A diversification of various models of preschool programmes is one of the topics that exists for a long time in our preschool system but is not sufficiently elaborated. This fact alone speaks about the significance of this manual which is even greater since the manual also with its approach to the issue carries several important messages. The first is about the importance of partnership in the process of starting changes within the educational system which through the cooperation of the projects (IMPRES and Kindergarten without Border) on the implementation of diversified programmes is already successfully demonstrated. The second is that the key actors' readiness for change is of crucial importance for starting the diversification process, more than the existence of material resources. The third, that the increase in coverage of children from vulnerable groups is not a question of diversification of various models of preschool programmes that would be specifically intended for them, but a question of increasing the quality of preschool practice in general and with that also the diversification process as one of the quality dimensions that should be achieved taking into account all children. The fourth, that the diversification process of various preschool programmes is a process of preschool quality development based on the reflexive practice and the involvement of all participants of preschool practice – practitioners, family, children and local community.

The Manual can serve as the inspiration and the incentive for everyone dealing with preschool education in various ways to embark on process of change through the questions that it poses, the guidelines it provides and the offered model that is not an instruction but a framework for developing one's own way in creating quality programmes.

Prof. Dragana Pavlović Breneselović, PhD
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The Manual is based on modern early education approaches such as the socio - cultural theory of development and contextually appropriate practice, neuroscience research, understanding of "the new sociology" of childhood and the concept of the child's rights. In particular, the reference to the image of a child as powerful, with developing potentials and the reference to the right to play from the Convention of the Rights of the Child, article 31, represents a progress in relation to practice implemented so far, making an effort to make protective and participation rights of the child more concrete and operational within the education.

Steps in the process of designing and introducing special and specialised (diversified) programmes, has the direct purpose of supporting the initiator's role of the preschool institution in the process of starting a preschool programme which is also supported by the local community, but the Manual constantly highlights the importance of their joint action. "Steps in designing and introduction of programme" reflect more on values, principles and activities within the social action on the development of preschool programmes than on the procedures required to develop a programme that would be determined as special or specialised. Such an approach can be interpreted as provision of guidelines that are yet to be put in the context of a specific local community and which above all enables the creation of quality programmes for the greatest number of children, and the programmes whose special quality is hidden in the flexible duration according to family needs, in the facilities that don't predetermine segregation of children, in various interactions of children and adults, participation of parents and heterogeneous age groups of children.

The Manual for diversification of various models of pre-school programmes for children from vulnerable groups represents a significative contribution to the process of diversification of preschool programmes and represents an important aspect of quality of preschool education in Serbia.

Prof. Živka Krnjaja, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

IMPRES
Improvement of preschool
education in Serbia

VRTIĆ BEZ GRANICA

Manual
for diversification of programs for pre-school education

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unicef

Manual for diversification of programs for pre-school education

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INTRODUCTION

Travelers, there is no path, paths are made by walking.

Antonio Machado

The manual that you hold in your hands is a product of joint work under two, big and for preschool education in Serbia, exceptionally important projects – IMPRES project (Improving Preschool Education in Serbia – project of MoESTD financed by EU) and Kindergarten without Borders: Expanding Early Learning Opportunities for Young Children (supported by UNICEF and IKEA Company) project. In these two projects, children, parents, preschool teachers, methodologists, principals, mentors, representatives of LSGs and international and national experts have worked together in 25 municipalities and towns on the development of diversified preschool programmes.

In recent years, interest in policy and among decision–makers in the pre-school education has greatly increased - preschool education has found its place in all the strategic goals and objectives of Serbia. Increasing insights on national (low coverage – particularly children from vulnerable groups; kindergarten services are not used by those who need them most; the network of preschool institutions is inadequate in terms of geographical coverage and spatial capacities; inability of LSGs to bear 80 % of the current cost of preschool education, etc.) , and European levels about the importance of early childhood and education at an early age contributed to the adoption of significant documents (National Millennium Development Goals; The Law on the Foundations of the Education System and the Law on Preschool Education; Education Strategy in Serbia 2020; rules/regulations supporting diversification of preschool programmes; support to the improvement of the quality of educational work, as well as regulations governing the system of self-evaluation and external evaluation; etc…) on the basis of which conditions can be created to increase the number of children with an access to high-quality and diversified preschool programmes.

Starting from these prerequisites and supportive atmosphere, both projects have focused on creating conditions to increase the coverage of children age 3 to 5, 5 in less developed areas of Serbia with high quality preschool programmes of different content and duration. For that it was crucial to create new understanding that preschool provision can be improved not only through building new kindergartens and organizing full day programmes, but also through development of diversified programmes adjusted to the needs of children, parents and communities as well as to the capacities of LSG. It was also important to change the current dominant opinion that PE and PIs serve to provide support to the employed parents, implicitly defining its economical function as dominant (social and educational are neglected) and that "one model of whole day programmes can fit all".

This manual is only one part of the toolkit developed to support diversification of the programmes and services; the other two parts are Training Manual and Compendium of good practice.

With this toolkit we want to:

1.	Tackle and change existing and prevailing understandings and attitudes towards function of PE and diversified programmes;

2.	Increase understanding of the importance of development and learning in early childhood and the role that preschool education can play in providing equal life opportunities for all children and empower all key actors in PE to advocate for more inclusive programmes and provisions;

3.	Increase understanding of different functions of preschool education (including social, economic and educational) and importance of their parallel existence in high quality PE systems;

4.	Stress the importance of high quality of programmes, competences of all professionals in PI (not only preschool teachers!) and their continuous professional development with mentoring support;

5.	Introduce democratic vision and practices in developing and implementing preschool programmes – participation of children, parents and local communities/LSGs; peer support and learning and learning communities;

6.	Motivate LSG, PI and local communities to open up to different needs of children and parents and possibilities for meeting them in order to provide access to quality preschool programmes to greater number of children;

7.	Provide knowledge connected with latest research results, policy documents – International, EU, national level and state of art in the science of ECEC;

8.	Motivate all important actors in PE to build partnerships, ask for support and understand their place in a complex system of preschool education – introducing the concept of competent system and competent individuals in the competent system/roles and responsibilities;

9.	Provide know how for LSG, PI management, preschool teachers, other professionals and parents for making preschool provision more flexible and adapted to the specific needs of children, families and communities;

10.	Create hands on material for mentors and trainers on local level in PIs so that they can disseminate knowledge and skills in their PI, but also in the region;

11.	Demonstrate that with limited resources, if they are used wisely, big changes can happen.

The manual deals with the design and implementation of special and specialized programmes, primarily aimed at increasing the coverage of preschool children with high quality programmes (with special focus on children from vulnerable groups) and it is organized in six chapters.

First chapter *The Importance and Significance of Quality Programmes for Preschool Education* is focusing on the impact of quality ECEC and different arguments (scientific, child's rights, social justice and economic returns and benefits).

The second chapter is looking at *Current situation and change* that we want to create. In it you will find international legal framework, but also Serbian laws and bylaws which provide the legal framework for development of diversified programmes. A lot of attention is paid to barriers to ECEC and five criteria of structural accessibility which have to be taken into account when we think about increasing coverage of children.

The third chapter, *Before the beginning* – Key questions that require answers is exploring issues of quality, competent educators and competent system. It is also challenging ideas of targeted vs. universal approach in organizing services and programmes for vulnerable children.

The fourth chapter, *Diversified programs* is very practical. It is trying to demonstrate the process of development of diversified programmes. Starting from the fact that diversified programmes currently being implemented within PIs are mainly confined to learning a foreign language, folk and modern dance, karate, art workshops, summer and winter trips and that are all accessible to the children who are already in PI and coming from well-off families, because they have to be paid for; in this chapter we define what we want to change and where we want to be. Steps needed to be undertaken in the process of changing existing practices are described in detail. Still it is stressed that this is only one way of doing it, local context as well as visions and needs of children, parents, communities and preschool professionals always have to be taken into account.

A lot of attention is also paid to: sustainability of this kind of change; the role of preschool teachers as agents of change and reflective practitioners; dialogue and connections and pedagogical documentation.

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The development of this manual was a very challenging task for many reasons.

First, it is difficult to motivate people to start a change; they need to see that something is possible to be able to try. We hope that we managed to showcase that diversification of programmes brings so much gratification for everybody involved in the process. When you read what your colleagues have said, you will feel empowered.

Second, the idea of organizing this kind of diversified programmes for most vulnerable children can be very tricky. We do not want to send a message that these programmes are any kind of segregation nor that only children from vulnerable groups benefit from them. We hope that in this manual you will find enough evidence that **all** children benefit of shorter **high quality** programmes, and that effects of programmes are not defined by the hours that the child spends in the kindergarten, but with what is happening during those hours between the child and the preschool teacher.

Third, it is not easy to prove that the duration of the program is not the only difference between whole day programmes and diversified programmes e.g. programmes of specific areas of educational work, which are aiming to promote holistic child development, socialization and specific interests of children. We tried to provide different evidence referring to specificity of these programmes: children's and parent's participation; team work; continuous professional development; flexibility; abandoning approach that all children have to fit in the existing system – but changing the system so that all children can fit; co-constructing programmes with all who are affected by these programmes; opening towards children and parents – following them, instead of waiting for them to come to PI.

We sincerely hope that you will see this manual as an invitation to try to work in a different way, as well as a map which will help you find your own way in reaching all children and enriching their lives.

As preschool teachers, principals, methodologists, policymakers, we have so much power to create the change for children, and responsibility to do our best so that all children have a good start in life and be able to fulfil their dreams. Your colleagues in 25 municipalities and towns in Serbia did it, and they feel content and proud. We invite you to do the same, and wish you good luck!

If you need any support you can always count on us. Our addresses and contacts you will find also in the manual (appendix 1).

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY PROGRAMMES FOR PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

1.1 The importance of early age – The age of unlimited opportunities for development and learning[1]

The first years in a child's life are crucial. There is no other phase in life in which we grow, learn and change so much, so fast and in so many ways. Young children are amazing in what they do and achieve in those few years, physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially…At the same time, they are also very vulnerable, dependent on others (parents and other caregivers) and in need of warmth, emotional support, nurturing, guidance and protection. Life experiences in these early years have a strong influence, both in the positive and the negative way, on the rest of the child's life, both in the short and the long term.

There is ample evidence of the positive impact of ECEC on the developmental opportunities for children themselves and even on the socio-economical level of society. But even if there would not be such proven positive results along the way, later in life, young children, as human beings, have a right to decent ECEC as such. They have the right to be provoked, challenged, to meet peers, to be stimulated, to learn with and from each other, to get out in the world and explore it, with the support of parents and educators within a safe and nurturing environment. In this children's rights perspective, ECEC becomes an end, an entitlement, a goal in itself, by its own virtue, and not just as the means to achieve some distant goal of achieving potential.[2]

> *"If the race is already halfway run even before children begin school, then we clearly need to examine what happens in the earliest years." (Esping-Andersen, 2005)*

ECEC functions as an important, additional educational environment for all children. It does not replace parents but co-educates with them and can offer other things than parents may offer. ECEC can function as a bridge from the home to the outside world. Research is showing that maternal employment and participation in out-of-home ECEC, even during infancy, appear not to harm children and may yield benefits if the child care is regulated and of adequate quality.[3]

Next to the benefits for children as such, ECEC can serve more interests at the same time. It can provide support to parents, it serves employment goals (both for the parents who can (continue to) work and for all the involved professionals in ECEC), it can serve as a meeting place for parents and children; it can improve the child's transition to compulsory education.

The importance of ECEC on societal level can also be illustrated by its different functions.

- **Pedagogical**: ECEC can offer children a space for social development and learning, for play, for stimulation. Children can learn from each other, get in touch with diversity in a safe and child-sensitive setting. As such it performs a supporting role for families as well and adds to the home learning environment.

- **Social**: ECEC can contribute to social integration and more cohesion. It can build towards a more just society, working on principles like equality, respect for diversity, dialogue and cooperation. It can provide equal opportunities for all children, irrespective of their family background. It can build bridges between families and between other community services

- **Economical**: ECEC allows parents to continue or engage in work or further education, knowing that their children are well taken care of. Employment opportunities and further education are very important for most vulnerable families– mainly women/mothers cannot find jobs or continue education because they have no place or a person to leave the children to. It is in itself also a place of employment for many professionals or people getting on-the-job training.

Preschool education has the capacity to contribute to the improvement of educational and socioeconomic status of citizens and thus become part of the infrastructure for the purpose of long-term development of any society (Melhuish & Petrogiannis, 2006).

In order for the preschool education to be considered high quality, it is essential that all three functions are represented and that there is a balance among them. Whenever one of the three functions is dominant, or missing, it is a risk to quality. For example, if the dominant function of preschool education is the economic one, then the priority enrollment is given to children of working parents, and insufficient attention is devoted to methods and content of the work with children and families when designing programmes. At the level of society as a whole, the "kindergarten paradox" effect is created– kindergartens/preschools (which are probably the institutions in the society with the greatest potential for promoting social inclusion of children from poor families at an earliest age), actually slow down social cohesion. Mainly enrolling children from less disadvantaged families and offering them (presumably) high quality service, kindergartens logically promote development of children who are already in better position, thus making the gap between them and the children from deprived backgrounds even bigger and even more difficult to overcome later in life.

1.2 Why do we need high quality preschool programmes

There are many important reasons why public resources should be invested in high quality ECEC. First, there is a huge body of research showing potentials and importance of early years for future development and success in life; second, it is a part of society's responsibility to educate children and provide them with opportunities to exercise their rights; third, society is also responsible to provide children with good start in life and combat child poverty and other disadvantages. At the end, it has significant economic and social payoff.

1.2.1 Scientific reasons

The latest brain researches show that the most intensive development occurs in the first years of life and that this is the period that should not be missed. This does not mean that children in later stages of life cannot be taught, but that the effects are largest and longest when stimulation is introduced on time.

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1   ECEC – Early Childhood Education and care programmes/services/provision
2   Woodhead, o.c., p. 27
3   Sarane Spence Boocock: Early Childhood Programs in Other Nations: Goals and Outcomes, http://futureof children.org/future of children/publications/docs/05_03_04.pdf
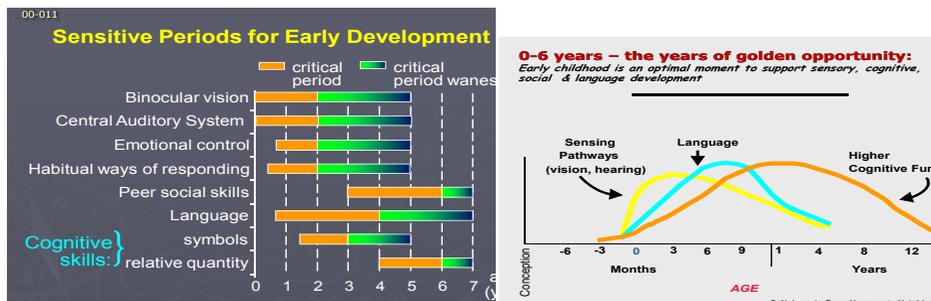
Chart 1 Sensitivity periods

The quality of experiences that a child has in its early age influences the development of the brain and its functions. Scanner images clearly show the difference in the structure and function of the brain of a child growing up in a healthy, safe and stimulating environment and those of a child growing up in a situation that is not conducive to development.
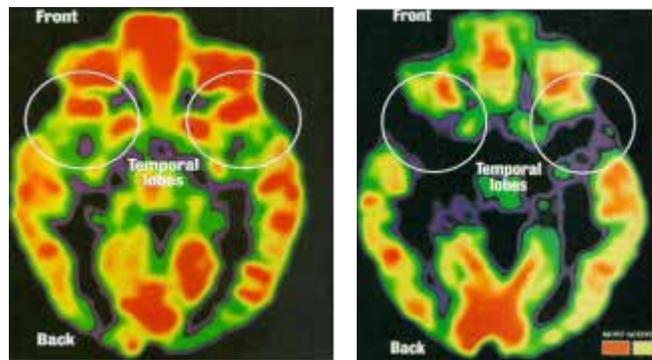

Chart 2 Brain developments in the early months and years

1.2.2 Child's rights

In policy debates, but also on the work floor, we often hear that children are so important and that they are society's future. At the same time, we also know that they are a lot more than just the future, that indeed they are human beings here and now, with their own temperament and competences, their own stories, experiences and life events. Educators, of all people, will know that for sure.

Still too often, children are still seen as some kind of decoration, as a kind of property of parents and society, as persons who should be 'seen but not heard'. Especially young children are often taken for granted and not seen as people with human rights, children's rights.

With the almost universal ratification of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child,[4] the child as a human rights bearer became a new topic on the political agenda. From a mere object in need of protection and care, children and young people are now to be considered as holders of rights, competent meaning makers, individual members of society and a separate social category to

take into account. Although children's rights seem to be more implemented in compulsory education, it is never too soon to start translating these human rights in all sorts of educational settings.

A description of all articles pertaining to young children would lead us too far. Let it suffice here by simply mentioning, without being exhaustive, fundamental principles like art.2 (non-discrimination), art.3 (the best interest of the child being a primary consideration), art.5 and 18 (parents as the first educators), art.19 (the right to protection against violence), art.28 (the right to education), art.29 (the aims of education) and art.31 (the right to play, rest and leisure).

Rights are indivisible; there are no "small" and "big" rights, there are no "important" or "less" important rights. All rights are interdependent and cannot be read or implemented selectively. All rights also equally apply to all children, including (and maybe even especially) to most vulnerable children, such as children from minorities, children with disabilities, children in conflict with the law, children living in poverty, to very young children who usually can't stand up for themselves. A holistic approach to early childhood development is primarily the right of the child. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children are guaranteed the right to life and development.

In all education settings, children's rights are not only a topic to learn about, they should color the daily lives in services for young children, and define the way how all people concerned (children, educators, parents, care givers, etc.) relate to one another.

Committee on the Right of the Child published a comprehensive General Comment 7 on the implementation of children's rights in early childhood.[5] With this Comment, the Committee wanted to feed into the discussion on children's rights of the young child and to give inspiration for a positive agenda for rights in early childhood: "A shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialization of the immature human being towards mature adult status is required. The Convention requires that children, including the very youngest children, be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view. For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning"[6].

