



# The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma

Analytical report



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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019

ISBN 978-92-79-91276-4

doi: 10.2766/041535

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### Please cite this publication as:

Vandekerckhove, A., Hulpia, H., Huttova, J., Peeters, J., Dumitru, D., Ivan, C., Rezmuves, S., Volen, E., and Makarevičienė, A. (2019). 'The role and place of ECEC in integrated working, benefitting vulnerable groups such as Roma', *NESET report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Doi: 10.2766/041535.

### ABOUT NESET

NESET is an advisory network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture initiated the establishment of the network as the successor to NESET II (2015-2018), NESSE (2007-2010) and NESET (2011-2014). The Public Policy and Management Institute ([PPMI](http://ppmi.lt)) is responsible for the administration of the NESET network. For any inquiries please contact us at: [info-neset@ppmi.lt](mailto:info-neset@ppmi.lt).

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## GLOSSARY

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**Early childhood development (ECD)** refers to the period of human life from the prenatal stage to the age of school entry. This period overlaps with the most important stages in personal development (physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional), in every possible aspect and regardless of the setting. It encompasses early learning and stimulation, health, education, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation. Early childhood development requires optimal support for the child and the child's parents from the family and from society and public institutions. This involves four main multi-sectoral intervention areas: the first 1,000 days; early learning and protection; caregivers and multigenerational nurturing care; and family support and strengthening<sup>1</sup>.

**Early childhood development policies and services** are referred to when discussing the key tools for – preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion; breaking the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage; and promoting social mobility. Early childhood development interventions need to be child-centred and to target all aspects of a child's development and well-being. Good coordination and interaction between health, education, social and child protection systems is essential in this respect<sup>2</sup>. Early childhood policies alone cannot address issues of poverty and social exclusion without comprehensive housing, employment and welfare policies. ECD policies should be closely linked with anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies.

**Early childhood education and care (ECEC)** refers to 'any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age – regardless of the setting, funding, opening hours or programme content – and includes centre and family day-care; privately and publicly funded provision; pre-school and pre-primary provision'<sup>3</sup>.

**Integrated working** is used in this report to describe a form of professional cooperation within some kind of network or partnership, which provides a range of supportive services for families and children, accessible to all, in which families and children can participate and where parents are respected as first educators (Gordon et al., 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on UNICEF's Guidance for Early Childhood Development (UNICEF, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> The definition is based on European Union Council (2018) conclusions on Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion.

<sup>3</sup> The definition is based on European Commission (2014a) study on effective use of ECEC in preventing ESL and European Commission's (2014b) proposal for key principles of a Quality Framework for ECEC.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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While the benefits have been widely evidenced of high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) for young children, especially those from vulnerable groups, it is clear that efforts to improve the holistic development and well-being of children and families must involve a wide range of policies, services and actions. No single intervention, service or sector on its own can hope to achieve sustainable improvements. There is a growing recognition among researchers, policy makers and practitioners that policies and services need to become better integrated if they are to effectively address complex issues such as poverty and promote social inclusion. Only multi-dimensional, aligned and integrated responses and interventions in early years can address the complex and multi-faceted needs of all children and their families, especially those in vulnerable situations, such as families living in poverty, Roma families, or families in the contexts of migration or asylum.

As a concept, integrated working covers a multitude of cooperative systems and models. It is context-specific: different models exist, starting from the specific needs of children and families, with different partners and/or sectors involved in distinct policy settings. Integrated working approaches are often seen as a continuum ranging from cooperation, through collaboration and coordination, to full integration, in which different services are united into a single organisation in order to enhance service delivery. A wide range of sectors and services can be involved in integrated working, depending upon the needs of children and their families. These include: early childhood education and care services; preventive health centres; preventive family support services; schools; out-of-school care; as well as services from the cultural sector (such as libraries, community centres). Integrated working can refer to specific types of integration (vertical integration, e.g. linking childcare to early education, with both being part of an integrated ECEC system); or it can go broader, linking ECEC provision to services in other sectors such as health or social services (horizontal integration). In this report, we consider integrated working to be a form of professional cooperation within a network or partnership, which provides a range of support services for families and children, accessible to all, in which families and children can participate and where parents are respected as first educators (Gordon et al., 2016).

The main purpose of this report is to examine the added value provided by, and the prerequisites for, integrated working – as well as the crucial role played by ECEC services – in order to better serve all families, but especially vulnerable and disadvantaged children and families. Separate attention is devoted to Roma children and their families as one of the most vulnerable groups in Europe, often trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination.

The report is written for policy makers and professionals working in the field of early childhood education and care. It is guided by the following questions:

- What services or functions should be involved in integrated working, paying specific attention to the role that ECEC can play?
- What inspiring examples of integrated working already exist in Europe?
- What is the added value of integrated working (for children and families, for professionals, for policy makers) in general, and specifically for Roma?
- What are the prerequisites for integrated working in general, and specifically for integrated working aimed at addressing the needs of Roma?

The report focuses on different groups of vulnerable children and families – and, in particular, on Roma. It is based on a literature review and six case studies illustrating different ways of integrated working in a variety of contexts. Specifically, the case studies look at the Early Years Children and Family Centre in Newry (the UK); bridging professionals in Ghent pre-schools (Belgium); the *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin, which links refugee

centres to childcare (Germany); Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma (Hungary); the municipal kindergarten network in Tundzha municipality (Bulgaria); and the 'Ready Set Go!' project (Romania). The evidence from the case studies (Part II) frames and supplements the more theoretical part of the report (Part I). It serves as a basis from which to discuss the added value of, and prerequisites for, integrated working (covered respectively in Parts III and IV), and feeds into the report's policy recommendations.

## Key findings

### Place of ECEC in integrated working

- Integrated working aims to better serve all children and families, and especially vulnerable children and families, by responding to their multi-faceted situations and actual needs. It can render ECEC and other support services more accessible, as well as better known and understood. By making services better connected to one another, integrated working can help to avoid abrupt transitions from one service to another, and avoid overlaps in service delivery.
- ECEC plays a crucial role as an essential partner or even initiator within the context of integrated working. ECEC services can fulfil a pivotal role in connecting children and families with services that can support them: providing adequate referrals; connecting services together; cooperating to improve service delivery; helping children and families to get to know other services; and making ECEC known to other services. It is vital that policies and services recognise parents as first educators, and work together to support them in a way that makes them feel appreciated instead of judged, and which addresses their actual needs.
- This report identifies the existence across Europe of a wide range of diverse services and functions that could be combined or connected with ECEC. These include:
  - fully integrated centres, such as Sweden's Family Centres and Sure Start centres in the UK;
  - integrated collaboration and coordination, such as the Flemish *Huizen van het Kind* ('Houses of the Child'), which facilitate cooperation between different partners in the field of preventive family support; or the initiative of the Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria, which combines together services and uses ECEC as a portal to the community through which other services can be delivered;
  - integrated programmes and projects, such as the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania.
- Furthermore, integrated ECEC systems and services should be based on support for children's rights, and upon a commitment to promoting universal services, rather than through increased targeting, conditionality and 'temporary support'. Universal services do not exclude a targeted approach: within universal services, actions can be developed that put extra effort into reaching specific groups, and which are tailored to the needs of specific groups, without stigmatisation.

### Benefits of integrated working

- Strong evidence exists in the literature and from case studies that high-quality ECEC provision which integrates childcare with education, health, social and other services is associated with improved cognitive and behavioural outcomes, and better health and well-being for children. This was also stated in the ISOTIS report on interagency working (Barnes et al., 2018).
- Increasing evidence from Sure Start in the UK and Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary suggests that early support is of critical importance, and requires improved cross-sectoral integration. A comprehensive

system of early years intervention should be based on the needs of children and families. These include, for example, pre- and post-natal health, early childhood education and care services, and preventive family support.

- Integrated work at the service level can have a positive impact on children and families in terms of improved access and speedier responses; better and clearer agreements on information sharing and communication between services; greater consultation on case planning; a more holistic approach; and seamless services. The case of the bridging professionals in Ghent preschools demonstrates that parents are positive about integrated working in early years, because they value greater accessibility and the smoother transition between services.
- Evidence from the evaluation of projects such as 'Ready Set Go!' in Romania shows that when integrated working combines an expansion of the capacity of ECEC settings with an improvement in the institutional quality of ECEC services and the provision of support for parents and Roma empowerment activities, it can bring measurable improvements in ECEC access and attendance and easier transition to primary schools.
- Evidence from projects such as the Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary and from regional-level initiatives such as in Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria, confirms that integrated working which focuses on early intervention, and which places ECEC at its centre, contributes to the strengthening of communities and the development of stronger local partnerships, and increases the social inclusion of Roma.
- Integrated working is beneficial for ECEC organisations and professionals, as well as for policies. Integrated working can reduce the duplication of efforts across sectors and maximise scarce financial, human and material resources at national, regional and local levels. Combined delivery and integration of services can improve efficiency and increase cost-effectiveness via synergies between interventions, as well as by promoting social inclusion.

### Key prerequisites for integrated working

Integrated working must always start from the needs of children and families living in the local context. It requires careful planning, commitment and enthusiasm on the part of partners, who may be required to deal with organisational, structural and cultural barriers, and to develop new skills and new ways of working. Based on the literature review and case studies, this report highlights four crucial prerequisites for integrated working:

1. A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and their families in the community.
2. A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff.
3. Supportive policy and funding.
4. Family and community participation.

The following conclusions and recommendations relate to these four key prerequisites.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### 1. A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and their families

#### A shared vision at the national level

A shared vision at the national level is a fundamental requirement for full cooperation between the various sectors relating to early childhood development (health, social welfare, the educational system and services, employment, housing), in order to ensure the coherence and continuity of provision throughout the period from pregnancy to long after a child starts primary school. It is important that the vision and, for that matter, the strategic plans and/or national policy frameworks, are discussed by all key stakeholders – policy makers across various sectors, service providers, parents and other actors – in order for them to become reality. This requires leadership, political will and commitment as well as the allocation of time, financial and human resources.

‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ in Scotland, ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures’ in Ireland, ‘Every Child Matters’ in England and Wales, the Flemish decree on preventive family support (2014) regarding the *Huizen van het Kind* (‘Houses of the Child’), are all examples of landmark national policy frameworks for improving children’s well-being and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and integrated working in early years.

#### Recommendations:

- Policy makers should develop a **national vision on early childhood** which is shared across all relevant sectors. Such a vision (e.g. a national policy framework) should be based on children’s rights and respect for diversity, and should aim to integrate ECEC in its broadest sense, including health and well-being, childcare and education, social inclusion and equality.
- Policy makers and service providers need to allow sufficient time and resources to enable the dialogue and discussions necessary to support integrated working.

#### A shared vision at the local and service levels

Examples of integrated working from the Sure Start programme in the UK; the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary; and the initiative of the Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria, highlight that a **shared vision at regional/local level and at the level of service provision** is required to affirm the commitment of the relevant services to an integrated approach that promotes the best possible response to the needs of every child and family. In particular, this shared vision should include ECEC services (childcare as well as preschools); preventive family support services; preventive health services; and social services. Central to this shared vision should be a discussion of why and how the integration should take place.

#### Recommendations:

- Regional/local authorities, service providers and professionals involved in early years services should discuss and agree a common vision and goals in order for integrated working to act in the best interests of children and be **responsive to the multi-dimensional needs of vulnerable children and families**.
- Local authorities, service providers and professionals should clearly define and agree upon the roles and responsibilities of the integrated network, and of each service.

## 2. A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

Evidence from projects and initiatives such as Sure Start in the UK, Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary, bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium, and from Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria, shows that integrated working cannot be considered the sole responsibility of individual professionals, but rather as a joint effort that involves the services of multi-disciplinary teams, training centres and local authorities. The 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania further highlights the important role played by local NGOs and community organisations in the success of collaborative working.

### A competent system

Research evidence further suggests that implementing integrated working on a large scale requires the creation of competent systems to provide guidance and support, and to develop competences at different levels (individual, team, and institutional). This includes the creation of multi-agency teams, team learning, clear protocols and mandates, joint training, the sharing of expertise, frequent and regular information sharing, and reflective practice.

Integrated working in a competent system also requires the creation of necessary structural conditions. These include the allocation of appropriate time and resources to developing a shared vision, and establishment of collaboration and trust among staff and families, as well as the setting-up of actions to meet the needs of children and families.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should support the development of competent systems in early childhood education and care in order to provide guidance and support to professionals, facilitate service management, and enable service providers to **develop the competences required for integrated working**.
- Policymakers should create **structural conditions** to promote integrated working among services in various sectors. ECEC services can be used as an entry point for integration.
- Service providers and management should **facilitate the provision of time and resources for integrated working**, including frequent, meaningful communication among services, e.g. by providing child-free hours to create time for reflective practice, team meetings, case reporting, exchanging experiences, training and coaching.
- Service leaders and staff should **develop clear and transparent codes of professional conduct**, including regulations on the sharing of information and data.

### Leadership

Strong, engaged and inspirational leadership was a key prerequisite for success in all six cases included in this report – Sure Start in Newry, UK; the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; the *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin, Germany; Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma, Hungary; Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria; and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania. Such leadership is required at national, regional and local government levels to ensure the coherence between services that is necessary to achieve common goals and move away from fragmented models. At the service level, this would involve motivating, supporting, valuing, communicating clearly, clarifying expectations for everyone's role, and maintaining their focus. Furthermore, the right people need to be in the right places – meaning that organisations should provide clear mandates to the professionals engaged in integrated working, and must ensure they are competent to function in those integrated settings.

**Recommendations:**

- Policymakers should invest in **developing leadership capacity** at the level of regional/local government (including mayors, heads of department responsible for early years services, designated coordinators); at the level of the integrated network (the network coordinator); and at the service level (leaders and senior management in ECEC, health, family centres etc.), in order to promote integrated working among relevant early years services. Specific training courses and seminars, networking and information sharing should be provided to enhance the competences of leaders. Leadership skills are required, including change management, promoting collaborative working, as well as inspiring and motivating integrated teams.
- Leaders at the service level should **facilitate** and shape the preconditions for cooperative and integrated work in ECEC, promote mutual respect and solidarity, and foster **democratic decision-making**.

**Reflective staff**

A more integrated working context requires well-qualified, experienced and competent staff with additional competences or attitudes such as the willingness to cooperate with others and reflect on one's own practice; open-mindedness to shared learning; and an enabling, welcoming, participative and inclusive work attitude. Professionals must also be equipped with skills in family and community engagement, in laying the groundwork for mutual respect, and in building relationships. Evidence from the literature review and from all six case studies highlights that in order to develop these skills, urgent investment is required to build capacity across services (including assistants, outreach workers and other support staff), and to systematically promote staff diversity.

**Recommendations:**

- **Preservice training** institutions that prepare professionals to work in early years (ECEC, health, social care etc.) should develop more joint courses, engage in greater collaboration, and offer more joint internships.
- Policymakers should **ensure policies and funding are in place to provide continuous professional development opportunities** for leaders and management from ECEC and other services, for teachers and other professional staff, and for paraprofessionals (e.g. teaching assistants, community mediators, bridging professionals). **Integrated** training courses and seminars, professional learning communities, as well as networking and mentoring, **should be available to develop skills and competences** on the central issues involved in integration, such as networking, cooperation and functioning within integrated services.
- Policymakers should develop **national quality standards and guidance** for staff on integrated working.
- Policymakers should actively promote balance between the qualification requirements for assistants and outreach workers, and the need **to ensure staff diversity and community representation**.

### 3. Supportive policy and funding

#### Supportive policy

Integrated working requires firm political will and commitment at national and regional/local government levels. Examples from the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria; and other cases, suggest that collective ownership and responsibility across policy and service areas is required to promote coordination and integration between sectors. Furthermore, careful attention should be paid to the structural requirements: clear policy frameworks; effective governance and monitoring processes; and adequate funding and financing mechanisms. Programmes such as Sure Start in the UK and Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary highlight the need for integrated policies to focus on early years services and preventive family support, and for this commitment to be shared across all the services involved.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should develop broad **policy and legislative frameworks for universal, inclusive and comprehensive ECEC systems** that are based on children's rights, and which promote an **integrated, multi-sectoral approach to early years intervention and prevention**.
- Policymakers should promote a **progressive universalist approach** that combines universal policies and services for all children with well-targeted, well-coordinated, cross-sectoral and multi-professional programmes and initiatives to increase the accessibility of these services among vulnerable groups such as Roma.
- Policymakers should support **different forms of integrated and high-quality ECEC services, including community-based programmes**, to ensure that they are responsive to the specific needs of children and their parents.

#### Adequate and sustainable funding

The allocation of sufficient long-term financial resources is necessary for integrated policies and services to be effective and sustainable. Adequate funds are needed to ensure the continuity of services, staffing and support for staff, as is the allocation of adequate time.

Due to restricted state budgets for ECEC, innovative integrated early years services often require a combination of funding from various levels of administration (national, regional and local government budgets). EU funds and other external resources (e.g. funding from donor agencies) have proved to be an essential element in ensuring appropriate funding for programmes and initiatives that focus on the inclusion of Roma, such as the Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma, Hungary, and the 'Ready Set Go!' Project in Romania. These examples highlight the need for EU funding instruments to be more explicitly directed towards investments in inclusive, accessible, high-quality and comprehensive early childhood services and integrated working. In particular, increased long-term funding is required to promote integrated approaches to ECEC for all children and families, but is especially necessary to enable the extra efforts required to make services accessible to vulnerable and marginalised groups such as Roma.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should ensure adequate and sustainable funding **to provide resources for the time, efforts and workforce necessary for integrated working in early years services (ECEC, health, social work, etc.)**.

- Policymakers should **provide funding to ensure secure working conditions** (such as wages, support and coaching, working hours, and an adequate child-adult ratio and caseload), in order to attract well-qualified professionals to work as part of an integrated approach to early years services (ECEC, health, social work, etc.).
- Policymakers at national, regional and local government levels should ensure that adequate funding resources are allocated to promote integrated approaches to ECEC, including cross-sectoral service provision, preventive family support, and community involvement.
- For the forthcoming EU funding period 2021–2027, **early childhood should become an investment priority for EU funding instruments**, and in particular for the European Structural and Investment Funds and Erasmus+.

#### 4. Family and community involvement

##### Family involvement and support

The success of integrated working ultimately depends upon the quality of the reciprocal and equal relationships established between professionals and families, both at individual and at group level. Parents possess expert knowledge of their children, and need to be involved as such. A mutual relationship between parents and professionals is essential to ensure better-quality and more accountable service delivery. The Sure Start Children’s Houses in Hungary, Tundzha Municipality in Bulgaria, and the ‘Ready Set Go!’ project in Romania, confirm that meaningful and respectful family involvement has a positive impact on children’s outcomes and upon families as a whole. Families, both children and parents, need to be involved in the development and delivery of services, as well as in evaluation and monitoring.

##### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should recognise the central role played by parents in their child’s development, and thus in ECEC services, and should **ensure that legislation and policies are in place to promote the active involvement of parents** in ECEC, health, social care and other relevant early years services.
- All services should develop a **policy on accessibility** and ways to reach all families, including vulnerable families, using an integrated approach.
- Practitioners should **work towards reciprocal and equal relationships with parents, strengthening parents in their role** as first educators and experts on their own children. Practitioners should not take the parent’s place or decide for them.
- Staff in integrated ECEC networks should **exchange information** about the children and families they serve (or should be serving). This should be carried out with due respect for data protection regulations, but with especial respect for the families themselves.

##### Community involvement

Active community participation is essential for services to become more responsive to community-specific needs. This is particularly important for vulnerable and excluded groups such as Roma, as it helps to develop mutual trust between families and service providers – as documented in, for example, the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary. Community engagement can help services to respond more effectively to children’s needs, with greater understanding of their strengths and difficulties. Evidence from Tundzha

Municipality; the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania, confirms the findings of previous research: that outreach workers such as community mediators and health visitors play a significant role in bridging the gap between education, health and social services, and marginalised communities, particularly the Roma community and Roma parents. By building mutual trust and tapping into community resources, they can facilitate an approach that is better tailored to the needs of specific communities.

**Recommendations:**

- Policymakers at national and regional/local levels should provide the resources required at community level to **develop and support community-based integrated working**.
- Policymakers at municipal and local levels should **engage communities in planning and designing services** to ensure that interventions are adapted to community needs and circumstances. Outreach programmes should be put in place to connect services with communities.
- Service providers and practitioners should develop **innovative and flexible outreach strategies** to engage with vulnerable children and families.

## KURZFASSUNG

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Die Nutzen einer hochwertigen frühkindlichen Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung (FBBE) für junge Kinder, insbesondere aus benachteiligten Gruppen, wurden in zahlreichen Forschungsarbeiten nachgewiesen. Es ist aber auch klar, dass eine Vielzahl von politischen Initiativen, Stellen und Maßnahmen notwendig ist, um die Entwicklung und das Wohl von Kindern und ihren Familien ganzheitlich zu fördern. Keine Maßnahme, kein Dienst oder Sektor kann allein nachhaltige Verbesserungen erreichen. Immer mehr Forscher, Politiker und Fachkräfte erkennen, dass zur Lösung komplexer Probleme wie der Armut und zur Förderung der sozialen Eingliederung politische Ansätze und Unterstützungsangebote besser vernetzt werden müssen. Nur mehrdimensionale, koordinierte und vernetzte Angebote und Maßnahmen in den ersten Lebensjahren können den komplexen und vielfältigen Bedürfnissen aller Kinder und deren Familien gerecht werden, insbesondere in besonderen Gefährdungssituationen, z. B. bei Familien mit Armutserfahrung, Roma-Familien oder Familien mit Migrations- oder Asylhintergrund.

Für diese vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe gibt es viele unterschiedliche Kooperationssysteme und -modelle. Diese sind außerdem kontextspezifisch; jedes Modell geht vom jeweiligen Hilfsbedarf der Kinder und ihrer Familien aus und vernetzt unterschiedliche Partner und/oder Sektoren, die innerhalb ihrer konkreten politischen Rahmenbedingungen zusammenarbeiten. Vernetzte Arbeitsmodelle bilden ein Kontinuum, das von der bloßen Koordination über Kooperation und Vernetzung bis zur vollen Integration reicht, bei der unterschiedliche Dienste zur Verbesserung ihrer Hilfsangebote in einer einzigen Organisation gebündelt werden. Je nach den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und ihrer Familien können an der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe unterschiedlichste Sektoren und Dienste beteiligt sein. Dazu gehören: Stellen, die frühkindliche Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung, präventive Gesundheitsfürsorge, präventive Familienhilfe und außerschulische Betreuungsangebote, Schulen sowie Dienstleister im kulturellen Sektor (Bibliotheken, Gemeinde- und Jugendzentren). Auch gibt es unterschiedliche Netzwerkformen, z. B. die Verknüpfung von Kinderbetreuung und frühkindlicher Bildung in einem integrierten System der FBBE (vertikales Netzwerk) oder ein breiterer Ansatz, an dem neben Angeboten der FBBE auch Dienste in anderen Sektoren beteiligt sind, z. B. Gesundheitswesen und soziale Dienste (horizontales Netzwerk). In diesem Bericht betrachten wir die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe als Form der professionellen Zusammenarbeit innerhalb eines Netzwerks oder einer Partnerschaft, durch die eine ganze Bandbreite von Hilfen und Dienstleistungen für Familien und Kinder angeboten werden, die frei zugänglich sind, in denen Familien und Kinder aktiv beteiligt und bei denen die Eltern als primäre Erziehungsinstanz respektiert werden (Gordon et al., 2016).

Der Bericht will vor allem untersuchen, welchen Mehrwert die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe für die Betreuung aller Familien, jedoch insbesondere von besonders gefährdeten und benachteiligten Kindern und Familien bietet, welche Voraussetzung dafür gegeben sein müssen und welche Rolle Einrichtungen der FBBE in diesen Netzwerken spielen. Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf Kindern und Familien aus der Gruppe der Roma, einer der am stärksten benachteiligten Gruppen in Europa, die häufig in einem Teufelskreis aus Armut, Ausgrenzung und Diskriminierung gefangen sind.

Der Bericht richtet sich an Politiker und Fachkräfte im Bereich der frühkindlichen Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung. Er orientiert sich an den folgenden Fragen:

- Welche Dienste und Funktionen sollten an der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe beteiligt sein und welche Rolle spielt dabei insbesondere die FBBE?
- Welche inspirierenden Beispiele für vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe gibt es in Europa bereits?

- Was ist der Mehrwert der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (für Kinder und Familien, Fachkräfte, Politiker) im Allgemeinen und insbesondere für die Roma?
- Welche Bedingungen braucht die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe im allgemeinen und mit besonderer Ausrichtung auf die Bedürfnisse von Roma?

Der Bericht untersucht unterschiedliche benachteiligte Gesellschaftsgruppen und insbesondere Kinder und Familien aus der Gruppe der Roma. Seine Grundlage bilden eine Auswertung der Forschungsliteratur und sechs Fallstudien, die unterschiedliche Formen der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in ihrem jeweiligen Kontext vorstellen. Konkret behandeln die Fallstudien das *Early Years Children and Family Centre* in Newry (Vereinigtes Königreich), die *Brückenbauer* an Genter Vorschulen (Belgien), die Initiative *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin, das Kinderbetreuung in Flüchtlingsunterkünften anbietet (Deutschland), das Kinderhaus *Sure Start* in Porcsalma (Ungarn); das kommunale Kindergarten-Netzwerk der Gemeinde Tundzha (Bulgarien) und das Projekt *Ready Set Go!* (Rumänien). Die praktische Daten aus den Fallstudien (Teil II) ergänzen und unterfüttern den eher theoretischen Teil des Berichts (Teil I). Auf dieser Grundlage werden Mehrwert und Voraussetzungen einer vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe diskutiert (in den Teilen III bzw. IV) und schließlich die politischen Empfehlungen des Bericht formuliert.

## Wichtige Ergebnisse

### Stellung der FBBE in der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe

- Die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe ist eine Reaktion auf die vielfältigen Probleme und konkreten Bedürfnisse von Kindern und Familien und soll dazu beitragen, allen Kindern und Familien und insbesondere denjenigen aus benachteiligten Gruppen bessere Unterstützungsangebote bereitzustellen. Sie kann den Zugang zur FBBE und anderen Angeboten erleichtern und das Wissen über diese Angebote verbessern. Durch die Vernetzung unterschiedlicher Stellen können abrupte Übergänge zwischen unterschiedlichen Stellen sowie sich überschneidende Angebote vermieden werden.
- Die FBBE spielt als Hauptpartner oder sogar Initiator von Kooperationen in der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe eine wichtige Rolle. Sie kann als wichtiges Bindeglied zwischen Kindern und Familien und anderen Hilfsangeboten dienen: durch Vermittlung an die zuständigen Stellen, die Vernetzung der Stellen untereinander, Kooperation bei der Erbringung von Dienstleistungen, Unterstützung der Kinder und Familien bei der Suche nach anderen Angeboten und Bereitstellung von Informationen zur FBBE an andere Stellen. Es ist entscheidend, dass Politik und Dienstleister die Eltern als primäre Erziehungsinstanz anerkennen und sie gemeinsam Unterstützungsangebote entwickeln, die nicht die Eignung der Eltern in Frage stellen, sondern diese wertschätzen, und sich an deren tatsächlichen Bedürfnissen orientieren.
- Dieser Bericht identifiziert zahlreiche Dienste und Funktionen, die in Europa bereits bestehen und mit der FBBE kombiniert oder vernetzt werden könnten. Dazu gehören:
  - Vollständig integrierte Zentren, wie die Familienzentren in Schweden und die 'Sure Start'-Zentren im Vereinigten Königreich,
  - vernetzte Kooperation und Koordination, wie bei den *Huizen van het Kind* ('Kinderhäuser') in Flandern, in denen unterschiedliche Partner der präventiven Familienhilfe zusammenarbeiten, oder die Initiative der Gemeinde Tundzha in Bulgarien, die unterschiedliche Angebote kombiniert und die FBBE als Zugang zur Gemeinschaft nutzt, durch den weitere Angebote vermittelt werden können,
  - vernetzte Programme und Projekte, wie das Projekt 'Ready Set Go!' in Rumänien.

- Vernetzte Systeme und Angebote der FBBE sollten sich am Schutz der Rechte des Kindes orientieren und nicht noch mehr zielgerichtete Maßnahmen, Auflagen und 'befristete Hilfe' anbieten, sondern sich für die Verbesserung allgemeiner Dienstleistungen einsetzen. Allgemeine Dienstleistungen schließen zielgerichtete Ansätze aber nicht aus: innerhalb des allgemeinen Angebots können zusätzlich Maßnahmen entwickelt werden, die sich an bestimmte Gruppen richten und auf deren Bedürfnisse zugeschnitten sind, ohne sie zu stigmatisieren.

### Vorteile der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe

- Die Forschungsliteratur und Daten von Fallstudien zeigen klar, dass hochwertige Angebote der FBBE, die Kinderbetreuung mit Bildungs-, Gesundheits-, Sozial- und anderen Dienstleistungen verbinden, kognitive Fähigkeiten und Verhalten sowie Gesundheit und Wohlbefinden der Kinder verbessern. Dies hat auch der ISOTIS-Bericht zur stellenübergreifenden Kinder- und Jugendhilfe festgestellt (Barnes et al., 2018).
- Zahlreiche Daten der Projekte 'Sure Start' im Vereinigten Königreich und der 'Sure Start'-Kinderhäuser in Ungarn deuten darauf hin, dass frühzeitige Unterstützung besonders wichtig ist und eine bessere Vernetzung unterschiedlicher Sektoren erfordert. Ein umfassendes System von Unterstützungsmaßnahmen in den ersten Lebensjahren sollten sich an den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und deren Familien orientieren. Dazu gehören zum Beispiel die Gesundheitsfürsorge vor und nach der Geburt, die frühkindliche Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung und die präventive Familienhilfe.
- Die Vernetzung der zuständigen Dienste und Einrichtungen kann den Zugang zu Hilfsangeboten erleichtern und beschleunigen, durch klare Vereinbarungen den Informationsaustausch und die Kommunikation verbessern, mehr Absprache bei der Fallplanung ermöglichen, ganzheitliche Ansätze und nahtlose Unterstützung fördern und sich dadurch positiv auf Kinder und deren Familien auswirken. Wie der Fall der 'Brückenbauer' an Genter Vorschulen beweist, schätzen die Eltern eine vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in den ersten Lebensjahren, weil sie den Zugang zu und den Übergang zwischen unterschiedlichen Diensten und Einrichtungen erleichtert.
- Die Auswertung von Projektdaten, wie z. B. aus dem rumänischen Projekt 'Ready Set Go!' zeigen, dass eine vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, bei der einerseits die Kapazität von Angeboten der FBBE ausgebaut und deren Qualität verbessert und andererseits Maßnahmen zur Unterstützung von Eltern und Stärkung der Roma-Gemeinden angeboten werden, den Zugang zu und die Teilnahme an der FBBE messbar verbessert und den Übergang zur Grundschule erleichtert.
- Daten aus Projekten wie den 'Sure Start'-Kinderhäuser in Ungarn und von regionalen Initiativen wie die der Gemeinde bulgarischen Gemeinde Tundzha bestätigen, dass vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, die sich auf frühzeitige Intervention konzentriert und vor allem auf die FBBE baut, zur Stärkung von Gemeinschaften und zur Entwicklung starker lokaler Partnerschaften beiträgt und die soziale Eingliederung der Roma fördert.
- Von der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe profitieren sowohl Einrichtungen und Fachkräfte der FBBE als auch die Politik. Netzwerke können die Dopplung von Maßnahmen in unterschiedlichen Sektoren verhindern und knappe finanzielle, personelle und materielle Ressourcen auf nationaler, regionaler und lokaler Ebene maximieren. Die koordinierte Bereitstellung und Vernetzung von Unterstützungsangeboten erzeugt Synergien zwischen den einzelnen Maßnahmen, verbessert ihre Wirksamkeit und Kosteneffizienz und fördert die soziale Eingliederung.

## Wichtige Voraussetzungen für eine vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe

Eine vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe muss immer von den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und Familien im lokalen Kontext ausgehen. Sie erfordert sorgfältig Planung, Engagement und Enthusiasmus der beteiligten Partner, die häufig organisatorische, strukturelle und kulturelle Barrieren überwinden und neue Kompetenzen und neue Arbeitsverfahren entwickeln müssen. Auf der Grundlage der Literaturübersicht und Fallstudien verweist dieser Bericht auf vier unabdingbare Voraussetzungen für die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe:

1. Eine gemeinsame Vision, die von den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und ihrer Familien in ihrem Umfeld ausgeht.
2. Ein kompetentes System mit einer starken Führung und Mitarbeitern, die in der Lage sind, die eigene Arbeit zu hinterfragen.
3. Politische Unterstützung und ausreichende Finanzierung.
4. Beteiligung der Familien und des sozialen Umfelds.

Die folgenden Schlussfolgerungen und Empfehlungen beziehen sich auf diese vier Voraussetzungen.

## Fazit und Empfehlungen

### 1. Eine gemeinsame Vision, die von den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und ihrer Familien ausgeht

#### Eine gemeinsame Vision auf nationaler Ebene

Eine gemeinsame Vision auf nationaler Ebene ist eine wesentliche Voraussetzung für die volle Kooperation zwischen den einzelnen Sektoren, die die frühkindliche Entwicklung beeinflussen (Gesundheit, Sozialfürsorge, Bildungssystem und -einrichtungen, Beschäftigung, Wohnen); nur durch sie ist eine kohärente und durchgehende Unterstützung von der Schwangerschaft bis weit ins schulpflichtige Alter gewährleistet. Damit die Vision und übrigens auch die strategischen Pläne und/oder nationalen politischen Rahmenbedingungen Realität werden können, müssen alle wichtigen Akteure an der Diskussion teilnehmen, d. h. politische Entscheidungsträger in den einzelnen Sektoren, Dienstleister, Eltern und andere Betroffene. Dies erfordert Führungsqualitäten, politischen Willen, Engagement, Zeit und die nötigen finanziellen und personellen Mittel.

‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ in Schottland, ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures’ in Irland, ‘Every Child Matters’ in England und Wales und die flämische Verordnung zur präventiven Familienhilfe (2014) durch die *Huizen van het Kind* (‘Kinderhäuser’) sind alles Beispiele für bahnbrechende nationale Initiativen zum Schutz des Kindeswohls und Förderung der sektorenübergreifenden Kooperation und vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in den ersten Lebensjahren.

#### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte eine **nationale Vision für die frühkindliche Förderung** in allen relevanten Sektoren entwickeln. Diese Vision (z. B. ein nationales Grundsatzpapier) sollte sich an den Rechten des Kindes und dem Respekt von Vielfalt orientieren und darauf abzielen, die FBBE möglichst umfassend zu vernetzen, einschließlich der Bereiche Gesundheit und Kinderschutz, Kinderbetreuung und Bildung, soziale Eingliederung und Chancengleichheit.
- Die Politik und die Stellen, die Dienste erbringen, sollten ausreichend Zeit und Mittel für den Dialog und die für eine vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe nötigen Diskussionen bereitstellen.

### **Eine gemeinsame Vision auf lokaler Ebene und innerhalb der beteiligten Einrichtungen**

Beispiele für vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe aus dem Programm 'Sure Start' im Vereinigten Königreich, den 'Brückenbauern' im belgischen Gent, dem 'Sure Start' Kinderhaus in der Gemeinde Porcsalma in Ungarn und der Initiative der bulgarischen Stadt Tundzha zeigen, dass eine **gemeinsame Vision auf lokaler bzw. regionaler Ebene und auf institutioneller Ebene** notwendig ist, damit die beteiligten Stellen und Anbieter sich für einen einheitlichen Ansatz engagieren, der bestmöglich auf die Bedürfnisse jedes Kindes und jeder Familie eingeht. Insbesondere die Einrichtungen der FBBE (Tagesstätten und Vorschulen) und Stellen der präventiven Familienhilfe, präventiven Gesundheitsfürsorge und sozialen Fürsorge sollten hinter dieser gemeinsamen Vision stehen. Ein zentrales Element dieser Vision sollte die Frage sein, warum und wie die Angebote vernetzt werden sollten.

#### **Empfehlungen:**

- Regionale bzw. lokale Behörden, Dienstleister und Fachkräfte, die für die frühkindliche Förderung zuständig sind, sollten eine gemeinsame Vision und gemeinsame Ziele entwickeln, damit die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe dem Kindeswohl dient und **auf die mehrdimensionalen Bedürfnisse benachteiligter Kinder und Familien** eingehen kann.
- Lokale Behörden, Einrichtungen und Fachkräfte sollten die Rollen und Zuständigkeiten des Netzwerks und aller beteiligten Dienstleister klar definieren und respektieren.

