries use to promote continuous quality improvements in ECE centers. This can be in the form of brief case studies.

3.2 **Key considerations** for countries wishing to strengthen their mechanisms for ensuring compliance and promoting continuous quality improvements (e.g., advantages and potential pitfalls related to registration, licensing and accreditation; training supervisors to work with ECE centers to develop action plans for quality improvements; comparability in compliance assurance between public and private facilities)

3.3 **Implementation steps** in the development of mechanisms for ensuring compliance and promoting continuous quality improvements (e.g., implementation plan, timeline, example of stakeholders to convene, and how to convene them)