This perspective of rights very nicely broadens the image of young children and the legitimacy of ECEC[7]. New image of the child is that: "...the child is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children"[8] The responsibility of educating children is fundamentally a shared one, between parents as the first educators, and the state which is responsible to offer the necessary support (ECEC, family services…) and quality requirements for professionals working with children. It was also stressed that states need to provide rights-based strategy and integrated policy on ECEC and that states have to make available provision of accessible ECEC for all children, aimed at the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (art. 29.1). The goal of education[9] is to "empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence" and that this must be achieved in ways that are child centerd, child friendly and reflect the rights and inherent dignity of the child, with no discrimination and with special attention to young children with certain vulnerabilities: disability, poverty, lack of parental care, refugee context, violence. For that sufficient resource allocation and capacity building for

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4   Serbia, as all other countries in the world, except for Somalia and the US, has ratified the Convention of the
     Rights of the Child , which increasingly inspires and directs legislation and policies relating to children and
     young people.

5   http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm
6   http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm
7   Woodhead, M., Changing perspectives on early childhood: theory, research and policy, UNESCO, Education
     for All, 2006 (2007/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/33/REV)
8   Malaguzzi, 1993
9   General Comment on education nr. 1

early childhood programmes is necessary.

Only very recently, the children's rights Committee devoted a General Comment on another fundamental right of the child, the right to play[10]. The Committee confirms that play, both in formal and informal settings is not a luxury right but a basic need for children and states e.g.: "Play and recreation are essential to the health and well-being of children and promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and physical, social cognitive and emotional strength and skills. They contribute to all aspects of learning[11]. They are a form of participation in everyday life, and are of intrinsic value to the child, purely in terms of the enjoyment and pleasure they afford. Research evidence highlights that playing is also central to children's spontaneous drive for development, and that it performs a significant role in the development of brain, particularly in the early years. Play and recreation facilitate children's capacities to negotiate, regain emotional balance, resolve conflicts, and make decisions. Through their involvement in play and recreation, children learn by doing, explore and experience the world around them, experiment with new ideas, roles, and experiences, and in so doing, learn to understand and construct their social position within the world.

Both play and recreation can take place when children are on their own, together with their peers, or with supportive adults. Children's development can be supported by loving and caring adults as they relate to children through play. Participation with children in play provides adults with unique insights and understanding into the child's perspectives. It builds respect between generations, contributes to effective understanding and communication between children and adults, and affords opportunities to provide guidance and stimulus. " (par. 9 and 10)

Overall it should be clear that policies on ECEC should, first and foremost be founded on the Rights of a child.

ECEC is a basic provision for young children, and within these services of education and care, their rights should be respected and promoted. This way ECEC can be a motor for children's rights, a place of dialogue on how to implement these rights in daily practice as well as a vessel by which children can actually experience their rights from a very young age. This way, we can start talking about children's rights ON, IN and THROUGH education.

1.2.3 Social justice/equality and respect for diversity

Over the last decades, there is an overwhelming consensus amongst policy makers, professionals and even wider community that:

a) early childhood education matters for the developmental outcomes of all children;

b) early childhood education appears to be a stronger force in the lives of low income than more advantaged children, and is most salient for children "at risk" or children from vulnerable groups, for underachieving in the educational system in later years (i.e. children living in poverty or children from ethnic minorities);

c) early childhood education can narrow the achievement gaps faced by disadvantaged children – the best time for intervention is in early years;

d) early childhood education gives great results if it is of high quality; and

e) that the early years workforce is one of the most powerful predictors of this quality.

Poor living conditions in early years can have devastating effects on child's future. Some researches (chart 3) have shown that the gap between capacities and capabilities of children coming from low income and high income families becomes so wide, that it is almost impossible for children from poor families to achieve and get results similar to other groups of children (charts 4&5).
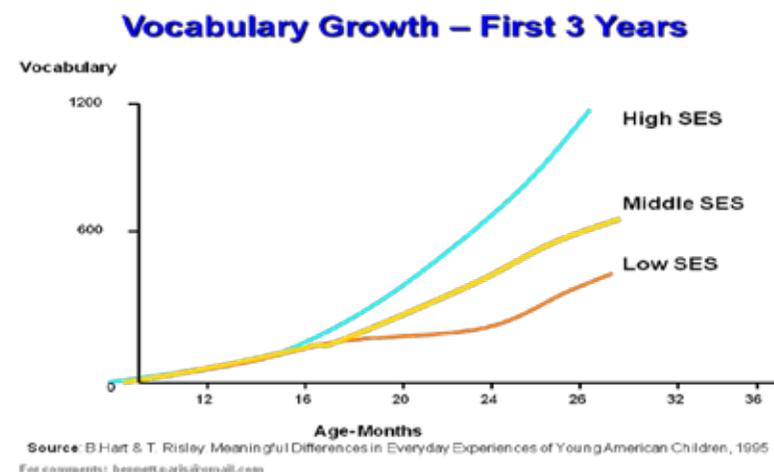
Chart 3 Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young Children[12]
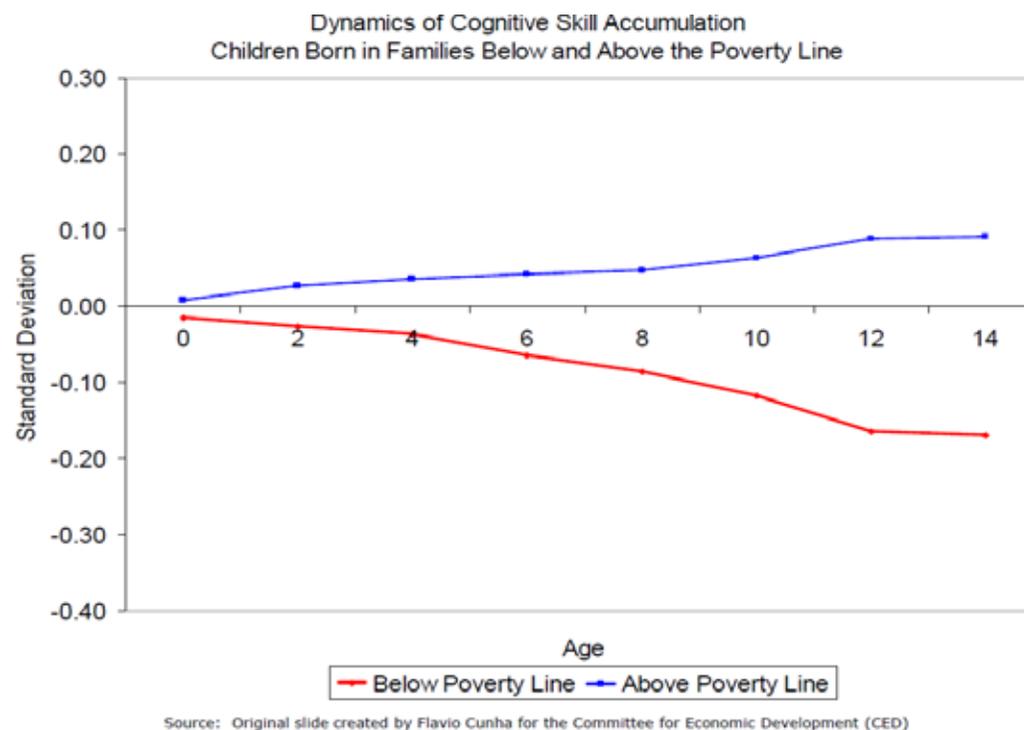
Chart 4Dynamics of Cognitive Skill Accumulation

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10   see http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm comment nr 17
11   Education for the twenty-first century: issues and prospects, UNESCO, Paris, 1998

12   Source: B. Hart & T. Risley (1995)
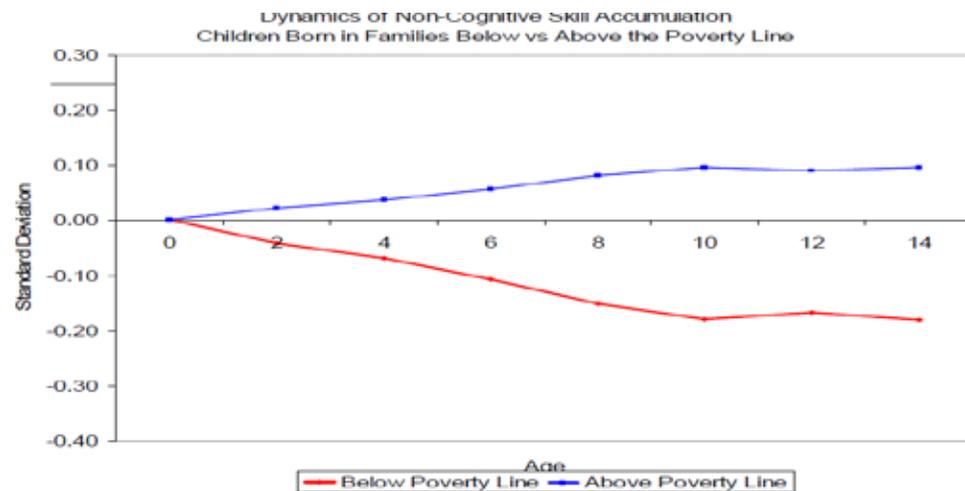
Chart 5 Dynamics of Non Cognitive Skill Accumulation

These three charts clearly show that poverty affects the development of skills in children, not only in language development and cognitive abilities, but it also influences non-cognitive skills (sociability, building constructive relationships with others, self-concept, self-esteem, self-regulation autonomy etc.). The other important thing is the gap between children who live below poverty line and above poverty line. Although they start almost from the same point during first 14 years of their lives, the gap is widening rapidly. The children from poor families are significantly deteriorating, while the other group is progressing.

On the other hand, there are studies that clearly demonstrate the importance of high-quality programmesfor pre-school children especially when it comes to those from vulnerable groups.

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE)[13] study, conducted in England and its Northern Irish counterpart (EPPNI)[14] are the most renowned European studies in this area. This longitudinal study concluded that high quality early years programmes have remarkably positive effects on educational achievements later in life for all children, but even more so for children from vulnerable families.

Chart 6 Effects of high-quality preschool education on the children's later success

The chart 6[15] shows how attending quality preschool programmes affect the reading ability of children from different social backgrounds (estimated on the basis of parental education). It is clear that the educational level of the parents and the social status of the families have a significant impact, and that all the children who attended the preschool program were more successful than their peers who did not go to kindergarten. It is also evident that children from families of lower status, who attended kindergarten, in some cases were more successful than their peers from better-off families.

Major conclusions of EPPE study were that:

- from age 2 all children benefit from pre-school,
- the quality of preschool matters,
- part-time attendance of high quality ECEC has equal benefit to full-time,
- high quality ECEC effects persist until teenage years and
- high quality ECEC can even protect a child from effects of a low effective school.

It is particularly distressing to see that the majority of children from lower social layers would have lower reading skills than the expected minimum, had they not attended a respected team of preschool programmes.

Besides EPPE study, several other researchers have confirmed that high quality ECEC programmes have long-lasting positive effects on the child's cognitive development[16] such as verbal abilities and scientific thinking. If the early start is followed by effective primary education, positive effects can last until the teen age. Moreover, positive effects were also found on the non-cognitive levels, such as pro-social behavior, self-regulation and autonomy. These competences are highly valued in our educational systems and societies.

Enrolment in ECEC enhances children's cognitive and social competences in such a way that it facilitates transition to school and adjustment to formal learning throughout the primary school career.[17]

There are many illustrations of beneficial effects of ECEC, especially for disadvantaged groups such as following:

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13   http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/e/eppe%20final%20report%202004.pdf
14   http://www.deni.gov.uk/researchreport41.pdf

15   Andersson, 1992, Broberg et al 1997 Sylva et al 2004, Melhuish et al 2006, Sammons at el 2007, Brilli et al 2011, Felfe & Lalive 2011
16   ibid
17   Sammons et al, 2003, Sylva et al 2004, Melhuish 2006, Lanfranchi et al 2002-2003, Felfe & Lalive 2011, Spiess et al 2003, Havnes & Mogstad 2011.

These positive effects seem to be the most frequent when children can enjoy ECEC services within a context of socially mixed environments[18]. This may well mean that ECEC serving a socially diverse population, being a structural and basic provision for all children alike, but with specific attention for disadvantaged children, may reach better outcomes than services that are specifically targeted at certain more vulnerable groups.

Based on a ten-month experience of setting up and implementing specific and specialized programmes for children aged from 3 to 5.5 years, in projects IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders-more opportunities for learning and development of young children, the following effects can be singled out as the most important (see shema 1):

gains for children
- For parents, educators, directors and professional associates, the largest gain is seen in socialization of children and opportunities for hollistic development in a stimulating and safe environment
- For parents and professional associates, the largest gain is that children who were most often excluded, are now offered the opportunity for further education
- For parents, the gain is that children become independent, and for educators and professional associates it is the fact that every child has the opportunity to learn and grow while individual needs are being met

gains for parents
- Parents, educators, professional associates and directors agree that the biggest benefit of these programmes is the building of alliances and partnershiops between families and kindergartens, as well as providing support to parents and caregivers in improving the home learning environment and parenting skills.
- PI representatives (directors, educators and professional associates see the biggest benefit in increasing the accessibility of high quality programs to children from vulnerable groups and in increasing the offer for children and parents.
- For professional associates and educators, the biggest benefit for children is that they are protected, happy and stimulated, and for parents that they can socialize and share with other parents, that they have better insight into the development and needs of their children and that they build confidence in the kindergarten and people working there and the fact that parents have more time for themselves and their own interests.
- For parents the biggest gain of the program is that they see the continuing progress of their children and positive changes in them.

gains for PI
- PI staff agree that the biggest gains are: increased coverage of children, diversified and richer offer, as well as better visibility of PI
- For directors and preschool teachers, the gain is in the increase of PI visibility in the local community and increase in the number of employees
- Professional associates and preschool teachers see the gain as the development of internal resources, development of professional competences and better professional development
- Preschool teachers see the benefit as the greater confidence that parents and children have in preschool teachers, as well as better working conditions.

Scheme 1: Summary of survey data

The program has definitely influenced the change of image of the role and function of the pre-school, which was by some unwritten rule considered as a full day child care in institutions and services designed especially for working parents. By extending the offer, kindergartens show respect and appreciation for the needs of the family, but are also sending a clear message that education, not simple child-care, is their primary role.

We must acknowledge however, that high quality ECEC in itself will not succeed in guaranteeing all these beneficial outcomes. Factors such as follow-up in compulsory education and the

home learning environment do play a vital role as well in combination with ECEC. In the process of designing and creating a more diverse offer of preschool programmes, it is necessary to emphasize the contextually altered educational practice, as well as the paradigm of human/children's rights, which requires from all of us to consider and take part in the development and improvement of preschool education in order to redefine our own perceptions of the child and respecting child's rights (with special emphasis on participatory right), and to participate in systemic educational interventions / changes that lead to internal changes of the overall system.

So far, we have mentioned various arguments why preschool education is important (children's rights, scientific and economic reasons, equity and respect for diversity). It is important to keep in mind that if we want to create high-quality preschool programmes we have to take into account all the arguments, and none of them should be dominant. In addition, it is very important to constantly keep in mind that adequate support network and appreciation of complexity and contextual specificity are necessary for the creation of high-quality diverse preschool programmes. Measures of preschool quality are not intrinsic, fixed and regulated exclusively by scientific knowledge of the development, but are culturally conditioned and must be elucidated as such (Woodhed, 2012).

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18   Sylva 2004, Tuijl & Leseman 2007, Havnes & Mogstad 2011

2. CURRENT SITUATION AND THE CHANGE WE WANT TO CREATE

2.1 International strategic framework

Discussing all international policy initiatives would lead us too far, but just mentioning a few shows how much education has been climbing up the political agenda:

- The Education for All movement of UNESCO[19]
- The UN Millennium Development Goals[20]
- The Global Education First Initiative[21]
- The Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights[22]

Although these initiatives are holistic by nature and not always explicitly focusing on ECEC they do stress the importance of certain rights too and in all possible educational settings.

ECEC has been a recurring topic on European policy agendas since the 1992 Council Recommendations on Child Care. In the beginning, this was mainly inspired by socio-economic concerns about employment, competitiveness and gender equality. However, lately, a new approach has been taken and more EU policy documents now point to children's rights, questions of citizenship, equal opportunities in education and work towards more social cohesion[23].

From **an economic perspective, ECEC** policies at European level are driven by the common concern to ensure a smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth[24]. The ambitious EU 2020 strategy[25] contains the acknowledgement that yesterday's solutions will not suffice to resolve the crisis and 'put Europe back on track'. Knowledge base and innovation, sustainability and social cohesion cannot be developed in isolation. The priorities are mutually dependent. Against this background, coherent approaches to education, training and lifelong learning are considered to be particularly important for 'improving citizens' employability, social inclusion and personal fulfilment'[26]. Moreover, ECEC services are seen as a means to deal with the demographic challenges of an ageing population[27], to create employment by increasing women's participation on the labor market and as a measure to promote gender equality by reconciling work and family responsibilities[28].

By 2020 at least 95% of children between four and compulsory school age should participate in early childhood education

At the Barcelona summit in 2002, all members states were aware of the need to increase the number of childcare places and specific quantitative targets were agreed: all EU States agreed to provide childcare places for 33% of children up to the age of three and 90% of children from three to mandatory school age by 2010. Despite the many efforts in the provision of ECEC over the last few years, many EU-member and candidate states like Serbia still struggle to meet these 'Barcelona targets', especially for children under three years of age.

The new benchmarks state that by 2020 at least 95% of children between four and compulsory school age should participate in ECEC[29].

Furthermore, early childhood services form a considerable part of the labour market. There is a growing need for ECEC work and this will lead to shortages on the European labour market in the decades to come, unless the status of this work force is raised and men as well as women join this work force[30].

[31]Where this economic perspective shows the highest concern for quantitative aspects of accessibility and availability of ECEC and *educational, pedagogical* concern on quality has been growing over the last two decades, focusing on the expansion of good-quality ECEC as indispensable for the educational attainment of the children and for the foundation of lifelong learning. The EU Commission for example stated that 'ECEC has a crucial role to play in laying the foundations for improved competences of future EU citizens, enabling us to create a more skilled workforce capable of contributing and adjusting to technological change.

There is a broad consensus in international reports and in research that ECEC is the most effective investment for later school achievements.

