European Commission

Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes – Key findings and study reports

Social Europe

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate C — Social Affairs
Unit C.3 — Disability & inclusion

Contact: Julius op de Beke
E-mail: Julius.Opdebeke@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

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2019

In 2015, the European Parliament called on the European Commission and the European Union Member States 'to introduce a Child Guarantee so that every child in poverty can have access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition, as part of a European integrated plan to combat child poverty'. Following the subsequent request by the Parliament to the Commission to implement a Preparatory Action to explore the potential scope of a Child Guarantee for vulnerable children, the Commission commissioned a study to analyse the feasibility of such a scheme.

The *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG)* is carried out by a consortium consisting of Applica and the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), in close collaboration with Eurochild and Save the Children, and with the support of nine thematic experts, 28 country experts and an independent study editor.

For more information on the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee, see:
https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-20763-4 doi:10.2767/962251 KE-04-20-410-EN-N

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Introduction

Following the call in 2015 from the European Parliament to introduce a Child Guarantee and the subsequent request to the European Commission in 2017 to implement a Preparatory Action to explore its potential scope, the Commission launched a feasibility study in 2018 to examine and make proposals as to how a specific programme could best be developed in order to ensure that the EU's most disadvantaged children[1] have access to five key social rights: adequate nutrition, free education, free healthcare, decent housing and free early childhood education and care.

This *Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee (FSCG)* has been commissioned as a key part of the Preparatory Action agreed between the European Commission and the European Parliament. It is managed by a consortium consisting of Applica and the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER), in collaboration with Eurochild and Save the Children, and with the support of nine thematic experts, 28 national experts and an independent study editor.

In addition to several analytical documents prepared in the context of the feasibility study, eight cases studies have been carried out to learn how specific international (EU and/or non-EU) funding programmes can stimulate the development and roll-out of interventions to help vulnerable children, and how they might leverage increased national (or sub-national) funding to support these children.

The case studies were aimed at identifying factors which increase the effectiveness of funding programmes as well as weaknesses in their design, implementation and monitoring that could limit their effects. Guidelines were prepared by the FSCG core team for the purpose. The experts involved were invited to conduct their analysis on the basis of existing research reports, evaluations of the programme in question and other relevant material. They were asked to consult with the people responsible for developing and monitoring the programme and other relevant stakeholders.

This document presents the main findings from the eight case studies together with the eight study reports. Section 1 provides a brief presentation of the eight case studies. Section 2 presents a short evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the funding programmes involved. Section 3 concludes. The eight study reports are provided in annex.

1 Brief presentation of the eight case studies

The case studies were selected to cover various kinds of funding programme and different EU Member States and different groups of disadvantaged children.

- **EEA Grants 2009-2014, Children and Youth at Risk programmes in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania** (Alex Stimpson): this case study focused on three programmes funded under the EEA Grants which focused primarily on children and young people in precarious family situations and in, or at risk of being, in institutions. Their aim was to enhance the quality of children's welfare and protection systems and/or to improve school attendance and access to preschool day-care, health and social care.
- **The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in Germany** (Isabel Naylon, Metis): this case study summarised the outcomes of FEAD activities in Germany in helping recently arrived people and their families. The projects under review were aimed at improving access to parental support for parents of migrant children of pre-school age, as well as access of the children themselves to early education and social inclusion opportunities.
- **Integrating refugee and migrant children into the education system in Greece** (Dimitris Ziomas, Antoinetta Capella and Danai Konstantinidou,

[1] These disadvantaged children include children living in precarious family situations, children residing in institutions, children with a migrant background (including refugee children) and children with disabilities.

National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)): this case study presented the outcomes of a programme, funded by the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the country's public investment programme, which targeted refugee and migrant children aged 4-15 living in refugee accommodation centres, and aimed at facilitating their integration into the educational system in a way that should gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools.

- **Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary** (Fruzsina Albert, Institute for Sociology Hungarian Academy of Sciences): this case study presented a programme which provides children living in extreme poverty with support in their earliest years to prepare for successful school education. It targets children aged 0-3 who do not have access to good-quality services, including Roma children, and provides a range of services that cater to the needs of individual families. This programme was first supported and developed by external funding (mostly from the European Social Fund and the Norwegian Fund) and is now funded from national sources and is part of the system of social services.
- **The Flemish AMIF-funding programme** (Goedroen Juchtmans, KU Leuven): this case study described a programme, funded by AMIF Flanders, which was aimed at improving the enrolment and attendance rates in pre-school education by children aged 2.5 - 6 of third-country nationals living in Flanders and Brussels in Belgium. The programme focused in particular on parental involvement as a lever for increasing enrolment, and innovative methods were experimented.
- **The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative** (Ertugrul Polat and Mary Daly, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford): this case study summarised a programme that took place in Ireland, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. The programme targeted children facing significant disadvantage, mainly defined as children living in poor areas, and included prevention and early prevention interventions on child behaviour, child health, parenting, child learning, inclusion and diversity.
- **The role of EU funds to address homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families** (Alina Makarevičienė, PPMI): this case study examined the role played by EU funding to stimulate the development and roll-out of both innovative and proven kinds of intervention addressing homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families in the EU Member States.
- **The World Bank Project for Roma children in Eastern Europe** (George Bogdanov, National Network for Children): this case study described a number of programmes funded by the World Bank in Romania and Bulgaria in support of Roma children's access to early childhood education and care.

The selected cases studies (programmes) cannot be compared without keeping in mind that they target different groups of disadvantaged children and that they reflect national (and in some cases local) specificities. Moreover, the measures implemented vary from one case study to another.

EU funds were the main source of funding in most case studies, but a few programmes were funded primarily from other sources (i.e. EEA grants, Atlantic Philanthropies, World Bank, national sources). The duration and budget also vary: for instance, AMIF Flanders designed a 2-year programme with an overall budget of €2 million, while Atlantic Philanthropies spent around €208 million over the 12 years of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative. Of course, these differences can partly be explained by the different 'nature' and scope of the measures implemented.

The case studies also differ in the way programmes were monitored and evaluated. Overall, the large majority of case studies reported satisfactory systems for monitoring and

evaluation[2]. For instance, in the case of FEAD in Germany, the evaluation used a mixed-methods approach with the use of monitoring data, qualitative analysis on the basis of two waves of case studies and two standardised surveys of project promoters, as well as interviews with experts. In the case of the Flemish AMIF-funded programme, monitoring and evaluation were carried out in a participatory way, i.e. experimental measures were continuously monitored and discussed with both implementers and beneficiaries. For programmes funded by EEA grants, a sample of projects was monitored on an annual basis and quarterly progress reports were prepared; and an independent evaluation of programmes in each country was carried out at some point during the Financial Mechanism.

Monitoring and evaluation were also part of the design of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative: each beneficiary organisation was given a budget to commission evaluations on the impact of their services (quasi-experimental studies, randomised controlled trials, qualitative methods) and received practical support on how to plan and execute evaluations from Atlantic Philanthropies staff. Grant recipients were also expected to submit regular progress reports, and monitoring was supervised by the 'advisory group' and the 'implementation group'.

2 Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses

This section presents a summary of the main strengths and weaknesses of the programmes analysed in the case studies, in terms of impact on the target group, on leveraging extra resources for the target group and on national and sub-national policies and programmes. It also presents some lessons for EU funding programmes.

2.1 Impact on target group

All programmes under review were successful in achieving their objectives and improving the lives of the disadvantaged children targeted.

- Despite the fact that there were no quantitative targets for some programmes, it was observed that the measures concerned increased the number children attending the services or facilities in question. For instance, in the case of the programmes funded by EEA grants in Lithuania, the number of children at risk attending day-care centres increased significantly and the likelihood of children entering foster care was reduced. These programmes had also a positive impact on the development of public services for children at risk. In the case of the programmes funded by the World Bank, there was an increase of the enrolment of Roma children in early childhood education and care services.
- The programmes under review had also a positive effect on the lives of the children concerned. In the case of the FEAD funded programmes for instance, there is evidence of children having improved access to medical care, learning German, going to kindergarten and participating in sports and leisure activities. The case study analysing EU funds to address homelessness and housing exclusion also reported an improvement in children's health and well-being, as well as better education achievements.
- In some cases, the positive impact also went beyond the target group to reach other vulnerable children. For example, the case study on the integration of refugee and migrant children into the Greek education system reported an increase in the

[2] However, monitoring was not systematic in the case of the World Bank project for Roma children in Romania and Bulgaria (no quantitative estimate) and it was underdeveloped in the case of the integration of refugees and migrant children into the Greek educational system (no monitoring tools and processes had been provided for). In addition, only an ad hoc evaluation of the first year of programme was carried out in Greece. In the case of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary, monitoring efforts were done, although not on a very rigorous basis.

number of morning 'reception classes'[3], so that the programme facilitated access to education of other vulnerable groups of children.

- Several programmes under review seemed to have also benefited the rest of the family, and in particular, to parents. For instance, the competence of parents became stronger in the case of the Sure start children's homes in Hungary, and the employment status of parents improved in the case of the EU funds addressing homelessness and social exclusion.
- In addition, the programmes improved cooperation between stakeholders, as reported in many case studies. The Flemish AMIF-funding programme, in particular, seems to have improved relations between all stakeholders and changed the way teachers thought about the parents of the children targeted and the importance of them being involved.

It seems clear from the case studies that programmes have to be properly designed and tailored to needs for them to have a positive impact on the children targeted. For instance, one of the reasons for success of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary is that the programme was scientifically grounded, i.e. it was carefully planned by experts and was evidence-based. The Flemish AMIF-funding programme was successful thanks to the implementation of action plans tailored to local needs, while strategic individual needs assessment explains most of the success of the EU funds in addressing homelessness and housing exclusion.

The involvement of parents seems also to be key to ensuring the success of programmes. This was highlighted by half of the eight case studies. For instance, the review of the Flemish AMIF-funding programme showed that it was essential to involve parents before children start school and to set up regular meetings with parents in order to strengthen parents' networks and reinforce mutual trust. Information campaigns targeting parents are also important, as reported by the review of the World Bank project in Eastern Europe.

The qualifications of the staff working with disadvantaged children is another key element of success. For instance, the EEA grants programme in Lithuania managed to develop competence building among staff and provided training for working with disadvantaged children, which was a source of success. The review of the World Bank project in Eastern Europe also shows that field work and outreach by trained health or education mediators from the community are conducive to positive achievement.

The fourth factor which seems to be behind the success of programmes is the close cooperation between stakeholders and the involvement of local actors. For instance, positive achievements of the Flemish AMIF-funding programme were partly explained by cooperation between local welfare organisations and schools. The evaluation of the EEA grants programme in Estonia highlights the fact that one source of success was the strong links established between the central and local levels through creating regional support and coordination units at the Estonian Social Insurance Board to channel national policy on children, young people and families to the local level. High-level support was also mentioned as a factor of success in the case study on the EU funds addressing homelessness and housing exclusion.

In addition, the review of the World Bank project in Eastern Europe underlined the importance of the elimination of fees and hidden expenses to obtain positive achievements; and the evaluation of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary drew attention to the importance of services for disadvantaged children being well located.

Nevertheless, the eight case studies noted some issues that reduced the impact of the programmes on the target groups.

Most of these issues are linked to the design of the programmes. For instance, delays were due to the short period of preparation in the case of the programme targeting refugee and

[3] These classes are part of the formal educational system and are aimed at pupils with limited knowledge of the Greek language.

migrant children in Greece. The monitoring and follow-up was also problematic for this same programme, as well as for the FEAD programme in Germany. Issues relating to implementation difficulties and delays in the adoption of national strategies were reported in the case of EU funds addressing homelessness and housing exclusion. The lack of a legal framework and national policies and changes in implementation arrangements limited the effect of the World Bank project in Eastern Europe.

Issues with staff were also reported. For instance, the shortage of trained staff and interpreters limited the efficiency of the Flemish AMIF-funding programme, while the review of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary pointed out the need for decent wages in order to motivate employees.

In some cases, it was difficult to reach the most vulnerable children. For instance, the Sure Start Children's Homes programme did not manage to reach those at the very bottom of Hungarian society. In the FEAD funded programme in Germany, parents were often not aware of the advantages of early childhood education and did not always bring their children on a regular basis.

In addition, cooperation between stakeholders has been impaired in some cases. In Greece, cooperation between schools and the 'Reception/Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees' was sometimes difficult, with some parents in a few local communities expressing concerns about the health of refugee children. In the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary, there were conflicts between various groups and families, which made it difficult to have all the children targeted in the Home at the same time.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

Five of the programmes examined were financed by EU funds (in particular from FEAD and AMIF), the others being financed by the EEA, Atlantic Philanthropies and the World Bank. In the case of one programme (Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary), financing, which initially came from the EU, was taken over by the Hungarian government, which gave rise to a number of issues.

In many cases, while the EU or other international funds were the major source of financing, there was also a contribution from national sources. For the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative, for example, for which Atlantic Philanthropies provided two-thirds of overall funding, the Irish government provided the other third. In practice, in the case of EU support for homelessness and housing exclusion, financing from the ESI Funds in most EU Member States was marginal in relation to national and local financing to combat these problems.

Municipalities were important in several cases. For instance, in the case of the EEA grants in Lithuania, municipalities contributed both financially and through the provision of premises. A number of municipalities also provided financing to support the FEAD programme in Germany and the programmes to address homelessness and housing exclusion. In the case of the Flemish AMIF-financed programme, municipalities freed up staff or resources to keep it going.

Most programmes, in addition, obtained additional financing from business, charities and, in some cases, the general public (e.g. the EEA grants programme in Lithuania), other international organisations and NGOs (e.g. programmes to integrate refugee and migrant children into the education system in Greece) or from schools (e.g. the Flemish AMF-funded programme).

Extra resources for the target groups of children were leveraged, in particular, when national or local governments showed interest and became directly involved in the programmes. In the case of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary, for example, leverage of national funding was helped by the national government having the goal of expanding and reinforcing good quality education in early childhood and by the Children's Homes model fitting government policy. In the Flemish AMIF-funded programme, the fact that a local authority had a steering role in the 'living labs' initiative, made it more able to leverage additional resources.

Leveraging extra funding was also facilitated when this was part of the funding strategy of the programme, such as in the case of the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative in Ireland. Investment in the planning and design phase of the programme also made it more likely that it would have an impact, which in turn facilitated the leveraging of more funding. In addition, the inclusion of the requirement for rigorous evaluation helped programme managers to leverage extra resources by enabling them to showcase the impact achieved.

However, obstacles to leveraging additional funding were reported in some cases, linked to the tightness of municipality budgets as regards the FEAD programme in Germany and to the economic crisis that restricted national budgets in Ireland, Greece and in some Eastern European countries. The administrative structure in Ireland, with functions relating to children spread across different government departments, also complicated the situation in that the programme had to look for support from several different sources.

In addition, the interruption of funding, as responsibility for financing passed from one source to another, created problems for the World Bank project in Eastern Europe. Similarly, the potential reduction or termination of EU funding raised threats to the continuation of the programme targeting refugee and migrant children in Greece and the AMIF-funded programme in Flanders. In the case of the Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary, the replacement of EU funding by national sources meant that the amount involved was significantly diminished, leading to a reduction of the number of external professionals involved in the programme. It also led to the Homes being part of an overly bureaucratic system, requiring them to comply with often irrational regulations, making the provision of low-threshold services almost impossible. Moreover, since the state funding was not calculated on a per capita basis, it did not increase as the number of children participating in the programme expanded.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

The majority of funding programmes seem to have had a limited impact in stimulating improvements in national and sub-national policies.

An exception is the EEA programme in Estonia, where national strategies and regulations were updated in parallel with the programme and a more effective legal and organisational framework for children and youth at risk was created. The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative also appears to have had a significant impact on national policy in Ireland, where key activities have been mainstreamed, but the process was slow.

In the case of the EU funds addressing homelessness and housing exclusion, the Housing First project in Brno was the first randomised controlled trial in social policy to be performed in the Czech Republic, which led the way to greater reliance on evidence-based policy and a focus on outcomes, and the project has become a model for other cities to adopt.

In Greece, the programme targeting refugee and migrant children stimulated the establishment of a unit within the Ministry of Education tasked with co-ordinating and monitoring the education of refugee children, which could lead to the systematic monitoring of all activities relating to refugee and migrant children's education. It remains to be seen, however, whether the experience gained so far from the programme will be used by the Greek authorities to formulate a strategic action plan in this regard.

Most programmes succeeded in raising awareness and changing the institutional approach towards disadvantaged children. For instance the EEA grants programme in Lithuania improved the understanding of regional politicians and executives about the provision of services to children at social risk. The FEAD funded programme in Germany shone a spotlight on the problems of newly arrived EU citizens and their children and on the measures to help their integration. The early child education and care concept became widely known and gained long-term political support in Hungary after the implementation of the Sure Start Children's Homes programme. Similarly the philosophy of prevention and early intervention spread in Ireland after the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative was launched.

2.4 Lessons for EU Funding Programmes

This section outlines the lessons to be drawn from the programmes under review for the future use of EU funding to assist vulnerable children. These are linked to the design of programmes, their implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as their funding.

Design of programmes

- Programmes should be properly planned and designed. In particular, they should be built on previous experience, demonstrated effectiveness and proven principles, and, ideally, on an ex ante impact assessment.
- Programmes should adopt a strategic and integrated approach, combining soft and hard measures, the development of strategies with working tools, investment in capacity building and awareness-raising of staff, and involving other organisations and, in certain cases, regional politicians.
- Programmes should be tailored to local and individual needs and circumstances, which could be helped by stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation phases of the programmes. In particular, welfare agencies and other services that know the target group well should contribute to the design of programmes.
- Programmes should provide services in a way that does not stigmatise and discourage children from accessing them. The number of places available should also be sufficient.
- Programmes should have some flexibility and be regularly adapted to changing demands, contexts, legislation and macro-level conditions.
- As political commitment is essential to ensure the success of programmes, policy-makers should be approached as early as possible as potential partners. In addition, mutual goals with the public sector should be identified.

Implementation of programmes

- The implementation of programmes should be ensured by increased administrative capacity and institutional involvement, in particular at local and regional levels.
- The participation of parents in programmes should be encouraged, as well as competent staff, ideally from the same community as the children targeted. The latter should be regularly trained and should receive decent remuneration. Outreach work is essential particularly at the beginning of programmes.

Monitoring and evaluation of programmes

- Ex ante, interim and ex post impact evaluation should be carried out, and could be made a precondition for financing by the EU.
- Applicants could also be required to include explicitly the costs of monitoring and evaluation activities in their budgets. They could also be asked to include in their monitoring and evaluation plan how they intend to collect the data required without compromising the privacy of the most vulnerable children and their parents.
- Examples of best practice could be scaled up.

Funding of programmes

- Programmes approach should be multi-funded, allowing both EU and national funds to be used in the most effective way.
- A stronger rights-based approach could be included in legislative proposals for the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), with a thematic focus on children within the strategic and monitoring framework.

- Greater flexibility should be introduced in EU fund regulations, so that a wider range of measures is eligible for support, responding to the particular and urgent needs of the programmes concerned. Programmes should include two phases, for which adequate, separate funding should be allocated. The first phase would include all the preparatory activities such as planning, tendering, personnel recruitment and setting up monitoring and evaluation arrangements. The second phase would include the implementation of the programme.
- Fewer programmes and larger funding would boost the potential impact of the programmes and cut their associated management costs.
- Future sustainability of the programmes should be assured – if projects cannot be sustained once EU funding ends, most of their effects vanish over time. The EU could encourage Member States to continue such projects through building political support and implementing legalisation that requires the continued operation of established services.

3 Conclusion

The programmes reviewed had a positive impact on the groups of children targeted. More children than usual attended the facilities provided and the number of places available increased substantially. The lives of the children also improved significantly in many cases, especially their health and well-being as well as their social skills, in one case, the improvement extending to vulnerable children outside the group targeted.

In addition, several programmes benefited parents by improving their parental competence and employment situation as well as prompting changes in the general perception of the children targeted and their families.

There are a number of lessons to be drawn from the programmes reviewed for the future use of EU funding to assist vulnerable children in order for this to be most effective. In particular, programmes should:

- be properly planned and designed, tailored to local and individual needs and be located close to the children targeted;
- involve parents, include awareness-raising campaigns and develop relations based on trust;
- involve trained staff used to working with disadvantaged children and preferably from the same community as the disadvantaged children concerned and pay them decent wages;
- ensure close cooperation between all those involved and elicit the support of local politicians;
- avoid stigmatisation of the children concerned and their families;
- be built on hard experience and a well-conducted ex ante impact assessment and involve ex-post impact evaluations as a requirement, which could be made a precondition of EU financing EU;
- allow a wide range of measures to be eligible for support in order to enable the most appropriate approach to be implemented.

4 Annex: Case studies on the effectiveness of funding programmes

Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
EEA Grants 2009-2014, Children and Youth at Risk programmes in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania

2019

Alex Stimpson

Contents

Summary

This case study focuses on three Children and Youth at Risk programmes funded under the EEA Grants in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, with allocated funding of €6.5m, €6.3m and €20.1m respectively. They were implemented between 2013 and the end of 2017.

The programmes focused primarily on children and youth in precarious family situations and those in or at risk of being in institutions by e.g. enhancing the quality of child welfare and protection systems and/or improving school attendance and preschool day-care, health and social care access. The programmes might also target minority children, including Roma in selected countries.

The programmes have contributed – in some cases significantly - towards effectively establishing systems and public service-provision for children and young people at risk, for example contributing to developing various abilities, socialisation, nutrition and hygiene, particularly in rural areas. There are several examples of the programmes successfully impacting national policies and programmes and more selective examples of the programmes leveraging extra financial resources.

Lessons for EU Funding Programmes

The review of the case study programmes has highlighted five main lessons that may support the future use of EU funding to assist vulnerable children.

1. **Programmes should follow a strategic approach.** Where the programmes appeared to be most successful was where an integrated approach was followed, which combined soft and hard measures, the development of strategies with working tools, investments in capacity building and awareness raising of staff, additional organisations and, in certain cases, regional politicians, as well as monitoring and evaluation as part of an evidence-based approach. Programmes can also aim to be preventive in nature. Fewer programmes and larger funding would boost the potential impact of the programmes and cut their associated management costs.
2. **Build administrative capacity and institutional involvement.** Increased capacity, particularly at local and regional levels, was seen not just as a success factor for implementation but also for sustainability, which was greatest when programmes included a strong competence building component. Involving local institutions (government and the third sector) appears to have been of benefit in all three programmes, increasing buy-in, awareness and understanding as well as, in some cases, helping drive reforms.
3. **Ensure programmes are relevant to needs.** This can be facilitated by stakeholder involvement in the programme or project design, as well as during implementation. It also includes providing services in a way that does not stigmatise and discourage children from accessing services and involving parents and families in the process. Providing flexibility to modify the programme during implementation allows for programme components to be adapted in accordance with needs.
4. **Sustainability** can be encouraged through building political support, capacity building and legal mechanisms that require the continued operation of established centres.
5. **Political attention and support.** Each of the three programmes has underscored the importance of political and policy interest, whose presence can help buy-in and leveraging funding and whose absence can hamper implementation and/or wider effects.

1 Description of funding programme

The EEA and Norway Grants represent the contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway to:

- reducing economic and social disparities in Europe; and
- strengthening bilateral relations between the Donor States and the Beneficiary States.

For the period 2009-2014, €1.798 billion was set aside. Funding for the 2009-2014 financial period was channelled through 150 programmes in 16 beneficiary countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics. Each beneficiary country agreed on a set of programmes with the donor countries, based on national needs and priorities and the scope for cooperation. These agreements were formalised in Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with each beneficiary state[4]. Grants were made available for public and private sector bodies, non-governmental organisations and research and academic institutions. Programme Operators in the beneficiary states were responsible for the implementation of the relevant programmes. Implementation of the Grants was overseen by the three donor countries and, on their behalf, a secretariat in Brussels (the Financial Mechanism Office - FMO).

The EEA funds are complementary to the EU structural funds and cohesion policy. Often the funds are managed at the national level by the same managing authority. EEA grants may sometimes perform the role of a pilot project or fund projects where EU or national funding is limited.

In the 2009-2014 financial period, with implementation between 2012/13 and the end of 2017, programmes were placed under one of nine priority sectors e.g. human and social development, civil society, justice and home affairs, climate change or green industry innovation. The sectors were further subdivided into 32 programme areas[5].

The Children and Youth at Risk programme area, funded by the EEA part of the Grants with contributions from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, provided €60.5m in funding for programmes in seven European countries, with the objective of improving the well-being of children and youth at risk. The programmes considered for this case study – in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania – were allocated funding of €6.5m, €6.3m and €20.1m, or 14.5%, 8% and 7% of the total country allocations respectively.

In relation to the target groups of children highlighted in the Commission's feasibility study to establish a child guarantee, these EEA Grants programmes focused primarily on children in precarious family situations and those in or at risk of being in institutions. As such, the children and youth at risk programmes focused on improving the quality of child welfare and protection systems and/or increasing school attendance and access to preschool day-care, health and social care. The programmes were also targeted at minority children, including Roma in selected countries.

The programmes were developed by the Programme Operators in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania, who were responsible for the design and implementation of the programmes, first by preparing and submitting a programme proposal to the donors detailing the main objectives and modalities of the programme. Programmes should follow a results-based management approach as outlined in the Programme Operators Manual[6] and include output and outcome indicator targets. Following comments and amendments and approval of the programme by the donors, a Programme Agreement was drawn up, serving as the legal

[4] http://eeagrants.org/Results-data/Results-overview/Documents/Legal-documents

[5] https://eeagrants.org/Results-data/Documents/Publications/Brochures/Programme-Areas-2009-2014-brochure

[6] https://eeagrants.org/Media/Files/Toolbox/Toolbox-2009-2014/Programme-operators-manual-POM

basis for the programme, and was signed by the donors and National Focal Point in each of the countries.

The programmes were implemented through projects and small grant schemes in the countries concerned. The majority of projects were selected following an open call for applications. In addition, selected projects were 'pre-defined', either at the time of agreeing the MoU or proposed by the Programme Operator during the programme development process. When projects were pre-defined, they were not subject to calls for proposals[7]. One of the features about the EEA grants is that each programme includes a bilateral component. This involves institutions from donor and beneficiary countries working together, sharing knowledge or producing joint results with the aim of strengthening bilateral relations.

All programmes were subject to monitoring and evaluation according to the Regulations. This required that a sample of projects be monitored on an annual basis by the Programme Operator. The National Focal Points in the beneficiary states, with overall responsibility for reaching the objectives of the EEA Financial Mechanism for their portfolio of programmes in the beneficiary state, were required to regularly monitor progress, in practice often through quarterly progress reports provided by the Programme Operators. Additional monitoring could be launched on behalf of the three donor states. The Regulation also foresaw an independent evaluation of programmes in each country at some point during the Financial Mechanism.

The three programmes considered for this case study are summarised in Table 1 and in the sub-sections below.

Table 1: Overview of case study programmes

Programme	Programme title	Allocation	Programme duration	Number of projects
Estonia (EE04)	Children and Youth at Risk	€6.5m	4 years 10 months	23
Lithuania (LT05)	Children and Youth at Risk	€6.3m	4 years 6 months	27
Romania (RO10)	Children and Youth at Risk and Initiatives to Reduce National Inequalities and to Promote Social Inclusion	€20.1m	4 years 3 months	100

Estonia

The programme in Estonia, signed in February 2013, aimed to improve the well-being of children and young people in Estonia up to the age of 26. In particular it aimed to address shortages in the Estonian support system for children and families such as poor coordination between government and local agencies, lack of effective measures targeted at supporting children and their families and community based crime prevention, low capacity of local governments and lack of skills of specialists to detect children and youth at risk and support them or provide parental support, and lack of aftercare for juvenile offenders placed in institutions.

[7] According to the EEA Regulations, in exceptional cases, the Programme Operator could propose pre-defined projects in the programme proposal: https://eeagrants.org/Results-data/Results-overview/Documents/Legal-documents/Regulations-with-annexes/EEA-Grants-2009-2014/Regulation-EEA-Grants-2009-2014, p. 18.

It had two expected outcomes and a series of associated outputs:

1. Effective and efficient measures addressing vulnerable groups of children and youth implemented. This included (i) a regional-level coordination mechanism to provide support and services for children and families, (ii) regional support units for children and families (iii) more inclusive integration strategies leading to reduced drop-out rates of forms 7–9 in schools (iv) increased capability of youth organisations and youth work organisations to involve children and youth at risk (v) community-based crime prevention measures in municipalities.
2. Policies and standards of intervention in the field of juvenile justice developed and implemented to ensure protection and secure full rights during detention and a wide range of opportunities for young offenders to reintegrate into society. This included (i) social inclusion of excluded youth and prevention of re-offending behaviour (ii) aftercare for incarcerated youth.

The Programme was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Estonian Youth Work Centre. They organised four open calls and two small grant schemes. In total, there were 23 projects of which one was a pre-defined project, 10 were selected following an open call (ranging from €170,000 to €680,015), and a further 12 were small grants schemes selected via open call (ranging from €11,880 to €149,999)[8].

Activities focused on creating a legal and organisational framework to establish a support system for children and families, supporting professionals in various agencies to provide adequate early intervention, supporting parenting skills and preventing juvenile delinquency. The pre-defined project included two evidence-based activities – a positive parenting programme called 'Incredible Years' (IY) to assist parents to prevent and successfully deal with behavioural and developmental problems in children. For youth with serious behavioural problems and their families, the Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) was used as an alternative to residential treatment, using individual and family therapy to address issues leading to problem behaviour.

Lithuania

The Programme in Lithuania was focused on children and youth in precarious situations. According to the Programme Operator, work with children and youth at risk had been long underdeveloped in Lithuania. In 2012, families at social risk raised around 20,000 children, yet 5,000 children and 2,800 family members received support from child day-care centres. Children at risk living in deprived families often did not have substantial meals or access to preventive services such as leisure-time activities, information or counselling, which could be provided at the day care centres. In addition, there was no established integrated assistance (psychological, medical, legal, social, etc.) for children who had suffered from sexual abuse and/or sexual exploitation in Lithuania.

The programme agreement was signed in June 2013 and was aimed at increasing the well-being of children and youth at risk and, in particular, at allowing children to grow up in their biological families by improving the availability of preventive services for children, taking into account their interests and needs. The Children and Youth at Risk programme is described as a "niche" programme in the ex post evaluation of programme implementation in Lithuania.

Two expected outcomes were set:

1. effective and efficient measures addressing vulnerable groups of children and youth implemented
2. violence, abuse and exploitation of children and youth prevented through implemented measures

[8] Children and Youth at Risk, Final Programme Report, Estonia, 2017 EEA Financial Mechanism 2009–2014.

To achieve these outcomes, improvements in institutional infrastructure and staff competences were targeted:

A. developing and improving day-care centres for children and youth
B. setting up a specialised centre for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation

The Programme was implemented by the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour. It consisted of 27 projects. One open call was organised regarding the development of day-care centres and a pre-defined project was established to set up a specialised centre for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation. The call was open for all legal entities related to the supported activities and received 104 applications for a total of €22 million. 26 project applications were approved and received €5.4 million.

The programme aimed to provide additional services to children and youth at risk, with the majority of funds used to develop child day-care centres, open youth centres and spaces in the most deprived municipalities (87% of project funding). The remainder was used to set up of a specialised centre for children suffering from sexual abuse or exploitation.

Romania

Romania has one of the highest rates for children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with the rate increasing where the level of education is lower. The programme in Romania was aimed at addressing the specific needs of around 7,000 disadvantaged children and youth, including from poorer regions with large Roma populations, or with one or more parents abroad and so living with relatives or in foster care, in placement centres or with other families. One of the main challenges the programme was intended to address was early school leaving (one of the overall benchmarks under the Europe 2020 strategy), and poor school attendance.

The programme also targeted decision-makers and experts involved in providing support services, promoting measures in areas such as education, professional training, employment and social inclusion. In addition, the programme was aimed at promoting social inclusion and strengthening policies related to anti-discrimination at national, regional and local levels for disadvantaged groups.

The two main expected outcomes of the programme were, first, effective and efficient integrated measures addressing vulnerable groups of children and youth at risk and, second, developing initiatives to reduce inequalities and to strengthen anti-discriminatory measures for groups vulnerable to social and economic exclusion. The second outcome fell under another programme area of the EEA Grants, but still under the priority area Human and Social Development.

The programme agreement was signed in September 2013. The programme included the following components: improving access to formal and non-formal education and childcare (35 educational and day-care centres), providing support services (counselling, awareness), family and community building, competence building for staff to deliver services, enhancing the inclusiveness of institutions, improving child welfare systems and child protection measures, improving the situation of the Roma.

The programme was implemented by the Romanian Social Development Fund and funded 100 projects in total[9], selected via four open calls. There was one pre-defined project which was implemented by the National Council for Combating Discrimination in partnership with the Council of Europe. It aimed to stimulate involvement of relevant actors in developing the national strategy to prevent and combat discrimination for the period 2017-2021. The General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection, acting at county level, were involved in the implementation of 21 out of the 100 implemented projects, providing new or improved services for children and youth institutionalised or under a protection measure.

