

Quality of ECE Services

Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Kosovo*

Montenegro



Dr. Jan Peeters
Ghent University



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Kosovo* (UNSCR 1244)

For further information, please contact:

Dr. Jan Peeters

University of Ghent
VBJK
Raas Van Gaverestraat 67A
9000 Ghent, Belgium
jan.peeters@vbjk.be

Dr. Deepa Grover

Regional Adviser
Early Childhood Development
UNICEF Regional Office for
Central and Eastern Europe
& the Commonwealth of
Independent States
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland
degrover@unicef.org
www.unicef.org/ceecis/

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**Quality of ECEC Services
Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*
and Montenegro**

Main report

Dr. Jan Peeters

Introduction

This consultancy emerges from the findings and recommendations of the 2014 Multi-Country Evaluation (MCE) on Increasing Access and Equity in Early Childhood Education. The MCE covered all UNICEF activities related to advancing Early Learning and School Readiness (ELSR) efforts for children in the 3-6 year age group and covered the period 2005 to 2012. Five countries and one territory participated in the MCE: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo*, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. This technical assistance responds to one of the evaluation's recommendations to ensure quality and to review the possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access.

The challenge for CEE/CIS: equitable access to quality ECE services

Across the CEE/CIS region many countries share traditions of state-funded care and education of preschool children under former Soviet or former Yugoslavian systems. Following the collapse of these systems and the loss of social subsidies, many countries were unable to sustain their early childhood education (ECE) and care services because of lack of funds, structures and institutions and political will. In these countries the residual kindergartens are concentrated in urban areas and cater largely to the wealthy, leaving much of the population without access to early childhood education or care.

Many countries in the CEE/CIS region are facing pronounced and pressing challenges related to access, quality and equity in ECE services. This situation affects not only the well-being of children, but also poverty reduction efforts, and the inclusion of specific populations, such as the poorest, rural populations, ethnic minorities, and the most vulnerable. **Robust evidence exists on the benefits of investing in good quality childhood education services for all children and especially for the most disadvantaged.** Providing good quality early childhood education services is an excellent way of nurturing and supporting children's well-being, promoting their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and providing opportunities for learning and developmental readiness for schooling. A wealth of research evidence shows that good quality ECE is **particularly beneficial** for children from poor socio-economic and marginalised groups, as it can compensate for the deprivations of their social environments. Furthermore, good foundations for learning achievement at school contribute to breaking the cycle of disadvantage early in the life of young children. However, this happens **only if** ECE provision is of high quality and is informed by equity and inclusion policies that address the most disadvantaged children. Research findings confirm that **quality** and **equity**, when factored into funding and implementing ECE services, are associated with positive educational, economic, social and poverty reduction impacts in both developed and developing countries.

1 Methodology

We based our findings on desk review of existing documents in English about the three countries and the territory, and we stayed for five days in each of the four countries. During those country visits we did consultations with a wide range of ECE actors and we did also field visits of services. In every country report we will give a list of the documents that were used and of the persons and

organisations that were interviewed. We will also give an overview of different schools that we visited in each country.

2 The need for a common quality framework for the three countries and the territory

A few existing quality frameworks are described here:

- The **OECD** (2012) describes five “policy levers” to encourage quality in ECE. These include: setting out quality goals and regulations; designing and implementing curriculum and standards; improving qualifications, training and working conditions; engaging families and communities; and, advancing data collection, research and monitoring.
- The 2005 **EFA Global Monitoring Report** focused on quality gave priority to teaching and learning processes – including learning time; teaching methods; assessment, feedback, incentives; class size; as well as other enabling inputs that included teaching and learning materials, curriculum, physical learning environment, teacher quality, leadership principals, inspectors, supervisors, administrators and parent and community involvement.
- The **EU** proposal for key principles of a quality framework for ECEC highlight accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding put forward ten statements that high quality ECEC requires.
- The **International Step by Step Association**, working in the CEE/CIS region for several years now, focuses mainly on individual educators in its conceptualisation and advocacy for quality. *Competent Educators for the 21st Century: principles of quality pedagogy*, emphasises interactions, family and community, inclusion, diversity, and values of democracy, assessment and planning, teaching strategies, the learning environment and professional development. The ISSA principles are focusing on the competences of the individual teachers; they describe a list of more than eighty required competences.

For **UNICEF**, quality encompasses physical learning environments, teaching and learning processes, teachers and auxiliary staff, curriculum, leadership and governance and parent and community involvement. Child-centred approaches that are inclusive, with early identification of children at risk, are central to equitable. The quality of professionals – managers, educators, health and social workers – is a prerequisite: workforce training and professional development is essential.

Through quality ECE all children should achieve a **range of outcomes** that support their development and the realisation of their potential and prepares them for school and later life. These include cognitive development measurable through traditional education assessments, but go well beyond this to include children’s holistic development in: (i) physical health and motor development, (ii) socio-emotional development, (iii) approaches to learning and (iv) language development, literacy and communication. Learning outcomes should be defined according to the age, development stage and abilities of each child and assessed against relevant indicators.

UNICEF recognises that achieving and sustaining such outcomes depends not only on supporting the child through quality ECE services, but also through **supportive families** ready

for their child's development and transition to primary education, as well as through **primary schools' readiness** for children's entry into primary education, as reflected in UNICEF's Regional Education Agenda: *Including all children in quality learning* and the regional *Call for Action: Education Equity Now!*

3 European and International Policy Research on quality used in this report

One of the objectives of this consultancy was: 'to share recent research and thinking on the question of quality in ECE services, its relationship to equity and learning outcomes. Here we refer to important European and international studies on quality in ECEC.

The role of ECEC in preventing early school leaving (European Commission, DG E&C, 2012-2014)¹

Early learning and school readiness are crucial concepts in the UNICEF policy in the region (Multi-Country Evaluation, 2014). The ECEC-ESL study did a literature research on the concept of school readiness. According to the traditional understanding, the transition to school has been framed around concept of children's "**school readiness**". In this case the role of early childhood education and care is understood in preparation of children for schools, so that they develop necessary skills and abilities to be able to cope with school programme. This can result in a 'Danger of schoolification' of ECEC. As a result, in an effort to prepare children for academic programmes of primary schools, pre-school systems adopt school-like characteristics, which prevents early childhood education systems from focusing on psychology and natural learning strategies of children (OECD, 2006). The focus on school readiness in the pre-primary 3h programmes and the fact that the PPP are also a part of the school system involves risk for schoolification. Therefore the findings of the ECEC-ESL study are important: "More recent thinking about the transition to school recognises that "school readiness does not reside solely in the child, but reflects the environments in which children find themselves" (Nolan et al., 2009). This perspective has contributed to the re-conceptualisation of the nature of "school readiness" and of how best to promote positive transitions to school. School readiness is now seen as a combination of four essential components: ready families + ready communities+ ready ECEC+ ready schools=ready children².

The ECEC-ESL study also focuses on another important part for the four countries: the effectiveness of pre-primary and half-day programs. The EPPE study (Sylva et al., 2004)³ concluded that children who start pre-school education earlier (e.g. from the age of 3) have a significant advantage over those children who attend only one year of the pre-school before entry into primary school. Recently the EPPE study came to the conclusion that half a day programs of at least 15 hours a week (around 500 hours a year during 3 years) have the same positive effect then full day programs (Melhuish, 2013)⁴.

The ECEC-ESL study concludes (p. 20) also that ECEC provisions do not need to be targeted at families "at risk". Structural provisions addressing the general population, but with specific support for families at risk, (the so-called **progressive universalism approach**) are more effective than

¹Rimantas, D., Peeters, J., Hayes, N., Van Landeghem, G., Siarova, H., Peciukonytė, L., Cenerić, I&Hulpia, H. (2014). Study on the effective use of Early childhood education and care in preventing early school leaving. Brussels: European Commission DG E&C.

²Nolan, A., Hamm, C., McCartin, J., Hunt, Scott, C., and Barty, K. (2009) *Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School: Report prepared by Victoria University for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development*. Melbourne: Victoria University

³Sylva, K. Melhuish, E. Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart B. (2004). *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project* University of London/ Nottingham

⁴Melhuish, E. Key nota at the TFIEY, Ghent January 2003.

targeted provisions. Vulnerable children benefit the most from ECEC when it is provided in the context of social mix.

Recommendations of the Core study: Competence requirements to work in ECEC, (European Commission, DG E&C, CoRe, 2011;Vandenbroeck, Urban, Peeters, 2016)⁵

From 2009 till 2011 the European Commission DG E&C commissioned a study on the competences that are required to work in ECEC. We think that the results of this study in fifteen European countries are of great importance for analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the initial training and the continuous professional development in the four countries.

- **Ensure equal and reciprocal relation theory/practice:** Besides the obvious and essential body of knowledge and the acquisition of specific skills, it is crucial that graduates are offered possibilities to build reflective capacities. Therefore, reciprocal relationships between theory and practice are essential.
- **Build leadership capacity:** Effective leadership is seen as a 'major factor in shaping the overall teaching and learning environment, raising aspirations and providing support for children, parents and staff' (Council of the European Union, 2009). Therefore the training and the professional development of directors is crucial.
- **Rethink professional development:** The quality of services and the competence level of staff depend on, but are not only the result of, individual initial preparation. Different pathways to professionalism are possible and there is ample evidence, both from literature and from the case studies, that comprehensive and long-term in-service professional development initiatives can yield beneficial effects equal to those of initial professional preparation. Short-term in-service training courses (e.g. a few days per year), however, are not sufficient. This demands a re-think of existing approaches to continuing professional development towards more sustained and comprehensive approaches based on pedagogical mentoring and on learning from practice.
- Importance of **alignment between training competence profile and professional competence profile.**
- Need for Policies that address entire ECEC system: invest in a **competent system** because professionalisation is multi-layered. A competent system should be developed within all levels of the ECEC system, which has the capacity to implement the necessary innovations. The following necessary measures have to be taken to support the process of change.

A competent system on the level of the individual practitioner/ heads of centres:

- At least 60% need to have a bachelor training.
- All workers of the services are provided with a wide range of courses concerning children, parents, teams and the community. It is important that they can choose between different models: courses for individual workers and peer groups for workers representing their institution.

A competent system on the team/institution level:

⁵Vandenbroeck, M., Urban, M. Peeters, J.(2016) *Pathways towards professionalism in ECEC*. New York, London: Routledge.

- To introduce innovations in an effective way Core recommend to link more theoretical courses to coaching sessions in the teams so that the practitioners can implement the new knowledge in their practice.
- CoRe recommends organising an introduction course for teams of new centres. During this course, members of the new team develop a common pedagogical vision based on the curriculum or the strategic goals.
- Another CPD initiative that is effective is a yearly study day for the whole workforce of the institution.

A competent system on the city level (or regional level):

It is important to invest in a coherent policy towards professional development for the whole workforce:

- organising peer groups and learning communities on the goals of the strategic planning;
- implementing new child-centred approaches;
- trainings for pedagogical coaches;
- annual Pedagogical Conferences for the whole workforce of a city, a region or a large ECEC organisation on the strategic planning. In these conferences, practitioners from different services can present innovative projects around the implementation of the strategic planning towards colleagues of other centres;
- peer groups with a focus on exchanging interesting practices among different centres, are highly appreciated by practitioners and are powerful tools in changing pedagogical practices;
- The coaches, NGO's and the universities must get the financial opportunities to developed instruments and ICT applications to use in coaching sessions.

A competent system on the level of the Government:

- The government must install democratic advisory groups chaired by respected independent experts. We think of advisory groups on different policy aspects of new strategic goals, but also advisory groups on the development of professional competences profiles and training competences profiles of the ECEC worker, on the development of a new curriculum and also the improvement of working conditions.
- The government must provide financial resources so that the sector can develop a coherent system of in-service training
- The government must provide child free hours for team meetings and coaching sessions

A competent system inspired by International Networks and European innovation projects:

An active participation in international networks is of major importance to increase the quality of ECEC. Participation in European projects, in UNICEF projects, in the Reyn Network for Roma children, in the ISSA Network and others can give inspiration for implementing the innovations.

Eurofound Systematic review: which CPD interventions are effective? (Eurofound: Peeters, et al., 2015)⁶

The system of continuous professional development is rather weak in the four countries and has to be rethought (TOR p.3). The Eurofound systematic review gives evidence-based arguments on which CPD interventions are effective and concrete recommendation on how a system of CPD should be organised. The system of Continuous Professional development has an impact on increasing the quality of ECEC and has an impact on child outcomes when the programs are intensive and are implemented for at least two years. Critical factors for success are:

- the active involvement of practitioners in the transformative process for the improvement of educational practices within ECEC settings;
- that the programs are focused on practitioners learning in practice, in dialogue with colleagues and parents;
- that a mentor or coach is available during non-contact hours;
- that the program has to be embedded in a coherent pedagogical framework or curriculum that builds upon research and addresses local needs.

Review of National Early Childhood Care and Education Quality Monitoring Systems

This review concludes that there is very little information on how countries are monitoring ECCE quality. The available evidence indicates that many high-income OECD countries have fairly sophisticated systems of monitoring and regulating ECCE programs while many low- and middle-income countries rely on proxy variables such as teacher-child ratios, compliance with operating hours, and infrastructure standards to monitor quality, if quality is monitored at all. The review states that there are areas of convergence on what is important for quality, which could be used as a basis for global monitoring tools or frameworks.

From high income countries (f.i. Belgium and The Netherlands) we know that implementing quality monitoring systems are expensive and require significant resources, often from multiple actors and agencies. Sufficient national (and, as needed international) expertise and resources are required to design and implement a national ECCE quality monitoring system, and ECCE providers need to have some type of incentive to comply with the standards. Evidence from high-income countries demonstrates that building and maintaining quality in ECCE settings requires an on-going emphasis on improvement. Ideally, monitoring systems should be designed to promote improvement by setting standards that are designed to promote children's development, ensuring support and resources are available to address areas of concern, and offering a supportive environment for sharing and acting upon results from quality monitoring.

An interesting example of how a coherent quality monitoring system can be developed, is the MeMoQ project in the Flemish Community of Belgium, by the University of Leuven and the University of Ghent. Inside this project financed by the Flemish Government first a pedagogical quality framework was developed in collaboration with a group of stakeholders and researchers. Based on this framework a measurement of the quality of Flemish ECEC was set up with the Class instrument and other instruments that were made by the MeMoQ researchers. This evaluation of the quality will be repeated every five year. In the year to come a monitor instrument for the

⁶Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., Cameron, C., Budginaite, I., Hauari H., Peleman, B. & Siarova, H. (2015). Early Childhood Care: working conditions, training and quality - A systematic review. Dublin: Eurofound

inspectorate will be developed. And next year the group of researchers and the stakeholders will work together on a self-evaluation instrument for the services.

4 Selecting a quality framework for the four countries

The effort of this consultancy was to support participating countries in defining and planning the application of context relevant quality frameworks to monitor and improve the quality of ECE.

After consultation with the UNICEF representatives of the four countries we decided to choose the **European Quality Framework**. We had several reasons for this choice:

- 1 The four countries are all candidate member states for joining the EU. Therefore they are focused on the EU requirements also in the ECEC field.
- 2 The EQF is scientifically based (Lazzari 2014)
- 3 The EQF was recently published (November 2014) and has been inspired by the other frameworks mentioned in the overview.
- 4 The EQF has been developed during a long period of more than two years, with workshops in different EU countries by a large group of around 50 people coming from 25 different countries, consisting of researchers, stakeholders and policymakers.
- 5 The EQF includes all aspects of quality that are mentioned in the TOR, from accessibility over workforce and curriculum, mentoring and governance, while other quality frameworks like the ISSA principles are focused only on one aspect of quality (competences of teachers).
- 6 The EQF is a broad framework, it can be filled in by concrete quality criteria in different contexts
- 7 There is a link between this framework and important policy research that has been commissioned by DG E&C in the past years (CoRe, 2011; ECEC – ESL, 2014) and that will be referred to in the reports.

5 EQF as frame of reference for analysing the quality of ECEC in the different countries.

First we will describe under the five principles of the EQF and the challenges for CEE/CIS. In the next part the ten quality statements of the EQF are explained in detail. In the last part of this chapter we set standards for a quality monitoring system in the four countries, based on the results of the studies we described in part 3 and on the Eurydice and Eurostat report (2014).

ECEC Challenges in CEE/CIS

Accessibility

Over the past decade governments have been strengthening or rebuilding national and decentralised systems for ECE, with Montenegro achieving significant expansion. However, coverage in many cases remains low with significant equity gaps in access. Where national enrolments are high the emphasis is on addressing disparities between different groups of children and between sub-national regions, which national level figures often obscure. Across the region, the **quality** of ECE provision is also a growing focus as stakeholders attempt to balance the pressures of expanding coverage with maintaining and strengthening the quality of services provided.

