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INTESYS

TOGETHER / Supporting
vulnerable children
through integrated early
childhood services

Early Childhood Integrated Systems

Summary of Cross-country Local Mapping Reports

2016

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1 Introduction

INTESYS is a three year (2015 –2018) Forward Looking Cooperation Project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme. The INTESYS consortium is composed of 9 partners all bringing diverse and complementary expertise in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care¹: Quality integrated ECEC services are critical for the most disadvantaged groups. High-quality early childhood services, which include accessibility, can make a tremendous difference in reducing the inequality in access and use of supportive services, especially for the most vulnerable families and their children. Currently, high inequality in the ECEC systems in Europe has a strong impact on these vulnerable groups: migrant children, Roma children, children with special needs, children living in poverty. The INTESYS project focuses on piloting new approaches to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems in Europe with a view to ensuring that children and families in vulnerable situations have access to high-quality ECEC provided by services that are better integrated across the different sectors (education, health, welfare, etc.), professions and across age groups and governance levels.

The purpose of Work package 2, undertaken during the first year of the project, is to map the state of integration of ECEC provision in EU Member States regarding their workforce policies, practices, tools, actors, leaders, key success factors, barrier and identification of good practices and gaps (policies, tools, practices etc.) with a special focus on governance, the workforce and delivery to vulnerable groups. The activities undertaken were a local survey carried out in the four countries (Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia) in which INTESYS will be piloting a framework and tools in specific areas, as well as a literature report and a European survey focusing on promising and inspiring practices. For the local surveys overviews of the national systems and pilot areas were drafted and interviews and focus groups carried out in the area selected.

This report contains firstly a short Introduction looking at objectives and challenges across the four pilot areas and then each of the country overviews.

2 Objectives and Target Groups

2.1 Summary of objectives for each pilot

Belgium	Italy	Portugal	Slovenia
<p>Flanders: Overall aim to provide integrated and accessible support all families in order to promote the rights and needs of children as well as the well-being of families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maximise development opportunities for all children starting during pregnancy, - Support and increase the capacities and competences of parents, - Support the use of local and community services, - Stimulate participation in society. <p>French-speaking Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop an experience of partnership between the pre-school system (3-6 years) and community-based ECEC services (0-3 years) for a ‘warm’ (vertical) transition. - Develop a common understanding of social and pedagogical needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing integrated training activities to practitioners and managers of services and policy makers from different early childhood sectors (health, education, social, cultural etc.) and serving vulnerable children; - Creating a shared understanding and responsibility among local public and private institutions through their active involvement in designing the training and in supervising and monitoring the follow- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integration of the ECEC services among sectors, building-up an ecological/systemic view and approach about children and family services; - Map family and children services at local level; - Promote interaction among local services in the areas relevant for families and children; - Build a shared, holistic systemic view about children, families, professionals, services and community; - Develop/adopt shared quality principles and indicators about ECEC services and integration of services / sectors; - Develop multidisciplinary and inter institutional actions plans; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a common understanding about the right to education for every child and about the importance of quality education for each and every child. - Mobilise all relevant stakeholders, in order to connect them and to develop services that will correspond to Romani families’ needs. - Focus on both a horizontal and vertical integration: - Increasing the enrolment rate and attendance of Romani children in preschool programs (Preschool Kekec Grosuplje) and

¹ King Baudouin Foundation (BE), Universal Education Foundation (NL), ISSA – International Step by Step Association (NL), Innovations in the Early Years - VBJK (BE), Compagnia San Paolo (IT), Emanuela Zancan Foundation (IT), Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (PT), Aga Khan Foundation (PT), Pedagoski Institut – Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education (SI).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase knowledge about the principal difficulties and challenges for a smooth transition. - Organise a group of parents to take part of the process throughout the whole pilot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> up integrated practices employed in services; - Informing the local and national policies on ECEC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen professionals' capacities in developing systemic and integrated approaches; - Pilot the toolkit in a process of improvement and contextualised adaptation, recording systematically the learning process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Making transition from preschool to primary school for the Romani children smoother (Preschool Mavrica Trebnje).
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2.2 Target Groups