[9] An overview of projects can be found here: http://www.frds.ro/index.php?id=129

Several projects aimed to encourage and provide support for local and regional authorities, or private and civil society actors, to develop initiatives to strengthen anti-discriminatory measures for groups vulnerable to social and economic exclusion.

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

This section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the programmes in terms of their impact on the target group, on leveraging extra resources for the target group and on national (or sub-national) policies and programmes. It concludes with lessons for EU funding programmes.

2.1 Impact on target group

The programme in **Lithuania** was judged by evaluators to have had a significant impact on the development of public services for children and young people at social risk. However, quality varies among specific projects, which might depend on regional or local capacities as well as engagement in implementation.

The programme was intended to establish or develop 24 day-care centres, but ultimately 43 centres were established or renovated: 23 child day-care centres, 7 child day-care centres with open youth spaces and 13 open youth centres[10]. The evaluation emphasises that the development of child day-care centres as well as open youth centres have contributed to developing various abilities, socialisation, nutrition and hygiene of children and youth at risk. This is particularly the case in rural areas. The programme far exceeded its target insofar as the new or renovated centres were attended by almost 6,000 children and youth, instead of the 1,300 targeted.

Looking only at children, the programme has contributed considerably to increasing the number and proportion of children at social risk attending day-care centres. At the start, around 23% of attendees at child day-care centres were children at risk from deprived families. By the end of 2017, the proportion of at-risk children attending day-care centres had increased to around a third (6,244 out of 18,345 children living with families at social risk[11]). It is worth pointing out that, during programme implementation, it was decided that day-care centres could be attended by all children and young people[12], regardless of whether they are at risk, in order to promote children's mutual understanding, tolerance and integration into society.

As an example, during one project the likelihood of children entering foster care was reduced through social work with children and their parents, and during the project implementation period 51 families were removed from the list of those at social risk, the number of children at risk was reduced to 238 and less children were accommodated at custody care institutions.

In developing the day-care centres, the programme placed a strong emphasis on competence building for both staff and volunteers, training nearly 400 people and exceeding the target by more than three times. This appears to have allowed the programme to increase its effectiveness and sustainability. The programme also created and launched a new integrated service for children and families at risk, which is provided at day-care centres. The service aims to empower families, by involving the whole family and its environment to raise awareness among family members about their decisions and lives. Such projects were first attempts to provide this service in Lithuania and – considered a success – have since been extended to other child day-care centres in Lithuania.

[10] Open youth centres and open youth spaces supported open youth work with youth at risk and with fewer opportunities.

[11] Estep (2018).

[12] Youth are 14-29 year olds in this programme.

This programme also funded the first and only specialised centre for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation and is considered in the final evaluation report to have fundamentally changed the provision of related assistance and services. In advance of establishing and launching the centre in 2016, a methodology for working with child victims was developed and training of 25 specialists was initially targeted. In the end, four cycles of training were conducted and close to 350 people were trained across different institutions in Lithuania e.g. heads of institutions, specialists of children's rights protection, psychologists and social workers. By the end of 2017, services at the centre had been provided to 239 children in precarious situations. The evaluation assesses that "*child victims are much less traumatised [than before the centre was established], experience their emotions easier during questionings and are protected from the influence of interested parties. The centre can give children temporary accommodation and provide psychological or other professional help. Investigators and other officials come to the centre to conduct pre-trial questionings. Children are less stressed in a cosier rather than formal institutional environment, which makes the process faster and shorter*"[13].

In **Romania**, the programme was found to have made an important contribution, but one which was mainly limited to the areas or municipalities in which the projects were implemented[14]. More than 61,800 beneficiaries from different target groups were supported: children, young people and parents, members of vulnerable groups including Roma, education and social services professionals, representatives of local authorities or non-governmental organizations active within disadvantaged communities.

In particular, over 18,000 children and 11,750 young people directly benefited from education services and activities. Over 16,300 parents of children or young people at risk (of whom 22.4% were Roma) received support services (e.g. information on the importance of education, psychological counselling, parenting, literacy, trainings) and over 9,600 social and educational specialists were reported to have acquired new knowledge and specific skills in working with children and youth belonging to various vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, the percentage of children in the Romanian public protection system has remained constant in the last 10 years. In particular, children with disabilities are most often taken over by the special protection system, institutions or maternal assistance, due to limited community-based social services[15].

An external evaluation, conducted in 2017 by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy, concluded that the interest of children and young people in education as well as school attendance rate and performance increased after project implementation[16]: 85% of respondents believed that the project activities had improved the interest in schooling for children and young people; 2 out of 3 parents considered that the activities of the programme had contributed to the decision of children and young people to continue their studies; as a result of the programme, 8 out of 10 children intended to continue their studies at high-school level.

The programme was found to have had positive social effects by providing opportunities for personal and social development to children from vulnerable communities, families or groups and by making investments in formal extra-curricular education (school-based programmes after school) or non-formal education in remote or poor areas.

Several measures were integrated into the programme to achieve these results. They included developing and establishing social facilities to deliver services (42 facilities) and developing methodologies, tools and action plans to combat social and economic exclusion of people belonging to disadvantaged groups (303 instances).

[13] Estep (2018).

[14] Ex-post evaluation of the programmes funded under the EEA Financial Mechanism and the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009-2014, Romania, 2018.

[15] Ibid.

[16] http://www.frds.ro/index.php?id=130

Some of the services created or improved could be used beyond the institutions involved in that, through training, networking or new working tools, the services could be taken up by other educational units in the county.

Among the success factors highlighted by the Programme Operator were the emphasis on working with parents to increase understanding regarding the importance of education, the material support that was provided in the form of meals and hygiene, and the focus on both formal and non-formal educational approaches to motivate children. The emphasis on public private partnerships was also seen as a success factor.

Indeed, the level of partnership in elements of this programme is notable. Of 32 initiatives implemented or piloted from community to national level with the aim of promoting anti-discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups, 97% involved partnerships with private entities or civil society.

Among the main challenges encountered, capacity at local level was a regular issue, including for teachers and for specialists, alongside convincing parents.

In **Estonia**, the programme was found by evaluators to have achieved all its objectives and outcomes, with the key achievements being[17]:

- A better legal and organisational framework for children and youth at risk was created and input was given to renew national strategies and regulations which were updated in parallel with the programme.
- Evidence-based education and social intervention programmes were introduced in Estonia.
- Many innovative preventive activities (including new methodologies) were established and implemented.
- Strong community networks were established and the capacity of the specialists in youth, education and child welfare at different levels (in particular local governments and third sector) increased.
- Awareness of the problems of young people increased, including of their multi-dimensional nature.

According to the final programme report[18], this has helped to reduce drop-out rates for children in grades 7–9 as well as to include socially excluded young people, it has helped to increase the number of municipalities in which community-based crime prevention measures are being enforced and, by providing access to and involving young people in educational hobby activities, it has helped to prevent re-offending behaviour. Under the parenting programme, parents learned new skills and were given advice and support on bringing up children, including migrant children. Altogether, there were 57 (30 in Estonian, 27 in Russian) groups of 523 parents involved in cooperation with 21 local governments (LG).

Under the Multidimensional Family Therapy component of the project, by the end, 184 families had received support while work was ongoing with a further 100 families. Strong links were also established between the state and local levels by creating regional support and coordination units at the Estonian Social Insurance Board to channel national policy on children, youth and families to the local level, and to advise and support local governments in planning corresponding activities.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

[17] https://entk.ee/riskilapsedjanoored/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/EY_ENTK_EMP_toetuste_programmi_hindamine_aruanne.pdf

[18] Final Programme Report, Children and Youth at Risk programme, Estonia.

There are selected examples of the case study programmes leveraging extra resources for children and youth at risk.

As required by the Regulations, EEA programmes are subject to co-financing, usually at a rate of around 15%. In **Romania,** the programme has leveraged funding according to the Regulations in terms of co-financing during programme implementation. To the extent that projects involve investment in real estate and/or land, the Regulations for the EEA Grants (Article 7.15 Durability of projects, p32) foresee that the Programme Operator shall ensure that projects are operational for at least five years *after* the project completion report is approved and that the real estate and/or land is used for the purpose of the project as described in the project contract. Thus, local authorities are committed to providing funding and ensure the continued running of the centres in this regard.

In **Estonia**, there is some uncertainty regarding the long-term financial sustainability[19] but the most notable activities to have received follow-up funding are the Incredible Years and the Multidimensional Family Therapy programmes, which are fully funded from the state budget, while more activities have continued with funding support from the local governments' budgets. Moreover, according to the final programme report, additional resources from the Ministry budgets and the EU Structural Funds were made available during the planning and implementation stages in order to support the connected activities not covered by the EEA Grants.

The strongest examples of leveraging resources come from the programme in **Lithuania**. For instance, the specialised centre for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation has become an institution under the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour and funding is guaranteed by the state budget.

The programme both developed existing centres and established new ones. Overall, the programme financed around 10% of newly established child and youth day-care centres in the network (eight new centres for children, five new centres for children and youth, and seven new centres for youth). The programme therefore was not a major contributor to increasing the size of the day-care centre network, which was also financed using resources from municipalities and nongovernmental organisations as well as EU Structural Funds (€5.11 million was allocated to 13 projects)[20].

In addition, in a national legal act from December 2015, a procedure was established to award funding to child day-care centres through a call for applications[21]. In 2017, €3.6 million was made available for 285 CDCCs under this call. Municipalities are also committed to contribute financially or through the provision of premises (although some municipalities do not honour this commitment). Day-care centres are also encouraged to look for additional financing from business, charity funds and the general public - staff of day care centres say that the issue of money is sensitive and demands constant attention[22].

Thus, policy emphasis and political support have been important for leveraging extra resources in both Estonia and Lithuania.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub national) policies and programmes

The programmes in Estonia and Lithuania were found to have stimulated improvements in policies or the development and rollout of innovative or proven interventions. In the case of **Estonia**, the evaluation found that input was given for the renewal of national strategies and regulations which were updated in parallel with the programme and a better legal and organisational framework for children and youth at risk was created. Moreover, many of

[19] https://entk.ee/riskilapsedjanoored/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/EY_ENTK_EMP_toetuste_programmi_hindamine_aruanne.pdf

[20] Under the Operational Programme for the Promotion of Cohesion, Priority 2 "Quality of public services and availability of health, education and social infrastructure".

[21] Regulations for the organisation of an open call for the selection of projects of child day-care centres for financing 2016-2018, approved by Order No A1-726 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 8 December 2015.

[22] Estep (2018).

the activities of the projects have continued at the local or state level. An important contribution of the programme has been on policy-making processes, specifically in integrating greater cross-sectoral cooperation and in seeing children and youth related issues from a multi-dimensional perspective. Cooperation between networks at regional level has also remained in place after the programme.

Given the political commitment in **Lithuania** to children and youth at risk, which included the Child Well-Being Programme for 2013-2018, the National Youth Policy Development Programme for 2011-2019 and the National Programme for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Assistance for Children for 2011–2015[23], funding from the EEA Grants and EU Structural Funds for the Child Day-care Centres appears to have supported the implementation of the national strategy.

The programme was found to have improved regional politicians' and executives' awareness and understanding regarding the provision of services to children and youth at social risk. Moreover, NGOs working with children and families at risk as well as people with disabilities helped drive institutional care system reforms and, at the same time, influenced policy towards greater stakeholder sensitivity and more inclusiveness[24].

The specialised centre project in particular, has contributed to change in Lithuania and beyond. In Lithuania, it has helped change the institutional approach regarding how to work with abused children (e.g. in institutions or in precarious situations), and has had an effect beyond the specialised centre by organising training for staff from other institutions working in the field of children's rights e.g. heads of institutions, specialists of children's rights protection, psychologists and social workers.

The centre also organises inter-institutional meetings in different parts of Lithuania with specialists of children's rights protection and law enforcement officers where it discusses cooperation and shares knowledge on how to address child abuse issues or provide assistance to child victims more effectively.

According to the final evaluation, there was discussion in Lithuania about the possibility of setting up another centre in Western Lithuania but it has now been decided that one centre is sufficient for providing services, including for reasons of geographical proximity.

The programme in **Romania** was aimed at helping to create broad change by developing an integrated national anti-discrimination strategy for 2017-2021, through a pre-defined project which was an integral part of the programme. Even though, according to the external evaluation, policies and strategies to promote antidiscrimination and social inclusion are being undertaken or have the potential to be undertaken by local and central institutions, the strategy itself has not so far been approved at Ministerial level. However, the programme has developed methods and tools for professionals and initiated local partnership networks, which has helped to make services for vulnerable children and young people more accessible.

2.4 Five lessons for EU funding programmes

The review of the children and youth at risk programmes under EEA Grants in Estonia, Lithuania and Romania has highlighted five main lessons that may support the future use of EU funding to assist vulnerable children.

Strategic approach

Where the programmes appeared to be most successful was where an integrated approach was followed, which combined soft and hard measures, the development of strategies with

[23] The Child Well-Being Programme for 2013-2018, approved by Order No A1-547 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 3 December 2012; The National Youth Policy Development Programme for 2011-2019, approved by Resolution No 1715 of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania of 1 December 2010; The National Programme for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Assistance for Children for 2011–2015, approved by Order No A1-2 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 3 January 2011.

[24] Estep (2018).

working tools, investment in capacity building and awareness raising of staff, additional organisations and, in certain cases, regional politicians, as well as monitoring and evaluation as part of an evidence-based approach. Programmes can also aim to be preventive in nature.

Fewer programmes and larger funding would boost the potential impact of the programmes and cut their associated management costs. Any weaknesses in the intervention logic of the programmes should be addressed early on and suitable indicators and targets should be established to provide clear direction as well as to suitably measure and assess the outcomes and benefits from the interventions.

Allowing these programmes to be implemented in a context which reduces the administrative burden on the projects would free up resources for implementation and achieving results.

Build capacity and institutional involvement

Country evaluations of the EEA programmes have pointed to the importance of building capacity and institutional involvement at programme and project levels for effective implementation in particular at the regional and local levels. For example, not all programmes in Lithuania were implemented by Programme Operators with 'content' expertise. Where they were, such as the Children and Youth at Risk programme, the planning of programmes and projects was more successful.

Increased administrative capacity, particularly at local and regional levels, was seen not just as a success factor for implementation but also for sustainability, which was greatest when programmes included a strong competence building component. In Romania, an evaluation conducted in 2017 by UNICEF found that the administrative capacity at the local level to implement the measures provided by the strategies varied greatly and generally needed to be developed, strengthened and improved to lead to a real impact on the well-being of children and their families[25].

Programmes could also be affected by frequent changes in staff. In the Romanian Children and Youth at Risk programme, staff changes were so frequent that projects were monitored by six different people in less than two years.

Involving local institutions (government and the third sector) appears to have been of benefit in all three programmes: in Estonia, strong community networks were established and the capacity of specialists in youth, educational and child welfare at different levels increased; a cross-sectoral approach and steering committee involving ministries of education, justice, children and youth led helped buy-in and increase relevance by tackling issues from different perspectives. Involvement of NGOs in the projects was found to support sustainability in Romania and, in Lithuania, helped drive institutional care system reforms and influence policy towards greater stakeholder sensitivity. Involvement of regional politicians and executives increased their awareness and understanding regarding the provision of services to children and youth at social risk in Lithuania. Moreover, establishing the specialised centre for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation as an institution under the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour and funding has guaranteed its systemic and financial support under the state budget.

Relevance to needs

The services provided need to be relevant to beneficiaries, which can be facilitated by stakeholder involvement in the programme or project design, as well as during implementation. Providing flexibility to modify the programme during implementation allows for programme components to be adapted in accordance with needs.

This includes involving parents and families in the process and providing services in a way that does not stigmatise or 'label' children such that it discourages children from accessing services. The early decision to provide day care centre services to all children and not just

[25] UNICEF (2018).

to those at risk is an example of promoting children's mutual understanding and integration into society.

In Lithuania, the involvement of NGOs working with children and families at risk as well as people with disabilities not only helped to increase participation of stakeholders, it also increased sensitivity towards their needs.

Sustainability

Sustainability can be encouraged through building political support, capacity building and legal measures that require the continued operation of established centres.

For example, the Regulations require that investments involving real estate or renovation must remain operational for at least five years beyond the programme. Beyond the Regulations, in Romania it was found that generally greater attention should be paid to sustainability from programme and project design onwards. There are good practices in terms of ensuring sustainability including using sustainability as a selection criterion in the calls, establishing sustainability plans and supporting advocacy, which serve to promote the results to be taken over or the activities to be pursued by public authorities. Training, producing training materials and involvement of NGOs were also found to provide at least a short-term sustainability effect.

Sustainability and further developments are dependent on political decisions, financing and also administrative capacity, the latter especially at the regional or local levels. For example, activities at day care centres, open youth centres and open youth spaces are guaranteed by national law, and their funding is ensured by the state and local authorities. As a result, the specialised centre for victims of sexual abuse is judged to be still running well three years after the end of the project[26].

Political attention and support

Each of the three programmes has underscored the importance of political and policy interest, the presence of which can help buy-in and leveraging funding and the absence of which can hamper implementation and/or wider effects.

For instance, in Lithuania, the programme fits with a clear political commitment and the Child Well-Being Programme for 2013-2018. Nevertheless, representatives of the project promoters and the PO highlight that the services offered should be further developed to address problems of children and youth at risk. This requires not just financial investment, but also maintaining a high political focus on families at social risk and their children, improving legal regulation and mobilising society.

In Estonia, the close involvement of several ministries in the design and implementation of the programme, including by sitting on the programme steering committee, has helped keep policy attention on children and youth related issues.

On the other hand, in Romania, an integrated national anti-discrimination strategy for 2017-2021 developed as a pre-defined project has so far failed to get the necessary political support to be approved.

[26] This project was completed in June 2016.

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Estonia: Gerttu Aavik, former programme Manager of the Children and Youth at Risk programme.

Lithuania: Sandra Remeikienė, former Implementing Agency Programme Manager of the Children and Youth at Risk programme; Daina Urbonaitienė Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, Programme Manager of the Children and Youth at Risk programme (written input provided).

Romania: Paola Constantin, Coordinator of Projects Implementation Department, Romania Social Development Fund; Cosmin-Marius Câmpean, Coordinator of Bilateral Relations, Communication and Reporting Department, Romania Social Development Fund.

Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in Germany

2019

Isabel Naylon
Metis

Contents

Summary

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was set up in 2014 to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in the EU and to promote the social inclusion of the most deprived persons. The total EU budget is EUR 3.8 billion for seven years (2014-2020) with a maximum EU co-financing rate of 85%. All Member States submitted an operational programme (OP), either for 'food and/or basic material assistance' (also referred to as 'OP I') or for 'social inclusion of the most deprived persons' ('OP II'). 24 Member States implemented OP I programmes and four implemented OP II. One of the latter was Germany, which specifically focused its OP on newly arrived EU citizens, in practice mostly from eastern and south-eastern Europe, and their children. The German OP was chosen for this case study as it covers one of the four groups of children targeted by the Preparatory Action to explore the potential scope of a Child Guarantee.

The German FEAD ('Europäischer Hilfsfonds für die am stärksten benachteiligten Personen in Deutschland', or EHAP (European support fund for the most deprived in Germany)) has a total budget of EUR 93 million, of which EUR 79 million is from the EU.

The German FEAD has three specific objectives (SO); the focus here is on the two strands of SO2, which is about improving access to parental support for parents of migrant children of pre-school age, and improving access by the children themselves to early education and social inclusion opportunities.

The main focus is on helping recently arrived EU citizens and their families, as well as homeless people, to access the regular assistance system such as migration counselling, medical services, socio-psychiatric services, youth welfare offices and support services for the homeless[27]. In this sense, it can be seen to have a 'bridging function'.

A particular focus is on ensuring that migrant children get access to early childhood education and kindergartens. A major challenge is ensuring that children who are close to school age get a place in a kindergarten so that they can learn at least rudimentary German before starting school[28]. Referral to a kindergarten is also one of the most common results. In the first three years of the programme, two thirds of the funds were used to support families.

FEAD support in practice takes the form of funding the salaries of counsellors/outreach workers in existing or new beneficiaries (public bodies or non-profit organisations) to support the integration of disadvantaged newly arrived EU citizens and homeless people. These are mainly social workers with language skills in Bulgarian, Romanian and/or Turkish.

The FEAD also funds co-operation between the partner organisations and the regular assistance system and training courses, for example in respect of intercultural competencies and non-discrimination, for the municipalities and other stakeholders.

84 projects were selected for support in the first round for a period of 3 years and 67 projects in the second round for a period of two years. As a result, the funds are almost totally allocated. In case of returns of funds it might be possible to give a prolongation for some projects. Some of the projects from the first round received further funding in the second round, but there are also new projects.

In terms of reaching its targets, the FEAD in Germany is a very successful OP. It has reached significantly more participants than planned and also helped them transition to other services, in particular kindergartens and healthcare, with higher success rates than expected. For example, the overall number of parents of migrant children counselled under SO2a was 9,956 (latest figures up to November 2018). Out of these, 8,565 then made use of an existing counselling or support service for parents. This was a success rate of 86% compared with a target of 50%. Similarly, the overall number of migrant children of

[27] http://www.bmas.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2015/projektideen-FEAD.html.

[28] European Commission (2018b).

kindergarten age supported under SO2b was 9,461. Out of these, 8,179 then made use of an existing social service. This was a success rate of 86% compared with a target of 50%. Most of the referrals of children under SO2b were to kindergartens and health services.

The impacts are more difficult to observe as the target group is very mobile and following them up (for example six months or one year after participation) was not possible. However, there is evidence of children having improved medical care, learning German, going to kindergarten and participating in sports and leisure activities[29].

The main impact on national or sub-national policy so far has been to shine a spotlight on the problems of newly arrived EU citizens and their children and the measures that can help their integration. No concrete national and sub-national policies have emerged so far and no extra resources have been made available to date. Resources are made available by the municipalities. It depends on the individual Land whether complimentary activities receive funds from the Land budget (e.g. NRW finances counselling offices whose task is to identify a health insurance coverage or to find a way for such coverage). Other municipalities, for example Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden and Ludwigsburg, have stated their intention to continue the work of the FEAD through municipal funding.

It is already decided to include the FEAD actions in the Federal ESF+ OP as a particular priority axis. The programme will be improved to tackle issue and further needs of support resulting from the evaluations. Also, the funds should be enough to enable the financing over the whole programming period.

Lessons that can be learned from the implementation of the FEAD in Germany are:

- the need for outreach work, especially at the beginning of the programme;
- the need for social workers to be able to speak the languages of the people they are supporting and to have intercultural competences;
- the need for the existing services to have the capacity to cope with the additional people referred to them through the bridging function of the FEAD if the whole system is to work;
- the need for very specialised services/staff to support the children of recently arrived EU citizens, as the latter frequently show developmental issues and will not thrive if just put into a regular kindergarten without receiving the individual support they require; and
- children's inclusion needs do not stop when they reach school age – intercultural and specialist support is also needed in mainstream schools to cope with the influx of newly arrived EU citizens.

[29] Survey of project promoters by the ongoing evaluation.

1 Description of funding programme

The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was set up in 2014 to alleviate the worst forms of poverty in the EU and to promote the social inclusion of the most deprived persons. The Fund complements social inclusion measures funded under the European Social Fund (ESF), while exclusively supporting the most deprived persons. The activities of the Fund are carried out under shared management between the Member States and the Commission, and the total amount of resources from the EU budget is EUR 3.8 billion for seven years (2014-2020). The maximum EU co-financing rate is 85%, and Member States have to provide as national co-financing at least 15% of the total funding. All Member States prepared an operational programme (OP), which sets out how the FEAD resources will be used. In particular, FEAD assistance may be implemented through two types of OP, as follows.

a) 'Food and/or basic material assistance' (also referred to as 'OP I') – an OP supporting the distribution of food and/or basic material assistance to the most deprived persons, combined where applicable with measures aimed at alleviating social exclusion.

b) 'Social inclusion of the most deprived persons' ('OP II') – an OP supporting activities other than active labour market measures, consisting in non-financial, non-material assistance aimed at the social inclusion of the most deprived persons. Only Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden chose to implement OP II.

The FEAD has to be implemented through partner organisations (in the case of OP I) and beneficiaries (in the case of OP II) – public bodies or non-profit organisations – which deliver food or material assistance, combined with accompanying measures in the case of OP I to the end recipients or undertake activities, aiming directly at the social inclusion of the end recipients in the case of OP II in particular.

The FEAD was chosen for a case study because the programme has, among other things, focused on children at risk of poverty and their families and developed new ways of reaching children at risk of poverty, be it through free school lunches, breakfast clubs, free school articles, etc. It was decided to focus this case study on the German programme ('Europäischer Hilfsfonds für die am stärksten benachteiligten Personen in Deutschland', or EHAP (European support fund for the most deprived in Germany)) as it specifically focuses on recently arrived EU citizens, in practice mostly from eastern and south-eastern Europe, and their children – one of the four groups of children targeted by the Preparatory Action to explore the potential scope of a Child Guarantee.

Germany has experienced a large influx of citizens from EU Member States in recent years. According to the Federal Statistics Office, in 2013, before the launch of the initiative, 31.5% of the total of 1.1 million migrants from outside Germany came from the central and eastern European Member States of Poland, Romania and Bulgaria (346,500 people)[30]. In 2017 the number was 450,858, with the largest proportion (219,989) from Romania. While most migrants from the EU to Germany are reasonably, or very highly, skilled, a significant proportion are low-skilled[31] and unemployed and live at risk of poverty and social exclusion[32]. They are migrating to escape extreme poverty in their home countries. The families tend to migrate to cities and towns in Germany in which they have family or friends or which are traditional 'arrival towns', for example Duisburg, Gelsenkirchen and Hagen in North Rhine-Westphalia. These towns and cities tend to have massive problems themselves and are often overwhelmed by the arrival of poor and low-skilled EU citizens from eastern

[30] Statistische Bundesamt.

[31] In 2017, 12.9% of the inhabitants of Germany with a migration background did not have a school leaving certificate, compared with 1% of Germans without a migration background (https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/245651/umfrage/bildungsstand--verteilung-der-bevoelkerung-nach-migrationshintergrund-und-schulabschluss).

[32] Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2013).

Europe. The EU citizens lack the language and other skills necessary to make use of the counselling and support services in the regular assistance system. A large proportion of the smallest children do not speak German and do not go to kindergarten. This hinders their integration and their ability to then participate fully at school. An additional problem is that it is difficult to reach their parents and inform them of the possibilities open to their children[33].

Homeless people and people at risk of homelessness also often do not make use of the support that is potentially available to them. Access to the help available is too complicated for them or they are not open to being helped. Homelessness is one of the multiple problems affecting them (debt, low educational levels, lack of social ties, psychological problems, etc.). In such cases they are not reached in practice by the services available, nor are they properly documented in the statistics. However, the problem of homelessness appears to be on the rise. The 'Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Wohnungslosenhilfe e.V.' (BAG W) estimates that approximately 420,000 people were homeless in Germany in 2016, not including recognised refugees. It estimates the number of homeless refugees at 440,000, thus bringing the total to 860,000. This was a rise of 150% compared with 2014[34]. They predict a further rise to 1.2 million in 2018 (not yet confirmed). Approximately 12% of homeless people (refugees excluded) are estimated to be EU citizens (i.e. around 50,000 people)[35]. The BAG W estimates that 8% (32,000) of homeless people (excluding refugees) are children and young people[36]. The BAG W states that it is difficult to reach homeless people and to get them to use the support on offer. Those who do not take up the offer of shelter are often affected by other problems as well[37].

It was therefore decided to focus the FEAD OP on helping the vulnerable target groups (recently arrived EU citizens, homeless people and people at risk of homelessness) to gain access to existing services. While there is some overlap between the homeless and recently arrived EU citizens, the problems of the two target groups tend to be different. Without going into detail, homeless people may have multiple disadvantages and problems, including mental health problems, leading to their homelessness; whereas recently arrived EU citizens are characterised by extreme poverty, low skills and multiple barriers to integration. They need different forms of support in most cases.

Under the overall objectives of improving the social inclusion of particularly disadvantaged EU citizens and their children, and of homeless people and people threatened by homelessness, the FEAD OP (EHAP in German) has three specific objectives (SO):

1. improving access by disadvantaged recently arrived EU citizens to existing counselling and support services in the regular assistance system;
2a. improving access by the parents of recently arrived children of pre-school age to parental support;
2b. improving access by recently arrived children to early education and social inclusion measures, such as kindergarten places, leisure activities such as sport and art or music classes, and language courses; and
3. improving access by homeless people and people at risk of homelessness to existing counselling and support services in the regular assistance system.

The overall budget of the FEAD in the programming period 2014-2020 in Germany is EUR 93 million, of which EUR 79 million is from the EU. The official start of the project was on 22 February 2016 with an event in Berlin. There were two calls altogether. The first was launched with an information event on 27 October 2016 in Bonn in which 150 potential project promoters participated. The second call was launched in 2018. The calls are also published on the website. The selection process is structured in two phases. In the first phase, project promoters submit an expression of interest. These are then assessed by the

[33] Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2013).

[34] http://www.bagw.de/de/themen/zahl_der_wohnungslosen/index.html.

[35] http://www.bagw.de/de/presse/Pressearchiv~147.html

[36] https://www.bagw.de/de/neues~147.html.

[37] European Commission (2018b).

BMAS (Ministry for Social Affairs) and the BMFSFJ (Federal Ministry for Families, Senior Citizens, Women and Young People) with the help of two independent evaluators. The criteria are:

- reliability and capacity of the applicant, including information on the qualifications and linguistic, intercultural and pedagogical competences of the project staff;
- demonstration of co-operation between the municipalities and the organisations providing welfare, and with other non-profit organisations;
- type and level of the municipality's problems and the resulting migration and gender-specific needs of the target group(s) with regard to the available assistance, (federal and Länder ESF programmes or other programmes);
- adequacy of planned output and result indicators;
- consideration of the horizontal objectives 'promoting equality of women and men' and 'non-discrimination';
- consideration of approaches to maintaining and safeguarding the sustainability of the project in municipal structures;
- convincing project concept with a description of concrete activities and a work plan, including a timetable to help achieve the project's goals; and
- appropriateness of project expenditure in relation to desired output and result indicators.

Two teams of evaluators assess the projects and assign points. If they diverge, then the project is checked by a third evaluator. 143 projects were submitted, out of which 67 made it into the second round of the tendering process. A workshop was held by the BVA (central service provider of the Federal Government) for the successful projects to help them prepare their proposals for the second round. The selected projects submitted their proposal to the BVA via the internet platform www.zuwes.de. The BVA then judged the correctness of the financial proposals, including the co-funding, in relation to the funding criteria. As granting authority, the BVA carries out the final project selection, pays out the project funding and checks the use of the funds[38]. At the moment, it looks as though all 67 projects will be supported.

By the end of 2017, 84 projects had been supported under all three Specific Objectives (SO)[39]. 81 projects continued until the end of 2018. 60% of the FEAD budget was committed in the first funding round (2015-2018)[40]. 67 projects were chosen for the second round of FEAD funding. Approximately EUR 40 million has thus been allocated up to 2020 (85% EU, 10% national and 5% project promoters). The projects each receive between EUR 250,000 and EUR 1 million for three years. It is not yet known what happened to those projects from the first round that were not selected for the second round.

The main type of support provided through the FEAD is the funding of the salaries of counsellors/outreach workers in existing or new counselling centres to support the integration of disadvantaged recently arrived EU citizens and homeless people. In the second round of projects a post of project coordinator is also financed by the FEAD. All other costs are covered by a flat rate as percentage of the direct staff cost. In addition to personnel costs, the FEAD also funds co-operation between the partner organisations and the regular assistance system in order to ensure the smooth running of the programme. It also funds specific training courses, for example in respect of intercultural competencies and non-discrimination, for the municipalities and other stakeholders.

[38] https://www.bva.bund.de/SharedDocs/Kurzmeldungen/DE/BVA/2015/Aktuelles_EHAB_221115.html

[39] One project can cover more than one SO. 58 covered SO1, 32 SO2 and 33 SO3.

[40] http://www.bmas.de/DE/Presse/Meldungen/2015/FEAD-projekte-zur-integration-koennen-starten.html

The main focus is on helping recently arrived EU citizens and their families, as well as homeless people, to access the regular assistance system such as migration counselling, medical services, socio-psychiatric services, youth welfare offices and support services for the homeless[41]. The approach with regard to children is holistic: the better the families fare, the better it is for the children. In the first three years of the programme, two thirds of the funds were used to support families.

A particular focus is on ensuring that migrant children get access to early childhood education and kindergartens. A major challenge is ensuring that children who are close to school age get a place in a kindergarten so that they can learn at least rudimentary German before starting school[42]. Referral to a kindergarten is also one of the most common results.