The ECEC workforce

Pre-service and in-service training vary by country, with some providers being active partners in the revision to sectoral standards and approaches whilst in others remain disconnected from these attempts at quality improvement. Being able to pay for teachers to attend courses is a barrier in most countries. Inclusive education is only now beginning to be a part of pre-service and in-service training but the hours/depth of training remains inadequate as yet. Studies on learning outcomes have been limited and **there is little information of teaching quality or quality of different types of provision in the region.**

Curriculum

In some countries, **the application of standards and associated curriculums is a challenge.** While standards may exist, there is a need for further/better training for teachers in the use of standards. **How these standards articulate with shorter pre-primary programmes needs also to be resolved in some countries** and the rapid expansion of pre-primary has led to concerns about overcrowding, approaches and resources.

Monitoring and evaluation

There has been a rapidly increasing access to low-cost “alternative” community-based centres, 1 year school readiness programmes as well as “condensed” pre-primary programmes (100hrs; 240 hrs) that are proliferating in the region – and there is no parallel effort to monitor or measure their quality. Little research is available to provide an in-depth assessment of quality within different types of preschool provision and possible risks to quality arising from rapidly increasing access. UNICEF has been a proponent of this form of provision but not fully reviewed the implications of this on the scope and quality of children’s preschool experiences. Apart from one comparative UNICEF study undertaken in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, little research is available on this critical issue.

Inspection systems are extremely weak across the region with overlapping accountability lines, and are often under-resourced and lacking proper regulatory frameworks and operational guidelines. Preschool provision needs to be appropriately inspected for compliance, quality

assurance and child protection. Quality monitoring and assurance of ECE services is directly related to larger issues that countries face in the region such as ECE program improvement, scalability, certification, and impact assessment. It also has important implications for **equity** as it has the potential to identify variations in provision for different socio-economic population groups. In terms of policy objectives in the ECE sector, the argument is made that CEECIS countries have to improve drastically the quality of their ECE services together with increased provision and equity in early learning services especially for the most disadvantaged children.

The ten statements of the EQF

Accessibility

1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children.

The potential benefits of high quality universal provision are particularly significant for children from disadvantaged and/or marginalised groups. ECEC provision should be made available from birth to the age at which children start compulsory primary school. To respond to parental circumstances and encourage all families to use ECEC services, provision needs to offer flexibility in relation to opening hours and the content of the programme.

2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity.

Successful inclusion in ECEC is based on: a collaborative approach to promoting the benefits of ECEC which involves local organisations and community groups; approaches which respect and value the beliefs, needs and culture of parents; an assurance that all children and families are welcome in an ECEC setting/centre; a pro-active approach to encouraging all parents to use ECEC services; a recognition that staff should be trained to help parents and families to value ECEC services and to assure them that their beliefs and cultures will be respected - this training can be supported by parenting programmes which promote ECEC; by close cooperation between the staff in ECEC centres, health and social services, local authorities and the school sector.

The ECEC workforce

3 Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role

Recognising the ECEC workforce as professionals is key. Professional development has a huge impact on the quality of staff pedagogy and children's outcomes. Developing common education and training programmes for all staff working in an ECEC context (e.g. preschool teachers, assistants, educators, family day carers etc.) helps to create a shared agenda and understanding of quality.

4 Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

Good working conditions benefit staff and contribute to their retention. Policy measures affect the structural quality of ECEC provision including locally-determined arrangements on the size of a group; children to adult ratios; working hours, and wage levels which can help to make employment in an ECEC context an attractive option. Good working conditions can also reduce the constant and detrimental staff turnover in ECEC.

Curriculum

5 A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enables children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

Children's education and care as well as their cognitive, social, emotional, physical and language development are important. The curriculum should set common goals, values and approaches which reflect society's expectation about the role and responsibilities of ECEC settings in encouraging children's development towards their full potential. All children are active and capable learners whose diverse competences are supported by the curriculum. At the same time the implementation of the curriculum needs to be planned within an open framework which acknowledges and addresses the diverse interests and needs of children in a holistic manner. A well-balanced combination of education and care can promote children's well-being, positive self-image, physical development and their social and cognitive development. Children's experiences and their active participation are valued, and the significance of learning through play is understood and supported.

6 A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

A curriculum is an important instrument to stimulate the creation of a shared understanding and trust between children; and between children, parents and ECEC staff in order to encourage development and learning. At a system or national level a curriculum can guide the work of all ECEC settings and contexts – and at a local or setting level, it can describe the practices and priorities in the context of each centre. An essential factor in developing a collaborative approach to the curriculum is the ability of individual staff to analyse their own practice, identify what has been effective and, in partnership with their colleagues, develop new approaches based on evidence. The quality of ECEC is enhanced when staffs discuss the implementation of the curriculum within the context of their centre/setting and take account of the needs of the children, their parents and the team. The curriculum can enhance this approach by promoting children's learning through experimentation and innovation; and encouraging cooperation with parents on how ECEC provision contributes to supporting children's development and learning.

Monitoring and evaluation

7 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

Systematic monitoring of ECEC allows for the generation of appropriate information and feedback at the relevant local, regional or national level. This information should support open exchange, coherent planning, review, evaluation and the development of ECEC in the pursuit of high quality at all levels in the system. Monitoring and evaluation is more effective when the information collected at a provider level is aligned with the information collected at a municipal, regional and system level.

8 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

Monitoring and evaluation processes are conducted to support children, families and communities. All stakeholders, including ECEC staff, should be engaged and empowered during the implementation of any monitoring and evaluation process. While monitoring can focus on the quality of structures, processes or outcomes; a focus on the interest of the child and staff engagement strengthens the importance of looking at the quality of the processes used in ECEC settings.

Achieving these statements is easier if the following governance arrangements are in place:

9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

Given the cross-sectoral nature of ECEC provision government, stakeholders and social partners need to work together to secure the success of ECEC services. Legislation, regulation and guidance can be used to create clear expectations about the importance of collaborative working which supports high quality outcomes for children, families and local communities.

10 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

Structural or legislative arrangements support access to ECEC by giving families the right to access affordable ECEC provision. Approaches which support progress towards the universal availability of ECEC recognise that providing additional funds to support access for disadvantaged groups can be an effective strategy for increasing access especially for children from migrant, disadvantaged or low-income families. Monitoring the uptake of ECEC ensures that funding is used effectively. In order to make progress towards universal entitlement to provision measures to emphasise the attractiveness and value of ECEC services need to be in place.

Standards for the quality of ECEC in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo* and Montenegro

Accessibility

- What is the current rate/expected rate for 2020 of enrolment in ECEC compared to the EU target for 2020: 95% of the 4 years to compulsory school age children are enrolled in ECEC?
- Is the attendance of ECEC (0- 6 years) free of charge or income related?
- Is there a system of universal services for all children with specific support measures for disadvantaged groups (progressive universalism)?

ECEC Workforce

- Is 50% of the workforce qualified on bachelor level?
- *Is there a balance in the initial training between theory and practice and is there a focus on reflecting on practice and on a child-centred approach, and do children get opportunities for forms of natural learning, for learning by experimenting?*
- Is Continuous Professional Development a professional duty for the whole workforce? Are their financial incentives for the services or the individual workers?
- Are there childfree hours available to organize coaching and team meetings?
- Can every centre rely on specialised workers for children with special needs or coming from disadvantaged groups and can services get the support of pedagogical coaches for implementing innovations?
- Is there a training/ coaching or supervision available for the directors?
- Are there alternative pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons?
- Do the working conditions (wage levels, status of the profession) make employment in ECEC an attractive option?



- Is the adult child ratio (1/12) and the maximum number of children in a group (24) in line with international standards?
- *Do the teachers have enough materials to create stimulating environments for the children?*
- *Are there special trainings for directors?*
- *Is there enough focus on the development of reflective competences and capacity building for planning?*

Curriculum

- Do the short programs have a minimum of 3h a day and around 500 hours a year?
- *Is there a curriculum based on pedagogical goals and scientifically based?*
- Is there a balance between adult led & child led initiated activities?
- Is there a focus on project based learning or forms of natural learning, are the children put in situations where they can guide their own learning process?
- *Are the interactions with the children, warm and stimulating? And is there any form of discrimination towards poor and disadvantaged children?*
- *Does the curriculum require staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and is the curriculum stimulating reflection on their own practice?*
- *Is there a policy that includes disadvantaged children and children with special needs and that also gives extra support to those children and their families?*

Monitoring and evaluation

- Is there an evaluation of the quality of the whole ECEC system? Is this evaluation of the quality in alignment with international measurement scales?
- Is the system of monitoring of the ECEC services coherent and well developed, is it based on international standards for monitoring?
- Is there a system of observation and documentation of the progress that the individual child is making? Which is the frequency of this individual evaluation?

Governance arrangements

- Does the government gives enough autonomy to the services, can they develop an own human resource management?
- Are the governmental bodies capable of respecting the legislation and the regulation on ECEC?
- Do the legislations and regulations stimulate collaborations between different stakeholders?
- Do the stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities and are they expected to collaborate with partner organisations?
- Is there a strategic plan (with the necessary legislation, regulation and funding) towards universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC and is progress regularly reported?
- Are there additional I funds provided to support access for disadvantaged groups.

- Did the government take measures to emphasise the value of ECEC services, also towards disadvantaged families?
- Is the uptake of disadvantaged groups monitored by the government to ensure that funding is used effectively?

6 Generic recommendations for the four countries

After writing the reports of the four countries, there seems to be quite some common opportunities and challenges. In this chapter we will formulate some common generic recommendations.

Accessibility

- **Monitor the increase of places in ECEC with respect to equity**

Compared to the European average (75%), the four countries have a low enrolment for the 3 to 6 years of age. BiH has the lowest with 14.26%, Kosovo* 30%, Albania 33.2% and Montenegro 40%. All countries want to increase the number of places, but Montenegro is the most ambitious, they have a target of 95% enrolment in 2020. In the four countries the enrolment of disadvantaged children is extremely low.

The four countries invest in short preparatory programs to enrol more children. These short programs have the opportunity that one class room can be used by at least two groups and one teacher can take care of two groups of children. These short programs are free for the parents and could give opportunities to attract disadvantaged children, but in all the visits we did in the four countries to short preparatory programs, the disadvantaged children were not well represented. Due to the lack of places in ECEC (3 to 6) middle class parents are also motivated to send their children to those programmes and we know from research that due to the lack of an accessibility policy, the middle class parents will have more chance to get a place than the disadvantage parents. Therefore, more actions are needed to help disadvantaged parents to send their children to preparatory preschool programmes. The short programs need also to develop an enrolment procedure that gives all children the same access opportunities⁷.

Workforce

- **The initial training should be reinvented, with more focus on the link between theory and practice, the development of reflective competences, child-centred approaches and very important more internship for the students**

The level of qualification is high in the four countries from 3 to 5 years of university training (bachelor/master). But in the four countries there is too much focus on theory and on a teacher-centred approach, and less on innovative pedagogical practice. In the first years there is nearly no practice and there is not enough focus on the development of reflective competences. The professors are not always experts in ECEC.

⁷For concrete examples of successful enrolment procedures for disadvantaged children see case study in Eurofoundstudy, Early Childhood Care: Accessibility and Quality of Services (2015) and backgroundpaper of TFIEY on accessibility <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-1-ghent>

- **The four countries need to invest in a coherent system of continuous professional development, with a focus on coaching⁸**
The focus must be on CPD initiatives that have been proven to be successful (see Eurofound study).
- **The status of the profession and the working conditions (wages) in the four countries need to be improved**
- **The four countries need to develop a professional competence profile and a training competence profile that are in alignment with each other.**

Curriculum

- **Short EC programs have to be at least a duration of 500 hours and must also use ECEC methods based on play and on forms of natural learning**
The four countries have developed short programmes, but in Montenegro they are 600 hours a year and it is organised for the children from 3 years on, while in the other three countries it is only a pre-primary year for the 5 years of age and it is less hours a year. From the EPPE research⁹ we know that the children have to follow at least 500 hours a year to see results on the children's outcomes. Taking into account the results of the longitudinal EPPE study, we must conclude that the pre-primary programs in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo* are too short (around 150 hours) to have significant child outcomes.
- **Curriculums must give autonomy to the teacher**
There are differences in the kind of standards / curriculum the countries have chosen. Albania and Kosovo* have found their inspiration in the United States and Montenegro and BiH have opted for a continental / Scandinavian European curriculum. This has important implications for the way how the new curriculum or standards will be implemented. In the BiH and Montenegro the teachers have more autonomy to give an own interpretation to the curriculum/standards, while for Albania and Kosovo* there are detailed behavioural indicators that contains the risk for a technical approach (filling in checklists of indicators). In Albania and Kosovo* there is therefore a need for brochures that translate the detailed standards or behavioural indicators into an inspiring and motivating tool for the teachers.

Monitoring and evaluation

- **The four countries have a need for a system of monitoring that is in alignment with other European countries**
We know from the review of ECEC Quality Monitoring System that the development of a system to measure and monitor the whole ECEC system *based on international standards for monitoring* is very expensive, especially for small countries. Therefore we would advise a common monitoring system for the four countries co-ordinated by UNICEF. But the countries need also to invest in a monitor system for the inspection and also in a system that documents the individual progress of the child.

Governance

- **More autonomy for the services.** The governmental organisations have a lot of influence in the four countries. The different stakeholders must get more autonomy

⁸Examples of coherent CPD systems see chapters on Ghent and Pistoia Vandenbroeck, Urban, Peeters, (2016)

⁹Melhuish, E. Key nota at the TFIEY, Ghent January 2003.

to develop their own policies for their services: schools must have the autonomy to appoint directors and teachers according to general Human Resource quality criteria.

- **Different stakeholders must have the opportunity to become an actor** in the process of change and the government must give responsibility to stakeholders to lead working groups and to take decisions in those working groups
- **The Strategic plans of the four governments are different in the way they are worked out.** The one from Montenegro is the most elaborated; in BiH it is difficult to use the same strategic plan for the whole country, due to the complex governance structure.

Annex 1



The Quality of ECEC Services in Albania

Dr. Jan Peeters

Introduction

Purpose of the mission in Albania

- i. To share recent research and thinking on the question of quality in early childhood education services, its relationship to equity and learning outcomes;**
- ii. To support Albania in defining and planning the application of context-relevant quality frameworks to monitor, measure and improve the quality of ECE.**

In consultation with UNICEF, the EU quality framework for ECEC was selected as the standard for quality. Based on the Eurydice report of 2014 and on several recently published European studies, we formulated some questions around the five key principles of the EQF: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding.

1 Methodology

Participation to the International conference on 'Teacher Professional Development' in Tirana March 24-25 2016.

Field visits and interviews with policy makers and stakeholders from 08-13 November 2015 in Tirana and Beirat

Visit to preschools

- I. preschool Tirana outskirts and meeting with staff and parents preschool kindergarten
 - II. Visit of preschools, discussion with teachers and meeting with Roma parents. Beirat
 - III. Visit to pre-primary class in Tirana.
- Meeting with UNICEF: Mirlinda Bushati, Early Learning & Education Specialist and Antonella Scolamiero, UNICEF representative;
 - Institute of National Statistical data in Albania (INSTAT): Meeting with Anila Kasneci;
 - Regional Directorate of Education Tirana: Ms. Jonida Matohiti;
 - Regional Directorate of Education of Beirat: Ms. Majlinda Xhamo;
 - Deputy Minister of Education and Science: Ms. Nora Malaj;
 - General Director of Pre-University Education: Ms. Zamira Gjini.
 - Directorate of Pre-university education: Ms. Rosalba Merdani/ Ms. Shqiponja Lamce;
 - Institute of Development of Education, Gerti Janaqi, Director (satellite Institute in charge of textbook, teacher curricula and standards), Ms. Aurela Zisi, Curricula specialist;
 - Inspectorate of Education, Ms. Eniana Veli, specialist;
 - General director for education, Besjona Dede;
 - Meeting with NGOs: YWCA, CRCA, OCR, Partner for Children, Step by Step, TLAS, Save the Children, Coalition for Education, World Vision etc.

Consulted Documents

- Policy of the Ministry of Health and the protection of the environment for building and functioning of the kindergarten (1995);
- Strategy on Pre-university education development 2014-2020. Ministry of education and sports (2014);
- Universal Preschool at five. Jan Van Ravens (2014);
- Inclusion practices in Albanian preschool system. Save the children (2014);
- Education Policy Review of Albania (2015).

2 Indicators for quality based on the European Quality Framework

Accessibility

1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

- *What is the current rate/expected rate for 2020 of enrolment in ECEC compared to the EU target for 2020: 95% of the 4 years to compulsory school age children are enrolled in ECEC?*

Compared to European member states (75%) the enrolment rate in Albania for 3 to 6 (33.2%) of children attending ECEC is low, but it is in line with the enrolment rate in the three other countries that are involved in this study. According to the data in the report 'Universal preschool at Five' of Jan van Ravens (September, 2014) 33.2% of the children get a place in ECEC in Albania, with a clear gap between urban and rural areas 42.5% versus 22.8%. This gap tends to be less pronounced among the five years old: 58.8% is the average attendance, with 66.4% in urban and 46.7% in rural areas. If Albania wants to universalise pre-primary programs for the five years old (as a first step for universalising 3 to 6) than according to 'Universal preschool at Five' the preschool capacity in urban areas needs to be expanded by 6424 and in rural areas by 9386 places in three hour programmes, whereby one teacher has two groups a day in the same class room.