## **2. Ein kompetentes System mit einer starken Führung und Mitarbeitern, die in der Lage sind, die eigene Arbeit zu hinterfragen**

Die aus Projekten und Initiativen, wie 'Sure Start' im Vereinigten Königreich, den 'Sure Start' Kinderhäusern in Ungarn, den 'Brückenbauern' im belgischen Gent und der Initiative der bulgarischen Stadt Tundzha gewonnenen Daten zeigen, dass eine vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe nicht in die Verantwortung einzelner Fachkräfte fallen darf, sondern nur als gemeinsame Anstrengung fachübergreifender Teams, Bildungseinrichtungen und lokaler Behörden gelingen kann. Die Erfahrungen des Projekts 'Ready Set Go!' in Rumänien betonen die wichtige Rolle lokaler NRO und Vereine für den Erfolg der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe.

### **Ein kompetentes System**

Die Forschungsdaten deuten darauf hin, dass der Aufbau großflächiger Netzwerke der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe nur gelingen kann, wenn ein kompetentes System entwickelt wird, das Beratung und Unterstützung anbietet und auf allen Ebenen (individuell, Team und Institution) neue Kompetenzen vermittelt. Dazu gehören die Schaffung interdisziplinärer Teams, Team-Lernprozesse, klare Protokolle und Aufgaben, gemeinsame Schulungen, das Teilen von Know-how, ein häufiger und regelmäßiger Informationsaustausch und die Reflexion der eigenen Praxis.

Die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe in einem kompetenten System braucht außerdem günstige strukturellen Bedingungen. Dazu gehören genug Zeit und Ressourcen für die Entwicklung einer gemeinsamen Vision, den Aufbau von Partnerschaften und Vertrauen zwischen Mitarbeitern und Familien und der Planung von Maßnahmen, die den Bedürfnissen der Kinder und Familien entsprechen.

#### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte die Entwicklung kompetenter Systeme der frühkindlichen Betreuung, Bildung und Erziehung fördern, die die Fachkräfte vor Ort beraten und unterstützen, die Verwaltung von Dienstleistungen vereinfachen und es den Einrichtungen ermöglichen, **die für die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe nötigen Kompetenzen zu entwickeln.**
- Die Politik sollte die **strukturellen Bedingungen** für die Vernetzung der für die Kinder- und Jugendhilfe zuständigen Stellen und Einrichtungen in allen Sektoren schaffen. Einrichtungen der FBBE können dabei als Schnittstellen für die Vernetzung dienen.
- Dienstleister und Management sollten **Arbeitszeit und Ressourcen für die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe bereitstellen**, zur der auch die häufige sachliche Kommunikation mit anderen Stellen gehört; dazu können zum Beispiel kinderfreie Arbeitszeiten für die Reflexion der eigenen Praxis, Teamsitzungen, Fallberichte, Erfahrungsaustausch und Schulung und Beratung geschaffen werden.
- Führungskräfte und Mitarbeiter sollten **klare und transparente berufliche Verhaltensregeln entwickeln**, in denen auch der Austausch von Informationen und Daten geregelt wird.

#### Führungskompetenz

Eine starke, engagierte und inspirierende Leitung bildete in allen sechs Fällen, die für diesen Bericht untersucht wurden – ‘Sure Start’ in Newry im Vereinigten Königreich, die *Brückenbauer* an Vorschulen im belgischen Gent, die Initiative *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin, das ‘Sure Start’-Kinderhaus in Porcsalma in Ungarn, die Gemeinde Tundzha in Bulgarien und das Projekt *Ready Set Go!* in Rumänien – eine wichtige Voraussetzung für den Projekterfolg. Um die Kohärenz zu gewährleisten, die zur Erreichung gemeinsamer Ziele und die Überwindung fragmentierter Modelle nötig ist, müssen nationale, regionale und lokale Regierungen eine klare Führungsrolle übernehmen. In den betroffenen Einrichtungen muss die Führungsebene die Mitarbeiter motivieren, unterstützen und wertschätzen, sie muss die Rollen der Mitarbeiter und ihre Erwartungen klar definieren und sie darf dabei das Ziel nicht aus dem Blick verlieren. Außerdem müssen die richtigen Leute an der richtigen Stelle sitzen - das heißt, die Einrichtungen müssen den Fachkräften, die mit der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe befasst sind, ein klares Mandat erteilen und dafür sorgen, dass sie für die Arbeit im Rahmen des Netzwerks qualifiziert sind.

#### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte in die **Entwicklung von Führungskompetenzen** auf der Ebene der regionalen bzw. lokalen Regierungen (Bürgermeister, Leiter von Behörden, die für die FBBE zuständig sind, Koordinatoren), innerhalb der Netzwerke (Netzwerkkoordinatoren) und in den beteiligten Einrichtungen (Leitung und Management in der FBBE, im Gesundheitswesen, Familienzentren usw.) investieren, um die Vernetzung aller für die frühkindliche Förderung und den Kinderschutz zuständigen Stellen zu fördern. Um die Kompetenz der Führungskräfte zu verbessern, sollten spezielle Schulungen und Seminare sowie Veranstaltungen zur Netzwerkbildung und zum Informationsaustausch angeboten werden. Insbesondere sollten Führungskräfte in der Lage sein, Veränderungsprozesse zu managen, kooperative Arbeitsformen zu fördern und multidisziplinäre Teams zu inspirieren und zu motivieren.

- Führungskräfte der beteiligten Stellen und Einrichtungen sollten die **Voraussetzungen schaffen** für Kooperation und Vernetzung in der FBBE, sie sollten gegenseitigen Respekt und Solidarität fördern und **demokratische Entscheidungsprozesse** ermöglichen.

### Zur Reflexion fähige Mitarbeiter

Die Arbeit innerhalb eines Netzwerks erfordert gut ausgebildete, erfahrene und kompetente Mitarbeiter mit besonderen Kompetenzen oder Eigenschaften, z. B. Bereitschaft, mit anderen zusammen zu arbeiten und die eigene Praxis zu hinterfragen, Offenheit für gemeinsame Lernprozesse und die Fähigkeit, anderen bei der Arbeit zu helfen und offen zu begegnen. Außerdem müssen die Fachkräfte in der Lage sein, mit Familien und dem sozialen Umfeld zu kommunizieren, eine Basis für gegenseitigen Respekt zu finden und Vertrauen aufzubauen. Wie die Forschungsliteratur und die Daten aus den Fallstudien zeigen, sind zur Entwicklung dieser Kompetenzen schnelle Investitionen in den Kapazitätsausbau aller beteiligten Stellen notwendig (auch für Assistenten, Lotsen und andere Aushilfskräfte); außerdem sollte die Diversität der Mitarbeiter systematisch erhöht werden.

### Empfehlungen:

- **Vorbereitende Schulungen** Einrichtungen, die Fachkräfte für die Arbeit in der Kinderhilfe vorbereiten (FBBE, Gesundheit, Sozialfürsorge usw.) sollten mehr gemeinsame Kurse entwickeln, stärker zusammenarbeiten und gemeinsame Praktika anbieten.
- Die Politik sollte den geeigneten **politischen Rahmen und finanzielle Mittel für Angebote der fortlaufenden beruflichen Weiterbildung** für Leitung und Management in der FBBE und anderen Einrichtungen, für Pädagogen und andere Fachkräfte sowie für Aushilfskräfte (z. B. Lehrerassistenten, Mediatoren und Bildungslotsen) bereitstellen. **Interdisziplinäre** Schulungen und Seminare, Lernteams, Netzwerke und ein Mentorensystem sind mögliche Angebote **zur Entwicklung der nötigen Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen** für die wichtigsten Aspekte der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, wie dem Aufbau von Netzwerken, Kooperation und die Arbeit in vernetzten Einrichtungen.
- Die Politik sollte **nationale Qualitätsstandards und Leitlinien** für die Mitarbeiter der vernetzten Kinder- und Jugendhilfe entwickeln.
- Die Politik sollte sich aktiv für ein Gleichgewicht zwischen den Qualifikationsvorgaben für Assistenten und Gemeinschaftslotsen und der Notwendigkeit einsetzen, die **Diversität der Mitarbeiter und Vertretung der lokalen Gemeinschaft** zu gewährleisten.

## 3. Politische Unterstützung und ausreichende Finanzierung

### Politische Unterstützung

Die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe braucht einen festen politischen Willen und das Engagement der nationalen und regionalen bzw. kommunalen Regierungsebene. Das Beispiel der Brückenbauer im belgischen Gent, des Projekts im bulgarischen Tundzha und anderer Fälle zeigt, dass eine gelungene Koordination und Vernetzung mehrere Sektoren nur möglich ist, wenn die Politik und alle betroffenen Sektoren das Projekt gemeinsam unterstützen und sich in gleichem Maße dafür verantwortlich fühlen. Außerdem sollte sorgfältig auf die strukturellen Bedingungen geachtet werden: ein klarer politischer Rahmen, effiziente Steuerungs- und Kontrollverfahren und angemessene Finanzierungsmechanismen. An Programmen wie 'Sure Start' im Vereinigten Königreich und den 'Sure Start'-Kinderhäusern in Ungarn ist zu sehen, wie wichtig es ist, dass sich

die Politik auf Unterstützungsmaßnahmen in den ersten Lebensjahren und die präventive Familienhilfe konzentriert und alle beteiligten Einrichtungen dieses Engagement teilen.

#### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte eine weiten **politischen und gesetzlichen Rahmen für universelle, auf Inklusion abzielende und umfassende Systeme der FBBE** schaffen, der von den Rechten des Kindes ausgeht und **vernetzte und sektorenübergreifende Konzepte für Intervention und Prävention in den ersten Lebensjahren** erleichtert.
- Die Politik sollte **progressive und ganzheitliche Ansätze** fördern, die allgemeine politische Maßnahmen und Dienstleistungen für alle Kinder mit zielgerichteten und sorgfältig koordinierten sektoren- und fachübergreifenden Programmen und Initiativen kombinieren, die benachteiligten Gruppen wie den Roma den Zugang zu den allgemeinen Angeboten erleichtern.
- Die Politik sollte **unterschiedliche Formen vernetzter und hochwertiger Angebote der FBBE, einschließlich von gemeindenahen Programmen** unterstützen und gewährleisten, dass diese den konkreten Bedürfnissen von Kindern und deren Eltern entsprechen.

#### Angemessene und nachhaltige Finanzierung

Vernetzte Ansätze und Angebote können nur dann erfolgreich und nachhaltig sein, wenn ihnen langfristig genug finanzielle Mittel zur Verfügung stehen. Nur mit einer angemessenen Finanzierung ist die Kontinuität der Leistungen und personellen Ausstattung und eine laufende Unterstützung der Mitarbeiter gewährleistet; ebenso wichtig ist genug Zeit.

Weil im Staatshaushalt oft nur begrenzte Mittel für die FBBE zur Verfügung stehen, sind innovative vernetzte Angebote der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe oft auf eine Mischfinanzierung durch mehrere Regierungsebenen (national, regional und kommunal) angewiesen. EU-Fördermittel und andere externe Ressourcen (z. B. Mittel von Geberorganisationen) haben sich als wichtiges Element bei der Finanzierung von Programmen und Initiativen erwiesen, die sich für die Eingliederung der Roma einsetzen, wie dem 'Sure Start'-Kinderhaus im ungarischen Porcsalma und dem Projekt 'Ready Set Go!' in Rumänien. Diese Beispiele zeigen, wie wichtig es ist, dass die Finanzierungsinstrumente der EU ausdrücklich auf die finanzielle Förderung von inklusiven, zugänglichen, hochwertigen und umfassenden Unterstützungsangebote in den ersten Lebensjahren und die vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe ausgerichtet werden. Vernetzten Ansätze der FBBE für alle Kinder und Familien sind auf eine bessere langfristige Finanzierung angewiesen; dies gilt umso mehr für die zusätzlichen Maßnahmen, die nötig sind, um benachteiligten und marginalisierten Gruppen wie den Roma den Zugang zu den allgemeinen Angeboten zu ermöglichen.

#### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte eine ausreichende und nachhaltige Finanzierung gewährleisten und damit **Mittel für die Arbeitsstunden, Programme und Mitarbeiter bereitstellen, die nötig sind, um die Unterstützungsangebote in den ersten Lebensjahren (FBBE, Gesundheit, Sozialfürsorge usw.) zu vernetzen.**
- Die Politik sollte **Mittel für sichere Arbeitsbedingungen bereitstellen** (in Bezug auf Gehälter, Unterstützung und Beratung, Arbeitszeiten, Betreuungsschlüssen und Fallbelastung), um gut ausgebildete Fachkräfte für die Arbeit in Netzwerken der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (FBBE, Gesundheit, Sozialfürsorge usw.) zu gewinnen.

- Die Politik auf nationaler, regionaler und kommunaler Ebene sollte für die Förderung integrierter Ansätze der FBBE, wie sektorenübergreifende Dienstleistungen, präventive Familienhilfe und die Partizipation der betroffenen Gemeinschaften, ausreichende Mittel veranschlagen.
- Im nächsten Finanzierungszeitraum der EU 2021-2027 **sollte die frühkindliche Bildung zu einer der Prioritäten für die Förderinstrumente der EU** und insbesondere für die Europäischen Struktur- und Investitionsfonds und Erasmus+ gehören.

#### 4. Beteiligung der Familien und des sozialen Umfelds

##### Beteiligung und Unterstützung der Familien

Letztlich hängt der Erfolg der vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe davon ab, ob es gelingt, sowohl auf individueller als auch auf Gruppenebene eine beiderseitige und gleichberechtigte Beziehung zwischen den beteiligten Fachkräften und den Familien aufzubauen. Eltern kennen ihr Kind am besten und müssen daher entsprechend beteiligt werden. Eine beiderseitige Beziehung zwischen Eltern und Fachkräften ist wichtig, um die Unterstützungsangebote zu verbessern und eine Rechenschaftspflicht zu gewährleisten. Die 'Sure Start'-Kinderhäuser in Ungarn, die Initiative im bulgarischen Tundzha und das Projekt 'Ready Set Go!' in Rumänien bestätigen, dass eine inhaltliche und respektvolle Beteiligung der Eltern den Kindern und der ganzen Familien zugutekommt. Die Familien, d. h. Kinder und Eltern, müssen in die Entwicklung und Umsetzung von Maßnahmen und auch in deren Auswertung und Kontrolle einbezogen werden.

##### Empfehlungen:

- Die Politik sollte die zentrale Rolle der Eltern für die Entwicklung des Kindes und damit für die FBBE anerkennen und **durch Rechtsvorschriften und politische Leitlinien die aktive Beteiligung der Eltern** an der FBBE, der Gesundheits- und Sozialfürsorge und anderen Leistungen für die ersten Lebensjahre gewährleisten.
- Die Einrichtungen sollte eine **Politik der Zugänglichkeit** entwickeln und durch einen Netzwerkansatz versuchen, alle - d. h. auch benachteiligte - Familien zu erreichen.
- Pädagogische Fachkräfte sollten **eine beiderseitige und gleichberechtigte Beziehung zu den Eltern anstreben und die Rolle der Eltern** als primäre Erziehungsinstanz und Experten für die eigenen Kinder **stärken**. Sie dürfen die Eltern weder ersetzen noch über die Köpfe der Eltern hinweg Entscheidungen treffen.
- Die Mitarbeiter von FBBE-Netzwerken sollten über die Kinder und Familien, die sie betreuen (oder betreuen sollten) **Informationen austauschen**. Dabei sollten aber die geltenden Datenschutzvorschriften eingehalten und die Privatsphäre der Familien respektiert werden.

##### Beteiligung des sozialen Umfelds

Eine aktive Beteiligung des sozialen Umfelds ist entscheidend, um die Unterstützungsangebote besser auf die konkreten Bedürfnisse vor Ort zuschneiden zu können. Bei benachteiligten und ausgegrenzten Gruppen wie den Roma ist dies besonders wichtig, weil es das gegenseitige Vertrauen zwischen den Familien und den zuständigen Stellen stärkt; dies ist zum Beispiel beim Kinderhaus 'Sure Start' im ungarischen Porcsalma gut dokumentiert. Die Einbeziehung des Umfelds kann dabei helfen, genauer auf die Bedürfnisse der Kinder einzugehen und ihre Stärken und Probleme besser zu verstehen. Die Daten aus Tundzha, von den 'Brückenbauern' im belgischen Gent und dem Projekt 'Ready Set Go!' in Rumänien bestätigen die Ergebnisse älterer Forschungsprojekte:

aufsuchende Sozialarbeiter wie Mediatoren und Gesundheitslotsen spielen eine wichtige Rolle, um die Kluft zwischen Bildungs-, Gesundheits- und Sozialeinrichtungen und marginalisierten Gruppen, insbesondere Roma-Gemeinden und Roma-Eltern zu überwinden. Indem sie wechselseitiges Vertrauen aufbauen und die im Umfeld vorhandenen Ressourcen nutzen, ermöglichen sie die Entwicklung von Ansätzen, die genauer auf die Bedürfnisse der jeweiligen Zielgruppen zugeschnitten sind.

#### **Empfehlungen:**

- Die Politik auf nationaler und regionaler bzw. kommunaler Ebene, sollte die nötigen Mittel bereitstellen, um vor Ort **eine auch in der Zielgruppe vernetzte Kinder- und Jugendhilfe zu entwickeln und zu fördern.**
- Die Politik auf kommunaler und lokaler Ebene sollte **die betroffenen Gemeinschaften an der Planung und Gestaltung von Angeboten beteiligen** und so gewährleisten, dass die Maßnahmen an die Bedürfnisse und Situation vor Ort angepasst sind. Es sollten spezielle Programme der aufsuchenden Sozialarbeit als Brücke zwischen den Einrichtungen und der lokalen Gemeinschaft eingerichtet werden.
- Einrichtungen und Fachkräfte sollten **innovative und flexible Strategien** entwickeln, wie sie benachteiligte Kinder und Familien besser erreichen können.

## RÉSUMÉ ANALYTIQUE

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Si les avantages de l'éducation et de l'accueil de qualité des jeunes enfants (EAJE) ont largement fait leurs preuves auprès des jeunes enfants, en particulier auprès de ceux appartenant à des groupes vulnérables, il est clair que les efforts visant à améliorer le développement et le bien-être des enfants et de leurs familles doivent impliquer un large éventail de politiques, de services et d'actions. Il n'existe aucune intervention, aucun service ni aucun secteur qui soit capable, à lui seul, de mettre en œuvre des améliorations durables. Les chercheurs, les décideurs politiques et les travailleurs reconnaissent de plus en plus que les politiques et les services doivent être mieux intégrés pour pouvoir traiter efficacement les problèmes complexes tels que la pauvreté et favoriser l'inclusion sociale. Seules des réponses et des interventions pluridimensionnelles, alignées et intégrées pendant la petite enfance peuvent répondre aux besoins complexes et multiples de tous les enfants et de leurs familles, notamment celles qui se trouvent en situation de vulnérabilité comme les familles vivant dans la pauvreté, les familles roms ou les familles confrontées à des contextes de migration ou d'asile.

Le concept du travail intégré couvre une multitude de systèmes et modèles coopératifs. Il est spécifique au contexte : il existe différents modèles, partant des besoins spécifiques des enfants et des familles, avec différents partenaires et/ou secteurs impliqués dans des contextes politiques distincts. Les approches inhérentes au travail intégré sont souvent perçues comme un continuum allant de la coopération à la pleine intégration, en passant par la collaboration et la coordination, et qui réunit différents services au sein d'une seule et même organisation afin d'améliorer les services fournis. Un large éventail de secteurs et de services peuvent être impliqués dans le travail intégré, en fonction des besoins des enfants et de leurs familles, parmi lesquels : les services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants, les centres de santé préventive, les services de soutien familial préventif, les écoles, l'accueil extrascolaire ainsi que les services du secteur culturel (tels que les bibliothèques, les centres communautaires). Le travail intégré peut faire référence à des types d'intégration spécifiques (intégration verticale, telle que l'association de l'accueil des enfants et de l'éducation préscolaire, ces deux éléments faisant partie d'un système intégré d'EAJE) ou aller plus loin, en associant la fourniture des services d'EAJE à des services relevant d'autres secteurs tels que la santé ou les services sociaux (intégration horizontale). Dans ce rapport, nous considérons le travail intégré comme une forme de coopération professionnelle au sein d'un réseau ou d'un partenariat, qui fournit une gamme de services de soutien aux familles et aux enfants, accessibles à tous, auxquels les familles et les enfants peuvent participer et où les parents sont respectés en tant que premiers éducateurs (Gordon et coll., 2016).

L'objectif principal de ce rapport est d'examiner la valeur ajoutée apportée par le travail intégré et les conditions préalables à ce dernier, ainsi que le rôle crucial joué par les services d'EAJE, afin de mieux servir toutes les familles, mais plus particulièrement les enfants et les familles vulnérables et défavorisés. Une attention particulière est accordée aux enfants roms et à leurs familles, qui figurent parmi les groupes les plus vulnérables en Europe et sont souvent piégés dans le cercle vicieux de la pauvreté, de l'exclusion et de la discrimination.

Ce rapport est destiné aux décideurs politiques et aux professionnels du secteur de l'éducation et de l'accueil des jeunes enfants. Il est guidé par les questions suivantes :

- Quels services ou fonctions doivent être impliqués dans le travail intégré, avec une attention particulière accordée au rôle que peut jouer l'EAJE ?
- Quels exemples inspirants de travail intégré existent déjà en Europe ?
- Quelle est la valeur ajoutée du travail intégré (pour les enfants et les familles, pour les professionnels, pour les décideurs politiques) en général, et plus spécifiquement pour les Roms ?

- Quelles sont les conditions préalables au travail intégré en général, et plus spécifiquement au travail intégré visant à répondre aux besoins des Roms ?

Le rapport met l'accent sur différents groupes d'enfants et de familles vulnérables, et plus particulièrement sur les Roms. Il repose sur une analyse documentaire et sur six études de cas qui illustrent différents modes de travail intégré dans différents contextes. Plus précisément, les études de cas portent sur l'*Early Years Children and Family Centre* à Newry (Royaume-Uni), les relais professionnels dans les écoles maternelles gantoises (Belgique), le *Sprungbrettangebot* à Berlin, qui fait le lien entre les centres pour réfugiés et les services d'accueil d'enfants (Allemagne), la *Sure Start Children's House* à Porcsalma (Hongrie), le réseau de jardins d'enfants municipaux de Tundzha (Bulgarie) et le projet « Ready Set Go! » (Roumanie). Les preuves issues de ces études de cas (Partie II) encadrent et complètent la partie plus théorique de ce rapport (Partie I). Elles servent de base de discussion sur la valeur ajoutée et les conditions préalables du travail intégré (abordées respectivement dans les Parties III et IV) et alimentent les recommandations politiques du rapport.

## Principaux constats

### La place de l'EAJE dans le travail intégré

- Le travail intégré vise à améliorer les services fournis à tous les enfants et à leurs familles, et plus particulièrement aux enfants et familles vulnérables, en répondant à leurs situations multiples et à leurs besoins concrets. Il peut favoriser l'accessibilité de l'EAJE et des autres services de soutien, mais également leur connaissance et leur compréhension. En facilitant l'interconnexion des services, le travail intégré peut également permettre d'éviter les transitions abruptes entre les services et les chevauchements dans les services fournis.
- L'EAJE joue un rôle crucial en tant que partenaire essentiel, voire en tant qu'initiateur, dans le contexte du travail intégré. Les services d'EAJE peuvent jouer un rôle de pivot dans la mise en relation des enfants et des familles avec des services à même de leur apporter différentes formes de soutien : fournir des recommandations appropriées, interconnecter les services, coopérer pour améliorer les services fournis, permettre aux enfants et aux familles de connaître d'autres services, et faire connaître l'EAJE auprès des autres services. Il est essentiel que les politiques et les services reconnaissent les parents en tant que premiers éducateurs et collaborent avec eux pour les soutenir de sorte qu'ils se sentent considérés, et non jugés, et que leurs besoins concrets soient traités.
- Ce rapport identifie l'existence en Europe d'un large éventail de services et fonctions divers pouvant être associés ou liés à l'EAJE, parmi lesquels :
  - des centres pleinement intégrés, tels que les centres familiaux en Suède et les centres Sure Start au Royaume-Uni ;
  - une collaboration et une coordination intégrées, comme au sein des *Huizen van het Kind* (« Maisons de l'enfant ») flamandes, qui facilitent la coopération entre les différents partenaires pour le soutien familial préventif, ou l'initiative de la municipalité de Tundzha, en Bulgarie, qui associe différents services et utilise l'EAJE en tant que portail tourné vers la communauté et qui permet de fournir d'autres services ;
  - des programmes et projets intégrés, tels que le projet « Ready Set Go ! » en Roumanie.
- En outre, les systèmes et services d'EAJE intégrés doivent s'appuyer sur le respect des droits des enfants et sur un engagement à promouvoir les services universels, au lieu d'augmenter le ciblage, la conditionnalité et le « soutien temporaire ». Ces services universels n'excluent pas une approche ciblée : dans le cadre de ces services, il est possible de développer des actions nécessitant des efforts

supplémentaires pour atteindre des groupes spécifiques et adaptées aux besoins de groupes spécifiques, sans stigmatisation.

### Les avantages du travail intégré

- On trouve dans la documentation et les études de cas de solides preuves attestant que des services d'EAJE de qualité intégrant l'accueil des enfants à l'éducation, la santé, les services sociaux et d'autres services donnent de meilleurs résultats cognitifs et comportementaux, et un meilleur niveau de santé et de bien-être des enfants. C'est également ce qu'indique le rapport ISOTIS sur la collaboration entre les agences (Barnes et coll., 2018).
- De plus en plus de preuves émanant de Sure Start au Royaume-Uni et des Sure Start Children's Houses en Hongrie montrent que le soutien précoce est d'une importance capitale et nécessite une meilleure intégration intersectorielle. Un système complet d'intervention pendant la petite enfance doit être fondé sur les besoins des enfants et des familles. Il s'agit notamment de la santé prénatale et postnatale, des services d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants, et du soutien familial préventif.
- Le travail intégré au niveau des services peut avoir plusieurs impacts positifs sur les enfants et les familles : meilleur accès et réponses plus rapides, accords améliorés et plus clairs sur le partage d'informations et la communication entre les services, consultation renforcée sur la planification des dossiers, approche plus globale et services fluides. Le cas des relais professionnels dans les écoles maternelles de Gand montre que les parents sont favorables au travail intégré dès la petite enfance, car ils attachent de l'importance à une plus grande accessibilité et à une transition plus fluide entre les services.
- D'après les résultats de l'évaluation de projets tels que « Ready Set Go ! » en Roumanie, lorsque le travail intégré associe le renforcement de la capacité des structures EAJE à l'amélioration de la qualité institutionnelle des services d'EAJE et au soutien des activités d'autonomisation des parents et des Roms, il peut apporter des améliorations mesurables en termes d'accès et de fréquentation des services d'EAJE et faciliter la transition vers les écoles primaires.
- D'après les données issues de projets tels que les Sure Start Children's Houses en Hongrie et issues des initiatives régionales telles que celle de la municipalité de Tundzha en Bulgarie, le travail intégré axé sur une intervention précoce et centré sur l'EAJE contribue au renforcement des communautés et au développement de partenariats locaux plus forts, et augmente l'inclusion sociale des Roms.
- Le travail intégré est bénéfique pour les organisations et les professionnels de l'EAJE, ainsi que pour les politiques. Le travail intégré peut limiter le dédoublement des efforts entre les secteurs et optimiser les rares ressources financières, humaines et matérielles aux niveaux national, régional et local. La fourniture et l'intégration combinées de services peuvent améliorer l'efficacité et la rentabilité grâce aux synergies opérant entre les interventions et à la promotion de l'inclusion sociale.

### Conditions préalables essentielles pour le travail intégré

Le travail intégré doit toujours partir des besoins des enfants et des familles qui vivent dans le contexte local. Cela nécessite une planification minutieuse, de l'implication et de l'enthousiasme de la part des partenaires, qui peuvent être confrontés à des obstacles organisationnels, structurels et culturels, et qui peuvent avoir à développer de nouvelles compétences et de nouvelles méthodes de travail. S'appuyant sur l'analyse documentaire et les études de cas, ce rapport met en évidence quatre conditions préalables essentielles pour le travail intégré :

1. Une vision commune, qui part des besoins des enfants et de leurs familles au sein de la communauté.

2. Un système compétent avec un leadership fort et un personnel critique et réfléchi.
3. Des politiques et un financement d'accompagnement.
4. La participation des familles et des communautés.

Les conclusions et recommandations suivantes concernent ces quatre conditions préalables essentielles.

## Conclusions et recommandations

### 1. Une vision commune, qui part des besoins des enfants et de leurs familles

#### Une vision commune au niveau national

La vision commune au niveau national constitue une condition fondamentale pour une pleine coopération entre les différents secteurs liés au développement des jeunes enfants (santé, protection sociale, système et services éducatifs, emploi, logement) afin de garantir la cohérence et la continuité des services, de la grossesse à bien après le début de l'école primaire. Il est important que la vision et, en l'occurrence, les plans stratégiques et/ou les cadres politiques nationaux soient discutés par toutes les principales parties prenantes (décideurs politiques des divers secteurs, prestataires de services, parents et autres acteurs) afin qu'ils se concrétisent. Cela nécessite du leadership, une volonté politique et un engagement ainsi que du temps et des ressources financières et humaines.

« Getting it Right for Every Child » en Écosse, « Better Outcomes Brighter Futures » en Irlande, « Every Child Matters » en Angleterre et au Pays de Galles, le décret flamand sur le soutien familial préventif (2014) relatif aux *Huizen van het Kind* (« Maisons de l'enfant ») sont autant d'exemples de cadres politiques nationaux décisifs visant à améliorer le bien-être des enfants et à promouvoir la collaboration intersectorielle et le travail intégré pendant la petite enfance.

#### Recommandations :

- Les décideurs politiques doivent élaborer une **vision nationale de la petite enfance** partagée par tous les secteurs concernés. Une telle vision (un cadre politique national par exemple) doit être fondée sur les droits des enfants et le respect de la diversité, et doit viser à intégrer l'EAJE au sens le plus large, y compris la santé et le bien-être, l'accueil et l'éducation, l'inclusion sociale et l'égalité.
- Les décideurs politiques et les prestataires de services doivent prévoir suffisamment de temps et de ressources pour permettre le dialogue et les discussions nécessaires au soutien du travail intégré.

#### Une vision commune au niveau local et au niveau des services

Les exemples de travail intégré du programme Sure Start au Royaume-Uni, des relais professionnels à Gand, en Belgique, de la Sure Start Children's House à Porcsalma, en Hongrie, et de l'initiative de la municipalité de Tundzha, en Bulgarie, soulignent qu'une **vision commune au niveau régional/local et au niveau de la prestation des services** est nécessaire pour affirmer l'engagement des services concernés en faveur d'une approche intégrée encourageant la meilleure réponse possible aux besoins de chaque enfant et de chaque famille. Plus particulièrement, cette vision commune doit inclure les services d'EAJE (accueil des enfants et école maternelle), les services de soutien familial préventif, les services de santé préventive et les services

sociaux. Les discussions sur les raisons et les modalités de l'intégration doivent être au centre de cette vision commune.

**Recommandations :**

- Les autorités régionales/locales, les prestataires de services et les professionnels impliqués dans les services de la petite enfance doivent discuter et s'accorder sur une vision et des objectifs communs afin que le travail intégré puisse agir dans l'intérêt supérieur des enfants et **répondre aux besoins pluridimensionnels des enfants et des familles vulnérables**.
- Les autorités locales, les prestataires de services et les professionnels doivent clairement définir et s'accorder sur les rôles et responsabilités du réseau intégré et de chaque service.

## 2. Un système compétent avec un leadership fort et un personnel critique et réfléchi

Les données issues des projets tels que Sure Start au Royaume-Uni, les Sure Start Children's Houses en Hongrie, les relais professionnels à Gand, en Belgique, et l'initiative de la municipalité de Tundzha, en Bulgarie, montrent que le travail intégré, loin de relever de la seule responsabilité de chaque professionnel, doit être considéré comme un effort commun impliquant les services des équipes pluridisciplinaires, des centres de formation et des autorités locales. Le projet « Ready Set Go! » en Roumanie illustre également le rôle important que jouent les ONG locales et les organisations communautaires dans la réussite du travail collaboratif.

### Un système compétent

En outre, d'après les résultats de la recherche, la mise en œuvre d'un travail intégré à grande échelle nécessite la création de systèmes compétents pour fournir des conseils et un soutien, et pour développer des compétences à différents niveaux (individus, équipes et institutions). Cela comprend la création d'équipes multiagences, l'apprentissage en équipe, des protocoles et des mandats clairs, une formation conjointe, le partage de savoir-faire, un partage d'informations régulier et fréquent, et une pratique raisonnée.

Le travail intégré dans un système compétent nécessite également la création des conditions structurelles nécessaires, parmi lesquelles l'affectation du temps et des ressources nécessaires à l'élaboration d'une vision commune, l'instauration de la collaboration et de la confiance entre le personnel et les familles, ainsi que la mise en place d'actions répondant aux besoins des enfants et des familles.

**Recommandations :**

- Les décideurs politiques doivent soutenir la mise en place de systèmes compétents en matière d'éducation et d'accueil des jeunes enfants afin de guider et soutenir les professionnels, faciliter la gestion des services et permettre aux prestataires de services de **développer les compétences nécessaires au travail intégré**.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent créer les **conditions structurelles** nécessaires pour promouvoir le travail intégré entre les services de divers secteurs. Les services d'EAJE peuvent servir de point d'entrée à l'intégration.
- Les prestataires de services et la direction doivent **faciliter l'affectation du temps et des ressources nécessaires au travail intégré**, y compris une communication fréquente et significative entre les services, par exemple en réservant des créneaux sans enfants permettant de consacrer du temps à la pratique raisonnée, aux réunions d'équipe, aux signalements de cas, au partage d'expériences, à la formation et à l'accompagnement.

- Les responsables des services et le personnel doivent **élaborer des codes de conduite professionnelle clairs et transparents**, y compris des réglementations sur le partage d'informations et de données.

## Leadership

Un leadership fort, engagé et inspirant constituait une condition préalable essentielle au succès dans les six cas mentionnés dans ce rapport : *Sure Start* à Newry, au Royaume-Uni, les relais professionnels à Gand, en Belgique, le *Sprungbrettangebote* à Berlin, en Allemagne, la *Sure Start Children's House* à Porcsalma, en Hongrie, la municipalité de Tundzha en Bulgarie et le projet « Ready Set Go! » en Roumanie. Un tel leadership est nécessaire aux niveaux national, régional et local pour assurer la cohérence entre les services nécessaires à la réalisation d'objectifs communs et à l'abandon des modèles fragmentés. Au niveau des services, cela implique de motiver, soutenir, valoriser, communiquer clairement, expliciter les attentes concernant le rôle de chacun et maintenir l'attention de chacun. De plus, les bonnes personnes doivent se trouver aux bons endroits, ce qui signifie que les organisations doivent attribuer des mandats clairs aux professionnels impliqués dans le travail intégré et s'assurer qu'ils sont compétents pour fonctionner dans ces environnements intégrés.

### Recommandations :

- Les décideurs politiques doivent investir dans le **développement des capacités de leadership** au niveau régional/local (y compris les maires, les chefs de département responsables des services de la petite enfance, les coordinateurs désignés), au niveau du réseau intégré (le coordinateur du réseau) et au niveau des services (les dirigeants et cadres supérieurs des services d'EAJE, de santé, des centres familiaux, etc.) afin de promouvoir le travail intégré parmi les services pertinents de la petite enfance. Des formations et des séminaires spécifiques, la mise en réseau et le partage d'informations doivent être assurés pour renforcer les compétences des dirigeants. Des compétences en leadership sont nécessaires, y compris la gestion du changement, la promotion du travail collaboratif, ainsi que des équipes intégrées inspirantes et motivantes.
- Les dirigeants au niveau des services doivent **faciliter** et définir les conditions préalables à un travail intégré et coopératif dans le domaine de l'EAJE, promouvoir le respect mutuel et la solidarité, et favoriser le **processus décisionnel démocratique**.