The monitoring and evaluation of the FEAD in Germany is contracted out to a consortium of social research institutes (SÖSTRA, IAW Tübingen and defacto). They support the BMAS in the monitoring of the FEAD and the completion of the annual implementation reports between 2015 and 2020.

The evaluation covers the same period and involves:

- analysis of the implementation and provision of recommendations for the second round of projects;
- analysis and assessment of the horizontal aims; and
- a cost-benefit analysis of the FEAD.

The evaluation uses a formative and participatory approach which includes network meetings with all the projects. It also co-operates with the *Landesverband der Sinti und Roma* BB (National Association of Sinti and Roma), which provides intercultural workshops and also some of the case studies for the evaluation team. The evaluation uses a mixed-methods approach with the use of monitoring data, qualitative analysis through two waves of case studies and two standardised surveys of project promoters. It also involves a very high number of expert interviews, for example with municipalities and *Länder* administrations, to get a multi-perspective view. It has produced factsheets on the horizontal objective 'equality between women and men' and recommendations on the continuation, design and implementation of the anti-discrimination workshops.

The specific results of the programme are given in the next Section.

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

2.1 Impact on target group

A summary of results is provided below.

- The overall number of recently arrived EU citizens counselled under SO1 was 54,530 by 8 November 2018. Out of these, 48,010 then transitioned to an existing counselling or support service, which is one of the main aims of the FEAD in Germany – to have a bridging function between eligible EU citizens and the services that they might not access otherwise. This was a success rate of 88% compared with a target of 70%.
- The overall number of parents of migrant children counselled under SO2a was 9,956. Out of these, 8,565 then made use of an existing counselling or support service for parents. This was a success rate of 86% compared with a target of 50%.
- The overall number of migrant children of kindergarten age supported under SO2b was 9,461. Out of these, 8,179 then made use of an existing social service. This

[41] http://www.bmas.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2015/projektideen-FEAD.html
[42] European Commission (2018b).

was a success rate of 86% compared with a target of 50%. Most of the referrals of children under SO2b were to kindergartens and health services.

- The overall number of homeless people or people at risk of homelessness counselled under SO3 was 17,871. Out of these, 14,581 then made use of an existing counselling or support service. This was a success rate of 82% compared with a target of 70%.

Table 1 – Results of the FEAD in Germany, up to 8 November 2018

	Planned values in the FEAD (EHAP) OP		Participants registered as 'remaining' in Germany[43] (Status 8 November 2018)				
	Output targets EHAP OP (2015-2020)	Output targets (2015-2018)	Output (people counselled) up to 8 November 2018	Output indicator (% of target)	Result (successfully advised) Actual	Result indicator (%) Actual	Result indicator (%) Planned
SO1	18,044	10,225	54,530	**533%**	48,010	**88**	**70**
SO2a	19,700	11,163	9,956	**89%**	8,565	**86**	**50**
SO2b	19,700	11,163	9,461	**85%**	8,179	**86**	**50**
SO3	21,450	12,155	17,871	**147%**	14,581	**82**	**70**

Source: SÖSTRA, IAW Tübingen and defacto (2018).

To sum up, the targets for the result indicators of all the SOs have been reached and exceeded; and from this point of view the programme can be considered very successful in achieving its aims. However, while the monitoring was very thorough, the impacts were not that straightforward to observe, as the target group is very mobile and following them up (e.g. six months or one year after participation, as is often done in an impact evaluation) was not possible.

The recently arrived EU citizens quite often have their own networks, which work quite well[44], but the transition into the state structures is not easy – even if many migrant parents really want their children to progress and will take the offers of kindergarten and school very seriously. For these recently arrived EU citizens, the FEAD is exactly the right kind of service. It is, however, impossible to know how many children do manage to integrate well, as there is no system to keep track of them and they are a very mobile target group. It is also difficult to get information from them concerning improvements (or otherwise) in their living standards[45].

Nevertheless, a survey carried out among project promoters found the following changes among the target group of children aged under 7:

- of the project promoters, 55% often (41% quite often) saw an improvement in the medical care of the children;
- 59% (32%) saw an improvement in the children's German language skills;
- 45% (32%) observed the children being found a place in a kindergarten; and
- 45% (32%) observed that the children had been offered leisure and playing opportunities.

[43] Teilnehmer im Status 'Verbleib gemeldet'.

[44] These networks help new arrivals find housing and even their way to the FEAD offices. However, they also request money for their services, whereas the FEAD does its own outreach work.

[45] Interview with the BMFSFJ and SÖSTRA.

With regard to the children's development:

- 14% of the project promoters often observed that the children developed in an appropriate way for their age, 27% quite often and 23% seldom, while 36% replied that they did not know.

The project promoters were also asked if the children had been able to overcome their experiences of violence or abuse. 18% answered positively (quite often), 27% replied not often and 23% seldom; 32% said they did not know.

With regard to a reduction in family conflicts and dependencies, 5% of the project promoters said they had observed this frequently, 9% said they had observed it quite often, 23% quite seldom and 14% seldom; 50% said they did not know[46].

The most common form of support under SO2 was referral to a kindergarten place. This was considered essential for the integration of children and also for their learning German. However, in spite of the follow-up of the families by social workers, it is difficult for the evaluators to find out much about how often children come to the kindergarten and how long they stay overall. The families are often not aware of the advantages of early childhood education and do not always bring the children on a regular basis. There were also issues with the integration of the children in the classes due to language issues and sometimes also hygiene issues. For example, bad teeth might make the other children avoid the children of recently arrived EU citizens, thus reducing their integration chances.

The evaluators of the FEAD in Germany also carried out telephone interviews with a variety of stakeholders including the project promoters. With regard to children, interviewees criticised the fact that children aged 7 and over (i.e. schoolchildren) were not covered by the support. School social work, it was considered, would also benefit from multi-lingual and culturally competent FEAD counsellors. There was criticism too of the lack of a holistic family counselling in a 'one stop shop'[47]. The children at age of compulsory school were not included in the FEAD Programme initially as there is an obligation to go to school, contrary to the kindergarten. In the discussion for the second round of projects the need to enlarge the counselling to this age group was discussed in depth. As this would have needed a request for a programme modification and in particular because of lack of funds this issue was not followed-up further. This age group will however be included in the new programming period.

In response to this criticism, at the third network meeting of the FEAD in Germany on 12 October 2017, one of the working groups was on 'Children and young people over 7 years old'. A FEAD project from Göttingen, and an ESF project from Hamburg developed and run by a Sinti association, presented their projects. These projects are summarised in the boxes below as they represent examples of good practice in respect of the FEAD and more widely.

One weakness in the implementation of the FEAD in Germany was the slow acceptance process of the selected projects by the BVA. While the projects could start the work, they only received the money later, which was a problem for smaller service providers.

A further weakness from the point of view of the projects was the rule that no existing employee was allowed to be employed by the FEAD[48]. From a regulatory perspective, this was meant to avoid deadweight effects (somebody being employed with EU money who would have been employed anyway). However, from a project perspective, this meant that FEAD positions were not filled, through a lack of qualified staff (i.e. social workers with key

[46] Presentation of the results of the ongoing evaluation at the monitoring committee for the FEAD in Bonn on 8 May 2019 (by SÖSTRA, IAW Tübingen and defacto).

[47] SÖSTRA, IAW Tübingen and defacto (2017).

[48] This problem did not exist in the first project round and came up with the development of the support guidelines for the second round. This was the result of a changed approach of the Federal Ministry of Finances. A solution could be found for the FEAD OP. However the problem is much wider covering EU and national funds and not yet solved.

language skills in Bulgarian, Romanian and/or Turkish – many Bulgarians also speak Turkish).

Box 1. Good practice cases: 'Check-In Göttingen'

The project 'Check-In Göttingen', a co-operation between the City of Göttingen, Beschäftigungsförderung Göttingen kAöR, Diakonieverband Göttingen and Jugendhilfe Göttingen e.V., works with a team of mother-tongue social workers in order to reach newly arrived EU citizens and their children as soon as possible, to help them access services for which they are legally eligible in Germany. The project is housed in the Jugendhaus Gartetalbahnhof (youth centre Gartetalbahnhof), located very close to a tower block complex inhabited mainly by newly arrived EU citizens. With the help of the FEAD funding, the project is able to offer additional counselling and support to newly arrived EU citizens at times when the youth centre is not busy (in the morning and lunchtime). The main focus of the FEAD project is to provide referrals to kindergartens to children up to the age of 7 (the age covered by the FEAD). The transition from kindergarten to school is financed by the City of Göttingen and carried out by the Jugendhilfe Göttingen e.V. under its school social work approach. The latter has a broad 'social environment' approach which provides support for children aged between 7 and 11 in Lower Saxony. Older children and young people (between the ages of 12 and 26) are supported by the JuSTIQ ('Jugend Stärken im Quartier – Supporting young people in the neighbourhood') programme which is co-financed by the ESF. In this manner, the Jugendhilfe Göttingen e.V. provides a wide range of services for all age groups under one roof in the Jugendhaus Gartetalbahnhof. It also offers parents, and mothers in particular, opportunities to meet, cook together and spend the afternoon together, with the aim of creating trust as a basis for the youth work. Although it is focused on one particular area, the project (or combination of projects) is embedded in an overarching strategy for the integration of recently arrived EU citizens adopted by the City of Göttingen, in which the actions of a number of key stakeholders are complementary. The FEAD project is thus integrated in an existing offer of support which is open to all children and young people, with the aim of fighting against segregation. The demand for the various forms of support offered is high, which is why efforts are also being made to provide additional infrastructure such as a new kindergarten and to develop community work.

The need for additional places in kindergartens for children of recently arrived EU citizens – and, in particular, for specialist staff – was underlined by the interviewees from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs. This is also the subject of another project that was presented at the third network meeting of FEAD in Germany. That project is described below.

Qualification to become a kindergarten and early childhood education teacher

The Sinti association in Hamburg trains people to become kindergarten teachers with the support of the Hamburg authority for work, social affairs, family and integration (BASFI) and the ESF. It started in spring 2017 with 11 participants. The aim is to train specialists to support both kindergartens and the children of Roma and Sinti families in the integration of the latter into kindergartens. The idea and the concept came from the Sinti association, and the BASFI supported the development of the concept. It was refined in co-operation with the Europa-Akademie. The training concept includes both early childhood education and language training as well as individual coaching for mothers in respect of marriage, upbringing and education. It is based on the existing concept of school counsellors for schoolchildren. In addition, the kindergarten counsellors support and accompany kindergarten children, act as facilitators and help manage conflicts between children, and between children and teachers. Efforts are made to ensure a smooth transition between kindergarten and school for the children when the school counsellors take over from the kindergarten counsellors and accompany the children through their school years[49].

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

The main aim of the FEAD in Germany is to provide a bridging function to the existing social services. In this sense, the fund should have an important leverage effect for the target group. However, the existing services are often overwhelmed by the influx of EU citizens from eastern Europe and are unable to actually provide the services to which the people have been referred. The FEAD relies on a functioning social service sector that is able to cope with newly arrived EU citizens. This is often not the case, as the towns and

[49] SÖSTRA and IAW Tübingen (2017).

cities to which the EU citizens tend to migrate are themselves not the richest and the services are very stretched.

Some towns and cities have pledged to continue the work started through the FEAD in Germany. This includes continuing to finance social workers who are able to speak Bulgarian, Romanian and/or Turkish. The following examples were cited by the evaluators from the case studies.

- 3 out of 4 municipalities in the region of Ludwigsburg agreed to take on the costs of 1.4 counselling positions.
- In Berlin, a variety of projects exchange know-how in the field of approaching, counselling and following up recently arrived EU citizens, and try to transfer their know-how to other project promoters and municipal organisations.
- The FEAD project in Sachsen 'Mensch – komm mit' ('Man[50] – come with me') covers six municipalities: Aue, Chemnitz, Dresden, Leipzig, Plauen and Zwickau. The project for the homeless, run by the Daikon Sachsen, is trying to secure the continuation of the successful project. The City of Dresden has pledged to continue to fund the FEAD projects once the FEAD is over and Leipzig is also trying to integrate it into communal funding.

Other cities and municipalities will continue to exchange know-how with similar entities. However, given the tightness of communal budgets, the prospects for the continuation of projects in Germany without the support of EU funding are not so good.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

The FEAD in Germany has had an effect on the awareness of poverty in Germany. In some locations, the FEAD is better known than the ESF although it is a much smaller fund. The FEAD has raised awareness of what is missing in the regular provision and how this needs to be improved. It has shown how the existing infrastructure is unable to cope with the influx of EU citizens and refugees (not covered by FEAD but needing social service support). There is a need for more of the same but also for specialised services, for example kindergartens that have experience dealing with Roma children. This is a service that does not yet exist. There is a need for an intensive form of accompaniment such as that offered by the 'Frühe Hilfen' programme[51], which is available in Germany but only for Hartz IV recipients and not for recently arrived EU citizens.

To sum up, the main impact on national or sub-national policy so far has been to shine a spotlight on the problems surrounding the need for support of newly arrived EU citizens and to be in a better position to define a strategy to deal with them. No concrete national and regional policies have emerged so far and no extra resources have been made available to date. The municipalities finance the main part of the services. It depends on the individual Land whether there are other support schemes. NRW, for example, finances counselling offices whose task is to identify a health insurance coverage or to find a way for such coverage. With regard to the future, it is decided that the FEAD OP will be continued in the Federal ESF+ OP as a particular Priority Axis. The Commission is in discussion with the authorities that the available funds to will be increased to allow the coverage of the whole programming period.

[50] In the sense of 'person'.

[51] 'Frühe Hilfen' ('Early help') is a comprehensive model of early childhood intervention from pregnancy to school age. It provides midwives who speak the languages of their clients to women registered as inactive or unemployed and who have (for example) a lot of children or are in need of support. The midwives visit the families every week and provide continuity.

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

This Section first addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the FEAD in Germany in responding to the needs of vulnerable children, then the strengths and weaknesses of the FEAD overall, followed by potential lessons that can be drawn that can of use for implementing the Child Guarantee.

In Germany, one of the main strengths of the FEAD from a policy perspective, as indicated above, was raising awareness of the situation of recently arrived EU citizens in Germany who, on the one hand, benefit from the advantages of the free movement of people in the EU but also fall through the net of social assistance.

By consulting with all levels of stakeholder and providing a forum for discussion and intercultural learning, the programme has developed a very practical system of support, which can be built on in future. It has also exposed the gaps in the existing system, for example in terms of a lack of capacity in some cities or of appropriate support for the target group (e.g. kindergarten teachers who are able to deal with high numbers of migrant children in their classes).

It has shown how essential it is for those providing support to be able to communicate with recently arrived EU citizens and their children in their mother tongue. This creates trust and facilitates the counselling process.

A number of weaknesses of the FEAD in Germany were highlighted by the evaluation. These included technical issues such as: the overlap between target groups under SO1 and SO2; the lack of clarity concerning which target group belongs to which SO; the fact that the real effort and time spent on counselling is not eligible to be paid for by the programme; the lack of funding for much-needed training of the counsellors; and the significant efforts needed for project management, which is not eligible for reimbursement through the fund[52].

Some general weaknesses with regard to the contents of the programme were also highlighted such as the fact that the segmentation of support sometimes makes a holistic approach difficult[53]. For example, there is a need to make it easier to make the transition from FEAD to ESF projects.

With regard to support for children, in particular, the main weakness identified was the regional differences in the capacity of kindergartens to take in newly arrived migrant children. In some municipalities there is enough capacity as well as a willingness to welcome foreign children; whereas in others the demand is much higher than the existing capacity, especially in certain districts. In one (unnamed) region, there were 800 children aged under 6 from Bulgaria and Romania who needed kindergarten places. The public kindergartens were able to take in 115 and a further 100 probably went to private kindergartens, leaving 600 without a place. There is therefore a clear need in some regions for significantly more kindergarten places.

However, it is not only kindergarten places that are important but also staff trained to work in a multicultural context and with children with development issues. Some of the children display behaviour that is not appropriate for their age; that is, there is delayed development that requires professional follow-up. Something like the more substantial support offered by the 'Frühe Hilfen' programme would be required for recently arrived EU citizens.

A further issue is the cut-off point of the FEAD in Germany when children reach the mandatory school entry age (seven). Here, the need for a smooth transition between support for pre-school children and for schoolchildren has emerged[54]. It was discussed in view of the preparation of the second project round. The children at age of compulsory school were not included in the FEAD Programme as there is an obligation to go to school,

[52] SÖSTRA, IAW Tübingen and defacto (2018).

[53] Beitrag der Evaluierung zur Ausrichtung der 2. Förderrunde Aktuelle Befunde und Einschätzungen aus Monitoring und Fallstudien, Bonn, 16.1.18

[54] ibid

contrary to the kindergarten. In the discussion for the second round of projects the need to enlarge the counselling to this age group was discussed in depth. As this would have needed a request for a programme modification and in particular because of lack of funds this issue was not followed-up further. This age group will however be included in the new programming period.

However, overall, it can be said that the FEAD in Germany has been a success in terms of reaching its targets for supporting recently arrived EU citizens and their families. In particular, the support for children reached its target and many were found kindergarten places and access to medical care. The support structures created with their multi-lingual social workers were quickly known among the target population and became a real recourse for recently arrived EU citizens and their children. There is a clear and persistent need for these kinds of specialised service in the future as the number of EU citizens arriving in Germany has continued to rise.

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Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
Integrating refugee and migrant children into the education system in Greece

2019

Dimitris Ziomas, Antoinetta Capella and Danai Konstantinidou
National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)

Contents

Summary

Following the dramatic increase in the influx of refugees and other migrants into the country in 2015, the Greek government began to take action to ensure access to education for refugee and migrant children. Among the main measures was a special education programme concerning the establishment and operation of 'Reception/Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees' (DYEP).

The aim of this programme, which is geared to refugee and migrant children (aged 4-15) who live in refugee accommodation centres, is to facilitate their integration into the educational system in a way that should gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools. For children aged 6-15, the DYEP classes operate during afternoon hours in certain public schools on the Greek mainland that are located in areas accessible from refugee accommodation centres. With regard to children aged 4-5, the programme envisages pre-primary classes operated within refugee accommodation centres during morning hours.

The programme has run for three consecutive school years (2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19), and plans have been made to continue it in 2019/20. The number of refugee and migrant children who have participated has increased from approximately 2,650 children in the first year to 4,600 in the third. Funding for the programme was secured mainly from the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and from the state's public investment programme (75% EU contribution, 25% national) with a total budget of €18 million. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) also secured funding from two EU funds (the AMIF and the Emergency Support Instrument – ESI), to cover the cost of transporting children between the accommodation centres and public schools. Funding for other related activities has been secured from various international organisations, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the Greek parliament.

In spite of some initial delays and shortcomings/inefficiencies, the programme constitutes a very positive step towards the gradual integration of refugee and migrant children into Greek society, as access to education is a key factor in this. However, no official assessment has been carried out of the extent to which the programme has achieved its objectives and its actual impact on refugee children. Notwithstanding this, the fact that more refugee children participate in the formal education system is a positive step in itself towards improving their quality of life. Many of these children are escaping the harsh living conditions in 'ghettoised' refugee accommodation centres, and are taking part in normal everyday activities suitable for their age.

Moreover, the programme has triggered an increase in the number of morning 'reception classes', which are part of the formal educational system and are aimed at pupils with limited knowledge of the Greek language. All refugee and migrant children who live in urban areas are enabled to attend these classes, and this has also provided an opportunity for other vulnerable groups of children to benefit from them too. Funding has been secured from the European Social Fund.

The programme has also stimulated the establishment of a unit within the Ministry of Education, tasked with co-ordinating and monitoring the education of refugee children. This is expected to improve the Ministry's administrative/management capacity and help the systematic monitoring of all activities relating to refugee and migrant children's education.

EU funding has greatly contributed to supporting interventions aimed at facilitating access to education for refugee and migrant children, especially given the fiscal constraints the country has been faced with over the last 10 years. However, EU funds have been used in an ad hoc way, rather than in a strategic and planned way underpinned by an integrated approach. The effective use of funds, in particular EU funds, requires among other things that the design and approval of the programmes concerned is based on hard evidence and/or on an *ex ante* impact assessment. Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation arrangements have been put in place is also considered a prerequisite in this regard.

1 Description of the funding programme

This case study is part of efforts to explore the feasibility of, and analyse the conditions for, implementing a Child Guarantee for vulnerable children. It focuses on a specific vulnerable group, namely children of recent refugees and migrants transiting or settled in Greece, and an EU-funded special programme aimed at their integration into the education system in Greece. It constitutes an innovative intervention for which the role of EU funds has been invaluable. Before presenting and analysing the programme, as well as assessing the use of EU funds, it is necessary to outline the context in which the programme has been designed and implemented.

The context

In the course of 2015, nearly 1 million people[55], mostly from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, entered or transited through Greece in order to escape conflict in their countries and make their way to Europe. In the vast majority of cases, they did not want to stay in Greece but wished to continue their journey to northern European countries, mainly Germany. For this reason, only a small number had made asylum applications in Greece by the beginning of 2016.

However, the full closure of the refugee transit route through the Balkans, along with the EU-Turkey Agreement in March 2016, changed both the way refugees behaved and the way they were dealt with by the Greek government[56]. The only option for them was then to apply for asylum in Greece, in order either to stay in the country or apply for relocation to other EU countries. The lack of alternatives has led to an increase in the number of asylum applications[57] as well as to a significant drop in arrivals since March 2016[58]. Migration flows into Greece continued, but at a much slower pace.

A large number of refugees and migrants are currently hosted in the country. Available data show that in April 2019 just over **77,000**[59] **refugees and migrants remain in the country**, among them approximately **28,500 children**[60] aged 0-18 (of whom **3,817 are unaccompanied or separated children**)[61]. This implies an imperative need for the Greek government not only to ensure decent living conditions for all those recently arrived but also to take specific action for gradual integrating into Greek society those who remain. To this end, one of the first government initiatives was the launching, in October 2016, of a special education programme targeted at refugee and migrant children.

Design and implementation of the 'programme for integrating refugee children into the educational system'

At the beginning of 2016, the Greek government began to take action to ensure access to education for refugee and migrant children. In particular, the Ministry of Education,

[55] In 2015, 861,630 people arrived; and in 2016 173,450, of whom around 64,200 (or 37%) were children. See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179 and https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/53447.

[56] According to the EU-Turkey Agreement, those entering Greece after 20 March 2016 who do not apply for asylum or whose applications are considered unfounded or inadmissible (in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive), will be sent back to Turkey. However, during the period March 2016-May 2019, only 1,867 people were returned to Turkey under the Agreement. See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/69842.

[57] According to the Asylum Service, in 2015 there were only 13,187 asylum applications, whereas in 2016 there were 51,053, in 2017 58,642 and in 2018 66,967. In the first four months of 2019 there were 21,155. See http://asylo.gov.gr/en/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Greek_Asylum_Stats_Apr2019_EN.pdf.

[58] The drop in arrivals continued in both 2016 and 2017, whereas in 2018 an increase was observed (50,508 arrivals against 36,310 arrivals in 2017), which nevertheless was followed by a fall in the first four months of 2019 (11,150 in January-April against 14,750 in the same period in 2018). See https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179.

[59] It should be pointed out that data concerning refugees in Greece are changing almost on an everyday basis.

[60] See https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/2019-05/Refugee%20and%20migrant%20children%20Greece%20data%2030%20Apr%202019.pdf.

[61] See https://www.unicef.org/eca/sites/unicef.org.eca/files/2019-05/Unaccompanied%20children%20Greece%2030%20April%202019.pdf.

Research and Religious Affairs (henceforth the Ministry) formed, in March 2016, three committees with the aim of preparing a relevant plan. Among these, the Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children drafted specific evidence-based proposals for the most appropriate programmes to facilitate the integration of refugee children into the education system. For the school year 2016/17, considered as a transitional year, the Committee proposed: pre-school education classes in refugee accommodation centres; morning reception classes or afternoon classes in mainstream schools; the creation of a central administrative unit at the Ministry of Education; and the appointment of 'refugee education co-ordinators' in each refugee accommodation centre. An administrative and co-ordinating mechanism within the Ministry, namely the **Working Group on the Management, Co-ordination and Monitoring of the Education of Refugee Children**, was then set up in July 2016. It took a range of preparatory steps, including the appointment of 62 refugee education co-ordinators[62], to help design and implement the programme for 2016/17.

In October 2016, the government launched a special education programme for the establishment and operation of '**Reception/Preparatory Classes for the Education of Refugees**' (DYEP). The programme was aimed at **refugee and migrant children aged 4-15 living in refugee accommodation centres**, and was designed to facilitate their integration into the educational system in a way that should gradually allow them to join mainstream classes in Greek schools, though no quantitative targets have been set by the Ministry. For children aged 6-15, DYEP classes were planned to operate: (a) within certain public schools on the Greek mainland located in areas accessible from refugee accommodation centres (from 14:00 to 18:00 daily); and (b) within accommodation centres (during morning hours), under certain circumstances. For children aged 4-5, the programme envisaged pre-primary classes within accommodation centres, operating as branches of the nearest pre-primary public school (from 08:15 to 13:00).

In practice, DYEP classes are part of the mandatory formal education system (pre-primary, primary and lower-secondary education) and are run by either permanent or substitute teaching staff from public schools, all appointed by the Ministry. The number of students in each class ranges between 10 and 20. A teacher is appointed to be responsible for the smooth operation of the classes, the supervision of the teaching and co-operation with the director of the public school. They are assisted by a three-member committee of teachers.

Children attending pre-primary DYEP classes follow the official education programme for all pre-primary schools. For children attending primary and lower-secondary education classes, the programme entails weekly education of 20 hours (four hours daily) and covers six main subjects: Greek, mathematics, English, information technology, arts and sports – the main emphasis being on learning Greek[63].

In addition, the programme envisages the provision of psychological support to the children, but this was only made possible at the end of the third year, due to time-consuming recruitment procedures for psychologists.

Apart from education provision, children attending DYEP classes participate in various cultural, artistic and sports events organised – on many occasions – in collaboration with the public school in which the classes operate. Some of these events are addressed to both children and their parents. The programme also envisages awareness-raising activities aimed at the parents of the refugee and migrant children. A key role in these has been played by the refugee education co-ordinators.

Special training and support for teachers of DYEP classes is envisaged in the programme, provided by the Institute for Education Policy (IEP), a public organisation under the

[62] Their main tasks are (a) to act as 'education mediators' between the Ministry, the accommodation centre and the local community (local authorities, public schools, civil society organisations, etc.) and (b) to take care of all issues relating to the education of refugee children.

[63] In primary education, the 20 hours includes six hours of Greek, four hours of English, three of mathematics, two of information technology, three of sports and two of arts. In lower-secondary education it includes an extra hour of mathematics, and one less of sports.

supervision of the Ministry. This training was organised in only two brief sessions (during the first year) and focused on providing the teachers with appropriate knowledge and working tools. Nevertheless, this training has not been as systematic as initially foreseen.

In the **first year** of the programme an estimated **2,643 children** joined 145 DYEP afternoon classes in 111 public schools (Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children, 2017). There are no selection criteria for attending DYEP classes other than age (4-15 years) and parental agreement. The plan to have pre-primary classes in accommodation centres was not achieved during the first year, mainly due to delays in the supply of pre-fabricated school units.

Moreover, following a Ministerial decision in August 2016, refugee and migrant children living in urban areas were given the opportunity to attend morning reception classes[64], which are part of the formal education system and are aimed at children aged 6-18 with limited knowledge of the Greek language. Children attend these classes so as to get specialised support, while they join mainstream classes for certain education sessions. According to the Ministry[65], approximately **2,000 refugee and migrant children** attended such morning **reception classes** in the **first year**. Attendance is not subject to any special criteria other than a limited knowledge of Greek. Funding has been secured from the European Social Fund (ESF) under the EU Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework for Greece (2014-2020).

In the **second year**, the available data reveal that **2,026 refugee and migrant children** attended pre-primary, primary or lower-secondary **DYEP classes**. However, efforts have also been made to increase the number attending morning **reception classes** in mainstream schools. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the number of those enrolled: **5,291** attended these classes in the second year compared with approximately 2,000 in the first. In addition, **700** enrolled **in mainstream schools** without reception classes[66].

Official data for the **third year** show that **4,577 children attended DYEP classes** – more than double compared with the second year. This was mainly due to better organisation, as well as more intense awareness-raising activities aimed at the parents. The fact that pre-primary DYEP classes began to operate from the second year has also had a significant bearing. Moreover, there has been an increase in the total number of **refugee children attending mainstream schools** (with or without reception classes). Their number reached **8,290** in the third year: 4,050 in mainstream schools with reception classes, and 4,240 in mainstream schools without them[67]. Among the main reasons for this increase are considered to be the following: (i) many children who attended DYEP classes in the first year joined mainstream schools in the subsequent two years; (ii) a relatively large number of children and their parents moved from the refugee accommodation centres to premises in urban areas; and (iii) the operation from the second year of morning reception classes in secondary education.

The **financial resources** for the programme[68] have been secured mainly from the European **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)** and from the **state's public investment programme** (75% EU contribution, 25% national). A total budget of €18 million has been allocated for the four years including 2019/20 (up to 31 December 2019). The funding covers, in particular, the recruitment of teachers and other educational

[64] Such classes have operated in certain public schools since 2010 in areas classified as zones of education priority (ZEPs). The Ministerial decision of August 2016 extended ZEPs (and reception classes) to the whole country.

[65] The relevant data were provided by a senior official of the Ministry of Education.

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[68] It is worth noting that informal educational activities also take place in the accommodation centres, especially on the islands, mainly funded by the UNHCR and implemented by NGOs.

staff, the production of educational material, the supply and installation of pre-fabricated school units within accommodation centres, and dissemination activities.

In addition, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has secured funding to cover the cost of transporting children between the accommodation centres and schools. This has been secured from two EU funds: for the first two years from the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI), and for the third year from the AMIF. Certain other expenses – mainly related to cleaning and maintenance services for the afternoon DYEP classes, mediation/interpretation issues, and the training of teachers – have been covered mainly by various international organisations (such as UNICEF and UNHCR), as well as some NGOs and the Greek parliament.

Arrangements for **monitoring and evaluating** the programme were initially underdeveloped. Although a working group was established, no monitoring tools and processes had been provided for. To address this, the working group adapted the existing information technology system ('myschool')[69] to monitor the attendance, dropping out and performance of refugee children attending public schools (reception and DYEP classes)[70]. However, it is questionable whether this by itself is adequate. It is of utmost importance to further develop/adapt the 'myschool' system to ensure that it works as a comprehensive monitoring system of the participation of all refugee and migrant children and of other vulnerable groups of children (such as Roma children and disabled children) in the education system. As for evaluation, no permanent arrangements have been put in place. The only initiative was the ad hoc assessment[71] of the first year of the programme, carried out by the Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children. In short, the issues of monitoring and evaluation have been addressed only partially; a comprehensive system has not yet been put in place.

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

A short introductory note

Before assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the programme, it is necessary to highlight some specific factors which have affected its design and implementation, especially in its initial phase.

- The country was in the middle of a deep and prolonged economic crisis and was not ready to respond to such a huge influx of refugees, to manage those remaining in the country and to integrate them into Greek society. The Greek authorities had neither previous experience nor the necessary means of dealing with such a multidimensional issue as the education of refugee children.
- The programme was designed under time pressure because of the immediate need to give refugee children living in isolated accommodation centres a 'normal' everyday environment, including attending school regularly.
- Refugee children were heterogeneous in terms of their socioeconomic and cultural characteristics; moreover, their numbers, locations and living conditions constantly changed, mainly due to the mobility of the refugee population.

Overall, these factors have made the design, planning and implementation of the programme really difficult. Notwithstanding this, and in spite of delays and

[69] The 'myschool' information technology system was designed and developed by the Ministry of Education for monitoring education through the collection of data (such as on human resources in terms of teaching staff and student population/flows, and building infrastructure) from all public and private schools. It has been in operation since the school year 2013-2014 and is being co-funded by the European Social Fund. The responsibility for its operation and maintenance lies with the Ministry of Education. The director of each school unit is responsible for data entry on a daily basis, while access to the system is granted to the competent central and regional services of the Ministry of Education.

[70] See also: Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children (2017).

[71] This resulted in a number of proposals for the school year 2017/18. Some findings are presented in Section 2.

shortcomings/inefficiencies in the initial phase, it may be argued that the programme constitutes a very positive step towards the gradual integration of refugee and migrant children into Greek society, as access to education is a key factor in this.

2.1 Impact on target group

During the first year, implementation of DYEP classes was slow – though not far behind the expectations of the Greek authorities – and a number of shortcomings were identified. Among the main reasons for delays was the very short preparation period for the schools hosting DYEP afternoon classes and the lack of proper official information to the local communities. A limited number of incidents occurred, with some parents in a few local communities expressing worries as to the health condition of refugee children. In response to this, the government launched a vaccination process for each refugee child prior to attending school, while a series of meetings were organised to raise awareness among local communities (local authorities, parent and teacher organisations, etc.).