- The introduction of a short three hours preparatory preschool programme seems to be a realistic way to increase the number of places, because it is possible to organise two programs a day in the same class room. But the multi-country evaluation of 2014 points at some possible negative effects of the short pre-primary programmes: 'Pre-primary programs can sweep aside some of the alternative models for preschool provisions and they can erode the advantages in covering full 3 – 6 age range and as sites for developing stronger child-centred methodologies' (Unicef, 2013, pxii).
- *Is the attendance of ECEC (0-6 years) free of charge or income related?*

The preparatory classes and the kindergarten are free of charge for the parents except for the kindergartens that provide food. This creates opportunities to attract Roma and Egyptian children, as well as children living in poverty. But this is not enough to attract those children from poor backgrounds: the Pre-Primary Programs also should be made 'desirable' for disadvantaged parents (see EQF). In all the short preparatory programs we visited in the four countries, the disadvantaged children were not well represented. Due to the lack of places in ECEC (3 to 6) middle class parents are also motivated to send their children to those programmes and it is possible that disadvantaged parents are less convinced that three-hour preschool programmes are useful for their young children or they do not find the way to enrol their children into those PP programmes.

2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

- *Is there a system of universal services for all children with specific support measures for disadvantaged groups (progressive universalism)?*
- Tirana has put in place a procedure for enrolling vulnerable children free of charge or at a reduced fee and the positive experience is being shared now in two other municipalities.

In other parts of the country actions are needed to motivate disadvantaged parents to send their children to preparatory preschool programmes in order to make Pre-Primary Programs (known and) desirable for them

ECEC Workforce

3 Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role

- *Is 50% of the workforce qualified on bachelor level?*

The level of qualification of the teachers is an asset of the Albanian ECEC system. According to the World Bank (2014) a majority of pre-primary teachers comply with teacher qualification requirements. Almost 60% of public pre-primary and 78% of private teachers hold a bachelor degree as required by MoE standards. The interviewees from the MoE complained about the low academic level of the students who choose for ECEC teacher. The interviewees make a link between the poor quality of the pedagogical practice of the teachers and the fact that they were not the best students in secondary school. But from research on initial training we know that the competences that are needed for working with young children and their parents in ECEC are different than the competences needed to work with older children, academic skills are less important and emotional competences are very important to work in ECEC. And it is the content of the training and the link with practice that is crucial for the development of the necessary competences (Core, 2011, 2016).

- *Is there a balance in the initial training between theory and practice and is there a focus on reflecting on practice and on a child centred approach, and do children get opportunities for forms of natural learning, for learning by experimenting?*

The level of initial training for teachers in ECEC in Albania (like the three other countries in the region) is high: 3 year bachelor and afterwards a year of internship. But despite the requirement of a bachelor training the interviewees were not positive about the content of the training. They all agreed that there is, as in the other countries in the region, too much focus on theory and the teacher-centred approach, and less on innovative pedagogical practice. This is due to a relative isolation of the universities of Albania. The professors of the universities should be more involved in European projects, so that they can learn from colleagues of other countries about innovative theories and practices.

- *Is Continuous Professional Development a professional duty for the whole workforce? Are their financial incentives for the services or the individual workers?*

In the 'Save the children situation assessment report on Inclusion in ECEC' teachers reported that they have few opportunities to take part in trainings, while based on the actual system developed by the MoE, they should participate in-service training and collect at least 3 credits per year. This was confirmed in the interviews we had with representatives from NGO's: there is a need for a more coherent approach towards continuous professional development. This is very crucial because in-service training has to play an important role in implementing the new curriculum that will be launched in the near future and in realising other innovations that are mentioned in

the important document: 'Strategy on pre-university education development (2014-2020)'.

- *Are there childfree hours available to organise coaching and team meetings?*
- *Can every centre rely on specialized workers for children with special needs or coming from disadvantaged groups and can services get the support of pedagogical coaches for implementing innovations?*
- *Is there a training/ coaching or supervision available for the directors?*

For implementing the new curriculum and the strategic planning there is a need for a clear definition of roles of who is responsible for the competent system on different levels.

We had the impression during our talks that there is a belief in a top-down approach. It is also important that we use methods and approaches of continuous professional development that have been proven effective in changing pedagogical practice. We also experienced a lack of methodology on how to implement change on the level of the institutions. It was as if teachers would automatically change their practice if the government should ask them to do this. We know from literature (CoRestudy for European Commission) that changes in pedagogical practice do not occur without concrete actions on the different levels of the competent system.

The big challenge now will be to develop a system of continuous professional development that is stimulating and effective in developing those necessary competences¹⁰. Therefore it is necessary to start long term CPD initiatives to implement the new curriculum, we will need initiatives for minimum two years, with an active involvement of practitioners. The CPD or coaching has to be focused on learning in practice, and has to be supported by a mentor or coach. UNICEF Albania is aware of the need for a coherent system of CPD, they organised a national conference in collaboration with MoE in March on professional development and both partners plan a project to develop a coherent system on CPD.

Last but not least the ECEC sector should go for an alignment between what is expected from the workforce and the initial training for ECEC. Therefore professional competence profiles (for the institutions) and training competence profiles (for the training organisations) have to be developed by a group of practitioners, researchers and policymakers¹¹.

- *Are there alternative pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons?*

In the conference organised by UNICEF and the MoE in March this was discussed and a project on pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons will be set up in the months to come. Albania will invest in programs for non-qualified persons, that are already working in ECEC. These practitioners will be able to benefit from systems of earlier acquired competences and courses one day a week will be provided, that are specially tailored for working students. Again the link with practice is extremely important.

¹⁰Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., Cameron, C., Budginaite, I., Hauari H., Peleman, B. & Siarova, H. (2015). Early Childhood Care: working conditions, training and quality - A systematic review. Dublin: Eurofound

¹¹The ISSA principles for the teacher of the 21st century can be a good starting point for this discussion

4 Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents.

- *Is the adult child ratio (1/12) and the maximum number of children in a group (24) in line with international standards?*

The average of children per teacher is not a problem in Albania, but the adult child ratio is disproportional between rural areas (few children) and urban areas.

- *Do the teachers have enough materials to create stimulating environments for the children?*

From our own observations and from the talks with the teachers we can conclude that the teachers are experiencing a lack of effective teaching materials.

- *Are their special trainings or interventions for directors?*

Effective leadership is very important for implementing sustainable change.

There is a need in Albania for trainings and for supervision or intervention for directors.

Curriculum

5 A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way.

- *Do the short programs have a minimum of 3h a day and around 500 hours a year?*

The pre-primary programs in Albania are sufficient in lengths and duration, but are limited to the year before primary school. They should be extended to the 3 and 4 years old.

- *Is there a balance between adult led & child led initiated activities?*

Is there a focus on project based learning or forms of natural learning, are the children put situations where they can guide their own learning process?

From the observations during the field visits we can conclude that the pedagogical approach is very teacher-centred: the teacher is the one leading the learning process. The result of the lack of inspiring practice in the initial training may be an explanation for this teacher-centred approach and for the traditional activities we observed (colouring of pre-printed commercial drawings..). We saw in services we visited in Albania, like in the other three countries few activities that provided real learning opportunities, no portfolio's on children's development and no documentation of inspiring activities and no forms of natural learning. The curriculum should be child-centred and focused on natural learning, or what other scholars call deep learning. This means pedagogical methods that are focused on putting children in situations in which they can explore and discover. In other words the new curriculum should be child-centred and focused on young children as researchers and active learners.

- *Are the interactions with the children, warm and stimulating? And is there any form of discrimination towards poor and disadvantaged children*

The teachers were very positive towards the children; we observed warm stimulating interaction, especially in the school with Roma and Egyptian children we visited. The teachers believed in the capabilities of the Roma and Egyptians children and we did not observe any form of discrimination. There is also respect for a children rights

approach, and in the centres we have visited Roma and Egyptian and Albanian children were together in mixed classrooms (progressive universalism). This creates positive opportunities because being together with Albanian children helps Roma and Egyptian children to learn Albanian language.

- *Is there a curriculum based on pedagogical goals and scientifically based.?*

Albania has developing in collaboration with the Teacher College of the Columbia University 'Early Learning and Development Standards'. The working group involved in the process of Standards Development took into consideration the standards of other countries recommended by the international expert, but not restricted to. The standards are based on a rich Albanian and international literature. Each field is composed by sub-fields and each sub-fields is composed by standards, each standard is composed by indicators. The indicators for each standard are provided as to what children know and are able to do in different age groups from 3 to 6 years. Teachers attached to the working groups defined the strategy activities, games, materials and didactic tools to meet the indicators, sometimes grouping them according to age groups 3-4, 4-5 and 5-6 years, and sometimes for the whole age group 3-6 years.

6 A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice.

- *Does the curriculum requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice?*

The 'Early Learning and Development Standards' approach seems to be greatly inspired by Anglo-Saxon views on quality, which is different with the pedagogical tradition in the region. There are some risks when the 'standards' become very detailed and become prescribed outcomes. This can limit real innovations, we know from experiences in other countries and from research that to detailed prescribed standards can lead to mediocre quality and will demotivate teachers who are reflecting on practice and look for real innovations. Therefore we advise to define the standards in an open way so that they can be implemented in different ways according to the context in which the teacher is working. We advise to continue a broad discussion on how to define quality, we refer f.i. to the Berliner Curriculum (2006) which is described in a background paper by John Bennet (2013),¹² or to the Developmental goals that are used in Belgium. These approaches are ways to define quality that are in alignment with what is mentioned in the EQF; they are a source of inspiration to reflect on the quality of the practice and to look for new approaches that increase the quality of the service provided to children and parents.

In the report on Inclusion (Save the children, 2014, 32) three child-centred approaches are mentioned, the Montessori pedagogy, the pilot project of Reggio Emilia (UNICEF) and the Step by Step program. During our field visits we visited a private Montessori school . According to UNICEF there are services that are working with Reggio although there is a need for refreshing the methodology.

Bennett, J. (2013). Early childhood curriculum for children from low-income and immigrant backgrounds. Transatlantic Forum for Inclusion in the Early Years. Brussels: KBS

The Reggio approach and the Step by Step approach are both gradually being used in many different countries and valued by researchers and international organisations, because of the child centred approach with a focus on natural learning and learning in group. While the Montessori approach is less used in Western European countries, and less valued because it is only focusing on individual learning.

During our field visits we did not see concrete examples of professionals reflecting on their own practice, which is a condition for changing and improving the pedagogical practice. On the other hand NGO's informed us that some training centres in Albania have experience in training on reflective competences. These reflective practices were introduced by UNICEF through external technical assistance. UNICEF also developed programs which used reflective practices among teachers, introduced mentoring or coaching and peer learning.

The university and the training centres should rather use these reflective methods¹³ that are scientifically based and proven to be successful in other countries, because we know from recent literature reviews and systematic reviews that reflecting on practice is essential to improve the quality and to have positive outcomes for children (Eurofound, Peeters et al., 2015).

Whatever the results of the discussion on defining quality will be, the vision on quality has to be larger than only the development of the child; the following aspects have to be taken in consideration: contact with parents, involvement of parents, teamwork, accessibility, leadership, qualification, etc. Therefore the EQF is an excellent framework that gathers all aspects of quality and can include different quality documents (curriculum, competence profiles, etc).

From our observations we had the impression that the collaboration with parents need to be improved.

- *Is there a system in place that includes disadvantaged children and children with special needs and that also gives extra support to those children and their families?*

The Save the children report is arguing for the development of coherent vision on inclusion because there are serious problems with access and participation of these children. Save the Children asks for targeted interventions for those groups inside universal services. A UNICEF supported assessment has identified that 45 % of Roma children are not attending preschools today, although in recent years progress has been made. Albania has an urgent need to open new kindergartens across all major cities and municipalities. Roma children are only one of the disadvantaged groups, many other social groups need to enjoy equal access to early childhood education. Priority should be given to the opening of kindergartens with meal provision since their impact is higher among Roma and/or other vulnerable groups. A strong cooperation among all the social partners and institutions and the Ministry of Education is needed in order to plan, prepare and introduce new policies on early childhood education. Albania not only needs new kindergartens, there is also a need for new curricula and professional competence profiles that respects and promotes diversity, the respect of children's rights and stresses the responsibility of teachers and educators.

¹³Concrete examples are the North-Italian method of documentation and the Wanda method, used in Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. And the French Analyse de pratique.

Monitoring and evaluation

7 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice.

- *Is there an evaluation of the quality of the whole ECEC system? Is this evaluation of the quality in alignment with international measurement scales? Which is the frequency of this evaluation?*

During the visits and also on the conference 'On professional Education and Development of Teachers' (24 March 2016) the problem of the accreditation of the training centres that provide CPD was put forward. The monitoring and evaluation of the accredited training centres that provide CPD is not efficient, some training centres are accredited and they sell false certifications to teachers that have not followed any CPD.

From our field visits and the interviews we had the impression that the monitoring of ECEC services in Albania was not well developed. The number of inspectors is limited. And the private sector is not evaluated and monitored. Although this is not experienced by the interviewees as a problem, this situation can create dangerous situations for the children of Albania who are in the private institutions. Private commercial initiatives can find the way to Albania and set up low quality centres with unqualified persons. The quality regulations for the private sector must be the same as for the public sector, all children have the right on the same quality.

- *Is the system of monitoring of the ECEC services coherent and well developed, is it based on international standards for monitoring?*

This principle is a very important issue. But during our field visit we got few information on how the many innovations that Albania wants to implement will be monitored and evaluated. We advise that not only Inspectorate of Education should be in charge of this but also stakeholders and representatives of local governments and NGO's should develop together a system for monitoring and evaluating the innovations and improvements of quality and practice. We know from the review of ECEC Quality Monitoring System that the development of a system to measure and monitor the whole ECEC system *based on international standards for monitoring* is very expensive, especially for small countries, therefore we would advise a common monitoring system for the four countries co-ordinate by UNICEF.

8 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

- *Is there a system of observation and documentation of the progress that the individual child is making? Which is the frequency of this individual evaluation?*

We advise that as a part of the broad discussion on quality, a similar group of policy makers, stakeholders (private, public), parents, NGO's and researchers can start with developing a system that can document the progress that an individual child is making. Several interviewees warned for a top-down approach: they do not believe that introducing a mentoring and measuring tool by the Inspectorate of Education will be well accepted by the sector.

The development of a monitoring instrument and a self evaluation instrument is a task for experts but in order to create broad support for this the vision on quality and the framework for the monitoring and self evaluation instrument need to be discussed with a broad group of stakeholders

Existing monitoring systems from different countries must be analysed and considered to see if and how they could be of use for the context of Albania.

Governance arrangements

9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations.

- *Does the government give enough autonomy to the services, can they develop an own human resource management?*

The governmental organisations have a lot of influence in the sector. The different stakeholders must get more autonomy to develop an own policy for their services: schools must have the autonomy to appoint directors and teachers according to HR quality criteria

- *Are the governmental bodies capable of respecting the legislation and the regulation on ECEC?*

The capacity building of people working in the governmental bodies that are responsible for inspection and monitoring the quality (accreditation of training centres, inspection of quality...) must be a priority for the near future.

- *Do the legislations and regulations stimulate collaborations between different stakeholders?*
- *Do the stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their the role and the responsibilities and do they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations?*

The 'Strategy' document states that the rate of decentralisation of responsibilities and decision-making authority from central to local level is not satisfactory. The result of this centralised, top-down approach is an insufficient participation and accountability of stakeholders and teachers.

Several interviewees are also warning for this unprepared decentralisation of ECEC. Teacher's budgets is being passed to local government, but the legislation is not well prepared for this important process and the local governments lack the necessary resources and expertise to manage that decentralisation.

10 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders.

- *Is there a strategic plan (with the necessary legislation, regulation and funding) towards universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidized or funded ECEC and is progress regularly reported?*

In the report of Jan van Raven and in the Strategy on pre-university development, there is a concrete plan on how to come to universal legal entitlements, first by increasing the pre-primary programs and later by increasing the places for 3 and 4

years old. While in the EU the average spending on ECEC is 0.5% of the GDP, in Albania the whole education budget is only 3% of the GDP and the increase of the number of places in pre-primary will cost only 1 % of the education budget (Van Raven, 2014).

Several interviewees speak of funding gap in Albania to cover preschool expansion and quality. There is concrete evidence from the WB Saber study and Jan Van Ravens paper on the level of current funding needs in Albania. The part of the GDP spent for ECEC is far beneath the average in Europe and an engagement to invest in ECEC from the Albanian government is a necessary condition to implement the strategic planning.