## Un personnel critique et réfléchi

Un contexte de travail plus intégré nécessite un personnel qualifié, expérimenté et compétent, doté de capacités ou d'attitudes supplémentaires, telles que la volonté de coopérer avec les autres et de réfléchir à sa propre pratique, l'ouverture aux apprentissages partagés, et un état d'esprit favorable, accueillant, participatif et inclusif. Les professionnels doivent également disposer de compétences en matière d'implication familiale et communautaire, et être capables de poser les bases du respect mutuel et de construire des relations. D'après les données issues de l'analyse documentaire et des six études de cas, le développement de ces compétences nécessite un investissement urgent pour renforcer les capacités de tous les services (y compris les assistants, les agents de proximité et les autres personnels de soutien) et pour promouvoir systématiquement la diversité du personnel.

**Recommandations :**

- Les institutions de **formation initiale** qui préparent les professionnels à travailler auprès des jeunes enfants (EAJE, santé, assistance sociale, etc.) doivent élaborer davantage de cours communs, s'engager dans une plus grande collaboration et proposer davantage de stages communs.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent **veiller à ce que les politiques et les financements permettent d'offrir des opportunités de développement professionnel continu** aux dirigeants et aux responsables des services d'EAJE et des autres services, aux enseignants et aux autres professionnels, ainsi qu'aux paraprofessionnels (par exemple les assistants d'éducation, les médiateurs communautaires, les relais professionnels). Des formations et séminaires **intégrés**, des communautés d'apprentissage professionnel, ainsi que des réseaux et du mentorat **doivent être disponibles pour développer les aptitudes et les compétences** sur les questions centrales en matière d'intégration, telles que la mise en réseau, la coopération et le fonctionnement au sein des services intégrés.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent élaborer **des orientations et des normes nationales de qualité** sur le travail intégré destinées au personnel.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent promouvoir activement l'équilibre entre les exigences de qualification des assistants et des agents de proximité, d'une part, et la nécessité de **garantir la diversité du personnel et la représentation de la communauté**, d'autre part.

### 3. Des politiques et un financement d'accompagnement

#### Des politiques d'accompagnement

Le travail intégré nécessite une volonté politique ferme et un engagement aux niveaux national et régional/local. Les exemples des relais professionnels à Gand, en Belgique, de la municipalité de Tundzha en Bulgarie et d'autres cas montrent que la propriété et la responsabilité collectives dans les domaines des politiques et des services sont nécessaires pour promouvoir la coordination et l'intégration entre les secteurs. En outre, une attention particulière doit être accordée aux exigences structurelles : des cadres politiques clairs, des processus de gouvernance et de suivi efficaces, et des mécanismes de financement appropriés. Des programmes tels que Sure Start au Royaume-Uni et les Sure Start Children's Houses en Hongrie montrent qu'il est nécessaire que les politiques intégrées se concentrent sur les services de la petite enfance et le soutien familial préventif, et que cet engagement soit partagé par tous les services concernés.

**Recommandations :**

- Les décideurs politiques doivent élaborer de larges **cadres politiques et législatifs pour des systèmes d'EAJE universels, inclusifs et complets**, fondés sur les droits des enfants et encourageant une **approche intégrée et multisectorielle des interventions et de la prévention dans le domaine de la petite enfance**.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent promouvoir **une approche universaliste progressive** associant des politiques et des services universels pour tous les enfants avec des programmes et des initiatives ciblés, coordonnés, intersectoriels et multiprofessionnels visant à accroître l'accessibilité de ces services parmi les groupes vulnérables tels que les Roms.

- Les décideurs politiques doivent soutenir **différentes formes de services d'EAJE intégrés et de qualité, y compris des programmes à base communautaire**, pour s'assurer qu'ils répondent aux besoins spécifiques des enfants et de leurs parents.

### Un financement approprié et durable

L'affectation de ressources financières à long terme et suffisantes est nécessaire pour garantir l'efficacité et la durabilité des politiques et des services intégrés. Pour assurer la continuité des services, la dotation en personnel et le soutien du personnel, il est nécessaire d'allouer suffisamment de temps et de fonds.

En raison des budgets EAJE limités des États, les services intégrés innovants pour la petite enfance nécessitent souvent d'associer des fonds provenant de différents niveaux administratifs (budgets nationaux, régionaux et locaux). Les fonds de l'UE et les autres ressources externes (telles que le financement des agences donatrices) se sont révélés être un élément essentiel pour garantir le financement adéquat des programmes et des initiatives axés sur l'inclusion des Roms, tels que la Sure Start Children's House à Porcsalma en Hongrie et le projet « Ready Set Go! » en Roumanie. Ces exemples mettent en évidence la nécessité d'orienter plus explicitement les instruments de financement de l'UE vers des investissements dans des services de la petite enfance inclusifs, accessibles, de qualité et complets, et vers le travail intégré. Un financement à long terme accru est notamment nécessaire pour promouvoir des approches intégrées en matière d'EAJE pour tous les enfants et leurs familles, mais surtout pour permettre les efforts supplémentaires nécessaires pour rendre les services accessibles aux groupes vulnérables et marginalisés tels que les Roms.

### Recommandations :

- Les décideurs politiques doivent garantir un financement approprié et durable **pour affecter les ressources en temps, en efforts et en personnel nécessaires au travail intégré dans les services de la petite enfance (EAJE, santé, travail social, etc.)**.
- Les décideurs politiques doivent **fournir des fonds pour garantir des conditions de travail sûres** (par exemple : salaires, soutien et accompagnement, horaires de travail, ratio enfant/adulte approprié et charge de travail adéquate) afin d'inciter les professionnels qualifiés à travailler dans le cadre d'une approche intégrée des services de la petite enfance (EAJE, santé, travail social, etc.).
- Les décideurs politiques aux niveaux national, régional et local doivent veiller à ce que des ressources financières appropriées soient affectées à la promotion d'approches intégrées en matière d'EAJE, notamment la prestation de services intersectoriels, le soutien familial préventif et l'implication de la communauté.
- Pour la prochaine période de financement de l'UE 2021-2027, **la petite enfance doit devenir un investissement prioritaire pour les instruments de financement de l'UE**, et en particulier pour les Fonds structurels et d'investissement européens et Erasmus+.

#### 4. Implication des familles et de la communauté

##### Implication et soutien des familles

La réussite du travail intégré dépend au final de la qualité des relations réciproques et égales établies entre les professionnels et les familles, à la fois au niveau des individus et des groupes. Les parents sont ceux qui connaissent le mieux leurs enfants et c'est à ce titre qu'ils doivent être impliqués. Une relation mutuelle entre les parents et les professionnels est essentielle pour garantir des services de meilleure qualité et plus responsables. Les Sure Start Children's Houses en Hongrie, la municipalité de Tundzha en Bulgarie et le projet « Ready Set Go! » en Roumanie confirment qu'une implication significative et respectueuse de la famille a un impact positif sur les résultats des enfants, et sur les familles de manière générale. Les familles, que ce soit les enfants ou les parents, doivent être impliquées dans l'élaboration et la fourniture des services, mais aussi dans l'évaluation et le suivi.

##### Recommandations :

- Les décideurs politiques doivent reconnaître le rôle central joué par les parents dans le développement de leur enfant et donc dans les services d'EAJE, et doivent **veiller à ce que la législation et les politiques permettent de promouvoir l'implication active des parents** dans l'EAJE, la santé, le travail social et d'autres services de petite enfance pertinents.
- Tous les services doivent élaborer une **politique sur l'accessibilité** et des façons d'atteindre toutes les familles, y compris les familles vulnérables, à l'aide d'une approche intégrée.
- Les travailleurs doivent **travailler dans l'optique de relations réciproques et égales avec les parents, pour renforcer ces derniers dans leur rôle** de premiers éducateurs et de connaisseurs de leurs propres enfants. Les travailleurs ne doivent pas prendre la place des parents ni décider en leur nom.
- Les membres du personnel des réseaux intégrés d'EAJE doivent **partager les informations** sur les enfants et les familles qu'ils servent (ou devraient servir). Cela doit se faire dans le respect des réglementations sur la protection des données, mais surtout dans le respect des familles elles-mêmes.

##### Implication de la communauté

Il est essentiel que la communauté participe activement pour que les services répondent mieux aux besoins spécifiques de cette dernière. Cela est particulièrement important pour les groupes vulnérables et exclus tels que les Roms, car cela favorise l'établissement d'une confiance mutuelle entre les familles et les prestataires de services, comme on le constate dans la Sure Start Children's House de Porcsalma, en Hongrie. L'implication de la communauté peut aider les services à répondre de manière plus efficace aux besoins des enfants, en comprenant davantage leurs atouts et leurs difficultés. Les données issues de l'initiative de la municipalité de Tundzha, des relais professionnels à Gand, en Belgique, et du projet « Ready Set Go! », en Roumanie, confirment les conclusions des précédentes recherches : les agents de proximité tels que les médiateurs communautaires et les visiteurs de santé jouent un rôle significatif dans le comblement des lacunes entre les services éducatifs, sanitaires et sociaux et les communautés marginalisées, en particulier la communauté rom et les parents roms. En établissant une confiance mutuelle et en puisant dans les ressources communautaires, ils peuvent faciliter une approche mieux adaptée aux besoins des communautés spécifiques.

**Recommandations :**

- Les décideurs politiques aux niveaux national et régional/local doivent fournir les ressources nécessaires au niveau communautaire pour **développer et soutenir le travail intégré à base communautaire**.
- Les décideurs politiques aux niveaux municipal et local doivent **impliquer les communautés dans la planification et la conception des services** pour garantir que les interventions sont adaptées au contexte et aux besoins des communautés. Des programmes de proximité doivent être mis en place pour faire le lien entre les services et les communautés.
- Les prestataires de services et les travailleurs doivent élaborer des **stratégies de proximité innovantes et flexibles** pour impliquer les enfants et les familles vulnérables.

## INTRODUCTION

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High-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) provides many benefits for children and families, and especially for those in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations (Lazzari & Vandebroek, 2013; Vandebroek, Lenaerts & Beblavy, 2018). However, the needs of vulnerable children and families are multi-faceted and cannot be addressed by ECEC services alone. Issues such as increasing poverty, social exclusion, weakening welfare systems, insecure employment and migration can have a dramatic impact on the wellbeing of children and families. These complex problems require multiple, aligned and coordinated responses and interventions.

Increasing attention has therefore been given to a more integrated approach across the different sectors and services that offer support to children and families, and more specifically to vulnerable groups (Moore & Skinner, 2010; TFIEY, 2015<sup>4</sup>; Geinger et al., 2015; Vermeiren et al., 2018). Recognising that a successful approach requires the integration of ECEC with other services and sectors, opportunities can be created to deliver positive changes in the support provided for children's holistic development. ECEC can better support children and families by working in an integrated manner with other sectors and services, such as those offering preventive family support, preventive healthcare, meeting places for parents and children, pre-primary and primary schools, libraries, as well as services for leisure-time activities (Gordon et al., 2016; Barnes et al., 2018).

In its Conclusions on Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion (EC, 2018), the Council of the European Union recommended that Member States should 'apply integrated and child-centred approaches targeting all aspects of child development and well-being and further strengthen the coordination and interaction between health, education, social and child protection systems, as well as integrated and coordinated service delivery at local level'. It also encouraged them to 'continue to provide multi-disciplinary support to children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds – such as Roma children'.

Taking into account the increasing recognition being given to the importance of aligned and coordinated responses between various services and sectors in order to address the needs of children and families, this report takes a closer look at integrated working and the role played within it by early childhood education and care.

### Aims and research questions

This report aims to shed light on the prerequisites for integrated working, and the added value it provides. Although the majority of this report focuses specifically on **vulnerable and disadvantaged groups**, it also underlines the fact that integrated working provides added value for all families. As one of the most vulnerable groups in Europe, separate attention is devoted to Roma children and their families, who are often trapped in a vicious circle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination.

The report is primarily written for policy makers and professionals working in the field of early childhood education and care. It is guided by the following **research questions**:

- What services or functions should be involved in integrated working, with specific attention to the role that ECEC can play?
- What inspiring examples of integrated working already exist in Europe?

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<sup>4</sup> The Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years (TFIEY) meeting in Dublin in 2015 was dedicated to integrated services. All documents and videos can be accessed and downloaded from <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-5-dublin>.

- What is the added value of integrated working (for children and families, for professionals, for policy makers) in general, and specifically for Roma?
- What are the prerequisites for integrated working in general, and specifically with regard to Roma?

## Methods

This study is based largely on the analysis of secondary data, together with six case studies. The main sources for the **secondary data analysis** include international and national reports, academic publications and other materials collected in the context of the projects INTESYS (Gordon et al., 2016); INCh (Vermeiren et al., 2018); and ISOTIS (Barnes et al., 2018); as well as on a series of Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (RECI) reports conducted in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia (upcoming).

The **six case studies** carried out for this report were selected to provide an overview of what can be achieved in different contexts across Europe. These case studies illustrate how integrated working can be supported at national, municipal and project levels, either as universal or targeted measures. They provide examples of the ways in which different services can be involved in connecting with ECEC services.

Three of the case studies focus on general examples of integrated working:

1. The **Newry case** (Northern Ireland) serves as a strong example of a ‘one-stop shop’, with one organisation offering different services in one location. These include ECEC, but also family support services, support for children with additional needs, and support for expectant parents.
2. The case of the **bridging professionals** in Ghent (Belgium) demonstrates how additional non-teaching staff in a school can provide a link between school life and the context of the family, and hence positively affect children’s access and development, and parental participation.
3. The Berlin case of the **Sprungbrettangebote** (Germany) illustrates one response to a very urgent need in today’s Europe: offering pedagogical stimuli and support to the very youngest children – and their families – in the context of asylum.

The other three case studies look at integrated work that aims to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of the most socially excluded and vulnerable children, and particularly of Roma children and families.

4. **Sure Start Children’s Houses** (SSCH) is an example of integrated early-years services for the most disadvantaged and excluded Roma communities in Hungary. Targeted support is provided for families raising children between birth and three years old, who have limited or no access to ECEC services.
5. The case study from **Tundzha municipality**, Bulgaria, illustrates how integrated working can be promoted by a committed regional authority that sees ECEC as an essential part of social inclusion. ECEC services (in this case, kindergartens) have become a portal to the community via which other services are delivered.
6. The **‘Ready Steady Go!’** project in Romania shows how an integrated set of interventions including teacher training, toy libraries and community actions, coupled with an expansion of ECEC capacity, can promote children’s development and well-being, as well as increasing access to ECEC services among children who would otherwise be excluded from them.

Information for the case studies was gathered from background documents, policy papers and reports, supplemented by visits and interviews with key players, parents and professionals within the services involved. The study visits to Newry, Ghent and Berlin (case studies 1, 2 and 3) were carried out by Chris De Kimpe and Ankie Vandekerckhove from VBJK. The three case studies on Roma were prepared by local researchers, working in close cooperation with Dr. Jana Huttova: namely, Szilvia Rézműves (case study 4); Eugenia Volen (case study 5); and Danut Dumitru and Claudiu Ivan (case study 6).

A common format and guidelines were developed and employed for interviews. These were refined where necessary, in accordance with the settings of the different case studies. The main themes of the interview guidelines (see Annex 1) were based on earlier research within the INTESYS project and included: the history of the service and its drivers; shared vision and continued commitment; communication (both internal and with families); a description of the integrated work, the project and the programme; leadership, coordination, workforce and working methods; the participation of families and accessibility; and more 'personal' reflections.

### Structure of the report

The report is composed of four main parts. In Part I, we describe the multiple needs of vulnerable groups as a rationale for service integration; policy responses at EU and national level; and the place of ECEC in integrated working. Part II presents six case studies illustrating different models, systems, policies, target groups and practices for integrated working. Some of these projects have been instigated by national policies, while others have been developed at a local level. The evidence from the case studies serves to both frame and supplement the more theoretical part of the report. It also forms the basis for discussing the added value of, and prerequisites for, integrated working (in Part III and Part IV, respectively), and feeds into the policy recommendations.

## PART I. ECEC IN INTEGRATED WORKING, BENEFITTING VULNERABLE GROUPS

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This part of the report begins by presenting the multiple needs of vulnerable groups as a rationale for integrated working, and for a multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to child development and well-being. Section 1.2 analyses the concept of integrated working as a response to the multiple needs of children and families. Section 1.3 provides an analysis of policy responses at EU and national level that target children, and in particular, children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Section 1.4 elaborates on the various types of integrated working, and the role played by ECEC in the provision of support to vulnerable groups.

### 1.1. The multiple needs of vulnerable groups such as Roma as a rationale for integrated working

#### The rights-based approach to child well-being, and the importance of high-quality ECEC that is accessible to vulnerable groups

Current challenges such as rising poverty, weakening welfare systems, widening inequalities, job insecurity, increased mobility and migration can have a dramatic impact on children and families (Moore & Skinner, 2010; Gordon et al., 2016). Families in vulnerable situations, such as those living in poverty<sup>5</sup>, Roma families<sup>6</sup>, and families in the context of migration and asylum<sup>7</sup>, may face several challenges at once. These include low education levels, unemployment or irregular employment, poor housing, health problems, social exclusion and material deprivation. Dealing with what Moore and Skinner refer to as ‘wicked problems’ (Moore & Skinner, 2010)<sup>8</sup> on an individual basis, using a complex array of services, may cause children and families to miss out on access to, or opportunities to fully benefit from, existing support systems. Such families often lack an extended support network, and experience barriers to accessing support services. Many are unfamiliar with the culture and language of these services, or lack the confidence to negotiate the system (Moore & Skinner, 2010).

The rights-based approach, grounded in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), highlights the multiple factors contributing to child well-being. It articulates a child’s rights to an adequate standard of living, and to be free from deprivations across crucial aspects of their lives including their health, education, nutrition, care and protection. At an individual level, a child’s resilience, especially at an early age, is often indirectly shaped and influenced by the characteristics of the caregiving environment and the local community. Growing up in an economically and socially disadvantaged area is likely to restrict children’s access to good-quality services and opportunities for development. Children belonging to vulnerable groups become increasingly directly affected as they grow older. For example, children from marginalised ethnic backgrounds, especially Roma and traveller children, refugee and migrant children, and children with disabilities, are in many

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<sup>5</sup> Eurostat data on children at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Children_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion).

<sup>6</sup> FRA report on Roma exclusion. Available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/roma-inclusion>.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF data on refugee and migrant children. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/eca/what-we-do/emergencies/latest-statistics-and-graphics-refugee-and-migrant-children>.

<sup>8</sup> As stated by Moore and Skinner (2010): ‘These complex manifestations are sometimes referred to as ‘wicked problems’, not in the sense of them being evil in some way, but in the sense of them being complex and difficult to solve, and requiring action on multiple fronts and levels’.

instances more likely to face discrimination and structural inequalities, and to face a particularly high risk of social exclusion and poverty.

High-quality ECEC has a strong positive impact on children and families, and especially upon vulnerable children and families. This has been extensively demonstrated by previous research on the importance and beneficial effects of high-quality ECEC (Sylva et al., 2004; Lazzari & Vandebroek, 2013; Melhuish, 2014; Vandebroek et al., 2018). These benefits are demonstrated in terms of children's holistic development, both at a cognitive (e.g. language, mathematics) and non-cognitive level (e.g. autonomy of social competences, self-regulation). Research also reveals that children from vulnerable groups derive even greater benefit from high-quality ECEC than do their peers from more advantaged families (EQF, EC, 2014b; Lazzari & Vandebroek, 2013).

A recent report of the European Expert Network on Economics of Education (Vandebroek et al., 2018) reinforces the existing evidence, summarising the multiple benefits of participating in high-quality ECEC. These are acknowledged by a broad range of disciplines and include substantial economic, social, educational and developmental benefits. Vandebroek et al. (2018) state that these benefits are not limited to the children involved, but extend to society as a whole.

- At the level of the individual child, participation in high-quality ECEC is associated with higher earnings, greater educational attainment, improved social integration and better health, among other advantages. Among parents, it is found to encourage participation in the labour market, especially by mothers, in addition to educational and other impacts.
- Ample potential benefits also exist at a societal level. These range from reduced spending on welfare to lower crime rates, higher tax revenues and improved social cohesion. In other words, the benefits of high-quality ECEC are both widespread and long-lasting.

It has also been established that ECEC provision has a role in supporting parents as first educators (EC, 2014b)<sup>9</sup>. As stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>10</sup> (art. 5 and 18), parents and children have the right to be supported throughout the process of raising children. In this process, parents and professionals are partners in education, and ECEC services can also offer opportunities for parents to engage with professionals and meet with other parents. Because ECEC fulfils not only a pedagogical, but also a social function, ECEC services are able to gain a clear view of the needs of families, and can link them to other support services such as preventive health, social work or education.

ECEC services are, in essence, a basic provision, in the sense that no specific requirement, defined problem or diagnosis is necessary in order to gain access to them. In principle, all young children can receive ECEC services. In reality, barriers do exist for certain groups (e.g. financial barriers, lack of knowledge about the service, waiting lists, feeling unwelcome).

Numerous reports and studies suggest that in order to improve access to and participation in ECEC services among Roma children, the policies and investments aimed at facilitating access to ECEC services must be better linked with measures aimed at raising the quality of such services (e.g. UNESCO, 2007; UNICEF, 2011; Roma Education Fund, 2013; World Bank, 2013). Quality ECEC programmes and services must adopt a curriculum that reflects diversity, and a democratic and inclusive learning environment that includes a strong element of care. They must also show respect for children's backgrounds, and view children as valued citizens and as competent and active learners in their own right (UNICEF and European Social Observatory, 2011).

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<sup>9</sup>The recognition of parents as first educators, and their right to be supported in this task, is also one of the core ideas in the European Quality Framework for ECEC, which states: 'parents are the most important partners and their participation is essential' (EC, 2014b, p. 8).

<sup>10</sup><https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> for the full text of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Evidence from evaluations of good practice demonstrates that high-quality, comprehensive ECEC services have the potential to reach out to disadvantaged communities, to involve children and parents in their delivery, and to promote social inclusion and children's well-being (e.g. Open Society Institute, 2007b; UNICEF, 2010; Roma Education Fund, 2013). The evidence collected in the RECI reports is clear – to ensure Roma children's right to participation and educational achievement, it is essential to improve existing ECEC, health and social care services so that they become more accessible and more inclusive for Roma children, particularly those from excluded communities (Aleksandrovic et al., 2012; Ivatts et al., 2015; Šikic-Micanovic et al., 2015; Vančiková et al., 2017).

### Challenges of the multiple disadvantages faced by Roma

Despite the efforts and commitments of governments, European and international organisations, donor agencies and civil society actors, the situation of Roma children and families remains one of the most challenging across Europe (Klaus & Marsh, 2014). Roma children continue to face difficult living conditions and unequal access to education, healthcare, social protection and adequate housing (OSCE, 2010; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and UNDP, 2012). Inequalities between Roma and non-Roma begin early and are striking (Gatti et al., 2016). A broad consensus now exists that the increased participation of Roma children in ECEC can both reduce the dramatic gaps in equity that begin in the earliest years, and improve lifelong outcomes.

While participation in ECEC among Roma children increased in a number of countries between 2011 and 2016, significant differences remain between the average rates of participation among Roma and among the general population (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018). Evidence indicates that governmental efforts have not yet reached many Roma children (e.g. Ivatts et al., 2015; Vančiková et al., 2017). In some countries, such as the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Romania, the impact of mandatory pre-school year(s) has been limited by a shortage of available kindergarten places. This has a negative impact on Roma children, especially those who live in excluded communities and in remote rural areas (Ivatts et al., 2015; Huillery et al., 2017; Centre for Policy Studies, 2018).

Large equity gaps also remain in the quality of ECEC received by Roma children and their non-Roma peers (UNICEF, 2011; Aleksandrovic et al., 2012; Ivatts et al., 2015; Šikic-Micanovic et al., 2015; Vančiková et al., 2017). As highlighted by UNICEF (2011), the needs and rights of Roma children are often overlooked even from early years, and mainstream ECEC institutions are 'conventionally insensitive to the cultural and linguistic background of Roma communities' (ibid, p. 17). Furthermore, skewed opportunities, institutional design, discrimination and negative stereotyping contribute to the deepening of these inequalities over the course of an individual's life (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and UNDP, 2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018; ERRC, 2010; Amnesty International, 2014).

Poverty and social exclusion among Roma children are not a result of a single factor such as lack of financial resources, unemployment, sub-standard housing or limited access to health, education and social services. They result from a combination of all these factors, which are 'both outcomes of past spells of exclusion and determinants of future deprivations' that reinforce the vicious circle of poverty (Ivanov et al., 2015). The multiple disadvantages and deprivations experienced by Roma children in specific areas of life are further exacerbated by prejudice and discrimination, and by limited opportunities to participate in early childhood education.

Thus, traditional sector-bound approaches to Roma inclusion are inadequate to address the 'scale, intensity and multi-dimensionality' (Burchardt et al., 2018) of the challenges faced by Roma. Nor can early childhood policies effectively promote the inclusion of Roma children in ECEC unless they include measures to tackle prejudice and discrimination, and to improve opportunities to exercise fundamental rights, including the right to quality education from early years. For Roma children to be included in ECEC, these dimensions are critical. To overcome the extreme and entrenched disadvantages experienced by Roma children in realising their right to education, a rights-based framework for the inclusion of Roma children in education is required that combines political,

legislative, policy, educational, communication and financial commitments (UNICEF, 2011). Such a framework calls for the development of broad cross-sectoral strategies and integrated care and education.

### Multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to child development and well-being

In the context of the multiple needs of children and families, including vulnerable families, reports from UNICEF (2011), UNESCO and the Council of Europe (2014), the Social Protection Committee (2013), and the European Commission (2018), have repeatedly underscored the need for integrated and inter-sectoral strategies that combine prevention, early years services and support for families. International studies highlight the importance of a child's earliest years as a window of opportunity to address inequality. The potential benefits are well documented of supporting children's early development and well-being in order to build a foundation that ensures their right to education, as well as developing human capital, breaking the cycle of poverty, promoting economic productivity, and eliminating social disparities and inequities (e.g. UNESCO, 2010; UNICEF, 2011; Bennett, 2012b).

European and international organisations have discussed widely the failure to meet the needs of all families, and especially those of vulnerable groups such as Roma, which results from the longstanding division between care and early education, and the fragmented early-years services (such as health, care and education, social care) that exist in parallel. There is a growing consensus in the literature that the disadvantages experienced by Roma children across many interconnected dimensions need to be addressed in an integrated manner, in order to bring about qualitative and quantitative change (RECI reports, UNESCO, 2010; Brüggemann, 2012; UNESCO and Council of Europe, 2014; World Bank, 2016). Part of the discussion has been an increasing recognition that the shift towards integrated and comprehensive approaches is one of the most important issues – and, indeed, challenges – facing the field of ECEC (Bennett, 2012b).

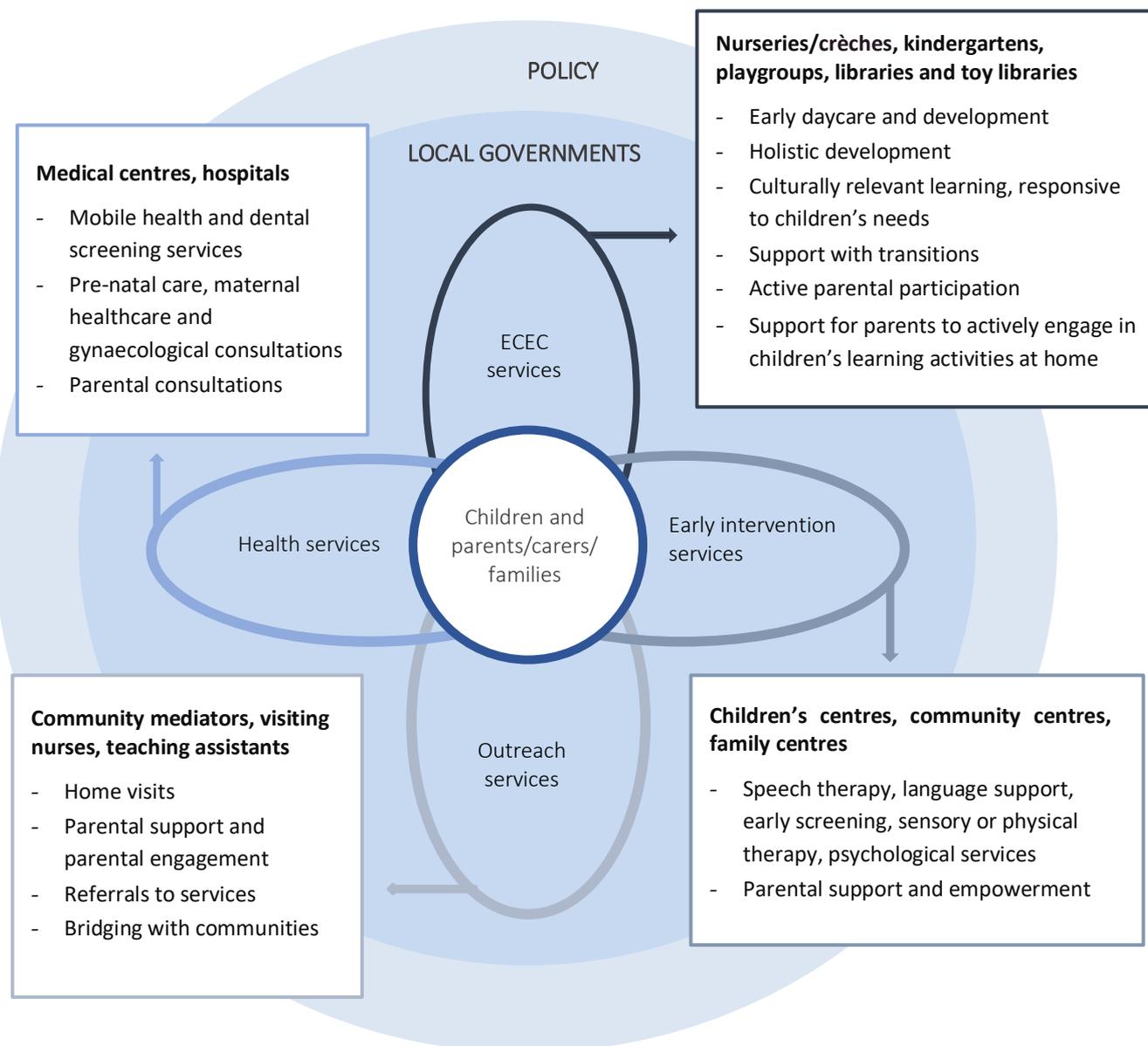
The multi-dimensional and comprehensive approach to child health, development, early learning and family support suggested by Bennett (2012b) is based on the conceptual framework developed by the Early Childhood Systems Workgroup (US)<sup>11</sup>. This recognises the need for a systemic approach to early childhood development, and emphasises that each component must be available, affordable, of good quality, and accessible to all who need it (Bruner, 2010). The model highlights the need for a holistic approach to child health, development and well-being. It also emphasises the critical importance of the first years (from pre-natal to 3 years), and the need to support the primary role of families in rearing children. A package of basic, integrated services involving pre-natal and infant health, pre-schools, home visits, and parent education and support, should be provided to children and families in all poor neighbourhoods and settlements. Flexible **community-based services**, including parent-led programmes, home visits and activities, are critical for building trust between service providers and vulnerable groups such as Roma communities (Macura-Milovanovic, 2013; Klaus and Marsh, 2014). Such services also offer greater opportunities to empower parents by building their understanding of their children's early learning needs (UNICEF and European Social Observatory, 2011).

**Error! Reference source not found.** below provides a visualisation of the comprehensive model, and the way in which integrated services can support vulnerable children and families. It is based on the model developed by Bruner (2010) and used by Bennett for the RECI Overview report (2012b). The visualisation has been further adapted to highlight the need to place children and parents at the centre of integrated working between various services during early years. It also recognises the importance of the local governments and policy contexts.

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<sup>11</sup> The Early Childhood Systems Workgroup, composed of national leaders from policy and research organizations in the United States, has established a common conceptual framework that recognises the need for a systemic approach to early childhood development.

**Figure 1.** A comprehensive, multi-dimensional model for early-years intervention.



Source: authors, adapted from Bruner, 2010.

**Local authorities** play a prominent role in supporting the quality of integrated services and access to ECEC, especially among vulnerable children. The RECI overview report argued that links with central government are critical, and that mechanisms must be developed to enhance **co-operation between central and local government**. Equally important is the willingness of central government to enforce its own regulations, including providing incentives: 'local governments can develop successful early childhood services if they have central financial and technical support for pre- and in-service training, supervision, standards, monitoring, evaluation and tracking systems' (Bennett, 2012b). The active involvement and support of local or municipal authorities in creating sustainable integrated services is highlighted in numerous reports and evaluations of good practice (e.g. REF, 2013; World Bank, 2013; UNESCO and Council of Europe, 2014).

## 1.2. Integrated working as a response to the multiple needs of children and families

In the context of the multiple needs of families and children in different life domains, the fragmentation of existing services can be problematic (Geinger et al., 2015). This fragmentation has often developed historically or organically as the welfare states of various Member States have grown up, and continues to be fairly substantial. Geinger et al. (2015) and Van Haute et al. (2017) describe several forms of fragmentation in services:

- Sectoral segregation (e.g. education, parent support)
- Age segregation (e.g. in countries with split systems of childcare and pre-school provision)
- Targeted services, as opposed to mainstream or universal services accessible to all (e.g. targeting specific groups such as single parents, children with special needs, vulnerable families)
- Construction of different policy levels (local, regional or national authorities governing a certain sector)
- Organisational segregation (e.g. public versus private, or a combination of both)

Barnes et al. (2018) point out that this fragmentation undermines the capacity of services to effectively support families, and vulnerable families particularly. It is therefore essential to join forces to better respond to the issues at stake.

As a concept, integrated working covers a multitude of cooperative systems and models. It is context-specific: numerous models exist, involving different partners and/or sectors involved in various policy settings. Integrated working can refer to specific types of integration – for example, by linking childcare to pre-primary school as part of an integrated ECEC system – or it can go broader, linking ECEC provision to services in other sectors such as health or social services. Integrated working can be regarded as an umbrella term. In both literature and practice, different terms are used interchangeably to describe the concept: integrated approaches; integrated networks; cooperative networks; interdisciplinary work; cooperation; collaboration; comprehensive approach; multi-dimensional approach; and interagency working.

While this multitude of terms is used elsewhere to describe the concept, for this report we propose an overall guiding definition of integrated working based on Gordon et al. (2016). This covers most of its essential elements: integrated working is a form of professional cooperation within some kind of network or partnership, providing a range of different supportive services for families and children, accessible to all, in which families and children can participate, and where parents are respected as first educators.

Integrated working develops in different ways depending on varying socio-political contexts, in an attempt to combat specific forms of fragmentation, or beginning with the needs of children and families. This integration can be carried out either at policy or service level. Within the broad range of integrated working approaches, a **continuum** can be distinguished between levels of integration containing different dimensions (Frost, 2005; Geinger et al., 2015):

- **Cooperation:** services work together toward consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence
- **Collaboration:** services plan together and address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in-service provision towards common outcomes
- **Coordination:** services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals

- **Full integration:** different services are combined into a single organisation in order to enhance service delivery

Classifications such as these do not imply that all policies or practices involved in integrated working need to go through all stages of this continuum. For example, full integration is not by definition the best system. It all depends on the **context** within a given community, taking into account not only the specific needs of children and families in a neighbourhood and the shared goals that are defined, but also the policy setting and available services. As Bennet and Kaga (2010) describe it: 'Integrated systems can vary in depth and location. It is therefore better understood not as a categorical established state but as a continuum, ranging from minimal to full integration.' For example, a childcare centre could work together with a preventive health centre for babies and toddlers, offering regular consultation sessions within the premises of the childcare centre, while remaining a completely separate service, under the auspices of a separate administration or ministry. Such an arrangement could help to facilitate access to childcare among families that are already familiar with health services, or vice versa.

Besides involving different levels of cooperation, integrated working can differ in other ways:

- **The departments or sectors involved.** For example, systems of integrated ECEC may operate under the welfare department, as in Finland; or the education department, as in Slovenia (Bennett and Kaga, 2010).
- **Management or policy level.** Moore and Skinner e.g. (2010) describe initiatives in Australia at local (partnerships between health centres and schools), regional (e.g. Victoria's Best Start and Primary Care Partnerships models) or national level (the National Early Childhood Development Strategy).
- **Progressive universalism or targeted services.** For example, Scandinavian Family Centres are open to all children and families; whereas in some countries, specific projects explicitly (but not exclusively) target Roma children and families.
- **Providing either material or non-material support, or both.** For example, in the Flemish *Huizen van het Kind* ('Houses of the Child'), the public welfare agency may or may not be a partner. In cases where it is, material support can be offered through this service.
- **One location or multiple locations.** For example, while the Children's Centre at Pen Green in the UK combines all services under one roof, this is not the case for all Sure Start centres in the UK. Being situated in one or multiple locations does not necessarily either facilitate or hinder integrated working (Barnes et al., 2018).