A number of shortcomings were also identified by the ad hoc assessment exercise[72]. Among them, the following can be singled out: the absence of afternoon DYEP classes on the islands (which implies that refugee and migrant children did not have access to any formal education activities); a lack of co-operation (in both administrative and education terms) between the school and the DYEP classes; insufficient numbers of teachers with relevant experience and appropriate skills; and the irregular attendance of many children, along with many dropping out (mainly due to changes in their place of residence and/or difficulties with the Greek language). In addition, there was a significant lack of provision of pre-primary education, while the programme did not envisage DYEP classes for upper-secondary education and vocational training. All these shortcomings may be attributed to a lack of organisation, which was mainly due to the fact that the programme was designed and implemented under time pressure.

Most of the shortcomings presented above were addressed, and the number of children attending DYEP classes increased significantly in the subsequent two years. When examining whether or not the programme has achieved its objectives, one observes that its implementation for three consecutive years has provided an opportunity for a relatively large number of refugee children to attend DYEP classes, while some of them have already been integrated into mainstream classes, to a great extent meeting the expectations of the Greek authorities. This is confirmed by relevant data, which show that **over the three years** there was an **increase of 73% in the number of children attending DYEP classes**, from 2,643 in the first year to 4,577 in the third. Moreover, the **number attending morning reception classes doubled** (an increase of 102%) between the first and third years, from 2,000 to 4,050. What is even more significant is that in the third year **4,240 children attended regular mainstream classes** (without reception classes).

However, it is difficult to assess to what extent the programme objectives have been achieved, in both quantitative and qualitative terms. This is mainly because the programme has never set quantitative targets for attendance at DYEP classes and, consequently, for attendance at mainstream classes. Setting feasible quantitative targets is impeded by a lack of official data concerning the total number of school-age refugee children living in the country, and the continuous arrival of new refugees.

As for qualitative aspects, again there are no specific objectives other than the general one of ensuring access to education for refugee and migrant children. A specific curriculum and other materials have been designed and produced for the programme[73]: but there is no mechanism in place to assess their effect on the children's school performance.

Despite the absence of any official assessment, it goes without saying that the programme has had a positive impact on improving the lives of a very vulnerable group of children.

[72] For more details, see: Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children (2017).

[73] These were designed and produced by the IEP.

The increase in the number of refugee children who participate in the formal education system (12,867 in the third year as against approximately 4,700 in the first) is considered a positive development in itself. Many of these children are escaping harsh living conditions in 'ghettoised' accommodation centres, and taking part in normal everyday activities suitable for their age. The provision of regular schooling responds to the needs of these vulnerable children, who despite being children have acquired 'adult experiences' in facing war, violence and famine. Nonetheless, it may be argued that the psychological support provided so far to these children is rather inadequate.

The participation of refugee and migrant children in the education system is a key factor in their gradual integration into Greek society. But despite the improvements made in the programme, it falls short of a comprehensive action plan for the education of refugee and migrant children; neither has it led, as yet, to the design and adoption of a strategic and integrated approach to addressing the multidimensional needs of this vulnerable group.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

As already stated, programme funding was secured mainly from the AMIF and the state's public investment programme. However, this did not cover non-educational activities considered a prerequisite – to some extent – for the programme: in particular, the cost of transporting students from accommodation centres to schools and back. This led the Ministry to leverage extra resources from other EU funding sources. The IOM, in close collaboration with the Ministry, **undertook to cover transport costs of approximately €4 million per year**, having secured funding from two different EU funds (for the first two years from the ESI and for the third year from the AMIF).

Another prerequisite for the proper running of DYEP classes was the provision of cleaning and maintenance services for the hosting schools during afternoon hours. This created a need for additional funding, which was finally covered by national resources and, in particular, from the Greek parliament's budget[74]. Moreover, during the first three years a number of other needs emerged which required additional funding. To this end, the Ministry managed to leverage extra funds from various international organisations, NGOs and donors (mainly in the form of the provision of goods and services)[75].

In addition to the above, it is worth noting that the programme has **triggered an increase in the number of morning reception classes in mainstream schools** which, in turn, implies that there has been a need to secure additional funding. Here again, the Ministry turned to EU funds and, in particular, the **ESF** (along with a contribution from the state's public investment programme) under the EU Partnership Agreement for the Development Framework for Greece (2014-2020). At present, funding for reception classes has been secured for all four years. For the first three a total of €41.8 million was allocated, with €13.8 million for 2019/20.

It is evident from the above that **the programme has hardly been able to leverage extra resources from national and/or sub-national sources.** The main reason is that, over the last 10 years, Greece has been facing a deep and prolonged economic crisis and strict austerity measures; these have left almost no room to increase the budget for social policy purposes and, in particular, for addressing the refugee crisis. Thus, the only alternative sources of funding for the programme, and for other measures to give education access to this vulnerable group of children, have been the various EU funds.

Although the use of EU funds has been invaluable, especially under the current socioeconomic conditions in Greece, it is also a source of major concern, as the viability

[74] For the first year, the Greek parliament's contribution was €160,000, and for the two subsequent years it was €300,000 per year.

[75] The IOM provided school bags and equipment (projectors, laptops, stationery, etc.); UNHCR provided school equipment as well as pre-fabricated school units; UNICEF covered part of the cost of vaccinations that were a prerequisite for participation in the programme. In addition, several NGOs provided services such as interpretation and intercultural mediation, and homework support for the children attending DYEP classes.

and sustainability of the educational activities will be put into great jeopardy in the event of a reduction, or even worse a termination, of this source of funding.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

The programme has also **stimulated certain improvements in policy initiatives** which are related to the education of refugee and migrant children as well as to the education of other vulnerable groups of children.

In particular, following the programme's first year, it became evident that the working group managing the programme should be given a 'permanent institutional setting' within the Ministry. In other words, there was a need to create a special unit that would co-ordinate, monitor and support all Ministry measures exclusively concerning the education of refugee and migrant children. To address this need, **the Ministry created**, in February 2018, the '**Autonomous Unit for the co-ordination and monitoring of the education of refugee children**', accountable to the General Secretary of the Ministry.

The establishment of this unit is undoubtedly a positive development, meaning that issues related to the education of refugee children are no longer dealt with on an ad hoc basis but are part of mainstream education policy. It is expected to improve the administrative/management capacity of the Ministry, ensuring appropriate and permanent links with all units and departments, and to facilitate the systematic monitoring of all activities relating to the education of refugee and migrant children. Moreover, it is likely to address problems of co-ordination and overlap between the various competent authorities and organisations, and to promote synergies between all relevant stakeholders.

Another improvement in the educational policy implementation process which has been stimulated by the programme is the **reactivation**, following a seven-year period of inactivity, **of reception classes**. As already described, these classes have operated in certain public schools since 2010, in areas classified as zones of education priority (ZEPs); they are aimed at supporting vulnerable groups of children with limited knowledge of the Greek language (Roma, migrant and other socially vulnerable groups) so as to enable them to attend mainstream classes. However, until 2017 the number of such classes was limited, their operation was mainly confined to primary schools, and only a few had been created in lower-secondary schools.

The emerging need to provide education opportunities to all refugee and migrant children led the Ministry to extend ZEPs; and since 2017 reception classes in primary and lower-secondary schools can be established all over the country (including the islands). For the first time, such classes can also be established in upper-secondary general and vocational education schools.

It is important to note that the increased number of morning reception classes in mainstream schools provided, in turn, the opportunity for other vulnerable groups of children with limited knowledge of Greek language to benefit from such classes. In other words, the programme not only triggered an increased number of morning reception classes, but also had a **positive impact on facilitating access to education for other vulnerable groups of children.**

Notwithstanding the significant contribution made by the programme, at no point has it formed part of an integrated approach to addressing the education needs of refugee and migrant children, let alone their integration into Greek society. It therefore remains to be seen whether the experience gained so far from the programme will be exploited by the Greek authorities to formulate a strategic action plan in this area.

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

EU funding has been essential to the very existence of the programme, as well as other education activities for refugee children – given the fiscal constraints that the country has faced over the last 10 years, and the serious spending cuts in all levels of education. In general, measures to facilitate access to education (and remaining in education) for certain vulnerable groups of children (such as Roma, disabled children and those with an

immigrant background) have relied heavily for some years now on the availability of EU funding and, in particular, the ESF.

Even so, access to education for these vulnerable children still lags far behind that for the general population of children. There is no strategic action plan for their education, including a specific investment plan, with the result that **EU funds are used in a rather ad hoc way and not in a strategic and planned way underpinned by an integrated approach.** Over the last 10 years, due to fiscal constraints, EU funding has to a great extent replaced, rather than complemented, mainstream funding from national resources – and this is particularly the case for DYEP classes.

Because there is no comprehensive plan of action, the use of different EU funds to support two similar but distinct education programmes has led to measures being implemented in a rather fragmented way. Different eligibility rules have been applied to similar measures, depending on the EU fund, with no complementarity between them. This, in turn, means that synergies and close interaction between the programmes have been hard to come by. It is evident, therefore, that **there is a need for integrated programmes based on a multi-funded approach,** allowing funding (both EU and national) to be used in the best and most effective way.

Existing administrative arrangements, especially those concerning public tenders, have had a negative impact on the programme, having brought about certain delays. Greater flexibility is needed in EU fund regulations, so that a wider range of measures is eligible for support, responding to the peculiar and urgent needs of such programmes. Moreover, programmes should include two phases, for which adequate, separate funding should be allocated. The first phase would include all the preparatory measures such as planning, tendering, personnel recruitment and setting up monitoring/evaluation arrangements. The second phase would include actual implementation of the programme.

In any case, the **effective use of funds**, in particular EU funds, requires that the design and approval of programmes is based on **hard evidence and/or an *ex ante* impact assessment**. Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation arrangements have been put in place is also considered a prerequisite. These elements of the programme were – and still are – underdeveloped. One of the main problems is the absence of a national mechanism for systematically monitoring and recording school-aged refugee children.

EU funding has greatly contributed to the response to the refugee crisis in Greece and, in particular, to supporting refugee and migrant children in many areas, including education access. The DYEP classes, along with other measures such as morning reception classes, could form part of a comprehensive plan of action for promoting access to education for this vulnerable group of children. To be able, however, to constitute an EU-funded 'good practice' initiative to be used as a model for other categories of vulnerable children, **efforts should be concentrated on addressing the various defects** identified above. The first and foremost priority should be to ensure, before the approval and implementation of specifically targeted interventions, that the programme design is based on an integrated approach and that EU funding and national funding have been earmarked for it. Finally, it should be emphasised that adequate financial support needs to be provided for interventions which are aimed at building public understanding of the problems confronted by vulnerable groups of children, as well as for interventions that promote the involvement of stakeholders.

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Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary

2019

Fruzsina Albert
Institute for Sociology
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Contents

Summary

The Sure Start Children's Homes in Hungary provide support and programmes for families with children aged 0-3 who do not have access to good-quality services – because of either having low incomes, living in disadvantaged or segregated regions/areas, or suffering generally from socio-cultural problems. The core of the programme is strong co-operation between parents, professionals and service providers, designed to promote the physical, mental and social development of young children and their parents. These Children's Homes can help disadvantaged children (including Roma children) at a very early stage, while providing complex services that cater to the needs of individual families.

This case study is based on a review of available evaluations of the programme and on interviews with relevant experts. The programme is a good example of how an initiative, based on good practice in other countries but modified to suit local needs, and launched with minimal resources, has been supported and developed by external funding (mostly from the European Social Fund [ESF] and the Norwegian Fund) and has become 'institutionalised' (i.e. 'survived' after external funding ends) by receiving national state funding and becoming part of the system of social services. From this perspective it is an ongoing success story, as it leverages extra resources for the target groups, the scale of the programme is still being extended, new evaluations are being prepared, and certain modifications to improve its professional quality are being carried out. It is also a model in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) for disadvantaged children, because it has enabled the ECEC concept to become widely known and to gain long-term political support and commitment.

Nevertheless, despite the continuing expansion of the network, only a fraction of children in need are at present able to access these services. State funding is significantly less than the previous EU funding, which has resulted in a reduction in the number of external professionals involved in the programme, depriving the model of a key component. The Homes cannot afford to provide complex services of good quality, because two employees (the legally prescribed number) are sometimes insufficient to meet the existing demand, and there is not enough funding for purchasing new equipment and toys. In addition, employees are only paid the minimum wage, which results in demotivation and pushes employees to look for better employment opportunities elsewhere (there is a shortage of professionals in the field). Higher wages would attract more people to train and would justify the time spent on training.

State financing also makes the Homes part of an overly bureaucratic system, requiring them to meet often completely irrational demands and regulations that make the provision of such low-threshold services almost impossible.

Projects should build on previous experience – demonstrated effectiveness and proven principles. Even so, programmes should be modified continuously, as demands, contexts, legal frameworks and macro-level conditions require flexibility and permanent adaptation. Effective data collection and the use of common evaluation indicators make these necessary fine-tunings possible[76]. Ex-ante, interim and ex-post impact assessments should be widely carried out, and these could be made a precondition of financing by the EU.

[76] Evaluations indicate (for example) that funding is insufficient, and that the programme can only be efficient with more intense attendance: regulations should therefore be modified to promote that.

1. Description of funding programme

This case study presents the Sure Start Children's Homes programme in Hungary, which provides children living in extreme poverty with support in their earliest years to prepare for successful school education. Its significance in the context of the Child Guarantee relates to the area of support concerned, and to its targeting of children experiencing disadvantage.

In Hungary, due to the shortcomings of care institutions and services, not all children have equal access to good-quality care best suited to their needs. There are maintenance problems, shortages of specialists and extreme staff workloads – in particular in disadvantaged areas such as smaller localities and rural regions. Neither children nor their parents have access to appropriate assistance. Variations in the standards and available capacity of services, and the fact that services are least available in the areas where they are most needed, represent a major problem.

In addition, Hungary is a country where the impact of the socio-economic situation of the family on school achievement is among the largest (OECD 2018:229). Poor parents with low educational levels cannot guarantee the environment indispensable for their children to acquire the cognitive and social skills needed for successful school achievement. Their children often start school later and drop out of the school system with low educational levels. Poor parents also tend to have a marginalised position in the labour market, and they transmit the same disadvantages to their children. The programme is aimed at ending this vicious circle at an early stage by focusing on disadvantaged children.

The Sure Start programme was first implemented in the UK in 1999; but unlike the UK, where the state had previously played little role in early childhood education and care (ECEC), Hungary had an extensive network of crèches and district nurses (home visitors), and the aim of the programme in Hungary *was not to create services, but to improve the availability and accessibility of services, and reduce inequalities in access and/or service quality*. Therefore, Children's Homes have been created in Hungary since the early 2000s in disadvantaged settlements where alternative care is not available and the proportions of Roma and socially excluded children are high (Szomor-László, 2014). The *regions* selected for the programme are characterised by multiple social problems and limited resources, and by the fact that early childhood services are lacking or very limited. The original *target age-group* was children aged 0-5, but since kindergarten attendance became compulsory in 2015 the target group has been children aged 0-3. The programme is now one of the fundamental elements of the government's inclusion strategy, which is aimed at ensuring children receive support 'that prevents the development of an inherited vicious circle of being disadvantaged' as early in their lives as possible.

All the following elements are needed so that the programme can be described as a Sure Start programme.

- Sure Start services must be easily *accessible* for families with small children (by pushchair or bicycle).
- There should be regular and continuous opening hours; and services[77] must be provided free of charge, and must be flexible and responsive to demands.
- A key feature of the programme is the *involvement of parents* – active participation and meaningful co-operation with them – in order to strengthen their parental skills and help families to access health, social, child welfare, educational and labour market services.

[77] Apart from regular play and skills development, most children also receive meals; and the Homes try to make up for the absence of social services, e.g. providing cleaning and washing opportunities for families, and teaching parents about healthy nutrition. The Homes also prepare status evaluations, and invite specialists for diagnosis or specific necessary interventions.

- The programme also promotes *inter-professional* co-operation, which is indispensable for the early detection and treatment of late developers.

The strategic goals of the Children's Homes network are:

1. children reaching kindergarten age should be healthy and reach the optimal development of their inborn capabilities;
2. parents should be persuaded to co-operate, supported in mobilising their own resources, and helped to develop the competencies needed to promote the healthy and harmonious development of their children's personality and skills;
3. the programme should be accepted in local community life so that local communities can provide instrumental and professional support for those employed in the programme; and
4. at a local level the tasks and responsibilities of institutions and experts working with children aged 0-3 should be explicitly defined (so as to promote their co-operation and secure access to services for early detection and prevention).

Originally, the programme was intended to set up 50 new Homes in each of the first two years, then 70 in each of the following two years, 100 in the fifth year and 100 in the sixth year, in order to achieve 400-500 operating Homes by 2013, reaching altogether 10,000-12,000 children[78].

The implementation of the programme faced (and continues to face) two issues, as follows.

- The significance of early childhood development, and the fact that childcare services should be provided as soon as possible, in particular for children from disadvantaged families, does not have wide acceptance. The majority of people, including a number of professionals, still believe that it is best for children to be at home with their mother at least until they are 3 years old. However, as time goes by, more and more children are starting to use childcare services at a younger age, especially where the services have been available continuously for the longest periods and have frequent contact with parents.
- The programme has to play an active, initiating role, facilitating co-operation between local actors, especially various service providers, and funds should be made available for this purpose (to make up for the gaps in service provision).

The programme has existed in Hungary since 2003-04, first as a pilot programme adapted to the Hungarian situation, and then as part of the New Hungary Development Plan (*Új Magyarország Fejlesztési Terv*, ÚMFT). In 2003 the programme was launched in five locations – Vásárosnamény and its vicinity, Csurgó and its associated settlements, Ózd, Győr and Józsefváros (a neighbourhood of Budapest) – with a moderate amount of funding by the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social and Equal Opportunities Affairs. In 2006, 52 programmes to facilitate co-operation between service providers for the targeted age group started in 13 counties: these were mostly based on voluntary work as, due to the lack of central funding by the Ministry, only the cost of experts supporting local co-operation between providers was financed[79]. In the meantime, the 'Making Things Better for our Children' national strategy for 2007-2032 was developed by the Programme Office to Combat Child Poverty, a research team operating within the Hungarian Academy of

[78] http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=202.

[79] http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=202.

Sciences (MTA GYEP)[80]. A pilot project ('Give kids a chance!') was financed by the Child Programme Office, as well as by other small government grants and the Norwegian Fund; it was launched in a disadvantaged micro-region, Szécsény (13 small settlements, 20,000 inhabitants), and one of its main elements was the setting up of Children's Homes. The Academy of Sciences' active involvement in the project facilitated a mixed action/research approach (Fresnoe, 2010). The national strategy was accepted by Parliament, and one of its objectives was early childhood development. The government action plan based on the strategy stated that the creation and operation of Children's Homes could start on the basis of external sources of finance, but that after two to three years national funding should take over.

Between 2008 and 2011, 49 Homes opened with funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) – under the Social Renewal Operational Programme (TÁMOP) 5.2.2 (39 Homes) and 5.1.1 (5 Homes) – and from the Norwegian Fund (5 Homes). The budget law for 2012 laid the basis for national financing. From 1 January 2013 the Sure Start programme was recognised under Hungarian child protection law as a component of basic child welfare services[81]. In 2014, 115 Children's Homes operated in Hungary (49 with Hungarian funding, 66 with EU funding[82]); 1,700 children attended 112 Homes regularly while 3,941 were involved to a lesser degree (Balás et al., 2016:22). Under the 'Integrated Regional Programmes[83] to fight child poverty' (TÁMOP 5.2.3.) at least two Homes had to be established in each of the most disadvantaged regions.

The programme is cited as a good example of an initiative launched with EU structural funds and then incorporated into national service provision with continuing national funding.

The development of Children's Homes has continued within the framework of the EU-funded Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EFOP) 2014-2020. The 'Give kids a chance' programme was relaunched in 2016, with a budget worth HUF 24 billion (€77.4 million). EFOP-1.4.3 is targeted at service provision development, and EFOP-2.1.2 at creating infrastructure for new Children's Homes (50 more Homes at national level, and 80 'Good places' [*Jó kis hely*] Homes in small disadvantaged settlements with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants). The government has allocated HUF 8 billion (€25.8 million) to further develop the programme, HUF 2.5 billion (€8.1 million) of which is for construction work and HUF 5.5 billion (€17.7 million) for the running costs of the Homes for four years.

In 2010, 1,441 children benefited from these services, while 80% more (2,578 children) received such services in 2016 (Gábos 2018: 91). Operators of the Homes can be municipalities, non-government organisations (NGOs) or religious organisations, and the mix varies in different regions. In 2018, 110 Homes operated with state funding and 80 new Homes were set up with EU funding (Husz-Kovács, 2018).

The Sure Start programme was one of the flagship elements of the original national anti-child-poverty strategy, which has been continued and extended, and has been evaluated several times – although it is a pity that these programme-specific evaluations are no longer embedded in a more complex one. The evaluation committee for the national

[80] The public responsibility of the MTA GYEP Office was to promote the implementation of the national strategy using three main tools: basic research, applied research (monitoring and action-research), and experimental (pilot) implementation.

[81] http://www.gyere.net/index_bk2.htm.

[82] Most of them are 'classic' children's Homes, but a few operate across two settlements: e.g. two days a week in one, three days a week in the other.

[83] These are complex programmes launched in 2009 in the intervention areas of the national strategy, and started in the five most disadvantaged micro-regions. They were slightly modified in 2011 and included another six micro-regions. In 2012 another 12 of the most disadvantaged micro-regions joined in with the worst indices related to child poverty. The programmes received methodological support under 5.2.1 of TÁMOP.

strategy 'Let Children Have a Better Life!'[84] carried out some complex evaluations of the national situation regarding child poverty and the impact of various measures: it carried out both comprehensive and specific research tasks, and prepared methodological material and annual reports. This work was partly carried out by the Child Opportunities Research Group (CORG) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which is primarily responsible for research and methodological support[85] for the whole Child Opportunities Programme (which includes Sure Start). Some of its tasks were related to micro-regional process support, including analyses and evaluations in support of regional programmes. These monitoring efforts have continued, although not on a very rigorous basis, providing quite regular feedback regarding necessary interventions.

2. Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

2.1 Impact on target group

The programme still cannot reach a significant proportion of disadvantaged children. There are about 270,000 children aged 0-3 in Hungary, but just 2,578 children regularly attended the Sure Start Children's Homes in 2016 (Gábos, 2018:91), which was about 1% of the whole age-group. However, a significant proportion of these children came from disadvantaged areas of the country, as the Homes are predominately located in settlements with high poverty rates with large proportions of Roma. The programme is scientifically grounded, as it was carefully planned by experts and is evidence-based. It can be said to be successful in achieving its objectives, namely developing children's social skills and parental competencies, and providing access to previously unavailable services. However, there is room for improvement, especially regarding Homes that are already funded from the state budget.

The exact location of the Homes within settlements seem to have significant impact. Homes in suitable locations are more successful in integrating the target group: if the Home is too close to a segregated settlement, families in better situations avoid it; whereas if it is very central, those in more deprived areas cannot attend. If the director of the Home is (or becomes) an acknowledged member of the settlement, whose professional competence is not challenged, it has a positive impact. Also, having Roma among the employees of the Home is beneficial as they are more credible and effective in involving disadvantaged Roma (Balás et al., 2016).

From the expert interviews, it was discovered that most Homes have largely Roma families in them, but a smaller fraction receive children from lower-middle class families (e.g. with single parents or where the mother has problems such as abuse in the family, addiction problems or mental health issues). Even when it is mostly Roma children who attend, because the Roma population is not homogenous there may be conflicts between various groups and families, which makes it difficult to have all these children in the Home at the same time. The most recently founded Homes are most often in segregated areas. Experts claim that the Homes can reach several kinds of disadvantaged children, especially from

[84] The committee was established in 2008 by Parliamentary resolution. Its role included helping to implement, monitor and evaluate the strategy. Most operational issues were handled by a unit within the Prime Minister's Office, while CORG provided research and scientific support. The committee lost its purely civic character in 2011, when 12 representatives of the government were appointed to it alongside the 12 civil members; its chair is the state secretary for social inclusion and a co-chair is elected from civil members. The committee's report for 2011 was criticised for dealing primarily with organisational issues rather than outcomes for children. For that reason, a Civil Report on the situation of children was written for 2011 by the one-time staff of the MTA GYEP. Unfortunately, no such comprehensive reports have been available since then.

[85] The main activities of CORG in the new phase include: providing methodological support to regional teams/applicants for the children programme in creating/actualising regional status reports; supporting the need assessments of families with children (preparing regional data collection, organising research camps); operating an online monitoring system; monitoring the regional programmes; creating evaluating analyses; and carrying out research focusing on the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of regional programmes. See: https://gyerekesely.tk.mta.hu/en/news/2019/05/restart-of-the-children-programme.

families where the parents are motivated to better their situation; but those at the very bottom of society, in the most desperate situation, cannot be successfully motivated and involved.

The following points can be made regarding the impact on children.

- Homes promote access by children and their parents to social and health services. A number of expert interviews contained accounts of developmental disorders recognised during a health screening in the Home, or cases where parents were willing to talk about their difficulties and ask for help due to the atmosphere of trust formed with the employees of the Homes. On these occasions the members of the child protection signalling system, and the arrangements for professional co-operation, helped to gain urgent access to support.
- The social skills of the children are better, they can adapt more, their vocabulary is larger and their co-ordination is more developed. Their social skills significantly improve, which help them adjust to kindergarten. However, this positive impact can only be achieved by regular attendance (Balás et al., 2016).

The impact on parents can be summarised as follows.

- There are only scattered, mostly qualitative, data on the impact on parents. Based on these, one can claim that parental competencies are stronger, and parents can co-operate better both with other parents and with service providers such as kindergartens. Their social networks and ability to adapt or solve problems also improve. They are especially better at creating daily routines for their children; and they play more, and communicate better, with them (Szomor-László, 2014; Balás et al., 2016; Husz-Kovács, 2018).

The impact on the local system of provision is as follows.

- In Hungary co-operation between various service providers has been quite poor and this has a negative impact on disadvantaged children. One of the aims of the Sure Start programme was to improve co-operation between various services, with the Homes acting as a focal point where professionals working in the field of ECEC can meet and co-operate. However, co-operation in most cases is found to be informal, tied to particular people, and a high turnover of personnel results in the need to regularly rebuild networks. The most important allies of the Homes are the district nurses and kindergartens, while the relationship with child support services is very mixed, and GPs/paediatricians also co-operate only as long as they have a contract with the programme. It is a major drawback that state funding does not provide for employing the various professionals formerly available during the EU-funded phase.
- Currently available data do not yet show whether attitudes and modes of co-operation have been significantly changed by the programme. One of the lessons learnt so far is that it takes time, at least five years, for such a programme to start working really well, partly because it has to achieve a change in attitudes on the part of both professionals and community members, as well as in the target group[86].

The following points can be made regarding sustainability.

[86] A detailed evaluation of the programme thus far including quantitative and qualitative data analysis is Szomor-László (2014).

- If municipalities operate the programme, they make more effort to support it, and are more successful in maintaining it after external (mostly EU) funding ends. It is very important that inter-professional co-operation is maintained. If municipalities see potential in maintaining the Homes, or can integrate them into the services of one of their bigger institutions, much stronger co-operation is formed among partners, and they were more inclined to go out of their way to support the Homes, both financially and personally. This includes positively acknowledging their achievements and considering the Homes to be an inherent part of the lives of the settlements. Where municipalities consider the Homes a burden, the latter have much more difficulty coping on a day-to-day basis, often finding themselves involved in conflicts regarding funding, with a negative impact on the self-esteem of the employees.
- An evaluation study indicated that the conditions surrounding the establishment of the Homes have an important influence on their subsequent development: there are cases where the 'survival rates' (that is, successful transition to national funding) are significantly higher, mostly because Homes received EU funding and mentoring support and training for a longer period.

To better measure the impact of the programme, it would be useful to set up a system for monitoring the long-run development of children who attended Homes – for example, by creating the school identification number of children earlier, so that they can be tracked through the school system (Balás et al., 2016). Research should be undertaken on the Homes and their relationship to other childcare facilities. It came up in expert interviews that the local crèche or kindergarten may sometimes try to get rid of more problematic/Roma children by referring them to the Home. Currently there is no available information on how Homes might be used in practice to segregate these children/families.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

The programme is a good example of how an initiative, based on a good practice in another country modified to suit local needs, and launched with minimal resources, has: (a) been extended through external funding (mostly from the ESF and the Norwegian Fund); (b) become institutionalised ('survived') after external funding ended; (c) received national state funding in the annual budget; and (d) become part of the system of social services. The programme is legally recognised under child protection law (38/A and 145/C §), and funding has been included in annual budget legislation since 2013. However, as state funding is not sufficient to ensure the proper running of Homes, some municipalities have made efforts to provide the necessary extra funding from their own budgets, while others do not want or are unable to do so.

Leverage of national funding is helped by the fact that the government's main goals include the expansion and reinforcement of good-quality education in early childhood, and the fact that the Children's Homes model fits with the present government's policy of preferring to provide in-kind benefits and support for poor families. The Sure Start programme was also adapted by the Programme Office to Combat Child Poverty, a very high quality multi-professional group, to make it respond to several wide scale problems existing in Hungary; so the need for this programme is still clear for decision-makers and the foundations for it are solid. From this perspective it is an ongoing success story in terms of leveraging extra resources for the target group, as the scale of the programme is still being extended, new evaluations are being prepared, and certain modifications to improve its professional quality are being made.

In the previous EU programming period (2007-2013), the development of the Sure Start network was primarily financed from the Social Renewal OP (TÁMOP) measures 5.2.2 and 5.1.1. 86 applications were submitted, for altogether HUF 4.5 billion (€14.5 million). But fewer than half of the proposals (42) received funding, totalling HUF 1.8 billion (€5.8 million). The regional distribution of the proposals was very uneven. The most

disadvantaged regions understandably submitted more proposals, one third coming from the northern great plain region, while there were hardly any from the more developed western regions. Specific details and data can be found in the analysis by the Századvég research body (Századvég, 2016:64, Table 3.9). The analysis claims that the programme was a partial success in terms of spatial targeting[87], as 50 proposals were submitted from the 47 most disadvantaged micro-regions (almost 60% of the proposals), and 22 of them received funding (a bit more than half of the winning proposals). This indicates some degree of territorial focus; but there was also significant demand for Homes outside the most disadvantaged regions[88].

Several negative aspects appeared after the Homes started being funded by national sources.

- State funding only provides for the employment costs of two permanent members of staff[89] (the director for 40 hours per week and another person for 30 hours per week, at a level which does not even reach the minimum wage). As a result, there is no extra funding to cover the purchase of professional services (speech therapists, psychologists, dieticians etc.), and the provision of special services has decreased significantly (Balas et al., 2016; Németh, 2018). This is a major step backwards as it deprives the Homes of one of their most important characteristics (i.e. the provision of a wide range of services to children and their families that could not be accessed otherwise). In most cases it is only the district nurse who regularly visits the Homes after EU funding is over. For 2017[90], HUF 6,245,115 (€20,145) was allocated for a year to each Home, which is 80% of the operational costs (Századvég, 2016). In addition, Homes funded from national sources may apply for an additional annual HUF 1 million (€3,200) for purchasing equipment and making renovations, on condition that a minimum of a quarter is spent on developmental equipment or outdoor toys listed in the call for proposals. On the other hand, this funding does not permit the purchase of specialised services, mentoring or training (Németh, 2018). There is hardly any money left for renewing equipment and, especially in Homes that started to operate in 2009, toys and carpets are often in a bad condition. Those maintaining the Homes, mostly the municipalities, try to help; but they can rarely provide financial support (e.g. to cover utility costs) or in-kind help, such as transporting children from other settlements to the Home by minivan. Quite often they provide public workers[91] to help out in the Home (Balás et al., 2016) – but this practice is less prevalent now as the scale of public works is being cut back across the country.

[87] The targeting of the programme is regional, focusing first on the micro-regions in the worst situation: the government in 2007 defined the disadvantaged (HH) and most disadvantaged (LHH) micro-regions, where social inclusion programmes had to be initiated.

[88] Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, despite the high number of proposals submitted and the requests for significant funding, gained support below its actual needs and population ratio.

[89] Originally the idea was to have three employees, one with tertiary, the other with secondary and the third with primary education (if possible, Roma) to replicate the whole spectrum; but financing does not make this possible, even though less-educated employees might be more trustworthy in the eyes of parents.

[90] 2016. XC. act, supplement 8, point 2B VI (5).

[91] To provide employment mainly for those at the margins of the labour market, *the public works scheme* has been significantly extended since 2010 and has become the most important employment programme in Hungary: for more details see Albert (2015). In 2016, the average number of those employed in public works was 223,470; this represented 41.6% of registered jobseekers and 4.9% of all the employed in Hungary (Central Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey, 4th quarter of 2016). The need to modify the scheme has been referred to in the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) for Hungary every year since 2012. In March 2017, the government announced a set of measures to amend the scheme, to reduce the number of public workers. The public workers employed in Sure Start Homes were often Roma women who help out with certain basic tasks and may help to reach the target group better.