Belgium	Italy	Portugal	Slovenia
<p>Flanders: Brussels network 'Samenwerkingsverband Huizen van het Kind' (SWV), working in Flemish-speaking Brussels context, which is characterized by population growth, demographic differences between areas, super-diversity, multilingual environment, increasing poverty. The pilot will focus on the development of local networks. These networks aim to integrate services that support families with children. As progressive universalism is a key concept, there is no real defined target group, except that the focus will be on families with children age 0-12 years old.</p> <p>French-speaking Community: Two or three districts of the commune of Schaerbeek characterised by a younger population, more foreign residents, a higher proportion of children born in households with no income from work, lower wealth indexes. Targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - children starting pre-school at the age of 2.5-3 years without previous experience of care outside their family. - teachers and professionals within the ECEC split system 	<p>Group of six municipalities on the outskirts of Turin (Piedmont Region) with a population of about 97,000 inhabitants. Specific target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practitioners (social workers, educators, health workers), service managers and staff of the Regional authorities (directly); - Children in the 0-6 age group with an immigrant background and/or whose families are at risk of exclusion (indirectly); - Romani children and their families (indirectly) 	<p>Olivais, one of Lisbon's parishes, with 51,036 inhabitants. Specific target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professionals from ECEC service providers (state public school); - Private for-profit schools; - Private non-profit Early Childhood centres, - A social service (SCML) and a health service. 	<p>Two municipalities with traditional Romani settlements, Grosuplje and Trebnje, characterised by very low enrolment rate of Romani children in preschools. Specific target groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Romani children and their families (indirectly); - Representatives of Romani community, - Educators, social workers, health workers, administrators (directly); other stakeholder in the environment (directly/indirectly).

3 Barriers identified in the local pilot areas

Across the four countries some common barriers to better integrated working are were highlighted by the surveys. They include:

- Too often organisations and administrations do not even know each other (and what the others do) or do not have experience of working together, nor the motivation to do so. This may be compounded by lack of policies, strategies and funding to encourage more integrated working.
- A similar situation exists among the different types of ECEC and pre-school provisions and services for children and families that exist in a given area that leads to lack of communication of important information and a tendency to rely on the competence of one's own organisation to the detriment of others.
- Issues of complexity of situations and problems that are increasingly difficult to address provide a further barrier.

The barriers are presented below in more detail for each of the pilot areas:

Belgium: The complexity of Brussels means that there are too many different authorities working in the same field. There is also a gap between welfare and education institutions, services and policies.

In the French-speaking Community in Brussels the survey observed that even though cross-sector coordination tools exist, integration and coordination pre-schools appear somewhat defensive and partnership with ECEC provisions for children under 3 years are not a priority, even where the infrastructure is shared. Furthermore transition and continuity are only emergent issues. A notable barrier to successful partnerships is the fact that there tends to be a critical view taken of other provisions, lacking in empathy, and also a tendency to fall back on one's own competence (rather than trusting that of others). Another barrier concerns evaluation for which there are few formal skills and assessment practices, little data collection for regular monitoring of services and in addition neither families nor the children are seen as partners for evaluation.

For the Flemish Community in the Brussels Region where the survey was undertaken, barriers to successful partnerships were also identified through the survey, including a lack of trust and relying on one's own mandate and competence. There are policies in place that do not provide the financial support needed for networking, integrated working and cooperation.

Italy: The survey carried out in the Turin area found that cooperation is not considered as a key strategy in the decision-making process and though a few existing examples of integration, they are not systematic and consolidated experiences. The limited resources together with problems that are increasingly difficult to manage create a barrier to integrated working as well as the lack of tools for integration and the issue of shared responsibility for the use of resources. Though integration between education, health and social policies would be useful for tackling vulnerability, it happens only for the most difficult single situations and there is a lack of involvement of beneficiaries. Due to lack of resources and time, staff remains closed within their organisations. Moreover, staff turnover is an issue and the difficulties arising from it mean that organisations are regularly start anew without treasuring past experiences of integration. Barriers are also constituted by the lack of a clearer and unitary legislative framework, overcoming existing divisions (e.g. between social and health sectors) and considering the expected impacts of legislation, implementing a comprehensive connection among different responsibilities (ministries, departments, managements, etc.) for favouring effective decision-making processes.

Portugal: The survey was undertaken in Lisbon where access to ECEC services are particularly difficult for 0 to 3 year olds, in particular and for low income families. Despite some promising examples of local networks that enhance cross-sectorial work, ECEC and family support services still work in silos, and lack information about the other social and family support services and resources which hinders facilitating the access of families. Though some professionals work in a cross-sector integrated way, the systems are not organised to integrate services and therefore may create barriers to services working together. In terms of information sharing, the protection of families and children's privacy leads professionals to be cautious about communicating with other professionals. The diversity of private providers for children aged 0-3 creates some difficulties for the local authority in coordinating and supporting coherence and integrative practices. Transitions from pre-school into primary school, especially when the transition is from a private institution into a public sector school, is left to the individual decision. A further barrier comes from the lack of family- and children-friendly labour policies and practices that do not support family needs.