Even though progress is not always as high as expected, there is a broad consensus among researchers and international organisations that ECEC can play an important role in meeting the benchmarks of the EU 2020 programme: to reduce the number of early leavers of education, to raise the number of young people in higher education, and to increase the participation in lifelong learning with regard to its workforce. In this framework, we can only look forward to more attention for education policies, including the preschool settings.

From a **social perspective**, the benefits of high-quality ECEC are particularly powerful for children who live in disadvantaged families. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is explicitly recognized in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (art. 24). From a human rights and children's rights perspective it is important that all children have the same access to high-quality provision: ECEC can make an important contribution to breaking the cycles of poverty and discrimination[32]. There is clearly a growing concern in the EU as well as in Serbia (see for example the Law on Preschool Education, 2010) for accessibility of ECEC for children from ethnic minority and low-income families. This concern is expressed in international policy documents, as well as in international reports[33].

19   http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all
20   http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals
21   http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/global-education-first-initiative-gefi
22   http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/upr/pages/uprmain.aspx
23   EC communication, 2011; Europe 2020, 2010 a; Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training, 2010.
24   European Commission, 2010a, p. 3
25   see http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm for more info
26   Council of the European Union, 2010a
27   European Commission, 2001b)
28   European Commission, 2007a, 2007d, 2009a

29   Council of the European Union, 2009a; European Commission, 2009 b, p.74
30   Cameron & Moss, 2007; European Commission, 2007a.
31   European Commission, 2008a, 2008b; Council of the European Union, 2010a; European Commission, 2011b
32   Esping-Andersen, 2002; Eurydice, 2009; Leseman, 2009
33   European Commission, 2011; European Parliament, 2002. e.g. Eming Young, 2007; Naudeau S., Kataoka N., Valerio A., Neuman M., & Elder K.L., 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006,2012; UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders Innocenti Research Center, 2008)

2.2 New possibilities for a new era - Serbia

UNICEF Study[34] showed that Serbia has adequate strategic and legal framework for further improvement of PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, and that the PRESCHOOL EDUCATION is recognized as an extremely important segment of the education system and that the Government is determined to improve it.

In Serbia, the new **Law on Preschool Education, (LPE)** based on Law on Fundamentals of Education System, was adopted in March 2010 [35]with the aim to line up the system of preschool education in the Republic of Serbia with the system of preschool education of the European Union[36].

The LPE 2010 has introduced the principles and aims of pre-school education, the procedures of establishing pre-school institutions, enrolment procedures, types and characteristics of curricula, functioning, internal regulations and data collection procedures of pre-school institutions, roles, responsibilities, qualification and work/load of pre-school staff, and the financing responsibilities and financial flows pertinent to pre-school education. In addition, LPE requires PIs to ensure a more equitable coverage of children (art 13) and enrolment, (priority is afforded to children from vulnerable groups); stipulates compulsory PPP for all children; enables the opening of special and specialized short-term programmes for children who are not covered by the system; defines the children to adult ratio; stipulates the obligation of PIs to implement quality programmes based on modern theory and practice, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and quality monitoring with the participation of parents and children; and provides that another legal entity and private person may also be the founder of a preschool institution.

Implementation of the Act provides a number of by-laws, the most important ones being: Regulation on the type, manner of implementation and financing of specific, specialized programmes, and other forms of work and services that achieves PI[37], Standards requirements for the exercise of special programmes in the field of preschool education[38], the Supplementary Regulations for educational, health and social support of a child and a student[39].

System analysis was created in an attempt to comprehend/review the situation of preschool education during the creation of the Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia[40], based on available statistical data on children of this age (Republic Statistical Office, Ministry of Education and Technological Development, Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Republic of Serbia and other sources). The analysis indicated that the system is underdeveloped and the coverage of children is not only insufficient/inadequate, but also socially unjust and lags behind significantly compared to the coverage of children in EU countries. Average coverage of preschool children in Serbia is 41,36%, while the average EU coverage ranges between 70% and 85%. Specified by age, the coverage of children up to 3 years of age is 15%, of children aged 3 to 4 years is 34,80%, and when children aged 4 to 5,5 are concerned it amounts to 39,83%, while the coverage of those aged 5,5 to 6 years old (compulsory preparatory program in the year preceding school) amounts to 87,82%. The system fails to include all children, even in the year prior to starting school, preschool education does not reach children that need it most, such as children from

34   Investing in Early Childhood Education in Serbia, 2012, http://www.UNICEF.org/serbia/Booklet_Investing_in_Early_Childhood_Education_in_Serbia_FINAL.pdf
35   Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 18/10
36   One of the relevant documents is European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth "Europe 2020"
37   Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, br. 26/2013
38   Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, br. 61/2012
39   Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, br. 63/2010
40   www.mpn.gov.rs

most vulnerable social groups (children with special needs and disabilities and children from Roma community, rural and economically underdeveloped communities and families). Only 22, 9% of preschool children from rural areas and families with low economic status (low-income families) were covered, only 8% of Roma children, and when it comes to children with special needs and disabilities, the accurate national statistics do not even exist. Although, the specific acts of the competent ministry (MoESTD) recommend that enrollment priority should be given to children from socially disadvantaged groups, this policy is not implemented in many municipalities. The reasons for this most often are the financial ones, since many municipalities do not have funds that can provide benefits for children from socially disadvantaged families (such as reduced payment of PI services or free programme). To increase the coverage of children, the Strategy recommended a number of short-term, but high-quality programmes and services tailored to meet the needs of children and families using the existing capacities of institutions and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the planning and implementation of these programmes.

In addition to low coverage, the quality is also one of the drawbacks of our preschool education system. Large variation in the quality of educational programmes among preschool institutions is noted, as well as disparity in competences of professional staff. Differences are not only in how an educator carries out educational practice, but also in what basic education he/she has at the same work post/job (from vocational school diploma to Teacher Education Faculty diploma). The quality is also adversely affected by the uniform offer for children and families. Families are usually forced to adjust their needs to the offer of the institution. Institutions mainly offer full-day programmes, without other varieties of programmes and services meeting the specific needs of children and families (such as services and special and specialized programmes in dislocated and Roma settlements, etc.). Preschool system is largely closed to the influences of other systems and interest groups (preschool institutions lack pedagogical assistants, civil sector hardly implements projects and programmes of interest to children and families, particularly in the area of inclusion). Active involvement of families in programmes is almost sporadic, initiated and articulated mainly by institutions. On the other hand, even when institutions do provide full support to parent participation, families have hard times getting involved in independent ventures and projects. All this indicates that the preschool education quality is not at the desired and required level. The Strategy made a number of recommendations on how to improve and equalize the quality – standardization of requirements and pedagogical standardization of practice followed by the development of a valid system for accrediting, monitoring and evaluating the quality and relevance.

When we analyze the efficiency of preschool system it can be noted that it is rather inefficient. The network of preschool institutions is underdeveloped; its capacities are unevenly and inadequately distributed. On the one hand, the network is concenterated in urban areas, where it mostly covers children of working parents, but does not "cover" their needs. On the other hand, children of unemployed parents, children from rural areas and from other vulnerable groups are virtually excluded from the system, for the capacities are insufficient or the institutions' capacities do not reach these children and their families. In this way, the system favors its social function at the expense of pedagogical and economic ones. This imbalance in the implementation of the main functions makes the system additionally inefficient. Local self-governments are not aware of these shortcomings and are not proactive enough in terms of developing the network and enriching the offer of programmes and services in line with the needs of children and families. In that sense, the Strategy for the Development of Education suggested that preschool institutions should develop high-quality and diverse programmes for children and families not covered by the existing programmes using the existing capacities and resources (material and human). This recommendation applies particularly to devastated areas (areas of low economic status) with limited resources where the need is the highest and the opportunities the least. In addition, the measure is recommended to provide the complete coverage of children (100%) by the preparatory preschool programme and

the measure anticipating that every child between three and five years of age should receive some form of free programme for a period of one year. In order to achieve these recommendations, it is important to establish a development plan, in the system and in local self-governments, as the founders of the system, based on the valid and reliable data on children. However, the practice has shown that different sources operate with different data on children, collected using different methods, so it is difficult to determine their validity and make a comparative analysis. The local and national levels have also not reached the consent about the approach. It is hard to plan development education policies and strategies based on uneven data; therefore, the Strategy recommends improvement of the education statistics at the national and local level and planning of the development of the system based on unique data on children.

An attempt to make an analysis of the system relevance lead to the realization that achieving the goals and preschool education outcomes is not monitored in the way that would allow consideration of how relevant the system is, that is to say, the extent to which it really encourages and supports development of the capacities and potentials of each child or generation of children. To improve the relevance, the Strategy recommended individualized approach in planning and implementing education, but also in monitoring progress based on beforehand clear indicators of development of early childhood and preschool children development. This would facilitate early detection of risks a child is exposed to and allow timely preventive / emergency actions of the system in relation to each child and especially those from the most vulnerable social groups.

Based on the analyses presented, a unique conclusion and recommendation of the Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020 is to diversify the preschool system in all directions and in every way. This understands the introduction of different and diverse programmes and offers, specifying services and programmes, their adjustment and adaptation to the needs of children and families. Also, this includes the introduction of comprehensive participatory processes in planning the development and diversification of the system, the maximum involvement of children and families in these processes, especially of those from the most vulnerable social groups, multi-sectorial and interdisciplinary approach in creating and implementing new programmes and inclusive policies.

One of the fundamental questions that arises after considering the recommendations of the Strategy is HOW to achieve that and HOW MUCH money it takes to do it?

Certainly, such a reformist approach calls for certain transformations within the system such as the optimization of the network of institutions and programmes, integration of all programmes and services implemented by different founders into the system, inner transformation of preschool institution in terms of quality, equity and efficiency, distinction between the mandate and competence between the local and national management, clear definition of financial and investment policies. Experiences from IMPRES and Kindergartens without Borders projects very clearly and vividly demonstrate the importance and role of diversified, i.e. special and specialized programmes for achieving the goals and recommendations of the Strategy related to preschool education. Not only that the projects proved that the coverage can be significantly improved with relatively small investments, especially of children from the most vulnerable social groups, but it has also been proved that a large number of children and families have different needs compared to what they are usually offered by the system and that they would gladly respond when the programs and offer are brought closer to their specificities and respond to their needs.

The experience, which has been achieved by introducing special and specialized programmes in the practice, is a very important moment in the development of the system. The results achieved by these programmes, especially the satisfaction of children and parents, but also of educators and other professionals, become a strong argument for future transformation of all preschool

institutions towards diversification, de-politicization, strengthening of the autonomy and pedagogical function, improving institution governance mechanisms, for full protection of children's rights and well-being of every child. The results of special and specialized programmes encourage opening of the institutions to change and empower all professionals in the system to engage their ingenuity, creativity and motivation to improve the quality and equity of the system, in other words in order for the system to be fully put into function of children and families. Most professionals involved in the implementation of the mentioned two projects, after dealing with the shortcomings of the system, showed high motivation to come to grips with them and commit to overcoming them. Particularly inspiring was dealing with the problem of unfairness of the system and its closure in relation to the other potential stakeholders in the community, especially in relation to the family and various local partners.

Different forms of organization (from the static through travelling kindergarten and educators, to van-transportation of children living in dislocated areas, etc.), where special and specialized programmes are implemented, conditioned also other varieties, out of which not all are acceptable (duration, location and method of implementation, different approaches to planning, involvement of various stakeholders and supporters). The Strategy recommends the standardization of conditions that programmes take place in, as well as standardization of the operation of the institution and professionals in order to protect the quality and ensure positive influence on the development of young children. The common feature of special and specialized programmes is the significant improvement of the quality in all segments.

The Strategy recommends also the improvement of research practice in preschool education in order to ensure informed decision-making during policy and development investments making. It is also recommended to organize and conduct evaluation studies and systematical documenting of the education process in all programmes and organization forms of program implementation, as well as documenting the progress in the development of each child to ensure system relevance and improve its pedagogical and economic functions.

Such a method of creating and implementing educational curricula calls for additional education of professional staff in the system and upgrading of their competences in order to successfully accomplish all of these changes and improvements. With some professional support (occasional trainings, mentoring and organized sharing of experiences among professionals), preschool teachers and their assistants and parents can easily and quickly improve their competences and put them in the service of the system for the benefit of children and families.

In special and specialized programmes, developed in the two above-mentioned projects, the vast majority of the mentioned recommendations and measures of the Strategy were realized. It turned out that almost all of these measures and recommendations were realistic and feasible with careful planning and professional management of the implementation and the processes of change in the system – to support the implementation of these programmes. To implement special and specialized programs it is necessary to make certain changes and improvements in other systems in the immediate environment in which they take place. The cooperation between sectors and departments is necessary, as well as among the various experts (local and foreign). This is the case especially when it comes to high-quality programmes based on the rights and well-being of children, inclusive policies and policies of high expectations. High-quality special and specialized programmes include high interest and responsibility of local communities to provide better conditions for growing up of young children in accordance with their capabilities. Also, they demand that local self-governments change the paradigm from which they observe and treat preschool activity and move from funding to investing in this area and to invest in the development of children, if they want to develop, grow and learn as a community.

Given the problems that our society is facing at the moment of education reform, special and specialized programmes and changes in the preschool education system must be accompanied by the consistent institutional adjustments in the education system both vertically and horizontally. It takes an integrated approach to support children and families from an early age (various support services and compensatory actions, early detection of risks and prevention and intervention when risks turn into consequences), in order to ensure the best possible outcome and achievement of the highest possible educational status for each child and young person in the community. All changes in the system, including special and specialized programmes, require certain measures and mechanisms for sustainability, in order for the established support to children and families (e.g. through special and specialized programmes) to maintain a consistent and long-term effect and make the system relevant and encourage the children from early years.

2.3 Possible barriers to creating various preschool programmes

In spite of all the documents, laws and proclamations, still in most European countries, as is the case in Serbia, not all young children have access to ECEC. This can be explained by many reasons of several natures. In general, ECEC, as a historically 'younger' service, is not yet considered to be as basic a provision as primary education is. In many countries, and even in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, we notice for example that primary education is compulsory and that most people find it normal that all children can attend school. This is not the case for ECEC. General convictions are e.g. that ECEC is a support for working parents only, that it is not as necessary as school, or that young children are best kept at home. Such perceptions can result in children not attending ECEC.

Other, structural barriers also influence accessibility and the frequent use of ECEC, especially for more vulnerable groups, such as migrant families, ethnic minorities or low-income families. Against common belief, it is often not by parental choice that children are not enrolled in ECEC[41]; a more complex mix of factors is at work here, [42]such as the distance, cost of services, busy parents, not knowing the language that the programmes are implemented in and the like.

In order to take the appropriate actions, it is necessary to analyze and understand the obstacles to increasing the coverage by preschool programmes. The easiest way is to say that parents do not want to enroll their children in preschool, because they do not understand the importance of early years and ECEC. Recent studies in Serbia show that parents have many reasons for not involving their children in preschool education: parents do not have confidence in preschool education; they do not recognize the purpose of the programme, nor do they think that the programmes offered to children are of adequate quality; they are not satisfied, because their opinion is not taken into account and because they cannot take part in the upbringing and education of their child; they are also afraid that their children are not safe and that they can be discriminated or oppressed, etc.

As indicated by studies done in the framework of projects IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders -more opportunities for learning and development of young children (Schema 2), as well as research by UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders and MISC 4, 2011 (Chart 7) following reasons and attitudes influence parent's decisions to involve/or not involve children in preschool programmes.

41   (Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2005)
42   An overview of studies on these issues is given by Vandenbroeck&Lazarri (background doc for TFIEY)

IMPRES SITUATION ANALYSIS, 2012
- Services are too expensive
- Kindergartens are too far
- There is somebody at home who can take care of children
- Lack of understanding of importance of early years for learning and stimulation

UNICEF - KINDERGARTEN WITHOUT BORDERS, 2012
- Parents want to be included, and asked for oppinion about what children will learn and how
- They want to have choice, to choose duration of the program and content
- They want to be respected
- They want regular meetings with teachers
- They want kindergartens in the neibourhood

Scheme 2. Reasons why parents from socially vulnerable groups do not enroll their children in preschool education

MICS 4 (MICS 2011) results show that the main reasons for not enrolling children of 3 and 4 years of age in PSE are: 59.4% parents state that there is someone who can take care of their child at home; 39.6% parents state that the PSI is too far from their homes; 12.5% state the reason is a lack of organized transport and very expensive services, and among the poorest the price of services is the main reason (25%).

Chart 7 Parents' attitudes toward preschool education, MICS 2011

One of the serious and unresolved issues, related to the coverage of children with special needs and disabilities, lies in the fact that their inclusion in preschool education is implemented mainly through the so-called development/special education groups (in preschools and primary schools), financed by the funds allocated for social protection, which is against the principle of inclusion.

Additional issues are, as it is stated in RECI National Report[43]:

• **Mono-cultur of PIs, curriculum and PE in general:** it is highly difficult for Roma and other disadvantaged or minority children to feel accepted in an environment which does not value the community that they come from, which is focused on values of dominant culture and dominant language and which is not sensitive to individual needs of children with different background or life situation.

• **Lack of knowledge of preschool teachers to work in context of diversity**

• **Reactions of the parents from the majority population to the enrolment of Roma and other vulnerable children**

In the table below we tried to present the most common barriers connected with accessibility as well as actions which can be undertaken in order to overcome barriers:

43   Roma Early Childhood Inclusion, The RECI National Report Serbia (2011)

BARRIER	WHAT CAN YOU DO?
Perception of parents, lack of trust, ECEC 'is not for us'	Welcoming attitude and image: use of different languages, diversity in staff, external signs of respect for different cultures and religions. Policy on intake and info sharing, clear communication (not only verbal or on paper)
Not feeling at home	Policy on getting acquainted, words of comfort in the child's language, family wall, songs/food/games from different backgrounds. Invest in authentic parent participation
Lack of knowledge or understanding of administrative procedures	Clear explanations, assistance with all formalities
Atypical needs, irregular attendance	Flexibility
Waiting lists	Well thought intake policy, general admittance rules, prioritising vulnerable groups, redistributing the scarce places (also leading to a better social mix)
Lack of information	Outreach, cooperate with other services in the area
Financial boundaries	Explain possible exemption rules, be respectful in asking financial information, facilitating payment procedures
Language	Use some known words in the family's language, avoid pedagogical jargon and explain what you do and why you do it that way.