Deciding which services or functions should be partners in an integrated network will depend on the needs of the children and families living in a specific neighbourhood, or the specific issues with which the services must deal. In her research into the Finnish Family Centres, Kekkonen (2015) examined different models of family centre. She concluded that a wide range of such centres exist because they develop in different local contexts, and involve various partners and functions – all under the same name of 'Family centre'. Family centres can operate under a variety of names, and not all of them need to offer exactly the same services. The range of services required depend on the **needs of the children and families** living in the specific communities. Moore and Skinner (2010) also link this question to what actually influences the daily lives of children and families. They list the following services as being involved: mainstream ECEC (childcare and pre-school); (preventive) health services; parenting support services (including financial counselling); services for refugee families or families with another home language; early interventions services; and mental health services. Because this report focuses on vulnerable groups, the other services relevant in an integrated setting include social welfare services (including material support), integration services, and even clinics offering legal advice.

### 1.3. Policy responses at EU and national level to promote integrated approaches to early childhood

At EU level, increasing attention has been given to the need for an integrated approach to address social exclusion and the multiple disadvantages faced by certain groups of children and families. High-quality ECEC and an approach that integrates ECEC and other sectors – both for children and families in general, and for Roma as a specific, vulnerable group – have gained increasing recognition as key elements of EU policies on social inclusion, poverty, equity, social justice and education.

#### Integrated working on the EU agenda

Over the past decade the EU has increasingly recognised the necessity to address the multi-dimensional needs of children and families. As a result, it has emphasised the need for a more collaborative, integrated approach. In its **communication of 2011 on ECEC** (EC, 2011) the EC acknowledged the benefits of an integrated approach by stating that: ‘A systemic approach to ECEC services means strong collaboration between the different policy sectors, such as education, employment, health, social policy. Such approaches allow governments to be organised and manage policies more simply and efficiently, and to combine resources for children and their families.’

The **EC Recommendation on ‘Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage’** (EC, 2013) refers to the preventive effect of a more integrated approach to providing ECEC, health and social services. It stresses the importance of integrated multi-dimensional strategies based on a ‘child rights’ approach; the need for early intervention; and the opportunity to strike a balance between universal and targeted policies. The Recommendation called upon Member States to ‘ensure a focus on children who face an increased risk due to multiple disadvantages’, including Roma children.

The **European Quality Framework on ECEC** (EC, 2014b) also refers to the importance of ECEC services cooperating with other sectors (under the heading of strengthening social inclusion), ‘by close cooperation between the staff in ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector’. In 2015, the Joint Report on the European Quality Framework for ECEC identified challenges in field of ECEC. Among its priorities, it reiterated: ‘Fostering generalised, equitable access to affordable high-quality early childhood education and care, especially for the disadvantaged, and taking forward the Quality Framework in this area’. On May 22, 2018, a proposal was adopted for a Recommendation on ECEC quality, which also referred to the importance of integrated working. It invites member states to ‘consider promoting further integration of services for families and children, most importantly with social and health services’.

Presented in 2017, the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (EC, 2017c) states that ‘Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities’. In turn, the Council of the European Union adopted its **Conclusions on Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion (EC, 2018)**. The Council recommended that Member States should ‘apply integrated and child-centred approaches targeting all aspects of child development and well-being and further strengthen the coordination and interaction between health, education, social and child protection systems, as well as integrated and coordinated service delivery at local level’, and that they should ‘continue to provide multi-disciplinary support to children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds – such as Roma children’.

The importance of integrated working is not only recognised in EU policy documents; it is supported by a range of EU projects and programmes. The EU invests in integrated working through projects under the **Erasmus+**

programme, such as INTESYS (supporting vulnerable children through integrated early childhood Services<sup>12</sup>); the START project<sup>13</sup> ('A good start for all: Sustaining Transitions across the Early Years') on warm and inclusive transitions to school; IAS (Increasing accessibility of integrated ECEC-services to support all families with young children); and the ISOTIS project<sup>14</sup> (Inclusive education and social support to tackle inequalities in society) on inclusive education and social support.

EU funding can also be an important accelerator for change, particularly in newer EU member states where the governmental budget provides insufficient resources for ECEC services. For the next EU budget period (2021-2027), the EC proposes to link spending priorities with the European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 11 of which focuses on protecting children from poverty and promoting childcare. However, to implement this ambition, the EC requires evidence from on the ground.

Another indication of the importance given to integrated working across EU Member States is the choice of topics discussed at the **Transatlantic Forum on Inclusive Early Years** (TFIEY). In 2015, one of TFIEY's high-level meetings was dedicated to the theme of integrated working<sup>15</sup>.

### Integrated approaches to ECEC for Roma on the EU agenda

The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015<sup>16</sup> was crucial in setting the agenda and focusing attention on the exclusion experienced by Roma families at all levels. The Roma Decade identified four priority areas – education, employment, health, and housing – and prompted governments to take into account the core issues of poverty, discrimination and gender mainstreaming. Beginning with **EC Communication 2006/367, 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child'**, a series of EC communications on children's rights have singled out Roma children as particularly exposed to poverty, exclusion and discrimination, and thus in need of special attention. In **Communication 2010/133 on 'The social and economic integration of Roma in Europe'**, the EC put forth its first strong statement on Roma. This was followed by a series of high-level policy documents highlighting the importance of tackling the multiple disadvantage faced by Roma, often with a specific focus on Roma children. The **European Commission Communication on an EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies** (EC, 2011b) asked EU Member States specifically to 'widen access to quality early childhood education and care' for Roma. The framework identified four key areas for interventions to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma: education, employment, healthcare and housing. This unprecedented EU-level communication stresses a comprehensive approach to Roma inclusion. The framework urges Member States to adopt 'integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion policies'.

In its **Communication on Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States - 2016** (EC, 2016), the European Commission highlighted the need for greater efforts to seriously address the high rates of poverty and exclusion prevailing among Roma children, and their low participation in ECEC. It called upon Member States to ensure effective implementation of integrated measures.

In addition to policies, a number of **EU funding measures** provide support to Member States in improving the living conditions of Roma. These include the European Structural and Investment Funds (the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Fund for Rural Development). The multi-

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on INTESYS, see <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/intesys>.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on START, see <http://start.pei.si/>.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on ISOTIS, see <http://www.isotis.org/about-isotis/project-information/>.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on TFIEY, see <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfiev-5-dublin>.

<sup>16</sup> The Decade of Roma Inclusion was an unprecedented political commitment by European governments to **eliminate discrimination** against Roma and **close the unacceptable gaps** between Roma and the rest of society. For more, see: <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/pages/4/roma-decade-and-the-eu>.

annual framework 2014-2020 makes it easier for EU countries to use EU funds for Roma integration. In recent years, these funds have increasingly aimed to address the multi-dimensional disadvantages faced by Roma, with an increasing focus on the specific needs of Roma children. A number of innovative and comprehensive programmes on Roma inclusion are currently underway in some Member States. These include projects aimed at a more comprehensive approach to ECEC (EC, 2016b).

A review of policy documents clearly shows that at EU level, the provision of high-quality ECEC as part of an integrated approach for all families, but especially for vulnerable groups and Roma families, is high on the agenda. However, integrated working raises important questions about the values, principles and desired outcomes that underpin services, as well as how they are funded, organised, governed and delivered. The next section briefly examines the key considerations for integration, such as the principles of equality and non-discrimination, and the balance of universal and targeted measures.

### Equality and non-discrimination

All children have the right to good early care and education. To fulfil this right for all children, including those who are socially excluded and in vulnerable contexts, such as Roma children, ECEC programmes should be made inclusive and equitable. In other words, every child should be able to access an ECEC service that is welcoming and responsive to her/his characteristics and needs (UNICEF, 2011). In 2013, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child called on countries to ensure that all young children and their families were 'guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services, including programmes of health, care and education specifically designed to promote their well-being'. For the effective participation of children in early-years services, all relevant policies need to be firmly based on the child's right, fully respecting the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

The *EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child (2017): Leave No child Behind* (European Union Council, 2017) reaffirmed that when realising all other rights, the four general principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should be applied, namely: non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; the optimum development of the child; and the right of the child to be heard and taken seriously in accordance with age and maturity. These principles should underpin all actions taken to promote the right to education of all children, including those who are most vulnerable. Taking this into consideration, UNICEF (2011) developed a conceptual rights-based framework focusing specifically on Roma inclusion, which is based on three interdependent and interlinked dimensions: the right to access education; the right to quality education; and the right to respect within the learning environment.

As an increasing number of governments have begun to recognise the importance of ECEC, they have adopted legislative and policy measures and investments aimed at improving access to ECEC provision. Gradual improvements in overall pre-school enrolments are visible in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>17</sup>, mainly due to the extension of universal entitlement.<sup>18</sup> However, for vulnerable children such as Roma,

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<sup>17</sup> Most CEE countries have increased their national participation rates, although they still have a long way to go to meet the ET2020 benchmark of reaching 95 % participation from the age of four. Out of those countries with a sizeable Roma population, only Hungary achieved the target (EC, 2018c). In Bulgaria, the national participation rate shot up from 74 % in 2009 to 82 % in 2012, and was below 90 % in 2015. Similar figures (below 90 %) exist in Romania and the Czech Republic. In Croatia and Slovakia, pre-school attendance is below 80 % (EC, 2018c).

<sup>18</sup> In some countries (e.g. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia and Poland), legislative changes have introduced or extended compulsory pre-school education as a preventive measure to improve school readiness and reduce early school leaving, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

facilitating universal access to ECEC is only one part of guaranteeing their right to education. On its own, universal access to ECEC cannot ensure that the right to education will be fulfilled. Empirical evidence available in the RECI reports from Croatia, the Czech republic, Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia (Šikic-Micanovic et al., 2015; Ivatts et al., 2015; Kaderják et al., forthcoming; Aleksandrovic, Macura-Milovanovic & Trikić, 2012; Vančíková et al., 2017) also confirms that policies aimed at universal access to ECEC have a limited impact on the most excluded Roma families and children, if they are not accompanied by effective anti-discrimination measures to prevent and remove segregation.<sup>19</sup>

Non-discrimination should be considered a cross-cutting issue embedded at national legislative and policy levels, as well as at the level of service delivery across all relevant sectors (UNICEF, 2011). Some countries have adopted legislative measures prohibiting ethnic segregation in schools and pre-schools, e.g. in Bulgaria (2016), Slovakia (2015) and Romania (2016). However, according to numerous reports these measures have had a limited impact, in so far as the legislation does not provide a strong basis for preventing and sanctioning segregatory practices (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, 2017; Centre for Policy Studies, 2018). For example, new education legislation in the Czech Republic<sup>20</sup> did not address the causes of the persistent segregation of Roma children, such as the legal basis for catchment areas (IQ Roma Servis et al., 2018).

Various reports indicate that kindergarten and primary school principals continue to create and promote segregated classes and groups, and that this practice has gone unpunished (Amnesty International, 2007; Centre for Policy Studies, 2018). These practices have led the European Commission to launch infringement procedures against the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia – yet no significant action has so far been taken by authorities to effectively promote inclusive education (Ivatts et al., 2015; Council of Europe, 2017; Vančíková et al., 2017). On the contrary, evidence collected by international and civil society organisations suggests that governments continue to pursue policies which maintain discrimination within the school system in Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic (Rorke, 2016; Amnesty international, 2017; Šabatová & Muižnieks, 2018).

To effectively address discrimination, the World Bank Report (2014) recommends several practical measures. The application of anti-discrimination laws could be strengthened by further clarifying how unlawful acts of discrimination will be sanctioned, and by increasing the capacity of enforcement bodies to consistently apply the law. Integrated approaches to service delivery should include measures to develop cultural competences among teachers, healthcare providers and so on, including anti-bias training (UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014). Mechanisms that promote interactions and foster mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma – such as funding schemes for projects of mutual interest to disadvantaged groups from both Roma and non-Roma communities– could facilitate collaboration and increased interaction, and help foster an increase in mutual understanding and respect (World Bank, 2014).

### Balance of universal and targeted policies and services

There is a recognition in the literature that the long-term, exclusive targeting of vulnerable groups such as Roma through specific policies can lead to further exclusion. What is important now, sources argue, is a balanced combination of universal policies that promote the well-being and development of all children, together with targeted policies directed at (but not stigmatising) the most vulnerable families (Bennett, 2012b; Klaus & Marsh, 2014). The INTESYS survey (Gordon et al., 2016) has revealed that in order to effectively benefit vulnerable groups, integrated working should contain a **sufficient number of mainstream, low-threshold and**

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<sup>19</sup> The latest reports show that in spite of the authorities' proclaimed commitment to reducing the segregation of Roma children, the number of classes containing only Roma pupils is increasing dramatically (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Centre, 2017; Albert et al., 2015).

**universal services** alongside more **specialist** ones. These universal services include maternal and infant health centres, childcare centres, pre-schools and parenting support services. Joining forces with other services (e.g. libraries, leisure time services, others) within an integrated setting can help to make these additional services more accessible and welcoming to vulnerable families who would not normally use them as often. Integrated working may also assist in the provision of services that are more specific to one group (e.g. support for pregnant teens, or for children with learning difficulties). In order to provide the best responses to emerging needs, and in consultation with families themselves, the services provided may differ in type, number, and the variety of activities deployed.

The RECI country reports unanimously underlines the need for universal health, ECEC and social services to be in place and sustainably funded for children (and their families) with multi-dimensional disadvantages (Aleksandrović, Macura-Milovanović & Trikić, 2012; Ivatts et al., 2015; Šikić-Micanović et al., 2015; Vančíková et al., 2017). At the same time, because Roma families face additional needs and obstacles arising from extreme poverty and discrimination, many reports and studies also argue that some specific measures should be developed within national universal ECEC policies (e.g. UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014). Optimal Roma inclusion policies, as defined in *The 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion (European Commission, 2010b)*, are those which are based on multi-sectoral and integrated approaches, and which target Roma explicitly, but not exclusively. Such policies must be accompanied by targeted measures to address overall discrimination and exclusion.

Bennett (2012b) argues that when geographical segregation of Roma has already occurred, the mixing of children at a very young age can only be achieved at great cost. Thus, community-based, early-intervention integrated services for families with young children need to be brought to where the children and families are. These services include pre-natal and post-natal health, nutrition, early learning, play and stimulation programmes for toddlers, as well as parenting support and adult education. When they are linked with integrated formal ECEC settings, community-based services may further strengthen cultural identity and home language, thus empowering Roma children and parents to engage confidently with inclusive pre-school institutions (Klaus & Marsh, 2014). However, to avoid segregation, early years community-based services situated in or close to settlements of vulnerable groups should be regarded only as a **transitory** solution – i.e. as a first step towards the subsequent enrolment of children in integrated ECEC settings (kindergartens) and schools (Macura-Milovanović, 2013). These integrated ECEC settings need to be child- and family-friendly, and must make conscious efforts to involve parents and communities – including Roma communities – in the education of their children. According to UNICEF (2011), the five pillars of the child-friendly kindergarten are: 1) inclusiveness; 2) a healthy, protective and gender-sensitive environment; 3) the engagement of families and communities; 4) effective pedagogy (based on play and other child-centred methods); and 5) the achievement of a smooth transition into primary schools.

To remove the complex barriers that exist for marginalised and disadvantaged children such as Roma, UNICEF's position paper *The Right of Roma Children to Education* (2011) recommended the adoption by governments of a combination of universal and targeted measures: the provision of free, early childhood education; available, accessible and inclusive education for all children, supported by the necessary resources and measures within schools to overcome discrimination and exclusion; and measures aimed at removing the social and economic barriers to education faced by Roma children.

Research suggests that targeted measures are most effective when additional attention and funding for disadvantaged children is provided *within* standard ECEC settings and schools, and when national early-childhood services as a whole are marked by high levels of access, quality and equity (Bennett, 2012a). For example, in **Slovenia**, the education of Roma children is guided by a strategy adopted in 2004 and amended in 2011, which lays down additional measures (mostly financial and human resources) for kindergartens and schools that include Roma children and pupils, provided from the state budget (Vidmar et al., 2017). These

additional measures include Roma assistants; additional forms of learning support (peer support; the help and support of NGOs, local Roma communities, etc.); smaller class sizes in those schools which contain a higher proportion of Roma children; and additional funds for food, schoolbooks, school excursions, etc., for Roma pupils. ECEC settings should pay special attention to communication and cooperation with the parents of Roma children (including teachers' visits to Roma settlements, organising special visits to the school by Roma parents, etc.).

**Hungary** provides an example where a much higher enrolment rate in ECEC among the child population as a whole (almost 95 %; see EC, 2018c) has been the result a result of a combination of universal and targeted measures. Mandatory and free pre-school for all children between 3 and 6 years of age is coupled with targeted programmes to remove cost barriers for disadvantaged families, and even provide explicit subsidies to enrol children based on conditional attendance (World Bank, 2012). Roma children from socially excluded communities have become one of the priorities in the government's national anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies. The Sure Start Children's Houses provide comprehensive support and programmes for families raising children of 0-3 years, who live in disadvantaged regions with Roma settlements and who have limited or no access to good-quality health and social services. The primary goal of the Children's Houses is to strengthen child–parent relationships, and to cooperate with parents in achieving the optimal development of their children. Services provided by Children's Houses are available free of charge to all children in the given settlement. The Children's Houses cooperate with a variety of specialists and professionals such as health visitors, doctors, social workers, child welfare specialists, kindergarten nurses, special education teachers and so on.

In **Bulgaria**, universal measures such as the abolition of tuition fees for 5 and 6- year-olds appear to have contributed to an improvement in the overall rate of pre-school enrolment (Huillery et al., 2017). However, recent studies suggest that various additional fees and costs associated with regular attendance (e.g. the cost of travel) continue to present an obstacle to regular participation in kindergarten by children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Trust for Social Achievement, 2018). A research project by the Trust for Social Achievement – 'Springboard for School Readiness' – showed that removing the most common costs involved in attending kindergarten (fees, books and supplies, medical lab tests, etc.) resulted in a statistically significant increase in enrolment and attendance among disadvantaged populations in Bulgaria.<sup>21</sup> The example of Tundzha municipality also demonstrates that removing the fee alone may not be enough to include children from the most vulnerable families and the most remote areas in ECEC. For such families, additional measures may be required, such as providing free transportation. Integrated services that combine care, education, health and social care are equally important. Furthermore, there is ample evidence that improving access to and the affordability of ECEC for disadvantaged children only works if it improves access to *good-quality* ECEC, and specifically to good-quality ECEC for children up to the age of 3 (OECD, 2006).

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<sup>21</sup> Compared with a control group, non-enrolment decreased by 50 % and attendance went up by 20 % when as little as 25 BGN per month was spent on each child (Huillery et al., 2017).

## 1.4. The place of ECEC in integrated working

With their focus on families with young children, ECEC provisions represent a crucial partner in integrated working, alongside services such as parental support, health and social services. A major report prepared for the European Commission (Bennett, 2012a) identified the barriers to participation in ECEC among disadvantaged children, and examined evidence of best practice used to engage vulnerable children and families such as Roma in good-quality ECEC. The report proposed that ECEC systems should remove all barriers to early enrolment and 'broaden the understanding of ECEC services for disadvantaged communities to include: comprehensive services; outreach to parents and the local community; community-based strategies to protect maternal and infant health'. The report made a strong case for a comprehensive and integrated approach to ECEC, with three of its six policy recommendations referring to specific elements of integrated working. In addition to universal entitlement to publicly funded, accessible, affordable and high-quality ECEC provision, together with a strong political commitment toward democracy, equality and civil rights, the report recommended that countries should promote:

- integration of ECEC systems (regulation, administration and funding) that promote more equitable access and a more unitary approach to service provision for 0-6-year-olds
- a combination of high-quality, centre-based ECEC provision and parent support programmes (including family health, parent education, counselling, and adult education)
- inter-agency cooperation between ECEC centres, health and social services, and local authorities

The more frequently that ECEC services cooperate with other family support services (whether in a split or integrated setting), the more likely they are to meet the needs of all children and families, but especially those in vulnerable positions. Similarly, the ISOTIS report (Barnes et al., 2018) notes the importance of integration within and beyond ECEC: 'While early education and day care are most commonly brought together, it is proposed that the full benefits of integrated service delivery can only be gained by creating an integrated services system that involves a wide range of services that work directly or indirectly with young children and their families.' These issues, which concern accessible and high-quality ECEC, the integration of care and early childhood education, and the role of ECEC in integrated working, are discussed in the forthcoming subchapters.

### Integrating care and early-childhood education

There is a growing consensus that care and education are 'inseparable', and that high-quality services for young children should incorporate both (OECD, 2001; OECD, 2006). Recognising that the longstanding separation of care from early education does not meet the needs of children and parents, several studies and reports have urged a move towards more integrated systems (e.g. Kaga et al., 2010; Bennett, 2011). The main arguments for integration include: the benefits to young children of consistent care and education in the same place and at the same time, as well as continuity of service as they move through their early years (OECD, 2017); the benefits to families of accessing more integrated services, and the reductions in time pressures and stresses that flow from this; and the potential cost-effectiveness of removing divisions between services. Integrated ECEC systems are associated with higher quality. They help to enhance universal entitlement, and provide more affordable access and better-qualified staff (Kaga et al., 2010). They are also more effective at addressing the significant service gaps experienced by children below kindergarten age, as well as achieving social inclusion and reducing child and family poverty (Bennett, 2011).

Integrating child care and early education services is, however, both challenging and complex (Moss & Bennett, 2006), and different countries remain at different stages in the process (Kaga et al., 2010). RECI country reports highlight that, despite the benefits for all children (and particularly for Roma children) of bringing child care and

early education closer together, policies for early years (age 0 to 3) and pre-school education (age 3 to 6) remain largely disconnected across most countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Bennett, 2012b; Aleksandrovic et al., 2012; Ivatts et al., 2015; Šikic-Micanovic et al., 2015; Vančíková et al., 2017). **Slovenia** is one of the few countries that has moved from a split system of ECEC towards a fully integrated one. Since 1993, ECEC in Slovenia has been organised as a unitary system under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. All children are entitled to a full-day place in an early childhood centre/kindergarten from the age of 11 months up to the school entry age of 6. Currently, however, many municipalities find it difficult to provide a sufficient number of places to meet local needs. Kindergartens are seen as complementing the family.

Even though the debate is far from settled in relation to split *versus* integrated ECEC systems (Bertram and Pascal, 2016; Haddad, 2006; 2016), the issues involved in integrated working are the subject of much broader discussion. This extends beyond whether or not to close the gap between childcare and pre-school, and concerns possible links with different sectors altogether. Establishing these links appears to be the challenge at hand, given the multiplicity of needs in the case of particularly vulnerable children and families.

### The role of ECEC in existing integrated settings

Within integrated settings, ECEC can play a pivotal role in connecting children and families with services that can support them. It can provide adequate and timely referrals, in order to avoid abrupt transitions and cooperate with other providers to improve service delivery. Increasing the awareness of ECEC among other services can enable those services to refer children, and thus increase enrolment. As a key player in this field of services, ECEC is a relevant partner because its provision is child-centred, with a holistic approach to child development and the involvement of parents. Hence, **ECEC is a crucial partner – or even initiator – in integrated working, in which collaborative efforts are made to support a diverse range of children and families, in accordance with their actual needs** (see also EC, 2014b).

Although ECEC is recognised as playing a pivotal role in integrated working, this role is not fully realised in all cases. In some countries and models, ECEC provision is a fully-fledged yet minimally required service within an integrated setting; in others, the lead is taken by other organisations, who involve ECEC provision along with other partner organisations. Existing practices show that ECEC, as a universal service, must have a place in any integrated setting that aims to support families with young children.

The following examples illustrate the many shapes and levels of cooperation that exist within integrated working, in and among different sectors.

#### Integrated centres – full integration

Sweden's **Family Centres** offer an example of integrated centres in which ECEC is a fundamental part of the minimal services offered. To be recognised as a 'Family Centre' by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, each centre must be fully integrated and guarantee to offer four services: 1) maternity healthcare; 2) child healthcare; 3) an open pre-school<sup>22</sup>; and 4) social welfare activities and operations (Abrahamsson et al., 2009). While the Swedish centres work under one roof, German **Familienzentren** offer essentially the same services – parental support; childcare; (pre)school; and counselling and health services – but at different locations (Van Haute et al., 2017).

In the UK, **Sure Start centres** offer children and families a variety of educational and support services, including ECEC. These centres bring together local health, education and social welfare services. Initially established in disadvantaged areas, they have been developed universally as children's centres (Melhuish, 2014). Some Sure

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<sup>22</sup> Open pre-schools are open places where fathers and mothers come to play with their child, meet other parents, other children and professionals.

Start centres have evolved into children's centres in which ECEC is the core partner. An inspiring example of a 'one-stop shop' in which ECEC plays a crucial role is the Pen Green Children's Centre, where high-quality ECEC is connected with supportive and empowering services such as adult education, family support, community work, training and support for ECEC practitioners, health and social welfare services – all in one location (Whalley, 2007). **Newry Early Years and Family Centre** (case 1) offers a similar example.

### **Integrated collaboration and coordination**

The Flemish **Huizen van het Kind** ('Houses of the Child') facilitate cooperation between different partners in the field of preventive family support. In 2014, the public agency *Kind en Gezin*<sup>23</sup> ('Child and Family') presented a law making this type of collaboration the key to supporting children and families. The *Huis van het Kind* roadmap (2017)<sup>24</sup> sets out the future direction of the *Huizen van het Kind*. The roadmap inspires the partners in a network to work on different life domains. Going beyond parental support, links are made, for example, with ECEC, but also with primary education, health, social cohesion, material support, mental health, libraries, youth services, music academies and out-of-school care.

### **Integrated programmes and projects**

The **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) project**, set up by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, analysed ECI policies in a number of European countries and highlighted early childhood intervention as an interdisciplinary and (often) an inter-agency area of work. Early childhood intervention policies need to be developed jointly by departments of health, education and social services and must be 'filtered down to regional and local level'. The analysis concluded that all families and children in need of ECI would benefit from integrated working that improved the coordination of services, across and within various sectors.

Examples of joint efforts between ECEC and other services and sectors to benefit holistic and continuous child development have also been collected by the OECD (*sine dato*)<sup>25</sup>. These include:

- The Slovenian **healthy pre-school project**, in which regional institutes of public health implemented a programme in a large number of pre-schools. The project involves health promotion activities aimed at children, parents and staff alike, including healthy nutrition, hygiene and vaccinations.
- In Germany, pre-schools and primary schools began working together more closely to smooth the **transition** for children: curricular activities and methods are shared; children's development is discussed together with parents; and professionals from both pre-schools and primary schools discuss the transition and cooperate to ensure continuity in the child's learning and overall development.
- The concept of **broad-based community schools** in the Netherlands and Belgium aims to strengthen links between educational services such as (pre)schools, out-of-school care, recreational facilities and child health services, in order to provide a better living and learning environment for children. This can be achieved either within a network of cooperating services, or even via a single, multi-functional location.

### **Cross-national programmes and initiatives, promoting integrated working**

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<sup>23</sup> *Kind en Gezin*, the Flemish public agency on early years (childcare, preventive health, parenting support, etc.)

<sup>24</sup> The roadmap for the *Huizen van het kind* is available at:

[http://www.expoo.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Interactieve%20PDF\\_huis\\_vh\\_kind\\_DEF.pdf](http://www.expoo.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Interactieve%20PDF_huis_vh_kind_DEF.pdf) (in Dutch only).

<sup>25</sup> Challenge 4 in *Encouraging quality in ECEC*. Strategies to tackle challenges in engaging communities. Available at: <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322700.pdf>.

A number of cross-national programmes and initiatives funded by the EU and donor agencies, and implemented by international organisations in partnership with local NGOs and other local actors, have been acknowledged as examples of good practice and have already spread widely (often internationally) from their local origins. For instance, programmes based on the examples of the British Sure Start and US Early Head Start schemes have had a visible impact on several countries within and outside the EU. The Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary; 'A Good Start' programmes in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, and Slovakia; Step by Step programmes; the TOY for Inclusion project; Home School Liaison and Fairy Tale Reading programmes have all been scaled up, producing tangible results.

One of the first initiatives to promote an integrated approach to ECEC was the **Step by Step (SbS)** programme. This project was launched in 1994 by the Open Society Foundations (OSF) across 15 Central European and Eurasian countries, and is now active in 30 countries. The project sought to foster social inclusion and child-centred teaching practices by strengthening local communities, helping them provide quality ECEC with a focus on disadvantaged children. The programme combines integrated activities with the aim of both promoting the professional development of ECEC staff and supporting parents through advocacy and research. Evaluations of the programme in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine have shown that disadvantaged children attending SbS programmes made greater gains than better-off students, and have been able to enter primary school equally well prepared.

The SbS programme is implemented by the **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)**<sup>26</sup>, which has also developed *A Quality Framework for Early Childhood Practice in Services for Children under Three Years of Age*. The Framework is grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and stands for the centrality of the child and family in programmes dedicated to this age group, no matter what type of service, programme, or sector they involve. It comprises 31 principles grouped around nine focus areas, including inter-sectoral cooperation. The Framework thus covers the complexity of the practices and responsibilities that bind together all professionals working in early childhood services.

The **Romani Early Years Network (REYN)**, launched by the ISSA in partnership with the Open Society Foundation, is a pan-European network with national networks in 11 countries. REYN aims to support practitioners working with Roma children. REYN promotes universal ECEC provision, with additional services for those in need of further support. The Network also provides visibility and status to Roma professionals and paraprofessionals in early years services, and offers opportunities for their continuing professional development.<sup>27</sup>

**A Good Start (AGS)**<sup>28</sup> was a pilot project supported by the European Union and implemented in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia. It combined interventions based in homes, centres and in the community that were customised to needs of the local community. Certain activities were common to all localities, such as community mediators (predominantly Roma), who acted as outreach workers liaising between local communities and institutions, conducting regular home visits and helping families enrol their children in pre-school. The project's basic structure was complemented with country-specific activities (e.g. home parenting support; the 'Your Story' reading and storytelling programme in Hungary), as well as material support and the

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<sup>26</sup> ISSA has created an online knowledge hub with a pool of resources, including the Quality Framework – for more information, visit ISSA's website: <https://www.issa.nl>.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on REYN, see its website: <https://www.reyn.eu>.

<sup>28</sup> For more information on A Good Start, visit: <http://www.romaeducationfund.org/good-start-eu-roma-pilot>.

covering of tuition fees and the cost of school lunches. Teachers, caretakers and staff from community centres received training from the ISSA. Evaluation of the projects reveals positive effects on the substantial kindergarten enrolment of Roma children, but mixed results on improving the regularity of attendance. Learning activities at home were increased. Strong partnerships with local stakeholders – including municipalities, school inspectorates and pre-schools themselves – were a key determinant of project success and sustainability.

The most recent European project, **TOY for Inclusion**<sup>29</sup>, is based on innovative community-based ECEC services for/with Roma and non-Roma children and families in seven European countries (Belgium, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovakia and Slovenia). The aim of the project is to improve social inclusion among Roma young children and families, enhance social cohesion, and to ease the transition to primary school. In each country, Early Childhood Play Hubs are designated and run by multi-sectoral teams composed of community representatives, school and pre-school teachers, health services, parents, local authorities and other organisations. Play Hubs mobilise local communities around young children and families, and organise inclusive, intergenerational activities involving older adults, with and without a Roma background. Activities can take place in the Hubs, but also in other settings within communities such as community centres, libraries, parks, squares, pre-schools and health centres. Parents and grandparents can also visit the Play Hubs with their young children/grandchildren to borrow toys and books, and at the same time access information about other child- and family-focused services and events in the community.

Evaluations of several programmes mentioned above (e.g. Step by Step, A Good Start Project) have revealed improvements in outcomes and the quality of life for many children and families (Roma Education Fund, 2013). These evaluations provide important practice-based evidence to inform policy development. They also demonstrate the existence of both the need and the potential for strengthening the links between practice, policy and research; for mainstreaming and scaling innovation; and for fostering the sustainability of integrated programmes and services.

It is clear from these examples that a diverse range of services and functions can be combined or connected with ECEC. In doing so, such projects aim to support children and families in coping with their actual needs. To demonstrate how integrated working benefits vulnerable children and families in different contexts, Part II presents case studies from six EU Member States.

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<sup>29</sup> The project is coordinated by International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI), and financially supported by the European Union and the Open Society Foundation. More information on the project, visit: <https://www.reyn.eu/toy4inclusion/>.

## PART II. CASE STUDIES

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This part of the report comprises case studies that clarify how integrated working can work in actual contexts. Six specific cases were selected to illustrate the ways in which different modes of integrated working are valuable and meaningful to different groups of families in different contexts. While integrated work in one context cannot simply be ‘cut and pasted’ into another, these cases serve as an inspiration and make visible the benefits of integrated working.

**Newry** (case study 1) represents a strong example of a ‘one-stop shop’, in which one organisation offers many different services in one location.

The **Ghent bridging professionals**<sup>30</sup> (case study 2) illustrate the way in which additional staff – in this case, non-teaching staff in a school – can make a huge difference in linking school life with children’s family context.

The Berlin case of the **Sprungbrettangebote** (case study 3) was selected because it concerns a response to a very urgent need in today’s Europe: offering pedagogical stimuli and support to the very youngest children in the context of asylum.

**Sure Start Children’s House** (SSCH) in Porcsalma (case study 4) is one of more than 100 government-funded SSCHs established in the most disadvantaged regions in Hungary. SSCHs offer services supporting child development (age 0-3) and facilitating access for children and families to health and social services.

**Tundzha** municipality, Bulgaria (case study 5) is an example of integrated working promoted by a committed regional authority that views ECEC as an essential part of social inclusion. ECEC, and more specifically pre-schools, became a portal to the community through which other services are delivered.

The **‘Ready Steady Go!’** project in Romania (case study 6) shows how kindergartens can be at the heart of integrated early interventions aimed at increasing access and participation by Roma children in pre-school education.

### 2.1. Case 1: Early Years Children and Family Centre, Newry, Northern Ireland, UK31

#### Context

In the UK, ECEC has been at the heart of integrated working since the end of the 1990s. From 1997, Early Excellence Centres were developed as new, integrated centres in deprived areas of several cities in the UK (Broadhead et al., 2008). Over time, changes were made to what are now known as Sure Start Children’s Centres, giving them a more universal approach. A combination of different services is deployed at Sure Start centres (e.g. Sure Start local programmes, neighbourhood nurseries, early excellence centres, schools, family centres, community centres, health centres, voluntary and private centres). Although most Sure Start centres were launched in more deprived areas, families living in poverty were not the explicit target group

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<sup>30</sup> The term ‘bridging professional’ is literally translated from Dutch ‘brugfiguur’.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Early Years – the organisation for young children’ has a long tradition in working with young children. It began in 1965 with a group of mothers who set up the first Northern Ireland Pre-Playgroups Association, and became one of leading organisation in early years, putting the rights of young children on the agenda and employing 250 staff. For more information, see the official website: <http://www.early-years.org/newry-early-years/>.

*per se*. Instead, centres are aimed at all families with young children within the catchment area. Different strategies have been developed to increase opportunities for children's holistic development. As well as supporting parents and improving their parenting skills, and in addition to addressing the family's health and life chances, one specific goal of Sure Start is to guarantee access by young children to high-quality ECEC. The leading department is the Department for Education, which is responsible for both child protection and education.

### The Newry Early Years Children's and Family Centre

The Newry Early Years Children's and Family Centre is part of the **Sure Start** programme, and states that its mission is to 'promote and develop high-quality, evidence-informed early childhood services for children, their families and communities'.

In December 2014, Early Years became the leading organisation at the Children and Family Centre in Newry, combining top-down resourcing with bottom-up dynamics. Local community and staff needed to be informed, listened to, and involved in the process. A shift in culture and values had to be achieved in order to become an integrated, inclusive centre. With training sessions on engagement and confrontation, and better working conditions, almost 99 % of staff employed at the time still work at the centre.

Deeply embedded in the local community, and responding to its specific needs, concerns and opportunities, the Newry Early Years Children's and Family Centre combines **several services**:

- Child care: full-time and part-time provision for children from birth to 12 years, across a range of services.
- Sure Start programmes: a wide range of free-of-charge family support services to expectant parents and those with children up to four years of age.
- Support in the home, in the centre, and in the community for children with additional needs from birth to 18 years.
- Parenting support in the centre, in the home and in the community for expectant parents and those with children up to 18 years.
- Most programmes include the whole family: children, parents and siblings.