- Funding is not per capita, so does not take account of the number of children attending.
- Due to the above funding limitations, it is often problematic for Homes to purchase the required quality of food (to provide a wider variety of food such as fruit and yoghurt) for children's snacks. This is also problematic because, as was mentioned in the expert interviews, in several cases Homes try to increase the involvement of families by providing extra resources, such as food or clothes, to those in need.
- Professional support is also provided in the form of a central mentoring system. However, this ceased to exist between November 2015 and 2016, which was the interval between the EU 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 funding programmes. Most recent evaluations (Németh, 2018) indicate that this lack of professional support had a significant negative impact. The study found a 70% turnover of personnel, and as a result, due to the lack of training and mentoring, in most Homes people worked without any specific methodological training regarding Sure Start[92]. Moreover, from 2018, the mentors mainly supported paper-based or electronic administrative tasks, and newly recruited employees received no training on the programme itself, which had a negative impact on service quality. A complex quality assurance system is indispensable in order to maintain the high-quality operations of such a complex and extended network in line with its original goals and principles (Németh, 2018). Now[93] the EU-funded Operational Programme provides a professional mentoring system for all Homes in Hungary, including the state-funded ones.
- There is a serious shortage of professionals needed for the programme in the country, especially in disadvantaged regions. This causes problems for the whole programme. Nationally funded Homes pay a very low salary, and often the municipalities maintaining the Homes, despite legal regulations, are unwilling to (for example) provide permanent contracts for the employees. As a result, many of them regard it as only a transitional employment opportunity.
- When the Homes become mainly funded by the state and part of the national service provision system, their administrative burden increases significantly, often to an irrational extent. They are required to meet strict regulations that are unrealistic in the context of the low-threshold services they are providing.
- Regulations, financing, the legal context and even the precise target group definition keep changing. This type of provision is brand new and hard to fit in to existing services. Thus it depends on the preferences of the individual taking policy decisions as to which directions the modifications in the regulations take it. In addition, the organisational framework of the managing authority has changed '10 times over the past 9 years'[94], causing many delays and uncertainties.

[92] The Sure Start programme has a special approach and methodology (described in some detail in Section 2). Most employees of the Homes come from child-related fields (professionals with degrees in social services, pedagogy, health etc.) and often they have no programme-specific expertise or knowledge of the Sure Start philosophy, which would be indispensable to provide services of the required quality.

[93] Since April 2016, the measure EFOP 1.4.1-15 "Professional support for integrated children's programmes" continues the activities of the former central programme, TÁMOP-5.2.1. The project provides professional and methodological support for local and regional programmes in the most disadvantaged regions aiming to prevent the reproduction of the disadvantages and improve the chances of children living there.

[94] Quote from an interview.

- Regulations introduced with the best of intentions may also do more harm than good. Legal amendments introduced from 1 February and 1 July 2018 modified (extended) some prescribed services of the Homes and significantly changed opening hours. The Homes must now organise at least two (instead of one) community events a month on average over the year for families with children under 3 and the local community, and the professional content of at least one of these events must be in line with the needs of the families receiving the services. The Homes must be open between 8.00 and 12.00 every workday and on average for six hours a day. Regular attendance is defined as a child aged 0-3 visiting the Home with their parent on at least 40% of the days it is open in a given month, and the headcount must be at least five children. At least half of the regularly attending children must receive regular child protection benefit (*rendszeres gyermekvédelmi támogatás*), and at least half of this latter group must also be disadvantaged or multiply disadvantaged[95]. For several reasons, the number of children receiving regular child protection benefit is declining and these criteria are quite difficult to meet. Moreover, it is counterproductive, as the Homes are no longer motivated to involve as many children as possible, including those not so seriously disadvantaged, because then they may not be able to meet the prescribed criteria.

There are also problems regarding the initial phase when the Homes were set up through EU funding, as follows.

- Sometimes a small region or a municipality receives funding from several sources, within the framework of different measures (e.g. for a community centre, a Sure Start Home, or a complex rehabilitation programme for segregated settlements/settlement parts). These programmes are often not co-ordinated as there are parallel activities and no interaction or synergies between them. In addition, due to the lack of professionals, the same people often work in all the programmes. This reduces the efficiency of the interventions significantly.
- EU project financing procedures are quite unsuited to low-threshold services, which require more flexibility to better suit local needs – as 'there are no two identical Homes', as an expert put it. Public procurement causes continuous delays.
- There have been several complaints regarding the very slow pace of the project application system: for example, the regional Child Opportunities Programmes invited applications by August 2016, but no decision on the 22 applicants had been made by May 2017 (Albert, 2017:12), and this is not an isolated case.
- Previously, project proposals were evaluated by experts; but now this is done by government officials, who may lack the necessary expertise.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

The fact that the Homes are funded through the national budget law and recognised under child protection law has helped the ECEC concept to become widely known and to gain long-term political support and commitment. 'When the first needs assessment was

[95] Entitlement to *the regular child protection benefit* is tied to the family's income. Children who are eligible for regular child protection benefit receive free meals and vouchers for the purchase of food, clothes and school supplies. The children are considered to be *multiply disadvantaged* when their parents are entitled to receive child protection benefit on a regular basis and out of the following three conditions at least two exist simultaneously: low education of the parents, low employment of the parents and poor housing conditions endangering health. This group also includes those who receive follow-up care. These children are considered to be *disadvantaged* when their parents are entitled to receive child protection benefits on a regular basis and at least another one of the circumstances listed above exists.

undertaken in Szécsény, the needs of 0-3-year-olds were one of the last items on the list. Decision makers, families and educators were often unaware of the fact a child's future development begins at age 0 and even earlier' (Fresnoe, 2010:31). The importance of ECEC has become a commonplace since then.

Although the Homes differ from other childcare facilities, as parents should be also be present with their child(ren) in the Homes, this system is part of the overall policy mix regarding ECEC, where the government has had ambitious plans. According to new legislation in effect from 1 January 2017, all settlements with more than 40 children aged under 3, or where the parents of at least five children apply, should provide such ECEC services. The previous system has been re-categorised into 'family crèche'[96], 'mini crèche', 'crèche', 'workplace crèche' or 'day-care child supervision', to better suit the relevant population segments in the various settlements and adapt better to labour market needs. The proportion of those under 3 having no access to childcare in their place of residence dropped from 27.9% in 2010 to 23.6% in 2016. Over the same time-period the share of those receiving ECEC increased by 17% to reach 157 out of 1,000 same-age children in 2016. However, the proportion of disadvantaged or multiply disadvantaged children in crèches is very small; among them, only 2 out of 1,000 same-age children attended crèches in 2016 (Gábos, 2018:91). The government included plans for a significant increase in capacity under the new Family Protection Action Plan: by 2020 they intend to increase the number of places to 60,000 from the present 50,000, and to 70,000 by 2022[97]. The number of Children's Homes are to be increased to 260[98]. Kindergarten attendance was made compulsory from September 2015, to increase the participation of disadvantaged children (among them Roma children) in pre-school education – how much this has to do with the Sure Start programme is unclear, but they are definitely based on similar ambitions.

Crèches and Children's Homes can mutually support each other, and there are good examples of co-operation and synergy. But the relationship between these two services has not yet been considered thoroughly. If there is a disadvantaged micro-region where a complex Child Opportunities Programme is implemented and there is no Home nearby, then the crèche to be opened should also provide a Sure Start-type service. Taking into account the obstacles in the way of extending crèche capacity to the required extent, and the need to reduce development costs, there should be a detailed assessment, in regions lacking certain services, of how many kindergarten or Children's Home premises could suitably accommodate a mini-crèche (Századvég, 2016:101). On the other hand, Sure Start Homes should not become a way of segregating disadvantaged children.

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

EU-funded projects are still short-term in nature, having too limited a timeframe to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Future sustainability should therefore be a key criterion – if projects cannot be sustained once funding ends, most of their effects vanish in time, so the investment is almost useless. In countries like Hungary, project achievements can be sustained for the years after external funding ends only with funding from the state – NGOs and disadvantaged municipalities cannot be expected to provide that. EU funds are there to launch pilot projects, which, if they prove to be efficient and respond to real needs, should be continued. Member States should therefore receive funding on condition they are willing to provide the same level(!) of funding after the project period, so that the original professional content and quality can be maintained. The state should not necessarily take over these services – funding could be provided via intermediary organisations as well (Albert, 2014; Darvas-Ferge, 2013).

[96] This form is a somewhat similar to private home childminders but these have to be registered and certified, and are usually quite expensive.

[97] https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-human-resources/news/new-child-support-and-interest-subsidised-loans-for-used-homes-available-from-july

[98] http://magyarhirlap.hu/cikk/98278/Czibere_Karoly_Negyszaz_milliardot_forditanak_gyermekvedelemre.

State funding in Hungary makes the Homes part of an overly bureaucratic system, requiring them to meet often completely irrational demands and regulations, which almost make the provision of such low-threshold services impossible.

The role of ECEC has become acknowledged in Hungary at least partly due to the Sure Start programme. But the professionals and specialist knowledge required are missing. Continuous training and professional mentoring should be provided to maintain the system. This should be funding on a systematic basis as well.

Projects should build on previous experience, with demonstrated effectiveness and proven principles. Even so, there is no such a thing as an elaborated, finished programme: programmes should be modified continually as demands, contexts, legal frameworks and macro-level conditions all change – we should be aware of this and prepared for the modifications needed. Flexibility and permanent adaptation to the specific circumstances of each local community are also important. Effective data collection and the use of common evaluation indicators make these necessary fine-tunings possible. Ex-ante, interim and ex-post impact assessments should be carried out widely in order to facilitate better policy-making at the highest level – these could be made a precondition of funding by the EU. They could perhaps even be carried out by the EU, or should at least be based on strict professional guidelines so that their quality could be ensured. As economic arguments are a key driver conditioning social policies, it is especially important to show that, by taking into account the long-term costs and benefits of investing in early childcare, governments can reap huge social and economic benefits.

The territorial approach has proven highly effective but activities must also be adapted to the different circumstances and needs of each settlement, with a bottom-up approach. Political commitment is essential.

Although there is a well elaborated programme with strong foundations, particular details are still very important. In the longer run, the personal characteristics of those implementing a particular programme seem to have great significance. The same is true of the organisational structure – i.e. whether it is a municipality, an NGO or a church – especially regarding long-term sustainability.

Based on the number of evaluations already prepared, one can claim that the continuous professional support and monitoring of programmes is essential. Similarly, a lack of new equipment and an inability to purchase extra services also reduce the quality and efficiency of the intervention. Permanent training opportunities must be provided for the employees, especially so if there is significant staff turnover in the programme. Professional materials prepared within the framework of a programme should be made permanently accessible[99]. The commitment to sustain webpages after project funding ends should be longer than the present five years.

Although EU structural funds – acting as both a financial and a policy tool – emerge as the best way of achieving an impact on social inclusion, existing barriers contained in regulations and calls for proposals should be simplified to increase efficiency and accessibility. Application procedures for EU funding need to become more flexible, as the organisations and micro-regions most in need of support are those that have the greatest difficulty in obtaining it (Fresnoe, 2010:39). In the case of child poverty (and more widely, social exclusion) projects, it is important to have longer project periods, even spanning EU programming periods. Short-term projects can only start a process and if (as often

[99] In case of the Sure Start project, some of the professional materials can be found at http://gyerekesely.maltai.hu/page/8&1 (the original project website, www.biztoskezdet.hu, does not work anymore). Some other related materials can be found at the website of the former programme office of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, http://www.gyerekesely.hu/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=202, and others at the website of the current research group, https://gyerekesely.tk.mta.hu/.

happens) the project is unable to continue, it does more harm than good[100]. The EU could also put pressure on Member States to continue such projects so that they go on being funded in the new programming period. Even in case of the Sure Start programme in Hungary, there has been a gap of several months or even longer between the end of EU funding and the provision of state funding (for example, in the case of the Child Opportunities Programme there was a gap of 18 months). This is completely counterproductive: besides undermining the credibility of service providers, long-term interventions stop, professional staff are lost, and any initial achievements are often wasted.

[100] It seems quite irrational to launch a project (create infrastructure, develop content, recruit personnel – especially in regions where there are hardly any – and invest substantial energy in involving often hard-to-reach target groups) and then, just after it all starts to work and could run more smoothly with fewer resources, stop the whole thing. Even where the plan is to continue a programme, there may be a gap of several months before this happens – the professionals leave the project as they cannot afford to be without income for months, and the target group members become disillusioned. The whole process of recruiting new professionals and training them etc. has to start again, which is a significant waste of resources.

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Interviews:

Ildikó HUSZ, senior research fellow, leader of the Child Opportunities Research Group (CORG) of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Erika KOVÁCS, professional director, EFOP Children's Chances programmes, Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Child Protection.

Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
The Flemish AMIF-funding programme

2019

Goedroen Juchtmans
KU Leuven

Contents

Summary

This case study describes a programme (January 2017-December 2018), funded by AMIF Flanders[101], which was aimed at improving the enrolment and attendance rates in pre-school education by toddlers of third-country nationals (a group that does not participate, or participates irregularly, in pre-school education)[102]. The programme focused in particular on parental involvement as a lever to increase the enrolment and attendance of this group of children, and built on the principle that problems in the further educational careers of these children can be reduced by investing in high-quality pre-school services and smooth transitions. AMIF Flanders designed a programme with an overall budget of EUR 2 million. Seven 'living labs' were set up in cities with a high proportion of non-EU citizens and relatively high child poverty rates (Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and smaller cities in Flanders). They developed and implemented locally based experimental measures, through network-based co-operation between pre-school services, organisations that served the same target group, and (mostly) local authorities. A learning network was established to supervise the living labs, which offered theory-based and methodological support (in a participatory manner) during the preparation, execution and evaluation of the programme.

Each living lab started by carrying out practical research to gain a better insight into the experiences of children and parents on the transition to pre-school education. Based on the results of this research, each living lab drew up an action plan tailored to local needs. This resulted in local innovative experiments, mostly in and for schools; new tools; and innovative ways of improving the professional skills of school teams. These covered the following domains: guiding parents to the pre-school service they preferred (before transition); the creation of a warm welcome (transition); and daily meetings and communications between school staff/teachers, parents and children (after transition). During implementation, each living lab was also responsible for monitoring and evaluation.

Based on the monitoring and evaluation results, the main impact of the programme was found to be on the quality of relations between all stakeholders (within and across groups of stakeholders): parents and school staff/teachers developed stronger and more reciprocal bonds with each other; parents strengthened their mutual networks; and schools learned how to work together with other organisations to improve the guidance they gave to parents and children in the target group, and to become more accessible to them.

A key factor behind these results was the way the programme led to the development of structural co-operation between local welfare organisations and schools. This co-operation triggered a process – combining improved support, greater professionalisation and joint activities in schools – that made it possible to offer a warm welcome to the target group. As child poverty is a multidimensional problem, it would be appropriate for future EU funding programmes for vulnerable children to standardise, and possibly even make compulsory, this kind of broad co-operation between local partners. Note that the presence and active involvement of schools in this co-operation is essential. A second key driver appeared to be the continuous efforts of the living labs to engage parents to tell their story, and to participate in and reflect on the experimental activities.

Living labs with a local government authority in a steering role also had more capacity to leverage extra resources. For these living labs, local authorities decided to free up existing staff resources to sustain the programme.

[101] The European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is a financial tool of the European Commission (2014-2020). In Belgium the resources of this Fund are divided between Flanders, Wallonia and the federal government. With the funds for Flanders, AMIF Flanders has financed projects to implement a stimulating and innovative integration policy and to provide answers to existing and new challenges. The ESF division manages the Flemish integration section of AMIF.

[102] The description of this case study is based on the call launched by AMIF Flanders in 2016, evaluations that were summarised in a book, interviews with the project co-ordinator of VBJK, and interviews with stakeholders from two living labs (Ostend and Antwerp).

Despite the promising results of the programme, it is highly uncertain whether they will become structurally embedded in school behaviour and in sub-national policies. To secure that, the programmes would be need to last longer; and there would need to be a commitment by sub-national and national authorities, from the start, both to play an active role during implementation and to subsequently subsidise those EU-funded programmes that showed promising results. This would be a better strategy than having entirely separate grant streams (EU, sub-national, local).

1 Description of funding programme

The funding programme, called in Dutch '*Proeftuinen duurzame kwaliteit kleuterparticipatie via ouderbetrokkenheid*' (Experimental labs for sustainable improvement of the intake and attendance of toddlers in pre-school education through parental involvement) belongs to the Flemish part of the National Programme AMIF 2014-2020. More specifically, it belongs to Specific Objective 2 'Integration and Legal Migration', National Priority 2 'Integration'. The programme lasted two years (from January 2017 to December 2018), and was targeted at children of third-country nationals.

The programme fitted in well with the European Pillar of Social Rights, and in particular principle 11, which emphasises that children have the right to affordable early childhood education (here pre-school education) and that 'children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities.' It was also in line with Flemish education policy, which emphasises the importance of maximising pre-school intake and attendance ('*kleuterparticipatie*') by all children.

1.1 Objective

The objective of the programme was to improve the intake and attendance rates by toddlers of third-country nationals in pre-school education. It focused in particular on parental involvement as a prerequisite for sustainable pre-school participation, through innovative methods created by 'living labs'.

The programme was aimed at developing new approaches to encouraging parental involvement in pre-school education, and testing and evaluating them. At the end of the programme, the living labs needed to have an action plan, a description of the process and an evaluation of the results (including data on the number of participants, although no quantitative targets were set for toddler enrolment). Other key aims were to build up new expertise and disseminate the lessons learned.

1.2 Target group

The target group consisted of children of third-country nationals living in Flanders and Brussels who were eligible for pre-school education (i.e. aged 2½-6). In order to ensure that the target group was reached, the AMIF stipulated that the programme should be aimed at toddlers with at least one parent meeting the following conditions:

- third-country (i.e. non-EU) nationality; schools were screened before and during the project to see whether they had a large intake of toddlers with this profile;
- legally resident in Belgium or in the process of obtaining legal status.

The programme was primarily set up to help the children of recent migrants and refugees (of non-EU nationality), which is one of the four groups of vulnerable children that are the focus of the Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee. In most cases, these children also have a greater risk of living in precarious family situations (Nicaise et al., 2019).

In practice, however, it appears that the influx of third country nationals was limited during the period of the living labs largely because the expected influx of third country nationals into large cities was not forthcoming. The nationalities of the third country nationals involved in the living labs were also diverse. The Flemish Migration and Integration Monitor (2018) shows that the largest group of third country nationals originates from Morocco, Syria and India. Because of this limited influx and the choice of an inclusive approach (see 2.1), the living labs broadened the target group to include schools with a high percentage of "indicator" children, children who do not speak Dutch at home, have a low-educated mother and/or are entitled to an education allowance (indication of family poverty). Here, too, the origin of the children is diverse. The largest group comes from the Maghreb countries (Moroccan and Turkish, 2nd and 3rd generation) and from Eastern Europe (in Ghent, for example, there is a large group of children of Bulgarian origin), but it could just as well be underprivileged children who are not from migrant families.

The same flexible approach was chosen as regards age. The programme was specifically aimed at pre-school education, in which children from 2.5 years old can enrol. However, in some living labs, there was an explicit focus on cooperation between childcare and pre-school education, meaning that in practice parents with children under 2.5 were also involved. In Ghent, for example, a number of professional teams offering parenting support to vulnerable families (called '*inloopteams*') and the schools involved worked out intensive arrangements with vulnerable parents who had to enrol their first child at school (18 months - 2 years) within a certain neighbourhood. The project consisted of home visits, training sessions with the parents and school visits (see 2.1 for more details).

1.3 Rationale of the programme

The benefits of toddler enrolment and attendance in pre-school education are increasingly recognised in the literature (Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2012; Vandenbroeck, Lenaerts, & Beblavy, 2018). This is especially the case for socially vulnerable children (such as children of third-country nationals), for whom participation in pre-school education is seen as a way of reducing disadvantage. Realising these benefits, however, requires that socially vulnerable children actually enrol in pre-school education, attend regularly, and receive high-quality education when they do so.

Flanders has a strong tradition of enrolment and attendance in (non-compulsory) pre-school education. Almost every toddler is enrolled (more than 97%) and attends regularly. However, enrolment and attendance is lower for children from underprivileged families and third-country nationals, indicating the need for measures targeted at them (Nicaise et al., 2019).

Data on the educational level of children aged 15 (from PISA[103]) show a gap of 1.5 years between pupils of Belgian origin and those of foreign origin – the largest gap of all OECD countries tested. Pupils of foreign origin scored much worse even if they had attended pre-school education regularly, showing that specific measures to prevent educational disadvantage are needed at every stage of their development.

The first critical stage is the transition from childcare and home environment[104] to pre-school settings. But a major obstacle is that in Flanders childcare and pre-school education come under separate administrative and policy regimes, which accentuates the division between 'care' and 'learning'. This appears to be especially problematic for families from a minority cultural background: for them, the transition to school is perceived as a (culture) shock, as their vision of how to bring up children clashes with the structure and organisation of the Flemish education system. Often these parents have questions about the emotional and physical care of their child, whereas pre-school services are more focused on what they believe to be their central task of teaching children. One consequence is that some parents decide to keep their child at home (Van Laere & Vandenbroeck, 2017; Van Laere, Van Houtte & Vandenbroeck, 2018). The AMIF programme was therefore focused on measures to strengthen the involvement of the parents and to encourage reciprocal co-operation[105] between parents and schools.

1.4 Organisation of the programme

From the overall programme budget of EUR 2 million, the AMIF financed from January 2017 to December 2018 seven living labs in cities with a relatively large number of non-EU citizens and of children at risk of poverty. Labs were established in Oostende, Menen, Ghent, Brussels and Mechelen, with two in Antwerp. Each lab received a budget of EUR 250,000 to develop and implement locally based experimental measures. Crucial in the

[103] OECD Programme for International Student Assessment.

[104] Most transition projects are set-up only for children and families who already attended childcare. This is problematic as it unintentionally favours more affluent families, since childcare is fairly inaccessible for families living in poverty, migrant families and single parents in contrast to preschool education that is free for all.

[105] In order to build parents' confidence in the school's pedagogical approach, it is necessary for them to be aware of its benefits; but equally, parents' educational values and beliefs must be recognised and respected by schools.

selection process was that the living labs could demonstrate that they were a local partnership of organisations that could promote parent involvement and co-operate with other local actors. At least one school with a large intake of children from the target group had to participate in the partnership. Co-operation with local authorities was also strongly recommended, to ensure complementarity with ongoing projects and networks.

In practice, the living labs were (and are) collaborations between pre-school services and other welfare or childcare service organisations used by young children and their families (mostly before starting school). In three living labs, local governments initiated and co-ordinated several local projects. Schools also co-operated actively in the living labs. In total, 24 schools were involved in the project.

Alongside the living labs, the programme set up a 'learning network', which also received a budget of EUR 250,000. The network was promoted by VBJK[106], which supervised the living labs in conjunction with the Diversity and Learning Centre (SDL – UGent) and the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy at the University of Ghent. VBJK and its partners offered each living lab methodological support during the preparation, implementation and evaluation phases. This was always done in a participatory manner, in consultation with all the organisations involved and with the target group parents.

Within the learning network, all living labs met one another on a regular basis. These meetings offered opportunities to broaden and deepen their expertise, to set up experimental activities and to share the knowledge acquired.

Each living lab started by carrying out practical research to gain a better insight into experiences of the transition to pre-school education, with an emphasis on listening carefully to the voices of parents and children. Based on this research, each living lab developed an action plan tailored to local needs. At the same time, the discussions in the learning network between the living labs lead to shared objectives, principles and underlying vision. All living labs finally aimed at establishing reciprocal parent-school co-operation, and achieving the correct balance between care and learning within the school (UNESCO, 2010).

The development of innovative experiments resulted in new activities and training programmes for schools, covering guidance to parents on selecting pre-school services, creating a warm welcome, and daily meetings and communications with parents and children.

[106] Vernieuwing in de Basisvoorzieningen voor Jonge Kinderen (Centre for Innovation in the Early Years); https://vbjk.be/en.

The monitoring and evaluation of the activities undertaken were developed and carried out in a participatory way by each living lab, following an 'action research' approach[107]. Some living labs, for example, went through different loops of design, action, reflection and re-design. In Ostend, for example, on the initiative of the local authority, a working group on pre-school participation met six times each school year, involving teachers from three different schools and the staff of welfare organisations working with the families. Based on an analysis of parents' concerns, suggestions for action were developed, which were then discussed, tried out and monitored in individual schools, before being re-evaluated at each meeting and improved.

The main output of the umbrella project, under the supervision of the learning network, was a publication[108] by the members of all the living labs, together with a closing conference (December 2018)[109]. Both were meant to stimulate knowledge-sharing and encourage as many actors as possible to actively work on parental involvement in pre-school education.

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

2.1 Impact on target group

2.1.1 Preliminary remarks

Before describing the impact of the programme on the target group, it is important to note that the programme underwent two main adaptations during its implementation.

Firstly, although the final target group was toddlers of third-country nationals, the learning network chose to concentrate primarily on influencing their parents, along with those responsible for registering and welcoming parents and their children in schools. This was based on the belief that improving reciprocal parent-school co-operation, and the quality of pre-school education, were essential preconditions for achieving the final goal of increasing toddler enrolment and attendance.

Secondly, the learning network immediately decided to broaden the scope of the programme to include a broad, inclusive approach to the target group, and that each school should build up good co-operation with *all* its parents. This implied that *all* children and their parents from a kindergarten class could participate in the activities developed. However, vulnerable families (not necessarily confined to non-EU third-country nationals) received additional support through more tailored measures. Most schools were situated in poor areas of their city and had a (very) high percentage of children living in vulnerable (mostly non-EU) families.

Both adaptations had implications for the way participants described the impact of the programme. Participants largely focused on the changes that the programme brought about in the quality of relations between schools and parents, and there was less focus on gathering quantitative evidence on the extent to which the programme increased target group enrolment/attendance. It also made it harder to establish whether the target group benefited more or less than other groups.

In any case, by requiring the living labs to develop action plans tailored to *local* needs, the programme made it harder from the start to draw clear overall conclusions regarding the impact and success of the programme. However, installing an academically supervised

[107] In action research, experimental measures designed to change practice are continuously monitored and discussed by both implementers and beneficiaries (with or without the support of professional researchers). As a result, further adjustments are made to the content and/or form of the measures. Action research is therefore research IN action (Coghlan, 2019).

[108] SDL, VBJK, & Ugent. (2018).

[109] https://vbjk.be/nl/nieuws/2018/12/warm-welkom-wederkerig.

learning network, that had also been responsible for an overall evaluation, would have been able to solve this problem.

2.1.2 Impact on parents (and their children)

Creating reciprocal interactions between schools and parents was a central intermediary objective of the programme. According to the participants, achieving this objective was helped by involving organisations that were already in contact with the families before the start of pre-school education (such as Kind & Gezin, day care centres, welfare organisations, health organisations). These organisations could work with schools to guide parents in making a good school choice, and bring parents and schools into contact with each other for the first time. Successful living labs exploited the strengths of these organisations, which usually lie in their 'outreach' work among the most vulnerable parents. Another key factor was to treat parents as equal partners, instead of the schools and teachers posing as the experts on bringing up and educating children (as reflected in statements often made in schools to the effect that 'we must try to convince these ignorant parents to send their child to kindergarten').

The most successful projects established parental involvement before the child started school. In a first phase, parents were brought together in a group to share their experiences and questions about the start of pre-school education. In this interactive way, parents were informed about the enrolment system and about which schools existed. In a second phase, the parents, together with the staff of welfare and childcare organisations, visited pre-school settings. Parents were encouraged to ask their questions of the school teams, who were supported by the welfare partners to understand and respond to the concerns of parents (e.g. physical and emotional care, is there continuous support for my child, who can I contact when?). This process allowed parents to become better informed about pre-school services, and as a result more of them made use of the legislation giving vulnerable groups a better chance of enrolling their child in the school of their choice (especially important in large cities where there is a shortage of places). The process also helped to instil the necessary trust between parents and the school before the actual start of schooling.

In several living labs, schools, sometimes in collaboration with day care centres or welfare organisations, also succeeded in creating a warm welcome for the target group parents. Schools did this by organising activities to help children and parents get used to the school before schooling actually began; by using welcoming language at all times; by home visits; and by developing a school policy which helped everyone involved (children, parents and teachers) to get used to each other. In these living labs, parents indicated that the transition to pre-school education went almost unnoticed, and that they felt confident in entrusting the care of their children to the school. Parents also noticed an impact on the well-being of their children, as the children sensed that their parents and the school were getting along well. Regular informal meetings of parents also strengthened parents' networks and helped create mutual trust.

After the first weeks at school, the most successful living labs were able to deepen these relations of mutual trust. They used different ways of interacting with parents, instead of only informing parents by letter or similar impersonal means. They allowed parents into the classroom each day and/or allowed them to do activities in the classroom with the children. The aim and content of classroom activities were explained to parents in advance, and afterwards teachers and parents shared experiences and observations. As a result parents were better equipped to identify and stimulate their child's talents in a home context.

Building trust with vulnerable and non-Dutch speaking parents (and children) is not easy. The living labs, therefore, used accessible and diverse forms of communication with parents. For example, when questioning parents and during home visits, most living labs worked with interpreters. A recurrent problem appears to have been a shortage of interpreters or too little resources to pay interpreters. To achieve smooth daily communication in schools, the use of pictograms, comprehensible written material and

visual forms of communication (e.g. videos where parents could see their toddlers playing in the classroom) was preferred, along with assistants who spoke the language.

2.1.3 Impact on teachers and school

The programme led to a change in the way teachers thought about target group parents and about the importance of parental involvement. Previously, many teachers thought that it was primarily the responsibility of parents to make children 'ready for school'. But the programme led teachers to focus more on how to make the school and its own classroom practice 'ready for every child' – that is, how to organise them in such a way that each child really gets the best possible education opportunities. Teachers and schools that adopted such a mind-set also came to believe in the importance of mutual trust and partnership with parents and other organisations.

The success stories within the living labs showed that achieving this mind-shift requires a variety of measures, such as joint learning communities and other activities involving mutual interaction, which allow the needs and experiences of parents to be taken into account. Parents' positive reaction to such activities surprised the teachers, who in turn understood parents' perspectives better and became more motivated to communicate with them in different ways. Co-operation with other organisations, such as training and welfare organisations, also played an important role. Their expertise and coaching methods led school teams to look at vulnerable parents with greater respect and feel empathy for the children's home life. Moreover, the co-operation brought school and welfare organisations closer together, reducing the threshold for schools to refer families with specific problems to other organisations.

2.1.4 Concluding remarks

The previous paragraphs show that the immediate impact of the programme was to improve the quality of the relationships between all stakeholders (within and across groups of stakeholders): parents and teachers/school staff developed stronger bonds, parents strengthened their own network, and schools learned how to work together with other organisations to become more accessible to parents and children of the target group.

However, it is too early to say what the long-term results will be. The ultimate objective of the programme was to improve pre-school participation and school success for children from the target group. That would mean embedding new practices in the organisations involved; but it remains unclear whether that is possible with a programme that lasted only two years. Follow-up projects and extra resources are therefore necessary, as well as systemic policy changes such as eliminating the institutional split between care and learning in Flanders.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

The projects were totally financed by AMIF Flanders (75% AMIF funds and 25% Flemish co-financing AMIF). The living labs were not obliged to provide their own funding, but in practice some municipalities in a steering role (Antwerp, Ostend and Ghent) freed up existing staff or project resources to sustain the programme. For example, in 2017 one of the living labs in Antwerp was embedded in a broader and highly subsidised project in the deprived urban neighbourhood of Kiel (with EUR 1 million for the whole project). This is a project called A'rea 2020, whose design is based on the principles of the Harlem Children's Zone. Because of this embedding in a broader framework, certain actions from this living lab formed a part of A'rea 2020, and in that way it was effective in leveraging extra resources during the project (and also subsequently). In Ostend and Ghent, staff with an expertise with parents and children of the target group were freed up to work part time on the AMIF programme (in Ostend, it consists of staff working with a total budget of approximately EUR 200,000), again both during the implementation and subsequently. If a municipality decided to continue the project after the end of the programme, it used either its own resources or additional ones from the Flemish government, called

'*Flankerend Onderwijsbeleid*' (supporting education policy)[110]. In addition, some schools allocated extra (staff) hours to the project using AMIF funds. Flemish schools receive funding for an extra number of staff hours based on the number of underprivileged pupils, which could in principle be used by them to continue the work of the programme after its end. However, the extent to which this has indeed happened is unclear.

Because of local elections in October 2018 and community/federal elections in May 2019, it remains unclear what the chances are in the long term of living labs being continued. Cities are currently in the process of drawing up their policy plans. In Flanders and Belgium, no governments have yet been formed.