- *Are there additional funds provided to support access for disadvantaged groups.*
- *Did the government takes measures to emphasise the value of ECEC services, also towards disadvantaged families?*

The first positive results of the ECEC programs for disadvantaged children are motivating the Albanian Government to combine the social policies with the educational ones. For instance the cooperation and coordination among the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth shall be strengthened, to develop a new social inclusion policy to implement new methods on how to fund and sustain Roma girl's social protection and education , because the average age for giving birth to their first child of Roma girls was 16.9 years of age (Worldbank, 2003) New gender-based support schemes of social services and education were set up to get a considerable number of girls and their children out of risk, and promote their personal welfare and development

- *Is the uptake of disadvantaged groups monitored by the government to ensure that funding is used effectively?*

The 'Save the children report on Inclusion' is arguing for financial facilitations to ensure that all children, even from low income families, have the opportunity to access the pre-primary education.

Several interviewees argued that measures have to be taken to emphasise the usefulness of ECEC towards disadvantaged parents¹⁴

¹⁴ The successful actions towards disadvantaged parents that were set up in Montenegro by students can be a source of inspirations.

3 Key Findings

Opportunities

- high level of initial training;
- the early learning development standards are a scientifically based quality framework
- teachers are very warm and positive towards the children;
- concrete strategy on how to come to universal legal entitlements

Challenges

- low enrolment 33,2% compared to the European average 75%;¹⁵
- low accessibility for disadvantaged children
- not enough opportunities to follow CPD
- accreditation of the training centres is not efficient
- danger of schoolification of the pre-primary programs;
- job in ECEC is not attractive;
- too much focus on theory in initial training;
- too much teacher-centred approach;
- more emphasis on reflecting on practice and on partnership with parents is needed;
- need for new forms of pedagogical inspiration;
- the childcare centres (0 to 3 year of age) is focused on medical approach;
- the progress of the individual child is not systematically documented;
- decentralisation of responsibilities is not satisfactory

4 Recommendations

- Further actions have to be put in place to make preparatory preschool programs desirable for disadvantaged, Egyptian and Roma parents. To do so successfully, the leaders of these communities must be involved and the schools need extra support to work with disadvantaged and special needs children. .
- The preparatory preschool programs must be based on a child centred approach (experimental or natural learning) and avoid schoolification of ECEC like it is mentioned in the new curriculum and teacher professional developmental program .
- Rethinking the initial training.
The content of the bachelor training must be more focused on linking theory and practice and more child centred learning (experimental or natural learning) and in working in a context of diversity (including going into dialogue with Roma, Egyptian and disadvantaged parents). The focus of the initial and in-service training must be on reflecting competences. University professors need to get opportunities to get in touch with their colleagues in other European countries, so that information about new pedagogical approaches can be exchanged.
- Rethinking continuous professional development: Albania needs a coherent and efficiently monitored system of CPD and we need pedagogical coaches or mentors that have the competences and the tools to support the practitioners to implement the innovations in practice. Some NGO's and the Institute of Development of Education have experience in coaching and can train the new coaches. More actions have to be taken at the level of regional departments of education.

¹³There is a problem with the data on enrolment in Albania. While the data referred to the report are from LSMS, the national administrative figures of enrolment reported from the UIS go as up as 81 % .

- The working conditions of ECEC professionals have to be improved. More specifically, the number of children per classroom is too high for disadvantaged and special needs children and the teachers need more learning materials that stimulate forms of experimental learning (natural learning).
- An investment in the alignment of the competences that are trained in the universities and that competences that the sector requires is necessary. Therefore a professional competence profile and a training competence profile need be developed by the different stakeholders of the ECEC sector under de supervision of IED.
- The non-qualified persons must get the opportunities to follow an adapted training to qualification that makes it possible to combine working in the schools with following a training.
- A broad discussion on quality and how to monitor it has to be continued by a group of stakeholders (including parents), researchers, trainers, NGO representatives and IED. This discussion should be chaired by a respected person who is independent from the government.
- More investment in the development of the system of monitoring and evaluation.
- The evaluation and monitoring system needs to be implement also in the private sector.
- The IED must take initiatives to develop a competent system that has the capacity to implement the necessary innovations on all different levels (individual, team, institution, government, international networks/organisations). To realise this , it is important to make use of the existing experience from NGO's (Step by Step and others) and international organisations like UNICEF.
- There are serious gaps in the funding system, that have to be addressed.
- The number of places in the 3 to 6 institutions (full day) needs also to be further increased. The same for the 0 to 3. This is necessary to stimulate the employment of mothers (an important tool to stop child poverty).

Annex 2



The Quality of ECEC Services in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dr. Jan Peeters

Introduction

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Purpose of the mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina

- i. **To share recent research and thinking on the question of quality in early childhood education services, its relationship to equity and learning outcomes.**
- ii. **To support BiH in defining and planning the application of context-relevant quality frameworks to monitor, measure and improve the quality of ECEC.**

In consultation with UNICEF, the EU quality framework for ECEC was selected as the standard for quality. Based on the Eurydice report of 2014 and on several recently published European studies, we formulated some questions around the five key principles of the EQF: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding.

1 Methodology

Participation at the UNICEF Conference: What makes a high quality ECEC workforce? Sarajevo, 12th-13th of February 2015

Field visits and interviews with policy makers and stakeholders from 16th – 19th November 2015 in Banja Luka, Čelinac and Sarajevo

Visits to preschools

- Kindergarten Neven Čelinac: public preschool institution (Republika Srpska)
- Kindergarten Mašnica: public preschool institution Sarajevo
- Private ECEC school with Maria Montessori approach in Sarajevo
- Visit to obligatory preschool education programme in Sarajevo¹⁶

Interviews

- Meeting with UNICEF: Sanja Kabil, Lamija Landzo, Anna Riatti, Alma Herenda, Selena Bajraktarevic
- Meeting with representatives of Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Institute and local community in Republika Srpska
- Meeting with representatives of University of Banja Luka pedagogical faculty: Dr Tatjana Mihajlović, Vice dean of academic affairs
- Focus group with UNBL students; University of Banja Luka
- Round table with representatives of Ministries of Education and Pedagogical Institutes of Herzegovina Neretva Canton, Middle Bosnia Canton, Tuzla Canton, and NGO Step by Step
- Focus group with preschool teachers from public preschool institution Djeca Sarajevo
- Focus group with parents from Public school Djeca Sarajevo
- Meeting with representatives of University of Sarajevo pedagogical faculty
- Focus group with students (2nd year of MA students)
- Meeting with NGO Edus¹⁷, Dr Nirvana Pištoljević. Primary school Vladislav Skaric
- Meeting with Ms Hašima Ćurak, Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education BiH
- Meeting with Ms Daria Duilović, Ministry of civil affairs in BiH

Consulted documents

- Independent Multi-country Evaluation: Increasing access and equity in ECEC in CEE/CIS Final report 2014
- Framework Law on Preschool Upbringing and Education in BiH, 2007
- Development Concept 2012-2016. Agency for pre-primary, primary and Secondary Education BiH
- Performance Quality Standards for educators, pedagogues and directors of the preschool Upbringing and Education Institutions
- Education for all 2015 National Review BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs of BiH

¹⁶Sarajevo canton implements obligatory 150-hour preschool programme for children prior to school entry.

¹⁷The NGO Edus works on provision of early childhood detection and intervention programmes. In partnership with UNICEF they established resource rooms for children in health centres and kindergartens and provide trainings for professionals.

2 Indicators for quality based on the European quality Framework

Accessibility

1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

- *What is the current rate / expected rate for 2020 of enrolment in ECEC compared to the EU target for 2020: 95% of the four years to compulsory school age children are enrolled in ECEC?*

Compared to European member states (75%) the enrolment rate in BiH for 3 to 6 (14.26%) of children attending ECEC is the lowest in Europe (Multi country evaluation, 2014). In BiH 9.8% of the children is enrolled in ECEC institutions and 4.46% of the five- year old children is attending a pre-primary program, the year before going to primary school, with a clear gap between urban and rural areas and between employed and unemployed parents: children from urban areas with their parents at work represent 75.5% of the total number of children in preschool institutions. Children from rural areas make 0.5% and children from unemployed only 2%.

There is also a substantial private sector which accounts 21% of preschool provision. The introduction of a short programme (preschool upbringing and education in the year prior to starting primary school) seems to be a realistic way to increase the number of places, because it is possible to organise several programs in the same class room. These preparatory programs are regulated by the Framework Law on Preschool Upbringing and Education in BiH, but some education authorities have still not adopted laws that are harmonised with the Framework Law mostly due to financial reasons.

But in general we can conclude that the attendance of ECEC programs in BiH is very low and that especially in rural areas and for Roma children concrete measures have to be taken to increase the participation o in ECEC if the education authorities want to reach the target of 50% of the children attending kindergarten and 100% enrolment in the year prior to primary school. Due to the low birth rate in the past decennium there are less children attending primary school and this creates opportunities to organise pre-primary classes in the primary schools and there are also primary school teachers available. But this close link with the primary school creates also challenges of schoolification of the pre-primary classes (see later).

- *Is the attendance of ECEC (0-6 years) free of charge or income related?*

ECEC for 0 -5 is not free of charge, but the preparatory classes are free of charge. The preparatory classes could create opportunities to attract Roma children, as well as children living in poverty, but several interviewees stated that the services are not ready for the poor children. There is a need for more capacity building on working with disadvantaged families and their children.

2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

- *Is there a system of universal services for all children with specific support measures for disadvantaged groups (progressive universalism)?*

Several interviewees said that due to the shortage of places the enrolment of poor children is not a priority for the services. But since we know from research and from

reports from international organisation how important ECEC is in breaking the cycle of disadvantage and since BiH was involved in the regional ministerial conference and approved the 'Call to Action: equal access to education and inclusion in quality upbringing and education' concrete measures should be taken to attract disadvantaged children. The Law on Preschool clearly states that disadvantaged groups should be subsidized however this right has been realized only in few cases.

The Pre-Primary Programs should be made 'desirable' for disadvantaged parents. In all the visits we did in the four countries to short preparatory programs, the disadvantaged children were not well represented. Due to the lack of places in ECEC (3 to 6) middle class parents are also motivated to send their children to those programmes and it is possible that disadvantaged parents are less convinced that three-hour preschool programmes are useful for their young children or they do not find the way to enrol their children into those PP programmes. Therefore, more actions are needed to motivate disadvantaged parents to send their children to preparatory preschool programmes in order to make Pre-Primary Programs (known and) desirable for them. The Pre-Primary Programs need also to develop an enrolment procedure that gives all children the same access opportunities¹⁸.

ECEC Workforce

3 Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role

- *Is 50% of the workforce qualified on bachelor level?*

The level of qualification of the teachers is an asset of the Bosnia and Herzegovinian ECEC system. In the Federation BiH the required level of initial training is from 3 years (bachelor) to 5 years (master) depending on the Canton

The interviewees from the Universities complained about the negative selection of the students who choose for ECEC teacher. The interviewees make a link between the poor quality of the pedagogical practice of the teachers and the fact that they were not the best students in secondary school. But from research on initial training we know that the competences that are needed for working with young children and their parents in ECEC are different than the competences needed to work with older children, academic skills are less important and emotional competences are very important to work in ECEC. And it is the content of the training and the link with practice that is crucial for the development of the necessary competences (Core, 2011, 2016).

- *Is there a balance in the initial training between theory and practice and is there a focus on reflecting on practice and on a child-centred approach, and do children get opportunities for forms of natural learning, for learning by experimenting?*

The level of initial training for teachers in ECEC in BiH (like the three other countries in the region) is high. But despite the requirement of a bachelor/master level, the interviewees were not positive about the content of the training. They all agreed that there is, as in the other countries in the region, too much focus on theory and the teacher-centred approach, and less on innovative pedagogical practice. In the first year and the first semester of the second year the only practice that the students

¹⁸For concrete examples of successful enrolment procedures for disadvantaged children see case study in Eurofoundstudy. Early Childhood Care: Accessibility and Quality of Services (2015) and backgroundpaper of TFIEY on accessibility <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-1-ghent>

receive is five days of observation. The initial training should be reinvented, with more focus on the link between theory and practice and more internship for the students, so that they can try out with children child-centred approaches. We also have our doubts about the one year practice after the initial training. In this year of internship there is no supervision from the university. From experiences in other countries we know that without a supervision from the university, the student will not come to innovative pedagogical approaches but will reproduce the existing pedagogical approach that is dominant in the services. Since the pedagogical practice is very teacher-centred and traditional this extra year will not lead to the more child-centred approach that the ECEC sector in BiH needs. Therefore it is very important to invest in the capacity of the professors at the university who are responsible for coaching the students during their practice. They must be trained in methods that stimulate reflecting critically on pedagogical practice and creating innovative practice. The professors of the universities of BiH should be more involved in European projects, so that they can learn from colleagues in European countries about new innovative theories and practices, that are focused on reflective on practice and on methods of experiential or natural learning with young children.

The Agency for Pre-primary Primary and Secondary Education has developed 'Quality standards for teachers pedagogues and directors'. This important document can be seen as a professional competence profiles (for the institutions). The Universities need to develop a training competence profiles together with a group of practitioners, researchers and policymakers¹⁹. It is important that there will be an alignment between what is expected from the workforce (the Quality standards or the professional competence profile and what is learnt in the initial training for ECEC (the training competence profile).

- *Is Continuous Professional Development a professional duty for the whole workforce? Are their financial incentives for the services or the individual workers?*

According to some of the interviewees there are not enough quality training centres to provide continuous professional development. They also mentioned that recently the financing of two training courses a year was stopped and that many ECEC workers were very disappointed that they could not follow courses anymore.

- *Are there childfree hours available to organise coaching and team meetings?*

The teachers have 6 to 6.5h (depending on government unit) direct work with children, and the remaining 1.5-2h is reserved for planning, preparation, work with parents, professional development, documentation and team meetings. There are few countries in Europe who provide so many child free hours a day and this creates important opportunities for effective forms of continuous professional development.

- *Can every centre rely on specialised workers for children with special needs or coming from disadvantaged groups and can services get the support of pedagogical coaches for implementing innovations?*

In some ECEC institutions there are specialised workers working in the institutions for children with special needs and also pedagogues who function like pedagogical coach, but this is not everywhere in BiH the case. From our interviews we learned that there is a need for a clear definition of roles of who is in charge on kindergarten level for the implementation of the innovation coming from the education authorities.

¹⁹The ISSA principles for the teacher of the 21st century can be a good starting point for this discussion

We had the impression during our talks that there is a belief in a top-down approach. It was as if teachers would automatically change their practice because it is written down in the Quality Standards. We know from literature (study for European Commission) that changes in pedagogical practice do not occur without concrete actions on the different levels of the competent system (CoRe, 2011). It is also important that the methods and approaches of continuous professional development that are used to implement the change, have been proven to be effective in changing pedagogical practice. We also experienced a lack of methodology on how to implement change on the level of the institutions.

The big challenge now will be to develop a system of continuous professional development that is stimulating and effective in developing those necessary competences²⁰. Therefore it is necessary to start long term CPD initiatives to implement the strategic goals; we will need initiatives for minimum two years, with an active involvement of practitioners. The CPD or coaching has to be focused on learning in practice, and has to be supported by a mentor or coach.

- *Is there a training / coaching or supervision available for the directors?*

In the Education for all 2015 National review was set as an objective that all principles of preschool institutions should have completed a minimum level of competency/qualification to manage educational establishments. According to the Framework Law, the directors need to have higher education in preschool education, pedagogy, psychology, or special education. In some laws of government units, this can be slightly different. For instance, in Republika Srpska the director can have another social science degree, but in that case they should have an assistant with the above mentioned degrees.

- *Are there alternative pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons?*

APOS representative told us that there are practically no non-qualified persons working with children, the teachers have at least first cycle of higher education completed. The law says they can also have an equivalent, which means if the person became a teacher before the law specified the current level of education, she had to be retrained, which was completed in the vast majority of cases.

The only exception are persons who had more than 20 years of experience upon the introduction of the new law requirements, who did not have to retrain. There are only a few of them left in the system, since they majorly retired.

²⁰Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., Cameron, C., Budginaite, I., Hauari H., Peleman, B. & Siarova, H. (2015). Early Childhood Care: working conditions, training and quality - A systematic review. Dublin: Eurofound

4 Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents

- *Do the working conditions (wage levels, status of the profession) make employment in ECEC an attractive option?*

In BiH the wages and the status of the professions are low, there is also a lack of autonomy for the teacher and together those factors make a job in ECEC a not attractive option. ECEC teachers are paid less than primary school teachers, although they ought to have the same level of initial training.

- *Is the adult child ratio (1/12) and the maximum number of children in a group (24) in line with international standards?*

There is no official adult child ratio in BiH, but the representative of APOSO told that there are some indicators that the classes are overcrowded in urban areas, with groups with more than 25 even 30 children for one teacher. Teachers experience the overcrowded classes as the most important problem.