All programmes are offered in collaboration with many partner organisations. Most of these are professional, but also include volunteer organisations<sup>32</sup>. Some programmes are more targeted (e.g. the Sure Start developmental programme for 2-3-year-olds); others are more universal (e.g. 'Bumps and babies' – weekly meetings for expectant parents and parents of babies). Some, such as childcare, are only for young children; others are for young people up to the age of 12 (e.g. the Family Health Initiative) or even 18, and their families (e.g. programmes for children with special needs).

Most of these programmes and services, which involve many different providers (public and private, professional and volunteer), share the same approach and support one another. They all subscribe to the underlying value of diversity as richness, and work towards inclusion. They refer children and families to the 'most appropriate' service in relation to their needs, and serve as paths for transition between one service or programme and another. They support each other's teams in training and competence building. Several interviewees mentioned how stimulating and invigorating this type of collaboration and integration is, not only

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<sup>32</sup> The research report mentions: full- and part-time childcare; Dominican @ Early Years playgroup; Newry Sure Start; the Sure Start development programme for 2-3 year olds; Bumps and babies; the Family Health Initiative; Supported Pathway Services; Autism Newry and Mourne; Child Development Clinic; and the Garden Project.

for the families but also for service providers. Team leader Lisa Smith stated that ‘Working in partnership is at the root of what makes Sure Start work’.

### Benefits of integrated working

At the Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre care, education, health and family support are well integrated into a single organisation that delivers a wide range of quality services to children from 0 to 18 and their families. Integrated working serves to better inform parents, makes it easier for them to find the services they need, and facilitates easier transitions to school.

Contacts with families made it clear how positive they are about the services provided for them and their children. These views align well with the results of the Sure Start Parental survey (2017):

‘Parents highlighted their own personal development with increased confidence, motivation, strength and development of coping strategies [...] and the progress and improvement in their children’s all-round development’.

### Prerequisites for integrated working

#### **A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community**

All members of the team(s) are truly committed to the organisation’s mission (to promote high-quality, shared, evidence-based, informed early childhood services for children, their families and communities) and supporting vision (that children are strong, competent and visible in their communities; physically and emotionally healthy; eager and able to learn, and respectful of difference). The mission and vision are shared by all staff members and the partners they work with. These serve as a reference point and guide in their daily work.

To implement this vision, the Newry Early Years Centre is always looking for new opportunities to work with other organisations, and to build local and international partnerships to create change and improvement in the lives of young children.<sup>33</sup>

#### **A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff**

##### *Leadership*

Strong, charismatic, engaged and inspirational leadership in this context is not so much about hierarchy. It is more about coordination, inspiration and motivation in an integrated, competent system. It entails setting (reachable) targets and providing the necessary resources, and about being able to connect, inspire and empower staff towards greater cooperation and the delivery of high-quality services. The CEO describes her leadership style as ‘**distributive**’, meaning that she intends for every member, employee, volunteer and parent within the organisation to fully engage in the process of translating their collective vision and values into reality. She defines her core task as sustaining the vision, inspiring and empowering others. This type of leadership also requires clear and open communication, being unafraid of confrontations, and acting effectively for change without generating conflict.

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<sup>33</sup> Early Years Annual Report 2016-2017, corporate Balanced Scorecard – Customers and Stakeholders.

### *Workforce*

The Newry centre invests in **continuous professional development**, conferences, study visits and follow-up seminars, as well as in specialist support teams – keeping in mind that ownership remains within the teams. Participatory evaluation lies at the heart of the organisation, and regular internal and external evaluations and surveys are carried out to listen to the needs and concerns of the staff.<sup>34</sup>

Efforts are made at the centre to show the workforce how highly they are valued. Given the fact that the sectors involved are not known for higher-end wages or the best working conditions, other means are used to motivate staff and demonstrate that they are valued. A culture has been developed of celebrating good work<sup>35</sup>, investing in support, and stimulating collaboration between different organisations.

Employees also speak about ‘openness and flexibility, agreeable cooperation in offering meaningful activities’. This relates to working together, combining expertise and strengths to advance better outcomes for children and families. While all partnerships at the Newry centre share this common goal, they differ in nature, ranging from very close and intense (e.g. with Sure Start) to looser and more practical (e.g. with the Child Development Clinic). This is possible thanks to the centre’s shared vision and common goals. The partnerships make staff feel part of the Early Years organisation, while still being able and allowed to maintain their own professional identity while working together and learning from one another. Apparently, highly formalised cooperation is not always necessary in order for professionals to effectively join forces.

### **Supportive policy and funding**

The Newry centre remains financially healthy by means of mixed funding, which keeps the organisation strong and sustainable (funding comes from local authorities, Health and Social Care Trusts, inclusive Sure Start, Pathway funds Projects, and from income gained through training and membership services or day care fees).

### **Family and community involvement**

Partnerships at the Newry Centre have strong community roots, in order to respond to real local needs and issues (e.g. by extending the age range for the garden project to 21 years).

It also appears that visiting families are quite willing to get involved. During our visit, it was clear how comfortable parents felt at the centre, and how willing they were to share stories about their personal lives and positive experiences with the centre.

## Challenges

### **Staff turnover**

Turnover of staff, particularly the retirement of those with long-term experience (including the charismatic CEO) requires efforts to ensure a smooth transition, to make sure knowledge and expertise is shared where possible, and to actively support the transition period.

### **Political context**

Brexit has caused political uncertainty, which has had an impact both upon the Newry Early Years Centre’s strategic plan, and upon prospective projects that involve European funds. The Newry Early Years Centre will

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<sup>34</sup> e.g. the tool ‘Improving outcomes for All Children, a step-by-step guide to self-evaluation’.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Celebrating good work’ is a key phrase used by all managers and leaders. The Newry Early Years Centre has a tradition of celebrating national and international awards such as the ‘Steps of Excellence’ award from the EU foundation for Quality management, and the ‘John Muir awards’ – an environmental award focused on wild places received by the youth club for children with additional needs.



percentage increases to 47 %. Hence, Ghent is a multicultural city, with all of the benefits and challenges that entails.

### Bridging professionals in Ghent

While a vulnerable home situation does not in itself always cause problems at school, children from such backgrounds run a higher risk of falling behind, not attending school on a regular basis (or not at all), and of presenting problems in terms of health, housing and nutrition. Over the years, both schools and Ghent city council became more aware of the challenges presented by poverty and migration. As a result, the 'bridging professionals' project was developed in 1997<sup>39</sup>. Today, more than 40 bridging professionals are active in around 50 schools. These bridging professionals enable stronger links to be made between school and home life, but also between schools and other services that support vulnerable families.

A publication reviewing 20 years of bridging professionals provides the following description: 'a bridging professional is appointed to a school with an explicit mandate to support and improve cooperation and communication between (vulnerable) families, the school and the neighbourhood. They work within the school but have no classes assigned to them, in order to have all the necessary time and space to engage in connecting all involved parties.' Bridging professionals are appointed as members of a school team, not as outsiders. Their main task is to build bridges between schools, families and the neighbourhood, and to carry out their work according to three pillars: **working with parents, working with the school team, and working with the children**. The last of these pillars has, however, been less well developed. The main focus of the bridging professionals is on working with parents. Their task can be described as 'linking, supporting and strengthening' on both sides: families (parents) and school teams. In the publication on 20 years of Ghent bridging professionals, their daily work is very accurately described in terms of the heart, the head and the hands (Ghent, 2017, p. 22):

- **The heart:** through daily contact with families, bridging professionals become immersed in what vulnerability does to children and parents, and help to ensure that the school team are as touched by this as they are.
- **The head:** the bridging professionals transfer knowledge and insights on vulnerability, poverty and migration backgrounds.
- **The hands:** the bridging professionals act as mirrors, enabling school teams to increase and strengthen their reflective and empathic competence on issues of vulnerability, and acting to support them and make adjustments in their work.

According to the bridging professionals themselves, four basic and inter-related core values shape their daily work: building trust, connecting, empowering/strengthening and positive communication. They are literally at the school gate on a daily basis. They carry out home visits. They take time to get to know people and develop relationships of trust with parents and their children. They make parents more aware of the school culture, and explain its sometimes-difficult rules and regulations. They employ a warm, informative, respectful and welcoming approach.

Recognising **parents as first educators**, and knowing that parental involvement positively affects a child's development, investing in communication between schools and parents is highly important. This is where bridging professionals are truly valuable: they are an antenna, picking up signals from both parents and schools, and trying to link them in order to benefit all parties involved. Bridging professionals work with parents at school, parents in their home setting, and in school-parent communication and information sharing. This work

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<sup>39</sup> See the report City of Ghent (2017), and the NPO documentary: [https://www.npostart.nl/2doc/03-10-2017/KN\\_1694025](https://www.npostart.nl/2doc/03-10-2017/KN_1694025).

takes many forms: explaining how enrolment procedures work, providing support with homework, translating administrative or financial documents, exchanging important background information between school and families, explaining existing perspectives, referring to different social services, and more.

The bridging professionals have a very **multi-faceted role** that takes in many different functions. Van Avermaet and De Mets (City of Ghent, 2017b) state: 'Bridging professionals are sometimes described as handymen, chameleons, corn starch, directors of social cohesion, the centre of the spider's web. This shows how multi-faceted their job is, and how important they are'. Always working from a bridging/mediating position, they form connections between different societal institutions and the people who encounter barriers in accessing those services. In the context of ECEC, they have placed a finger on some relevant weak spots. Why do certain children do not attend pre-school, when a huge majority of toddlers in Flanders do? How can ECEC be more 'outreaching'? (Here, we refer not to hard-to-reach families, but to hard-to-reach services.) How can families be connected with other important services and organisations through their presence in pre-schools? How can children's two most important living contexts – home and school – be linked together?

### Benefits of integrated working

#### Added value for parents

Bridging professionals **improve the lines of communication between schools and families**. This is vital to creating a positive climate for **parental involvement**.

In providing a link between school life with the home situation, the bridging professionals acquire greater insight, combining the perspectives of both parents and schools. By doing so, they improve mutual understanding and lessen the cultural gaps that exist. Increased awareness and knowledge are gained of issues such as poverty, diversity and social inclusion, resulting in the development of more explicit school policies.

To parents, especially those of vulnerable families, the bridging professionals explain why pre-school is important for their children; how it benefits their development; and how they, as parents, can become more involved. The bridging professionals develop a good understanding of what issues the parents experience as barriers, what doubts they have, and what their backgrounds are. These relevant pieces of information and insights are discussed with teachers.

Bridging professionals **empower parents** in different ways: they support them in practical ways (e.g. by making an appointment with the health centre); they support parents as a group by having them meet informally and exchange experiences; they also support parents in their home situation (e.g. by explaining homework assignments, translating messages about when to bring gym clothes). In addition, they help parents to become more familiar with school culture and jargon. By building trust and showing parents that they believe in them, the bridging professionals make parents more comfortable in their relationship with the school. For example, bridging professionals can accompany a parent to a meeting with a teacher. On subsequent occasions, the parent may feel confident enough to do this on his/her own. The same applies to providing parents with information about services in the neighbourhood: how they work, how to access them, and certain formalities involved.

#### Added value for the school and staff

The bridging professionals work with the school team, making them **more aware** of the particularities of different families, explaining the specifics of certain home cultures or behaviours. This is one of the most powerful aspects of this work: changing mono-cultural perceptions and prejudices within school teams and strengthening the school team's empathic competences. For example, why might a parent fail to attend parent-teacher contacts? Are they afraid or insecure, do they require translation, do they feel unwelcome, or is the timing inconvenient?

Bridging professionals have also been involved in projects with trainee teachers and starting teachers, providing them with a better view and understanding of families living in precarious circumstances.

### **Added value for children**

By communicating with and informing parents as well as the school team, the bridging professionals build and strengthen the connection between parents and school, which in turn **benefits the child**. The bridging professionals also work with and for the children in different ways: providing support with homework, helping them with additional language support (e.g. for newcomers), explaining and teaching children about certain elements of school culture (e.g. the importance of time-keeping), and informing them about out-of-school activities etc.

### Prerequisites for integrated working

#### **A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community**

A clear vision on the **deontological approach** is needed. Because the bridging professionals often know a great deal about families and their home contexts, they need to be aware that some information must be treated confidentially. Not all information needs to be shared with the school team, and parents need to know when information is being passed on.

#### **A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff**

Bridging professionals are **part of the school team**, not a separate service. Unlike teachers, however, their work is outreach. They take the initiative to become acquainted with parents, to gain their trust, and to establish daily contact. It is vital that their work is supported by school directors and colleagues.

The role of a bridging professional demands a **specific profile**, to define the requirements for the function. Their specific competences are: reflective thinking; learning to see and respect different perspectives; cultural sensitivity; knowledge of migration, poverty and diversity; pragmatism and patience; outreach working skills; flexibility; and strong communication skills. The bridging professional needs a 'bridging' attitude: open, respectful, empathic and non-judgmental, with a welcoming approach. Their first contacts with children and parents (e.g. at the school gates each day) are vital, as are more informal ways to engage with parents (a cup of coffee may do more than a formal parent-teacher meeting).

In the Ghent system, regular meetings and group **reflections** among bridging professionals are considered vital to supporting them in their work. These are facilitated by a coordinating team.

Several prerequisites can be defined, not only at the level of the bridging professionals, but also at the **level of the whole school team**. All staff members should be reflective practitioners who are willing to work together and reflect critically on their daily practice with vulnerable children and their families. It also helps to include diversity within the team. Sharing a common background with families can help in breaking down barriers, and speaking languages other than Dutch is an asset.

#### **Supportive policy and funding**

The work of the bridging professionals needs to be embedded and secured. They must be able to take the necessary time: bridging work is slow work. They need to know that there is continuity and stability, both in the immediate school setting in which they work, and at the policy level. The bridging professionals were initially a social project (using Flemish government resources from the Social Impulse Fund). At the start, the idea was that the bridging professionals would become redundant over time. In practice, this has not been the case. While they have coached the school staff in their work with parents, and in creating stronger links with families from very different backgrounds, their work has been proven to provide such important added value that they have been kept on board. Consequently, they have become a **structural part** of the city's educational

policy, and are financed by its regular budget. Ghent City council firmly supports their work, and is now considering expanding the practice to secondary schools.

### Family and community involvement

Because the bridging professionals were assigned to (pre)schools precisely to create better links between school and home life, children's families are the main points of contact in their daily work. They meet parents at school in the morning and at pick-up times, they carry out home visits, and are available for the families – sometimes even outside working hours. They accompany parents to various services, and can assist them with administrative issues, housing problems or financial questions.

Through the work of bridging professionals, many parents have become more involved in school activities such as parent-teacher contacts, supporting their children with homework, or at school parties.

### Challenges

- It is very important that everyone's **role** remains clear. While the bridging professionals were created to improve communication and strengthen links between parents, the neighbourhood and school, this does not mean that the school and the teachers themselves should no longer work on this task. The bridging professional should never be a substitute for the teacher. Teachers themselves are still responsible for connecting with parents; the bridging professionals are there to support this process. Their work is a two-way street; they not only connect with parents, they also appeal to the school to grow and to develop a vision, policy and practice towards diversity, vulnerability, partnership with parents and communication. If this is not clear, bridging professionals can become instrumentalised and used merely as a one-way communication channel.
- Bridging professionals need to be aware how to handle delicate or **private information** with care. If they do not, the relationship of trust can easily be demolished.
- The job of the bridging professionals is **not always easy**: different interests are at stake. Sometimes they may witness difficult living conditions; sometimes the needs or questions far exceed what he or she is able to do. They may encounter problems that are not strictly linked to the school setting (e.g. families being evicted, experiencing financial hardship, health issues, etc.). These can be frustrating and emotionally exhausting. Coaching, support and **group reflections** need to be in place. Bridging professionals must also be allowed to indicate their **personal limits**: they cannot solve all problems, and they should not be expected to.

### Policy pointers

This case illustrates the need for solid **policy** support and funding. Through this, bridging professionals can carve out a specific place within school teams, and their work in providing a bridge between vulnerable families and the school can become sustainable in the long run.

The case also demonstrates the importance of having the **right person in the right place**, and of ensuring that everyone clearly understands their role and responsibilities. The bridging professionals are not teachers, and do not take over teachers' responsibilities towards children and their families. Instead, their role is to support teachers in a specific way, in order to increase trust and create links between school and home life.

## 2.3. Case 3: *Sprungbrettangebote*, linking refugee centres to childcare – Berlin, Germany

### Context

In Germany, all families are legally entitled to a place in childcare from the age of one year. This right also applies to refugees, but in reality this entitlement is challenged by several factors: many refugee families do not know about the ECEC system and how to access it; they may have a different educational culture; there may be a lack of trust; and they may not speak German. Children may also be traumatised and stressed, or their behaviour may cause problems within a group setting.

Fairly soon after the large influx of refugees into Germany in 2015, policies were developed in Berlin to provide mainstream services for this group among others in the ECEC sector. Practitioners and policymakers understood that a culturally sensitive approach was required to facilitate access by this group to mainstream ECEC services (i.e. childcare services for children aged 0-3 years) in a child-friendly way and at their own pace. Childcare services can offer opportunities for children and their parents towards integration and educational development, so it is important that these groups can obtain access to Berlin's childcare system. This requires a relationship of trust with children and their parents to be built by professionals involved in refugee accommodation, as well as those in the childcare service.

### *Sprungbrettangebote* Berlin

One of Berlin's approaches is the so-called *Sprungbrettangebote*<sup>40</sup> – literally, the 'springboard' programme. This is a programme of the Berlin Senate, supporting pre-school playgroups and activities for young children in the context of asylum, to introduce them to the Berlin ECEC system. It was set up in 2016 as part of the '*Masterplan Integration und Sicherheit*', and in 2018 consisted of 17 projects. These projects offer low-threshold, time-limited activities within refugee shelters. They serve as a transition phase, paving the way for children to access mainstream childcare services. The funding covers personnel costs as well as material expenses such as toys, books, outings, etc.

*Sprungbrett* **staff members** are not ECEC professionals, but are specifically employed for this project. They serve as educators within refugee centres, and provide a link to childcare centres. They provide educational and integration activities for children and parents, who can choose freely whether or not to attend. Unlike mainstream childcare, where parents leave their children, activities in the reception centres are intended for parents and children together.

### Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the project are:

- To provide a structured daily programme in a stimulating, educational and supportive environment, where children can play and meet peers and other adults.
- To introduce children (and their parents) to, and familiarise them with, the Berlin ECEC (i.e. childcare) system.
- To offer children and families a first introduction to the German language.

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<sup>40</sup> Besides the *Sprungbrettangebote*, Berlin has also invested in *Familienzentren* and *Willkommensklassen* (preschool) and *WillkommensKITA* (childcare), but these will not be discussed in this case study.

- To preparing children for integration into the school system (pre-school level), and for entry into primary education.
- Partnership with, and support for, parents.
- To rRelieve stress and allow parents to engage in language and integration programmes.
- To encourage parental involvement in ECEC.

In the *Sprungbrettangebote* projects<sup>41</sup>, **activities** are offered for approximately 10 to 20 children aged 0 to 6, within refugee centres. Playrooms have been established with materials for play, drawing, reading etc. Outside play space is also available, as most refugee centres have a garden. Other activities include a breakfast every week for children and parents; picnics with families; sports involving children and their parents; cooking together; and very informal German teaching<sup>42</sup> throughout the daily contacts. Parents can also suggest activities, and be involved in planning.

Several times a week, some children can **visit a mainstream childcare centre** in the neighbourhood, to get the feel of it and experience a little of life outside the refugee centre. Parents are often reluctant to come along, as they may still feel uncomfortable or be embarrassed to talk to others. But they are happy that their children can go. Most childcare centres are very welcoming towards these children, and the children themselves are interested in meeting new friends. At times, children from childcare centres may also visit those in the playrooms at refugee centres. Sometimes these regular visits can even lead to a child obtaining a place in a regular childcare centre (in most cases, however, there are waiting lists).

### Benefits of integrated working

The *Sprungbrettangebote* programme has offered children and parents positive and supportive opportunities to become **familiarised with life in Germany and with services** for families with young children. By considering the families' histories of leaving their countries of origin, their possible trauma, parental stress and insecurities, the project takes into account the needs and the pace of families, in order to create **warm transitions to the mainstream ECEC services**.

The project offers **opportunities for play** for refugee children, which can be helpful in processing traumatic experiences. The activities offer them the opportunity to be a child: to play, to explore, to engage with peers, and to experience joy (for some, this may be after a period of highly stressful and traumatising living conditions). In this informal play and learning setting, they may also become easily familiarised with the German language.

The programme also **supports parents** with their parenting skills, and provides them with a meeting place. Activities are available for a couple of hours on an (almost) daily basis, in child-friendly spaces at the refugee centres. Children and parents can attend the activities together, which is reassuring for parents who are not willing or ready to let their children out of their sight. Slowly but surely, they begin to trust the caregivers and in this way, parents become familiarised with ECEC. The staff of the *Sprungbrettangebote* mention that they play a very important role as a **'person of trust'**. As the parents see how the way staff engage with their children, and how the children enjoy attending the activities, they can begin to forget their worries and stress. After a while, they start to confide in the caregivers. The staff also provide practical information on services that parents can use in the area (such as the library, shops and playgrounds).

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<sup>41</sup> The more detailed information on the specific activities is taken from interviews with staff at two projects.

<sup>42</sup> In Germany, people are not obliged to take German classes during the asylum application procedure. Once they are granted asylum, they are. German classes then become part of a broader programme of integration that they must attend.

Regular visits to mainstream childcare centres in the surrounding area make it possible for both children and parents to become acquainted with these services. This has facilitated **access by refugee children to ECEC centres**. At the same time, the *Sprungbrettangebote* supports and relieves childcare centres in their work of receiving refugee children and their specific needs. The *Sprungbrettangebote* can serve as a good transition to mainstream childcare services, and at times can help refugee children to become officially enrolled.

### Prerequisites for integrated working

#### A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community

The shared vision of the *Sprungbrettangebote* is that childcare is beneficial to children and their parents (e.g. for the child's overall development, for German language acquisition, for parental support and integration), and the main goal of the programme is to enable every child to secure a place in childcare. The *Sprungbrettangebote* serve as a 'springboard' towards that goal: familiarising children and families with educational and bonding activities and, through this, with the Berlin ECEC system.

#### A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

- The staff involved (caregivers working with the children and their parents) have previous pedagogical work experience, as well as **competences** for intercultural work and work with refugees. They are committed to their work and proud of it. They witness results, e.g. when a child gets a place in childcare or progresses in German.
- The *Sprungbrett* staff are given sufficient freedom by their leaders to arrange activities, taking into account the needs and issues of the families they work with. They enjoy a strong sense of being **trusted for their professionalism**, and of the opportunity to be an actor for change.
- Depending on the umbrella organisations that fund the projects, different types of **support for professionals** are offered: team meetings; reflecting together and sharing experiences and expertise; supervision; involvement in planning. However, no explicit budget is allocated for this support. Colleagues also support one another on the work floor.
- The professionals **do not act in an overly 'professional' manner** in their contacts with the families. To families, they appear more like friends. For example, staff may hug parents or bring their own children to activities and have them play together. When asked what they felt was the biggest success factor, some said that it was a matter of 'putting your heart into it', or behaving 'as if it is working with your own family'. All in all, they act as professionals in terms of organising the *Sprungbrettangebote*, informing families, referring people to the correct services, offering parental support, helping people with administrative issues and contacting outside services (e.g. child protection) when required.
- The fact that *Sprungbrett* staff also connect with **other services** (e.g. social services, parental support services, ECEC services, etc.) is important. This usually happens fairly informally, and it helps when the major providers of other services (whose services to the *Sprungbrettangebote* are subsidised) also coordinate mainstream services such as childcare and family centres. More formal cooperation has also been developed between mainstream childcare and *Sprungbrettangebote*. Regular meetings occur with all childcare centres in Berlin to see what places are available, and if children from refugee centres can be **enrolled**. *Sprungbrettangebote* staff also support mainstream childcare centres in their work with refugee children and families.

### Supportive policy and funding

- The project is **funded** by the Berlin Senate, through subsidies to private non-commercial service providers.
- A certain openness and **integrative climate** were already present within Berlin's early years policies (see, for example, its large investments in *Familienzentren* and *Willkommenskitas*). This made it easier for the *Sprungbrettangebote* projects to be launched and connected with mainstream services in the area of refugee reception centres.
- One of the project's goals is to **enrol** refugee children in mainstream ECEC services. However, in most cases there are waiting lists, which has a negative influence on the accessibility of ECEC services.

### Family and community involvement

- The *Sprungbrettangebote* project facilitates the building of relationships of trust, and the strengthening of relationships among families in refugee centres. Involving the parents is a strong pull factor here: it enables them to feel a little more 'in charge' of their lives. **They decide** whether they and their children engage in the *Sprungbrettangebote*, and they take all decisions concerning their children. They are also actively involved in planning certain activities, and engage with the staff to organise parties, cooking sessions, outings etc. All staff members are fully aware of the fact that parents must be taken seriously, and that a relationship of trust is vital.
- **Informal meeting opportunities** appear to work best in this context. Examples include having parents suggest activities (e.g. henna painting, cooking), throwing a party together, organising a soccer game. All of these seemingly simple activities relieve the stress of living in a refugee reception centre. They give parents time to breathe, laugh together and relax, chat and exchange practical information (e.g. 'How do you get your baby to sleep?'), speak some German, etc.

### Challenges

- There is, of course, the **language barrier**. Translators are not always available.
- Some **cultural gaps** exist in relation to the concept of childcare. Depending on their background and country of origin, not all refugee parents share the same views on childcare. In several of their countries of origin, it may be quite unknown or even viewed negatively to have young children (those aged 0-3) taken care of by adults other than their parents. Also, **traumatic experiences** can make parents afraid of allowing their child to attend activities on their own.
- During the asylum process, families are also moved from one place to another. This is problematic in terms of **continuity, stability** and maintaining the required relationship of trust. The problem is even greater if deportation is pending and adds to a family's stress levels.
- An issue exists in finding a sufficient number of **qualified and competent staff**.
- Even though access is a legal entitlement, childcare services in Berlin suffer from a **shortage of places and waiting lists**. Some refugee children therefore remain visitors and can't become officially enrolled in mainstream childcare.
- Some staff mention problems relating to sustainability (annual funding) and a **lack of funding for structural professional support**. They also refer to the strenuous requirements of annual reporting during the Christmas period, without knowing if their project will be continued into the coming year. This uncertainty causes stress among the project workers.

## Reflections

This case demonstrates the vital role of a **committed staff** in successfully supporting refugee children and parents. By working closely together with ECEC services, the *Sprungbrettangebote* provide added value for children and their parents.

A supportive **broader policy on ECEC** is also vital. In Berlin, this policy has been socially inclusive for many years, with social diversity, accessibility and legal entitlement being relevant building blocks. The *Sprungbrettangebote* appears to be a strong addition to that.

## 2.4. Case 4: Sure Start Children's House – the case of Porcsalma, Hungary

### Context

The Sure Start Children's Houses (SSCHs) programme is part of the Hungarian Government's measures aimed at stopping social exclusion and eradicating child poverty and malnutrition. Following the British example of Sure Start, the Government started to build a network of centres in 2006, to ensure access to early development and day care for children in disadvantaged regions, especially in poor villages with a Roma population. Since the ending of EU funding for Sure Start Children's Houses in 2014, the Government has continued to fund the programme from its national budget. Currently, 135 SSCHs are funded across the country; however, the Hungarian Government plans to increase this number to 240 in the next year, as a response to the growing number of children living in poverty<sup>43</sup>. According to the report 'Combating child poverty: an issue of fundamental rights' (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018), one-third (33.6 %) of children in Hungary were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2016.

Since 2013, when pre-school education became compulsory for children aged 3-7 years, SSCHs have provided services to children under 3. From 2013, the Sure Start Children's Houses programme has become part of Hungarian Child Protection Law as a basic component of child welfare services. According to recent regulations, the SSCHs should equally target children receiving child protection benefits and disadvantaged children, including children with multiple disadvantages.

The main aim of the programme is to provide help for young children to ease their access to and enrolment in kindergartens, and to prepare them for successful school education. The core of the SSCH programme is to establish strong cooperation with parents (or future parents) and other partners from relevant services (workers in health, social and early childhood care) in order to promote the physical, mental, social and emotional development of young children. The SSCHs provide complex and flexible services catering to the needs of individual families. These range from parental support, health counselling and play activities, to providing opportunities to cook and do their laundry.

### Sure Start Children's House, Porcsalma

This case study looks at the SSCH in Porcsalma, a small village in the north-east of the country. Almost one-third of Porcsalma's population is Roma. The Porcsalma SSCH began operating in 2009 at the initiative of the local government. Indeed, the mayor is very committed to the integrated work of the SSCH, as the service fills a gap in the provision of services for children between birth and kindergarten. The main objective of the local government is to contribute to the well-being of children and to overcome disadvantages that have already

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<sup>43</sup> Website of the Hungarian government: <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/emberi-eroforrasok-miniszteriuma/szocialis-ugyekert-es-tarsadalmi-felzarkozasert-felelos-allamtitkarsag/hirek/az-ev-vegeig-szazharminc-uj-biztos-kezdet-gyerekhaz-letesul>.

begun to appear by the first grade of school. Its long-term goal is to contribute to improvements in the children's future school performance. The municipality recognised the need for urgent action to prevent an increase in social exclusion, and to focus on future generations.

Porcsalma's SSCH integrates universal services such as visiting nurses with non-formal learning activities for parents, such as a mothers' storytelling programme. The main partners of the Porcsalma SSCH are health visitors, kindergarten, the Family Care Centre and the Community House near the Roma settlement.

The storytelling programme helps young Roma mothers who dropped out of school to create a positive experience by reading books to their children. 'Parents are learning a lot without realising it,' reports Zoltáné Tóth, a (non-graduate) Roma social worker from the Family Care Centre. Activities implemented by the SSCH team include: a cooking club, telling tales, play with puppets, a singing club, face painting, drawing, walking, observing the environment (e.g. learning the colours of leaves), and small-group discussion with parents. An important part of the SSCH's activities are community programmes such as Roma day, Children's day, Family day, birthday parties for children, and group activities. Parents can also use the washing machine and shower, and practice cooking using healthy ingredients.

### Benefits of integrated working

One of the most widely recognised added values of the programme is the involvement and participation of Roma in different levels of services. Roma participation contributes to mutual understanding, and helps to mobilise and empower parents. The involvement of parents allows them to widen their social network and develop relationships with other parents. The SSCH also helps parents to establish relationships of trust in institutions and service providers.

The social worker of the Family Care Centre (who is Roma) has conducted intercultural mediation training and is well known by the community. She also volunteers at the SSCH, especially with the mothers' storytelling activity. This activity is led by a well-educated Romani woman from a neighbouring town. The fact that young Roma mothers like to learn and participate in reading activities, and the positive feedback from the kindergarten, are evidence that SSCH is a niche service that fills the gap between birth and kindergarten with regard to young children's development.

One of the most important benefits of the SSCH is the fact that it creates opportunities for children and parents to spend quality time and play together. Roma children in Porcsalma live in extreme poverty, and do not have the chance to learn and play with toys that can contribute greatly to their development. At the SSCH, children can play with various toys, and parents can easily learn about child rearing and development by playing together with their children.

The fact that children are involved together with parents is very valuable. Sharing this informal learning can strengthen the capacities of parents in relation to their children's education, and positively affect their children's cognitive skills. The SSCH in Porcsalma is also successful in assisting the holistic development of young children's basic skills. According to feedback given to the SSCH and parents by kindergarten teachers, children who have used SSCH services are developmentally more advanced than their peers when they enter kindergarten. They possess basic social and hygiene skills, they adapt better to the environment of the kindergarten, their vocabulary is more developed, and their motor skills are improved.

The SSCH programme is declared by interviewees to be one of the most significant services helping in the transition of Roma and disadvantaged children from home care to kindergarten. SSCH staff members and the Family Care Centre in Porcsalma were very keen to share information on their work at the SSCH. In Porcsalma, the rate of Roma children in pre-school and primary school is high. Feedback from kindergarten teachers and from the local primary school is important, as it encourages parents to use SSCH services.

## Prerequisites for integrated working

### A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community

- **The local vision** is to prevent social exclusion and create services that fulfil the needs of poor children, and to contribute to improved education with the involvement of parents. This vision is shared by the qualified local practitioners, local representatives and Roma community members. They believe that all children should enjoy equal access to ECEC, and that it is beneficial for the whole local society. Interviewees referred to the commitment of the local authority as the key to sustainability.
- **The commitment of the local authority** as the body establishing and maintaining the SSCH: at policy level, the support of decision makers is very important due to the integrated nature of the Porcsalma SSCH's work. The support of the mayor for Roma integration appears to contribute to increased tolerance among Roma and non-Roma at local level. The municipality has already implemented several integration projects, and a new project is underway.

### A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

- **Networking and partnerships** are well developed in Porcsalma, and involve local stakeholders (school, the Family Care Centre, kindergarten, health visitors, local government and the Community House). All partners communicate informally on a daily basis. They all work to advance the development of children and families. The main engines of these partnerships are the health visitors and the Roma social worker, who previously worked as a Roma mediator. Both have daily contacts with the wider Roma community and are able to mobilise families. Activities organised by the health visitors and the social worker are particularly popular among mothers and children. Their partnership also functions as a signalling system for various services about the specific needs of families.
- **Quality of services** is ensured by national regulations and the qualified practitioners involved in integrated work. According to the recent regulation, at least the manager must have higher education in teaching, health, psychology or social pedagogy. Aside from higher education, at least two years' experience in a SSCH is required.
- **Professional development activities** for SSCH staff include professional workshops and training, information and knowledge exchange with other SSCHs, as well as mentoring at a micro-regional level. The SSCH has a weekly team meeting and an annual meeting with all partners.

### Supportive policy and funding

At its outset, the SSCH in Porcsalma was supported by EU funds. Since 2012, the local government has received 19,000 EUR/year from the national budget to maintain the SSCH. This amount is enough to pay the monthly salary of the manager and the professional associate. All other costs are covered from various budgets within local government. For example, the Roma assistant is employed under the Public Employment Programme.

### Family and community involvement

- To inform families, the SSCH prefers to use an information board on its wall. It reaches the wider public via its own Facebook page. The mothers' storytelling activity is very popular among young Roma mothers, and is the result of a partnership with another project from a different location that works on the integration of Roma families.
- Flexibility and openness to adapt to family needs is another of the SSCH's main success factors. For example, although the national regulations stipulate that the SSCH programme is for children aged 0-3 years and their parents, parents in Porcsalma are sometimes able to also bring their older children so

that they do not leave them alone at home. This flexibility further motivates parents to use the SSCH's services.

### Challenges

- **Location of the SSCH** – the accessibility of SSCHs is one of the key factors in the operation of the service. According to national regulations, the SSCH must be within walking distance and easily accessible to the target group by foot or baby carriage. However, many Roma families live in locations that are more than 2 km away from the SSCH, making the SSCH's services less accessible. This is a barrier to providing ECEC services to the most disadvantaged and excluded communities. The impact study of the Sure Start programme shows that integration is more effective in those locations where SSCHs are located not too close, but also not too far from disadvantaged Roma communities.<sup>44</sup>
- **Lack of qualified professionals** available at a local level, and **frequent staff turnover**. Since 2009, the Porcsalma SSCH has already had five managers. The current manager started at the beginning of 2018. She is from a neighbouring village, and had to start by building partnerships and communication with local stakeholders and families. In general, Roma mothers find it easier to accept local professionals rather than non-locals, because they know them better.
- **Involvement of non-Roma**: it is not typical for non-Roma families to use the services of the Porcsalma SSCH. The main reason for this is that SSCHs target disadvantaged children and their parents, and these disadvantages mostly occur among Roma families. It would have been better to challenge this and aim to involve more non-Roma young children by, for example, conducting intercultural activities within the services of SSCH. While SSCHs have made huge efforts to aid the development of young Roma children, questions still exist as to how, when and where young Roma children have the chance to interact with their non-Roma peers from an early age. This is especially important, as the proportion of Roma children in local school and kindergarten is increasing (the rate is between 40 % and 60 %).
- **Synchronisation of different services**: the SSCH is open every weekday for six hours in the morning. The Community House is open in the afternoon to welcome children and youth coming home from school. In summer, members of the Roma community prefer to go to the Community House because it is closer to them, but children do not receive the same services there that they do at the SSCH.