2.1 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

So far there are no indications that the programme has been effective in stimulating a fundamental improvement in policies at community level. The organisation '*Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen*' (Refugee Work Flanders) has said: '*…these very concrete living labs are strong building blocks. But they do not form a sufficient basis for an integration policy that stands as a house. There is a lack of integration of the lessons learned from the living labs in regular policy*[111]*'.* One of the reasons for this is a fragmented policy landscape: fragmented between communities but also within the Flemish community, where the three departments of welfare, integration and education are separate and co-ordinated by different ministers. This separation also reflects and strengthens the split between care and education. The programme showed that this split needs to be overcome, for instance through structural co-operation between welfare organisations and schools. This would help to mainstream the lessons of the programme into national policies. Being aware of these issues, the Departments of Education, Welfare and Integration in the Flemish Community recently started to collaborate to smoothen the transition between childcare/home environment and preschool environment. They developed an action plan in order to ensure pedagogical, professional, structural continuity and continuity with the family/neighbourhood (Van Laere & Boudry, 2019)[112].

Furthermore, the Flemish government has taken other measures to maximise pre-school participation and to create equal opportunities for socially vulnerable children. For example, it has freed up additional resources for non-native speakers in pre-school education and issued guidance on pre-school education for refugees. It has also published an action plan on the enrolment and attendance of toddlers[113] in pre-school education; under this, a 'toddler coordinator', appointed by the Minister of Education, has promoted the central principles of the programme to schools and local authorities, along with various specific measures created by it.

2.2 Lessons for EU funding programmes

The following lessons can be learned from the programme for the future use of EU funding to assist vulnerable children, both in general and specific groups among them (such as the target group).

- Both in terms of both design and implementation, the programme was strongly committed to broad co-operation with local partners. AMIF Flanders included this

[110] https://data-onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/edulex/document.aspx?docid=13961. This education policy is defined as the set of actions taken by a local authority, starting from the local situation and complementing the Flemish education policy, to develop an education policy in co-operation with local actors. The municipality of Mechelen did not free up any resources during the programme, but has now invested EUR 20,000 from its own budget to extend it. Ghent is also funding an extension of the project with the 'inloopteams'.

[111] https://www.vluchtelingenwerk.be/nieuws/analyse-beleidsbrief-integratie-2018-2019

[112] https://www.expoo.be/transitie-tussen-thuis-buurt-kinderopvang-en-kleuterschool; https://www.expoo.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/REFLECTIE-instrument%20transitie_oktober%202018.pdf

[113] https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/actieplan-kleuterparticipatie-bijlage-PB-12-12-2016_0.pdf. In this plan, smooth transitions from home or day care to pre-school education are called in Dutch 'warme transities' or 'warm transitions' (as in 'warm welcome').

as a mandatory element at the design stage. In practice, too, good and structured co-operation between welfare organisations and schools appears to be an important success factor. As child poverty is a multi-dimensional problem, future EU funding programmes for vulnerable children should standardise, and possibly even make compulsory, this kind of broad cooperation between local partners that effectively benefits children and families. The active involvement of schools appears to be essential.

- The local anchoring of the project, combined with mandatory interviews with parents and children by school teachers, made it possible to tailor the project to the needs of the target group. This is essential to generate long-term effects. During the project, the steering role of local authorities also proved to be important. This ensured that there was complementarity with ongoing projects and networks; that a more integrated approach was created; and that there was a greater chance the programme effects would be sustained. Future EU funding programmes should be designed to ensure that local authorities are given such a leading role, and are thus sustainably engaging in a networked approach to tackling child poverty.

- AMIF Flanders was aware that the local living labs could not operate completely independently of one another, and the learning network played an important role. Members of different living labs were able to inspire each other, were given frameworks based on scientific research, and were able to strengthen and question each other. This also resulted in an evidence-based publication that offers a lot of inspiration for other organisations. The publication also shows that it is possible to offer vulnerable children (in general and for the target group of this project in particular) a warm welcome when they take the first steps in care and/or school. It would therefore be interesting to make this book – in a suitable form – available to the European public.

- The contribution of welfare actors and other services that know the target group well, although not part of the programme design, was crucial in achieving profound changes in the mind-set of teachers and in school policy, and therefore in embedding the programme's objectives in school activities. A role for that kind of procedural support could be included in the design of future EU funding programmes.

- The participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation (living labs did the monitoring and evaluation, supported by the learning network) was important, creating the conditions for the changes in mind-set described, and for the development of practices tailored to the target group and other stakeholders. For future EU funding programmes, this means that a monitoring and evaluation process carried out by external researchers, and thus completely separate from the project, must be avoided. It is better for stakeholders to monitor and evaluate the programme themselves. At the same time, it remains important to provide scientific support for these activities, as well as the time and training needed for their realisation. European funding programmes could therefore require applicants to explicitly include the costs of their monitoring and evaluation activities in their budget.

- The programme (in terms of both design and implementation) placed a strong emphasis on the fact that high rates of pre-school enrolments and attendance are not sufficient to ensure equal opportunities in education for vulnerable groups, and

in particular for the target group of this programme. Therefore measures that aim to create a good and sustainable match between home and school for every child and its family must be prioritized. The programme showed the importance of managing the critical transition from home to pre-school education, and investing in high-quality pre-school education. It is to be hoped that future EU funding programmes in this area will encourage member states to approach the issue of ensuring equal opportunities for vulnerable groups from the same broad perspective, and will also encourage them to set up a clear policy in this regard.

- When implementing the programme, the participants decided to broaden the target group. Nevertheless, the living labs had to record the presence of members of the target group during programme activities. This was often experienced as disturbing by the schools and other services, because it made it harder to build up mutual trust with unrecognised refugees (the most vulnerable parents of the target group children). It is open to question whether recording their presence contributed significantly to achieving the programme's objectives. After all, no quantitative data for the (broad) target group were tracked, registered or made public, either during implementation or at the end. A possible solution is that stakeholders should be asked to include in their monitoring and evaluation plan how they will collect these data without compromising the privacy of the most vulnerable children and parents.

- Although AMIF Flanders made a large budget available for the implementation of this programme, its duration was not sufficient. In two years the programme could lay the foundations of change (as for instance changing the mind-set of teachers and school teams) and identify good practices; but it was not able to anchor these in the school behaviour. Given the fact that, with the exception of the 'goodwill' of local authorities or schools, there has not (yet) been any follow-up to this successful project at the Flemish or Belgian (policy) level, there is a risk that it will not have a lasting impact. There are two possible ways to deal with this risk, within the confines of the same budget: either increase the duration of the programme but support fewer living labs, or obtain hard guarantees from the authorities (sub-national and national) at the start that they will provide sufficient finance to keep it going (which may well be less than initial EU funding, with no start-up costs).

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Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative

2019

Ertugrul Polat and Mary Daly
Department of Social Policy and Intervention,
University of Oxford

Contents

Summary

This case study focuses on a programme of interventions that took place in Ireland between 2004 and 2016. The Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) comprised some 52 interventions targeting early intervention with, and education of, children facing significant disadvantage (mainly defined in terms of children living in poor areas). The programme was initiated by Atlantic Philanthropies (AP), and was also primarily funded by it. In all, an estimated €208 million was expended by AP over the programme duration. The PEII adopted a strategic approach, with both short- and long-term objectives. In the latter regard, it sought transformation of the Irish landscape. Hence it carefully selected projects that had potential and treated these as demonstration projects. A second strategic component was the creation of an evidence base and research infrastructure to evaluate the PEII programmes and to work towards the dissemination of learning from these programmes. Third, focus was placed on relationship-building with government, with the aim of eventually mainstreaming prevention and early intervention into the statutory sector.

It is estimated that PEII programmes reached some 90,000 children and young people, 24,000 parents or caregivers, and 4,000 professionals. They were generally locally based, and within localities targeted either all children or the worst off. The PEII had five main foci, with a range of interventions undertaken for each: ***child behaviour, children's health and development***, ***parenting***, ***children's learning***, and ***inclusion and diversity***. In addition to providing funding, AP also resourced its programmes with in-kind assistance including providing support with planning and evaluation, monitoring implementation and progress, and exchanging ideas regarding mainstreaming. AP also resourced evidence-gathering, skills in data accumulation and analysis, and network building and research capacity in the field.

The available evidence suggests a number of achievements. Out of the 33 programmes for which evaluation results are available, 22 are reported to have led to a significant improvement in regard to at least one outcome. The projects with the strongest reported outcomes were those focusing on parenting and social inclusion and diversity (although only a small number of the latter were funded). A second type of impact related to garnering significant matching funding from government. Third, the PEII had an impact in terms of influencing policy and services for children and their families in Ireland. Among the contributions were spreading the philosophy of prevention and early intervention, and making available evidence for policy-making. This helped subsequent research, evaluation, and advocacy activities, acting as a catalyst for government's increasing interest and investment in the field. It also delivered projects that could be built on.

The PEII provides an extremely important case study, not just for Ireland but in an international context also. It demonstrates the importance of leadership, a clearly worked-out philosophy and approach, and significant investment in the field. That said, AP operated in a rather 'club-like' fashion and there was little transparency in its selection process. It could also be said that it did not sufficiently engage with existing provision in the areas it operated in, or with providers and decision-makers more generally. This kind of engagement is vital for lasting change to be effective, especially once donor funding ends.

1 Description of funding programme

This case study introduces the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) funding programme in Ireland, and evaluates its main strengths and weaknesses. The significance of this case study in the context of the Child Guarantee pertains to: the relevance of the services area (prevention and early intervention); the targeting at children experiencing significant disadvantage; the particular nature of the PEII (the relatively large philanthropic funding); and the commitment to an evidence base. For the purposes of this case study, a review was made of relevant policy documents, programme evaluations, and research reports from both academic and non-academic sources; and online consultations and interviews were conducted with several stakeholders. It should be noted that grant-giving only recently finished and hence the full outcome of the PEII is not yet known.

The PEII is a funding programme of Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) in Ireland, a private foundation founded in 1982 by an Irish-American businessman, Charles Feeney. The PEII emerged from AP's wider activities for children and young people in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, named its 'Children and Youth Programme'. Promoting prevention and early intervention was initially one of the overarching goals of this programme, and eventually evolved into a stand-alone initiative[114].

The funding programme, which dates back to 2004, was set up against a backdrop of children and young people being one of the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. Child poverty rates were high, with 1 in 5 children at risk of poverty in 2004; there were considerable inequalities in school achievement between children from different socio-economic status; and problems such as teenage drinking and anti-social behaviour were at worrying levels (Paulsell et al. 2009). AP was concerned that these problems were being tackled in a reactive way, which was costly and punitive, and that there was a lack of an early intervention and prevention approach (Atlantic Philanthropies 2015).

AP's main objective was to transform, through the PEII, how children and young people receive services (Atlantic Philanthropies 2015), and thereby improve outcomes for this target group. No quantitative goals were set but the strategy had three explicit aims. The first was funding, as demonstration projects, those prevention and early intervention programmes that, based on preliminary findings and needs-assessments, showed potential in terms of improving outcomes. The second component was the creation of an evidence base and research infrastructure to evaluate the PEII programmes and to work towards the dissemination of learning from these programmes (and indeed good practice in evaluation). Third, with credibility achieved through demonstration projects, relationships were to be built with government with the aim of eventually mainstreaming prevention and early intervention into the statutory sector in Ireland. Rather than direct provision, PEII funding worked through partner grantee organisations, which received funding initially for planning, and then, if approved, for implementing and evaluating their proposed programmes[115]. No public calls for funding were issued – organisations were approached to apply. Grantee profiles differed, especially in terms of size and geographical spread. In some cases area-based coalitions were funded, especially in the low-income Dublin suburbs of Tallaght and Ballymun; whereas in others it was organisations that received funding in a support and development approach (Foróige and Barnardos).

Over the course of 12 years, there were 52 services/programmes delivered through the PEII with 34 partner agencies (Atlantic Philanthropies n.d.). The 'early' in early intervention was defined rather broadly and not in the most conventional way, which usually refers to 0 to 3 years of age. In fact, 20 out of 33 PEII programmes for which this information is available targeted children who were older than 3 (see the Appendix). For approximately one fifth of these programmes early intervention could mean as old as 18, and there was

[114] In this case study all such relevant activities will be referred to as PEII activities.

[115] The term 'programme' refers to the whole of the activities carried out by grantee organisations to provide various services.

even a programme that targeted children and young people aged 14-24[116]. The number of programmes delivered by an organisation with PEII funding varied from 1 to 7 – so there was some specialisation, but programmes were also run within organisations that offered other activities (and received funding from other sources). This meant some large funding for some organisations[117]. It is estimated that PEII programmes reached some 90,000 children and young people, 24,000 parents or caregivers, and 4,000 professionals (Rochford, Doherty and Owens 2014). As for the target group of children and families, PEII programmes were typically operated in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. These were the areas where local needs were demonstrated through the preliminary research that the grantees carried out. The most common characteristic among the selected areas seems to be the over-representation of families living in poverty. In some areas such families consisted of households with unemployed parents; in others many of the families in poverty were lone-parent households.

Generally, the approach to service provision could be described as 'targeted universalism', meaning that in a targeted geographical location the programmes were available to the whole community. That said, a number of programmes were targeted at those with the most urgent need in the areas concerned; for example, some programmes aiming to improve children's behavioural outcomes worked only with children who already exhibited behavioural difficulties, rather than all children in a given area.

PEII programmes can be divided into five different outcome areas (Rochford, Doherty and Owens 2014). A first strand focused on ***child behaviour***. Examples of relevant types of intervention here include programmes addressing children's skills in social, emotional, and behavioural regulation by working directly with children, as well as programmes training parents and teachers about children's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development (Statham 2013). An example was *CDI Early Years*[118] by the Childhood Development Initiative, an early-childhood care and education programme targeting children aged 2-5 and their families in a disadvantaged area in Dublin, delivered at home and in early-years settings over a period of two years.

A second area of intervention focused on ***children's health and development***. Some examples here include programmes that were aimed at providing good nutrition, increasing breastfeeding, and reducing obesity in the early years. Other than children and parents, teachers and early-years practitioners were also a target group for such capacity-building. An exemplar here is the *Parent-Child Psychological Support Programme*[119] by Youngballymun, which worked in a community/local setting with children and their parents starting from birth for an 18-month period.

A third theme was ***parenting***. Here the idea was that, in order to improve children's outcomes, it was also necessary to have programmes that improve parenting by providing support and changing parents' behaviour. Some examples in this strand included programmes that worked to reduce parental stress and improve parents' knowledge and skills in regard to child-rearing. An example is the *Triple P Parenting Programme*[120], delivered by Midlands Area Parenting Partnership, which worked in a community setting at

[116] This was the Brook Sexual Health Programme, which was aimed at improving young people's sexual health.

[117] For example, Tallaght West CDI received $12 million, Ballymun Partnership received $10.2 million, and Archways received $9.2 million.

[118] This programme entailed the direct provision of a flexible early-years curriculum, with well trained practitioners, in smaller groups than Ireland's average practitioner/child ratio. It also had a parent/carer component that provided training for self-identified parenting/caring needs. For more information see: https://www.cdi.ie/what-we-offer/early-years-service.

[119] This programme entailed the provision of periodical check-ups for babies and toddlers to monitor their overall development, such as physical development (e.g. through weight and height measurement) and brain development. For more information see: https://www.pcpsparenting.org.

[120] This programme consisted of presentations, seminars, workshops, group sessions, and one-to-one telephone sessions for parents, which focused on several issues related to parenting and children's development. For more information see: https://www.triplep.net/glo-en/home.

a population scale in Longford and Westmeath areas, targeting all parents with children aged 18 months to 7 years.

The programmes for ***children's learning***, the fourth theme, were aimed either at directly improving children's skills in, for example, literacy, numeracy, and language or more indirectly the environment within which the child's learning took place. An example is Archways' *Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme*[121]*,* implemented in participating schools with teachers and children aged 4-7 one day per month for a total period of five months.

Finally, another group of PEII grantees delivered programmes to promote ***inclusion and diversity****,* the fifth theme, among children and parents. These worked towards the integration of children from different cultural, ethnic, religious, and sexual identity (inter alia) backgrounds. *Media Initiative for Children: Respecting Difference*[122] is one such programme, delivered by the organisation Early Years for children aged 3-5, parents, and practitioners over a school year, with the aim of raising awareness about diversity issues. It is important to note that a majority of PEII programmes were planned to improve outcomes across multiple areas.

Diversity was therefore a hallmark of the PEII. The interventions varied in several ways:

- programme duration and intensity ranged from those with only a couple of hours contact time in all to a five-year intervention with regular home visits;
- for programmes working with children, the age group could vary from birth to 24 years;
- the setting within which the programme was delivered also varied (i.e. delivered at home, school, community, or early-years settings);
- some programmes worked with children, others with parents, and there was also a third group that targeted both; a number of interventions also worked with early-development practitioners and teachers; and
- the size and reach of the organisations varied from national organisations to stand-alone single projects.

Some of the programmes were developed from scratch locally in Ireland; others were international programmes that were adapted for the needs of particular communities in Ireland; and a third group of programmes were taken from outside Ireland and applied in their original format.

Investment in the PEII totalled over €208 million over the 12 years of its operation (Sneddon 2016:1). The amount of individual grants ranged from about $31,000 to $19 million (Atlantic Philanthropies n.d.). The funding was organised on a multi-annual basis, which meant that AP ring-fenced funding for some programmes over a period of years (Rafferty and Colgan 2016). This was to enable a longer-term orientation for the programmes and better planning. PEII's funding strategy included investments in interventions entirely funded by AP, as well as others partially funded together with government. The Irish government funded 50% of 15 PEII programmes, which is approximately a third of the total.

In addition to providing funding, AP also provided in-kind assistance to projects throughout. This involvement was mainly for: 1) providing support to grantees for planning and evaluation; 2) monitoring implementation and progress; and 3) coming together with the stakeholders to exchange ideas and work towards mainstreaming and dissemination of the learning from PEII programmes.

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[121] This programme consisted of six full-day workshops for teachers working with children aged 3-8. For more information see: http://www.incredibleyears.com/programs/teacher/classroom-mgt-curriculum.

[122] This programme entailed the provision of sessions by trained practitioners, where they used five one-minute cartoon media messages to talk about diversity. For more information see: http://www.early-years.org/mifc.

To start with evaluations, they were seen as an integral part of grantees' work, and hence the conduct or commissioning of evaluations of the impact of their services, to show the improvements made, was a condition of eligibility for PEII funding (Rochford, Doherty and Owens 2014). The rationale was twofold: to ensure that the desired outcomes for the target communities were reached; and to promote learning from the experience of grantees, and work towards sustainability of the returns. As part of this strategy, each beneficiary organisation was given a budget to commission evaluation studies. Additionally, AP staff provided the grantees with practical support on how to plan and execute evaluations. Different evaluation strategies were used, such as quasi-experimental studies and randomised controlled trials as well as qualitative methods. Other than evaluations, grantees were also expected to submit regular progress reports (on, for example, updates on activities, accomplishments, and budget use). As for monitoring, there were two main arrangements. One was the oversight group (a.k.a. 'advisory group'), which consisted of AP members, government representatives, and grantees, which was charged with monitoring progress and strategic planning and financial management (Boyle and Shannon 2018). The other arrangement was the steering committee (a.k.a. 'implementation group'), which was charged with programme delivery and implementation monitoring, and hence consisted of administrative staff.

An important development was the establishment of the Centre for Effective Services (CES) in 2008 by AP and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), with the function of providing expertise and building bridges between research, policy, and practice to improve services and outcomes. This was very much oriented towards ensuring a legacy for the programme. Moreover, a 'Dissemination Initiative for Prevention and Early Intervention' (DIPEI) was established for sharing information related to evaluations, discussing their dissemination, and exchanging ideas. There were two DIPEI groups, one in the Republic of Ireland and the other in Northern Ireland, consisting of representatives from PEII grantees, the statutory sector, and CES. A grantee network was funded by AP to promote learning between different programmes.

PEII funding was ended in 2016 when AP's final grants were awarded. Because they have been taken on by the government, four programmes implemented by three grantees under the PEII continue to operate in three disadvantaged areas (Tallaght, Darndale, and Ballymun).

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

2.1 Impact on target group

There has been a substantial amount of evaluation of the PEII programmes. One of the most significant was the CES-run project *On the Right Track*, which was designed to cumulate the overall learning from the evaluations published in several outcome reports across the period between 2012 and 2017. These reports are updated as more evaluations are released, and they present the most up-to-date statement of impact achieved[123].

As mentioned, a majority of PEII programmes were aimed at improving outcomes across several areas. Overall, at the time of writing, 33 out of the 52 programmes have been evaluated. Of these, the available evidence indicates that 22 led to a significant improvement in regard to at least one outcome.

A summary overview of the impact on the target group by outcome area is presented below. The outcomes were reported in the following manner. A 'significant improvement' means that there was a statistically significant improvement on at least one measure of an

[123] In this Section the findings presented are from the following outcome reports, divided into five thematic areas: child behaviour (Statham 2013), child health and development (McAvoy et al. 2013), children's learning (Sneddon and Harris 2013), parenting (Sneddon and Owens 2012), and inclusion and diversity (McGuirk and Kehoe 2017).

observed outcome. A 'positive trend', on the other hand, means there was a positive change on at least one measure of outcome, but not at a statistically significant level.

- **Child behaviour**: Evaluation findings are available from 15 relevant programmes. The majority of programmes in this area are reported to have significantly improved children's behaviour or at least showed positive trends. Examples of outcomes achieved include reduced hyperactivity, reduced risk of social and emotional difficulties, reduced likelihood of aggressive behaviour, and improved empathy. Of the 15 programmes in all, 5 are reported to have delivered a significant improvement in child behaviour; 7 showed positive trends; 2 yielded mixed findings (that is, there were both positive and negative effects for relevant measures); and 1 reported a negative impact[124] (referring to a statistically significant negative effect on at least one measure of the relevant outcome).
- **Child health and development:** Of the 12 evaluated programmes that included a focus on health outcomes, 2 are reported to have led to significant improvements in children's health, and 6 showed some positive trends. Some achievements of note are higher immunisation rates, a reduction in rates of asthma and chest infection, and higher cognitive development scores. Of the remainder, 2 programmes demonstrated mixed findings, and there was no significant difference between pre- and post-programme outcomes for 2 others. This is one of the outcome areas where the PEII's impact on children was rather limited.
- **Children's learning:** 14 programmes were evaluated that focused on children's learning outcomes. Of these, 5 programmes achieved significant improvement, with a further 3 showing positive trends on outcomes such as improved literacy skills (e.g. word recognition, reading outcomes), better fine and gross motor skills, and better problem-solving skills. 4 had mixed findings and there was no difference in learning outcomes in a further 2. As explained in the previous Section, under this theme programmes generally also aimed to improve the home and/or school learning environment. Of the 15 relevant programmes here, 9 are reported as having demonstrated a significant improvement, and 6 showed positive trends on children's learning environment. Improvements were also reported in carer-child interactions and teacher practices.
- **Parenting:** Parenting is one of the areas where PEII programmes reported the strongest impact. Of the 15 programmes evaluated, 8 showed a significant improvement and 5 showed positive trends. Among the major achievements here were reduced parental stress and anxiety, reduced usage of harsh parenting practices, improved family cohesion, and improved parental relationships. There was one programme with mixed findings and another with a negative impact on the target group (the same programme mentioned above under child behaviour).
- **Inclusion and diversity:** This is another outcome area showing great success in terms of the reported positive impacts on children, albeit there was only a small number of such programmes. Out of 5 programmes, 4 showed a significant improvement in the children assisted, and 1 showed positive trends on at least one outcome measure. Improvements were reported, for example,

[124] This programme, *Mate Tricks*, was a one-year after-school programme designed to promote children's pro-social behaviour. The evaluation findings showed that it actually led to an increase in children's anti-social behaviour. However, it was also reported that increased engagement with the programme was associated with reduced anti-social behaviour. The programme was discontinued following negative evaluation findings.

in children's empathy and co-operation; ability to recognise emotions in others and instances of exclusion; likelihood of getting involved in community issues; and more positive attitudes to LGBT individuals.

The evidence available thus far, therefore, shows that the PEII has had some success in terms of achieving its goals. There are several factors that are likely to have contributed to the achieved impact. First, in the Irish context, AP invested a substantial amount of money, its funding was comparatively generous in the existing landscape, and it also managed to leverage funding from government (to be discussed below). Moreover, the funding and in-kind resources enabled investment in the initial design and planning stages of interventions, which are not necessarily always funded; this in turn made needs-assessments possible, along with the creation of an initial evidence base for the prevailing situation. This improved targeting, and hence heightened the chances of impact.

A second significant factor is the strong focus on outcomes. Grantees based their programmes on worked-out logic models that identified what concrete steps needed to be taken to achieve certain outcomes. Another crucial part of this outcome-focused strategy was the central role attributed to evaluation and seeing what worked. Learning from other grantees, as well as from their own programmes, made it possible for providers to focus on strategies that would heighten effectiveness in changing children's lives. Third, the acknowledgement of mainstreaming as a crucial goal, and the pursuit of co-investments with government towards this end, was very significant. Fourth, through the Children's Research Network, a network bringing together researchers and practitioners working in the area of children and youth in Ireland, AP provided grants to individuals or teams to work with research data generated by the PEII, which were made accessible via public data archives. The idea was to ensure that PEII data were widely utilised and reused. This was especially important in terms of building capacity in the prevention and early intervention field in Ireland, and one can say that these capacity-building efforts also helped increase the PEII's impact. Lastly, PEII's holistic approach to the needs of the target group was notable. This approach in essence took into account a range of outcome areas relevant to children, from health to education, and was crucial in increasing the chances of having an impact on target groups.

Although PEII is reported to have had a considerable impact on children, parents, and those who work with children, it is helpful to think about why more impact has not been reported. With such a short time span, only short-term outcomes can be identified, so it may be that future research will confirm additional outcomes. Furthermore, there can be a trade-off between the size of the target group and impact, in the sense that, for programmes with a more universal service-provision strategy, reaching more children meant smaller changes in outcomes (an example of a universal approach would be where the target group consisted of all children at a school rather than a group of selected or referred children, even though the school itself was selected from a disadvantaged area).

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

In terms of its impact on leveraging extra resources for children, the PEII can also be credited with significant success. Four years after the launch of the PEII, in 2007, central government funding for five years was secured (there was no funding from local authorities). This funding partnership was to support three organisations under the PEII to deliver model programmes in selected disadvantaged areas of Dublin between 2007 and 2013, and is known as the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP). The Irish government's commitment to fund 50% of €36 million for the PEIP was a considerable achievement for the wider initiative.

Between 2012 and 2018, €29.1 million of AP investment was accompanied by government funding of €97 million (authors' calculation from Boyle and Shannon 2018) (see Table 1

below)[125]. These were not necessarily PEII programmes, but all were part of PEII efforts (for example, leveraged resources for CES, which is not a programme under the PEII but is part of the initiative's work). The leveraged government funding should be seen as part of the PEII's success.

Table 1: Co-investments by Atlantic Philanthropies and the Irish government in the prevention and early intervention field (2012-2018)

Project	Atlantic funding	Matched government funding
Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme	€14.85 million	€23.80 million*
Infant Health and Wellbeing (Nurture)	€10 million	€50 million
Growing Up in Ireland (GUI)	€2 million	€10 million
Centre for Effective Services (CES) Implementation Infrastructure	€2.25 million	€2.25 million

Source: Boyle and Shannon 2018.

* This is the figure updated to 2018, made available by the DCYA.

There are several reasons behind the success in leveraging government funding. First of all, leveraging extra resources was a part of AP's funding strategy, according to which co-investment with government was an important means of including government in PEII work. In other words, while the financial support itself was important, government funding was also crucial to be able to achieve the eventual aim of mainstreaming PEII services into the statutory sector. Second, requirements for rigorous evaluation and provision of support to the grantees in the evaluation process helped grantees leverage extra resources for their programmes by enabling them to showcase the impact achieved. In addition, the investment in the planning and design phase made it more likely that programmes would have an impact, which in turn made it possible to leverage more resources.

Although the volume of extra resources leveraged by the PEII is impressive, one can still identify some barriers that might have hindered access to further funding from government. First, the way in which functions relating to children are spread across different government departments in Ireland complicated the situation for grantees that had to find support for projects from several departments (Paulsell and Pickens Jewell 2012). This is perhaps one of the more difficult problems to overcome, as the structure is unlikely to change radically; but it does pinpoint the need for more initiatives facilitating co-ordination and co-operation across different governmental units. Second, there were also some exogenous factors that had a negative impact on the ability to obtain extra resources, the biggest of which was the 2008 financial crisis. At a time when the recession caused cutbacks in budgets and hence had a negative impact on services for children, leveraging resources was even more difficult than usual.

[125] Note that matching government funding shown here excludes 'soft' support of some €100m for the Partnership, Prevention and Family Support Mainstreaming Programme: this covers family support services funded by Tusla, which work towards achieving better value for money, and better outcomes for children and families, through ensuring that services are evidence-based and have prevention and early intervention at their core (Boyle and Shannon 2018).

2.3 Impact on national policies and programmes

The PEII seems to have had some significant impact on policy and services for children and their families in Ireland, although it must be noted that this is difficult to prove. It did help to spread the philosophy of prevention and early intervention in Ireland, and made relevant evidence available on this. In this and other ways it could be said to have acted as a catalyst for government's increasing interest and investment in the field. It also delivered projects that could be built on. When considering impact on particular policies it is better to think of synergies.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: **National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020** is one of the areas where there is synergy between the PEII and national policy. The framework, which sets out a long-term policy vision and master plan for children's development and education, is consistent with the PEII's focus on the use of evidence in decision-making and the significance of a prevention and early-intervention approach. One of the six transformational goals is 'earlier intervention and prevention'. This framework also acknowledges the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, which is the successor to the PEIP, as one of the key supporting policies for achieving better outcomes. One might say therefore that, grounded as it is in the framework, PEII's approach will have a greater chance of sustainability and carries the potential to achieve further impact in the future. Of course, it would be misleading to attribute the impact solely to AP and its grantees; most certainly there have been other drivers of change and government policy was moving in this direction anyway – for example the National Children's Strategy which, dating from 2000, predated the PEII – was moving in this direction[126]. That said, the findings of interviews with stakeholders from several evaluations corroborate the proposition that PEII was one of the most influential factors here (Boyle and Shannon 2018).

Another important indicator of influence on national policy is the extent to which the services provided through the PEII have been mainstreamed into the statutory sector through either improvements to existing services or the roll-out of new programmes. **The ABC Programme**, which was built on the AP and government co-investment in the PEIP, is one such case in progress. The target group is the same – that is, children and their families in areas of disadvantage. For the ABC Programme, three sites that were a part of the PEIP were extended to 10 areas considered to be socially disadvantaged. The programme was expected to run from 2013 to 2016, under AP and DCYA's equal financial commitment of €30 million in total, and was subsequently extended until December 2019 (Children's Rights Alliance 2019), with solo government funding of €2.7 million for the extension year (Boyle and Shannon 2018). To regularise and enable learning from ABC by existing services, in September 2018 the DCYA decided to move the programme to Tusla, the Child and Family Agency. To embed prevention and early intervention in public service provision, the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) Programme was undertaken by Tusla between 2015 and 2018 with support from UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, and AP funding. In addition to and as part of these mainstreaming efforts, an initiative called the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI) was launched by the DCYA, with funding of €14 million (from the Dormant Accounts Fund) with the goal of enhancing the quality of prevention and early intervention services provided by the statutory sector, and bringing a more strategic approach for long-term sustainability. All these developments demonstrate that, since its launch in 2004, the PEII has achieved considerable impact on policies for children and their families in Ireland.

Those programmes that were aimed at supporting the implementation of existing policies through capacity-building are also worth mentioning in terms of their impact on policy. PEII programmes played a role in stimulating improvements in *Síolta*, which is Ireland's National Quality Framework for the Early Years, and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

[126] See https://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/Aboutus/stratfullenglishversion.pdf.

The PEII also had an impact on promoting greater co-ordination among grantees and other non-government organisations in the children's sector in Ireland. An exemplar here is the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN)[127], where organisations come together to organise events, such as talks and press releases, and lobby on particular issues.

Again, the strategic approach adopted by AP was key to its impact. Without the ability to demonstrate that what the PEII advocated was actually working, the programme would not have had an influence on policy discourse, strategic plans, and ongoing efforts to mainstream into existing services – certainly not to the extent achieved. Furthermore, mainstreaming and policy impact was always an important goal for the PEII, which in turn helped mobilise PEII grantees to work towards such goals. Such a mobilisation was also made possible by the creation of a grantee network, which provided a learning and sharing platform and hence increased networking and critical mass. A third facilitating factor is the relationship built with government: not only at high level with policy-makers, but also with 'street-level bureaucrats' familiar with the daily workings of service provision.