- *Do the teachers have enough materials to create stimulating environments for the children?*

From our own observations and from the talks with the teachers we can conclude that the teachers are experiencing a lack of effective teaching materials.

- *Are their special trainings or interventions for directors?*

Effective leadership is very important for implementing sustainable change. There is a need in BiH for trainings and intervention for directors.

Curriculum

5 A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way

- *Do the short programs have a minimum of 3h a day and around 500 hours a year? The pre-primary programs in BiH are sufficient in lengths and duration.*

In Sarajevo Canton the preschool programs last 150 hours throughout the whole year, in blocks of two hours a week. Most of the preschool programs in other cantons have 150h programme implemented for three months. The total number of hours of these preparatory programs in BiH is rather low, since scholars mention that you need at least 3 hours a day during a whole year. Another critic comes from the UNICEF multi-country evaluation of 2014 points at some possible negative effects of the short pre-primary programmes: 'Preparatory programs can sweep aside some of the alternative models for preschool provisions and they can erode the advantages in covering full 3 - 6 age range and as sites for developing stronger child-centred methodologies' (Unicef, 2014, pxii).

- *Is there a balance between adult-led & child-led initiated activities? Is there a focus on project-based learning or forms of natural learning, are the children put situations where they can guide their own learning process?*
- *Is there a curriculum based on pedagogical goals and scientifically based?*

The excellent document 'Performance quality standards for Educators, Pedagogues and directors of the Preschool Upbringing and Education Institutions' that was the result of a consultation of hundred of professionals a couple of years ago can be a starting point for a more child-centred approach in the preschools of BiH. This document gives an outstanding view on all different aspects of quality and it contains indicators and at the same time it focuses on the importance of the autonomy of the teacher, which is very important in the context of BiH, where there is still a strong culture of a top-down approach according to implementation of innovation.

There is still a lot of work to do and the Quality standards must be the tool to go in the direction of a more child-centred approach based on play and on natural forms of learning. This 'Standards' document is stressing the importance of pedagogical methods that are focused on putting children in situations in which they can explore and discover. This focus on young children as researchers and active learners must be the main focus for future reforms in the preschool institutions in BiH.

From the observations during the field visits we can conclude that the pedagogical approach is teacher-centred: the teacher is the one leading the learning process. The result of the lack of inspiring practice in the initial training may be an explanation for a more teacher-centred approach and for the traditional activities we observed (colouring of pre-printed commercial drawings ...). We saw in services we visited in BiH, like in the other three countries few activities that provided real learning opportunities, no portfolio's on children's development and few documentation of inspiring activities. There was one exception in a kindergarten in Sarajevo where children were brought into situations of natural learning.

- *Are the interactions with the children, warm and stimulating? And is there any form of discrimination towards poor and disadvantaged children?*

The teachers were very positive towards the children; we observed warm stimulating interaction.

6 A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice

- *Does the curriculum require staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and is the curriculum stimulating reflection on their own practice?*

The project 'Quality Standards of preschool Education in BiH', that was developed by the Agency for pre-primary, primary and secondary education in collaboration with the UNICEF BiH and Save the Children Norway, is an excellent tool that focuses on collaboration with parents and on reflection on the own practice.

Other forms of inspiration are the North Italian approach on documentation (the Reggio approach) and the Step by Step approach. Both approaches are being used in many different countries and valued by researchers and international organisations, because of the child-centred approach with a focus on natural learning and learning in group.

The university and the training centres should invest in using these reflective methods (see Quality standards document, Italian approach of documentation, Step by Step,

Wanda²¹) that are scientifically based and proven to be successful in other countries, because we know from recent literature reviews and systematic reviews that reflecting on practice is essential to improve the quality and to have positive outcomes for children (Eurofound, Peeters et al., 2015).

The Quality standards are focusing on partnership with families and local communities. The quality indicators stipulated in this document are excellent. During our visit we had interesting discussions with parents who were very happy about the way teachers were interacting with them. But we have the impression that the institutions will have to invest a lot of coaching and training to reach the targets formulated in the indicators.

The different authorities responsible for preschool education do not all use the same quality standards. Whatever the results of this discussion on quality standards will be, one set of standards for the Federation of BiH, or different set of standards for different cantons, the vision on quality has to be larger than only the development of the child. The following aspects have to be taken in consideration: contact with parents, involvement of parents, teamwork, accessibility, leadership, qualification ... Therefore the EQF (European Qualifications Framework) is an excellent framework that gathers all aspects of quality and can include different quality documents (curriculum, competence profiles ...).

- *Is there a policy that includes disadvantaged children and children with special needs and that also gives extra support to those children and their families?*

The laws and bylaws of BiH do imply inclusion of all disadvantaged children. However, in practice the situation is different: many institutions are still struggling with developing a policy towards inclusion. During the visits, several interviewees said that there is need for assessment instruments for children with special needs and for trainings on how to work with disadvantaged children and children with special needs.

²¹ Wanda is a reflective method especially developed for ECEC with funding of the European Social Fund and tested out successfully in Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Belgium.

Monitoring and evaluation

7 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice

- *Is there an evaluation of the quality of the whole ECEC system? Is this evaluation of the quality in alignment with international measurement scales? Which is the frequency of this evaluation?*

APOSO has the mandate to work on directives and recommendations for the improvement of the quality and reports on the implementation of the common core curriculum and EU standards. Last such report was done in 2014.

Pedagogical institutes have the mandate for monitoring and evaluation, they are in charge to check if the standards and norms are respected. In case that there is no Pedagogical Institute the Ministry of Education is in charge.

The representative of APOSO noted that there is a good system in place for external evaluation, but what lacks is a self-evaluation instrument for the preschool institutions.

The director of the preschool institution is directly responsible for quality. As well, the management board of the institution, preschool councils, and local government representatives also have the right in deciding about the annual work plans which contain the monitoring and evaluation plans.

- *Is the system of monitoring of the ECEC services coherent and well developed, is it based on international standards for monitoring?*

This principle is a very important issue. But during our field visit we got little information on how the many innovations that BiH wants to implement will be monitored and evaluated. We advise that also stakeholders and representatives of local governments and NGO's should develop a system together to monitor and evaluate the innovations and improvements of quality and practice.

8 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

- *Is there a system of observation and documentation of the progress that the individual child is making? Which is the frequency of this individual evaluation?*

Although these aspects are well described and developed in the 'Quality Standards' document, we had the impression from the observations during our field visits and the interviews that the observation and documentation of the progress that every individual child is making was not well developed.

We advise that the same process as used in the 'Quality' approach should be used: involving professionals, policy makers, stakeholders (private, public), parents, NGO's and researchers in a developing a system of portfolio of every individual child.

Based on the 'Quality Standards', a system of documenting the progress of every child must be developed. Existing systems from different countries (Italy f.i.) must be analysed and considered to see if and how they could be of use for the context of BiH.

Governance arrangements

9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations

- *Does the government give enough autonomy to the services, can they develop an own human resource management?*

The governmental organisations have a lot of influence in the sector. The different stakeholders must get more autonomy to develop an own policy for their services: schools must have the autonomy to appoint directors and teachers according to general Human Resource quality criteria.²²

- *Are the governmental bodies capable of respecting the legislation and the regulation on ECEC?*

The governmental bodies are capable for this, but yet the capacity building of people working in the governmental bodies that are responsible for inspection and monitoring the quality (accreditation of training centres, inspection of quality...) must stay a priority for the near future.

- *Do the legislations and regulations stimulate collaborations between different stakeholders?*

Even though legal documents are referring to different sectors it is mainly about division of responsibilities and not so much about real intersectoral collaboration

- *Do the stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and their responsibilities and are they expected to collaborate with partner organisations?*

The decentralisation of responsibilities and decision-making authority from central to local level is in some cantons problematic. The local governments lack the necessary resources and expertise to manage that decentralisation.

10 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders

- *Is there a strategic plan (with the necessary legislation, regulation and funding) towards universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC and is the progress regularly reported?*

In the 'Education for all 2015 National Review' (p.9) is mentioned that only four education authorities have their own early childhood development strategy. Some ministries and even local communities develop their own ECE strategy. But since some ministries are so small, they do not develop their own but just refer to the entity or the state ones.

- *Are there additional funds provided to support access for disadvantaged groups.*

According to the framework law, the disadvantaged groups of children have access to so called financial subventions, which can partially or fully cover the participation costs. The financing of the subventions goes under the responsibility of social welfare

²²In Western European countries like Belgium the directors and teachers were until the nineties also appointed by the policy makers, but now they are appointed by a objective jury on the basis of their leadership competences (directors) or teaching competences (teachers)..

authorities. However, the law is not being implemented and we heard only about few cases of children who obtain this right.

- In one of the round table in Sarajevo (on public and private partnership in ECEC) the participants stated that the criteria for obtainment of the subventions is problematic, e.g. they require many paperwork steps and some conditions are debatable (e.g. if a family has a car, they cannot obtain the right).
- *Did the government take measures to emphasise the value of ECEC services, also towards disadvantaged families?*

The financing of preschool institutions depends on the financial resources of the municipalities, poor municipalities allocate fewer funds for ECEC, this has an impact on the price the parents have to pay (increase of parental fee) with the result that disadvantaged children are not enrolled in those communities. This makes the gap between the poor children and the middle class children larger. During our visit we heard several times that there is no political will to invest in ECEC for disadvantaged children.

- *Is the uptake of disadvantaged groups monitored by the government to ensure that funding is used effectively?*

The MICS data reports that only 2% of Roma children aged 3 to 6 attend preschool. This is an extremely low enrolment of Roma children.

3 Key findings

Opportunities

- high level of initial training.
- child free hours for team meetings and for reflection on practice.
- space and teachers available in primary schools to organise pre-primary programs.
- the Standards are an excellent quality framework that is scientifically based and creates opportunities for autonomy of the teacher. The emphasis on reflecting in practice is in line with recently published research. Also the emphasis on partnership with parents is very inspiring.
- teachers are very warm and positive towards the children.

Challenges

- lowest enrolment in Europe;
- low accessibility for disadvantaged children and children with special needs in ECEC and pre-primary programs;
- danger of schoolification of the pre-primary programs;
- job in ECEC is not attractive;
- too much focus on theory;
- too much teacher-centred approach
- lack of financial resources for in-service training;
- need for new forms of pedagogical inspiration;
- need for self evaluation instrument;
- the progress of individual is not systematically documented;
- the decentralisation of the financing system of ECEC has a negative effect on the enrolment of disadvantaged children in poor communalities;
- the fragmentation of responsibilities due to the complex system of governance in BiH.

4 Recommendations

- The **enrolment rate is the lowest in Europe**. Actions must be set up by UNICEF and stakeholders to increase the enrolment with a focus on disadvantaged children. Actions must be taken to
 - sensibilise the public opinion and the policy makers of the benefits of ECEC.
 - give extra financial support for poor communalities to increase the number of places in ECEC.
 - set up further actions to make preparatory preschool programs desirable for disadvantaged and Roma parents. To do so successfully, the leaders of these communities must be involved and the schools need extra support to work with disadvantaged and special needs children.
 - The number of places in the 3 to 6 institutions (full day) needs also to be further increased. The same for the 0 to 3. This is necessary to stimulate the employment of mothers (an important tool to stop child poverty).

- The initial training and continuous professional development must be rethought:
 - The content of the university initial training must be more focused on linking theory and practice and more child-centred learning (experimental or natural learning) and in working in a context of diversity (including going into dialogue with Roma and disadvantaged parents). The focus of the initial and in-service training must be on reflecting competences.
 - University professors need to get opportunities to get in touch with their colleagues in other European countries, so that information about new pedagogical approaches can be exchanged.
 - Rethinking continuous professional development: BiH needs a coherent and efficiently monitored system of CPD and we need pedagogical coaches or mentors that have the competences and the tools to support the practitioners to implement the innovations in practice.

- The **working conditions of ECEC professionals have to be improved**. Teachers and institutions must get more autonomy. The number of children per classroom in urban areas is too high and the teachers need more learning materials that stimulate forms of experimental learning (natural learning).

- An investment in the **alignment of the competences that are trained in the universities and those competences that the sector requires** (Quality standards) is necessary. Therefore a training competence profile need be developed by the different stakeholders of the ECEC sector that is in alignment with the Quality Standards.

- The non-qualified persons must get the opportunities to follow an **adapted training** to qualification that makes it possible to combine working in the schools with following training.

- The preparatory preschool programs must be based on a child-centred curriculum (experimental or natural learning) and avoid schoolification of ECEC.

- On the level of governance actions has to be taken:
 - A broad discussion on how to monitor quality has to be set up by a group of stakeholders (including parents), researchers, trainers and NGO representatives. This discussion should be chaired by a respected person who is independent from the government.
 - More investment in the development of the system of monitoring and evaluation.
 - The Agency for Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education BiH must take initiatives to develop a competent system that has the capacity to implement the necessary innovations formulated in the Quality Standards on all different levels (individual, team, institution, government, international networks / organisations). To realise this, a concrete plan has to be made on how this innovations will be implemented on the different levels of the competent system. It is important to make use of the existing experience from NGO's (Step by Step and others) and international organisations like UNICEF.
 - There are serious gaps in the funding system, which have to be addressed.

Annex 3

The Quality of ECEC Services in Kosovo*

Dr. Jan Peeters

Introduction

Purpose of the mission in Kosovo*

- i. To share recent research and thinking on the question of quality in early childhood education services, its relationship to equity and learning outcomes.
- ii. To support Kosovo* in defining and planning the application of context-relevant quality frameworks to monitor, measure and improve the quality of ECEC.

In consultation with UNICEF, the EU quality framework for ECEC was selected as the standard for quality. Based on the Eurydice report of 2014 and on several recently published European studies, we formulated some questions around the five key principles of the EQF: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding.

1 Methodology

Field visits and interviews with policy makers and stakeholders from 30th of November till 3th of December 2015

Visits to preschools

- public kindergarten "Bleta", meeting with the director of the kindergarten (Ms. SadifeteLumi);
- NGO Balkan Sunflowers, learning centre in FusheKosova / Kosovo*Polje;
- public pre-primary class within primary school in Prishtina (Dardania Primary school);

Interviews

- meeting with UNICEF: Laila Omar Gad/Head of Office and UNICEF Kosovo* team: James Mugaju / Deputy Head of Office, Aferdita Spahiu / Education specialist, Agron Gashi / Health & Nutrition specialist, Kozeta Imami / ECD officer, ArjetaGjikolli / M&E officer, Feride Dashi / Child Protection Officer, Ivana Milosavljevic, Tamara Slavkovic / UNICEF Zonal Office Zvecan;
- meeting with the OIC general secretary for education (Mr. AlushIstogu), Head of preschool division / MEST (Ms. LaberiLuzha), Head of special needs education division/MEST (Ms. LulavereKadriu), Head of division for teachers professional development / MEST (Ms. IgballeCakaj);
- meeting with responsible officer for education management information system (EMIS) / MEST (Mr. EnverMekolli) and officer for statistic/MEST (Ms. ShqipeBruqi);
- meetings with educators trained on ELDS implementation and some parents (kindergarten "Bleta");
- meeting with preschool officer / Kosovo* Pedagogical Institute (Ms. MevludeAliu);
- meeting with UNICEF ECD Consultant (ELDS and municipal ECD action plans) for children 0-6 years (Ms. Merita Shala);
- meeting with representatives of Save the Children on joint activities;
- meeting with municipal education director at FusheKosova/Kosovo*Polje municipality (Mr. Islam Shabani and education official Ms. ElmijeGrajqevcZymberi)and with the representatives of the NGO Balkan Sunflowers and visit learning center in FusheKosova / Kosovo*Polje (meeting parents of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, children activities);
- meeting with Ms. Hana Zylfiu / Step By Step Kosovo* / Kosovo* Education Center;
- meeting with representatives of University, faculty of education staff involved in early childhood education programmes (Ms. MajlindaGjelaj, Ms. ArlindaBeka, Ms. GanimeteKulinxha).

Consulted documents

- joined Hands Better Childhood UNICEF 2011;
- curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo*;
- Kosovo* Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016;
- Roma, Ashali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo*. Multiple Indicator Cluster survey 2013-2014 Key Findings;
- law on inspection of Education in Kosovo*;
- development and Learning Standards in Early Childhood 0-6 years of age.

2 Indicators for quality based on the European quality Framework

Accessibility

1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

- *What is the current rate / expected rate for 2020 of enrolment in ECEC compared to the EU target for 2020: 95% of the four years to compulsory school age children are enrolled in ECEC?*

Compared to European member states (75%) the enrolment rate in Kosovo* for 3 to 6 is rather low (30%). The percentage of children attending ECEC (age 36-59 months) is 13.9% and 75% of the children attended a preschool program (Multiple indicator, 2014).