2.4 Five crucial criteria of structural accessibility – What do we have to take into account

Vandenbroeck (2012) defines five crucial criteria for structural accessibility. This is not only important to get families acquainted with the ECEC provisions and get their children enrolled, but also to keep them there, to honour their trust, to make them feel welcome 'behind the door' as well.
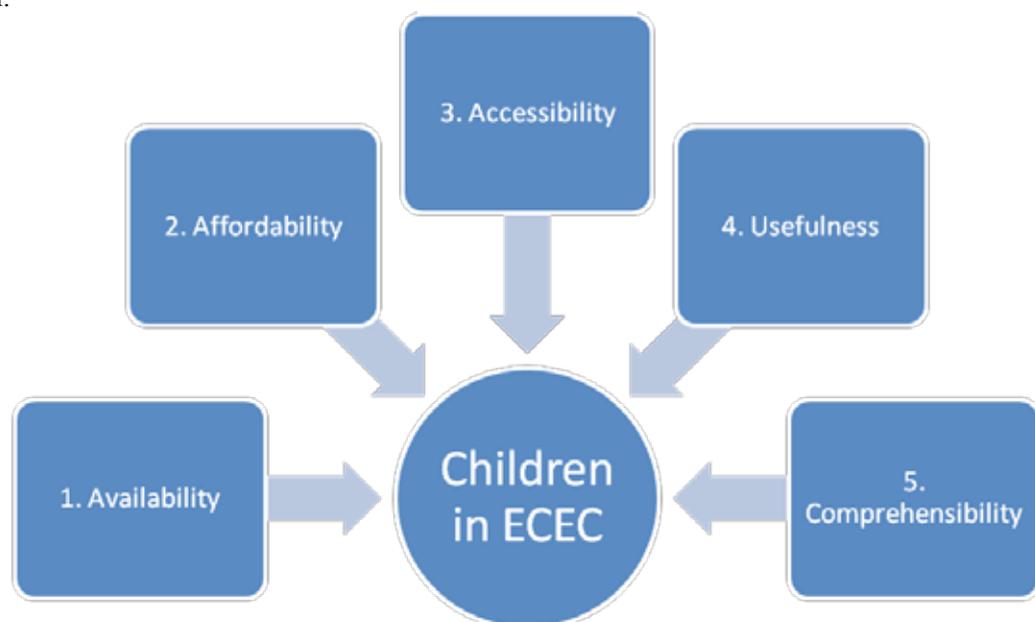
2.4.1. Availability

As families living in poverty are often less mobile than more affluent families, it is crucial that high quality services are to be found in those neighborhoods where vulnerable families reside. This is not to say that ECEC provisions are to be targeted only to families "at risk". Quite on the contrary, we have seen from research that structural provisions addressing the general population (but with specific attention for specific needs of families) are more successful than targeted provisions.[44]

A targeted approach towards poor has a risk of stereotyping and to quote John Bennett: 'Services for the poor are often poor services.' Therefore, we have to aim for a social mix in services for young children. Several cities in Europe have developed a policy towards making universal services available for children of disadvantaged groups. (Brussels, Rome, Gent, Bologna). Some cities have developed a central registration that tries to realize this social mix in the population of the centers for the young children. In other places, managers of preschool institutions develop a policy together towards availability of ECEC places for children of disadvantaged groups.

A disparity analysis of the preschool coverage of children aged 3 to 5 years in Serbia, indicates systemic unjust to a substantial degree. First, there are significant disparities in terms of coverage among different regions – children who live in wealthier regions such as South Bačka, Belgrade, and Moravički region have more chances to attend preschool education than children who live in disadvantaged regions such as Pčinjski, Braničevski, Toplički and Jablanički region[45]. Furthermore, according to MICS 4 data[46], twice as many children are covered by the preschool education system in urban settings (56,6 %) then in the rural areas (28,7%). MICS 4 data also suggests that children living in richest households attend kindergartens thee time more (13,1 %) than children from the poorest households (4,5%).

In IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders' project the idea was to "follow the children" and open kindergartens where there were no kindergartens or where there was a huge shortage of places. Spaces were adapted and new groups were opened near the children, and they were organized as universal service, targeting all the children in the neighborhood. (For more info please read the Practicum – examples of practices developed in Serbia).

2.4.2. Affordability

The Network Children in Europe is making the case for a free access to preschool institutions for all children[47]. In several countries where public funding is structurally available, provisions are usually free for 3 to 6 years old or parents can contribute according to their income, which makes these services a lot more affordable[48].

However, the criterion of affordability does not only refer to material resources but also to more "symbolic" forms of payment. For instance, when provisions are targeted to specific populations "at risk", parents have to pay the symbolic prize of being labelled or giving up part of their privacy, which may in turn become a significant threshold[49].

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44   OECD 2006
45   SORS, 2011
46   Republic Statistic Burro of Serbia. 2011. Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2011(MICS 4), Final Report. Belgrade. Republic of Serbia: Republic Statistic Burro of Serbia

47   http://www.vbjk.be/files/CIE%20Policy%20Paper_0.pdf (2008)
48   Del Boca, 2010
49   (Roose & De Bie, 2003)

A UNICEF's analysis of the amount of funds invested by families[50], shows that the maximum monthly fee per child for an eight-hour programme in 2011 (SORS 2011, DevInfo) amounted to 33% of the economic price (on average) and stayed at around €45 that year. This parameter varies greatly among different municipalities (the same source was used)[51].In economically more stable municipalities, the amount of fees paid by parents depends of their socioeconomic status, because municipalities are able to subsidize low-income families. In 2011, only 37% of the families in Serbia paid the full price of PI services, while only 22% of the children attended the programme free of charge. These figures indicate just how jeopardized the economic status of families truly is and show that full-day PI services are still *expensive for majority of the families, especially if they have more than one child.*

One additional issue is so called "The price of free programmes" meaning that even, **when** children from vulnerable groups are enrolled in PI free of charge, there are additional financial demands that parents cannot provide for (e.g. slippers, paper, pencils, workbooks, etc.).

As already mentioned above, **the paradox of preschool institution / kindergartens**, leads to preschool institution (which is probably the place with the highest potential for stimulating social inclusion) which actually contests social cohesion and increases the gap among children. The Kindergartens are attended by children who are already in a better position and presumably receive good service and therefore the kindergartens logically stimulate psycho-social, cognitive and emotional development of these children, thus increasing the gap between them and the children from low-income families and making it harder to overcome later in life.[52]

Better-off families, with both parents working, exert a lot of pressure on kindergartens to enroll their children (in order to have someone taking care of their child while they are at work), while the unemployed parents believe that their children do not need the kindergarten because they already have someone at home to look after them (MICS 4).

IMPRES and UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders projects agreed with the local self-governments to organize free special and specialized programmes. During enrollment, it was taken care that programmes are attended by children who are not included in full-day programmes; children from low-income families; children living in the vicinity of the place where the programmes take place; children from vulnerable groups and the like. It addition, it was also taken care that the composition of the group reflects the demographic structure of the community/settlement in which the program is organized. Parents were very satisfied with this opportunity. After more than one year of project implementation, it is obvious that LSG can finance limited number of free of charge programmes without special problems.

2.4.3. Accessibility

It is not because provisions are available and affordable that they are necessarily accessible, as many types of thresholds may continue to exclude children from vulnerable families: language barriers, lack of knowledge of bureaucratic procedures, waiting lists, or priorities set by the management.

In Serbia, Preschool coverage is rather low both with regard to existing needs and national policies, and in comparison to EU countries (Table 1, SORS 2011, DevInfo).

Table 1: Preschool coverage by age

Coverage	Serbia 2011	EU average[53]
Coverage of children aged 0-3 years (in %)	14	35
Coverage of children aged 3-5.5 years (in %)	42	73
Coverage of children aged 4-6.5 years (in %)	47	85
PPP coverage (in %)	93	100

* PPP – mandatory preparatory preschool programme

Obviously, the percentage of coverage increases with the age and it is the highest in PPP (it is compulsory and it is the preparation for school), and the lowest at the age of 3 years. This fact can be explained by the number of available places in PI (more available places for older children); costs (the most expensive services are for the youngest, primarily due to the standards), and the attitude of parents (the closer the children are getting to school age, the more important it becomes that they attend PI to prepare for school) and the like.

In Serbia, due to insufficient spatial capacities of PI and the fact that the demand for premises is higher than the offer, insufficient attention is devoted to barriers that children and their parents face in kindergartens. There is no evidence of fluctuation of children, or the "drop-outs" at the preschool level, as it is taken for granted that all who have been enrolled will be happy to have been "chosen" and that they will not drop out regardless of the level of satisfaction by the services offered. That is why they are not (often) thinking about what could be changed in the operation and functioning of the PIs to make them more attractive for parents of vulnerable children or for parents who have alternative choices, and therefore go to private kindergartens or have someone taking care of children or the like.

Projects *IMPRES and UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders*, devoted a lot of attention to creating the sense of belonging in each child and family. All kindergartens tried to reflect the local community, different cultures, traditions and languages by spatial organization, objects in the kindergarten, working hours, language used and the like.

The programmes have also been designed (the number of children, the composition of the group, work method, level of parental involvement, working hours and the like) together with children, parents and representatives of the local community and local self-government. Ready-made programmes have not been offered and they enrolled only those that could fit in; the programs were designed to fit children and parents, preschool teachers, professional associates, but also the directors, and the funders (local self-government).

Conclusion: Increasing availability of preschool education can contribute to the improvement of outcomes of each child and equality among children by reducing socio-economic disparity, IF AND ONLY IF the increase of the coverage does not jeopardize the quality of preschool education.

(OECD, 2001, PISA in Focus

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50   Investing in early Childhood Education in Serbia UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders, 2012)
51   (Roose & De Bie, 2003)
52   Počni od početka --Begin at the begining, beginig is important, 2010.

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53   Source: First National Report on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction in the Republic of Serbia, Overview and Status of Social Inclusion and Poverty Trends in the Period 2008-2010 and Future Priorities, Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2010

2.4.4. Usefulness

Preschool programs must be perceived as useful and meaningful, both by children and families and the local self-governments, which mean that preschool education, should be of help to and in accordance with the expectations and requirements of all relevant stakeholders in preschool education. This primarily pertains to practical issues, such as e.g. working hour's adjusted to vulnerable families often doing atypical, low-paid jobs with unspecified working hours. This is also associated with what parents feel about the services rendered, to what extent and when they are involved, if there is a democratic decision-making and if they really feel respected regardless of their social status and background. For local self-governments, the meaningfulness and usefulness are related to labor market, the satisfaction of citizens, higher birth rate, higher educational level of the population and the like.

In Serbia, despite the altered needs of children and families (European working hours for parents, inclusion of children with developmental impairments and disabilities, Roma inclusion and other), the preschool education system is still organized in the old fashioned manner: full-day programme for children in PIs (offered by as many as 56% of the institutions and attended by 62% of children) and half-day programme (PPP)[54].

From 2010, state structures have been observed to harbor increased interest in the development of preschool education – since a few significant development projects have been launched[55], as well as some policy relevant research studies have been conducted. However, these initiatives have not made significant improvement in terms of coverage and quality of preschool education in Serbia. One of the reasons is the lack of money for investments, but the other possible reasons could be: lack of public awareness or lack of understanding how important early years and early education are for further development of the child; consequently, there is the lack of interest in local self-governments to invest in early childhood development programmes and services for families. The reasons could be, roughly, divided into two groups.

The first group of reasons primarily relate to the lack of funds for investments especially at the local level. This is an additional paradox, namely the maximum expanding of the capacities is most needed in most underdeveloped areas, which are also the poorest. As preschool education is primarily the responsibility of the local community, it is unrealistic to expect that poor local communities can create change without the assistance from the national level. In addition, PI and local self-governments are not proactive in exploring additional sources of funding to assist in expansion and development of different and new programs and services both inside and outsie the PI buildings (e.g. within the alternative spaces and different contexts – the so-called outreach programs in the community; travelling kindergartens, teachers and teams; private kindergartens and creches; joint programs for parents and children in the cultural center or sports center; kindergartens and creches organized inside the families; organizing the program on the premises of a kindergarten in the afternoon, or on weekends, and the like).

The second group of reasons have already been mentioned a couple of times, but we will just look at them once again. Underdeveloped public awareness or insufficient understanding of the importance of early childhood development and learning for further development of a child, pardons the LSG passivity. Public opinion, particularly parents do not ask for a better preschool education system, and the local self-governments are not interested enough to invest in early childhood development programs and services for families.

In spite of hugely spread belief that parents are interested only in whole day programmes, *experiences from UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders and IMPRES project are showing something different. When parents were asked what kind of programmes they want for their children, they knew what they wanted: flexible working hours; opportunities for children and themselves to socialize; interesting and inspiring learning opportunities. They also wanted to have a say on what is important and meaningful for their children to learn.*

When parents were asked what type of programme they want for their children, they knew what they wanted:
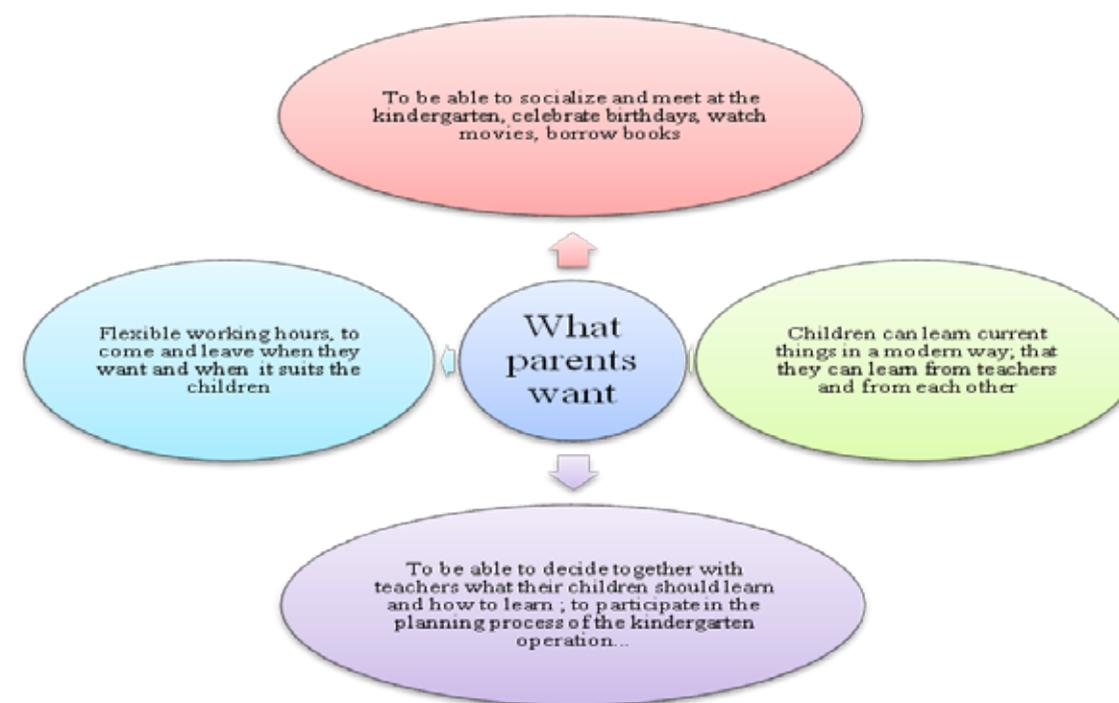
Scheme no. 3: Preschool education from the parental perspective

2.4.5. Comprehensibility

Finally, this criterion refers to the extent to which the meaning of ECEC provisions is matched with the meanings that parents attribute to these provisions. This implies that values, beliefs and educational practices of the provision need to be negotiated with families and local communities[56]. Mono-cultural provisions often fail to do so and may therefore generate segregation and discrimination.[57]

54   Source: UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders, 2012: Technical report titled Investing in Early Child hood Education in Serbia - Costing Models for Ensuring Preschool Education for All, UNICEF - Kindergarden without borders, 2012, available on the website: www.UNICEF - Kindergarten without bor ders.org/serbia/; The principal authors of this report are Sunčica Vujić, Department of Economics, Universi ty of Bath, United Kingdom; Hana Baronijan, IPSOS; and Aleksandar Baucal, University of Belgrade. Jan van Ravens, International Consultant at the Faculty of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at the Yale University, contributed to the development of the research methodology for this study.

55   The Improvement of Preschool Education in Serbia - EU funds IMPRESS/IPA, implemented in 15 municipal ities, Project Kindergarten Without borders, implemented in 10 towns by UNICEF and the CIP Center for Interactive Pedagogy, the initiative Parents Also Have a Say , project The Missing Link – Developing Mecha nisms for Support to the Successful Transition of Children with Special Needs Through Education Levels in Mainstream Education in Serbia

56   Vandenbroeck, 2011
57   Driesen 2004, Leseman 2002

Cross-cultural studies on the meanings that parents attributed to the participation of their children have revealed that these meanings depend on the negotiations with preschool teachers, which may vary substantially across contexts and cultures. The meaning that parents attribute can also differ substantially from the meaning that professionals attribute to early childhood education[58]. Studies among parents whose child is often absent from preschool, suggest that the separation between care and education may be one of the important thresholds for sending their child[59]. Parents in this study expressed their concerns about potty training, about having to leave their child at the doorstep and lacking information about the well-being of the child in school; and about the risk of bullying, especially if they are poor and/or do not speak the dominant language.