That said, one could argue that progress in mainstreaming has been somewhat slow, considering that the programme first began in 2004. Again, one can hazard various reasons for this. First, although stakeholder engagement was an important part of the PEII, some evaluations underlined the need for stronger engagement in order achieve a stronger impact. The 2011 evaluation report for the PEII, in particular, pointed to a prevalent theme in the interviews with government officials, to the effect that some stakeholders thought AP's engagement with the public sector was rather limited and that it was more focused on the voluntary sector – despite its goal of changing statutory sector policy and practices (Paulsell and Pickens Jewell 2012). Although this evidence was collected some time ago, it is still worth noting as one of the potential factors that may have limited PEII's impact. The 'select' nature of the projects funded, and the tendency for these to operate in isolation from existing statutory or other projects, also limited impact. In addition, in some cases there was no 'exit strategy' for when AP funding ended.

To conclude, the PEII's overall impact on national policy in Ireland has been impressive but also slow. In the past 15 years proven programmes under the PEII have been extended to a broader geographical area, and some of the key activities have been mainstreamed.

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

There are many lessons for EU policy-makers (and indeed policy-makers in general) from the PEII programme. At the outset, though, it must be said that the PEII in many ways provides a case study in strategic philanthropy – a particular phenomenon with opportunities, but also limits, in a statutory context. That said, the PEII provides many insights into 'what works'. Among the main insights are the following.

The first relates to the vision. There are two aspects to highlight here. First, significant benefits attach to an intensely targeted and focused programme that has a complex and holistic understanding of the factors that contribute to children's disadvantage. As mentioned, the AP vision included five areas or intersecting domains: children's behaviour; child health and development; children's learning; parenting; and inclusion and diversity. In some instances, a stand-alone programme was introduced to address one of these areas; but many programmes targeted more than one area. The strength and consistency of targeting is an important message from the Irish experience. This has significance and may be an exemplar for what the EU means by an 'integrated strategy'. Furthermore, the intersection of inequalities in children's lives was seen to be important.

[127] See https://www.childrensrights.ie/alliance-members/prevention-and-early-intervention.

A second notable aspect pertaining to vision was the long-term strategic approach that was a feature of the PEII. The programme was oriented towards putting in place a lasting service infrastructure, and advancing a public commitment to early intervention and prevention in Ireland. It contributed to developing policy through several means. Among the most significant were planning, engaging in a dialogue with policy-makers, and building an evidence base. Any funding programme needs to catch national policy-makers' attention. The lessons from the PEII suggest that policy-makers should be approached as early as possible as potential partners, and that attempts should be made to integrate programmes with existing provision (which did not always happen). Of course, the context also has to be opportune and the existing focus on child poverty in Ireland – and the existence of anti-poverty plans and strategies that were built on a life-cycle approach, and included a shared set of outcomes for children and young people – made for conditions receptive to what AP was trying to achieve.

A second element is critical mass and ring-fencing of funding. With some 52 different interventions, the potential for both impact and learning was high. The synergies between programmes were relatively strong and deliberately fostered. PEII programmes were almost like an eco-system, and the relative generosity of resources offered – including in-kind support – made the programmes and the grantees among the best resourced in Ireland. Moreover, the fact that funding was ring-fenced gave the programmes a sense of security and freed them from the work of continuous fundraising.

Third, the attention to capacity-building was another notable feature of what made the PEII successful. As is clear from the foregoing, capacity was viewed not just in terms of physical and material resources but also in terms of resourcing design, evaluation, and the building of networks and information exchange among practitioners and researchers. There was also another aspect to capacity-building – the accumulation of a data and evidence base, and the emphasis on evaluation and assessment as a core element of good practice. The legacy and capacity-building extended also to the setting up of a bespoke centre of excellence – the CES – and the resourcing of the research and evidence communities in early childhood education and care in Ireland. Prior to the AP era, much of this work was done on the margins and to a level that funding allowed. In the AP era, for those sites that were funded, all parts of the process, planning, implementation, and evaluation were funded to a very high level.

Some issues also have to be raised about some of the ways in which AP proceeded and was organised. In particular, there are issues about the degree of partnership with the statutory sector. In some of the evaluation research, issues were raised about the role of the statutory sector and the potential for duplication with, or stratification in relation to, government-funded work. Some stakeholders expressed the opinion that rather than AP funding being used for new initiatives, partnership with government to improve existing services would have had greater impact (Paulsell and Pickens Jewell 2012). There is some evidence to suggest that public officials were insufficiently included during the agenda-setting phase and as the AP programme was rolled out. The AP programme had a very strong sense of mission for its own programme and did not specifically consult about this. This seems like a vital missed opportunity to embed learning from service provision that goes beyond individual programmes (Frazer 2016). Therefore, an emerging lesson from the PEII in this respect is that in order to ensure government buy-in, which is essential for bringing about systemic change that goes beyond the provision of individual programmes, it is important for any funding programme to first identify mutual goals with the public sector, and then fund the relevant programmes that serve these already identified, mutual goals.

In terms of how AP operated, the organisation was in total control, in that it approached individuals or organisations – there was no open application process and the information available in the public sphere was limited. A lack of transparency meant that it was not known why some organisations were approached to apply for funding and others not. This is a particular way of proceeding that can only work on a particular scale, for a particular period, and for a 'private' initiative. The democratic credentials of this kind of 'club-like' approach can be questioned. A further egalitarian consideration is that this way of

proceeding may deepen inequalities among service providers, given that AP funding was the 'gold star'. Apart from egalitarian aspects, it may also create fissures between the service providers, creating an insider/outsider divide, and therefore diminishing the willingness to co-operate.

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Appendix: Age range of PEII programmes

Programme name	Age range
The Parent Child Psychological Support Programme	0 to 18 months
Preparing for Life (PFL)	0 to 5
Growing Child Programme	0 to 5
National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI)	0 to 6
Triple P Parenting Programme	0 to 7
Eager & Able to Learn	2 to 3
CDI Early Years	2 to 5
CDI Speech & Language Therapy Service	2 to 6
Suite of Incredible Years Programmes	3 to 12
Tús Maith	3 to 5
3,4,5 Learning Years	3 to 5
Media Initiative for Children: Respecting Difference	3 to 5
Incredible Years Parent & Child Training for Children with ADHD	3 to 7
Incredible Years Parent Training Programme	3 to 7
Healthy Schools Programme	4 to 13
Protective Behaviours	4 to 17
Write Minded	4 to 18
Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme	4 to 7
Ready to Learn	4 to 8
Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)	5 to 11
Doodle den	5 to 6
Wizards of Words (WoW)	6 to 8
Belong	7 to 12
Mate Tricks	9 to 10
Time to read	9 to 12
Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland	10 to 18
The Youth Citizenship Programme	10 to 18
Out of School Time (OST)	11 to 14
Functional Family Therapy	11 to 18
Odyssey Parenting Your Teen	11 to 18
Big Brothers Big Sisters Ireland Peer Support	12 to 14
Real U	12 to 18
Brook Sexual Health Programme	14 to 24

Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study – The role of EU funds to address homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families

2019

Alina Makarevičienė
(PPMI)

Contents

Summary

The main purpose of the case study was to examine the role that EU funding can play as a stimulus to the development and roll-out of both innovative and proven kinds of intervention addressing homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families, as well as how EU-funded interventions can leverage national funding and lead to improved policies and programmes. The case study is based on desk research and interviews with representatives of national authorities and NGOs.

The case study showed that the overall strategic and monitoring framework of EU funds does not specifically address child poverty, and in particular homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families. Nevertheless, the FEAD targets children and includes common indicators relating to the number of children aged 15 years or below among recipients of support. In addition, the ESIF and FEAD support interventions addressing the issue of homelessness, by: providing assistance for homeless people to access mainstream service provision; providing food and other basic material assistance, and support for pilots of housing-led approaches; and helping service providers to develop more sustainable solutions. EU-level programmes, such as PROGRESS and EaSI, also invest in social experimentation and mutual learning activities in the EU Member States.

For projects addressing homelessness, EU funding constitutes up to 85% of the total budget. The rest is usually funded by national and/or local government and by the project manager (e.g. municipality) or partners. However, funding from the ESIF in most Member States is marginal in comparison with national and local level funding, especially if there are housing policy measures funded from the national budget.

Analysis of selected projects shows that success is linked to high-level support, good project management and close co-operation between project partners and the target group. A strategic individual needs assessment, introduced in the housing-led approach as well as in deinstitutionalisation projects, actively involves the families at risk of homelessness and housing exclusion and provides support to their children. However, EU-funded projects face a number of challenges, including difficult implementation provisions, the need to co-ordinate support from different EU funds, and delays in the adoption of the national strategic documents needed to implement reforms or scale up innovative practices.

The recommendations from the case study for managing EU funds include: establishing a stronger rights-based approach and thematic focus on children within the strategic and monitoring framework in the 2021-2027 period; the development of incentives for Member States to follow EU social inclusion policies and European Semester recommendations; simplifying the administration of EU funds, maintaining the possibility of combining ESF and ERDF investment for housing with social support and intensive case management; and promoting the evaluation of innovative projects and scaling up examples of best practice.

1 Description of funding programme

Access to decent housing is one of the five areas mentioned in the Preparatory Action on establishing a Child Guarantee Scheme introduced by the European Parliament in 2017. The Preparatory Action is aimed at introducing a framework that is in accordance with the Recommendation on Investing in children (which the European Commission made in 2013[128]) and the European Pillar of Social Rights (ESPR)[129]. The European Commission monitors and supports the implementation of the Recommendation and ESPR by looking at the evolution of key policies through the European Semester and advising how best to use EU funds to invest in children, as well as disseminating innovative practices.

The main purpose of the case study was to examine the role that EU funding can play in stimulating the development and roll-out of both innovative and proven kinds of intervention addressing homelessness and housing exclusion[130] for children and their families. The case study is based on desk research on relevant studies, evaluations and administrative data at European and national level, as well as interviews with national officials and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in the implementation of projects focused on homeless children and their families.

The European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) defines child homelessness as '*a process where most of the children concerned are moving frequently between the streets, situations of homelessness, forms of insecure housing (living with family and friends) or inadequate housing (in squats or makeshift dwellings)*'[131]. According to FEANTSA, the causes of child homelessness consist of a combination of structural, institutional, relational and personal factors and are connected to the poverty and homelessness experienced by adults. Although general policies to prevent child homelessness exist, such as those in relation to social security protection, housing, education and healthcare, the number of homeless children seems to be rising in particular countries[132]. For example, in Ireland 3,333 children were homeless in November 2017, which was a 276% increase since 2014. In Sweden, a 60% increase in the number of children in emergency accommodation was registered between 2011 and 2017, and the same 60% increase can be observed in the numbers of children registered as homeless by local authorities in France in 2015 compared with 2013[133]. At EU level, the severe housing deprivation rate experienced by households with dependent children was 5.8%, compared with 2.2% for households without children, in 2017. At the same time severe housing deprivation experienced by people aged less than 18 was 6.0, compared with 4.0 for the total population[134].

A number of EU funds address the issue of homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families by:

- supporting investment in social housing and social infrastructure (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD));

[128] European Commission (2013).

[129] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

[130] The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) defines 13 operational categories corresponding to homelessness across Europe: rooflessness (without a shelter of any kind, sleeping rough); houselessness (with a place to sleep but temporary in institutions or shelter); living in insecure housing (threatened with severe exclusion due to insecure tenancies, eviction, domestic violence); living in inadequate housing (in caravans on illegal campsites, in unfit housing, in extreme overcrowding). Available at: https://www.feantsa.org/download/ethos24842157487482398888.pdf.

[131] FEANTSA (2007).

[132] FEAD (2018).

[133] FEANTSA (2018).

[134] Eurostat database: Severe housing deprivation rate by age, sex and poverty status – EU-SILC survey.

- funding soft measures focused on improved the social inclusion of target groups (European Social Fund (ESF) and Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD)); and
- promoting social experimentation projects, mutual learning and peer review (PROGRESS – EU employment and social solidarity programme for the period 2007-2013, and the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme).

A study on four EU funds (ERDF, EAFRD, ESF and FEAD) completed in 2018 shows that, though the overall design of EU funds does not specifically address child poverty, and in particular homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families, specific interventions or particular projects address children as one of the main target groups[135]. However, these funds lack a sufficient monitoring framework to track the investments in children and measure the progress and benefits. Only the FEAD directly addresses children as a target group and contains common indicators referring to the number of children aged 15 years or below among recipients of support. Though another FEAD indicator refers to the number of homeless people supported, it is not divided by age group.

At the level of the Member States, ESF investments are the main tool to address social exclusion, with €31.3 billion out of €64.5 billion earmarked for the Thematic Objective of 'Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination' (TO 9) from the ERDF, ESF and EAFRD in 2014-2020. However, the Thematic Objectives and common indicators of the ESF and ERDF do not refer specifically to the problems of either homeless children or homelessness in general. The mapping of goals and activities addressing homelessness in Operational Programmes 2014-2020, conducted in eight Member States – Czech Republic, Germany (North-Rhine Westphalia), Finland, France (Ile-de-France), Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania – concluded that only very few ERDF, ESF and FEAD programmes targeting vulnerable groups address the specific needs of homeless people[136].

The mapping exercise showed that the planned and actual use of EU funds benefiting homeless people is only sometimes based on actual consultation with (or the consent of) the sector's players, and on strategic documents' priorities. However, measures for ESIF funding are selected on both a competitive and non-competitive (e.g. Italy) basis[137], which leaves room for policy innovations while implementing Operational Programmes under a top-down approach.

- The results of this mapping exercise revealed that various interventions are supported using finance from the ESIF and FEAD, including:
- provision of assistance for homeless people to access mainstream service provision, such as education and training, employment, housing, health, transport and leisure activities (Germany, Poland, Italy, France);
- provision of food and other basic material assistance (e.g. schoolbags and stationery for children, hygiene articles for the homeless) funded by the FEAD;
- support for housing investment or housing-led approaches (Italy, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary); and
- support for service providers in finding more sustainable solutions; and development of co-operation between various actors and cross-sectoral services, as well as the development of related skills (Finland).

For example, Germany under the FEAD OP[138] (type II) supports bridging activities between the target groups, including migrant families and homeless persons, and existing support systems (social, educational, health services, housing) by funding additional staff,

[135] Brožaitis et al. (2018).
[136] Teller (2018).
[137] Ibid.
[138] FEAD type II Operational Programmes are funding social inclusion measures for the most deprived.

especially for outreach work counsellors and in local counselling centres. Though children are not prioritised in these projects as a specific target group for activities addressing homelessness and housing exclusion, they become beneficiaries when families receive FEAD assistance (see Box 1).

Box 2. FEAD support for migrant families and homeless people in Germany

The main goal of FEAD projects in Germany is to point out existing counselling and assistance services to newly immigrated EU citizens and their children up to the age of 7, as well as to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, in order to improve their living conditions. In Germany, the FEAD has a total budget of around €93 million for the 2014-2020 funding period. The EU funding rate of 85% is topped up by 10% from the Federal Government, so that project management organisations have to bear 5% of the cost. The Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs co-operates with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth to support newly arrived parents and their children (up to 7 years of age). Co-operation with municipalities, non-governmental welfare institutions and other non-profit organisations is obligatory for project management organisations. This makes the projects more transparent and efficient, and promotes mutual learning.

The FEAD is an important instrument to help municipalities face up to the challenges resulting from the increasing immigration of citizens from other EU Member States. A small share of the newly arrived (including their children) suffer from particularly harsh personal circumstances. They were already poor in their countries of origin and their social integration is hard to achieve in Germany due to poor knowledge of the German language, very low level of school education or vocational training, health problems or problematic housing conditions. As they have possibly experienced exclusion in their home countries as well as immediately after arrival in Germany, they often do not feel in a position to seek or accept help, and lack knowledge of how to access local services and support systems.

Another target group is homeless people and people at risk of homelessness, to whom the Federal Government's report on Poverty and Wealth refers in particular. They have been affected by the problem of no, or insufficient, access to the support systems available locally or regionally, which is above all due to the fact that in addition to their housing situation they are also burdened by other problems (unemployment, health problems, substance abuse). By 2017 almost 61,858 persons in need of help had received advice, and 6,686 of them were children. Also 15,000 homeless people benefited from FEAD-funded interventions in Germany in 2014-2017[139]. According to the Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs, at least 85% of FEAD recipients have taken advantage of existing assistance services.

The gold winner of the FEANTSA Ending Homelessness Award 2018 – the 'Frostschutzengel Plus' project jointly managed by GEBEWO and Caritas – illustrates that overcoming linguistic barriers is a prerequisite to ensuring that homeless people have equal access to the existing mechanisms for claiming social rights. This project focuses on promoting the social inclusion of homeless people in Berlin by establishing new communication channels between them and existing service providers. This is a service provided in Berlin for homeless mobile German and EU citizens in a range of languages including Bulgarian, Bosnian-Serbian-Croatian, English, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian and Russian. The project provides counselling in existing homelessness services (day centres, night shelters, GP surgeries etc.) which allows service users to receive advice and support on location. Service users are also informed of their rights, often for the first time. By offering the support in several languages, clients are able to better make use of social services. In the period January-October 2016, 266 individuals (about 20% of whom were women) received social counselling and 195 received health counselling. 25% were German citizens and 75% were citizens of other EU Member States.

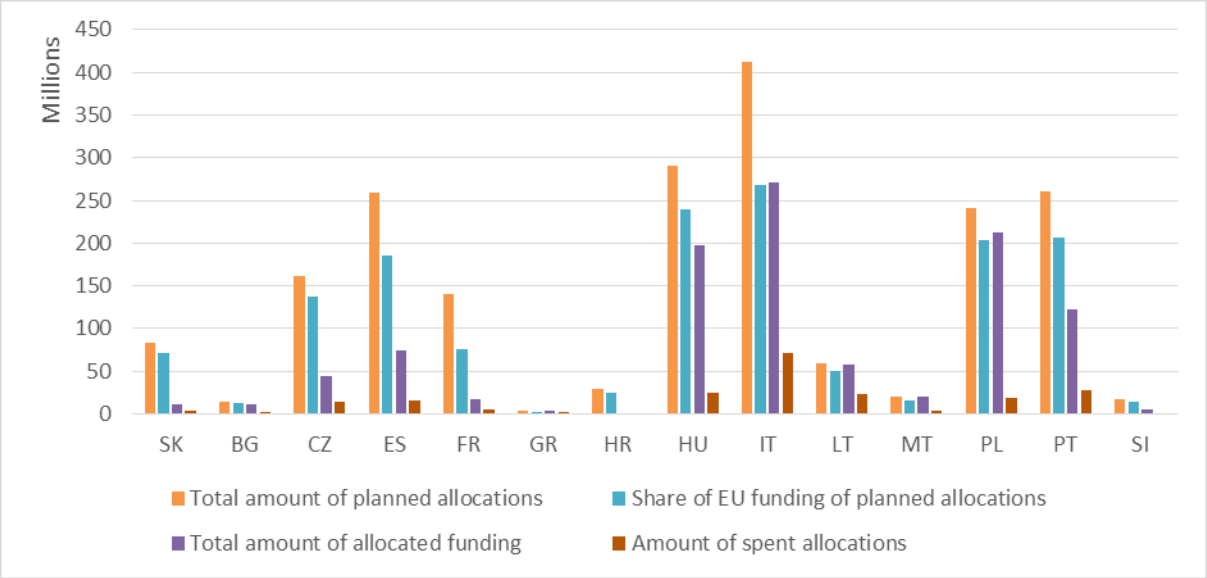
Sources: The Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs website; European Commission (2019); FEANTSA Ending Homelessness Award 2018.

Multi-fund ESIF OPs (rather than single ERDF-financed tools) fund social infrastructure development, social housing programmes and deinstitutionalisation measures in the 2014-2020 programming period; though in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Spain and Italy

[139] European Commission (2019).

(partially) investments in housing infrastructure are planned under regional ERDF OPs or the Integrated Regional Programme (Czech Republic). In total, 14 Member States have allocated €1.99 billion (ERDF and national funding) for housing infrastructure[140] in 2014-2020, with Italy, Hungary, Portugal, Spain and Poland leading (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Total amount of ERDF and national funding allocated for housing infrastructure under 2014-2020 OPs (€million)



Source: Author, based on ESIF database 31 December 2018.

The co-financing rate of the ERDF for housing infrastructure varies from 40% to 85% of total Member States' allocation for this category of expenditure. According to 2018 data, Member States investing in housing infrastructure demonstrate sufficient progress in allocating funding to the selected projects, though the level of their actual implementation is rather low due to the long planning and project development process inherent in infrastructure investment.

ESF activities to support families with children, including children and service providers affected by the process of deinstitutionalisation, are funded under the social inclusion Thematic Objective (TO 9). Examples of projects focused directly on homeless children living in families (not in institutional care) as a primary target group are rare. Usually, the general approach for different target groups facing problems of homelessness and housing exclusion includes temporary accommodation and counselling support for adults to improve their access to mainstream services and the labour market and to promote social inclusion. Children living in families facing problems of homelessness and housing exclusion primarily receive support to access education and health services. Children under institutional care are approached through the process of deinstitutionalisation and activities aimed at improving their living environment and social inclusion (see example in Box 2).

According to the 'Opening Doors for Europe's Children' pan-European campaign in 2017-2018, advocating for strengthening families and ending institutional care, important steps have been achieved to remove financial barriers to deinstitutionalisation using the ESIF:

- in Bulgaria, over €160 million has been allocated for deinstitutionalisation reforms;
- Romania has allocated over €100 million to close 50 old-type institutions for children;

[140] Social housing is a part of it; however there are no data available on social housing in particular.

- with the help of the ESF, support services for foster carers will be developed in Latvia and over €90 million will contribute towards deinstitutionalisation reform through the ESF and ERDF; and
- five calls for proposals financed by the ESF were launched to support deinstitutionalisation and the strengthening of families in Croatia[141].

Box 3. Deinstitutionalisation project 'Leave No Child Behind' in Bulgaria

The project 'Leave No Child Behind' was one of the first projects launched in respect of deinstitutionalisation. Initially, the Bulgarian authorities decided to choose children with disabilities as a first beneficiary group, since they were the most vulnerable and at the highest risk of social exclusion. Over the course of project activities, authorities extended the target group to include all children living in institutions in 79 municipalities. This decision was based on the aim of optimising new services so that they could be provided at full capacity.

The project involved a variety of activities that illustrate the holistic approach of deinstitutionalisation: experts performed children's needs assessments; municipalities developed the necessary infrastructure for service provision during parallel projects; personnel participated in training; foster parent readiness to take care of children was explored; municipalities developed and provided sustainable services in a community environment; etc.

This project is a good example of a combination of several funding sources: the development of necessary infrastructure was funded through the ERDF and EAFRD Operational Programmes, whereas service provision was financed by the ESF (€18,100,422 spent in 2010-2015).

The project resulted in: 179 newly provided community-based social services (target value of 60); 1,349 people from specialised institutions reintegrated in the community (target values of 1,100); 2,046 persons benefited from social services delivered within the community (target value of 800); and 24 closed specialised institutions were created for children with disabilities (target value of 15).

Source: Brožaitis et al. (2018).

The EU Member States also use the ESIF to pilot innovative ways to 'end' (as opposed to 'manage') homelessness among families and children. The goals of such OPs are often more progressive than the actual predominant policy and service approach in place. In this way, EU funding opportunities create room for innovation and institutional and policy shifts. For example, the gold winner of the FEANTSA 2017 Ending Homelessness Award[142], the ESF-funded project 'Housing First for families in Brno'[143] (see Box 3) addressed the problem of homelessness among families with children directly under the *Housing First* approach.

This approach has been tested in other EU Member States as well. The European Union Programme for Employment and Social Security – PROGRESS (2007-2013) supported the Housing First Europe (HFE) social experimentation project, implemented from August 2011 to July 2013, whose aims included the evaluation of, and mutual learning between, local projects in 10 European cities giving homeless people with complex needs immediate access to long-term, self-contained housing and intensive support[144].

HFE in Budapest included families with children, among other target groups; and according to the results of the final evaluation, families with small children were the ones most

[141] Opening Doors for Europe's Children: https://www.openingdoors.eu/europe-making-steady-progress-towards-deinstitutionalisation-of-children-new-fact-sheets-reveal.

[142] FEANTSA (2017).

[143] Brno Housing first project website.

[144] Housing First seeks to move homeless people into permanent housing as quickly as possible with ongoing, flexible and individual support as long as it is needed, but on a voluntary basis. The eight principles of this model, which focuses on homeless people with mental illness and concurrent substance abuse, are: housing as a basic human right; respect, warmth and compassion for all clients; a commitment to working with clients for as long as they need; scattered-site housing in independent apartments; separation of housing and services; consumer choice and self-determination; a recovery orientation; and harm reduction.

motivated to get into and keep accommodation. For almost all HFE projects there were also reports of progress made in reconnecting with family members and estranged children[145]. However, in Budapest, financial challenges were reported in relation to the individual rates available for housing and support, which were far too low and time-limited. The fact that the weak welfare system does not provide for any substantial housing allowances, and that benefits to guarantee a minimum income are extremely low and do not allow for a decent life, was also challenging. In such a context, larger long-term funding would have been needed to cover housing costs and provide more active and multidimensional support for those who were formerly homeless[146].

Box 4. Ending Family Homelessness through 'Housing First in Brno: A Randomised Controlled Trial'

In April 2016, a Housing First pilot project funded by the ESF was launched in Brno, the second largest city in the Czech Republic with a population of 400,000. When the pilot was launched there were 421 homeless families living in the city; 19 of them lived in temporary hostels and 64 in shelters, while the rest stayed in overcrowded households or 'couchsurfed' where they could. Two thirds of the families were headed by a single parent, two thirds were Roma, the average age of the mothers was 35 and on average the families had been homeless for 6 years. Disability, illness, debt and institutional care were some of the factors affecting the lives of those families.

The key partners in the project – Brno municipality, flat-owners, social services, the University of Ostrava and the Platform for Social Housing – randomly selected 150 families out of the 421 to take part in the project. 50 families were given immediate access to housing and the necessary support (the treatment group), while the other 100 continued to receive support as usual (the control group). The University of Ostrava followed the families over a 12-month period and found that 48 of the 50 treatment group families remained housed after a year. On average, the families involved spent 11.8 months of the 12 months in regular rental housing, compared with 2.7 months for the control group. The total budget of this Brno project was €372,290 with an ESF grant of €369,656 for 2016-2018. Brno municipality has provided co-financing from the city budget.

It is worth mentioning that in the previous programming period, projects aimed at rehabilitation and expansion of social housing infrastructure and urban environment in Brno were funded under the Integrated Urban Development Plan (IUDP) set up within the country's national Integrated Operational Programme (2007-2013). The total budget of €11.6 million and ERDF support of €5.26 million was allocated for the IUDP of Brno for the period 2008 to 2015. However, only soft measures funded by the ESF in 2014-2020 delivered tangible results in reducing homelessness and housing exclusion for families with children. Some of the main benefits of the project were that children of rehoused families avoided 3,984 days in institutional and foster care, the rate of child injuries fell from 12% to 2.4%, the number of respiratory diseases among children fell by 50%, and the number of hospitalisations and the use of antibiotics also fell significantly.

Sources: Brno Housing first project website; Brno city website; FEANTSA (2017); DG REGIO project database.

To summarise, activities focused on the issue of child homelessness and housing exclusion were eligible for financing from the ESIF and FEAD at the level of Member States and mainly from EaSI (PROGRESS in 2007-2013) for mutual learning. Investments in housing and social infrastructure as well as social inclusion measures have been financed from the ERDF and ESF under Thematic Objective 9 'Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination', though the general strategic and monitoring framework for the funding does not prioritise children or families with children as target groups. However, at project level there are a few examples where families with children were put at the centre of interventions addressing homelessness and housing exclusion. These include pilot implementation of the Housing First approach aimed at social experimentation and evaluation of results achieved in order to scale up successful intervention, as well as targeted counselling and assistance funded by the FEAD and ERDF, and ESF support to deinstitutionalisation reforms in the EU Member States. These projects were developed as

[145] Busch-Geertsema (2013).
[146] Ibid., p.75-76.

a policy response to national and/or local needs (FEAD projects in Germany), EU and national strategic framework (e.g. deinstitutionalisation reforms), or policy experimentation to test innovative approaches to address societal challenges (*Housing First* approach).

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

In the 2014-2020 ESIF programming period, the 2013 Recommendation on Investing in children was used to leverage more funding from the ESF, ERDF and FEAD for children and their families. The programming rules of the 2014-2020 period foresaw a strengthened link to the European Semester. Member States now have to make a clear link between EU-funded interventions and the Europe 2020 strategy at the programming stage, with a particular focus on the relevant country-specific recommendations. Although interventions targeting homeless children and their families are funded to some extent in several Member States, a lack of clear objectives and targets on reducing child homelessness discourages commitments to invest in this area and complicates the monitoring and reporting of progress.

2.1 Impact on target group

Examples of ESIF-funded projects and FEAD-funded activities in Germany, presented in the first section of this case study, were based on the strategic individual needs assessment of the target groups, though children were not a primary target group for these interventions (with the exception of 'Leave No Child Behind'). Due to monitoring requirements, information on participants or recipients of assistance is unavailable or limited to the number of children below 15 years old (in the case of the FEAD).

The impact of interventions addressing homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families is usually assessed at the level of individual projects or groups of similar projects. For example, the 'Leave No Child Behind' project in Bulgaria demonstrated higher than planned numbers of persons benefiting from social services delivered within the community and closed specialised institutions for children with disabilities (see Box 2).

In Brno, the University of Ostrava followed the families who received housing support over a 12-month period and found that the rehousing project had a positive impact in terms of children's health and well-being (see Box 3).

The Housing First approach applied in Brno was also shown to reunite families. Children in the treatment group spent on average 33 days less in institutional or foster care than those in the control group. As one mother put it:

'When we lived in the hostel, my daughter would hardly communicate, she was silent all the time …. And now that we have the flat she has started to communicate, she has her own room, she talks, she learns, she is happier'[147].

Other parents have also noticed better educational achievements and socio-emotional improvements after their children have a safe and decent place (even their own room) to live, learn and grow. The project can reduce the negative impact of anti-Roma discrimination in the housing sector, which impedes Roma families from obtaining permanent housing. The project aimed at an 80% housing retention rate after one year, and reached 96% in 2018. In addition, the experiment showed the Housing First approach helped make municipality expenditure savings of CZK 1,573,850 (€61,002) in 12 months.

The indirect impact of EU-funded interventions on children experiencing homelessness and housing exclusion would result in the changed employment status and incomes of their parents. But due to the fact that children usually are not involved in the decisions on family spending, this effect is limited and difficult to measure.

[147] Ripka et al. (2018).

The main factor in the success of the Brno project was close co-operation by families with social workers, and individual case management. Strict obligations were imposed on participating families – they had to co-operate intensively with social workers, not to have any rent or energy debts when renewing the contract, and not to breach the terms of the lease. Also, social workers worked with parents to place children in ordinary, non-segregated nursery and primary schools and were looking to significantly improve their schooling achievements.

'We provide our clients with support instead of control, we respect their choice and we work to minimise the risks and adverse effects of bad decisions. Our common job is to maintain housing and all other interests and goals are determined only by the client. At the same time, by using motivational interviews, we outline important changes and bring new topics into co-operation' explained Jan Milota, a social worker.

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

The examples of FEAD interventions in Germany, the housing project in Brno and the deinstitutionalisation project in Bulgaria show that the leverage effect of EU funding on the allocation of extra resources for the target group is threefold.

Firstly, the allocation of ESIF and FEAD funding requires national co-financing from the national and/or regional budget or private funding, as the EU co-financing rate in respect of the ESIF varies from 40% to 85% and is 85% for the FEAD. The EU-level requirement to allocate 20% of the ESF to social inclusion investment, as well as decisions at national level on the allocation of EU funding, serve to leverage additional funding for strategic objectives.

Secondly, innovative interventions (implemented as pilot projects) can be scaled up and this will stimulate allocation of extra resources for interventions addressing the target groups. For example, based on positive project results in Brno, the Housing First intervention is going to be scaled up in Brno and across the Czech Republic to ensure the knowledge gained is used to its full potential. An ESF call for the period 2018-2021 expects to support between 30 and 50 Housing First projects and 500 to 750 households. This is in line with the European Commission's ambition to change the way homelessness is tackled across the EU. The aspiration is to reduce the amount of money spent on emergency responses, such as shelters and temporary accommodation, and instead promote investment in social housing.

Thirdly, ESIF funding provisions require that steps are taken to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved. At the project development stage, sustainability is assessed as one of the key aspects of ensuring that the results achieved can be sustained and that sufficient means of financing further assistance are in place. However, research shows that funding coming from the ESIF in most Member States is extremely marginal in comparison with national and local level funding streams, especially if there are targeted housing policy measures from the national budget[148]. The main reasons why the funding remains limited are the administrative difficulties associated with EU funds in general, and (in particular) co-ordination of ESF and ERDF, or ESF and FEAD, activities; and few or weak incentives within the EU funding programmes for municipalities and NGOs to tackle core issues of homelessness[149].

