1. Brief description of INTESYS

Quality integrated ECEC services are key to improving children's learning outcomes in absolute terms and relative to other groups. For the most disadvantaged groups, high-quality early childhood services can make a tremendous difference in reducing the disparities in the learning outcomes. Currently, high inequality in the ECEC systems in Europe has a strong impact on the most vulnerable groups: migrant children, Roma children, children with special needs, children living in poverty.

Integration and alignment of services including poor and migrant families with young children (Geinger et al, 2015), the background research paper drafted for the Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Childhood meeting in January 2015, describes the current fragmentation of such services and the ‘countermovement of integration and networking in which care and education, early childhood and family support programmes, special needs and mainstream provision are combined in response to the demands of local communities in contexts of diversity’.

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.

INTESYS will respond to the European Quality Framework on ECEC (2014) by promoting integration:

- of different services: care, education, health, family/social services, employment, cultural, integration of migrants;
- between age-related services: transition between services for the unborn/pregnant mothers, crèche, kindergarten/maternity schools and primary schools;
- of systems at different levels of public governance (local, regional and national).

The main blocks of activities in the project could be summarized as it follows:
2. Brief description of the four INTESYS pilots

Pilot in Belgium, Brussels Region

The pilot in Belgium will be coordinated by VBJK and will focus on initiatives in the context of integrated services in the Brussels area. Recently, in the Brussels capital region, investment has been made on integrating different services by the Flemish and the French-speaking Communities Commission. The pilots in both regions of Brussels will build further on these ongoing experiments and focus mainly on the challenges that services face.

The Belgian ECEC system (Flemish and French speaking) is split into two systems, for the children under 3 years of age and for children over 3 years of age, although ‘reception classes’ (classes d’accueil) for children aged 2.5-3 year are present in the majority of preschools (écoles maternelles) for the 3 to 6 years of age. In the Flemish community of Belgium a new law was implemented in 2014 on preventive family support. The goal of this law is to stimulate the integration and coordination of a broad-range of family support services. Growing attention is being paid to the transitioning periods from one type of service to another, as an indicator of smooth coordination and successful integration of service delivery.

The current policy framework is a positive move towards more integrated work (see the Flemish decree above). The Commission of the Flemish Community in Brussels has been supporting the concept of integrated services for families and children, an illustrative example being a research and innovation project aimed at developing a model of integrated services for families in the Brussels region. The purpose is, alongside different partners’ contribution, to strengthen links between services for: childcare (birth to 3 years old), preventive health (consultation bureaux), parenting support initiatives, preschools and other services that can be of any support to families.

Another focus of attention is on promoting so-called ‘warm’ transitions, e.g. between home or childcare and preschool, preschool and school, as we know that these transitions create additional barriers for children and families in vulnerable living conditions. Moreover, a recent demographic growth in the most disadvantaged municipalities prevents some children from enrolling and this impacts the quality of care. (Humblet, 2012). Despite the very high level of participation in the ‘école maternelle’ (preschool, where 95% of all children in Brussels are enrolled, ages 2.5 to 5 years) in all municipalities, the quality of the ECEC system is not always satisfactory and has a negative impact on children from vulnerable social groups. The more integrated work can help break down those barriers.

The pilot in INTESYS focuses on the issue of a ‘warm’ transition of children with various experiences of socialization and various maternal languages in the reception class for children aged 2.5-3 years and 1st grade of ‘école maternelle’ (children aged 3).

As the move towards an integrated ECEC system is not on the national political agenda, this pilot will serve as a first experience of partnership between the school system and community-based services in order to:

- Develop a common understanding of the social and pedagogical needs of children across local stakeholders and actors, as well a shared awareness of social equity in access to the services;
- Raise knowledge on the principal difficulties and challenges to overcome, in particular a more equal partnership between preschool teachers and childcare practitioners.

The results will contribute to the integration of ECEC systems and help policy-makers, trainers and practitioners surpass the disadvantages of a split system for the most vulnerable young children.

Pilot in Italy, Piedmont Region

1 The Flemish Community of Brussel is targeting 30% of the Brussels population.
In Italy, a new law of education is to be adopted and Compagnia San Paolo has been instrumental in promoting a unified system of Early Childhood Education and Care through the robust advocacy campaign ZeroSei.

In Italy, the pilot activities will be implemented in a group of municipalities on the outskirts of Turin in the Piedmont Region. The main objectives of the pilot activities in Italy include:

- Provision of integrated training activities to practitioners and managers of services from different early childhood sectors (health, education, social, cultural etc.) 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-up practices employed in services;
- Informing the local and national policies on ECEC.

Pilot activities in Italy will start with the establishment of a Local Steering Committee (LSC) composed of representatives from public and private institutions from different sectors as well as parents and caregivers. A local mapping of services will be developed, providing a framework of integration for all professional abilities and social capabilities. The framework will also consider existing tools, documents and publications at the local scale describing available services, and thus becoming a useful tool for policy development and decision making regarding ECEC services.