Next to the public centres there are also private centres, but very little is known about the private preschool institutions. The UNICEF 'Joined hands' report from 2011 mentioned Community-based ECD centres in poor rural areas. These centres are situated in rural areas and entirely focused on child development and the children come for short daily sessions (low costs). But the government has not supported these centres and during our visit we heard that a lot of them are closing because of financial problems. Many interviewees said that not funding the community centres was a missed opportunity to make ECEC affordable for the poor children (80 % of the children in rural areas), since those centres are about 4 to 6 times cheaper than full day kindergarten.

Only public institutions have a set of criterias that needs to be applied when registering children. Pre-school education is a municipal responsibility, so the criteria for attendance are also defined by the municipalities. In a public/state kindergarten we visited there are 28 criteria, the most important are: working parents, poor parents, orphans, children with disabilities, war veterans and single parents

Is the attendance of ECEC (0-6 years) free of charge or income related?

The parental fees are fixed by the municipalities, so the parental fees can vary, but in the interviews we heard several times that they are far too high for many parents. We advise an income-related system. The preparatory classes are free of charge. This could create opportunities to attract Roma children, as well as children living in poverty.

2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

- *Is there a system of universal services for all children with specific support measures for disadvantaged groups (progressive universalism)?*

From research and from reports from international organisation we know how important ECEC is in breaking the cycle of disadvantage. The UNICEF study of 2011 mentioned that only 2% children with an ethnic minority background attend preschool. In the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2013-2014) they talk about 16% attendance. But in both cases the enrolment of ethnic minorities is very low and therefore concrete measures should be taken to attract disadvantaged children.

The Pre-Primary Programs should be made 'desirable' for disadvantaged parents. In all the visits we did in the four countries to short preparatory programs, the disadvantaged children were not well represented. Due to the shortage of places in ECEC (3 to 6) middle class parents are also motivated to send their children to those programmes and we know from research that due to the lack of an accessibility policy, the middle class parents will have more chance to get a place than the disadvantage parents. Therefore, more actions are needed to help disadvantaged parents to send their children to preparatory preschool programmes. The Pre-Primary Programs need also to develop an enrolment procedure that gives all children the same access opportunities²³.

For the rural areas the community centres were an excellent solution to attract the poor children. We should advise to invest in these short programs in collaboration with Save the Children, since they have proven to be effective.

ECEC Workforce

3 Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role

- *Is 50% of the workforce qualified on bachelor level?*

The level of qualification of the teachers is an asset of the ECEC system. In Kosovo* the training is on bachelor level (four years)

- *Is there a balance in the initial training between theory and practice and is there a focus on reflecting on practice and on a child-centred approach, and do children get opportunities for forms of natural learning, for learning by experimenting?*

The level of initial training for teachers in ECEC in Kosovo* (like the three other countries in the region) is high. But despite the requirement of a bachelor level, the interviewees were not positive about the content of the training. They all agreed that there is, as in the other countries in the region, too much focus on theory and the teacher-centred approach, and less on innovative pedagogical practice. In the first year there is no practice and the fourth semester of the second year only four weeks of practice and in the third year six weeks of practice. The fourth year the students get eight weeks of teaching practice. The professors are not always experts in ECEC, students told us that for instance their mentor was a specialist in Albanian language not in ECEC. A study on the quality of trainings given by the Universities said that 80% of the professors had never published about the subject of the courses they were teaching.

The initial training should be reinvented, with more focus on the link between theory and practice and more internship for the students, so that they can try out with children child-centred approaches. Therefore it is very important to invest in the capacity of the professors at the university who are responsible for coaching the students during their practice. They must be trained in methods that stimulate reflecting critically on pedagogical practice and creating innovative practice. The professors of the universities of Kosovo* should be more involved in European projects, so that they can learn from colleagues in European countries about new

²³For concrete examples of successful enrolment procedures for disadvantaged children see case study in Eurofoundstudy. Early Childhood Care: Accessibility and Quality of Services (2015) and backgroundpaper of TFIEY on accessibility <http://www.europe-kbf.eu/en/projects/early-childhood/transatlantic-forum-on-inclusive-early-years/tfey-1-ghent>

innovative theories and practices, that are focused on reflective on practice and on methods of experiential or natural learning with young children.

From the Core research we know that it is important the sector disposes of a professional competence profile (what is expected from a practitioner who works with young children) and a training competence profile (which competences have to be taught in the initial training). It is important that there will be an alignment between what is expected from the workforce (the professional competence profile) and what is learnt in the initial training for ECEC (the training competence profile). We have not seen a professional or a training profile. The government needs to take the initiative to develop a both competence profiles together with a group of practitioners, researchers and policymakers²⁴.

- *Is Continuous Professional Development a professional duty for the whole workforce? Are their financial incentives for the services or the individual workers?*

Until now courses were organised for the implementation of the Standards (ELDS: 7 days of training) and there were also mentors involved to support the implementation in practice. The Ministry of Education has organized 7 day intensive training for all educators, pre-primary teachers including nurses working in public kindergartens.

- *Are there childfree hours available to organise coaching and team meetings?*

In the pre-primary programs the teachers have two child free hours a day for team meetings, to prepare the activities and for coaching sessions.

- *Can every centre rely on specialised workers for children with special needs or coming from disadvantaged groups and can services get the support of pedagogical coaches for implementing innovations? Is there a training / coaching or supervision available for the directors?*

In Kosovo* there are specialised workers in the institutions working for children with special needs and also pedagogical coaches. In public preschools and kindergartens and in some pre-primary classes within schools there are specialised teachers for children with special needs and there is also a pedagogical coach covering every eight ECEC., but we do not find them in every school. These coaches play a crucial role in the implementation of the 'Early learning development standards for children(0-6)', but they must do this in close collaboration with the heads of centres²⁵The role of both the coach and the head of centre must be clearly defined the external counsellors may support the team, in close cooperation with the heads of centres. Pedagogical counsellors create a culture of mutual learning. They have to combine a broad knowledge on ECEC and group processes and dynamics, with the competence to use different models of coaching²⁶ that stimulate reflective thinking on how the Standards can be implemented. On the other hand the coach must valorise the role of the head of centre in the process of change, who has to take up the leadership of the process of change. As a consequence, the differences between the role of the head of centre and pedagogical counsellor have to be clearly defined. Heads of centres are leaders of ECEC centres: they co-ordinate the practical daily activities of the centre, they execute organisational and administrative tasks. Heads of centres organise team meetings and evaluate the practitioners. In cooperation with the practitioners they implement the

²⁴The ISSA principles for the teacher of the 21st century can be a good starting point for this discussion

²⁵For an example of how this can be organised see: Peeters, De Kimpe, Brandt, 2016; The competent system of Ghent .

²⁶ Concrete examples are the North-Italian method of documentation and the Wanda method , used in Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. and the French Analyse de Pratique.

pedagogical vision and the quality framework in practice.

It is also important that the methods and approaches of continuous professional development that are used to implement the change, have been proven effective in changing pedagogical practice. We also experienced a lack of methodology on how to implement the Standards on the level of the institutions.

The big challenge now will be to develop a system of continuous professional development that is stimulating and effective in implementing the Standards²⁷. Therefore it is necessary to start long term CPD initiatives (for minimum two years) to implement the strategic goals, with an active involvement of practitioners. The CPD or coaching has to be focused on learning in practice, and has to be supported by a mentor or coach.

The Kosovo* Education Centre has developed a coherent system of professional development for project schools that work with the ISSA program. The Education centre uses different sort of CPD: coaching, training courses for teachers and a joint course for inspectors and directors.

- *Are there alternative pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons?*

We did not get any information about pathways to qualification for non qualified persons. Kosovo* should invest in training programs on pedagogy for young children for the nurses in the childcare centres and also for the non-qualified persons, that are already working and should be able to benefit from systems of earlier acquired competences. Both groups should be able to follow courses one day a week, that are specially tailored for working students and that lead to a qualification in ECEC. Again in these courses the link between theory and practice is extremely important.

4 Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents

- *Do the working conditions (wage levels, status of the profession) make employment in ECEC an attractive option?*

In Kosovo* the wages of the teachers vary greatly: from less than 100 euro per month to more than 300 euro. In part this variation in salaries is linked to difference in hours of service the teacher is providing, some provide full day service others only three hours a day (UNICEF, 2011).

- *Is the adult child ratio (1/12) and the maximum number of children in a group (24) in line with international standards?*

According to MEST statistical report (2015) the adult-child ratio for preschool is 10 students per 1 teacher, for pre-primary education is 24 students per 1 teacher (school year 2013/14). But the UNICEF study of 2011 has observed sometimes up to 30 children for one teacher.

- *Do the teachers have enough materials to create stimulating environments for the children?*

From our own observations and from the talks with the teachers we can conclude that the teachers are experiencing a lack of effective teaching materials.

²⁷Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., Cameron, C., Budginaite, I., Hauari, H., Peleman, B. & Siarova, H. (2015) *Early Childhood Care: working conditions, training and quality - A systematic review*. Dublin: Eurofound

- *Are there special trainings or interventions for directors?*

Effective leadership is very important for implementing sustainable change (see 3, role of director).

There is a need in Kosovo* for trainings and intervention for directors.

- *Is there enough focus on the development of reflective competences and capacity building for planning?*

The universities and the training centres should invest in using reflective and planning methods²⁸ that are scientifically based and proven to be successful in other countries, because we know from recent literature reviews and systematic reviews that reflecting on practice is essential to improve the quality and to have positive outcomes for children (Eurofound, Peeters et al., 2015).

Curriculum

5 A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way

- *Do the short programs have a minimum of 3h a day and around 500 hours a year? The pre-primary programs in Kosovo* are sufficient in lengths and duration.*

In the pre-primary program that we visited the teacher had two groups of each around 28 children, the duration of the program was 1h30-2h a day. The government is focusing their ECEC policy on this pre-primary programs and they want 100% of enrolment in the near future.

- *Is there a curriculum based on pedagogical goals and scientifically based?*

The important document 'Early Learning Development Standards in Early Childhood 0 to 6 years of age' that has been developed between 2008 and 2011 by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology with the support of UNICEF, is scientifically based and the standards and behavioural indicators describing in detail the pedagogical goals that have to be reached. Between 2008 and 2011 national and international experts and representatives of the sector were involved in the process of development of the standards.

The ELDS is starting from an Anglo-Saxon vision on curriculum and on quality with a focus on behavioural indicators that can be measured. The Standards can be a source of inspiration for trainers and coaches to set up trainings and coaching sessions about the curriculum. We advise not to translate the standards and behavioural indicators in a checklist for the teachers, like they often do in Anglo-Saxon countries. The level of training of the teachers in Kosovo* is quite high they have the capacity to give in their activities with children an own interpretation of the standards. But during our visit we saw that the teachers used a practical guideline for implementing the ELDS, which is highly appreciated by the teachers. It was used as framework to set up projects and activities and seems to give space for inspiration for the teachers. It is important that in coaching sessions on the ELDS teachers get autonomy to give their own interpretation on the standards.

²⁸ Wanda is an example of a reflective method especially developed for ECEC with funding of the European Social Fund and tested out successfully in Slovenia, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic and Belgium.

- *Is there a balance between adult-led & child-led initiated activities? Is there a focus on project-based learning or forms of natural learning, are the children put situations where they can guide their own learning process?*

From the observations during the field visits we can conclude that the pedagogical approach is teacher-centred: the teacher is the one leading the learning process. The result of the lack of inspiring practice in the initial training may be an explanation for this teacher-centred approach and for the traditional activities we observed (colouring of pre-printed commercial drawings ...). We saw in services we visited in Kosovo*, like in the other three countries few activities that provided real learning opportunities, no portfolio's on children's development and few documentation of inspiring activities. The interviewees confirmed that that the pedagogical approach is very teacher centred and that there is a need for more child-centred approaches.

The standards ELDS have to be translated in a brochure or video's that inspires the teachers for a more child-centred approach based on play and on natural forms of learning. In the curriculum Framework this is formulated as follows: 'Children will be exposed to basic essential learning processes in order to stimulate their curiosity about themselves, society, nature, culture and new technologies. The aim of the education process is to stimulate their creativity and enthusiasm in approaching new experiences and facing real-life situations' (p26). This focus on young children as active learners in natural situations must be the main focus for future reforms in the preschool institutions in Kosovo*.

Kosovo* also needs a curriculum for the 0 to 3 years. The workforce of the childcare centres are mainly nurses and there is medical hygienic approach with little attention for educational issues. The new curriculum in the Flemish Community of Belgium and the ISSA curriculum for the 0 to 3 could be a source of inspiration for Kosovo*.

- *Are the interactions with the children, warm and stimulating? And is there any form of discrimination towards poor and disadvantaged children?*

The teachers were very positive towards the children; we observed warm stimulating interaction. Especially in the services for Roma children we saw very engaged teachers, who believed in the capacities of the children.

6 A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice

- *Does the curriculum require staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and is the curriculum stimulating reflection on their own practice?*

The ELDS only focuses on the interactions with young children and the outcomes for children, the collaboration with the parents which is critical factor for quality in ECEC in not addressed, neither the collaboration with colleagues. For this two important aspects of quality (see international reports: OECD, 2006, 2012; European Commission, 2011) we need to look for other approaches and curriculums²⁹. A vision on quality has to be larger than only the development of the child; the following aspects have to be taken in consideration: contact with parents, involvement of parents, teamwork, accessibility, leadership, qualification ... Therefore the European

²⁹The Berliner curriculum strengthens those two aspects and also the North Italian approach on documentation (the Reggio approach) and the Step by Step 'Teachers for the 21th century'. These approaches are being used in many different countries and valued by researchers and international organisations, because of the child-centred approach with a focus on natural learning.

Quality Framework for ECEC is an excellent framework that gathers all aspects of quality and can include different quality documents (curriculum, competence profiles ...).

- *Is there a policy that includes disadvantaged children and children with special needs and that also gives extra support to those children and their families?*

The government has transformed the former schools for special education into resource centres for children with special needs. The special needs teachers are now helping the ECEC teachers in the regular schools in their work with children with special needs.

Seen the extremely high percentage of poor children (40%) more attention has to be given to support for disadvantaged families with young children. During our visits we had the impression that the work with disadvantaged families is not a priority. UNICEF and other organisation must continue to put the role of ECEC for disadvantaged families on the agenda of policy makers and the ECEC institutions.

Monitoring and evaluation

7 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice

- *Is there an evaluation of the quality of the whole ECEC system? Is this evaluation of the quality in alignment with international measurement scales? Which is the frequency of this evaluation?*

We know from the review of ECEC Quality Monitoring System that the development of a system to measure and monitor the whole ECEC system *based on international standards for monitoring* is very expensive, especially for small countries. Therefore we would advise a common monitoring system for the four countries co-ordinated by UNICEF.

The Education Management Information System, (EMIS) is since three years gathering information on all aspects of the ECEC schools, but there are no data of the quality of the ECEC system.

- *Is the system of monitoring of the ECEC services coherent and well developed, is it based on international standards for monitoring?*

There are: 45 inspectors divided in 7 regions, each region has 1 inspector in charge only for preschool education. The law of 2004 is describing the duties of the inspection of education and contains also a concrete description of competences and tasks of the inspectors.

8 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

- *Is there a system of observation and documentation of the progress that the individual child is making? Which is the frequency of this individual evaluation?*

We had the impression from the observations during our field visits and the interviews that the observation and documentation of the progress that every individual child is making was not well developed.

Based on the 'ELDS', a system of documenting the progress of every child must be developed. Existing systems from different countries (Italy f.i.) must be analysed and considered to see if and how they could be of use for the context of Kosovo*.

Governance arrangements

9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations

- *Does the government give enough autonomy to the services, can they develop an own human resource management?*

The governmental organisations have a lot of influence in the sector. The different stakeholders must get more autonomy to develop an own policy for their services: schools must have the autonomy to appoint directors and teachers according to general Human Resource quality criteria. The situation is even worse in the universities. Professors need to be recruited on the basis of academic criteria and pedagogical knowledge about young children.

- *Are the governmental bodies capable of respecting the legislation and the regulation on ECEC?*

The capacity building of people working in the governmental bodies that are responsible for inspection and monitoring the quality (accreditation of training centres, inspection of quality...) must be a priority for the near future.

- *Do the legislations and regulations stimulate collaborations between different stakeholders? Do the stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and their responsibilities and are they expected to collaborate with partner organisations?*

In the document 'Curriculum Framework for pre-university Education' published by the government the implementation of the Curriculum is described and more specific the role of the different stakeholders is explained.

The government needs to develop professional and training competence profiles in collaboration with representatives of the universities, the training centres and ECEC stakeholders. Both competence profiles must be in alignment with each other.

10 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders

- *Is there a strategic plan (with the necessary legislation, regulation and funding) towards universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC and is the progress regularly reported?*

The decentralisation of responsibilities and decision-making authority from central to municipality level is problematic. The local governments lack the necessary resources and expertise to manage that decentralisation. There is need to provide central budget funding for ECEC, to give the municipalities more opportunities to go for a

universal entitlement for the pre-primary programs and also to increase the number of places in 0 to 3 and 3 to 5 years of age.