### Policy pointers

- This case highlights the importance of creating legal, regulatory and policy frameworks for integrated services. In Hungary, SSCHs have become statutory services, regulated by legislation on social inclusion and child protection (15/199. (IV.30) NM Regulation and Act XXXI of 1997 on the Protection of Children and Guardianship). Since 2015, they have been funded from the national budget.
- Because opportunities for professional development are not available to Roma assistants, there is a need to change the existing regulations governing SSCHs to allow and provide funding for the professional development of Roma assistants. Improving the skills and competences of Roma assistants would further improve the quality of the SSCH's services.
- The Porcsalma case highlights the importance of the commitment of local government, and of active involvement and networking by stakeholders and the SSCH team. It also shows that in addition to statutory regulations, there is a need for policies providing incentives (e.g. additional funds and

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<sup>44</sup> Gábor, B., Zsolt, B., Bálint, H., Gábor, J. (2016). Biztos Kezdet program hatásvizsgálata. [http://hetfa.hu/wp-content/uploads/hetfa\\_biztoskezdet\\_zarotanutmany0210.pdf](http://hetfa.hu/wp-content/uploads/hetfa_biztoskezdet_zarotanutmany0210.pdf).

methodological support) to local government. It is also important to increase the accountability of local government in protecting the rights of vulnerable and marginalised children from early years.

- The lack of qualified professionals is a symptom of a national problem, and is mostly due to the underpayment of professional workers. Staff salaries at the Sure Start Children's House are insufficient to attract many graduated professionals to work with the most disadvantaged groups. This case shows that in order to retain SSCH staff, local governments need to actively seek additional funds. For example, Porcsalma's local government has asked for a state subsidy so that the manager can receive an allowance to supplement her salary. Raising the salaries of professionals working with disadvantaged groups might be an effective tool to attract and/or retain the most qualified and dedicated personnel.

## 2.5. Case 5: Municipal kindergarten network, Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria

### Context

Since 2009, several successive Bulgarian governments have increasingly prioritised ECEC policies. Several funding measures, policy initiatives and monitoring procedures have aimed to increase both access and quality, with some measures specifically focusing on at-risk communities. Two years of mandatory pre-school education were introduced in 2010, and possibly as a result, participation rates have increased both among the general population and among disadvantaged communities. A number of donor-funded programmes have focused on integrated services for young children and their families.

At the same time, the true integration of services for young children and their families remains a stretch goal. The three key systems for early childhood development – education, social services and healthcare – function largely independently of one another, within their own legal frameworks. This forces parents into the position of doing the coordination on behalf of the experts (Yosifov, 2018). Funding for essential services such as mobile outreach or early intervention is frequently only provided on a project-by-project basis, rather than via regular state funding. Challenges remain in securing the universal accessibility (e.g. the existence of sufficient open spaces in ECEC centres) and the affordability of full-day ECEC services, which carry fees set by municipal authorities. The continuing closure of ECEC centres in rural areas increases average travel costs, impacting poor families in villages and especially Roma. Even so, centres are still present in many settlements across the country. These offer unrealised potential to reach young families, particularly in rural municipalities such as Tundzha.

### Municipal ECEC services network, Tundzha municipality

Tundzha, one of Bulgaria's largest rural municipalities, is experiencing a sharp decline in population (Tundzha, 2014). Even so, in recent years several villages with predominantly Roma populations have grown. The municipality provides free transportation for all 529 children aged 2-6 attending the municipality's five free full-day ECEC centres and their 12 branches. Over 70 % of children attending Tundzha's ECEC centres are of Roma origin (Tundzha, 2016b). Through project funding, the municipality offers free services such as parenting classes, a summer camp for children transitioning to first grade, and children's book libraries. As deputy mayor Mr. Stancho Stavrev explains, 'the kindergarten is the platform, a portal to the community through which other services can be delivered'.

A community centre run from an unused wing of the Kabile village ECEC centre provides essential social and early intervention services for at-risk pregnant women and children aged 0-7 and their families. Courtesy of project funding, up to 50 children and their parents attend free-of-charge speech therapy, Bulgarian language

support, sensory or physical therapy, and family counselling by a psychologist at the centre. Approximately 300 parents and pregnant women receive individual and group consultations annually.

The municipality leverages its network of ECEC centres to provide the remaining villages with mobile health and dental screening services, conduct gynaecological consultations, distribute information on opportunities for work and training, and consult families on parents' legal rights and responsibilities. Home visits are conducted for younger children and children not in formal care. A team of over 20 mediators coordinates this process locally.

### Benefits of integrated working

As a result of Tundzha's policies to remove financial barriers, ECEC participation rates among children aged 3-6 have risen by 10 % since 2009, reaching 68 % in 2017 (NSI, 2018b). Official statistics probably underestimate the true extent of participation because total population numbers are based on permanent address registrations within the municipality, and many families migrate to the cities or abroad without changing their permanent registration. Municipal administrators claim close to full inclusion in reality, relying on door-to-door canvassing by teachers and mediators for this information. The number of children up to the age of 3 enrolled in nursery care has increased three-fold compared to the level when fees existed, and the number of children aged 5-6 enrolled in half-day care has decreased by one-third (Tundzha, 2018b). This data appears to support the popularity among parents of the removal of fees.

In focus group discussions, parents expressed their satisfaction with the services available to their young children. Unsurprisingly, parents placed the highest value on the removal of all cost barriers to kindergarten participation, as this enables even the poorest families from villages without an ECEC centre to seek employment. They expressed their appreciation for the fact that children can learn to speak Bulgarian fluently at the centre, and bring home rules and habits such as following schedules and maintaining personal hygiene. Such skills are viewed as valuable by parents, who believe that they themselves do not have the capacity to teach their children. 'They learn their hygiene, they know about cleanliness, and they can even teach you about it,' said one Roma mother. Local primary school teachers added that children who attend kindergarten fare much better in the first grade.

Attending ECEC services allows children to be involved in a variety of activities that families recognise they would otherwise never have access to. This appears to broaden parental perspectives on what is possible, and to increase their expectations of further services.

Specialists from the mobile services provided by Kabile community centre are appreciated for teaching parents how to recognise certain conditions and how to support their children. Thus, parents feel they possess greater capacity to care for their own children, and are more comfortable seeking help. One mother praised the local speech therapist who works with her child: 'I am not very educated, but the speech therapist gave me pictures and templates that anyone could understand, and explained [to me] what to do with my child to help him learn. It's easy – everyone can do it'.

The integration of services plays an important role during periods of transition from a home environment to the ECEC centre, and from the ECEC centre to school. Educational mediators help to create the first links between family and educational institutions: they explain the importance of education, rules and procedures; they help to reduce parental anxiety and build trust in institutions; and they facilitate connections with other services such as mandatory medical tests. At the request of parents, summer camps for primary school students were recently expanded to include future first-graders in an effort to increase their familiarity with teachers, other students and the new environment.

### Prerequisites for integrated working

A number of studies have focused on Tundzha's methods for integrating services aimed at young children (e.g. Yosifov et al., 2018). Some of the key factors defining Tundzha's success are:

#### **A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community**

For a decade, Mayor Georgi Georgiev has prioritised investment in early childhood development, aiming to overcome challenges such as early school leaving, early pregnancies and illiteracy, as well as supporting parents. ECEC and services for young families are listed as top priorities in the mayor's 2015-2019 governance programme (Tundzha, 2016a). This vision has been translated into various municipal strategies and implementation plans, with each measure supporting the achievement of the broader goals.

#### **A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff**

##### *Leadership*

The mayor and deputy mayor are admired by their team, and enjoy the support of municipal councillors across party lines. Deputy Mayor Stavrev's **collaborative approach** involves all stakeholders through regular meetings with different teams – municipal department and division heads, municipal service providers, state agencies, village mayors, directors of schools and ECEC centres, *chitalishta* (traditional multi-purpose community centres, of which there are 3,668 around the country; MOC, 2018), as well as sports and pensioners' clubs. Strategies, current priorities, project ideas and project proposals are widely consulted on and coordinated.

**Communication and information sharing.** An open-door policy, frequent in-person consultations with the local population and a 'walk the talk' attitude among top management instil accountability among professionals. The municipality's website is updated regularly with official documents and the landline and mobile numbers of relevant individuals are listed. Goals are defined in simple terms, without professional jargon, in order to foster wider support.

The deputy mayor champions a **spirit of continuous improvement** by constantly asking 'What else is there a need for, and what else can we do?' Municipal employees are encouraged to experiment, innovate and adapt good practices. Every problem is viewed as an opportunity, and all parts of the system continuously refocus their attention on identifying new needs and opportunities to address them.

The municipality **plans and monitors** the quantity of services provided through annual plans and their respective implementation reports. The quality and appropriateness of those services is monitored through (often informal) interactions with the community, and via satisfaction surveys. Because many of the additional services are implemented by various agencies and through different projects, this informal approach to assessing impact has served the administration well to date.

##### *Workforce*

Over 20 educational, health and labour **mediators** provide a vital link between the service delivery teams and the local population. They facilitate mobile services, check on absentee children and students, accompany children to specialists, provide information to parents on healthy growth and learning at home, link individuals and employers, and translate for residents who do not speak Bulgarian. Most of the mediators are of Roma origin, and view their role as key to gaining the community's trust: 'We are the real bridge to reach people', says Ms. Ani Vassileva, an educational mediator in Skalitsa village. Mediators are instrumental in overcoming deep-seated prejudices and superstitions within the most uneducated and excluded communities: for example, convincing women to use contraceptives or getting mothers to openly discuss parasitic diseases. In recognition of their role, the municipality consults with them on all policy initiatives and project ideas.

### Supportive policy and funding

- The municipality's **participatory approach** has shaped a shared vision of priorities and responsibilities among professionals, despite the fragmented nature of the national legislative and funding framework within which various agencies operate. Though they are financed via completely different sources, services find a way to function together seamlessly. For example, a new ECEC facility will open in an unused section of the Zavoy chitalishte. The chitalishta in Bezmer and Roza villages have set up 'book corners' in their respective ECEC centres to engage parents in reading with their children. Centre kitchens double as distribution points for hot meals for the elderly.
- Given the limited capacity of local government to generate tax revenues, the efficiency with which resources are utilised is of primary concern. Most of the innovations in Tundzha involve **incremental improvements** that leverage existing infrastructure and services – adding baby food delivery to the social kitchen, adding dental screening to health check-ups, etc. The lower cost and operational simplicity of this approach allows for continuous innovation.
- **The centralisation of certain activities** has created cost efficiencies, such as when the accounting functions of all ECEC centres were transferred to the municipality's finance department. This helps the municipality to provide a free ECEC service, and allows directors to focus on the children and their parents.
- **External funding opportunities** are sought out specifically to fit local needs, rather than the other way around. Sometimes ideas will remain on the back-burner for months and even years until an appropriate funding call is announced. Deputy Mayor Stavrev sums this up, insisting that these are 'not separate policies [...] We create a common policy with the available resources.'

### Family and community involvement

- Tundzha focuses on working with parents to increase parenting capacity and improve service quality. Experts hail Tundzha as 'a community-based institution, because of its deliberate and ongoing interaction and exchange with the local population' (Yosifov, 2018). The administration believes that the removal of fees improves communication with at-risk families. Services for parents, parenting classes and community celebrations are also built into every programme.

### Challenges

- **Funding sustainability.** Project funding comprised 7 % of 2017 municipal revenues (Tundzha, 2018a), with the largest amounts allocated to educational and social initiatives. Tundzha's innovations in service delivery require continued external funding to be sustained, as illustrated by the closure of the family support centre in Tenevo village after the Social Inclusion Project ended, and by the insecurity felt by mediators with regard to their prospects for continued employment. Gaps in funding hamper the sustainability of service integration, and the importance of donor programmes cannot be overlooked. A planned national reform of community centres will hopefully allow them to offer on-site and mobile integrated services in the future (MLSP, 2018).
- **Impact assessment.** The municipality assesses its services via nationally available statistics, project-specific reporting, and satisfaction surveys. Because no integrated framework of goals and indicators exists, measures could be implemented without a consistent reference point for desired child outcomes. National statistics are limited in range and sometimes inaccurate, owing to unrecorded migration. Donor projects have tailored evaluation requirements and typically focus on direct service recipients, complicating the synchronisation of indicators across initiatives and their continuous use over time. Surveys offer only a glimpse into attitudes and opinions.

- **Data access and use.** Valuable data on children's health and school readiness has been collected, but can currently only be found in hard-copy portfolios at ECEC centres. The results of a school readiness test, administered to all children immediately prior to their entry to first grade, are provided to parents, but the transfer of this information to primary school teachers is not guaranteed. Neither are test results aggregated at the municipal level. This example reveals a missed opportunity to use available data to track the impact of various programmes and policies on children's development.
- **Training of experts.** ECEC experts in Tundzha acknowledge the need to receive training on a variety of topics, yet the project-based nature of employment, the involvement of multiple agencies and the centralisation of agency budgets make it difficult to plan for professional development at the municipal level. Under Bulgaria's new Education Act, ECEC centres are allocated annual budgets for staff training via licensed providers. Quality professional development programmes in ECEC are scarce. Moreover, experts other than educators still rely heavily on centrally organised events that may not meet local needs. In some cases, they may have no access to training.
- **Integration with employment services.** Most ancillary services integrated into ECEC centres relate to child wellbeing and parenting capacities. No formal links exist between ECEC centres and employers or employment-related services in Tundzha, or at the national level.
- **Medical specialists and hospital infrastructure.** The lack of medical specialists and hospital infrastructure poses a challenge to the integration of health services. Women give birth in hospitals outside the Tundzha municipality (Yambol, Sliven or even Burgas). Emergency health services exist in two of Tundzha's 44 villages, and these operate ambulances that service the remaining villages. Serious illnesses are referred to the university hospital in Stara Zagora. In 2014, there were only nine general practitioners and four dentists in Tundzha, with more than 2,500 patients per general practitioner (Yambol Regional Administrator, 2016). A national health map, adopted in 2018, determines the specialist and infrastructure needs of each of Bulgaria's 28 administrative regions and will be a valuable tool for Tundzha and other municipalities to manage health services.

### Policy pointers

- ECEC centres can play a key role in service integration, yet their potential is currently not fully utilised on a national scale. For integrated approaches to yield results, it is critical to first remove all barriers to attendance, including financial barriers, following Tundzha's example. The government has promised to abolish kindergarten fees for the mandatory attendance period, and is expected to pilot this initiative through an Operational Programme funding measure focused on active inclusion in education, with a total budget of EUR 41 million.
- Further measures are necessary in rural areas: for example, providing financial support for ECEC activities in less formal settings using available infrastructure, such as organising play groups in community centres for children younger than the mandatory attendance age. Moreover, free transportation should be extended to all children through additional annual funding, not only those at and above the mandatory age.
- To ensure the sustainability of Tundzha's gains in service integration, state policies need to be flexible enough to retain and build on project-initiated improvements (which could be achieved by giving municipalities greater freedom over decisions on revenues and expenses), while shifting the emphasis from redress and crisis management to early prevention and detection. Focusing on the latter will require support for evidence-based approaches in existing and future national strategies, and the formulation of goals in terms of their impacts, not just their outputs).

- Various policy efforts are underway that could improve data collection and application. Mandatory testing of children under the 2016 Education Act at the beginning and end of their period using the ECEC service could enhance the types of data collected to track progress. Standards for early childhood development (ages 0-3) proposed by the Ministry of Health in 2017, together with efforts to create a national early childhood development strategy, and the establishment of development milestones for each year of ECEC attendance, aim to define desired national outcomes (Bulgarian Ministry of Health & Ministry of Education and Science, 2017; Prohazkova, 2018; Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science, 2016).

## 2.6. Case 6: 'Ready Set Go!' project, Romania

### Context

Massive inequalities exist in Romania in terms of access and educational opportunities for children under 6 years, particularly among Roma. In 2015, some 63 % of Roma pre-school children did not attend any kind of kindergarten/pre-school education – compared with 33 % of non-Roma<sup>45</sup>. At national level, the rate of absolute poverty among the estimated Roma population exceeds 80 %. The vulnerable position of these children is manifested by their low level of participation in pre-school education, and the poorer quality of ECEC services available to those among them who are enrolled in pre-school education.

Through laws adopted in 2018, Romania intends to gradually introduce mandatory pre-school education<sup>46</sup>. However, unless enough places are made available in kindergarten for all pre-school children, doubts exist as to whether this legislation will be effective. The limited availability of kindergarten places particularly affects children living in poor rural areas. These vulnerable communities comprise a significant share of the places where Roma children live. In addition to the aforementioned barriers to participation in pre-school education, significant differences exist between the quality of ECEC service provision in these communities, compared to the country as a whole. Teachers in kindergartens in socially excluded communities are often less qualified and have fewer opportunities for professional training and development (especially in rural areas). With no additional rewards for working in these communities, the share of teaching staff who are substitute teachers (many of whom lack solid professional training) is much higher in rural ECEC institutions than in urban areas.

### 'Ready Set Go!'

The 'Ready Set Go!' (RSG) project was funded by Norwegian funds via the framework of the Poverty Alleviation Programme in Romania. The project was implemented between December 2014 and April 2017<sup>47</sup> by the Roma Education Fund Romania Foundation (REF-RO) in partnership with five local NGOs, with technical advice provided by the office of the World Bank in Romania. It was implemented in 11 localities from six Romanian counties (Bihor, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Ialomița, Mureș and Sălaj). The selected localities were in poor rural areas with limited access to pre-school education services and facilities (i.e. kindergartens), particularly for the most vulnerable (specifically but not exclusively Roma) children.

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<sup>45</sup> Strategy of the Government of Romania for the inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for 2015-2020, <https://www.swedenabroad.se/globalassets/ambassador/rumanien-bukarest/documents/romanian-strategy-for-2015-2020.pdf> (1.07.2018) p.12.

<sup>46</sup> The last year group of pre-school education becomes compulsory by 2020 at the latest; the middle group by 2023 at the latest; and the youngest group by 2030.

<sup>47</sup> 'Ready Set Go!' website: <http://www.readysetgo.ro/?lang=en> (1.07.2018).

The RSG project aimed to increase access to kindergartens among Roma children aged 3-6, and to improve their pre-school enrolment and participation. Ultimately, the project aimed to improve early childhood development outcomes for Roma children. The RSG project achieved its objectives via a portfolio of interventions, including:

- Creating new pre-school places in kindergarten facilities.
- Implementing a kindergarten programme focused on improving the institutional quality of Early Childhood Development (ECD) services.
- Ensuring parental support and empowerment activities – including the literacy programme Your Story, Home School Community Liaisons, and community events.

By itself, the RSG project constituted an integrated approach to enhancing the quality of ECD services in Romania. Its objectives and activities were inter-linked and complemented each other. The project began with the building/renovation/rehabilitation/extension of 14 kindergarten locations, and the building of additional rooms for toy libraries. The kindergarten programme focused on teacher training, and was accompanied by the use of innovative methods to develop children's learning outcomes through toy libraries and community events. The development of learning outcomes for children was promoted, together with the improvement of parents' skills and practices (involving caregivers in 'Your Story' reading sessions; and educator-for-a-day sessions known as 'Home School Community Liaisons'). Once the project's infrastructure component was complete, the new facilities (kindergartens, classrooms and playgrounds) were handed over to be further administered by local councils. These will remain within the ECD public space domain in the long run, as a sustainable result of Roma Education Fund Romania's actions.

Over 570 children aged 3-6, who did not have access to education before the project, were enrolled into the kindergartens for two school years. Moreover, 1,446 individuals benefitted from educational toys and games through the establishment of the toy libraries (this activity is still ongoing in all 14 kindergartens from the project).

### Benefits of integrated working

The impact assessment of the project and the monitoring of the results thereof were thoroughly documented by methods well established in the literature: a longitudinal study, with data collected at the beginning and at end of the project's intervention, making use of two control groups. Thorough documentation of impact assessments is essential, as it can lead to solid and convincing arguments for good practice that can be carried over and integrated by policy makers into national public policies.

The main added value provided the project is the inclusion into the national ECEC system of hundreds of children from vulnerable environments, who would otherwise have remained outside the system and entered primary school without any prior experience of formal education institutions.

The main results of the impact assessment show that the level of cognitive abilities – measured using the IDELA (International Development and Early Learning Assessment) tool – increased consistently among the beneficiary children, compared with those in the two control groups. The RSG project has contributed decisively to the effective use of pre-school education as a tool to facilitate cognitive development and improve school attendance. The project has offered the participating children access to pre-school education under natural conditions, by counterbalancing the negative effects of the socio-economic situation of their family and their place of residence.

By building/renovating/expanding 14 kindergartens and 14 playgrounds for children in rural areas, Roma Education Fund Romania has successfully contributed to increasing the number of places available to Roma

children in kindergarten, and to improved access for Roma children to pre-school education, as a prerequisite for education. Local authorities, kindergarten teachers, community mediators and the communities themselves were involved at all stages of the project's implementation. We believe that this has enabled the project's sustainability after its completion.

### Prerequisites for integrated working

#### A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community

- The project was built on the previous experiences of the Roma Education Fund and its implementation partners in promoting early childhood education and care for Roma children – in Romania and abroad.
- The project responded to a fundamental social need highlighted in the literature and in the public statements of key stakeholders, namely: improving the ECEC system as a tool for socio-economic development and social justice, reducing inequalities in education and, implicitly, equalising life-chances. At the same time, the project responded to Romania's very specific needs, determined by the somewhat difficult socio-economic conditions existing historically in Eastern Europe.
- Integrated working means that the increased provision of quality ECEC services is combined with parental involvement, the empowerment of the local community, and the strengthening of relationships between the school and the community.

#### A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

##### Leadership

- The success of the project was made possible by the **level of involvement and cooperation** among local actors such as the parents of beneficiary children, the teachers involved, and local authorities (the mayor, local council and school inspectorate). The level of integrated working among stakeholders amplified the effects of the intervention.
- **Good relationships with local authorities and school representatives**, and their motivation to support the project and its activities. In terms of sustainability, the local authorities (in partnership with school or kindergarten representatives) took all necessary steps – writing applications, providing administrative arguments, demographic data, etc. – to secure funding from state and local government budgets for additional staff in newly opened classes at kindergartens, as well as to cover the administrative and maintenance costs of the buildings.
- **The development of trust** between teachers, parents and the public authorities was a key element of the project. The role of project coordinators was an essential part of this equation. Throughout the project's implementation, these coordinators facilitated communication and the sharing of information with all stakeholders.

##### Workforce

- Collaboration with the **community mediators** hired as experts was vital. These mediators were selected from the community or local stakeholders, spoke the Romani language, were respected by community members, and capitalised on this trust. They were thus able to mediate relationships with the community, and to build trust between representatives of the school and community. These mediators were one of the key factors in the success of the project.
- **The training of educators** played an important role in raising the quality of teaching in the kindergartens/schools, as well as contributing to the professional development of all teaching staff. In this respect, the project paid attention to providing teachers with quality training and exchange of

experiences by following the Step by Step and Montessori systems. Teacher training aimed to improve teaching methods in practice, including the management of relationships with parents and the community in general, making use of empathy to understand the specific situations of children, and to understand the determinants and causes of their situation of vulnerability.

### Supportive policy and funding

- One strength of the project was the **flexibility of the donor**, who accepted the tailoring of the initial plan to the challenges encountered in the process, as well as allocating funds to bring in additional experienced and professional engineers, and to support the NGO in erecting good-quality ECEC (kindergarten) buildings.
- Another strength was the ability of the management team to negotiate the relationship with public authorities to ensure the basic conditions for the project's development and sustainability. As a result, the project's activities were fully sustainable in most of the localities in which they were carried out, and the positive effects of the integrated intervention continued even after the end of the project. Twelve kindergarten groups (out of the total of 14 newly created and sustained by the project) are now financed from the local public budget. They have been registered with the County School Inspectorates, and continue their activities as part of the ECEC system.

### Family and community involvement

- Parental involvement was essential to ensuring the successful implementation of the project, and the success of its integrated approach. In partnership with kindergarten teachers, an educational support initiative was carried out in the school/kindergarten, in which Roma mothers were involved by becoming 'educators for a day'. Activities such as this have created the conditions for stimulating children's development even at home, especially during the time spent with their families.
- Community involvement in the project's implementation was very important. All community events organised with parents and other community members provided opportunities for communication among parents and other family members. These events also were helpful in overcoming inter-cultural barriers that may exist within the community. They raised awareness regarding the Roma community, and promoted tolerance.

### Main challenge

- The project's main challenge was its relationship with public stakeholders (i.e. the local municipality/County School Inspectorate) and the challenge of persuading them to support the project's investments. The local NGOs who led the project lacked expertise in public lobbying (e.g. how to identify and negotiate with relevant actors who can influence decision making and attract the interest of public authorities, political actors, etc.).

### Policy pointers

- The RSG! project represents a positive model for integrated interventions seeking to equalise access to educational opportunities among vulnerable communities in Romania. The project's innovation came from its integrated approach, which attempted to concurrently improve and correlate several aspects of the educational process with the construction of the new educational facilities.
- The RSG! project is a transposition of empirical evidence and good practice principles derived from rigorous, advanced research that revealed unequivocally that the integrated approach improves access to ECEC. One of the key aspects of the project's success was the involvement of all stakeholders (local

government, schools, teachers and community members) in developing educational infrastructure and improving children's life-chances.

- The project has most likely changed the destinies of the 570 children who have benefitted from its work. However, equalising opportunities in education for all children can only be achieved via national public policies and increased, sustainable funding.
- Impact assessments of projects such as RSG! are very important because they provide extremely important information and data for the development of evidence-based public policies. Within this framework, the RSG! project is an intervention that supports a package of pre-school education in vulnerable communities that could inspire and contribute to the future development of related public policies.
- The participation of children in kindergarten was often prevented by illness. The project highlights that an integrated approach needs to include healthcare services and support the sound health of children, including medical check-ups for children and health education for parents (e.g. on developing children's immunity; how and when to call a doctor; how and when to go for basic medical check-ups; facilitating access to medicines in case of illness; preventing the occurrence of certain parasites, etc.).

## PART III. ADDED VALUE OF INTEGRATED WORKING

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There are many reasons to adopt integrated systems and services, and many advantages to be gained from them. Integrated working is first and foremost about an approach – a belief that cooperation can be worthwhile for all parties concerned. Improving the lives of all children and families, and especially those in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations (Statham, 2011) should be the main driver behind the integrated approach. Any added value should, in the first instance, be created for those children and families. Nevertheless, research findings also point to added value for communities and local partnerships (Moore & Fry, 2011), for professionals and services, as well as for policy making at various levels (e.g. OECD, 2001).

Integrated working takes time to become established, and it is unrealistic to expect early evidence of a measurable impact on outcomes for children and their families. However, where evidence does exist for the impact of integrated working, it is mostly positive (Statham, 2011). Drawing on the literature review and the findings of the case studies, this chapter focuses on the added value created for (vulnerable) children and families (Section 3.1), for professionals and services (Section 3.2), and for policy (Section 3.3).

### Added value for (vulnerable) children and families

International research provides evidence that integrated working can offer multiple benefits for children and families. A comprehensive and integrated approach to ECEC contributes to broader outcomes relating to children and families. Improvements are noted in the health, wellbeing and holistic development of the children involved, in the general functioning of their families, and in the ability of families to meet their children's learning and care needs (Vegas & Santibáñez, 2010).

With regard to positive outcomes for **children**, research findings point to changes in cognitive abilities, social competences and behaviour. For example, the study carried out by Oliver et al. (2010) demonstrated that integrating childcare and education produces positive outcomes on children's **cognitive and behavioural level**. An evaluation of UK children's centres (Sammons et al., 2015) revealed the positive effects of integrated working on children and families, albeit in very specific ways. An evaluation of Sure Start in the UK also showed positive effects on some groups of children, with fewer reported behavioural problems and greater **social competence** (Melhuish et al., 2010). As demonstrated by the case study on the bridging professionals in **Ghent** (previous chapter), school-based integrated working can also have a positive effect on school attendance among older children, and can help to avoid drop-out. A similar conclusion, analysing the negative impact of gaps and difficult transitions, was reached by EU research on early school leaving (EC, 2014a).

Our case studies include three examples of integrated interventions in early childhood that aim to improve educational opportunities and outcomes among **Roma children and families**: Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary; Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria; and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania (case studies 4, 5 and 6, respectively). These cases demonstrate impacts on **children** in several areas. Children participating in these innovative programmes benefitted from improved **educational outcomes**, and significantly improved opportunities to **access** kindergarten among children who would otherwise have remained outside the ECEC system. For example, an impact assessment study of the '**Ready Set Go!**' project revealed a considerable

positive impact on kindergarten **enrolment** and the **attendance** of participating children.<sup>48</sup> This project also improved the **cognitive skills** of participating children, compared to control groups.<sup>49</sup> Other studies of good practice show that integrated interventions that include a strong teacher training programme produce positive effects on Roma children's overall well-being (e.g. UNICEF, 2010; UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014).

The case study on the '**Ready Set Go!**' project in Romania also shows that positive environments in ECEC settings and better-prepared teachers enable Roma children to feel more **comfortable** and **happier**. Meanwhile, the evaluation of Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary (Balás et al., 2015) documented improvements in **social and linguistic skills** among participating children. As described in the case study on **Sure Start** in Hungary in the previous chapter, staff at the kindergartens noticed improved social abilities, easier adaptation, greater vocabulary and better mobility among children participating in the programme. However, as noted by Balás et al. (2015), these changes are most likely to occur when parents and children attend the children's centre on a regular basis, and for an extended time.

Integrated working is likely to lead to improved **access** for vulnerable families to relevant services (Barnes et al., 2018; Statham, 2011), and to a speedier response (Statham, 2011). It can render ECEC and other support services more accessible, as well as better known and understood by service users. Improved communication and coordination through integrated working can help to **avoid abrupt transitions or overlap** (Gordon et al., 2016) and contribute to **greater continuity** in the provision of services (Allen, 2003; Anthony, King & Austin, 2011; Moore & Fry, 2011; Statham, 2011; Raeymaekers & Dierckx, 2012). It can lead to positive impacts on families in different ways, such as: improved access and speedier responses; better information and communication; greater consultation on case planning; a more holistic approach and seamless services; improved outcomes; and a reduction of stigma.

Integrated working, with exchange of information and better referrals, can make ECEC services **more accessible to vulnerable groups**. Other services are able to refer families to ECEC services when these are either unknown to the family, or when the family does not feel welcome. As previously mentioned, children from disadvantaged groups enjoy less access overall to ECEC than their more affluent peers (Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2013). By cooperating with services that support families in reducing existing barriers, ECEC services can reach more children from these vulnerable groups. This is also clearly seen in the case studies described in the previous chapter. For example, **Berlin** childcare now receives more refugee children, thanks to the **Sprungbrettangebote**, while the initiatives in **Tundzha** municipality in **Bulgaria** have clearly increased the percentage of children enrolling in pre-school. Evidence from good practice examples (Roma Education Fund, 2013; case studies 5 and 6) has shown that in interventions aimed at increasing access and participation among Roma children in ECEC settings, kindergartens can be at the heart of integrated working. Integrated working is most effective when kindergartens are closely linked with **early years services**, whether these are centre-based (as in the Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary), community-based, or involve home visits (Roma Education Fund, 2013; Tankersley, 2015).

Integrated working at the level of service delivery is particularly important in **localities where young children and families are difficult to reach** and have limited contact with education and care, medical or other service delivery personnel. Making the best use of every contact with parents (mainly mothers) and children to deliver appropriate interventions, requires good coordination between services across different sectors (Black, Morris & Bryce, 2003). Integrated service delivery (achieved either via co-operation or co-location) can reduce the cost burden for service providers and for clients by minimising the time and travel costs involved in accessing

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<sup>48</sup> While the project is aimed at addressing the disadvantages of Roma children, ethnicity was not part of the selection criteria. Approximately 80 % of children in the Programme and Control 1 groups came from households where the caregiver self-identified as Roma.

<sup>49</sup> Strengthening Early Childhood Development (ECD) in Romania. Support for the implementation of the 'Ready Set Go!' project. Report on the project evaluation report (2017) Internal document, Roma Education Fund.

services (OECD, 2011). ECEC settings can serve as entry points for services and state institutions to target hard-to-reach and most-excluded groups such as **Roma** for inclusion into the community and society (OECD, 2006). Particularly in poor and segregated localities, kindergartens can become a portal to the community through which other services can be delivered, as illustrated by the case study on Tundzha municipality. Furthermore, kindergartens can **provide resources** that families lack at home. For example, they can set up 'book corners' to engage parents in reading with their children, or open toy libraries, as the case studies on '**Ready Steady Go!**' in Romania and **Tundzha** municipality in Bulgaria demonstrate.

As illustrated by the case study on the bridging professionals in **Ghent**, integrated working enables parents to reach professionals more easily, because the bridging professionals work within the school. This produced some empowering effects for parents, due to the **practical support** they received, the opportunities they had to meet and discuss with other parents, and in becoming more comfortable with school culture and jargon and generally feeling more at ease around the school. Strengthened links between school and home life meant that parents became more involved, and enabled them to better understand the importance of school (and regular attendance) to their child's development.

Similarly to the case study on bridging professionals in Ghent, the examples of integrated interventions presented in case studies 1 and 3 also indicate added value for parents. In **Newry**, integrated working serves to **better inform parents**. It makes it easier for parents to locate the services they require, and facilitates the transition to school. At the **Berlin Sprungbrettangebote**, which serves as an effective transition path for refugee children to mainstream childcare, **parents** are helped to feel **less isolated** through group activities, parties, and informal get-togethers.

Improvements in **parental competences** and general **family functioning** have been demonstrated in integrated early-years interventions that are aimed at Roma children and families, and feature a strong parental support component, such as the Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary (case study 4). Parents were more likely to develop daily routines in their children's lives; they learned to play with their children; they were more accepting, loving and self-reliant (Balás et al., 2015). The involvement of parents (especially mothers) in the programme also enhanced their social networking abilities. Their isolation decreased, and they started to develop a more extensive network of contacts (Balás et al., 2015). The 2017 evaluation of the 'Ready Set Go!' project also documented that interventions which provided strong support to parents positively affected parental aspirations for their children's education.<sup>50</sup>

More flexible **community-based services**, including parent-led programmes of home visits and activities that focus on building trust between educators and Roma communities, are effective in **reaching younger children** prior to entering formal ECEC settings. These services also offer greater opportunities to **empower parents** by building their understanding of their children's early learning needs (UNICEF and European Social Observatory 2011; Klaus & Marsh, 2014). Cooperation and shared common values, language and goals between service providers and parents can be effective in counterbalancing the negative effects of the socio-economic situation of poor Roma families, as demonstrated in the case study on Sure Start in Hungary, as well as in wider research literature on the topic (Bennett, 2012; RECI+ Slovakia, 2017). All three case studies focusing on Roma children and families showed that informal and personal interactions, as well as active parental and community

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

involvement, were found to be key in helping Roma parents establish **relationships of trust** with service providers, and in enhancing their confidence in state services.

A consensus emerges that integrated working, and partnerships between social, educational, health and other services may lead to more **sustainable answers** to the needs of **poor and migrant children and families** (Geinger et al., 2015). A similar notion can be found in the INCh project (Vermeiren et al., 2018)<sup>51</sup>, which focuses on integrated working for families living in poverty. As part of this project, Van Haute et al. (2017) describe the ways in which fragmented and targeted/category-based services fail to adequately address the issue of poverty in all its complexity, and how ‘the creation of integrated and holistic answers to poverty is believed to be **more responsive to the needs** of families living in poverty’. By the same token, the case study on the Berlin *Sprungbrettangebote* demonstrates specific added value for refugee children entering mainstream care: the opportunities provided for play and informal learning, as well as engaging with other children, relieved stress and helped the refugee children to process traumatic experiences. Integrated working can contribute to the strengthening of **communities** and the development of stronger **local partnerships** (Moore & Fry, 2011) and can ultimately increase families’ social capital and improve social inclusion (Gilchrist, 2004 cited in Broadhead et al., 2008; Martin, 2010).

Although it is generally agreed that integrated working can be especially helpful to vulnerable groups (Moore & Fry, 2011; Kalland, 2012; Rolfgaard, 2012; Department of Education, 2013a; McKeown, Haase & Pratschke, 2014), not all services have the same positive impact on all groups of families. For children and families in **highly disadvantaged** situations, however, it is clear that family support services alone will not remedy all of the problems they experience due to their vulnerable position.

#### Added value for (ECEC) professionals and organisations

Even though improving the lives of all children and families, and especially those in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations (Statham, 2011) is considered to be the main reason behind the integrated approach, integrated working also offers advantages for **professionals and organisations**.