As stated in the previous paragraph, the *parents from UNICEF– Kindergartens without borders and IMPRES projects wanted their voice to be heard, but also to obtain more information from the teachers. They want the best for their children and are afraid when they do not understand e.g. why educators work with their children in a certain way or why they introduce some new practices in educational work/teaching. Therefore, in these projects teachers devote a lot of attention to informing parents and gathering information from them. Educators were collecting data on each child, habits, needs, favorite toys, games, lullabies, ways of reassurance, etc., as well as data on family culture and practices (attitude towards food, going potty, hygiene, and needs at bedtime, need for privacy; habits for dealing with adults and other children; styles of upbringing/education, and the like). Consultations were made with parents about the least painful ways of ensuring successful transition of children from home to kindergarten. In this way opportunities were created for parents to realize participatory role in upbringing and education of their children (for more information please read Practicum– examples of practices developed).*

3. BEFORE THE BEGINNING ... KEY QUESTIONS THAT REQUIRE ANSWERS

3.1 Questions of preschool education quality– What are we talking about

> *"The issue of quality in education is an issue that relates to the values and meanings we give to children and childhood and is therefore a philosophical and ethical issue ".*
>
> *(Woodhead, 2012)*

As it was stated in OECD, Starting Strong III, a growing body of research recognises that early childhood education and care (ECEC) brings a wide range of benefits, for example, better child well-being and learning outcomes as a foundation for lifelong learning; more equitable child outcomes and reduction of poverty; increased intergenerational social mobility; more female labour market participation; increased fertility rates; and better social and economic development for the society at large. However, all these benefits are conditional on "quality". Expanding access to services without attention to quality will not deliver good outcomes for children or the long-term productivity benefits for society. Furthermore, research has shown that if quality is low, it can have long-lasting detrimental effects on child development, instead of bringing positive effects.

However, what constitute high quality in ECEC are complex, and often a contradictory matter: definitions of quality and strategies to ensure it vary considerably across countries[60]. Any discussion on quality in ECEC should be contextualized: it should encompass the regular review of understandings and practices for the improvement of services in ever-changing societal conditions[61].

Consequently, quality needs to be considered as an on-going *process* rather than as something that is achieved or not. Above all, quality should be negotiated between all interested parties who participate in the process. They need to be evaluated and documented, but cannot be predetermined without negotiation with all stakeholders. In literature, usually you can find definitions of two essential aspects of quality[62]:

Defining and assuring quality should be a participatory and democratic process, involving different groups including children, parents, families and professionals who work with children. (OECD, 2006)

• *structural quality* - the regulated environment of space, teacher training, group size etc. and

• *process quality*, which is concerned with such things as relationships, stimulation within the learning environment and social emotional security.

The 2006 Starting Strong II report describes quality as constructed from several interrelated elements such a

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58   (G. Brougère, Guénif-Souilamas, & Rayna, 2007; G Brougère, Guénif-Souilamas, & Rayna, 2008; Kurban & Tobin, 2009; Tobin, 1995, 1997, 2009; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989).

59   (M. Vandenbroeck, De Stercke, & Gobeyn, Forthcoming).

60   Penn, Helen, (2009), EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, Key lessons from research for policy makers, An independent report submitted to the European Commissionby the NESSE networks of ex perts, European Commission - The electronic version of this report is available at: http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/ nesse_top/tasks

61   ibid

62   Doherty-Derkowski (1995) in Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8), April 2008, © Victorian Cur riculum and Assessment Authority 2008, Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

41   St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

Chart 8 Quality as constructed from several interrelated elements

Orientation quality *is* the type and level of attention that a government brings to early childhood policy, e.g. through national legislation, regulation and policy initiatives. If there is no orientation to quality on policy level, positive and quality interventions are going to be result of "good will" of individual settings or professionals, but in general, on the system level quality will not be in focus.

Structural quality is primarily a responsibility of administrations, and it refers to the over-arching structures needed to ensure quality in early childhood programmes. This aspect of quality is defined trough clear formulation and enforcement of legislation, laws and bylaws. Structural requirements may define the quality of the physical environment for young children (buildings, space, outdoors, pedagogical materials); the quality and training levels of the staff; an appropriate curriculum properly tailored, and covering all the broad areas of child development; acceptable child-staff ratios; adequate work conditions and compensation of staff, etc.

Educational concept and practice is aspect of quality generally guided by the national curriculum framework which sets out the key goals and ways of operating of the early childhood system.

Quality of interaction or process is defined by: interaction between children and educators and interaction between children themselves in the learning process; cooperation in the preschool institution team; level of participation and cooperation with the family and local community; system inclusiveness; strategies of teaching, planning and evaluation, as well as the environment. Under this approach to quality, attention is paid to

the continuing professional development of employees.

Operational quality is connected with management that focuses on responsiveness to local needs, quality improvement and effective team building: operational quality is maintained by leadership that motivates and encourages working as a team and information sharing. It includes regular planning at center and classroom level; opportunities for staff to engage in continuous professional and career development; time allowed for child observation, assessments and documentation; support of staff performance in the form of accompaniment and mentoring.

Careful analysis of these aspects of quality shows that quality can be ensured not only through high-quality legal documents and / or through proper functioning of PI or individual teachers, but that the quality is also the result of the interaction of different levels of preschool education (Woodhead, 1996, prema Pavlović Breneselović, Krnjaja, 2013).

Everybody is talking about a competent system, which is essential as a framework in which every institution and every individual will be able to develop, progress and achieve good as it was stated by Urban **'there is no COMPETENT SYSTEM' without competent practitioners (and vice versa)[63]**

In Serbia, the quality of preschool education is defined by the Quality Standards for Preschool Institutions, but also by the Strategy for the Development of Education, which envisages the strategic measures of quality assurance set in five supporting points: Defining the national quality standards for conditions (space, equipment, health), quality standards for staff (competencies, group size, ratio), quality standards for educational process (rights, individuality, interaction, participation, families), quality standards for preschool institution (children's well-being, organization of activities, family and local community participation), quality standards for educational curricula (developmental characteristics, playing activities, operational plans, family participation) (Pavlović Breneselović, Krnjaja, 2013).

3.2 Questions about Competences of educators

As it was stated before, competent educators are most salient predictors of quality of ECEC. There is strong evidence that enriched stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by better qualified staff; and better quality pedagogy leads to better learning outcomes. When speaking about the quality of the work of educators, one primarily speaks about the process quality (described in the text above).

Staff quality are the way staff involve children and stimulate interaction with and between children as well as staff's scaffolding strategies, such as guiding, modelling and questioning. It also includes ability to develop children's perspectives; ability to praise, comfort, question and be responsive to children; leadership skills, problem solving and development of targeted lesson plans; and good vocabulary and ability to elicit children's ideas. Competent educators also know how to create an environment of trust, mutual respect and professional shared vision for children and families.[64] [65]

Over the past years, there has been a shift in what are considered to be the necessary com-

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63   Ibid
64   Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8), April 2008, © Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2008, Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 41 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
65   OECD Research Brief, Qualifications, education and professional development matter

petences for practitioners working with (young) children.[66]

Increasingly present is the idea that the quality of educators' work primarily depends on the prevailing image of the child, educators and parents. If educators are no longer seen as experts, who work from a distance and know all the answers, but as reflective practitioners, then the children are seen as active and competent, as well as the parents. Then, kindergartens are no longer places where children "are taught things" and where parents "don't have a say", but places of getting together, a dialogue, sharing ideas and values, places where new knowledge and understandings are constructed. It is important to understand the mutual connection between the above-described images, the change of one automatically leads to the change of others. For example, the moment we start viewing the child as competent, independent, capable to construct knowledge and the like, we have to change the image about the role of educators and parents, which automatically changes the method of operation and improves the quality.

Group work with parents and children from different cultures, of different ethnicities and etc. origin is a particular challenge for educators, especially if the educator him/herself does not belong to the same groups.

The DECET[67] and ISSA[68] networks have worked together in 10 coutries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Serbia, Spain and the UK - England and Scotland) in close cooperation with different practitioners on the field on describing action-oriented competencies, both on the level of the individual practitioner and on the level of the team[69]. Whatever their qualifications, background *and previous experience*, practitioners have identified the following fundamental and core competencies needed by the practitioners involved in preschool education in the context of diversity and equality*:*

• willingness to accept diversity in society and appreciate other ways of being

• do not judge

• have an open understanding

•feel empathy and understanding

•demonstrate flexibility and adaptability

•be sensitive (aware of the needs of children and parents) and responsive (take actions accordingly)

•support the development of a sense of belonging

•be enthusiastic: engaged and motivated

•be creative – find alternative solutions and approaches

•show warmth and love

These competencies represent the basis and prerequisites for high-quality practice and professional engagement. As specific, the following competences have been listed (at the level of individual practitioner and the team level)[70].

Working toward social change	Being aware that services for young children are intrinsically linked to the broader society and that interactions and relations that emerge in services are a reflection of what is happening in that wider community. Understand that society is constantly evolving and that therefore practitioners cannot be static or complacent. Feel comfortable about experimenting with and introducing new practice and ideas.
Open communication and dialogue	Pro-actively nourish this dialogue, rather than dominating it with your own views or expertise. Facilitate dialogue through active listening without judgment. Create a safe environment where everybody feels free to express their views and opinions and to contribute to the development of services for the children.
Critical reflection: exploring complex issues from various angles	Understand that every child, parent, colleague has his/her own history and experiences, norms and values. Recognize and appreciate that families have different beliefs, ideas and approaches to situations. Be able to 'critically' reflect on how your own background and perspective influence the way you perceive, acknowledge and work with different people from various cultural contexts and background. Know how to build empathic relationships with children, parents and colleagues.
Learning from disagreements	Know your own limitations and strengths. Humor and self-awareness are important qualities in any work situation. Know not to take yourself too seriously. Know that you don't have all the answers. Value disagreements as learning opportunities for improving practice.
Co-constructing new practice and knowledge with children, parents and colleagues	Be aware that knowledge does not only come from books. Be willing to learn from children, parents, colleagues and their communities. Constructing new knowledge and enhancing the practice is not a solo activity, but joint effort of all participants. Be able to deal with uncertainty. Feel comfortable exploring unknown paths and know that a process can lead to something worthwhile.

However, it is not the qualification per se that has an impact on child outcomes, but the ability of better qualified staff members to create a high-quality pedagogic environment that makes the difference (Elliott, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009), and provide strengths-based training and mentorship that encourages independent decision making and risk taking. A curriculum is a living document, ever changing to meet the needs of children, families and communities. An early childhood curriculum that values the professional knowledge of educators will have overarching principles, but will rely on the competence of teachers to interpret these principles for the contexts and the individual children with whom they work.

66   More background information can be found in PEETERS, J., The warm professional ... and in Wanda p
       http://www.vbjk.be/en/node/3949 CoRe reserach
67   Diversity in Early Childhood and Education and Training (see www.decet.org)
68   International Step by Step association (see www.issa.nl)
69   The brochure 'Diversity and social inclusion: exploring competencies for professional practice in early child
       hood education and care' can be downloaded for free on http://www.vbjk.be/files/Diversity%20and%20So
       cial%20Inclusion%20Exploring%20Competences%20for%20Professional%20Competences%20in%20ECEC.
       pdf
70   The brochure 'Diversity and social inclusion: exploring competenties for professional practice in early child-
       hood eductaion and care' se može besplatno preuzeti na adresihttp://www.vbjk.be/files/Diversity%20and%20
       Social%20Inclusion%20 Exploring%20Competences%20for%20Professional%20Competences%20in%20
       ECEC.pdf, kao i na www.impres.rs iwww.cipcentar.org

In order to improve educational practice and to support educators to become more competent and successful in their work it is necessary to give them opportunities to[71]:

- become aware of their professional strengths and weaknesses,

- understand what quality teaching practice is about,

- discover intrinsic motivation to create a change in their practice,

- gain support from colleagues and representatives of other levels of education system and to feel safe and protected in the process of change.

It is necessary that teachers are critically reflective practitioners who will constantly evaluate their own practice. Critically reflective practitioners will co-construct understandings about children's learning with other staff, children, families and interested community members.

Existence of **competent system**[72] is of crucial importance for development of reflective practitioners. A 'competent system' creates possibilities for all staff to engage in joint learning and critical reflection and collaborations between individuals and teams and institutions.
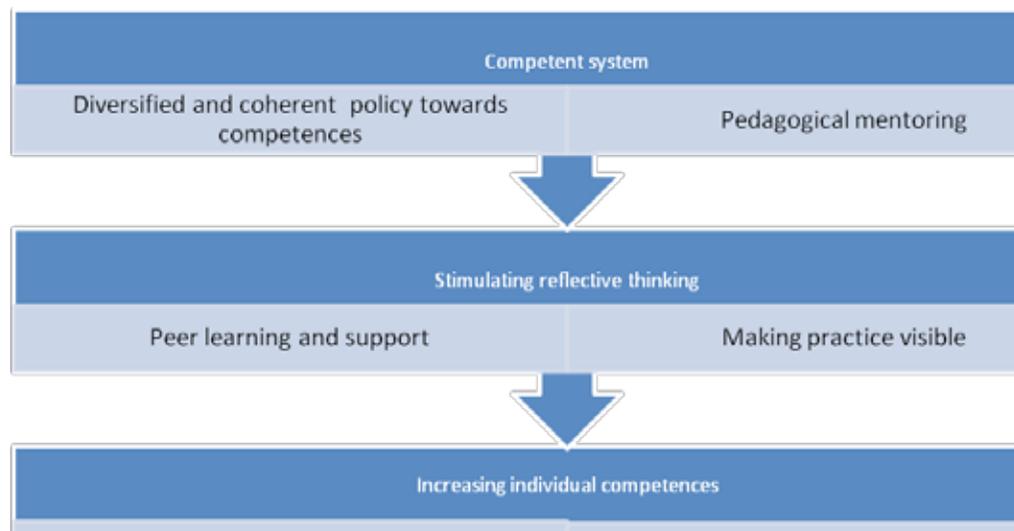
Shema 4 Levels of competent system

The *competent system* develops in reciprocal relationships between individuals, teams, institutions and the wider socio political context, including good governance at the policy level. A key feature of a 'competent system' is its support for individuals to realise their capability to develop responsible and responsive practices. That kind of system requires possibilities for *all staff* to engage in joint learning and critical reflection. This includes sufficient *paid* time for these activities. A competent system includes collaborations between individuals and teams and institutions[73].

> *"A key feature of a competent system is to develop responsible and responsive practices that respond to the needs of children and families in ever changing societal contexts." (CoRe, 2011)*

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71   Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8), April 2008, © Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2008, Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 41 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
72   Urban et.al. (2011), CORE report - Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care
73   Ibid.

3.3 Essential Principles of quality provision in early years

Essential Principles of quality provision for children from birth to 8 years can be divided in four groups.[74]

A. **Recognition of how our views or images of children impact on both how we interact with them and the types of experiences we provide:** Viewing children positively as capable and competent; Acknowledging children as having rights; Valuing the richness that cultural diversity brings to learning situations; Recognizing children as being literate within the cultures of their communities and families.

B. **Recognition of the special characteristics of children from birth to eight:** Focusing on a sense of well-being and belonging; Acknowledging the importance of relationships; Recognising play is centeral; Enabling environments: Learning through exploration, engagement, enquiry, investigation, hands-on real life experiences, risk-taking and problem-solving.

C. **Recognition of the importance of collaboration and partnerships in education**: Empowering children, families and communities; Viewing teachers as scaffolders and co-constructors of learning; Valuing and embracing diversity and acknowledging the multicultural nature of respective society.

D. **Recognition of quality teaching and learning approaches:** Interweaving teaching, learning and assessment; Learning through play; Using teachable moments for focused teaching and learning; Embedding rich literacy and numeracy experiences into programmes; Acknowledging the environment as the third teacher and recognizing the quality of teaching staff as critical to quality program delivery.

3.4 Questions of educational quality practice – what we expect to see within the high-quality education in early years?[75]

Questions of educational practice quality are directly connected to what we have said so far. In short, they can be described as an approach to changes of the preschool education system towards a more flexible, democratic, context-specific and more ethical system. All aspects of quality are reflected directly and cut through the very practice. If we aspire to create various high-quality programmes in preschool education practice, we should bear in mind that such practice is based upon the needs of children, families and the local community, that it is created through a dialogue about the values and purposes of education and upbringing, that it reflects the specific context in which it takes place, it includes a network of support and inclusion of parents, children and the local community. In this way, the program is being developed "inside" by those who participate in it and who make it[76].

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74   Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8), April 2008, © Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2008, Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority 41 St Andrews Place, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002

75   Dawn Tankersley, 2012, based on Competent Educators of the 21st Century: Principles of Quality Pedagogy (International Step by Step Association)

76   The "Inside program" or "user's design" as a way of developing programmes makes it possible for all stake holders to better understand the system and their own values, generate consensus among the participants and provide greater committment, as well as the authenticity and sustainability of the system (Banarhy, 1991, acc. Krnjaja, Pavlović Breneselović, 2013)

How do we know that?
• There are opportunities for children to engage in *interactions*, and to model respectful and supportive interactions among all adults involved in children's lives;   • There are strong *partnerships* among educators, families, and other community members   • Through everyday experiences, children learn to appreciate and value *diversity* and to develop the skills to participate.   • The roles *of assessment and planning* promote learning that enables every child to succeed.   • Using *strategies* that promote *learning* should reflect democratic values; cognitive development and academic achievement must be combined with social development.   • Children are in a secure *environment* and accommodating specific learning needs, to work cooperatively, to be engaged in different kinds of activities,   • Teachers who are engaged in *ongoing professional and personal development*, reflect on their practice, and work cooperatively with others modelling enjoyment of the process of lifelong learning.

The EPPE[77] study also looked into what makes ECEC more effective and pointed at these important elements: the quality of adult-child verbal interaction; the knowledge and understanding of curriculum; the knowledge on how young children learn; the adult skills in helping children to resolve conflict and helping the parents to support children's learning at home.

In general high quality ECEC programmes are flexible and responsive to children's ideas, while including careful planning and resourcing. They enable children to engage in exploration, investigation, problem solving and discovery in collaboration with others (Arthur et al, 2003). Above all, they cherish competent educators, support them and provide them with opportunities to continuously learn and grow.

4. DIVERSIFIED (SPECIAL AND SPECIALIZED) PROGRAMS

This chapter will focus on most challenging, but at the same time most gratifying part of the process – putting great ideas into practice. We will present to you step by step the process that we have implemented in IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders projects, barriers that we have faced, as well as different ways of developing various types of programmes.

The Law on Preschool Education sets the foundations for introduction of special and specialized programmes which, for the first time, besides ensuring additional contents for children who attend kindergartens (ballet, English and the like) have the function of increasing the availability of preschool education to children not included in the system, including the vulnerable children, as well. Bylaws, such as the standards of conditions for implementation of special programs in the sphere of preschool education, Rules of closer conditions, types and method of implementing and funding special and specialized programmes and other forms of work and services and the Quality standards for Preschool Institutions define the frameworks for designing the programmes.