- *Are there additional funds provided to support access for disadvantaged groups.*

There are centres who get additional funds from the Roma Education Fund and from Save the Children and Western European countries. But there are no additional funds from the government for disadvantaged groups.

- *Did the government take measures to emphasise the value of ECEC services, also towards disadvantaged families?*

The financing of preschool institutions depends on the financial resources of the municipalities, poor municipalities allocate fewer funds for ECEC, this has an impact on the price the parents have to pay (increase of parental fee) with the result that disadvantaged children are not enrolled in those communities. This makes the gap between the poor children and the middle class children larger. During our visit we heard several times that there the government should invest more in ECEC for disadvantaged children.

- *Is the uptake of disadvantaged groups monitored by the government to ensure that funding is used effectively?*

With the support of European countries important data are gathered. The MICS data reports that only 16% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children aged 3 to 5 attend preschool.

3 Key findings

Opportunities

- high level of initial training;
- child free hours for team meetings and for reflection on practice;
- pedagogical coaches specialised to support teachers to work with children with special needs and disadvantaged families;
- the practical guideline to implement the ELDS is welcomed by the teachers;
- coherent systems of CPD organised by NGO's;
- space and teachers available in primary schools to organise pre-primary programs;
- the ELDS is a scientifically based quality framework;
- teachers are very warm and positive towards the children;
- the tasks and responsibilities of inspection are clearly defined.

Challenges

- low enrolment 30% compare to the European average 75%;
- community centres had lots of opportunities in rural areas but the government need to give funding;
- low accessibility for disadvantaged children and children with special needs in ECEC and pre-primary programs: 16%;
- danger of schoolification of the pre-primary programs;
- job in ECEC is not attractive;
- too much focus on theory in initial training;
- too much teacher-centred approach;
- more emphasis on reflecting on practice and on partnership with parents is needed;
- need for new forms of pedagogical inspiration;
- the childcare centres (0 to 3 year of age) is focused on medical approach;
- the progress of the individual child is not systematically documented;
- the decentralisation of the financing system of ECEC has a negative effect on the enrolment of poor children in poor communalities.

4 Recommendations

- Actions must be set up to increase the number of ethnic minorities. Further actions have to be put in place to increase the access of disadvantaged children in preparatory preschool programs. To do so successfully, the leaders of these communities must be involved and the schools need extra support to work with disadvantaged and special needs children.
- The number of places in the 3 to 6 institutions (full day) needs also to be further increased. The same for the 0 to 3. This is necessary to stimulate the employment of mothers (an important tool to stop child poverty).
- Poor communalities must get extra financial support from the national government to increase the number of places in ECEC.
- The preparatory preschool programs must be based on a child-centred approach (experimental or natural learning) and avoid schoolification of ECEC.
- Rethinking the initial training.
The content of the university initial training must be more focused on linking theory and practice and more child-centred learning (experimental or natural learning) and in working in a context of diversity (including going into dialogue with Roma and disadvantaged parents). The focus of the initial and in-service training must be on reflecting competences. University professors need to get opportunities to get in touch with their colleagues in other European countries, so that information about new pedagogical approaches can be exchanged.
- Rethinking continuous professional development: Kosovo* needs a coherent and efficiently monitored system of CPD. The pedagogical coaches or mentors must have the competences and the tools to support the practitioners to implement the innovations in practice.
- The working conditions of ECEC professionals have to be improved. Teachers and institutions must get more autonomy. The teachers need more learning materials that stimulate forms of experimental learning (natural learning).
- An investment in the alignment of the competences that are trained in the universities and the competences that the sector requires (Quality standards) is necessary. Therefore a training competence profile need be developed by the different stakeholders of the ECEC sector that is in alignment with the Quality Standards.
- The non-qualified persons and the nurses must get the opportunities to follow an adapted training to qualification that makes it possible to combine working in the schools with following training.
- A broad discussion on how to monitor quality of the whole ECEC sector has to be set up by a group of stakeholders (including parents), researchers, trainers and NGO representatives. This discussion should be chaired by a respected person who is independent from the government.
- Initiatives must be take to develop a competent system that has the capacity to implement the necessary innovations formulated in the ELDS on all different levels (individual, team, institution, government, international networks / organisations). To realise this, a concrete plan has to be made on how this innovations will be implemented on the different levels of the competent system. It is important to make use of the existing experience from NGO's (Step by Step and others) and international organisations like UNICEF.
There are serious gaps in the funding system, the national government needs to support the municipalities.

Annex 4

The Quality of ECEC Services in Montenegro

Dr. Jan Peeters

Introduction

Purpose of the mission in Montenegro

- i. To share recent research and thinking on the question of quality in early childhood education services, its relationship to equity and learning outcomes.
- ii. To support Montenegro in defining and planning the application of context-relevant quality frameworks to monitor, measure and improve the quality of ECEC.

In consultation with UNICEF, the EU quality framework for ECEC was selected as the standard for quality. Based on the Eurydice report of 2014 and on several recently published European studies, we formulated some questions around the five key principles of the EQF: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and evaluation and governance and funding.

1 Methodology

Participation to the International conference on 'Quality Education, 28th of October 2015. All kindergarten directors of Montenegro as well as the representatives of the Ministry of Education, the Bureau for Education and all other relevant institutions were present on this conference.

Field visits and interviews with policy makers and stakeholders from 26th until 30th of October 2015

Visits to preschools

- Visit to „ĐinaVrbica“ Kindergarten
- Visit to “VrelaRibnička” Kindergarten for Roma children (refugees from Kosovo*)

Interviews

- Meeting with Deputy Minister of Education for Preschool and Primary Education Ms. ArijanaNikolić,
- Meeting with Head of the Section for Preschool Education and Inclusion / Ministry of Education, Ms. Tamara Milić,
- Meeting with Bureau for Education: Mr. Fran Vuljaj, Supervisor for Preschool Institutions / Ms. DušankaPopović, Head of the Professional Development Department; Ms. Vesna Bulatović, Head of the Dept for Quality Assurance
- Meeting in University of Montenegro: Ms. Tatjana Novović, Head of the Dept.for Preschool Education / Teacher Training Faculty – Faculty of Philosophy, Ms. BiljanaMaslovarić, Vice-Dean for International Relations / Faculty of Philosophy, and Director of the NGO Pedagogical Centre of Montenegro (involved in preschool education for Roma children)
- Meeting in Preschool Institution „ĐinaVrbica“: Director Ms. NatašaTomović, and Ms. SenkaŽivković, Special Education Teacher, Ms. Marijana Ivančević, psychologist, Ms. VesnaBulatović, kindergarten teacher
- Meeting with NGO Roditelji Director Ms. Kristina Mihailović
- Meeting with NGO Puževakućica – Association of parents of children and youth with disabilities Ms. NatašaAnastastov.
- Meeting with British Council: VanjaMadzgali
- Meeting with UNICEF: Benjamin Perks, Ana Zec, Maja Kovačević

Consulted documents

- Investing in Early Childhood education in Montenegro. UNICEF, Ipsos
- Strategy for Early and Preschool Education in Montenegro 2016-2020 Ministry of Education, UNICEF
- Strategy for Early and Preschool Education 2010-2015. Ministry of Education and Sports, UNICEF
- State-of- play in Preschool Education: Infrastructure, Coverage, Teaching Staff and Equipment
- Continuous professional development of teachers in Montenegro Bureau for Education. Power point presentation UNICEF Tirana conference, March 2016 by Dusanka Popovic and LjiljanaSubotic
- Knowledge, attitudes and practices of parents from Northern municipalities regarding pre-school education UNICEF, Ipsos
- PPP distributed on ECEC conference: Quality Education, 27thOctober Podgorica

2 Indicators for quality based on the European quality Framework

Accessibility

1 Provision that is available and affordable to all families and their children

- *What is the current rate / expected rate for 2020 of enrolment in ECEC compared to the EU target for 2020: 95% of the four years to compulsory school age children are enrolled in ECEC?*

In 2010 Montenegro launched a Strategy for Early and Preschool Education (2010-2015). This strategic plan consisted of six strategic developmental goals for early and preschool education. One of the objectives of this strategic plan was to increase the number of places from 20 to 40% in five years time (objective1). Montenegro succeeded to realise this target. But there is a serious gap in attendance rates between rural (19%) and urban Montenegro (55%). Data from MICS 2013 also show that only 7% of children aged 3 to 5 from the poorest quintile attend preschool. Amongst the wealthiest quintile attendance is ten times as high (66%). Before 2020 the Strategy for Early and preschool Education 2015-2020 wants to introduce universal short (3h a day, 600 a year) preschool programs for children over 5 in 2015, for children over 4 in 2017 and for children over 3 in 2019.

Although Montenegro reached the target of 40% enrolment, we learned from representatives of schools, parents, NGO's and professors of the university that few new centres were built. The increase of places was mainly realised by allowing more children per class room. A recurring complaint in our visits to centres was that the classrooms were overcrowded and that this had a negative impact on the quality of the services. In the observations we did during the visits, we could confirm that the norm of 3 m² was not respected. There were far too many children in each classroom with the exception of a school for Roma children, that was financed by the Roma Education Fund. Directors of preschools recognised the problem, but they declared that there had been great pressure to put more children in the same classroom.

After an intensive policy advocacy campaign, the Government and the Ministry of Education have committed to invest efforts in increasing the coverage and developed the new Strategy for Early and preschool Education 2015-2020 setting out three main goals: expansion of preschool education according to international standards, improving the quality of preschool education, and ensuring financial sustainability. The Strategy for Early and preschool Education 2016-2020 aims an increase of places from 40% to 95%, this is very ambitious since the average of enrolment of the 3 to 6 years of age in the EU is 75% (Eurydice, Eurostat, 2014). The new Strategy was adopted in November 2015 and was presented on the conference of the 27th of November to the professionals and to the public.

The interviewed stakeholders (teachers, directors, trainers, parents ...) were very concerned that this new ambitious plan could have a negative impact on the quality if again more children were put together in way too small classrooms.

The representatives from parent organisations and independent NGO's make a strong statement: investing in new premises as proposed in the study on investing in ECEC in Montenegro (2014), is necessary and they ask for concrete measures to realise this, in order to help overcome all these barriers. UNICEF is taking into consideration the concerns of the sector. The 'Study on investing in ECE' (UNICEF, Ipsos, 2014) proposes cost-effective scenarios for increasing access by introducing a free of charge three hour program in all municipalities, as well as to launch outreach and interactive services for children in rural areas. According to UNICEF building new premises is

about to start or is already under way for four more units in the capital of Podgorica, and another three in Pljevlja, Bar and Ulcinj. UNICEF Montenegro will continue to provide support to implementation of the new Strategy with the focus on activities ensuring equity, access and quality of services.

In the Strategy for Early and preschool Education 2016-2020 is mentioned that the parental fee has to be slightly increased and is not used only to cover the costs of food, as has been the case so far, but that it can be used to increase the quality of the service in general.

We agree with recommendation 3 that parent should pay a monthly fee, but we recommend to link this fee to the family income of parents. This approach is common in many European countries and is used successfully as a tool to realise equal access.

- *Is the attendance of ECEC (0-6 years) free of charge or income related?*

The short three hour program (600 hours a year) will be free of charge as are the recently launched outreach preschool services for children in rural areas.

The Ministry of Education also endorsed to provide a free meal for all children.

For the kindergarten parents pay for the food costs an amount of 1,80 euro or an average of 36 euro per month (figures of 2010).

2 Provision that encourages participation, strengthens social inclusion and embraces diversity

- *Is there a system of universal services for all children with specific support measures for disadvantaged groups (progressive universalism)?*

Two programs are free of charge for all children: the three-hour programme, which will be launched in September 2016 and the outreach preschool services, that was launched in December 2015 and is already functioning in rural areas in five northern municipalities, with an intention to expand it to six more municipalities in the North. These free of charge programs create opportunities to attract Roma and Egyptian children, as well as children living in poverty.

But this is not enough to attract those children from poor backgrounds: in all the visits we did in the four countries to short preparatory programs, the disadvantaged children were not well represented. Due to the lack of places in ECEC (3 to 6) middle class parents are also motivated to send their children to those programmes and we know from research that due to the lack of an accessibility policy, the middle class parents will have more chance to get a place than the disadvantage parents. Therefore, more actions are needed to help disadvantaged parents to send their children to preparatory preschool programmes. The actions set up by the University of Podgorica in the Northern municipalities were an excellent example of how the three hours program and the outreach program should be made 'desirable' for disadvantaged parents (see European Quality Framework for ECEC). This kind of actions have to be continued in which the usefulness of this programs for their children should be demonstrated to the parents. Key persons in the ethnic minority groups must be involved in those actions. Like it is stated in the Strategy for Early and Preschool Education 2016-2020, Montenegro will invest in those actions. The Ministry started with outreach and interactive services in 6 municipalities and in autumn five other municipalities will start with those outreach programs. Those programs recognise parents as first educators and parents will be informed of the importance of ECEC programs but are also encouraged to play an active role in the education of their child.

ECEC Workforce

3 Well-qualified staff whose initial and continuing training enables them to fulfil their professional role

- *Is 50% of the workforce qualified on bachelor level?*

The level of initial training for teachers in ECEC in Montenegro is very high compared to other countries: 3 year bachelor and a 4th specialisation year and afterwards a year of internship.

- *Is there a balance in the initial training between theory and practice and is there a focus on reflecting on practice and on a child-centred approach, and do children get opportunities for forms of natural learning, for learning by experimenting?*

Despite this long training of five years the interviewees were not positive about the content of the training. They all agreed that there is too much focus on theory (which they find rather traditional), too much teacher-focused and not enough on innovative practice. This is due to a relative isolation of Montenegro and to the fact that it is a small country with only one teacher training school. The professors of this school should be more involved in European projects, (Erasmus plus) and attend European conferences so that they can learn from new theories and practices.

The result of this lack of inspiring practice in the initial training may be an explanation for the teacher-centred and traditional activities we observed (colouring of pre-printed commercial drawings) and we saw few activities that provided real learning opportunities. The documentation that was shown to us was about big festivities, not on daily practice that could be shared with parents and colleagues. There is also no culture of reflection on the daily pedagogical practice. We know from the CoRe (2016) and Eurofound (2015) study that the development of reflective competences are a key task for the initial and continuous training. But it is hopeful for the years to come that play based and active learning and also the reflective thinking of the learning community get so many attention in the Strategy for Early and Preschool Education 2015-2020.

- *Is Continuous Professional Development a professional duty for the whole workforce? Are their financial incentives for the services or the individual workers?*

The Bureau of Education had taken the initiative to develop a coherent system for in-service training for the teachers in the period 2005-2008. And also in the Strategy (2016-2020) the need for coherent system of CPD is mentioned. This CPD framework for teachers contains school-based professional development, a varied range of courses and mentorship for new teachers. The Bureau of Education also made a plan to implement it on the school level in two years time. The Strategy for Early and Preschool Education (2010 – 2015) already mentioned the need to develop such a coherent system for in-service training for the preschool teachers. This CPD framework for teachers was therefore also put in place for the teachers of the 21 preschools of Montenegro. During the visits a director showed us a long list of CPD initiatives that the educators could attend. In the talks we had with directors, we did not had the impressions that the CPD initiatives had an impact on reflecting on the own pedagogical practice. Also, in the talks with representatives from NGO's it was mentioned that the CPD initiatives has to be linked more to practice and more concrete it has to give inspiration and motivation to implement the innovations mentioned in the Strategy. Therefore we need a clear definition of roles of who is

responsible for what in the implementation of the goals stipulated in the Strategy for Early and Preschool Education

- *Are there childfree hours available to organise coaching and team meetings?*

A recent systematic review on the impact of professional development, published by Eurofound³⁰, points out that one of the success factors for continuous professional development initiatives are the availability of paid hours for non-contact time and the presence of a mentor or coach who facilitate practitioners' reflection in reference groups during those child free hours.

- *Can every centre rely on specialised workers for children with special needs or coming from disadvantaged groups and can services get the support of pedagogical coaches for implementing innovations?*

In some institutions there are pedagogues and psychologists to support the teachers to work with children with special needs, but this is not the case in all centres. The same for the coaches who can support the teachers in the implementation of the goals of the Strategy. These coaches play a crucial role in the implementation of the Strategy, but they must do this in close collaboration with the heads of centres³¹. The role of both the coach and the head of centre must be clearly defined the external counsellors may support the team, in close cooperation with the heads of centres. The counsellors can be a member of the staff or can be an external person. The coach need to have an appreciative approach and a strong confidence in the capabilities and the engagement of the practitioners. Pedagogical counsellors create a culture of mutual learning. They have to combine a broad knowledge on ECEC and group processes and dynamics, with the competence to use different models of coaching³² that stimulate reflective thinking on how the Strategy can be implemented. On the other hand the coach must valorise the role of the head of centre in the process of change, who has to take up the leadership of the process of change. As a consequence, the differences between the role of the head of centre and pedagogical counsellor have to be clearly defined. Heads of centres are leaders of ECEC centres: they co-ordinate the practical daily activities of the centre, they execute organisational and administrative tasks. Heads of centres organise team meetings and evaluate the practitioners. In cooperation with the practitioners they implement the pedagogical vision and the quality framework in practice.