ECEC practitioners and teams are not always equipped to deal with the complex problems relating to various societal challenges such as poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. They work with children and families from disadvantaged groups, and the problems faced by these groups do not remain outside the walls of the ECEC service. Therefore, ECEC practitioners require support, either from within their own service (e.g. via team support, continuous professional development or reflection, as noted by Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014), or by working together with others (Lazzari, 2017a). When collaborative networks are expanded, these professionals are able to **share expertise, as well as build knowledge and competences** on these types of issues. Conversely, individuals and teams can share their expertise on child development or parental involvement with others. Sharing expertise can strengthen their professionalism, as well as facilitating better and timelier referral to the most appropriate services. Lazzari (2017) refers to the case of an Italian multi-functional ECEC service, in which ‘the pedagogical quality of the service was achieved over a long period of time through ongoing professional development and pedagogical guidance, involvement in action-research projects and inter-professional cooperation across the healthcare, social and educational sector [...] the close inter-professional collaboration among early childhood educators, midwives, social workers and family counsellors which promotes a more holistic and integrated support for families with young children, starting from their birth’. For practitioners, integrated working can contribute to enhanced knowledge and skills, better understanding of children’s needs, greater enjoyment of their work and increased opportunities for career development (Statham, 2011).

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<sup>51</sup> For all info and documents on the INCh project, available at: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/integrated-networks-childpoverty/>.

These opportunities for professional growth can enable professionals to **better serve the needs** of the children and families with whom they work. Exchanging experiences with other professionals adds to one's own expertise, as happens in the school teams described in the **Ghent** case study, where new knowledge and perspectives on families and the home situations of pupils are brought to the table. The **bridging professionals** bring additional insights into the whole school team, adding the perspectives of families and improving mutual understanding between parents and schools. Their colleagues in school, the teachers, learn from the bridging professionals. Hence, the view of other professionals on service delivery may include suggestions for quality improvement or may increase the understanding of families' needs. A similar effect is observed in the case study on the **Berlin Sprungbrettangebote**, where professionals from asylum centres support the development by staff in regular childcare centres of a better understanding of the specific needs and backgrounds of refugee children<sup>52</sup>. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the **Sure Start Children's Houses (SSCH)** showed that integrated services can help social and healthcare professionals to identify and reach their target groups more effectively, ultimately leading to a positive impact on the local community (Balás, 2015).

By better connecting services, integrated working also improves **communication and coordination**, which in turn can provide **seamless and continued service provision** where required (Gordon et al., 2016). Besides improving the link between home and school, integrated working can ease the way for parents to get to know and actually use other supportive services such as the welfare centre or the health centre, as demonstrated in the case study on **bridging professionals in Ghent**. The bridging professionals can guide parents through practical issues such as paperwork, registration procedures, and so on. This example also shows how integrated working can improve **access** in both directions – not only for families but for services as well, because the staff can learn how to better relate to and work with 'hard-to-reach' families (see also Raeymaekers & Dierckx, 2012; Barnes et al., 2018).

**Evaluation of the Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary showed that communication and collaboration among professionals** from various services and among SSCH staff, ECEC educators and primary school teachers, is particularly important in dealing with **transitions**, as noted by Balás et al. (2015). It is recommended that experienced childcare professionals are required to provide methodological support to non-ECEC staff (Balás et al., 2015).

Increasing a professional's competences and helping them to feel more capable of dealing with emerging issues can also improve their sense of **well-being and accomplishment**. Staff members interviewed in **Newry** and **Berlin** made it very clear how much they enjoyed their work, how they felt valued, and how their own specific expertise and knowledge added to the good work carried out in collaboration with other services. These positive experiences for professionals involved in integrated working echo findings from the broader research literature. For example, Oliver et al. (2010) reported that 'evidence based largely on professional perceptions, indicates that integrated working is associated with a range of positive benefits for practitioners, including improved enjoyment and well-being in their working lives', as well as greater opportunities for personal and career development, and skill acquisition. Similarly, Barnes et al. (2018) also noted from their research and case studies that professionals find multi-agency working more enjoyable, rewarding and stimulating, given the increased knowledge and understanding it brings of other agencies, often leading to improved relationships and communication.

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<sup>52</sup> The positive effect of integrated working on improving cultural sensitivity is also mentioned by Barnes et al. (2018).

### Added value for policy makers

A literature review carried out in the context of the INTESYS project (Gordon et al., 2016) points to increased usefulness, efficiency and effectiveness (including cost effectiveness) as the main drivers for policy makers to engage with integrated working (see also Van Haute et al., 2017; Barnes et al., 2018). As Oliver et al. (2010) indicates, evidence already indicates that integrated working can produce savings, which can be reinvested into services. More specifically, the research literature refers to a reduction in the complexity of governance and/or an improvement of governance through increased coordination of activities (Hood, 2012; Moore & Skinner, 2010; Melhuish et al., 2010; OECD, 2001; Oliver et al., 2010; Sammons et al., 2015; Vermeiren et al., 2018). It can also result in the cutting of overhead costs – or at least, no additional costs (OECD, 2001); a reduction in the duplication of efforts across sectors (Statham, 2010), and the maximising of scarce financial, human and material resources (Neuman, 2007). These improvements aim to ‘close the gap’ and avoid ‘overlaps’ (Department of Education, 2013a; Kalland, 2012; Mc Keown, Haase & Pratschke, 2014; Rolfgaard, 2012; Moore & Fry, 2011) in order to better serve local needs, with a focus on ‘at-risk’ children. Furthermore, they contribute to the strengthening of communities and to building stronger partnerships at the local level (Moore & Fry, 2011), as well as improving social inclusion and increasing families’ social capital (Martin, 2010; Gilchrist, 2004 in: Broadhead, Meleady & Delgado, 2008).

International evidence indicates that strategies which support the delivery of integrated early childhood services, including education and care, health and nutrition, can reduce poverty and exclusion in adulthood by laying the foundations for successful lifelong learning, social integration and employability, while also promoting efficiencies in the delivery of ECEC services (Naudeau et al., 2011). New approaches can be efficient and effective in overcoming sectoral boundaries and promoting cross-sectoral coordination, as well as in aligning ECEC policies with those on health, social care, and with social inclusion and anti-poverty strategies—especially in times of restricted budgets (Vegas and Santibáñez, 2010).

Inter-sectoral coordination is important not just at the national policy level, but also at regional and local levels, especially in decentralised systems. Coordinated efforts can help programmes to better adapt to local needs and conditions. The combined delivery and integration of services can improve efficiency and increase cost-effectiveness through synergies between interventions (Vegas and Santibáñez, 2010), as well as promoting social inclusion, as demonstrated in case studies on Sure Start Children’s House in Hungary and on the municipal kindergarten network in Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria. For regional/local municipalities, particularly those in poor regions with limited capacity to generate tax revenues, the efficiency with which resources are utilised is of primary concern. Most of the innovations in Tundzha municipality involve incremental improvements and leveraging existing infrastructure and services – for instance, adding baby food delivery to the social kitchen, adding dental screening to health check-ups in kindergartens, and so on. The lower cost and operational simplicity of this approach allows for continuous innovation.

## PART IV. PREREQUISITES FOR INTEGRATED WORKING, TARGETING VULNERABLE CHILDREN

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In order to achieve the aforementioned added value for children and families, for professionals and organisations, and at the policy level, several conditions must be met. While certain types of integrated working may require more specific conditions, for general purposes we recognise four main prerequisites. These ‘critical success factors’ for integrated working were collected as part of the INTESYS project<sup>53</sup> (Gordon et al., 2016), based on the content of the TFIEY meeting on integrated working (2015), and on research among professionals in the field.

This section of the report examines evidence from research and good practice, and provides insights on the key factors involved in effective integrated interventions that contribute to addressing the multi-dimensional needs of vulnerable groups such as Roma children and their families, and which promote their inclusion and equal access to high-quality ECEC and other services.

### 4.1. A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and families in the community

At the heart of integrated working are the needs of children and families. These needs are the reason for the existence of the integrated working arrangement, and should bond different partners together to work in an integrated way. These needs may cover several life domains, and views as to how to address these may vary quite markedly at national policy level and among partnering services. Partners must therefore search for a **shared vision and mission**, and answer the question: ‘Why are we working together?’. This question is intended to reveal what vision and goals the connected partners share in common.

#### Shared vision at the national level

In developing a common national vision for an integrated approach to ECEC, agreements must be reached among various stakeholders as to how to ensure children’s rights and the core values of equity and inclusion, supported by the key principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness. Consensus is required concerning whether and how to integrate care and early childhood education, and how to ensure a variety of service types to meet the holistic needs of vulnerable children and their families, including community-based services. Acknowledging the key roles played by local authorities, service providers, civil society organisations and representatives of Roma communities, agreement needs to be reached in a participatory way.

The joint guidelines produced by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, ‘Inclusion from the Start’ (2014), recommended that within national ECEC policies, some specific goals for Roma children and other disadvantaged children should be developed to remove the systemic and structural barriers faced by Roma

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<sup>53</sup> See also INTESYS European survey, available at: <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/~media/Europe/Intesys/Review-Report/INTESYS-European-Survey-and-Literature-Review-Report.pdf>. Barnes et al. (2018) mention the same elements as ‘facilitators for attaining success’, albeit with other details and in a different type of scheme. In Part III, the same four building blocks are used to describe the six cases.

families in accessing early years services. A comprehensive national agenda on ECEC should consider the following points in planning services for Roma children:

- Focusing on pre-natal to 3 years, paying particular attention to comprehensive health and developmental monitoring during the pre-natal and infancy period
- Ensuring the early inclusion of Roma children into mainstream ECEC services
- Providing early care and education through alternative provision, if mainstream kindergarten services are unavailable or unwelcoming to Roma families
- Investing in prevention and health monitoring rather than special schools (UNESCO and Council of Europe, 2014, p. 19)

The OECD's 'Starting Strong' report recommended that in order to create a vision and goals for high-quality ECEC, governments need to take the following steps: focus on building consensus around ECEC goals; align ECEC goals with the goals of other child-focused services; and eventually translate these goals into action (OECD, 2012). In its 'Conclusions on Integrated early childhood development policies as a tool for reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion' (2018), the Council of the European Union highlighted that developing a comprehensive national common policy framework on early childhood could be a useful way to articulate and coordinate various sectoral policies. Such a vision should be based on common European values and principles, on protecting and promoting children's rights, and on a holistic approach to child health, development and well-being (European Council, 2018).

International evidence suggests that the degree to which a comprehensive national policy on early childhood is required depends on the context within a particular country (Vegas & Santibáñez, 2010). Countries with robust and adequate social policies, integrated sectoral policies and strategies, and well-defined children's policies, may not need a national 'umbrella' policy on early childhood. What is necessary in those contexts is an integrated framework or plan of action to ensure coordination and to prioritise sector responsibility – thus facilitating effective implementation. In contrast, countries that place a low priority on vulnerable children, or which have low levels of intersectoral coordination, would benefit from a comprehensive national policy on early childhood (Ibid).

In the absence of comprehensive ECEC frameworks and policies in most countries with a sizeable Roma population, National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS) are the main policy framework promoting an integrated approach to Roma inclusion. In recent years, the importance of ECEC to Roma children and families has been increasingly recognised by NRIS (European Commission, 2017b). The EPHA analysis (2017) of NRIS in five countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and FYR Macedonia) showed that several governments are increasingly allocating resources from EU and national funds to build new kindergartens and extend the capacity of existing ECEC institutions, to increase the number teaching staff, and to offer free meals to disadvantaged children attending kindergarten (e.g. in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia). The Bulgarian NRIS takes the broadest approach to addressing the quality of ECEC, the need for ethnically mixed kindergartens, the importance of ECEC based on non-discrimination and tolerance, and the right of children to education (EPHA, 2017). The Slovak NRIS takes the most holistic approach to health, and includes measures to improve sanitation, pollution and water quality, as well as improving access to healthcare, including vaccination, health education and reproductive health. However, the European Commission's assessment also noted that implementation of these measures is hampered by a lack of clear targets, monitoring and financial resources (European Commission, 2017b). In addition, because most programmes are framed from a social perspective, they do not address sufficiently the problem of ethnic discrimination (Centre for Policy Studies, 2018).

**Bulgaria** is one of the CEE countries moving towards the development of a more comprehensive approach to early childhood, with an emphasis on early intervention. The development and provision of integrated cross-

sectoral services including ECEC, health and social protection, is one of the key priorities in the agenda of the current Bulgarian government. In this context, a strong focus is placed on the development of innovative, integrated services for ECEC (Frazer, 2016). For example, to address the lack of quality care and educational facilities for children up to two years of age, so-called ‘children’s groups’ are being introduced. Where necessary, these will include specialised educational and social services. Many such facilities will thus provide an environment of prevention and early intervention. Efforts are also underway to draft a National Early Childhood Education Strategy. This appears to be much-needed: in reality, opportunities for integrated working in early years materialise mainly through external funding sources such as EU funds, as documented in Tundzha municipality (also in Yosifov, 2018).

In many countries with decentralised systems, local governments are key players in promoting integrated social, health and education services in early years. The drive of local government to contribute to the well-being of children and to overcome the disadvantages faced by Roma children from early years is essential (e.g. UNICEF, 2010; Roma Education Fund, 2013, Vančíková et al., 2017; Centre for Policy Studies, 2018). The examples of the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary and Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria highlight that successful implementation and the sustainability of comprehensive early years programmes depends on the political will and commitment **of local and** regional government to social inclusion. In these cases, the belief that all children should have equal access to ECEC, and that investments in the inclusion of Roma children are of benefit to the whole of local society, was shared across multiple services involved in education and care, health, social protection and welfare, as well as by local representatives and the Roma community. A shared vision to create services that could fulfil the needs of poor children, and contribute to improved education with the involvement of parents, was then translated into common goals, priorities and responsibilities, resulting in true service integration.

Innovative, integrated services piloted in projects such as ‘A Good Start’ in Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, the Social Inclusion Project in Bulgaria, and the ‘Ready Set Go!’ Project in Romania, continued only in those municipalities where political will and commitment existed on the part of local authorities (Roma Education Fund, 2013; Yosifov, 2018).

### Shared vision at local and service levels

In the context of early years, many different players may be invited (or obliged) to join a network. Examples include ECEC services (childcare as well as pre-schools), parent support services, preventive health services, and social services. All of these can differ in many ways: they can serve certain target groups or age groups; they may be funded in different ways (e.g. public or private); their goals may have a certain focus; they may report to different authorities, or function under different monitoring mechanisms. For this reason, their goals, views and priorities are not always aligned. To develop smooth integration, there has to be a common ground, a **shared purpose** that stimulates commitment to the integrated network. This can be an overall vision expressed in more general, non-limited terms, such as promoting the best possible development for every child (as is the case in Newry, case 1). Alternatively, it may be a more precisely formulated vision regarding a shared belief in how beneficial childcare can be for every child, and that every child should have access to childcare, as is the case with the Berlin *Sprungbrettangebote* (case 3).

How to reach a consensus on this shared purpose is not self-evident. It depends, among other things, on the number and type of partners, the sectors being represented, the types of professionals involved, and the leadership role and commitment of every partner. In Porcsalma, for example, the vision of preventing social exclusion and providing adequate services is shared by qualified local practitioners, local representatives and the Roma community. All parties believe that all children should enjoy equal access to ECEC, and that ECEC is beneficial for the whole local community. The Tundzha case illustrates how a vision on the importance of early

childhood can be developed by one person – in this case, a committed mayor – who translates it into policy planning across municipal policy domains.

Throughout the interviews in the INTESYS project (Gordon et al., 2016), respondents mentioned **how vital it is to have a common vision, but also how difficult and delicate it is to come to a real consensus**. Barnes et al. (2018) describe several barriers to integrated working, among which is a mismatch in cultures, behaviour and understanding of services that creates a divide among partners and prevents them from reaching a shared purpose. The ability to develop a common vision also depends on certain perspectives on society, on poverty, and even on ideologies. When considering families in vulnerable situations, views on, for example, individual vs. societal responsibility, will define the way people and services relate to them.

While partners require space to maintain their own identities and possess their own visions and missions, their connected work within the integrated setting requires them to agree upon at least some fundamental issues within any given policy context. Again, this depends on the type of integrated working, the domains covered, and the goals set – but some basic agreement must exist, or must be developed, on questions such as: do we render universal or selective/targeted provision? What is our underlying approach? (e.g. a supporting attitude towards families, or a controlling one?) Do we develop family-centred or child-centred strategies, or both? Does a hierarchy exist between different professions or services, or not? Is there an agreed view on social inclusion, diversity, tolerance? Do we adopt a rights-based or a charity approach? (Vermeiren et al., 2018). Unless the partners clarify these issues, defining a clear vision and mission will be close to impossible.

## 4.2. A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

Leadership and management play a key role in the delivery of high-quality ECEC programmes and services. Research evidence suggests that implementing integrated working on a large scale requires the creation of competent systems to provide guidance and support, and strong leadership.

### Competent system

Working towards a common goal within a network can be quite a challenge for the professionals involved. For this reason, **guidance and support** need to be in place at a network level. This can be achieved by facilitating reflective practice, continuous professional development, setting up learning communities, and by scheduling a sufficient number of team meetings, working groups, study visits, and so on (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014). In both Newry and Tundzha, sufficient time is scheduled for regular team meetings to discuss urgent issues and strategies, as well as to reflect on practices. The Newry centre also invests in Continuous Professional Development (CPD), offers seminars to staff members, and organises study visits. This not only benefits the individual professionals involved, but also their entire organisations – and ultimately, service delivery. The example of Porcsalma, Hungary, highlights the need for professional development opportunities to also be offered to paraprofessionals, particularly to Roma assistants.

Aside from traditional training activities (e.g. workshops and seminars), the capacity of staff and managers in ECEC services can be enhanced through networking and mentoring schemes among service providers. This can be one of the effective CPD strategies, especially in contexts where opportunities are limited for staff to be trained in issues relating to disadvantage and diversity (Balás, 2015). The mentor network established among Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary proved to be a great help for children's homes with more frequent changes in management. The support of a network was also important for newly-established Children's Houses, as mentors were able to assist with the transfer of know-how and experiences from other Houses (Balás, 2015).

Integrated working can be managed in many different ways, and context influences the type of management that best suits the network. Integrated working may involve different partners working together in an organic way, while in other situations it may be managed very strictly. Some organisations may join the network voluntarily, because they share common goals and beliefs; others may be obliged to join (e.g. in exchange for funding). The need for strong governance varies depending on the number of partners, the actions required to meet the network's goals, the level of (or lack of) trust among the partners, diversity among the partners, and so on. The INCh report (Vermeiren et al., 2018) shows how certain **vertical layers**, ranging from fairly limited to very advanced, can support integrated working. This project analysed existing networks aimed at combatting child poverty in Belgium. In general, the vertical layers are portrayed as:

- a lead organisation
- a coordinator: a practical organisation, taking the lead, mediating, maintaining a balance of power, offering a forum to all partners, keeping an eye on the network's goals
- (possibly) a steering group in which some partners invest more time and energy, supporting the coordinator, safeguarding the network's vision and goals, maintaining the integration of partners, preparing (or influencing) decision making
- (possibly) some working groups on specific issues: preparatory brainstorming on a given issue, preparing and supporting the implementation of decisions

Not all networks require all of these structures – but where such structures exist, the **mandates** of the different persons within them must be clear.

Aside from leadership, management, staff and support, other critical points must be addressed. Setting up networks and bringing partners together around a shared vision and common agenda takes **time**: time to get to know and trust one another, and to share the work. **Clarity in roles and responsibilities** is also required. As networks of integrated services become larger, there is an increasing risk that if roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, nothing gets done: partners assume that another service or person will take up a certain function. Another risk of unclear roles is that people may feel less committed.

**Communication** and information sharing between services and providers, such as via regular formal and informal meetings and consultations, is critically important for integrated working. Discussion and reflection are required on the network's shared vision and purposes, processes and actions. In connection with this – and with particular relevance to working with vulnerable groups – clear **deontological rules** should be drafted, especially with regard to sharing information on families. Because all partners involved may possess specific and sometimes unique information (Statham, 2011; Van Haute et al., 2017), this can become problematic<sup>54</sup> because the partners have different backgrounds, mandates, purposes, positions, or rules on professional secrecy. The Ghent bridging professionals, for example, often know a lot more about families than the school does. Not all of this information needs to be shared with the school team – and the families need to know which information will be shared, and which will not.

Integrated working also requires agreements on 'good' professional behaviour, i.e. **codes of professional conduct**. These include rules on discretion; on how partner organisations are spoken to or about; on how boundaries are respected between the work and mandates of different partner organisations; and on how to deal with certain chains of command.

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<sup>54</sup> The formulation of clear deontological rules is vital when private or delicate information of families is shared. Different interests can clash here: while it may be in the best interest of a child to reveal information about a parent, at the same time, this goes against the need to maintain a relationship of trust with that parent. Sharing too much information, or doing so in an inappropriate way, may result in the parent turning away from the service and in doing so, going against the child's best interests in the long run.

Finally, the added value provided by integrated working (for children and families, for professionals and organisations, and for policy) should be regularly **monitored and evaluated**. The nature of this evaluation and monitoring may differ depending on its goal: improvement versus accountability. Its focus and the methods used may be both quantitative and qualitative (e.g. derived from cases, narratives, from the perspectives of children and parents, of core practitioners, and of other involved partners).

## Leadership

Strong leadership is a crucial condition for integrated working (Barnes et al., 2018). The leader is required to keep the integrated network heading in the right direction, and to maintain cooperation between partners in order to reach their commonly agreed goals. In essence, the leader's role is to ensure the network is viable and lasting.

Strong leadership may also have meanings other than a hierarchical one. Leadership may also be understood as a coaching and motivating approach (Gordon et al., 2016). This type of leadership is about being able to **connect**, motivate and empower staff; to develop and implement a clear vision in a participative way; to stay on track; to effectively communicate, and to support staff in developing greater cooperation. Leadership in this context is about coordination, organising common practice and professional development, and mediating between the different actors. It is much more about **facilitating** and shaping the preconditions for cooperative work, mutual respect and solidarity, and **democratic** decision-making. It is not about top-down management.

This is the view of leadership adopted in Flanders, in defining what is to be expected of a coordinator for a *Huis van het Kind*<sup>55</sup>. In this setting, hierarchical leadership is not considered appropriate, as all partners in these networks have their own relevant expertise and input, and are to be treated as equally important. Here, the notion of '**connective leadership**' is more likely to work. This approach is also clearly demonstrated in Newry, where the coordinator is reported to be strong, charismatic, engaged and inspirational in connecting people, rather than being a hierarchical CEO. A similar collaborative approach is described in the Tundzha case, where the mayor meets regularly with all stakeholders and keeps them on board for consultation on strategies and planning.

Leaders and management at the service level need to promote a positive workplace culture and encourage collaborative and reflective learning communities. Positive workplace cultures support ECEC staff and other professionals and paraprofessionals in learning from each other, and in developing professionally. Effective leaders also extend their practice beyond the service itself, to connect with families and the local community, as well as establishing links with other services to form professional networks of practice. Effective leaders who are responsible for innovative, integrated programmes supported by international organisations, need to encourage a supportive culture based on collaboration, mutual respect and trust between ECEC services, local governments, professionals and other service providers, as well as families and communities. They need to promote shared responsibility for supporting vulnerable families and children.

Examples from the Sure Start House in Porcsalma in Hungary and Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria highlight the role of committed and inspirational leadership in municipal and local government, as well as at the service level. This has been essential to the success of these integrated working projects. The leadership sets strategic directions and fosters core values and principles of equality, which inform the way in which services operate. In Tundzha, Bulgaria, leaders at the municipal level are open to new ideas, encourage staff reflection and self-review, and motivate service providers to pursue continuous improvement. Here, experimentation, innovation and the adaptation of services to local needs are actively encouraged by the local authority management. Regular meetings are used to brainstorm ideas. Problems are viewed as opportunities, and all parts of the

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<sup>55</sup> House of the Child, see e.g. <https://www.expoo.be/metafoor-van-een-co-%C3-%B6rdinator-30-mei-2016>.

system continuously refocus their attention on identifying the new needs of vulnerable children and their families, and exploring possibilities to address them.

While leadership may be distributed at a management level – for example, between the Mayor and Deputy Mayor in Tundzha municipality, or among staff across services at the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary, some studies suggest that a designated leader or ‘champion’ at central or local government level should be appointed to lead the development of a shared vision and the implementation of integrated services (e.g. Vegas & Santibáñez, 2010; Yosifov, 2018).

The role and type of leadership is not a static question, however (Vermeiren et al., 2018). It may change according to the history, size and nature of the network. Over time, the coordination of a given integrated network may, for example, change from a hierarchical role into a more facilitating one. At the outset, when confidence between partners or towards a lead organisation may be low, or when partners do not wish to ‘show all their cards’, it may be more advisable for the leader to adopt the style of a steering commissioner. As things start to work and trust begins to develop, the coordinator’s role may develop into that of a facilitator or co-producer.

### Reflective staff

Evidence from evaluations of programmes demonstrating good practice indicates that integrating services is only effective if it leads to better-quality services for children and families, and that integration on its own has little impact on outcomes (Katz & Valentine, 2009). Ample evidence exists that the quality of ECEC, and its positive outcomes for children – especially for those in vulnerable living conditions, including Roma – depend on well-qualified, experienced and competent staff (Peeters, 2016)<sup>56</sup>. The contexts of diversity and poverty require additional competences and professional attitudes from ECEC professionals (Peeters & Sharmahd, 2014).

In order to engage in more integrated working settings, staff require **additional competences** on top of those relating to their day-to-day jobs (Gordon et al., 2016). A child practitioner in an ECEC service may be very good at his/her job within the context of his/her playroom or classroom. But to become involved in a more integrated working context, they require additional competences or attitudes, such as a willingness to cooperate with others and trust in other professionals, a willingness to reflect on one’s own practice, and courage to reassess ‘the way things have always been done’. Professionals in integrated settings also require an open mind to enable shared learning, and for the exchange of views on certain functions and the ways in which these may need to be adapted. Furthermore, when focusing on vulnerable groups, specific attitudes and competences are required in order to work in the context of diversity. Professionals may need to further develop their expertise, not only in reaching out to so-called ‘hard-to-reach families’, but also to work as part of a more diverse team. Old habits or a more paternalistic approach will need to make way for a more **enabling, welcoming, participative and inclusive work attitude**. As Gordon et al. put it: ‘Parents/carers and children should receive the services they actually need, not what professionals think they need’ (Gordon et al., 2016). This is aptly illustrated in the cases of the bridging professionals in Ghent and the *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin (cases 2 and 3, respectively, in Part III). In these cases, staff in mainstream schools and childcare became more aware of the particularities of the different types of families they were working with, and got to know more about the children’s backgrounds, through exchanges with the bridging professionals and with the *Sprungbrett* staff, respectively.

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<sup>56</sup> Also, The CoRe research showed that this is not only an issue for the individual ECEC worker. CoRe promotes a competent ‘system’, involving individuals, teams, management and policies.

Integrated programmes for disadvantaged children such as Roma require well-trained staff, as well as teams of specialist professionals and outreach workers (Open Society institute, 2007; Roma Education Fund, 2013). Projects such as the School Open for All in Slovakia, the Social Inclusion Project in Bulgaria, or the network of Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary, have promoted inclusive teams of teachers/instructors, nurses, social workers, speech therapists, special education professionals, psychologists, and so on. In order for early years settings to become multi-functional centres that provide a variety of services (education and care, health and social care), it is necessary to ensure the clarity of the legislative framework, policies and funding that relate to inclusive education and responsibilities for ECEC (Yosifov, 2018). It is also necessary to ensure that qualified specialists are available (Vančíková, 2017; Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture, 2018). The example of the Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma, Hungary, shows how important is to ensure the continuity of staffing, as frequent changes staff (mainly due to financial reasons) mean that relationships have to be built up again.

However, many studies report the lack of skilled professionals working in ECEC institutions, particularly in remote and poor rural areas in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania (Roma Education Fund, 2013; Vančíková et al., 2017). Professionals require competences to develop and maintain respectful and tactful relationships with parents and the community in general, using empathy to understand the specific situations of children and the causes of their vulnerability (Roma Education Fund, 2013). These relationships are assisted by ECEC staff taking an active interest in community affairs (Bennett, 2012b). Integrated services further require motivated and highly-skilled staff, equipped with the skills and qualities necessary to better communicate, interact and collaborate with professionals from other sectors – as can be seen in the cases of the Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma, Hungary and 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania.

A mixed workforce that reflects the social and cultural diversity present in local communities is another important prerequisite for successful integrated working. In many good practice examples (e.g. Step by Step, A Good Start, Sure Start Children's Houses, 'Ready Set Go!'), the recruitment of Roma as teachers and teaching assistants, mediators and assistants in children's centres has contributed not only to wider access for children from marginalised groups, but also to action on cultural issues and social inclusion. Roma mediators offer the potential to sensitise the majority population to the problems and needs of Roma communities, and to mobilise energies among both Roma and majority populations (Klaus & Marsh, 2014). For example, Roma teaching assistants in the 'A Good Start' project helped to overcome language barriers, improve communication and cooperation between teachers and parents, and facilitate children's inclusion (World Bank, 2013). Examples from Porcsalma, Hungary; Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria; and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania confirm the findings of previous research concerning the important role of Roma mediators. In these cases, these mediators acted as role models for the rest of the community, conducting home visits, organising community events and communicating with different institutions and local authorities – including social, welfare and health services. However, Roma assistants and mediators must be seen as equal partners in ECEC services, and not pushed into a subservient role (Wide Open School, 2011).

### 4.3. Supportive policy and funding

#### Policy frameworks

Integrated working tends to be more effective if **supportive policy measures** are in place. It is easier to develop more integrated working in the field when responsibility is not divided between different levels of authority (e.g. between welfare and education). Bridging policy levels is a difficult exercise, but examples do exist:

- a coordinating minister for children (Ireland, Sweden<sup>57</sup>)
- cross-sectoral action plans on poverty (Belgium, federal action plan to combat poverty 2016-2019<sup>58</sup>; Ireland, 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures', the National Policy Framework for Children and Young people 2014-2020<sup>59</sup>)
- inter-ministerial working groups (e.g. the Belgian National Commission on the Rights of the Child<sup>60</sup>)
- cross-sectoral children's strategies (e.g. Ireland<sup>61</sup>)

Policies can also be developed at the level of **monitoring** and **quality**. This involves asking questions about which types of services should be involved in which types of network. It also includes considering regulations on deontology and the sharing of information, as well as requirements for Continuous Professional Development. Such policies are apparent in the Swedish Family Centres (Abrahamsson et al., 2009), and in the Sure Start Centres (Melhuish et al., 2010) and children's centres in the UK (Sammons et al., 2015).

#### Legislative frameworks

It is also important to have a **legislative framework** that stimulates integrated working. This can be either descriptive (e.g. stipulating which partners must be involved, and what services must be offered), or it can allow some leeway so that integrated initiatives can be adapted to what is needed at a local level. In Belgium's Flemish community, the 2014 law on the preventive family support provides a general framework that combines a minimal set of obligations (e.g. each network should include a consultation bureau for 0-3-year-old children as a partner) with sufficient freedom to develop the network according to what needs exist within a given community, what partners are available and willing to commit, and what resources can be used.

The legislative context is also influenced by the general nature of governance, either through a strong central authority or via more decentralised governance. In order to really understand the local context and needs, **local governance** plays a crucial role in integrated working. In the case of the Ghent bridging professionals, it is clear that long-term support from the city council has been vital to the development and success of this initiative. In Tundzha municipality, the mayor and deputy mayor are the driving force behind the project. The experience of the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania reveals that it was a challenge to fully involve the local authority and school inspectorate. Other examples of local cooperation exist in Norway, where the national

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<sup>57</sup> More information about the Irish and Swedish ministers for children is available at <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=documents/Aboutus/contact.htm> and <https://www.government.se/government-of-sweden/ministry-of-health-and-social-affairs/lena-hallengren/>.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, the Belgian policy planning on poverty [https://www.mis.be/sites/default/files/documents/federaal\\_plan\\_armoedebestrijding\\_2016-2019\\_0.pdf](https://www.mis.be/sites/default/files/documents/federaal_plan_armoedebestrijding_2016-2019_0.pdf) (in Dutch).

<sup>59</sup> See more on the National Policy Framework for Children and Young people 2014-2020 of: <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/docs/EN/Better-Outcomes-Brighter-Futures-The-National-Policy-Framework-for-Children-and-Young-People-2014-%E2%80%93-2020/3146.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, the Belgian national commission on the Rights of the Child, [https://ncrc-cnde.be/en/?lang=en#slider\\_activites32](https://ncrc-cnde.be/en/?lang=en#slider_activites32).

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, the comprehensive Irish approach <https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/Aboutus/stratfullenglishversion.pdf> and [https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp\\_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureBriefingNote.pdf](https://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureBriefingNote.pdf).

Kindergarten Act (sections 8, 21 and 22) defines the responsibility of municipalities to cooperate with social and child welfare services, ECEC services, schools and special education assistance, and to share information among the various services involved (OECD Challenge 1).

### Coordination structures

Despite some positive trends among governments in Central and Eastern Europe to move towards more comprehensive approaches to national ECEC policies and National Roma integration strategies, large gaps remain between policy planning and implementation at ground level (Centre for Policy Studies, 2018; European Commission, 2017). Research suggests that one of the reasons for weak collaboration and implementation capacity is that most countries in Central and Eastern Europe do not possess effective coordination structures (Bennett, 2012b; UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014; Vančíková et al., 2017). In Bulgaria, for example, cross-sectoral cooperation is mostly poor due to weaknesses in horizontal planning (across ministries) or vertical coordination (especially with regard to local government). Legislative and political frameworks relating to children and their families remain confined to sectoral legislation and policies in the healthcare, education and social spheres (Yosifov, 2018).

The existence of adequate coordinating structures is a precondition for the proper coordination of policies, measures and funding schemes for Roma inclusion (Vančíková et al., 2017). The OECD (2012) recommended the designation of a lead ministry for young children, which would be responsible for overall policy, while working in cooperation with other departments and sectors. However, developing a common policy framework is not just a matter of which department takes charge; it strengthens accountability and clarifies the responsibility of a selected ministry for comprehensive policymaking, funding, regulation, personnel qualification, training, certification and professional development (Haddad, 2006). According to Bennet (2011), integrating care services within the education sector would ensure universal entitlement, affordable access, and a unified and well-educated workforce, as well as enhanced learning for all ages and smoother transitions for young children. Vegas & Santibáñez (2010) argue for the coordinating role of a strong ministry (with the political support of the whole government) as a crucial condition for promoting dialogue between sectors and forging a national consensus.

Evidence from the implementation of National Roma Integration Strategies suggests that a specialised governmental agency for coordination (such as the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities in Slovakia, or the Agency for Social Inclusion in the Czech Republic) can play a positive role in piloting and supporting innovative programmes with integrated approaches to the inclusion of Roma children in ECEC (Centre for Policy Studies, 2018). In practice, however, the scaling up and mainstreaming of pilot projects has not taken place in many countries. As the European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network's study (2014) pointed out, this is mainly due to a lack of necessary implementation mechanisms, a lack of resources for scaling up, and a lack of evaluation. The recent synthesis report on the implementation of NRIS further highlighted a lack of political will to promote the development of comprehensive evidence-based policies and the scaling up of good practice (Centre for Policy Studies, 2018).

Still, a few examples exist of the scaling up and mainstreaming of innovative practices promoting integrated approaches to ECEC. The Sure Start Children's Houses project in **Hungary** is one example of the mainstreaming of an integrated programme into existing legislation, policies and national strategies. The pilot project was funded using EU/Norwegian funds. Since the project's completion and evaluation, the Sure Start Children's Houses programme has become part of national social inclusion, antipoverty and social protection policies, and is funded from the state budget. **Slovakia** provides another example of the impact of evidence from good practice (and the strong involvement of civil society actors) on the way EU funds are allocated. The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities in Slovakia stipulated that projects aimed at expanding the capacity of kindergartens must comply with the principles of desegregation, de-ghettoisation

and de-stigmatisation. They must also promote inclusive education, include additional measures to improve access to ECEC (such as the provision of school buses with escorts, or the building of safe, new road infrastructure), and involve activities aimed at increasing mutual understanding and awareness between the Roma and non-Roma population (Vančíková et al., 2017).