Slovenia: The survey in the municipalities where the pilot will be carried out (Grosuplje and Trebnje) observed that although there is some integration among different providers and authorities, there still is room for improvement. One barrier is constituted by the lack of consultation of the Romani community and their inclusion in decision-making processes that concern them. Decisions are taken in a paternalistic way ('we know what is good for you') without sufficient understanding about the Romani community. Outreach work is still little known, which may constitute a barrier and the work of pre-schools is still very much considered to be only the work they do with children who are already in pre-school.

4 Challenges

The challenges have been organised under sub-headings, each one illustrated by one or more of the pilot areas.

4.1 Shared beliefs and values

The **Belgian** survey highlighted what the partners consider necessary for successful partnerships, which include the need to go through a preliminary phase of identifying the specific skills of each other, given the multidisciplinary nature and diversity of services, in order to increase respect and trust between partners and build a common framework. Through a preliminary phase of really getting to know each other (views, skills, work, methods...) they will be able to work towards a shared vision and set clear goals, viewing all partners as equals and keeping an open mind. Taking a respectful attitude towards families is also an important challenge as well as taking a process rather than outcome approach.

4.2 Policies, strategies and funding

A major challenge for the **Lisbon** pilot area, where access to ECEC services are particularly difficult for 0 to 3 year olds and for low income families, is working towards the integration of services and access to services by families in a context of a proliferation of private providers. Despite some promising examples of local networks that enhance cross-sectorial articulation, ECEC and family support services still work in silos, and lack information about the other social and family support services / resources which prevents them facilitating families' access. Though some professionals work in a cross-sectoral way, the challenge is for the systems to become organized to integrate services. Currently the protection of families and children's privacy leads professionals to be cautious about information sharing.

There are funding issues to be addressed. Public funding in crèches and pre-school is a fixed rate per child. As parents pay according to their income, institutions have to ensure a balance of families from different SES in order to have healthy finances. This can prevent some vulnerable families having access to ECEC and middle class families are required to make stressful financial efforts by enrolling their children in private-for-profit ECD provision.

In the **Italian** pilot area one challenge is the lack of shared quality criteria, indicators for monitoring and evaluation, joint training activities among different organisations involved in early childhood services. This is a challenge at managerial level between public and private responsibilities and resources compounded by gaps in the legislation concerning the management of human resources in particular regarding professional profiles and qualifications that are subject to contractual differences. In addition there are gaps in the investments related to technical, professional and administrative competences for integrating between public and private bodies and there is hence a need to invest resources for to support integration and coordination.

4.3 State of integration: responding to families and diversity of situations

In the pilot areas in the **Brussels** region the will to move towards more integrated working is definitely present, even though questions still remain on the best way forward. The challenge is to increase accessibility and provide more adequate responses to actual needs of vulnerable groups. Hence the importance of getting a clear view on what services are available for whom and knowing how to benefit from them in order to better support and guide the families you work with. These issues are as much important for the vertical and for the horizontal integration.

The **Italian** survey highlighted the difficulties that can exist between public bodies and non-profit organisations in planning interventions to support families from a community-based perspective, integrating needs, resources and capabilities. There is a lack of financial resources from both public bodies and non-profit organisations for the development and maintenance of integrated planning and evaluation at the community level. There are also challenges in involving stakeholders such as businesses, private individuals and everyone else interested in building a higher level of well-being and social cohesion.

In the **Lisbon** pilot area some of the parents who participated in the focus group felt disempowered and that they cannot ask for better/more quality support services because of the economic crisis. Vulnerable families with children still need to search in order to obtain some kind of support and there is no active outreach to families in the community. One of the challenges is to better articulate between different administrations and the municipal council in order to reach a clear definition of responsibilities for each organisation in order to avoid the duplication of services

or lack of support for some families and children. Professionals need also to learn about each others' services and to develop an integration approach in their work.

Moreover, there is a lack of intercultural awareness in the services related to children and families that necessitates better professional development and training. Local policies may impact on the ability of ECEC services to respond locally to the diversity of needs and cultures though the process of transferring competences and resources from the municipality into the parish is in many cases producing better practices in answering the social and cultural needs of the population.