According to standards of conditions for special and specialized programmes is to contribute to:

• Building of the relationship with a family, local community and wider social environment in accordance with the needs of preschool children and their parents, considering the developmental specificities of preschool age, creating conditions for nurturing the activity of play as an authentic way of expression and learning of preschool child, and paying due consideration to cultural and language specificities of the child's growing environment in compliance with the law;

• Strengthening and improvement of the educational function of the family;

• Satisfying the needs for diversity and individuality of children and their families through various forms of pedagogical work in accordance with the developmental characteristics of children, changes in technical and technological, cultural, educational, sport and recreational activities offered by closer and wider community;

• More successful inclusion of children of preschool age in further education and social environment through interaction with children of different ages and various adults;

• Create incentives for continuous education and professional development of teachers and staff associates."[78]

4.1. What needs to be known in order to comply with the righteousness of including children from vulnerable groups in high-quality diversified programs?

The Bylaw on closer conditions on types, methods of implementation and funding of special and specialized programmes and other types of pedagogical work and services provided by preschool institution was focusing on the same issue, leaving space in kindergartens for children coming from different marginalized and vulnerable groups. Still, there are many issues when it comes to its implementation.

It is very important to take care that the introduction of these programmes does not further stigmatize vulnerable families and children and reduce them only to background/origin and status. On the other hand, we must not allow denying that some children are in a more difficult situation

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than the others and that they need more support.

The question whether ECEC services should be universal, equally open to and the same for every child or more targeted, with specifications to benefit vulnerable groups, is an on-going one. In reality and taking into account different contexts of policies and available budgets, it is not easy to give YES or No answer. Both universal and targeted systems can have positive and negative effects. In addition, as it is correctly stated in Starting Strong II, simply because a service is offered, targeted or universal, it can only be beneficial to children when their parents actually use it or feel that they are welcome to it.

Targeted services

Benefits	Negative effects
The scarce resources can be put in place in a more effective way to tackle the issue at stake	Some children who just do not meet the set criteria (e.g. just not poor enough) can be missed
Service is organized where it is really needed	The target group can be additionally stigmatized and excluded
Users feel more at ease by being among people who share the same life experiences or circumstances	There is less pressure on quality issues from middle-class users who are often better heard.

Universal services could avoid these drawbacks and the use of universal services may be higher.

Benefits	Negative effects
More children are likely to enrol, when an ECEC services are well known and available to all.	There is risk of being captured by the middle class and thus becoming excluding again and reinforcing inequalities instead of eradicating them
These systems are rights-based, rather than based on certain criteria to attend (SES, home address, parental background…).	They are very costly and could be at risk especially in times of crisis. Some expenditure is also done for families who may not need that kind of (financial) support.
There are better chances of obtaining a social mix among attending children and families and there is no stigma because everyone attends the service.	This can be" too middle of the road" and can make more vulnerable groups not feeling at home.

In addition, we should not lose sight of other conditions that influence children's well-being, such as home environment, socio-economic status, housing etc. However, the effects of a weaker socio-economic background are less influential on children's attendance of ECEC in countries where universal services are available, often even free of charge (e.g. Scandinavian countries). This may mean that universal entitlements (= a right) to publicly funded ECEC provision with integrated systems that combine care and education, with flexible allocation of funds, targeting additional resources for disadvantaged groups, may help to overcome the social stratification in the use of ECEC with the highest benefit for disadvantaged groups[79]

79   See Vandenbroeck, M, Lazarri, A (2012): Accessibility of ECEC for children from ethnic minorities and low-income families. Background paper for TFIEY, jan. 2013 (with references to a.o. UNICEF - - Kindergarten without borders-Innocenti 2008, Leseman 2002, Ghysels & Van Lancker 2011), http://www.calameo.com/read/001774295780e9c56e158?authid=lunFhaVetzQ6

A pragmatic response could be the road of "progressive universalism", or 'cascading service model' as it is called in Starting Strong II. Given budgetary restrictions and the mentioned risks of universalism, a combination of both systems could be more feasible (e.g. the Integrated centers in the UK, Sure start programmes). In this progressive universalism, services are designed to basically reach all children. The entry point is the same for all, but it leaves room for certain adjustments to tackle certain risks.

In some cases, additional funding and projects can be injected for specific groups (poverty, migration, disability,…) Offering additional targeted responses to specific needs of children can also help to 'get the weak stronger' before drowning them in middle class aimed programmes. In the UK for example, experience showed that, once the families got acquainted with meeting places in disadvantaged areas, their trust in other provisions grew and attendance got higher. E.g. in the Flemish community in Belgium, education is equally funded for all children, but schools get additional resources for pupils meeting certain criteria such as learning difficulties, poverty, non-native speaking parents…This support is not passed on to the individual child or parent but to the school who can then use it within the broader school setting (e.g. extra staff) which can be beneficial to all children.

In both projects, IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders, we were aiming towards progressive universalism. The main idea was to create special and specialized programmes in the areas where preschool programmes were lacking and to introduce enrolment policies which supported creation of socially mixed groups. Special and specialized programmes should not become targeted services, and they should never serve as a tool for additional segregation of specific groups of children.

4.2. What we should have in mind when we create different types of programmes:[80]

The **child as a subject of rights**: to autonomy, well-being… and the right to growth on the child's own premises. The child as agent of its own learning, a rich child with natural learning and research strategies… A child growing outdoors for pleasure and freedom. A time for childhood that can never be repeated.

The **center is seen as a public socio-educational service**, in which the community interest – as well as the interests of individual parents – must be taken into account. It is viewed as a life space.

Programmes are **child-centerd** – interactivity with educators and peers encouraged and the quality of life in the institution is given high importance. Quality control is more participatory, based on educator and team responsibility. Documentation used not only to mark child progress but also as collegial research on staff pedagogical approaches. A wide range of child outcomes may be sought, and assessed informally in multiple ways. The focus is on center performance rather than on child assessment.

In the process of the implementation of IMPRES and Kindergartens without borders projects, and by means of a dialogue with all the participants, special and specialized programmes directed at increasing the coverage of vulnerable children can be defined as:

- a **specific kind of a process**. It is a constant social process of interactions that includes children, teachers, knowledge and environment. It is shaped by the context of a local community, the context itself consisting of social relations between the

80   Bennet, J. Pedagogy in Early Childhood Services with Special Reference to Nordic Approaches http://psyjournals.ru/en/articles/d31325.shtml

participants (teachers, children, parents, others …), the organizational arrangement and the ethos of the particular institution and nature and content of teacher-child interaction and communication - a set of values, rules, roles and responsibilities inscribed in the organization, material structure and management of the institution itself.

- representing a **joint life of a group of children and teachers**, who in the process learn together: they find and try out different ways of understanding the learning situations and their own part in them. In this way, learning becomes a cooperative activity, what a child learns or understands "is not her personal construction" but rather a result of "joint co-construction of knowledge of children and adults"(for more information please see the Rules on types and methods of implementing and funding special and specialized programmes and other forms of work and services implemented by PI and Appendix no. 2).

Diversified programmes, as its very name suggests, already indicates a dynamic and continuous process and a contextually dependent agency. It presents a way of organizing life, the totality of life that includes relations between children, between children and teacher, and between teachers themselves, besides the structured part of teaching-learning sequences. Changes that appear during this process are not just about what we are going to teach the children, but are also related to the approach to teaching and learning – how to approach and interact with children, how to teach them.

In the opinion of directors, educators, professional associates, and participants of the projects IMPRES and Kindergartens without borders, *what makes this type of program* different from the others are primarily appreciation and taking into account children's needs and interests, parental involvement, as well as flexible and creative way of program implementation. Directors and professional associates also emphasize the duration of programme and work in mixed groups (children aged 3 to 5 years). Professional associates see differences in the fact that programmes are free, as well as that they are based on the respect for diversity and cooperation amongst children.

As for the educators, the greatest differences are reflected in:

- the level of activity of children and their participation (children are more active and more involved in the overall educational process)

- the importance given to the professional development of educators and the provision of direct support in work (seminars, trainings and mentoring)

- team work at the level of kindergarten (learning from and with colleagues and providing mutual support)

- systematic monitoring of children and the work process, documenting the process and progress of children as the basis for a reflective approach to work and formative monitoring)

When asked what they *like most* about these programs, educators, directors and professional associates stated the following: greater parental involvement and empowerment for successful parenting, and respecting the needs of children and parents.

Educators particularly like: flexibility, spontaneity and a holistic approach to child development, team work and cooperation with colleagues, as well as work in mixed groups. It is particularly interesting that the educators like the professional challenge set before them and opportunities

for learning and development.

Directors and associates particularly emphasize the increase of program availability for vulnerable groups, as well as the increase in PI enrolment rates.

4.3 Preparation - Starting with change

Change begins with each of us….each step counts……together we make a difference for children!

Questions connected with development of theory of change….

What is your desired situation/your vision?

Who will be the change agents

What conditions are necessary for achieving your desired change? Projecting future realities – Conditions and Interventions

How do you know that you are on track? What would you like to see exactly?

What is the context about and how to influence it by whom?

What is the long-term change that you seek to support and beneficial for whom?

What is the process/sequence of change that is anticipated?

What assumptions do you have regarding how change may happen?

Making decision to start the process of change is not easy. Usually we are happy and content in the situation we are in. Even if we are not happy, we are not sure should we change what we have and what we know, what we are used to and what we know how to handle with more or less success. Change creates disequilibrium, which can be uncomfortable. People have to make sense of the process for themselves.

According to some authors, to begin the change process in the field of education people needed to have a *moral purpose*. Moral Purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of the people (children, parents, professionals) it affects[81].

If we see diversified programmes as a tool to reach children and families who are out of the preschool system (usually children from vulnerable groups) and to provide them with adequate developmental and learning stimulation and a good start in life, then the moral purpose is more than clear.

As a first step in the process of change, it is necessary to develop on the level of the PI and LSG theory of change, which is going to guide you, motivate you and inform you how to progress and whether you are on a right track. You need to relay on a structured way of thinking about how change happens (assumptions) whilst taking into account external factors and interventions and your own interventions. Development of change should be a multi-stakeholder, participative and collaborative experiential learning exercise that helps to analyze complex change processes.

Accepting the new idea that special and specialized programmes, especially programmes of specific areas of educational works[82], should serve in the first place to reach out towards children

81   Fullan, M (2006): Change Theory a Force for School Improvement, Center for Strategic Education Seminar Series Paper No 1, 157, November 2006
82   programmes aimed at stimulating the children's overall development, providing opportunities for socializa

and families who are out of the system, requires a complex change.

For complex change to happen it is necessary to provide:

1. Vision – where we want to be
2. Skills – what do we need to learn to be able to work in new conditions
3. Incentives – motivation and appreciation
4. Resources – material and human resources
5. Action Plan – clear plan on what are the steps and where they lead.

If *vision* is missing, then people will experience confusion. They will not have a picture of what they are trying to achieve.

If *skills* are missing, people will be anxious. They know what needs to happen but do not have the skills to accomplish what needs to be done.

If people are missing *incentives*, change will likely occur but it will be gradual or slow. People will not have the same motivation to make the necessary changes a priority.

If people are missing *resources*, there will be frustration.

If people are missing an *action plan*, they will know where they want to go but will experience false start because there is no logical plan of action. (For better understanding while you are reading see appendix No 2 – Managing the Complex Change).

For this kind of change good planning, leadership and network of support are more than important. LSG need to have an active and dedicated person who will work on the development of these programmes. On the level of PI Principals have a key role. Amongst other things they have to:

✓ Provide strengths-based training and mentorship that encourages independent decision making and risk taking,

✓ Create an environment of trust, mutual respect and professional shared vision for children and families,

✓ Make people feel that even in the most difficult times, problems can be discussed productively,

✓ Have confidence, not always certainty,

✓ Really care about the people they lead. According to Fullan, "It is the interactions and relationships among people, not the people themselves, that makes the difference in an organizational success. Relationships within an organization are essential to consider during the change process."

✓ Always perceive change as complex system not as a check-list,

✓ Cooperate with all relevant stakeholders,

✓ They have to be good advocates for new practices.

On the level of PI, the first and main leader should be a principal (with support from LSG),

Vision

Clear, education-focused vision represents an image of what PI can or should become. The vision is associated with the values, beliefs and aspirations

Mission

The mission is specific and defines what the PI wants to achieve, i.e. explains the way in which the vision will be achieved.

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tion and support for the development of specific preferences and interests in accordance with the mental and physical abilities of children - article 5 of the Regulation on the type, manner of implementation and financing of specific, specialized programmes, and other forms of work and services that achieves PI(Offical Gazette RS, No 26/13)

the second level are preschool methodologists (pedagogist, psychologists and others) who play a crucial role in establishing new practices based on new understandings and knowledge. All of them together with preschool teachers need to work together in teams, sharing experiences and knowledge. Every step within the process of planning and implementation should be based on participation and collaboration, but not only inside of the preschool institution/kindergarten, but also together with parents and other key stakeholders.

To increase the availability it is not enough just to make the decision that we want to introduce changes in our work and introduce new programmes. It also takes the following:

- Intense advocacy and effective communication strategies
- Implementation of diverse programmes based on community felt needs
- Effective multi-sectorial co-ordination
- Strengthened partnership among various stakeholders
- Empowered communities for enhanced sustainability
- Strengthened accountability as well as monitoring and evaluation systems

Change connected with the introduction of diversified programmes is gradual and it happens in phases, since it is not connected only with new practices, e.g. organizing shorter programmes, in different settings, it is about changing the prevailing understanding of what preschool education is about (see more in the part on functions of preschool education). It is also about new understanding of what the main purpose of special and specialized programmes is – shifting from the existing paradigm that these kinds of programmes are additional services and catering for children and parents who are already in the system, to new paradigm stating that diversification of programmes will bring more children in the system and contribute to greater equity of the preschool education system.

During projects UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders and IMPRES participants in the process defined what current prevailing paradigm is and what they would like to have concerning diversification of programmes.

What we have	What we would like to have
Targeting children in the system	Targeting all children/especially those out of the system and from vulnerable groups
Offering finalized programmes, and forms of work to families – in the system enter those who "fit the best"	Create programmes through dialogue with children, parents and local community
Organize programmes where conditions exist.	Organize programmes where they are needed and where children and families are
Follow the logic "One approach (whole day programmes, with meals and sleeping) fits all"	Embedding in local context and focusing on respect for diversity
Dominant function - economical	All functions represented – economical, educational and social
Not flexible (working hours, rules about hygiene...)	Flexible (working hours, rules about hygiene...)
Working in the more or less hierarchical constellation	Learning communities/democratic practices
Performing	Reflecting
Limited understanding of quality	High quality/child/family/community centered approach

To come from where we are to where we want to be we have to walk down the road of change. This road is symbolically presented in the following continuum - Process and phases of change of Preschool Institution during introduction and implementation of diversified programs[83].

	Phase of Self-centeredness		Phase of Transition	Phase of Change	
Stage	**Status Quo**	**Inside look**	**Wondering**	**Targeted approach**	**Flexibility**
Description	Existing practices are maintained with no reflection, critique and inquiry "We are OK with what we have, this is the only possible way"	Small changes, but only targeting those who are in the system Introducing special and specialized programmes but only for children who are in the system, creating even more opportunities for them	Looking out of the PI, becoming aware that there are children not involved in PE Collecting data about them, exploring reasons, why they are not involved, but not taking concrete actions Main focus on waiting lists	Creating special programmes for special groups Organizing one time or temporary programmes for children and parents from vulnerable groups (e.g. workshops for Roma children, parenting programmes, language learning for minority children etc.)	Focus on all parents and children in local community. In focus is determination to make all aspects of preschool programmes and preschool education accessible to all children - that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Table 2 Process and phases of change of Preschool Institution during introduction and implementation of diversified programs
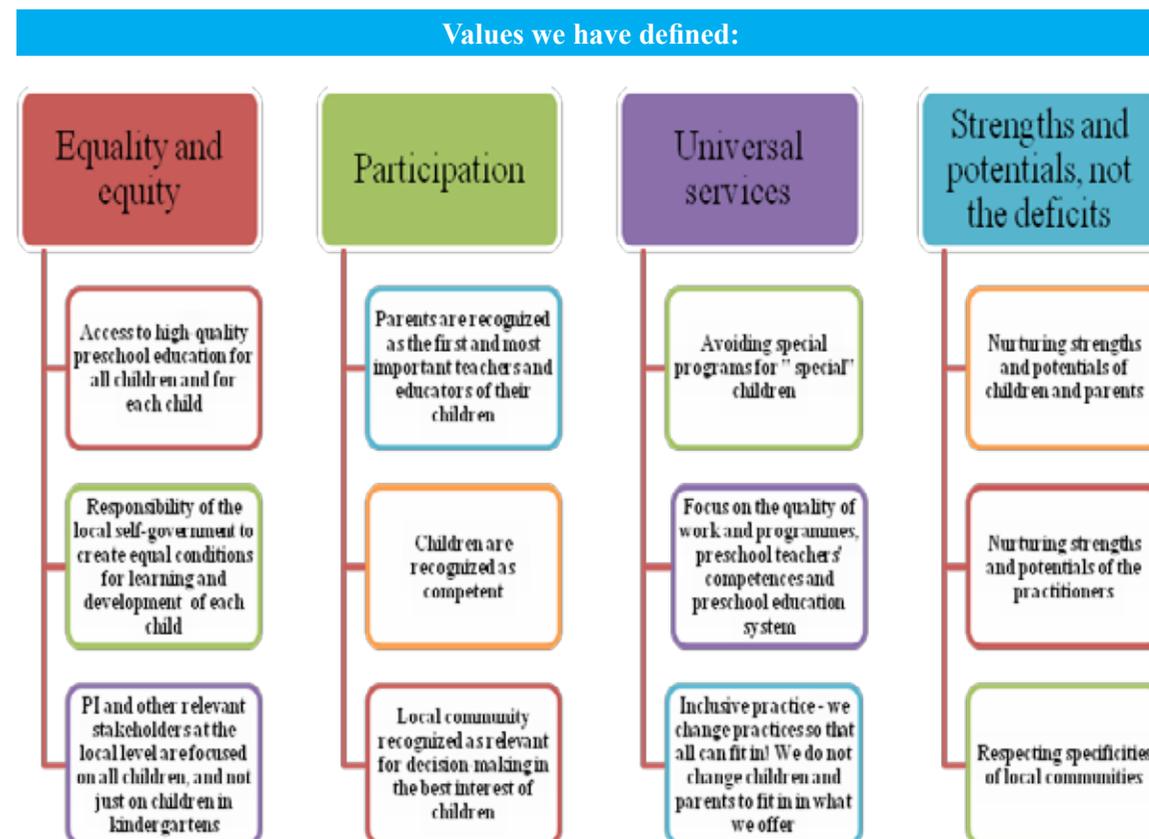
Look at it and try to estimate where you and your PI are. ***Why are you there? Where would you like to be? How can you get there?***

Sometimes we go through phases faster, sometimes slower; sometimes we linger on one of the phases even longer than it might be necessary; sometimes we happen to go back. All this is due to the support we have. If the local community and parents support the change, then it takes places easier. If the support fails, when changes do not raise interest, then it even happens that we go back.