### Adequate and sustainable funding

Barriers to effective integrated and comprehensive programmes and services are often formed at policy level, and by a lack of secure funding. Both the literature and good practice examples have highlighted the need for the requisite financial resources to be allocated in order for integrated policies and services to be effective and sustainable. Governments may stimulate the development of networks, and legislation may provide the required setting – but when no funding is available, networks can be difficult to sustain<sup>62</sup>. Adequate funds are required to ensure the continuity of services, staffing, and support for staff (Gordon et al., 2016), as consistently highlighted in all six cases. Funding is also necessary to ensure that adequate time is allocated, e.g. to ensure that timescales are realistic, and that time for planning is built into schedules (Open Society Institute, 2007b; Wyslowska & Zachrisson, 2018).

Based on the INTESYS survey (Gordon et al., 2016), the suggestion has been made that so-called ‘earmarked’ budgets should be allocated for integrated working, rather than all funds being distributed to the individual sectors or organisations involved in networks or integrated services. Countries such as Sweden have a long tradition of public funding, and the Swedish Family Centres are a good example of how this type of integrated working is offered to all families, free of charge and publicly funded (Abrahamsson et al., 2009).

Funding can also be a **combination of private and public resources**. In the Newry case, the centre relies on both public and private funding, and reports this mixed funding as a way of staying financially healthy. In Flanders, the Ministry of Welfare and a private foundation have invested budgets in the KOALA<sup>63</sup> project over a period of 10 years. This project is aimed at innovation in basic services for vulnerable families, and funds cooperation between ECEC services (i.e. childcare centres for 0-3 years) and organisations providing parental support and offering child-parent activities. KOALA projects create opportunities for new places in childcare, and increase access to basic provision among vulnerable families.

### The role of EU funds in promoting integrated working for Roma

Most programmes that explicitly (but not exclusively) target Roma children and their families are funded from the European Structural Funds (ESF), or from the external funds of donor agencies. ESF funds are considered a crucial financial instrument for the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), which should be seen in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the National Reform Programmes, and the European Semester. However, monitoring reports prepared by civil society organisations, European and international agencies argue that although Roma are considered a target group within the NRIS, they should be also included in the context of mainstream policies and programmes (e.g. Centre for Policy Studies, 2018; Vančíková et al., 2017).

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<sup>62</sup> In the UK, budget cuts have resulted in the closure of several Sure Start centres. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-sure-start-children-centres-closures-government-understating-decline-report-family-support-a8288076.html>: ‘Professor Kathy Sylva, lead author of the report, said: ‘Our national survey of local authorities found wide variation in the level of closures and in the number of services on offer. This is all the more alarming in light of the government’s own evaluation of Sure Start showing many beneficial effects of children’s centre use on families.’’

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.kindengezin.be/cijfers-en-rapporten/jaarverslag-2018/koala/> (in Dutch) KOALA is an acronym for ‘Child and Parent activities in combating poverty at the local level’.

**Box 1.** Examples of EU-funded projects aimed at integrating ECEC services.

Some governments have used EU funds to develop projects with a more comprehensive approach aimed at integrated services. For example, the Ministry of Education in **Slovakia** has implemented a €30 million large-scale, ESF-funded project, ‘School Open for All’ (SOA). The project integrates measures for pre-school and primary education. The main objective of the SOA project is to ensure that the largest possible number of Roma children have access to pre-school education. Building on experiences from previous large-scale projects, SOA promotes a comprehensive approach through inclusive teams of teachers, teaching assistants and specialist professionals (e.g. social pedagogues, educational psychologists), an all-day educational system, the professional development of teachers, and non-formal learning methods for children and families. Parenting support programmes aim to improve the capacity of Roma parents to support their children at home, e.g. by improving parents’ reading skills (Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture, 2018).

In **Bulgaria**, the ‘Social Inclusion Project’ (SIP) was the first national project entirely focused on promoting an inter-sectoral approach at service level (Yosifov, 2018). The idea of this project was for services to be provided by a multi-disciplinary team consisting of various specialists from the healthcare, social and education sectors. A network of integrated early childhood services for children and families (including services for early childhood development, early childhood risk prevention, better coverage and the improved readiness of children to be included in the education system, improved family environment, etc.) was set up in 66 municipalities throughout Bulgaria. Municipalities were given the opportunity to choose from and combine services so that they were suitable for the local context. SIP activities included parental support for children up to the age of 3; the integration of children aged 3-6 years into kindergartens and preparatory groups/classes; summer schools for pre-school age children; children’s health consultation and disease prevention activities; the reduction of crèche fees; early intervention for children with disabilities; individual pedagogical support for children with disabilities to join first classes; the formation and development of parenting skills through group and individual work with current and expectant parents; family counselling and support, including group and individual sessions for family planning, and individual work to solve specific problems in raising children. The project funded family centres for children in areas where the capacity of existing kindergartens and nurseries was insufficient. The project evaluation showed some good results for child beneficiaries, but also pointed out problems relating to the implementation of the project and service sustainability (Yosifov, 2018).

**Romania** has supported programmes to provide Roma health mediators and community nurses; promoted employment among communities with high numbers of Roma; implemented a pilot programme of social housing for Roma communities; and introduced social vouchers as a targeted measure to stimulate participation in pre-school by children from disadvantaged families. These vouchers depend on children’s regular attendance at kindergarten, and can be used to purchase food, hygiene products, clothing and/or supplies (Resource Centre for Roma Communities et al., 2018).

The policy brief on the Role of the European Social Fund in Supporting Childcare Provision in the European Union, prepared by RAND Europe (Harte et al., 2016), reviewed ESF-funded projects that acted as vehicles for supporting childcare provision and ECEC to promote employment and social inclusion, as well as fighting poverty and discrimination. The review identified many regional and local initiatives and projects across Member States that are moving towards a more integrated approach. Aside from initiatives aimed at ‘standalone childcare provision and/or early childhood education programmes’, many interventions were aimed at an integrated approach to supporting labour market integration, improving work-life balance and gender equality in the workplace, or improving the capacity and/or quality of childcare (Harte et al., 2016). Potential still exists,

however, to use ESF funds in the future to finance initiatives promoting integrated working in ECEC services that target vulnerable children such as Roma.

Local and regional governments can play a role in identifying gaps in childcare provision and raising awareness of the ESF among practitioners at service level, to encourage them to apply for funding. Empirical evidence collected by the authors of case studies from Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania has shown that, with restricted state budgets for ECEC, innovative integrated early years interventions often require a combination of funds from various levels of administration, as well as EU funds and external funds. For example, the Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma, Hungary receives state funds for the centre's maintenance and two staff. All other costs are covered by a combination of other resources (local government budget, EU projects). In Tundzha, Bulgaria, services continue to function because the municipality is able to use funds from completely different funding sources.

Nevertheless, budget cuts or the end of funding for a project often affects the employment of specialists and teaching assistants – or results in the closing down of a community centre, as documented in Porcsalma and Tundzha. Evidence from the case studies shows that creative, flexible and incremental solutions are often needed to overcome the restrictions imposed by limited budgets. Local governments, managing agencies and ECEC institutions need to be willing to go the extra mile to ensure the success and continuity of integrated services. They also require a new set of skills to manage external funds, and to communicate and negotiate with external donor agencies, central and local governments, and civil society actors. The European Social Fund (ESF) Learning Network's report (2014) suggested that countries could consider using EU funds for Technical Assistance to support local governments and services, e.g. through the creation of a database of experts who could provide technical assistance over the course of the project life cycle.

#### 4.4. Family and community involvement

Research has established that strong partnerships between ECEC and other services, families and communities are an essential component in integrated working. The literature emphasises that educators and other professionals need to take into account the different compositions, backgrounds, lifestyles, and characteristics of families in order to support children's learning, development and wellbeing (ISSA, 2010; Bennett, 2012b; UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014).

##### Family involvement and support

The main driver behind integrated working is providing a better response to the needs of children and their families. Hence, it is only logical to involve these families and to learn about their needs and what they think about possible responses. This is noted by Balduzzi and Lazzari in the INTESYS survey (Gordon et al., 2016): 'The first step is to listen, respectfully, to what people think about their own lives, about the meaning they give to the situation perceived as problematic, and then try to create a process of empowerment, starting from that.' We find the same notion in discussions of the accessibility of ECEC: not only does this involve the breaking down of (financial, cultural and emotional) barriers, it also involves offering services that families find useful, and which respond to the things they need most (see e.g. EC, 2014b).

In the debate over ECEC quality, the voices of 'users' – in this case, children and their families – are becoming increasingly important. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the European Qualifications Framework (under accessibility, which includes the notion of usefulness):

‘as unequal enrolment is a result of the reciprocal relationships between policies, characteristics of families and services, ECEC provision needs to be perceived as useful by potential users. This means that families should experience ECEC services as supportive and attuned to their demands [...] Second, it means that the ways in which ECEC settings are run must make sense to different parents and local communities.’

The quality of services also refers to being responsive to the actual needs of all children and their families (including those living in vulnerable positions). To obtain a clear view of these needs and what responses to them are helpful, an **ongoing engagement** is required with the families themselves: reaching out to them; engaging them in **dialogue** and co-constructing what ‘quality’ means together with children and their families. For example, the bridging professionals in Ghent connect with families and build a relationship of trust. This opens up opportunities to get to know what issues parents experience as barriers, and what doubts and worries they have. In doing so, the bridging professionals can improve mutual understanding and reduce existing cultural gaps.

It is vital to recognise parents as **first educators**, and to support them in a way that makes them feel appreciated instead of judged. In the Berlin *Sprungbrettangebote*, parents can co-decide on activities. When they first arrive, they tend not to engage very much – but after a while they begin to take responsibilities as part of activities with children and other parents. Living in an asylum centre removes some authority from parents’ hands (closing time, bathing and eating schedules, and so on). By becoming involved in the *Sprungbrett*, parents feel they are once more valued.

Family participation is also linked to the **accessibility** of services. It is not enough to involve those families who attend. Research is required to gain a clear view of where, and by whom, various services are most needed. Centres need to evaluate who is attending – but perhaps even more importantly, who is not. Constant reflection on accessibility should be high on the agenda of integrated working networks, particularly those working with vulnerable groups. Working and thinking outside the box, getting involved in the community and performing **outreach work** are all vital to getting in touch with the most vulnerable families, many of whom do not know about services, or may not feel welcome there.

Successful integrated programmes and services such as Step by Step, A Good Start, Sure Start Children’s Houses and ‘Ready Set Go!’ also emphasise strong family and community engagement (UNICEF, 2011; Roma Education Fund, 2013). Several interrelated components contribute to the efficiency of these programmes: establishing and maintaining trusting relationships with Roma children and parents; support for parents; home visits; a Roma community approach (including the use of mediators); the high quality of kindergarten programmes; as well as overcoming the barriers Roma families encounter in accessing ECEC services (Macura-Milovanović, 2013; Bennett, 2012). Services need to find appropriate and respectful strategies to involve Roma parents in decision making, particularly with regard to their rights to be informed and participate in key decisions concerning their children (OECD, 2012; UNICEF, 2012).

Numerous reports and studies show that mainstream ECEC services are often unattractive to Roma families due to limited opportunities for parental involvement and participation, staff who are poorly trained in inclusive and intercultural pedagogy, and a lack of linguistic or other support necessary for Roma children (UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014; Aleksandrović et al., 2012; Šikić-Micanović et al., 2015; Vančíková et al., 2017; Kaderják et al., forthcoming). Conversely, when children have been accepted unconditionally by education institutions and treated with respect and in an inclusive manner, this has been key to parents forming positive views of educational institutions (Roma Education Fund, 2013; Sime, Fassetta & McClung, 2014).

Several studies have also documented the way in which the prevailing fragmentation of early years services places the burden of coordination on the shoulders of parents, which is particularly challenging for

disadvantaged families. For example, the recent RECI country report from Hungary (Kaderják et al., forthcoming) documented the frequent need for parents to navigate a substantial number of education, health and social services. This makes access to these services almost impossible for Roma families from isolated and excluded localities. Yosifov (2018) points to similar challenges in Bulgaria, where ‘it is expected that the parent acts as the natural coordinator of the care’ (Yosifov, 2018). Both studies highlighted the need to overcome traditional beliefs among the professionals involved in early years services that it is up to parents to manage interactions between services. Instead, they argue, professionals should develop ‘client-oriented’ integrated systems, in which services make direct contact with one another.

Research shows that ECEC staff need to be creative and willing to search for the best possible solutions and approaches for vulnerable children and families, such as Roma. Instead of insensitivity and imposing the values and standards of mainstream society, solutions should be created alongside Roma, who can then choose from among alternatives that are offered in a clear and sincere manner, with a detailed explanation of the consequences of any alternative they choose (Macura-Milovanic, 2013). Only Roma parents who trust kindergarten teachers will accept their advice regarding the nurturing, health, learning and development of their children (Bennett, 2012b). Therefore, kindergarten staff need to be trained to actively listen to parents’ needs, feelings and concerns, in order to establish a basis for this type of trusting relationship (Macura-Ivanovic, 2013; Vančíková et al., 2017; Yosifov, 2018). Like all parents, Roma parents are more likely to respond positively to parenting support interventions if they feel they are partners in the process (Bennett, 2012b). Instead of labelling parents as uninterested, efforts should be made to tackle the reasons why parents find it difficult to engage with services (Vančíková et al., 2017). Integrated and comprehensive services therefore need to adopt inclusive practices that go beyond the curriculum and activities for children, to focus additionally on the home and community environment (UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014). Examples from Porcsalma, Tundzha and the ‘Ready Set Go!’ project in Romania show that good working relationships between ECEC professionals and families can, for example, include daily, informal but intentional contacts between ECEC staff and parents. The creation of democratic decision-making structures (e.g. parent boards, committees) for the management of ECEC services is another important and effective strategy (Vančíková et al., 2017).

### Community involvement

Community involvement is considered one of the key characteristics of high-quality ECEC (OECD, 2012), as well as an important condition for integrated working. The ISOTIS research project emphasised the need to move towards a ‘whole community’ approach, together with inter-agency partnerships, as part of a necessary shift towards more effective integrated working (Wyslowska & Zachrisson, 2018). The literature on Roma inclusion has long established that the involvement of the Roma community is one of the key elements in comprehensive and effective early years interventions (Open Society Institute, 2007b; UNICEF, 2010; UNICEF and European Social Observatory, 2011; Bennett, 2012b; Roma Education Fund, 2013; Klaus & Marsh, 2014). The meaningful involvement of those who need and use services enables those services to be made more relevant and appropriate to the users’ needs, as well as more efficient in achieving effective outcomes. An example of this comes from the evaluation of the ‘Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion’ project of the European Fundamental Rights Agency in Pavlikeni municipality, Bulgaria. This showed that by implementing a universal ECEC policy that included the abolition of fees, and working with families and local communities, the project yielded roughly 95 % enrolment of Roma children in compulsory pre-school groups (Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, 2018).

Evidence from Porcsalma, Tundzha and the ‘Ready Set Go!’ project shows that the community can act as a connector between families and local services, a social network for parents, and a source of resources for ECEC services. A sense of community plays an important role in the development of children’s awareness of their identity, and in their feeling of belonging. If early years services can establish clear and meaningful connections with the Roma community, this can promote a child’s sense of belonging. Community involvement, such as

drawing on the expertise of those belonging to a cultural group or inviting culturally relevant guests to the service, may also build respect for diversity, as well as cultural competence (UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014). Furthermore, interaction with the children's community and families can help educators to teach children more effectively, with greater understanding of their strengths and difficulties (ISSA, 2010).

A strong, comprehensive system of community and formal ECEC services empowers disadvantaged families to cope with their specific poverty-related problems (OECD, 2012). For Roma communities to engage in planning new strategies or interventions, they need to believe their views will be respected (Bennett, 2012). Informed consultation with communities, including a survey and analysis of the needs of families, can lead to better-tailored services (Vančíková et al., 2017). The starting point for such consultation is to gauge what is already happening in the community, build on existing strengths, and affirm the value of community initiatives (Bennett, 2012). Evidence from field research conducted for the RECI country reports strongly suggests how important it is for services and infrastructure relating to education, basic health (including pre-natal and preventive health screening), nutrition and hygiene, and which are aimed at Roma families and their children, to correspond with the real needs of the beneficiaries (Bennett, 2012; Aleksandrovic et al., 2012; Šikic-Micanovic et al., 2015; Vančíková et al., 2017; Kaderják et al., forthcoming). National projects addressing community issues in a uniform way are not always the best solution to community problems (Mušinka, 2012). Instead, flexible and locally-based solutions, such as those developed in Tundzha, can be more effective.

Another way to bridge the gap between Roma communities and services is to bring those services into the community. Programmes and initiatives that exhibit good practice, usually supported by external donors, are much more flexible than the statutory provision offered by formal education systems. The services offered by these community-based programmes can be tailored to fit the needs of communities, with better cross-sectoral integration of child development, health and social welfare components (Klaus & Marsh, 2014).

In many countries, the use of outreach workers such as education and health mediators, health visitors and social workers, has proved successful in building mutual trust and in tapping into Roma community resources (UNICEF and the European Social Observatory, 2011). These workers play a vital role in bridging the gap between Roma communities and education, health and social services, as they allow an approach that is better tailored to the needs of specific communities (e.g. UNICEF, 2010; UNESCO and the Council of Europe, 2014). Mediators can also help to reduce the bureaucratic and communication obstacles faced by the Roma parents in enrolling and maintaining their children in pre-school education (Vančíková, 2017). In Tundzha municipality, for example, health workers were able to provide mobile health services, check on absentee children, accompany children to specialists, provide information to parents on healthy growth and learning at home, and translate for residents if they do not speak the majority language.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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High-quality ECEC offers added value for the holistic development and wellbeing of all children, and particularly for vulnerable children such as Roma. However, in many countries it remains a challenge to ensure access to quality ECEC for all children in general, and for children in vulnerable situations in particular. While promoting quality and universal accessibility, ECEC systems and services need to ensure that the diversity of the needs and strengths of also vulnerable and disadvantaged groups among the population are taken into account.

It is clear that efforts to support children and families must involve a wide range of policies and actions; no single intervention or service on its own can hope to achieve sustainable improvements. There is a growing recognition among researchers, policy makers and practitioners that policies and services need to become better integrated to effectively address poverty and promote social inclusion. Only a multi-dimensional and integrated approach involving ECEC services can address the complex needs of all children and families, but especially those who are in vulnerable situations, such as families living in poverty, Roma families or families in the context of migration or asylum.

In today's world, early childhood care and education requires the shared responsibility of governments, ECEC institutions, services from other sectors (such as health, social and welfare), and families. The success of integrated working depends on the synergy arising from joint attention to the needs of children and their families. By situating ECEC services in a more integrated context, children and their families benefit from more than just education and care. Services become more responsive to children's specific needs in terms of their overall holistic development, as well as to parents' needs for child care, healthcare and other opportunities. Integrated working within a comprehensive system of community-based and formal ECEC services empowers disadvantaged families to better cope with their specific problems. This is particularly important for many Roma children and their families, who experience extreme poverty, unequal access to ECEC, discrimination and segregation. A comprehensive system of early years intervention for Roma children and their families is based on integrated working, including, pre- and post-natal healthcare, ECEC services, social and welfare services, as well as preventive family support and adult education.

This report identifies several **core principles for integrated working**:

- **Holistic approach:** the needs of children and families are often complex, inter-linked and multi-causal, especially for those living in vulnerable situations. Understanding and effectively addressing these needs requires a more holistic approach to children's and families' health, development and well-being.
- **Parents as central partners:** it is vital to recognise parents as first educators and support them in a way that makes them feel appreciated instead of judged. Research continually shows that strong childhood development occurs only when and if parents are empowered to act as their child's 'first agent', and when parents experience the services offered as useful and trustworthy.
- **Multi-level approaches:** for children and families experiencing significant levels of disadvantage, a multi-level, approach is required, involving integrated working at all three levels: children and families; community and service level, and system level.
- **Flexible and responsive service systems:** to address complex problems, service systems need to become more agile and responsive than they have been traditionally. This means engaging families and communities as partners in determining the most suitable strategies to address their needs.
- **Start early:** intervention from early years for vulnerable and disadvantaged children such as Roma is essential. The periods pre-birth and 0-3 years are key to a child's development. Ensuring the best outcomes at these stages is vital to children's long-term development and well-being.

- **Prevention:** the emphasis of integrated working should be on *prevention*, as opposed to managing at-risk and crisis situations. Approaches need to focus on health, development and the general well-being of children and families.
- **Progressive universalism:** integrated working should be based on supporting children's rights, and on a commitment to promoting universal services, rather than on increased targeting, conditionality and 'temporary support'. Within a universal approach, targeted actions can be developed that do not stigmatise, and which are tailored to the needs of specific groups.
- **Key role of ECEC institutions:** ECEC institutions are well-placed to refer children and families to other existing services (such as health, social care). The integration of ECEC services, or at least better collaboration between ECEC and other services, is essential for smooth transitions between early years settings, including the transition from home to pre-school and from pre-school to primary school.
- **Quality of integrated working:** most evaluations of integrated working indicate that the main influence on outcomes is the quality of services, rather than the type of integration. Integrated working will only benefit children and families in vulnerable situations if it results in higher-quality interventions, i.e. when it is responsive to their actual needs. Otherwise, it will undermine parents' trust in the services, and de-motivate service providers.
- **Monitoring systems:** to ensure the effectiveness of integrated working in early years services, particularly in reaching and benefitting vulnerable children and their families, it is important that effective monitoring systems are put in place.
- **Learn from good practice:** evidence from evaluations of targeted, integrated programmes provide valuable lessons that allow them to be expanded nationwide as universal services. Several examples of cross-national learning exist, such as Sure Start (UK, HU) and 'A Good Start' (HU, MK, SK, RO).

Integrated working is more than simply putting all kinds of services together. It requires careful planning, commitment and enthusiasm on the part of partners; the overcoming of organisational, structural and cultural barriers; and the development of new skills and ways of working. Based on the literature review and the case studies, this report highlights four building blocks of prerequisites that are crucial for integrated working:

- A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and their families in the community
- A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff
- Supportive policy and funding
- Family and community participation

These prerequisites are vital for ECEC and other sectors (such as education, health, welfare, social). The following conclusions and recommendations focus on these building blocks, and concern children and parents, community and service, and system levels.

### 1. A shared vision, starting from the needs of children and their families

A clear vision of early childhood is required at national, regional/local and service levels that is based on a broad, holistic and contextual view of child development and well-being, and an understanding of the profound interdependence between family life/circumstances and the services of ECEC and other sectors. The shared vision should result in children and parents/carers receiving the services they *actually* need, rather than those the professionals *think* they need.

### A shared vision at the national level

A shared vision at the national level is a fundamental requirement for full cooperation among related sectors (labour, health, welfare, and the educational system and services) to ensure coherence and the continuity of provision throughout the period from pregnancy to long after the child starts primary school (0-8 years). ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ in Scotland, ‘Better Outcomes Brighter Futures’ in Ireland, ‘Every Child Matters’ in England and Wales, the Flemish decree on preventive family support (2014) on the *Huizen van het Kind* (‘Houses of the Child’) are examples of landmark national policy frameworks for improving the well-being of children and families and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and integrated working in early years.

#### Recommendations:

- Policy makers should develop a **national vision on early childhood** which is shared across all relevant sectors. Such a vision (e.g. national policy framework) should be based on children’s rights and respect for diversity, and should aim to integrate ECEC in the broadest sense, including health and well-being, childcare and education, social inclusion and equality.
- Policymakers and service providers need to allow sufficient time and resources to enable the dialogue and discussions necessary to support integrated working.

### A shared vision at the local and service levels

Examples of integrated working from Sure Start in the UK the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary; and the initiative of the Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria, highlight that a common vision at the regional/local level and the level of service provision is required to affirm the commitment of the relevant services – particularly ECEC services (both childcare as well as preschools), preventive family support services, preventive health services and social services – to an integrated approach promoting the best possible response to the needs of every child and families.

#### Recommendations:

- Regional/local authorities, service providers and professionals involved in early years services should discuss and agree a common vision and goals in order for integrated working to act in the best interests of children and be **responsive to the multi-dimensional needs of vulnerable children and families**.
- Regional/local authorities, service providers and professionals should clearly define and agree upon the roles and responsibilities of the integrated network, and of each of the services.

## 2. A competent system with strong leadership and reflective staff

Evidence from projects and initiatives such as Sure Start in the UK, Sure Start Children’s Houses in Hungary, the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium and Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria shows that integrated working cannot be considered the sole responsibility of individual professionals. It is instead a joint effort that involves multi-disciplinary teams, services, training centres and local authorities. The ‘Ready Set Go!’ project in Romania further highlights the important role local NGOs and community organisations play in the success of collaborative working. Ultimately, integrated working aims to create cultural change: a change in the way service providers and professionals who work with children view the purpose of their work.

### A competent system

Research evidence further suggests that implementing integrated working on a large scale requires the creation of competent systems to provide guidance and support, and to develop competences at different levels (individual, team, governance and institutional). A competent system provides opportunities for leaders and all staff to engage in joint learning and responsive practice that responds to the needs of children and families. Such models include team learning, multi-agency teams, clear protocols and mandates, joint training, sharing expertise, frequent and regular information sharing, and reflective practice.

Integrated working in a competent system also requires the creation of structural conditions, such as the allocation of appropriate time and resources to develop a shared vision and establish collaboration and trust among staff and families, as well as setting up actions to meet the needs of children and families.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should support the development of competent systems in early childhood education and care that provide guidance and support to professionals, facilitate service management, and enable service providers to **develop the competences required for integrated working**.
- Policymakers should create **structural conditions** to promote integrated working among services in various sectors. ECEC services can be used as an entry point for integration.
- Service providers and management should **facilitate the provision of time and resources for integrated working**, including frequent, meaningful communication among services, e.g. by providing child-free hours to create time for reflective practice, team meetings, case reporting, exchanging experiences, training and coaching.
- Service leaders and staff should **develop clear and transparent codes of professional conduct**, including regulations on the sharing of information and data.

### Leadership

Strong, engaged and inspirational leadership was a key prerequisite for success in all six cases included in this report – Sure Start in Newry, UK; the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium; *Sprungbrettangebote* in Berlin, Germany; the Sure Start Children’s House in Porcsalma, Hungary; Tundzha municipality, Bulgaria; and the ‘Ready Set Go!’ project in Romania. Such leadership is required at national, regional/local government and service levels to ensure coherence among services in terms of reaching common goals, and to move away from fragmented models. At the service level, this involves motivating, supporting, valuing, maintaining focus, communicating clearly and clarifying expectations for everyone’s role. Furthermore, the right people need to be in the right places, meaning that organisations need to provide clear mandates to the professionals engaging in integrated working, and need to ensure that they are competent to function in those settings.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should invest in **developing leadership capacity** at the level of regional/local government (including mayors, heads of department responsible for early years services, designated coordinators); at the level of the integrated network (the network coordinator); and at the service level (leaders and senior management in ECEC, health, family centres etc.), in order to promote integrated working among relevant early years services. Specific training courses and seminars, networking and information sharing should be provided to enhance the competences of

leaders. Leadership skills are needed such as change management, promoting collaborative working, as well as inspiring and motivating integrated teams.

- Leaders at the service level should **facilitate** and shape the preconditions for cooperative and integrated work in ECEC, promote mutual respect and solidarity, and foster **democratic decision-making**.

### Reflective staff

A more integrated working context requires staff with additional competences or attitudes, such as a willingness to cooperate with others and reflect on one's own practice, open-mindedness for shared learning, and an enabling, welcoming, participative and inclusive work attitude.

Professionals also need to be equipped with skills in family and community engagement, in laying the groundwork for mutual respect, and in relationship building. Practitioners must avoid judgment and stigmatisation (e.g. avoiding language such as 'needy families'). Evidence from the literature review and from all six case studies highlights the fact that in order to develop these skills, urgent need to invest in building capacity across services, including assistants, outreach workers and other support staff, and to systematically promote staff diversity. Key ways to achieve this include developing training modules and mentoring for professionals; encouraging networking and collaboration; and establishing quality standards.

### Recommendations:

- **Preservice training** institutions preparing professionals working in early years (ECEC, health, social care etc.) should develop more joint courses, engage in greater collaboration together, and offer more joint internships.
- Policymakers should **ensure policies and funding are in place for continuous professional development opportunities** for leaders and management from ECEC and other services, teachers and other professional staff, and paraprofessionals (e.g. teaching assistants, community mediators, bridging professionals). **Integrated** training courses and seminars, professional learning communities, as well as networking and mentoring **should be available to develop skills and competences** on the central issues involved in integration, such as networking, cooperation and functioning within integrated services.
- Policymakers should develop **national quality standards and guidance** for staff on integrated working.
- Policymakers should actively promote balance between the qualification requirements for assistants and outreach workers, and the need **to ensure staff diversity and community representation**.

## 3. Supportive policy and funding

### Supportive policy

Integrated working requires firm political will and commitment at national and regional/local government levels. Examples from the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium, Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria, and other cases suggest that collective ownership and responsibility is required across policy and service areas to promote coordination and integration across sectors. Furthermore, careful attention should be paid to structural requirements: clear policy frameworks, effective governance and monitoring processes, and to adequate

funding and financing mechanisms. Programmes such as Sure Start in the UK and Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary highlight the need for integrated policies to focus on early years intervention and prevention before crisis, and that this commitment needs to be shared across all of the services involved.

**Recommendations:**

- Policymakers should develop broad **policy and legislative frameworks for universal, inclusive and comprehensive ECEC systems** that are based on children's rights, and which promote an **integrated, multi-sectoral approach to early years intervention and prevention**.
- Policymakers should promote a **progressive universalist approach**, combining universal policies and services for all children with well-targeted, well-coordinated, cross-sectoral and multi-professional programmes and initiatives to increase the accessibility of the services among vulnerable groups.
- Policymakers should support different **forms of integrated and high-quality ECEC services, including community-based programmes**, to ensure that they are responsive to the specific needs of children and their parents.

**Adequate and sustainable funding**

The allocation of sufficient and sustained financial resources is necessary for the development of effective and sustainable integrated policies and services,. 'Earmarking' funds specifically for integrated working within ECEC can be more effective than distributing funds to separate sectors and services. Adequate funds are required to ensure the continuity of services, staffing and support for staff, as well as the allocation of adequate time.

Sufficient human and financial resources are key to ensuring the quality and sustainability of integrated ECEC services. Secure funding is needed to retain a qualified workforce and additional support staff, including integration coordinators, specialist professionals and paraprofessionals. Given the restrictions on state budgets for ECEC, innovative integrated early years services often require a combination of funds from various levels of administration (national, regional and local government budgets). EU funds and other external resources (e.g. funding from donor agencies) have proved essential for pilot projects aimed at the inclusion of Roma, such as Sure Start Children's Houses in Hungary and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania. These examples highlight the need for EU funding instruments to be used to invest in inclusive, accessible, high-quality and comprehensive early childhood services. In particular, increased funding is required to promote integrated approaches to ECEC for all children and families, and especially for the extra efforts required to reach vulnerable and marginalised groups such as Roma.

**Recommendations:**

- Policymakers should ensure adequate and sustainable funding **to provide resources for the time, efforts and workforce necessary for integrated working in early years services (ECEC, health, social work, etc.)**.
- Policymakers should **provide funding to ensure secure working conditions** such as wages, support and coaching, working hours, and an adequate child-adult ratio and caseload, in order to attract well-qualified professionals to work as part of an integrated approach to early years services (ECEC, health, social work, etc.).
- Policymakers at national, regional and local government levels should ensure that adequate funding resources are allocated to promote integrated approaches to ECEC, including cross-sectoral service provision, preventive family support and community involvement.

- For the forthcoming EU funding period 2021–2027, **early childhood should become an investment priority for EU funding instruments**, and in particular for the European Social and Investment Funds and Erasmus+.

#### 4. Family and community involvement

##### Family involvement and support

Integrated working should always start from the needs of children and families. Hence, the success of integrated working ultimately depends upon the quality of the reciprocal and equal relationships established between professionals and parents, both at individual and group levels. Parents possess expert knowledge of their children, and need to be involved as such. The active participation of parents is essential for better quality and more accountable service delivery. Sure Start Children’s Houses in Hungary, the initiatives of Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria and ‘Ready Set Go!’ project in Romania confirm that meaningful and respectful family involvement has a positive impact on children’s outcomes and upon families themselves. Families, both children and parents, need to be involved in service development and delivery, as well as in evaluation and monitoring.

At the level of service delivery, services can engage families meaningfully in a number of ways. These include viewing parents as experts on their children, and promoting their active participation in care and early learning. Developing integrated networks that tailor services to the needs of children and families can be more effective in addressing the barriers to family engagement in services. Integrated services are particularly necessary in engaging vulnerable and so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ families. Families should receive the services they *actually* need/want, rather than those that professionals *think* they need/want. Mutual trust between parents and services, and those services being ‘easy to reach’, are the key factors for integrated working.

##### Recommendations:

- Policymakers should recognise the central role played by parents in their child’s development and thus in ECEC services, and should **ensure that legislation and policies are in place to promote the active involvement of parents** in ECEC, health, social care and other relevant early years services.
- All services should develop a **policy on accessibility** and how they can reach all families, including vulnerable families, using an integrated approach.
- Practitioners should **work towards reciprocal and equal relationships with parents, strengthening parents in their role** as first educators and experts on their own children. Practitioners should not take the place of parents, or decide for them.
- Staff in integrated ECEC networks should **exchange information** about the children and families they serve (or should be serving). This should be carried out with due respect for data protection regulations, but with especial respect for the families themselves.

### Community involvement

Active community participation is essential for services to become more responsive to community-specific needs. This is particularly important for vulnerable and excluded groups such as Roma, as it helps in developing mutual trust between families and service providers. This is documented, for example, in the Sure Start Children's House in Porcsalma in Hungary. Meaningful connections with the community can promote a child's sense of belonging. Community engagement can help services to respond more effectively to children's needs, with greater understanding of their strengths and difficulties.

To ensure meaningful community involvement, it is important to partner with a wide range of stakeholders to create a strong basis for the delivery of multi-dimensional interventions, and to improve communication between communities and services. Evidence from Tundzha municipality in Bulgaria, the bridging professionals in Ghent, Belgium, and the 'Ready Set Go!' project in Romania confirms the findings of previous research that outreach workers such as community mediators, health visitors or bridging professionals can play a significant role in building mutual trust, tapping into community resources and bridging the gap between education, health and social services and marginalised communities, particularly Roma community and parents. Such workers allow an approach that is better tailored to the needs of specific communities. They are most effective when they are paid members of staff (not just volunteers), and recruited from local communities or minority groups.

#### Recommendations:

- Policymakers at national and regional/local levels should provide the resources required at community level to **develop and support community-based integrated working**.
- Policymakers at municipal and local levels should **engage communities in planning and designing services** to ensure that interventions are adapted to community needs and circumstances. Outreach programmes should be put in place to connect services with communities.
- Service providers and practitioners should develop **innovative and flexible outreach strategies** to engage with vulnerable children and families.

To conclude, the four blocks of prerequisites for integrated working are critical success factors in creating ECEC services that support children's holistic development and well-being. Combining and integrating the strengths of different services, including ECEC, provides better opportunities to serve all children and families. Integrated working is particularly important for vulnerable children and families, as it is more responsive in addressing their multi-faceted needs.

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## ANNEX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

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### History of the service and drivers

How did the centre/programme start?

Who took the initiative? Did it happen bottom-up or top-down?

What were the main goals at the start?

What is the role of local/regional/national governance? Do you feel supported?

Is there any support for the 'network'?

Shared vision and continued commitment

Do you share a clear vision and goals with partners/in the programme? If so, how did you get there?

Is the project/programme sustainable?

How do you keep teams enthusiastic, committed to the work and goals?

How can the team's competences be supported and strengthened?

### Communication (both internal and with families)

What are the main communication lines among partners? Between partners and governance?

How do you share the information needed to keep the cooperation/programme going?

Are there guidelines on how to deal with/share (delicate) information about the families you work with?

Description of the integrated work, the project, the programme

What is the formal setting?

What partners are involved?

Is there both material and non-material family support?

### Leadership, coordination, workforce, working methods

What works well, and why? Conditions?

What is difficult? Thresholds?

How do you deal with difficulties (in cooperation, in (not) reaching families)?

### Participation of families and accessibility

Do you have certain target groups, or are all families served?

Universal vs. targeted approach, applied to your service?

If possible, can you compare and provide examples of how this approach works for the families targeted?

Have you reached more families, particularly among vulnerable groups? Are they receiving higher-quality support? Are their needs better taken care of?

### 'Personal' reflections

What benefit has been/could be gained through integrated working for your service? For your team?

What is, according to you, essential to succeed in integrated working? What are the basic conditions?

What is your dream scenario?

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