There are many challenges in the pilot areas in **Slovenia** because Romani families face many different problems: very high unemployment, poverty, bad housing conditions, etc. that are not isolated problems. There is clear evidence that ECEC services are least used by Romani children and there are issues of access issue and child allowance. Outreach activities are not perceived as a way to support Romani families. In institutions prejudices and stereotypes towards the Romani community are still present. Services are 'specialised', offered by many different providers with rare collaboration and joint planning. Resources for services are mainly project based with no sustainable planning and funding. Since local legislation depends on national legislation there is little awareness about the bottom-up approach.

Instead of organising (too) many different actions for Romani children and families, the challenge is to develop a joint plan of action which is likely have a more positive impact but increasing the understanding about the importance of joint planning and implementation is part of the challenge. A further challenge is for elementary schools to become more focused on preparing for future pupils and to be better connected with preschools so there is an increased understanding about the added-value of working together. In the current situation the work of pre-schools is still very much focused on children already in pre-school and outreach work is not well-known.

4.4 Quality

In the **Portuguese** pilot, both in crèches and in pre-schools the levels of quality vary considerably, despite teachers' high level qualifications (Masters) and the implementation of a quality assurance framework (crèche) and quality development programmes and inspections in pre-school. The good examples of ECE services that adopt a clear pedagogical approach based on values of participation, inclusion, active and purposeful learning activities and valuing diversity need to be expanded and assumed as the right of children and families to quality education. However there is a perceived inflexibility of ECEC services in adapting rules / policies to the needs of families and relationships between ECEC professionals and the families need to improve. One challenge is improving professionals' lack of soft skills to work closely with families; as well as their lack of flexibility and of responsiveness of services/professionals. An important challenge raised by the survey is that children do not have enough time to play, especially free play and outdoors play.

In **Italy**, quality is often considered as a coherent application of procedures and regulations rather than good services performance aiming at the well-being of children and families. Accreditation systems introduced criteria for assessing the quality of the process. In many cases this implied overly standardising process requirements. It emerged that the problem relates to the fact that process requirements do not necessarily guarantee the evaluation of the quality needed to support children and their parents effectively. Sometimes monitoring systems have not helped existing services to tackle needs, on the contrary they have required additional documentation on the functioning of services. Consequently, these systems, although necessary, had the effect of bureaucratising processes, and of mixing up the quality of process with the quality of outcomes, which are different dimensions.

4.5 Workforce and management

The **Belgian** survey highlights that knowing and trusting each other is crucial for professionals and this process takes time. It is a vital challenge for partners to get to know how every partner understands and interprets certain concepts, such as integration, cooperation, vulnerability, leadership...in a non-judgemental way. The Belgian ECEC system being split, these challenges are particularly significant children transition between the different parts. There is a need to establish foundations for a more equal partnership between the professionals working in the ECEC services for children

under 3 and teachers in pre-schools. Moreover the place of the parents in education should be revised in order to improve the family-school partnership.

The **Italian** survey drew attention to the fact that a single professional is not considered as an agent of integration and for this reason there is a lack of shared information, timely communication, and combination of different sources of professional knowledge. The lack of knowledge-sharing among professionals in relation to the operational models adopted creates difficulties because it is necessary to overcome the lack of trust among professions and to facilitate mutual interactions among professionals but also among their representative bodies. Languages and professional codes are not shared among professionals. On-going and integrated training could be the first step towards integrated and effective interventions.

A challenge in the **Slovenian** pilot will be to increase cooperation in sharing information about children and families among schools, municipalities, health and social centres to obtain a clearer view about the needs of families concerning school enrolment, social support, benefits, etc. It will also be important for professionals to share learning about working methods and successful approaches.

4.6 Monitoring and evaluation

The **Slovenian** survey underlines the importance of developing more combined strategies for monitoring and evaluation, such as self-evaluation, group and external evaluation, including involving parents and children, which will be a challenge. This approach could probably lead to a higher quality level in all sectors involved.

The **Italian** survey highlights that evaluation is mainly based on feedback. Positive feedback can come from users but also from other colleagues. And positive feedback can attract more collaboration and projects. This is seen as a positive factor, but at the same time the need is recognised to find solutions for sharing evaluation involving different levels (users, policy makers, professionals and managers). Outcome and social impact evaluation seem neglected and this kind of evaluation is not evolving within professional practices. By its very nature, evaluation implies responsibilities, which are required to produce the expected outcomes. Identifying outcomes (besides the mere production of results) is thus an element that can make a difference, since it requires thinking differently: from output to outcomes.

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