- *Is there a training / coaching or supervision available for the directors?*

Yes there also CPD initiatives for directors, but again we have the feeling that they are not enough linked to reflect on and change pedagogical practice in the ECEC institutions.

- *Are there alternative pathways to qualification for non-qualified persons?*

There is very low percentage of non-qualified teachers in Montenegro. But there are still a lot of nurses working in childcare (Strategy, 2010). For these nurses an adapted

³⁰Peeters, J., Lazzari, A., Cameron, C., Budginaite, I., Hauari H., Peleman, B. & Siarova, H. (2015). Early Childhood Care: working conditions, training and quality - A systematic review. Dublin: Eurofound

³¹Peeters, J. De Kimpe, C. & Brandt S. (2016) The competent system in the city of Ghent: a long-term investment in continuous professional development. In Vandenbroeck, M., Urban, M., Peeters, J. *Pathways towards professionalism in ECEC* New York, London: Routledge.

³²Concrete examples are the North-Italian method of documentation and the Wanda method, used in Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia and Croatia. and the French Analyse de Pratique.

qualifying training (that takes into account earlier acquired competences) in pedagogy for the young child should be set up.

4 Supportive working conditions including professional leadership which creates opportunities for observation, reflection, planning, teamwork and cooperation with parents

- *Do the working conditions (wage levels, status of the profession) make employment in ECEC an attractive option?*

There is no shortage in teachers in ECEC in Montenegro, although the status of the profession and the wages are like in the other countries in the region rather low. According to figures of 2010 the net month salaries are 390 euro for preschool teachers and 435 euro for professional support staff. But the ambitious Strategy on Early Preschool Education (2016-2020) can improve the working conditions and make employment in ECE more attractive.

- *Is the adult-child ratio (1/12) and the maximum number of children in a group (24) in line with international standards?*

The law on preschool education is very precise in the group size that varies according to the age of the children from eight children for the children up to 1 year, and 25 children for 5-6 years old. But in reality the average class size vary greatly depending on the region. In Podgorica there are classes of 41 children and rural areas sometimes only twelve children in a group. In the kindergarten we visited the classes were overcrowded and the children had not enough space to play. In each group of 3 to 6 years of age there are two teachers, in the school year 2009- 2010 the overall teacher-child ratio was between 1/15 and 1/27. The problem is not the adult-child ratio but the numbers of children per group. Therefore it is important that the inspectors and the government will ensure that the group size do not exceed the numbers stipulated in the regulations.

- *Do the teachers have enough materials to create stimulating environments for the children?*

The lack of space in the centre we visited makes it difficult for the teacher to interact positively with each child individually. In the playroom for the youngest children specifically, there was way too much noise. The sound isolation is not adapted for children: too much glass and hard materials. The materials we saw were very traditional and they do not stimulate play-based and active learning, like is mentioned in the Strategy document. But the Strategy document we find concrete plans for new innovative materials, equipment, books and toys.

- *Is there enough focus on the development of reflective competences and capacity building for planning?*

There is an urgent need to focus more on reflective competences in the initial and the in-service training. It is important that we use methods and approaches of reflecting on practice that have been proven effective in changing pedagogical practice (see results Eurofound, 2015). Important is that the method is starting from the practice like it is now, then looks at the goals mentioned in the Strategy, thereafter gathering ideas for changing practice and next planning the concrete innovations and finally evaluating the changes in pedagogical practice that have been made.

For the directors it is very important that they get capacity building in planning and implementing change.

Curriculum

5 A curriculum based on pedagogic goals, values and approaches which enable children to reach their full potential in a holistic way

- *Do the short programs have a minimum of 3h a day and around 500 hours a year?*

The pre-primary programs in Montenegro are sufficient in lengths and duration, the preschool preparatory programs lasts three hours a day, over five days a week, for at least ten months, in total every child should receive 600 hours which is sufficient if we look to results of a longitudinal study like EPPE.

- *Is there a curriculum based on pedagogical goals and scientifically based? Is there a balance between adult-led & child-led initiated activities?*

Is there a focus on project-based learning or forms of natural learning, are the children put situations where they can guide their own learning process?

In the Strategy is mentioned that the Ministry of Education will review and revise the standards for quality in ECEC. The direction in which MoE wants to go is very promising, they will be based on research and on successful models in others countries. The Strategy argues for a more child centred curriculum with a 'focus on play-based and active learning which includes play learning centres that replicates real life situations'. The MoE also plans a broad consultation with ECE practitioners and stakeholders and high level meetings to develop the standards. This is very important to create a broad support for the new standards, because the transition from the teacher centred approach which is now mainstream in Montenegro to a child centred approach will not work without a strong support from all stakeholders and a coherent system of CPD.

- *Are the interactions with the children, warm and stimulating? And is there any form of discrimination towards poor and disadvantaged children?*

In the two visits we observed warm interactions with the children, in particular the practitioners working with refugee Roma children were very engaged and involved and very stimulating in their interactions. They also talked very positive about the children although they work in difficult circumstances.

6 A curriculum which requires staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and to reflect on their own practice

- *Does the curriculum require staff to collaborate with children, colleagues and parents and is the curriculum stimulating reflection on their own practice?*

The new standards give a lot of attention collaboration and communication with communities in remote areas. Here again we see a gap between the ambitious goals of the Strategy and the reality we observed during our visits. We saw no concrete examples of working with partners in the neighbourhoods and also we saw no

inspiring examples of parent involvement. It will be important to focus on parental involvement in the future CPD initiatives³³.

- *Is there a policy that includes disadvantaged children and children with special needs and that also gives extra support to those children and their families?*

The policy towards children with special needs is focused on detecting special needs in an early stage. There is a lot of expertise in the ECEC sector on this topic. But in the interviews we learned that there is less attention for how to support teachers to work with children with special needs in normal classrooms.

The standards of the Strategy give a lot of attention on how to work in a context of diversity, not only for children with special needs but also for children from ethnic minorities (Roma children).

Monitoring and evaluation

7 Monitoring and evaluating produces information at the relevant local, regional and/or national level to support continuing improvements in the quality of policy and practice

- *Is there an evaluation of the quality of the whole ECEC system? Is this evaluation of the quality in alignment with international measurement scales? Which is the frequency of this evaluation?*

The discussion on quality of education, including the quality of preschool education, started in July 2014 when the first conference on quality of education was organized by UNICEF, in cooperation with MoE. It was followed by a series of conferences (another one in 2014, two in 2015), where issues of expansion and quality were discussed with national, regional and international actors and experts. This resulted in a coherent vision like it is written down in the Strategy on Early and Preschool Education (2016-2020).

Overall monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the whole system has been carried out by supervisors and advisers of the bureau of Education at specific intervals. But the fact that so many urban ECEC centres are overcrowded shows that this system is not operating efficiently and has to be improved.

But there is no evaluation of the whole ECEC system in alignment with international measurement scales. We know from the review of ECEC Quality Monitoring System that the development of a system to measure and monitor the whole ECEC system based on international standards for monitoring like Class or EECERS is very expensive, especially for a small country as Montenegro. Therefore we would advise a common monitoring system for the four countries co-ordinated by UNICEF.

- *Is the system of monitoring of the ECEC services coherent and well developed, is it based on international standards for monitoring?*

According to the old Strategy document (2010-2015) the monitoring and the evaluation of the services is done internally by pedagogues and psychologists. But since this specialists do not exist in all institutions, this internal monitoring is not taking place in all institutions. The Bureau of Education must get the opportunity to benefit from capacity building on monitoring and evaluation of ECEC.

³³There are several brochures on parental participation that are results of European projects (f.i. 'Parental involvement also for fathers', the video 'Childcare Stories' ...) that can be used in coaching and training.

8 Monitoring and evaluation which is in the best interest of the child

- *Is there a system of observation and documentation of the progress that the individual child is making? Which is the frequency of this individual evaluation?*

Until now this aspect is not well developed, we did not see any portfolio or documentation during our visits, but in the new Strategy (2016-2020) there is a strong focus on the documentation and the observation that the individual child is making. New standards will be implemented to monitor and assess children. According to the Standards children has to be assessed in the near future on a daily and weekly basis. We would advise to do the documentation and assessment only on monthly basis, otherwise this can lead to too much administrative work for the teacher. The MoE will also establish a variety of assessments, portfolios, videos, observation tools and other methods to observe children's learning and report their progress. Therefore we advise to look for inspiration in the North-Italian approach of Documentation.

Governance arrangements

9 Stakeholders in the ECEC system have a clear and shared understanding of their role and responsibilities, and know that they are expected to collaborate with partner organisations

- *Does the government give enough autonomy to the services, can they develop an own human resource management?*

Although the Strategy on Early and Preschool Education (2016-2020) is a very inspiring document we experienced during our visits a lot of scepticism towards the implementation. During the talks we had we heard that the role of the Bureau of Education is very strong in the process of change and that the services do not have enough autonomy. The different stakeholders must be actively involved in the process of implementing the change. We also heard complaints about the appointment of the directors. They were not recruited by objective Human Resource management rules, but are mostly politically appointed.

- *Are the governmental bodies capable of respecting the legislation and the regulation on ECEC?*

Regulations on f.i. the number of children in one group seems not to be respected, so there need to be invested in the credibility of the inspectors (MoE), the supervisors (Bureau of Education) and the directors of the kindergartens, they all must get the autonomy to do their job properly.

- *Do the legislations and regulations stimulate collaborations between different stakeholders? Do the stakeholders have a clear and shared understanding of their role and their responsibilities and are they expected to collaborate with partner organisations?*

We experienced a lack of a methodology on how to implement change on the level of the institutions. It was as if teachers shall automatically change their practice if the government or the Bureau of Education will ask them to do. We know from literature (study for European Commission) that changes in pedagogical practice do not occur without concrete actions and engagements on the different levels of the competent system. The role of the Bureau of Education but must be limited to organising and directing the process of change. Working groups of practitioners, researchers and policymakers must act as the motors of the process of change. These working groups

need to be chaired by representatives of the stakeholders that are respected by the whole sector and representatives of training organisations, ECEC schools, and parents must get an active role in the process of change.

The role of the coaches and of the directors needs also to be defined clearly³⁴.

The government needs to develop professional and training competence profiles in collaboration with representatives of the universities, the training centres and ECEC stakeholders. Both competence profiles must be in alignment with each other.

10 Legislation, regulation and/or funding supports progress towards a universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC, and progress is regularly reported to all stakeholders

- *Is there a strategic plan (with the necessary legislation, regulation and funding) towards universal legal entitlement to publicly subsidised or funded ECEC and is the progress regularly reported?*

The new Strategy on Early and Preschool Education (2016-2020) is undoubtedly the most ambitious plan for ECEC of the four countries. It is also in alignment with the statements of the European Quality Framework and with the results of international research. It is an outstanding document that can bring Montenegro to an ECEC system of high quality. Yet we felt among the interviewees scepticism about the implementation in practice. Several interviewees said to implement the former Strategy a top down approach was used and that too many of the engagements that were stipulated in the Strategy (2010-2015) were not realised.

- *Are there additional funds provided to support access for disadvantaged groups.*

The authors of the Study on Investing in ECE are arguing to make ECE free of charge for vulnerable groups (p83). And also in the new Strategy document this is mentioned. Currently kindergarten fees are not charged to children from families who are recipients of social benefits. Their costs are covered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

The Study on Investing in ECE in Montenegro proposes that the fee collected from parents is not longer used only to cover food costs (as it has been so far), but for other purposes as well, such as engagement of new teachers, equipping of new premises, etc needed to enrol more children. Legislation changes are proposed in the new Strategy for Early and Preschool Education (2016 - 2020), so we may hope that they will take place.

- *Did the government take measures to emphasise the value of ECEC services, also towards disadvantaged families?*

Within the 'Preschool for All Campaign' successful actions were taken in collaboration with university students to convince the parents in the rural North of the importance of ECEC for their children. The NGO "Pedagogical Center" and the Department for Preschool Education at the Faculty of Philosophy organized outdoor preschools in five towns. The aim was to promote learning through play, present the benefits of preschool education to children and parents and strengthen the skills of preschool teachers UNICEF and the Ministry of Education launched the campaign "Preschool for All" in five municipalities in the north of Montenegro, where the preschool enrolment rates are the

³⁴Peeters, J. De Kimpe, C. & Brandt S. (2016) The competent system in the city of Ghent: a long-term investment in continuous professional development. In Vandenbroeck, M., Urban, M.,Peeters,J. *Pathways towards professionalism in ECEC* New York, London: Routledge.

lowest: Bijelo Polje, Berane, Rozaje, Plav and Andrijevica. The campaign is now being expanded to 6 more municipalities in the north, and will be followed by launching of outreach preschool services for children living in rural areas.

- *Is the uptake of disadvantaged groups monitored by the government to ensure that funding is used effectively?*

This is also planned in the new strategy.

3 Key findings

Opportunities

- The Strategy on Early and Preschool Education (2016-2020) is an excellent strategic document in alignment with the European Quality Framework for ECEC scientifically based, and also inspiring for practitioners. On all aspects of the EQF, the Strategy has concrete plans to realise it in the years to come
- plans to increase the enrolment from 40 to 95 %
- high level of initial training
- child free hours for team meetings and for reflection on practice
- pedagogical coaches specialised to support teachers to work with children with special needs and disadvantaged families (although not in every school)
- short programs for all children from 3 to 6 year of age are free
- teachers are very warm and positive towards the children
- concrete engagement of the government in the process of improving quality of ECEC.

Challenges

- find the buildings and the teachers for the increase of the child places as envisaged by the Strategy
- low accessibility for disadvantaged children
- job in ECEC is not attractive
- too much focus on theory in initial training
- too much teacher-centred approach
- more emphasis on reflecting in practice and on partnership with parents is needed
- a need for a child centred pedagogical approach in the childcare centres (0-3)
- lack of a coherent and needs based system for continuous professional development for ECE teachers
- increase the quality of the parental participation.
- monitoring and evaluation of the ECEC system
- making tools to document the progress of the individual child
- top-down approach towards implementing change
- more focus on the autonomy in Human Resource Management of the services: political, rather than professional criteria are being taken into account in the recruitment of kindergarten principals.

4 Recommendations

- Actions must be set up to increase the number of Roma children and children affected by poverty and exclusion in the short programs. To do so successfully, the leaders of these communities must be involved and all schools need extra support to work with disadvantaged and special needs children.
- Rethinking the initial training.
The content of the university initial training must be more focused on linking theory and practice and more child-centred learning (experimental or natural learning) and in working in a context of diversity (including going into dialogue with Roma and disadvantaged parents). The focus of the initial and in-service training must be on reflecting competences. University professors need to get opportunities to get in touch with their colleagues in other European countries, so that information about new pedagogical approaches can be exchanged.
- Rethinking continuous professional development
Montenegro needs a coherent and efficiently monitored system of CPD. The pedagogical coaches or mentors must have the competences and the tools to support the practitioners to implement the innovations in practice.
- An investment in the alignment of the competences that are trained in the universities and the competences that the sector requires (see new Strategy) is necessary. Therefore a training competence profile need be developed by the different stakeholders of the ECEC sector that is in alignment with the goals defined in the Strategy.
- A broad discussion on how to improve the system of monitoring the quality of the whole ECEC sector has to be set up by a group of stakeholders (including parents, researchers, trainers and NGO representatives). This discussion should be chaired by a respected person who is independent from the government.
- Initiatives must be take to develop a competent system that has the capacity to implement the necessary innovations formulated in goals of the Strategy on all different levels (individual, team, institution, government, international networks / organisations). To realise this, a concrete plan has to be made on how this innovations will be implemented on the different levels of the competent system. It is important to make use of the existing experience from NGO's (Step by Step and others) and international organisations like UNICEF.
- The strengthening of a democratic approach that gives the different stakeholders an important role as actors of change in the implementation of the goals formulated in the Strategy. More specific there is a need for more parental involvement and development of parental support programs like it is envisaged by the new Strategy .
- The Strategy is very ambitious and the proposed changes must be monitored carefully in order to ensure that they are implemented in line with principles of quality and equity. A mid-term review of the results after two and a half year could be of interest to monitor the progress in the implementation of the Strategy .
The financial steps to be taken like it is described in the Study on investing in ECE must also be monitored carefully.



Vernieuwing in de
Basisvoorzieningen
voor Jonge Kinderen
Centre for Innovation
in the Early Years
Centre d'Innovation de
la Petite Enfance

a Raas Van Gaverestraat 67A
9000 Gent, Belgium/Belgique
t +32 (0)9 232 47 35
f +32 (0)9 232 47 50
e info@vbjk.be **w** www.vbjk.be