In the framework of these two projects, the following goals of change have been set:

- increase in the understanding of the importance of early years and the function of preschool education (including social, economic and educational function) in decision-makers, funders parents, professionals and members of local communities;
- creating incentives for local self-governments, preschool institutions and local communities to open up to different needs of children and parents and opportunities to meet in order to provide more children with an access to high-quality preschool programmes;
- introduction of democratic visions and practices in the development and implementation of preschool programmes – participation of children, parents and local communities; learning communities …;
- motivating preschool education stakeholders to create partnerships, seek support and understand their position in a complex system of preschool education – introducing the concept of a competent system and competent individuals within the system;

- enhancing knowledge and skills of local self-governments and preschool institutions with an aim to create a more flexible preschool system, adapted to individual needs of children and parents;
- creating a network of trainers and mentors at the local level in every preschool institution involved in the projects, so that they can continue to spread knowledge and skills in their respective PIs, but in the region, as well.

Values we have defined:

Equality and equity	Participation	Universal services	Strengths and potentials, not the deficits
Access to high-quality preschool education for all children and for each child	Parents are recognized as the first and most important teachers and educators of their children	Avoiding special programs for "special" children	Nurturing strengths and potentials of children and parents
Responsibility of the local self-government to create equal conditions for learning and development of each child	Children are recognized as competent	Focus on the quality of work and programmes, preschool teachers' competences and preschool education system	Nurturing strengths and potentials of the practitioners
PI and other relevant stakeholders at the local level are focused on all children, and not just on children in kindergartens	Local community recognized as relevant for decision making in the best interest of children	Inclusive practice - we change practices so that all can fit in! We do not change children and parents to fit in in what we offer	Respecting specificities of local communities

In UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders and IMPRES projects, when we set these goals and set out to achieve them, the following changes took place, and various opportunities were created: inclusion of marginalized groups of children; higher coverage of children, high-quality services offered to those who need them most, creating basis for lifelong learning and better success in life for all children, especially for those from socially most vulnerable groups, contribution to social inclusion, better utilization of the existing human and material resources – even very limited material resources can have greater effects if invested wisely, more cost-effective investments, diversified offer of preschool programmes more in line with the diversified and emerging needs of families and children, better implementation of the fundamental principles of the Law on Preschool Education (Article 4), empowered/reinforced preschool institution, educators, parents and the local self-government.

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83   Trikic, 2012

For every change we make we would like it to last, and evolve. For that we learned that you need to provide changes on different levels. As you may remember in the previous part of the guidebook we mentioned a competent system and its levels – from a competent individual professional to a competent system. When it comes to change on each level transformation is needed; that's the only way to make change sustainable.

It is important to keep in mind that nothing would change if we do not target the whole system. In the case of diversification of programmes it means that it is not enough to educate professionals and then put them back in the system (from the level of individual kindergarten to the level of the Ministry) expecting that they will make a change. If others in the kindergarten, parents, management of PI and other professionals in it, LSG, Ministry of education and broader society do not support the change it will not happen. This is a very challenging issue; new practices in organizing diversified programmes can be abandoned and resources and knowledge wasted or misused if e.g. PI and preschool teachers do not have support and coordinated governance.

4.4 Steps[84] in development and implementation diversified programs

Now when you made the decision to start something new, we suggest that you should take the following steps. We call them Model 5 P[85] which indicates five of the most important phases (data collection; support and empowerment; connection; taking action and reflection, monitoring and evaluation) in developing programmes that aim to meet the needs of children, parents and the local community.

These stages do not happen in the specified sequence; they often overlap, or even occasionally occur in parallel (more about this you can find in Practicum).

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84   These steps were created under MATRA project in Serbia
85   Trikic, Z, Ed: Begin at the beginning, Beginning is Important – Parents, Professionals and Local Community – Joint Actions for the Benefit of Young Children,(2010) CIP-Center for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade

I 4.4.1. Step 1 – Collecting data

Majority of PI in our context in Serbia, are more focused on children who are in kindergartens; they usually do not see their role in serving all children and families in community, but only those who can "meet criteria" (e.g. working parents; financial status; etc...). They miss opportunity to be children's advocates and take a lead in local community on issues concerning children in general. The moment they decide to step beyond their traditional role, like they did in IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders project, they gain more support and respect in local community. To be able to provide services to a higher number of children and to attract the attention of LSG, community members and parents PI need data on children such as: numbers, age, social status, place where they live, problems they have, their needs and expectations. On the other hand, it is also important to map the existing and potential resources that PI and LSG have and can offer to children and families.

To be efficient and well grounded, new practices that we want to introduce have to be based on accurate data.

In IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders project, everything started with data collection. Special questionnaires for PI, LSG and parents were created (more about this you can find in Practicum). Based on the collected data decisions were made, where to organize programmes, where are the children who are not in PI; what are the available empty spaces that can be used; what are the needs of children, parents, LSG and PI, and how they can be harmonized in the best interest of children. What our practice has shown is that when people discuss about numbers and concrete issues they are able to find solutions.

Questions for reflection in step 1

1. What is the state of young children in our community?
2. Who are children and families in our PI?
3. Who in our community is currently excluded from programmes and services we offer for young children and families?
4. How many children and families we do not reach?
5. What do we know about them?
6. Why are they excluded?
7. What can we offer to them? What do we have to offer?
8. How can we reach them?

II 4.4.2. Step 2 Support and Empowerment

We mentioned the issue of support several times in this guidebook. We did it on purpose, because in many ways it is of great importance.

Question for reflection in Step 2

1. What professional knowledge and skills we need to be able to create new programmes?
2. What kind of professional development we need? Trainings? Mentoring? Meetings with teams and experts?
3. How can we provide children and families with high quality programmes? How are we going to be sure that programmes are of high quality?
4. What kind of support we need: in institutiona from colleagues and management; form parents; LSG; educational councillors and inspectors?
5. How we are going to ask for support?

In the IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders projects a lot of attention was paid to professional development of all important stakeholders. The set of training was organized for principals, preschool teachers, decision makers, mentors, educational counsellors and inspectors, preschool methodologists and representatives of Ministries. Different topics were covered: Importance of Early Years; high quality child centered methodology, mentoring training, training on mentoring and process of development diversified programmes, evaluation and self-evaluation, strengthening the quality of practices through documentation, parents participation, how to create a change, optimization of the preschool network etc.

Trainings for mentors were of huge importance for the development of diversified programmes. These trainings include a combination of presentation of theory, individual work, as well as small and large group activities, some of which were conducted in preschool teams, while others involved mixed groups of participants. The trainings were also intended to stimulate reflection on existing practice, as well as creative responses to the concepts presented.

Over the course of the training, participants should be reminded about how activities relate to the goals and objectives of the training. The goals and objectives of the training are:

- Develop professional skills and knowledge for creating different opportunities for children and their families who are out of the system
- To create body of trainers and mentors who can trigger and support change in the work of preschool institutions, who can work in local community and preschool institutions on developing diversified preschool programmes;
- To introduce the openness towards diversified programmes around accessibility and the social function of PI's
- To create learning community inside the Preschool Institutions which will include professionals, children and parents

In accordance with current knowledge on professional development, that points to the fact that trainings are not enough if we want to create sustainable change, special attention should be devoted to mentoring and support. Educators, professional associates and directors had regular support from mentors, who were not part of the institution and institution's team. This does not mean that mentors cannot be, for example, professional associates or educational advisors.

Preschool teachers, methodologists and principals had support from outside mentors on a regular basis. Practitioners analyse their practices in order to understand their meaning and implication and eventually modify them. Mentors from IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders projects encouraged the professionals' ongoing reflection on their approach and their beliefs. Their task was to assist the teams in PI to 'discover what is possible' in their own communities.

1. The role of a mentor is to **start the process of change**, and he first must take on himself to "challenge" and "provoke", of course, in the best sense of the word, and then ask: What else is possible? Could it be done differently? How?

In this way he creates opportunities and encourages open dialogue between members of the team, and all those who can contribute to the change happening - parents, community... A prerequisite for the success of this process is the establishment of a climate of trust and respect, which will be incentive for everyone to express their opinions, ideas, and views. Reciprocity in this process can be provided by giving constructive feedback, which will include mostly positive aspects - what I like, and then in the form of a concrete proposal - what could be different or performed in a different way. This creates opportunity for everyone to express their own opinions and show respect to the opinions of others in a clear and direct way, and to avoid evaluation and criticisms, just for the sake of it.

2. Detection of what is possible is not a goal on its own. The next step is to *design strategies to make that which are applicable in practice*. Mentor supports the collection of data and information which should enable analysis of the specific needs of those whom the programmes are intended directly - children and parents in the community. He helps the team to create tools for data collection, and constantly checks to see if everyone is involved and, if necessary who can be consulted, or who can be an ally.

3. The next phase involves the f*ormulation of mission and vision and concrete steps* leading to the effectuation of the vision, and the changes that the team wants to achieve, that are conceived to be realistic and achievable within a specific time period. Oversized steps, i.e. ambitious task, can lead to low energy and failure, and the team needs an uplift that comes after successfully over passing obstacles and achieving concrete results. Support is especially important in the design of the framework program to be implemented, such as working in mixed groups.

4. In the process of *joint knowledge construction*, the mentor helps the team members to observe realistically which *resources* are available to them, what *knowledge and skills* they posses as a team. This is an opportunity for the team to foster horizontal learning, and for mentors to develop a plan for additional (individual or team) support. The mentor himself can be a source of new knowledge (provision of additional literature, examples of how others do it), but at the same time, he should encourage members to explore, learn, try...

5. Professionalism in the field of education and early childhood education is closely linked to the ability of critical reflection on pedagogical practices and the ability to change them. In this sense, the support of mentors means to motivate professionals to be *reflective practitioners* – to continuously analyze methods, techniques, and strategies they apply, in order to understand their meaning and implications for daily practice, and to find a way for their potential modification.

6. Certainly, support in *monitoring and documenting* daily practice is important, and its consideration at the team level in order to monitor the effectuation of perceived objectives and define next steps. Documentation and evaluation process are focused on the fact that change needs to be visible to all participants, so they could engage in the process of mutual learning, and with their insights create the "new possible". This is also a way to monitor the quality of the educational process and get ideas on how it can be improved, for example through video recording of certain sequences during the day, used as a stimulus for discussion of topics related to educational practice.

In the process of documentation of the progress and development of children, mentors

with their teams can develop different ways to keep track of both, through what form they can present products and derived information (such as the portfolio for each child), and how to involve parents and children in this process. This is important not only in terms of monitoring, but also in terms of parents and children involvement in the process of planning the advancement of learning.

7. Mentors support *professional exchanges* as well, by encouraging team members to publish reports, write and publish articles on specific issues related to the field of early childhood development, present their experiences at conferences or professional meetings, which contributes to the change being visible, to the process being transparent, and also to take every opportunity to promote and advocate the importance of early learning and development, as well as the need for organizing programmes that are focused on their support.

Based on the all above-said, it can be concluded that the main roles are those of mentors: process facilitators, presenters of new knowledge and skills, consultants/advisors and "guides" through the change and the processes that take place. Mentors are there to motivate, inspire and set challenges, provide support, advice, to be role models, but primarily to...constantly motivate and encourage educators and question their beliefs and practices and provide support when the situation becomes difficult, and challenges too great at first sight. Their main job is to question and discover what is possible with them"[86].That is an ongoing process.

The role of the mentor and / or team in developing specific and specialized programme is the first link in the development of a competent system (from a competent individual to a competent system). Being involved in a process of change, in which practitioners are agentic actors, gives them hope and self-confidence, and increases their job satisfaction (Peeters, Vandenbroeck, 2012).

MENTOR'S ROLE – based on the experience of establishing specific and specialized programmes during the execution of IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergartens without Borders projects

The main task of a mentor within the IMPRES and UNICEF-Kindergartens without Borders projects was to support pre-schools in establishing and developing specific and specialized programmes tailored to the needs of the community. This task is increasingly important given the fact that the said project aims to increase the coverage and availability of programmes for children aged from 3 to 5.5, with special emphasis on vulnerable children. Therefore, when choosing mentors, particular attention was paid to selecting professionals who have years of experience in pre-school education, but more importantly who advocate child-centered approach, who are open to change, and have teamwork skills and ability. To ensure continuity, mentors, besides via direct meetings, communicated with the team by email, phone or Skype. The advantage, of course, was given to direct contact, because, as it was pointed out by one of the mentors, that way "... we can resolve things with more ease, right away, or give them a try or draw them out, and most importantly – we can immediately get feedback from each other on what we do". Going through this process, preschool teams responsible for the development and expansion of the program (which consisted of the Principle, support staff and teachers), were at the same time empowered to establish mentoring as a permanent practice. For this process to be successful, it would be good, as it was put by a mentor, ".... to choose those that are most open to new experiences, willing to try out and explore, and to support them in their effort to get out of the usual patterns and routine. They are most wanted as mentors in their facilities." The best indicator of how successful our mentors have been is whether and to what extent do the teams they worked with continue to act and work independently. That is, in the words of one of the mentors: "The feeling of educator and his belief that he is competent

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86   Discovering what is possible Peeters, Vandenbroeck, 2011

and that he creates, and not only to implement for his mentor, is the best indicator that he has been successful in his role."

III

4.4.3. Step 3 – Networking

Networking of professionals, parents and decion makers is very important. It gives to people who are trying to do something new feeling of belonging. People often feel lonely in the process of introducing novelty in their work. Knowing that there are people who share similar ideas and values can be inspiring.

When it com-es to the introduction and implementation of diverse programmes at the local level, particularly for vulnerable children, we have to think about different levels of networking and connecting.

Networking and optimization of preschool education network

The question is how to optimize the cooperation and interaction of all actors working with children and families. This networking and interaction has to be in focus when aiming at considerable increase in PSE participation of vulnerable children. It is about creating synergy and exchange of information and data between the actors as well as joint recognition of support and service needs. Establishment of a regular and functional network would increase both effectiveness and efficiency of all member organizations in the common activities for the benefit of the children and the families.

The following members of the local network are needed in order to create common strategy and atmosphere conducive to more accurate data collection, analysis, higher coverage, better quality and more diverse preschool education at local level. Various organizations, facilities and institutions are mentioned, such as: LSGs, PI, primary schools, schools for children with special needs, school administrations, centers for social work, community health clinics, NGOs, private companies and organizations, public companies, cultural centers, sports centers, etc. Each of them has special role and they all have the power to contribute to higher coverage of children (for more information about the members of the local network and their roles please see the Rules on networking and optimization of preschool education network).

Organizing special and specialized programs, whose main goal is to increase the coverage of out-of-preschool education children, opens up opportunities for networking of their parents, both at the local and at the national levels. In that way, parents are empowered to organize themselves and take an active role in creating better conditions for education of their children, in developing proactive approach to preschool education and become active in seeking to organize programs meeting their needs and their children's needs. They also learn from each other how to contribute to the development of programmes and their monitoring.

Such networking has added value, for vulnerable children and parents are made visible, their problems become known and require resolution, and above all, parents do not feel lonely, because they know that there are others who share their ideas and desire to improve the situation of children. In addition, parents build mutual relations of solidarity.

In IMPRES and UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders projects, parents of children, who are involved in special and specialized programs, from different places in Serbia started to mutually connect, talk about the problems they face and share ideas for their resolution. One such example is when parents from Lešnica (preschool institution „Bambi" Loznica) decided to have their work and material resources, that they had, invested in the neighboring village and help parents and the preschool institution to open the same programme, so that the children and parentes from that village could "enjoy the way they do".

Networking of educators, directors, principals, professional associates, PI and local self-governments that implement similar programmes and want to diversify the offer of preschool programmes

As in the case of parents, the networking of professionals, PI and local self-governments plays an important role in the process of realization and implementation of special and specialized programmes. The exchange of knowledge, strategies, ideas and best practices improves the performance of every individual and the institution. In addition, such kind of networking provides enough information, examples of best practices and critical thinking about new ways of doing things, decision-makers and policy-makers at the national and the local level and enables better strategically planning and improvement of preschool education practice. Such networking, also, provides parents with the sense of safety, because they know that these are not the "experiments" and isolated cases, but the practices that have been spread and that involve various professionals.

Although IMPRES and UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders projects began as two separate projects, at one point they connected, which led to the organization of joint training sessions and meetings for representatives of 25 preschool institutions. Preschool institutions mutually connected; educators, directors, professional associates and parents started visiting each other, exchanging trainings and expertise and creating informal networks. In that way, they provided mutual support and created conditions for further work and cooperation even upon the completion of projects. On the other hand, messages they send to policy-makers and local self-governments (funders) are of greater importance.

IV 4.4.4 Step 4 – Taking actions

The Rules on closer conditions and manner of implementation of special and specialized programmes are defined by the various forms of special and specialized programmes (Appendix number 1). Keeping in mind what you want to achieve, it is up to you to choose, in collaboration with parents and LSG representatives, the program that best suits you, either in form, content, duration or method of work in the context of your community.