The Housing First project in Brno demonstrated success, so that Brno dedicated all needed units to ending family homelessness by 2020. The project was operated by the city, the social department dedicated personnel working on it, and its lessons were integrated into the city system for tackling homelessness. However, the fact that only 1.6% of the project's cost was covered by the city budget shows that financial sustainability of such innovative interventions could be highly dependent on EU or international funding.

[148] Teller (2018).
[149] Ibid.

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

EU funds can have an effect on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes through regulations and eligibility requirements, and through financing innovative projects and inspiring practice. In order to ensure that Member States meet the conditions necessary for effective support through the ESIF, the regulations have laid down ex ante conditionalities, linked to specific investment or EU priorities, or to the existence of the administrative capacity needed to invest EU funds effectively. Although formally linked to receiving support from the ESIF, such conditionalities were likely to have a much wider effect. They could help tackle barriers to investment in the EU; they supported EU policy objectives; and they triggered policy reforms and the delivery of relevant country-specific recommendations.

Box 4. Monitoring methodology on the inclusion of Roma in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, to fulfil the ex-ante conditionality on the integration of marginalised Roma communities, a monitoring methodology was adopted on the **inclusion of Roma** in education, **housing**, social services, employment and health services in order to measure the impact of planned substantial ESIF investments in these areas. This example illustrates the contribution of ex ante conditionality to addressing weaknesses pointed out by the European Court of Auditors. Also, the Czech government in 2016 approved a strategy to fight social exclusion, one of whose goals was to move 6,000 families from hostels to standard housing by the end of 2020.

Source: European Commission (2017).

Although Housing First projects have proved to be successful in several EU Member States and in the USA, the Housing First project in Brno was a pioneer and the first randomised controlled trial in social policy to be performed in the Czech Republic, which led the way to greater reliance on evidence-based policy and focus on outcomes. Housing First itself is one of the most innovative shifts in social policy in recent decades, which has moved from programmatic innovation to a leading approach in the health and human services sector in less than 20 years. The project philosophy – housing as a basic necessity – responds to the individual needs of beneficiaries: homeless families are interested in being housed, and see housing as their main problem. For the first time in Brno, housing was not allocated according to criteria of deservingness or through financial competition, but randomly. The project treated housing as a basic necessity so there were no preconditions (apart from being a household with children living in Brno City and be willing to co-operate with social workers) attached to beneficiary families – the most needy could be supported in contrast to the usual approach that excludes indebted families and is sometimes discriminatory[150].

The project has created a model for other cities to adopt for their family population. Other municipalities from the Czech Republic are interested in this project and are willing to implement similar projects in their cities. The new manual of social work, which is in the process of preparation and is inspired by the Housing First model, is transferable to follow-up projects. The successful implementation of the innovative EU-funded Housing Project in Brno provides reliable evidence for decision-makers considering policy shifts in addressing the problem of homelessness and housing exclusion. Similar examples of EU-funded Housing First pilot projects can also be found in other EU Member States. In Italy, successful implementation of the Housing First approach led to a binding national regulation for EU-funded interventions to apply Housing First to addressing the problem of homelessness and housing exclusion.

In the case of deinstitutionalisation projects, EU funding also works as a lever to develop a comprehensive strategy or reform package, due to requirements embedded in ex-ante conditionalities. For example, Bulgaria has adopted the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020, and an action plan for its implementation, in order to use EU funding available for the social inclusion investment priority, and has set the specific objective of: '*Reducing the number of children and youth placed in institutions*

[150] Ripka et al. (2018).

by providing community-based social and health services'. Progress towards this objective is monitored by indicators aimed at counting *children and youth in institutional care covered by deinstitutionalisation measures,* as well as *children receiving community-based services after leaving institutions.*

The major factor that contributed to the overall success of deinstitutionalisation in Bulgaria was a strong political consensus and support from policy-makers at the highest level. However, the project also faced some challenges during implementation. The children's needs assessment activity fell behind schedule due to prolonged discussions, uncertainty about the approach, lack of experience and managerial challenges. Due to this delay in the assessment, the placement of children and service provision also did not start on time. According to ERDF rules, the municipalities had to start service provision in the facilities that were constructed through ERDF funding within three months after completion. The delay of primary activities created a risk that this rule would be violated, putting the whole project at risk. This example shows that there is a need for better co-ordination and alignment of ESF and ERDF regulations and implementation rules.

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

Desk research shows that overall ESIF goals are relevant to providing support for homeless children and their families, especially in the housing area. Still, the use of the funds for housing is quite low and children are not prioritised for housing interventions at programme level. A qualitative study, which investigated the situation of homeless children from the children's own perspective, shed light on the absence of references to children in housing legislation and housing policy plans, and their invisibility in statistics on homelessness. It also confirmed many of the structural causes of family homelessness and in particular the centrality of poverty and domestic violence[151].

In some countries the EU-funded Operational Programmes' goals on homelessness are sometimes more progressive than the actual predominant policy and service approach in place. These features of ESIF-funded OPs provide room for innovation, and institutional and policy shifts[152]. The lessons for EU Funding Programmes from this case study and earlier research are relevant both at the EU and national level to attempts to tackle homelessness and housing exclusion for children and their families in a more effective way. These include the revision and application of a strategic and monitoring framework as well as implementation provisions which make homeless children visible.

Recommendations derived from the peer review on homelessness from a child's perspective are formulated around six key policy elements: 1) make homeless children visible in policy plans and statistics; 2) reinforce their legal provision; 3) enhance local governance and collaboration; 4) develop child-friendly shelters and support; 5) prevent child homelessness; and 6) improve the housing allocation system[153].

Translating these recommendations into the management system for EU funding, the following actions should be considered:

- introduce a stronger rights-based approach in legislative proposals for the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and a thematic focus on children within the strategic and monitoring framework;
- encourage the use of EU funding as a lever to end children homelessness, and develop incentives for Member States to follow EU social inclusion policies and European Semester recommendations;
- simplify difficult administrative procedures for EU funds; promote the possibility of Member States using a multi-fund approach, and develop further support for them

[151] ICF and European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (2018).

[152] Teller (2018).

[153] Ibid.

to do so – e.g. by combining ESF and ERDF funding for housing with social support and intensive case management;

- limit the administrative complexity of EU fund management to facilitate their mobilisation by NGOs;
- focus more on strengthening prevention and service development, initiating long-term projects and funding cross-sectoral co-operation to address the complex needs of homeless children;
- promote the evaluation of innovative projects as a prerequisite for evidence-based decisions; and
- scale up individual examples of best practice.

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Feasibility Study for a Child Guarantee

Case study
The World Bank Project for Roma children in Eastern Europe

2019

George Bogdanov
National Network for Children

Contents

Summary

This case study is a review of programmes for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in some countries of central and eastern Europe funded by the World Bank and by other organisations or private funds. It mainly reviews funding programmes supporting Roma children's access to ECEC, with a focus on those emphasising the access to, and affordability of, crèches, kindergartens, and pre-school programmes. The coverage of programmes, other than those of the World Bank, is aimed at providing a wider basis for comparison and analysis of the efficiency of projects. The review is based on monitoring and evaluation documents (where available), and on reports and studies of the World Bank and of organisations that have received funding. Additional information has been provided by experts and stakeholders. However, the lack of comparable programmes and approaches[154] made the analysis difficult. Insufficient data (quantitative in particular) also limited the possibility of gathering comprehensive information on some programmes, funding instruments, and selection processes.

The main objective of many funding programmes is to improve both the affordability of ECEC and its accessibility (in terms of both physical accessibility and distance from home to the service). Studies and independent evaluations show that eliminating fees for nurseries and kindergartens, and the provision of financial incentives to families for regular attendance of children, play a huge role in increasing enrolment. Field work and outreach through trained health and/or education mediators from the community are generally seen as conducive to positive programme outcomes, along with information sessions with parents and the professionals providing the service, and cooperation with parents and the wider community. Inclusion of local actors – such as local city councils, municipalities, non-government organisations (NGOs), and civic associations – is also considered beneficial for achieving programme goals.

One of the systemic barriers in all countries covered is the lack of a legislative framework, and of national policies, aimed at comprehensive and prioritised early intervention and care. Studies and evaluations also include among the main recommendations the need for coordination between different stakeholders responsible for children aged 0-6, meaning that ECEC should be mainstreamed into the policies of all ministries, social services, crèches, schools, and other entities dealing with children and families.

Future funding for early childhood development projects should be linked to government policy changes and be mainstreamed. Investment in projects for children must be sustainable and so in practice depend not only on project funding but on sustainable financing from government with the participation of NGOs, academia, and other key actors in society.

[154] Programmes often target different children's needs, use different approaches, and have different criteria for allocating funding.

1 Description of funding programmes

This case study reviews World Bank-funded programmes for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in some countries – Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as a number of similar programmes funded by other organisations targeted at Roma children and/or disadvantaged children generally. The significance of this case study in the context of the Child Guarantee relates to the relevance of the area and the targeting at children experiencing significant disadvantage. Relevant programme evaluations and other reports from the World Bank and beneficiary organisations were reviewed and interviews were conducted with experts and stakeholders. The main difficulty of this exercise lay in the wide variety of legislation, financing instruments, and ECEC policies in the countries covered.

Four programmes funded by the World Bank are described below.

The **Social Inclusion Project (SIP) of the World Bank in Bulgaria** was designed to support the pilot phase of a national school readiness programme composed of a range of early childhood development interventions targeted at low-income and marginalised children below the age of 7, including those with a disability. Education represented a key element of the strategy adopted to address persistent pockets of poverty and social exclusion, particularly in rural areas and in Roma settlements[155]. The SIP was launched in November 2008 and lasted until December 2015, with a total budget amounting to €136.73 m[156]. The pilot was to be implemented in about 30% of Bulgaria's 265 municipalities, the remaining municipalities forming a control group against which the effects of the project could be measured. Support was channelled through two components as follows.

- An integrated social and child service component providing grants to pilot municipalities to deliver integrated services to the children targeted and their parents.
- A capacity-building component aimed at strengthening national capacity for programme management, implementation, and evidence-based learning and improvement, including support for baseline, mid-term, and impact evaluations. It was also aimed at supporting municipal capacity-building for cooperation, collaboration with non-government organisations (NGOs), and accessing EU funds.

The SIP was assessed in 2018 by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank Group[157]. According to the results of the assessment (World Bank Group, 2018), many service delivery output targets were exceeded, despite substantially delayed and compressed service delivery time frames. But these outputs are not a proxy for the outcomes embedded in the objectives. 80% of children aged 6-7 and identified as vulnerable, who were exposed to SIP kindergartens and pre-school groups for at least a year, passed school readiness tests, compared with a 49% pass rate in a 2012 matched baseline group. However, evidence is lacking to assess the effectiveness of the targeting

[155] Poverty in Bulgaria is associated with lack of education, old age, rural location and ethnicity. More than two-thirds of Bulgarians who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion either did not complete primary school or, in some cases, secondary education (World Bank Group, 2018).

[156] The funding became effective on 16 April 2009 and ended on 31 December 2015 (World Bank Group, 2018).

[157] The IEG assesses the programmes and activities of the World Bank. Its staff examine project files and other documents, visit the borrowing country to discuss the operation with the government, and other in-country stakeholders, interview World Bank staff and other donor agency staff both at headquarters and in local offices as appropriate, and apply other evaluative methods as needed. Each project performance assessment report (PPAR) is subject to technical peer review, internal IEG panel review, and management approval. Once cleared internally, the PPAR is commented on by the responsible World Bank country management unit. The PPAR is also sent to the borrower for review. IEG incorporates both World Bank and borrower comments as appropriate, and the borrower's comments are attached to the document that is sent to the World Bank's Board of Executive Directors. After an assessment report has been sent to the Board, it is disclosed to the public.

of low-income, marginalised children and their parents (except for disabled children), as was envisaged under the project.

Moreover, project efficiency seems modest as there were limitations in the implementation of SIP. Significant delays in implementation curtailed the time frame for service delivery and reduced cost efficiency. In addition, there were shortcomings in targeting and reaching the low-income, marginalised sections of the population (including the failure to involve NGOs, community-based organisations, and other local actors, which could have provided better data, insights, and outreach to relevant communities).

Risks identified when designing the project did not include the difficulty of recruiting the substantial number of professional service-providers needed, given their limited supply in the country and the low pay levels in social services.

The **Social Inclusion Project (SIP) of the World Bank in Romania** was launched in 2006 and ended in 2014. Its objective was to improve the living conditions and social inclusion of the most disadvantaged/vulnerable people in Romania, as well as to strengthen the administration of social assistance benefits (World Bank Group, 2015).

Component 2 of the project focused on inclusive early childhood education (ECE) and was aimed at supporting the Ministry of Education and Research's ECE programme by mainstreaming the participation of children from vulnerable groups, including Roma, into the regular policies and programmes of the Ministry. This meant in practice:

- the construction, extension, rehabilitation, and furnishing of ECE infrastructure in communities with a high percentage of Roma;
- the development of an inclusive ECE curriculum, the provision of training to ECE staff, the development and distribution of ECE teaching and learning materials, and the provision of technical assistance to entities entitled to submit applications for projects to be financed through the EU Structural Funds;
- the promotion of integrated services and alternative community-based solutions for ECE, including the development of coherent ECE legislation, and the provision of training and counselling programmes for parents; and
- carrying out monitoring and evaluation, and information/education/communication activities.

The total estimated cost of the project was $71.4 m (around €64.6 m) of which $6.9 m (nearly €6 m) was for Component 2. The project was evaluated in 2015 by the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank Group. The evaluation concluded that the achievement of objectives for Component 2 was rather modest, though it is important to keep the relatively small amount of funding in mind. Just 19 new pre-school units were built and furnished and 8 existing units were refurbished in areas where there is a large proportion of Roma children aged 0-6. Nevertheless, education material was developed[158], and in-service training for upgrading staff skills in ECE units was implemented. ECE teaching and learning material, primarily for ECE project units, and training in preparation for ECE projects eligible for EU financing, were also provided. Community-based services were developed on a pilot basis. Training programmes and modules for counselling parents were set up, as well as a monitoring and evaluation system for early childhood development. As a result, the participation of children from vulnerable groups in ECEC in targeted communities increased by 6 percentage points (from 70% to 76%), as compared with a target of a 5 percentage-point increase, and there was an increase of 11% in the number

[158] Development of an ECE curriculum for children aged 0-3, a revised curriculum for children aged 3-6, a methodological guide for teaching the new curriculum for those aged 0-3, and a good practice guide for teaching and non-teaching staff dealing with those aged 3-6. The quality standards for teaching and learning material were also updated.

of staff with inclusive education skills. In addition, the community-based pilot was successfully introduced in isolated communities, exposing parents to early childhood education and practices.

The **Trust for Social Achievement (TSA) programme in Bulgaria**, funded by the World Bank, includes projects focused on early childhood development and educational achievement, and in particular on a child's first thousand days of life. It encourages healthy parenting and increased participation in pre-school provision. The programme covers the following areas: preventing teenage pregnancy; providing specialised nursing support for first-time parents; improving nutrition habits during pregnancy and early childhood; increasing access to good-quality childcare services for children aged up to 6 by building capacity through partnership with other organisations, institutions, and professionals; developing social, emotional, and cognitive skills and increasing the number of children at risk of poverty who attend kindergartens and pre-school programmes.

The TSA programme involves 101 funded projects with a total budget of BGN 4.9 m (around €2.5 m), 33 grant recipients, and 18,116 beneficiaries (including 429 in maternal and infant health, 150 in specialised home visiting care, and 9,487 in pre-school and kindergarten programmes)[159]. In the 2014-2015 school year, a project encouraged pre-school and kindergarten enrolment of 5,737 children from vulnerable groups (predominantly of Roma and Turkish origin, but also from other disadvantaged families). It continued up to the 2017-2018 school year and was aimed at covering tuition fees and other charges for enrolment in kindergartens and pre-school groups, and at teaching families the importance of pre-school attendance. It was implemented in cooperation with 20 civil society organisations that waived pre-primary fees for Roma children and gave some families a small stipend to encourage enrolment. An evaluation was carried out in 2016 in 236 settlements that had at least 25 households with children aged 3-6. The communities were randomly assigned to either receiving one of three financial packages – removal of fees, or having fees removed with a monthly voucher worth about either $5 or $13 (€4 or €12) for regular attendance – or being part of the control group and receiving no incentives. The communities were then randomly assigned again, so that half of each group were given the opportunity of participating in community outreach meetings. The results showed that removing the costs of pre-primary programmes increased enrolment in ECEC by 19% and improved attendance by 24%[160].

The **World Bank's pilot project entitled 'A Good Start' (AGS)**, implemented by the Roma Education Fund and partners[161], and supported by the EU, the Lego Foundation, and the Bernard van Leer foundation, took place from June 2010 to June 2012 in 16 localities across central and eastern Europe, in particular in **Slovakia**, **Romania**, and **Hungary**. It targeted Roma and non-Roma children aged 0-6 and their parents, offering good-quality ECEC services. The total budget amounted to €2.5 m (World Bank, 2013). The programme involved a complex set of centre-, community-, and home-based interventions that were customised to the local community. Certain activities were common to all localities. The breadth of activities included: supporting children to attend formal kindergartens; training teachers and support staff; providing informal classes for children; parenting classes; and enrolment support such as helping children to get identity cards and vaccinations. The approach was tailored to the needs of people, taking into account the varying quality of provision in the different localities. Where possible there was close collaboration with local authorities and other providers. For example, the local partner organisations employed community mediators, predominantly of Roma ethnic origin, whose role was to conduct intensive outreach work and liaise with local communities and institutions. They also

[159] https://socialachievement.org/en/what-we-do/program-areas/early-childhood-development-program.

[160] Note that enrolment relates to registering children for attendance, while attendance relates to the actual presence of children in ECEC activities.

[161] These partners are the International Step by Step Association, the Spanish Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, and the Slovak Governance Institute.

conducted regular home visits and helped families enrol their children in pre-school programmes. The basic structure was complemented by country-specific activities.

In Romania, similar reading activities were designed into the project's framework; these involved the participation of local AGS partners and parents. In Slovakia, AGS activities included after-school instruction and tutoring provided in the first year of primary education. To facilitate pre-school attendance, material support was distributed that addressed differing needs (such as clothes, shoes, school supplies, and hygiene packages). In some cases, children were also transported and accompanied to and from school. In addition to these project-wide and country-specific activities, each locality within the AGS project received assistance to conduct additional locality-specific activities; for example, certain localities were given help vaccinating children, or assisting parents and children to obtain official identification documents.

In addition, AGS sought to strengthen the quality of the education and care services in several localities, and targeted key local stakeholders in many of the communities. For example, it supported the development of greater pre-school capacity for local Roma children and the provision of alternative services in Slovakia. It sought to improve the quality of pre-school facilities through training of teachers and care-providers, and employing and/or training Roma pre-school assistants (e.g. in Hungary).

At the start of the AGS project, enrolment among beneficiary children in the 3-6 age group was low. However, it increased substantially for those aged 3-5 in each of the four AGS countries over the project period. In particular, enrolment increased from 92% to 100% in AGS localities in both Hungary and Romania, and from 41% to 66% in Slovakia (World Bank, 2013).

Similar projects, not funded by the World Bank, have also been implemented in central and eastern Europe. A few are briefly summarised below.

- In Romania, the Ovidiu Ro organisation implemented the project 'Every Child in a Kindergarten', funded by the Romanian corporate sector and an American non-profit organisation (the Alex Fund), which was aimed at encouraging the participation of children from disadvantaged families in pre-primary education by providing families with RON 50 (around €10) a month for attendance for more than half of the time, aimed at improving the nutrition of the children concerned. As at January 2017, 62,000 children were registered and 38,000 received daily attendance and food coupons[162]. It was demonstrated that by continually bringing early education issues to local attention, holding regular local action group meetings, and circulating the initial positive results, the community could believe in positive changes[163].
- The project 'Toy for Inclusion', co-funded by the European Commission and the Open Society Institute, focussed on Roma, migrant, and socially disadvantaged children. It has been implemented in Slovakia, Hungary, and several other EU countries from 2017 to 2019 and is aimed at improving the transition of Roma

[162] Between 2010 and 2015, over 6,000 children in 45 rural and semi-rural communities benefited from early education and better nutrition through pilot *Fiecare Copil in Gradinita* programmes, which were part of the project 'Every Child in a Kindergarten'. Apart from direct family incentives in the form of food coupons, the programme also included cooperation with local councils, with a yearly contribution of €35 per child included in the project (mainly for clothes and shoes). In addition, local councils were in charge of forming the implementation team composed of pre-school teachers, a social worker, and a school mediator. Ovidiu Ro allocated €15 per child per year to buy school materials and handbooks, and also provided training for implementation teams.

[163] http://www.alexfund.org/our-mission/overview-of-the-fiecare-copil-in-gradinita-pilot-program.

children to schools and their preparedness for formal education, and at increasing the trust of Roma communities in local services. Over 4,000 children were involved in the activities in 2018[164].

- In Hungary, EU-funded programmes aimed at improving the accessibility and quality of ECE institutions were established[165]. In addition, the government funded programmes that improved the nutrition of disadvantaged children[166].

2 Evaluation of Strengths and Weaknesses

2.1 Impact on target group

The SIP of the World Bank in Bulgaria faced significant delays due to changes in implementation arrangements and government limits on project expenditure following the 2008 economic crisis. The project lasted eight years, but children were enrolled in kindergartens and pre-school programmes only during the project's last two years, and services were delivered during the last six to eight months (World Bank Group, 2018). However, project inputs (i.e. infrastructure and 1,409 staff) enabled new places to be created, enrolment in kindergarten and pre-school programmes to be increased, and integrated social services for target children in the 66 pilot municipalities to be established. In total, 2,357 new places in kindergartens and pre-school programmes were created – exceeding the 1,600 target – and 4,420 children aged 3-7 were newly enrolled in kindergartens and pre-school programmes, surpassing the 3,000 target (although there is no breakdown to indicate how many of these came from the low-income, marginalised groups targeted by the project). The project also created 113 community centres for the provision of services, exceeding the target of 68. However, despite a target that at least 30% of new children enrolled should come from the target groups, this share was not routinely monitored and World Bank reports noted difficulty in ensuring a sufficient representation of Roma children within that quota. In addition, there was no systematic monitoring of the target children's performance compared with their better-off counterparts.

In Romania, the SIP of the World Bank resulted in an increase in the participation of children from vulnerable groups (by 6 percentage points, slightly more than the initial target). However, overall efficiency was limited by capacity constraints, particularly at local level, and by government bureaucratic procedures surrounding project implementation. The beneficial effects on the target group were also difficult to quantify as no quantitative estimates of efficiency were made during the project's implementation (World Bank Group, 2015).

In the case of the Bulgarian TSA programme, the evaluation shows that relieving parents of paying for pre-primary programmes increased enrolment by 19% and improved attendance by 24%. This finding is supported by another Bulgarian study (World Bank Group, 2017) which found that covering school fees for children of vulnerable groups reduced by half the number of children not enrolled and boosted the attendance rate by 20%. However, although more Roma children went to school, they did not show the same

[164] https://www.reyn.eu/toy4inclusion.

[165] The regional operational programmes within the New Széchenyi Plan – which is responsible for the regulation of the allocation of EU funds – provided financing for infrastructural development. Moreover, since September 2015, in line with the principles set out in the document 'Hungarian Social Inclusion Strategy II – Permanently Deprived Persons – Children Living in Poor Families – the Roma' (2011-2020), children must be provided with ECE from the age of 3.

[166] A large number of children can eat for free: those living in families with at least three children receive meals in crèches and kindergartens free of charge; the so-called 'kindergarten milk' programme provides 0.25 litres of dairy products four times a week to every child; and the provision of a free meal during school breaks became mandatory for local municipalities from 2016.

developmental progress as other children; and in some cases, Roma children in the programme did slightly worse than children who did not go to school.

The other measures of the TSA programme failed to increase enrolment any further. For instance, offering an additional cash incentive did not have any effect on top of removing school fees. Regular attendance at kindergarten by a child entailed a big change in lifestyle and daily routine for the whole family, so the envisaged additional compensation of BGN 7-20 (around €3.5-10) a month, paid only if the child attended over 70% of the time, was not a sufficient stimulus. To be efficient, conditional cash transfers should be tailored to those in need and combined with social services, and they should avoid stigmatisation (European Commission, 2014). The long-term effects of the conditional cash transfers on ECEC participation seem rather small and the TSA programme shows that many other factors, such as the socio-economic status of the family, level of parental education, and even the gender of the child, have a greater impact on long-term outcomes.

Information campaigns, with no financial incentives, had a positive effect on parental attitudes and interest in kindergartens even if parents did not immediately decide to enrol their child. Yet the most powerful means of boosting enrolment of children from vulnerable groups was to abolish fees and hidden expenses (for leisure activities, excursions, education materials, etc.). The combination of information sessions with parents and no fees for early education was the best way to boost enrolment and change parental attitudes to ECEC in the long term.

This conclusion is also supported by the results of an independent evaluation in Romania of the school food coupon programme developed by the Ovidiu Ro organisation (but not financed by the World Bank). The share of children aged between 3 and 6 in the pilot municipalities *(Fiecare Copil in Gradinita* [FCG] programmes) enrolled in the education system (pre-school classes or *clasa pregătitoare*) was 10 percentage points higher than average. About 300 children in the municipalities concerned are estimated to have enrolled in the education system who would not have done so in the absence of the programme. This means that about a third of the children in question would not have been enrolled at all without the FCG programme.

The involvement of Roma teaching assistants (or school mediators) also helped to achieve positive results at relatively low cost. However, their role needed to be better defined, as mediators were often diverted to do administrative work or cleaning, or they were assigned to teach Roma children in place of qualified teachers, leaving these to teach only non-Roma children (Kreindler and Stuppert, 2015).

2.2 Impact on leveraging extra resources for the target group

Analysis of funding programmes shows that extra resources should be allocated only when programme design has been undertaken in a detailed and holistic way, such as: ensuring the accessibility and affordability of pre-school services; supporting parents in covering hidden expenses for their children's attendance (shoes, clothing, school materials); involving parents in decisions on their children's lives and future; and involving local communities and creating ownership of the programmes by making results visible and stressing their importance. Overall, the World Bank programmes managed to leverage additional funds but faced many administrative difficulties and delays.

The financing plan of the SIP of the World Bank in Bulgaria included contributions of €73.43 m from government (including European Social Fund financing for a nationwide programme roll-out) and €23.30 m from local communities to cover total costs of €136.73 m. However, on five occasions, implementation arrangements were modified, with more loans allocated to cover municipality payments, the results framework revised, activities reduced, part of a loan (€8.6 m) cancelled, and the closing date extended twice. The government also reduced its contribution because of budget constraints following the economic crisis. As a result, the total project cost amounted to €25.99 m.

The project was successful in developing the capacity of municipalities to access EU funds. 97% of the pilot municipalities obtained EU funding to continue the provision of services initiated under the SIP. However, the period between the end of World Bank funding and the start of EU financing averaged six months and led to breaks in the provision of services (World Bank Group, 2018). In the period 2015-2018 and under the 'Human Resources Development' Operational Programme (OP HRD), BGN 30 m (around €15 m) was allocated to the municipalities concerned for early childhood development projects. All the projects under the OP HRD should have been finalised by the end of 2018 but some of them are still ongoing because of delays. There are no monitoring or evaluation measures in place to assess the effectiveness of this funding.

In Romania, the SIP total costs were estimated at $71.40 m (€64.6 m) at appraisal. However, the costs at closure amounted to only $53.50 m (€48.5 m) because of the cancellation of $20.9 m (€18.9 m) of World Bank funds as a result of underspending on community sub-projects. The government contribution was $12 m (€11 m) at appraisal, but it increased to $15 m (€13.6 m) after the VAT rate was raised from 19% to 24% in 2010. Local communities contributed $0.9 m (€0.8 m). The project's financing arrangements were altered by the closure of three designated accounts and the reimbursement to the Bank of advances made when the government took the decision to pre-finance all externally financed project expenditure from the national budget (World Bank Group, 2015).

The World Bank's AGS project was mainly financed by the European Commission DG for Regional Policy (€2,046,104). To supplement this, the Roma Education Fund involved a number of other donors who financed complementary activities: the Bernard van Leer Foundation (€260,918), the LEGO Foundation (€107,660), and the Network of European Foundations (€69,134) (World Bank, 2013).

2.3 Impact on national (and sub-national) policies and programmes

In case of the SIP in Bulgaria, the government has taken a number of key policy decisions and initiatives that are supportive of early child development. But a comprehensive, cross-sectoral, evidence-based policy is still needed. Moreover, the pilot project did not culminate in learning and improved development effectiveness (World Bank Group, 2018). Low appreciation of evidence for learning, programme refinement, and policy-making can undermine the effectiveness of programmes and policies, especially where piloting is intended. The development of monitoring and evaluation capacity could provide local ministries with a critical management tool for ensuring continuous learning and accountability for early childhood development results, and increase the potential for mobilising resources and future replication (World Bank Group, 2018).

The evaluation results of the TSA programme in Bulgaria have helped focus the attention of policy-makers and development groups on the challenges of making pre-primary programmes work for all children. The Open Society Foundation is now funding an advocacy project to encourage officials to remove all fees. As part of this, an inter-institutional working group, chaired by the government's Ombudsman office, will propose an operational plan for removing all fees for kindergartens around the country. In addition, the TSA is partnering the government and local organisations in testing new approaches for improving pre-primary education in Bulgaria and promoting access to all. A new curriculum that promotes and recognises diversity will be evaluated with World Bank technical support. The evaluation also includes a component to give Roma parents information on what they can do at home to stimulate their children's development[167].

[167] http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sief-trust-fund/brief/closing-the-early-learning-gap-for-roma-children-in-eastern-europe.

Some programmes, not funded by the World Bank, have led to the adoption of new legislation, as is the case in Romania and Hungary. Since the passage of 'the FCG Law' (or 'Every Child in a Kindergarten' – same name as the Ovidiu Ro project), Romania has seen an increase in the attendance of disadvantaged children in pre-school programmes[168]. In Hungary the Sure Start Programme has become part of the Child Protection Law as a basic component of child welfare services. The government is financing the establishment of the new homes as part of the expansion of the children's home network and their services. They also have created additional training requirements for staff in children's homes. The advocacy element in both programmes is of particular interest and highlights the significance of recognising the strengths of a funding programme and adopting nationwide and state-supported measures to replicate them[169].

2.4 Lessons for EU funding programmes

The strengths of the World Bank programmes are mainly related to their scope (more than 5,800 children are currently covered by the early childhood programmes in Bulgaria); to the involvement of many stakeholders (the state administration, NGOs and businesses); and to the research carried out by the World Bank, which has a direct impact on the implementation of data-based policies.

However, these programmes should be better mainstreamed into the policies of all ministries, social services, crèches, schools, and other entities dealing with children and families. National governments should in particular ensure sustainable funding, with the support of key actors in society, and establish institutions that both monitor quality and make recommendations on ECEC.

National governments should also develop large-scale awareness campaigns targeting parents with young children, and they should reach out to Roma communities in particular. The assessment report of the SIP of the World Bank in Bulgaria emphasises that a mapping of target communities and households and their needs, priorities, motivations, and dynamics, should be undertaken by those with intimate knowledge of the community and with community development expertise. Mobile services and mediators should be used, but they sometimes face challenges due to heavy workloads, poor knowledge of the community, and lack of personnel. Combining their efforts with NGOs, community-based organisations, and others trusted by the community has the potential to increase the coverage and effectiveness of services.

ECEC services are not affordable in many countries. The fees to attend kindergartens can be too high and limit access to ECEC, for instance in Bulgaria. But out-of-pocket expenses and material needs (e.g. clothing) can also be a barrier. National governments should therefore provide monetary and in-kind support and incentives to families. However, conditional cash transfers had a limited impact on ECEC attendance in the case of the TSA programme in Bulgaria, which shows that such an incentive has to be properly tailored to be efficient. Parents, particularly those with addiction problems and those living in poverty, should also be more involved in pre-school programmes with the help of teaching assistants, and should be supported at home.

[168] In the 2017-2018 school year, 46,000 children were registered, and 32,000 attended daily and received food coupons. In Romania, the monthly child allowance (which is unconditional) was, at the time, €10, so the food coupons (also €10 per month) represented a significant increase for families surviving on their child allowances.

[169] The Sure Start Children's Houses support the development of children aged 0-3 in the most disadvantaged micro-regions, in settlements with segregated areas and ghettos. As with the establishment of Sure Start Children's Houses, the establishment of 'Good places' children's houses has been going on since 2017 for settlements with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants. More information available at: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/early-childhood-education-and-care-35_en.

Finally, national governments should increase the availability of pre-school spaces by funding infrastructure development and should ensure that pre-school education is of good quality. Teachers should in particular receive decent remuneration.

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Special thanks go to Eva Izsak and Liana Ghent of the International Step by Step Association; Jana Schierlová from Step by Step in the Czech Republic; Eugenia Volen from the Trust for Social Alternative in Bulgaria and Desislava Kuznecova from World Bank Bulgaria.

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