Results of the mapping activities and ideas from the first LSC meeting will be discussed during local roundtables, involving approximately 60 representatives.

Training activities designed and planned with the support of the Local Steering Committee and informed by the Toolkit that will be created within INTESYS project, will be organized for 25 participants, professionals and paraprofessionals from different services/sectors and parents/caregivers. Training will be monitored in order to evaluate changes in the practices and outcomes will be measured.

The results of the pilot training activities will be presented to local institutions and regional authorities. The outcomes of the pilot activities will contribute to defining policy recommendations for the integration of ECEC services to be deployed in the Piedmont region. This activity is particularly relevant as it can inform the current revision of regional ECEC regulation.

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**Pilot in Portugal, Lisbon Region**

The Pilot in Portugal is a joint responsibility of Portuguese partners: Calouste Gulbenkian (CGF) and the Aga Khan Foundation (AFK). It will be carried out in a defined area in the Municipality of Lisbon where AKF has been running a center since 2009 – *Olivais Sul ECD Centre*. Since the beginning the aim was to create an experiential center and to support a network of affiliate early childhood centers to provide participative practices, with a particular emphasis on multicultural awareness and intercultural pedagogy.

The *Olivais Sul ECD Centre* has 15 early childhood teachers, 19 educational assistants, 1 social worker, 2 after school animators, and also administrative and maintenance staff. It encompasses a nursery for very young babies, 6 crèche rooms, 4 preschool rooms, after school care facilities, and a network of 7 childminders.

The neighborhood population includes diverse social classes; there are several housing estates with problems of low-levels of education and lack of training. In some of the poorest areas in the parish there are also migrant families.

At the moment AKF is aiming to scale-up the center to encompass a more integrated approach to reinforce interaction with the community and promote a closer contact with other services involved with families and children (education, health, social affairs, culture and leisure, justice...).

INTESYS will facilitate this process through a methodology based in participatory approach namely:

- Local Project Sounding Board (local and municipality level) composed of representatives of local stakeholders where parents and primary carers will also be represented;
- Roundtables with stakeholders;
- Local mapping and diagnosis: mapping of the organizations and activities locally that support families and young children will be undertaken to inform the baseline.
- Capacity building activities and mentoring within Communities of Practice.
The monitoring and evaluation indicators and activities developed for the whole project will ensure consistency in data collection between the pilot countries. A system of monitoring the process and the impact of the implementation of the toolkit will be developed based on the project’s needs. Expected results include the opportunity to have practical guidance on implementing the Quality Framework on Early childhood Quality and Care (integrated services); that the INTESYS key principles and results based on the local pilot and the international pilot allow identification of the next steps for wider implementation of integrated services.

**Pilot in Slovenia**

The pilot in Slovenia will be implemented in two traditional Romani settlements that have very low rates of Romani children enrolled in preschool education. The preschools involved in the two municipalities have already explored levels of cooperation with representatives of local institutions, other early childhood services, organizations and individuals, but only on the level of organizing local events (once or twice per year; on International Roma Day, for example), or when there are urgent issues to be addressed. The pilot will build on such experiences and will expand the practices that would lead to a better integration of the services addressing specifically the Romani children. Given the very low participation of Romani children in the preschool education, the pilot will work on creating a shared understanding among various actors about the right to education for every child and about the importance of quality education. Relevant stakeholders from different sectors and levels of governance will be mobilized through local roundtables and training workshops in order to create stronger connections, mutual learning and contribute in a coordinated way to delivering responsive services to the specific needs of Romani families. The general objective of the pilot is to increase the enrolment rate and attendance of Romani children in preschool programs in the two municipalities. The specific objectives are:

- To raise awareness about the importance of addressing holistically the needs of the child and family through the provision of integrated ECEC services, especially when addressing vulnerable groups;
- To empower actors in the pilot, including representatives of Romani community, educators, social workers, health workers, administrators and local authorities to advocate for integrated ECEC services and promote practices that support integration;
- To identify challenges that need to be overcome in order to build an integrated ECEC system on the local level and develop policy recommendation to address integration on the local and national level.

**3. INTESYS Consortium**

The INTESYS consortium is composed of 9 partners all bringing diverse and complementary expertise in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

**Partner 1:** [King Baudouin Foundation](#)

**Partner 2:** [Universal Education Foundation](#)

**Partner 3:** [ISSA – International Step by Step Association](#)

**Partner 4:** [Innovations in the Early Years - VBJK](#)

**Partner 5:** [Compagnia San Paolo](#)

**Partner 6:** [Emanuela Zancan Foundation](#)
Partner 7: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Partner 8: Aga Khan Foundation

Partner 9: Pedagoski Institut – Developmental Research Centre for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step (PI-DRCPI)