> **Questions for reflection in Step 4**
>
> 1. What kind of alternative programs can we imagine?
> 2. How do organize programs?
> 3. Are parents involved in the preparation of programs? Does this make them feel like co-initiators?
> 4. Do our community, parents and children really need these types of programs?
> 5. Which qualities do we value in parents? What do we know about these parents?
> 6. Are we alert to the wishes of (all) parents? How do we translate these wishes into action?
> 7. How do we plan our work? Who is involved?
> 8. How to create spaces for dialogue withparents and with respect for diversity?
> 9. How to anchor the insights and methods of cooperation with parents in a context of diversity?

If you want to generate universal interest and support from the local community, you should promote the programme among community members and local councelors. Local councelors decide how much money can be spent on pre-school education. Before they approve your programme, they need to adopt a resolution, so they need to know precisely why the community wants to implement this particular child-serving effort, what benefits they may expect from this kind of day care service, and how other communities are implementing it. Most importantly, you should convince members of the local education committee and the budget committee that your idea is good. A demographic data analysis and some vital statistics will help you to determine the number of potential child beneficiaries. Invite each family with one or more young children of suitable age to attend a preparatory meeting in every town and village where a diversified program is supposed to be opened.

As already stated from the very beginning, an educator should encourage participation of parents and the local community. Specific needs of parents, but also the context of the local community, affect both the choice of form of the programme and the content of work and the venue.

When choosing the venue, in collaboration with the local community and by means of monitoring the needs of children and parents, it is necessary to go beyond the PI and open new programmes either where they do not exist at all (e.g. village), or where the needs are great and the offer limited. It is advised to choose venues that are accessible, safe and that could be adapted using minimum investments. If there is an unused space in PI, then it should be used for the implementation of these programs.

Premises of local community centers, rural schools and community health clinics and the like were used in UNICEF – Kindergartens without borders and IMPRES projects.

Parents are the first educators of their children; in this sense, it should be natural to work with them on the wellbeing and development of children. This is, however, not always so easy or comfortable, given that they already have found the way to the ECEC services… Parents can have different views on how to educate children or they can have a different (cultural, religious, language, social…) background. Practitioners may be weary that parents would get too involved or they could get the feeling of being 'controlled' by parents. Or, both parents and practitioners don't really know how to start cooperating.

However, there is ample evidence that cooperating with parents (and the wider community) adds to more successful social inclusion[87], to more children attending ECEC and to more wellbeing on all sides: children, parents and professionals.

ECEC services can function as meeting places (see above) and as places of education and socialization. Making parents' allies, making the dialogue on education more alive, based on authentic and mutual respect, is building a more democratic school. However, this doesn't occur naturally; it is a choice, a value within an ethical, pedagogical and social framework.

Picture 1: Poster for parents[88]

> "This idea of participation therefore, defines the early childhood center as a social and political place and thus an educational place in the fullest sense. However, this is not a given, so to speak, it is not a natural, intrinsic part of being a school. It is a philosophical choice, a choice based on values."[89]

Working with parents can be done in many different ways and on many levels. It is important to stop and think what could be the best way, what is needed, or what could be feasible in any given setting or service. (In addition, no matter what kind of cooperation is set up, if it isn't built in both directions or if it isn't really meant seriously, it will not really work either.) It is also important to offer different ways to cooperate: not all parents will be interested in all activities. Some will prefer more formal parent-teacher meetings, while others like to help with a school play. Some will be shyer than others and will need more encouragement and so on (examples of different levels of parental participation you can find in Appendix 3).

Day-care centers, preschools and other ECEC services do not exist on their own. They are embedded in a community, and have daily contacts with not only the children, but also the parents and people in the neighborhood. There is a lot to be gained when these community contacts are well developed for all partners concerned.

When children can explore the neighborhood, it does not only expand their own world; it also shows the community that they are there and they are also entitled to have their place. This way, the school and the children can shape the community together with others and the school can, at the same time, pave the way for children to get to know the world, outside the well-known safety of their homes and preschool. By opening the ECEC doors, preschools and other services can show to the outside world what they have to offer.

The kindergarten becomes a learning community (see Appendix 4) and in that way a place of living. The approach of the practitioners is based on their ability for critical thinking / reflection during the activity, and aspiration to understand their own role and expectations set before them.

There are different ways to connect with the surrounding community, including the parents who live there:

- go to a bakery, a store, the market with the children
- attend neighborhood activities
- take the children on a walk, take pictures of the area and have a group discussion about what the children like and don't like about the neighbourhood, how they feel
- make the preschool visible from the outside with drawings, pictures
- organize an open school day
- build connections to other services and organizations in the area (museum, theatre, family support center, sport club, library…)

By doing so, it is not only the neighborhood that gets to know the preschool, but also parents who don't know this provision. Getting linked to the community can help to make the preschool better known and to function as both a 'nest' and a 'web'. A nest as a place where children (and their parents) can feel at home, are comfortable, feel that they belong. A web with links to other services in the area.

On a practical level, one can start community-oriented work with exploring several, practical questions. What does the neighborhood look like, what are specific characteristics (open spaces, traffic, green areas, tall buildings…) who lives there, what services are available for families, what kind of activities are being organized…This way, one can make a map of the area and start to think what the preschool could do with that information e.g. if there is a Roma settlement nearby, or a refugee center, or a playground.

Then you can try to make contact, informally or more formal, to get to know the different services, to inquire where and how some kind of cooperation would be possible.

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87   See also the example of the bridging figures above.
88   Thisposter was designed and created by the mentors and team of PI "Vukica Mitrović" Leskovac
89   Cagliari, P., Barozzi, A. And Guidici, C: Thoughts, theories and experiences: for an educational project with participation, in Children in Europe, 2004, 6, 28-30 and cited in Moss, P (2001), Democracy as a First Practice in Early Childhood Education and Care, p. 4.

V 4.4.5 Step 5 – Reflection, monitoring, evaluation

The reflective practitioner, the competent system, theory of change, co-constructing pedagogical practice...We can use many difficult words or refer to several publications and concepts to explain what would be the most desired attitude and approach of early years professionals in general. (You will find some references in the bibliography in the back.) However, what is important for professionals in any field of education, is to be open minded, to be willing and able to question yourself, to engage in dialogue with colleagues, pupils, parents or other professionals, to exchange different experiences, to reflect on your daily work, to know that there is no harm in not knowing and that willingness to learn from others is a strength and an important asset for teachers. It is also important to be able to feel secure within a system that leaves room for reflection, questioning, reviewing (for more information please see the Appendix 4), overviewing (for more information please see the Appendix 6). By means of observation, careful listening and documenting, educators create new opportunities and directions in leading the group and creating a „place of living" for children, parents and educators. Choices, that educators, parents and children make together, develop a specific programme, which is flexible and adjusted to all the participants living in the kindergarten.

As previously stated in the manual, in the last twenty years enough data has been collected about educators / teachers as main carriers of the quality of the educational system (Jolly, 2008., Rowe, 2003., Hanushek, 2010. acc. Wiliam 2011, Sahlberg, 2012, William, 2011., Hattie, 2012.). At the same time, it becomes evident that there is a need to introduce new forms of professional development for educators and teachers to incite them to professional development in line with the current demands of the profession. Learning communities, developing reflective practice, and constructing meanings are just some of the possible forms of professional development that meet these requirements.

At the end…. Or at the beginning

If we want preschool education to really take the characteristics of being open, authentic and democratic, in which a child is seen as being competent with authentic way of expression and learning, in which his/her needs and rights, as well as his parents', are observed, in which the relationship of participation is built together with the family and wider local community, then the question of programme diversification should not be posed.

The diversification of programmes represents a qualitative leap, a shift from economic cost-effectiveness to the appreciation of values of specific community, a shift from exclusively technical issues towards issues leading to joint construction of the community culture.

Only if we really think about program diversification can we talk about equal right and availability of programmes for children and parents, without discrimination and continuous improvement and practice development.

Educators, professional associates, educational counselors, representatives of local communities who participated in these projects showed they could do it. We hope this will arouse your curiosity to try this in your communities.

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Appendix No 2 –Bylaw on closer conditions on types, methods of implementation and funding of special and specialized programmes and other types of pedagogical work and services provided by preschool institution – tabular program overview

Name	Goals	Duration	Age/number of children	Staff
Playgroup 1	To stimulate play as basic manner of children's expression, learning, and companionship	Minimally once a week (up to 1.5h), at most once daily (2-3h)	Children of the age 3 to 7 come voluntarily. Number of children depends upon the available space, maximum 24 children per adult.	Teacher, pedagogue, special pedagogue, psychologist, and exceptionally experts of other profiles (article 8. LFES) Parents can be included on voluntary basis.
Playgroup 2	To provide opportunities for free play and companionship among peers and with adults; to provide various playful and exploratory activities as a way of learning and expressing one's own experience; to make opportunities for parents to share experiences in order to better understand their child and participate in educational work.	Minimally twice a week (1.5 - 3h). There are no fixed groups of children created	It is provided for children from three to seven years of age and their parents. Number of included children depends of space size, and is limited to 24 . There is a possibility of forming "baby groups" (up to 12 children) with the duration up to 2 hours with mandatory presence of one parent/guardian	Teachers, pedagogues, special pedagogues, psychologists, and exceptionally experts of other profiles if they are trained for moderator of Playgroup 2 (article 8. LFES) Parents can be included on voluntary basis and participate in managing, equipping, adapting and maintenance of space, procurement of materials, planning of educational work and its implementation, all in cooperation with moderator of Playgroup 2.
Preschool mobile unit (travelling kindergarten)	To mitigate the effects of socio cultural inequalities. To increase the coverage of children from areas where there is no educational work provided.	Twice or three times a week, two or to three hours a day	It is Provided for children aged 5-6, up to school age. Up to 24 children per adult	Teachers, pedagogues, special pedagogues, psychologist, and exceptionally experts of other profiles (article 8. LFES)

Mobile teaching unit (travelling teacher)	To provide educational experience to children in areas where no pedagogical work is organized or where no organized transportation for children is provided. To offer professional pedagogical support to parents and other parties interested in early childhood education	Two to three times a week, two or three hours a day	It is provided for children aged 5-6, up to school age, as well as for children unable to attend any of other programmes and services provided due to illness or other reasons	Teachers, pedagogues, special pedagogues, psychologist, and exceptionally experts of other profiles (article 8. LFES) Basic guidelines for the provision of this type of the programme shall be created by the preschool institution according to the specific conditions and needs of children and families

Specialized programmes

Reading room (Talking room)	To introduce the child into the world of books; stimulate speech and language development/ status	Once or more times per week (1 to 1.5 hours.) Can be organized in libraries, reading rooms and specially equipped rooms in the preschool institution.	Intended for children aged 3 to 7. Possible contents of educational work: displaying books and conversation about books, storytelling / reading stories, encounters with authors for children (writers, poets, illustrators ...), the borrowing of books, and the use of different teaching methods to stimulate creativity in children.	Librarians, philologists, writers and other associates (Article 8. LFES)

Drama Studio (Workshop for dramatic expression)	To develop and encourage creative expression (by gesture, voice, drawing ...)	Once or more times per week (1.5 to 2 h).	Intended for children from 4 to 7 years of age.Possible contents for educational work: drama play and elements of dramatic expression (improvisation, simulations, role-playing), the elements of theatre and theatre techniques (Puppetry, making and operating with theatre dolls, script, scenography, costume, costimography ...).	drama specialists and other staff (Article 8 LFES)
Art studio/ workshop	To support and stimulate development of the artistic visual expression of all children (not only talented children)	At least once a week (1 to 2 h).During the working hours of preschool institution (if performed in the facilities of preschool institution)	Designed for all preschool children. . Number of children in mixed age groups is limited to 15 per group.The programme should include elements of fine and applied arts and sculpture. (Molding clay, plasticine ...).	art teachers, artists, specialists and other staff (Article 8 LFES)
Physical Education Programmes	To encourage physical growth and development of children and contribute to health care and prevention; to provide a variety of natural activities that children enjoy in which, when conditions are met, the children involve spontaneously. These programmes are not limited only to corrective function.	At least once a week and preferably three times a week (1 to 2 h) (Existing spaces in preschool institutions may be used after working hours)	They are designed for all children of preschool age. Number of children in mixed age groups is limited to 15 per group.The Physical Education Programmes shall be designed in a manner that recognizes the importance of play.	Pedagogues for physical education, teachers and other staff (Article 8 LFES)

Specialized courses	"Courses" of exercise and learning in the fields of sport, art and language (foreign language, ballet, swimming ....)	1 to 3 times per week (1 to 2 h)	They are designed for all children of pre-school age depending on the type of specialized courses	They are moderated by appropriate experts (Article 8 LFES)
Clubs and sections	This type of programmes can be provided by elementary school, children's centers, cultural centers, sports and cultural institution, and other associations. They are organized as children`s clubs in special areas (eg, children's technology club (workshop), animated movie and classical film clubs) or as separate sections (folklore, drama, art, music ....). Clubs work on the principle of Membership payment.			
Playgrounds - physical space arranged as a playground that offers a programme of organized educational work with children	To provide an opportunity for play and encourage children to play outdoors.	At least 30 minutes daily. Contents of programme and time schedules are defined for specific age groups.	They are available to all children of pre-school age. Playgrounds for children may exist as a part of some other type of organisation /programme (e.g. playgroup). In the areas of these playgrounds other types of organisation may be provided (e.g. specialized programmes, occasional and periodic programmes, sections, manifestation). (In the same way for outdoor activities parks and other outside spaces can be used).	They are moderated by appropriate experts (Article 8 ZOSOV)
Playroom	The main function is to provide opportunities for borrowing the toys (children's books and picture books can also be borrowed)	Existing spaces in preschool institution, schools, libraries, children's centers, galleries, museums..... Also, Playroom can be delivered as a part of travelling kindergarten and travelling teacher.	All the children of preschool age enrolled in Playrooms. Parents shall pay an annual membership fee (similar to library membership).	They are moderated by appropriate experts (Article 8 ZOSOV)

Family support services

Name	Goals	Duration	Target group	Staff
Parental counselling	To provide professional advice, the necessary information and assistance on all matters related to education, learning and upbringing of children, in the fields of education, development and psychology (preparing children for entering kindergarten or school, the selection of appropriate procedures in relation to specific educational goals, the ways of encouraging and developing children's interest, aptitude, attitude towards play and ways of its stimulation, selection of toys and books for children, parental problems and dilemmas ...)	At least 2 times per week for 3 hours.	It is designed for all parents in a particular territory, regardless of whether the children are involved in a pre-school or some different types of organization. These programs take place through individual and group interviews and other types of organization, such as discussions, lectures, practical demonstrations, promotion of toys and books ect. Within these, popular publications for parents and children can be published or distributed, such as informants, brochures, books for children and parents etc.	Pedagogues, psychologists and, when needed, other staff, in accordance with the law and the needs of local communities.

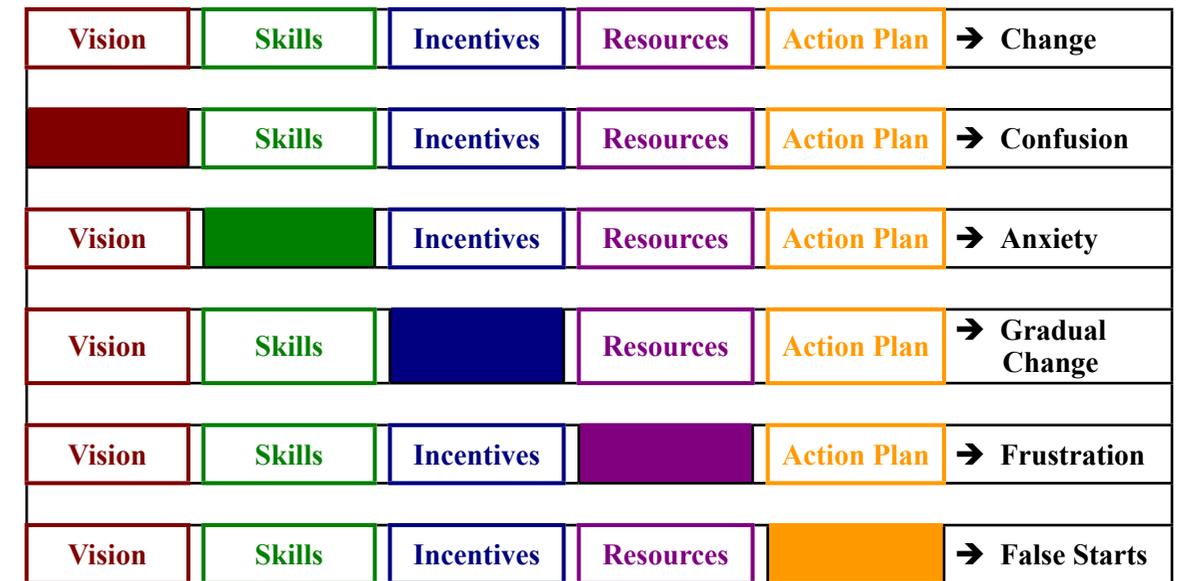|				
Parenting school	To provide professional advice, the necessary information and assistance on all matters related to education, learning and upbringing of children, in the fields of education, development and psychology (preparing children for entering kindergarten or school, the selection of appropriate procedures in relation to specific educational goals, the ways of encouraging and developing children's interest, aptitude, attitude towards play and ways of its stimulation, selection of toys and books for children, parental problems and dilemmas ...)	At least 2 times per week for 3 hours.	It is designed for all parents in a particular territory, regardless of whether children are involved in a preschool or some different type's organization. These programs take place through individual and group interviews and other types of organization, such as discussions, lectures, practical demonstrations, promotion of toys and books summer and winter schools of parenting etc. Within these, popular publications for parents and children can be issued or distributed, such as informants, brochures, books for children and parents etc.	Pedagogues, psychologists and, when needed, other staff, in accordance with the law and the needs of local communities.
Child Care Services	To provide reliable and professional child care in the family : Short or Long term Child Care) (occasionally or regularly)	Short or Long term Child Care, occasionally or regularly, depending on the needs of families.	It is intended for all families with preschool children in a particular territory. Preschool institutions are responsible for their provision.	This service is designed to serve as a type of mediator between parents and young professionals, without permanent employment but motivated for this type of work. Appointed staff is teachers, nurses - teachers, pedagogiues, psychologists, therapists, doctors, and other profiles (philologists, social workers, senior students, etc.) who have previously passed the selection procedure and appropriate training.
Family day nurseries	Early childhood care and education for children of working parents, who can pay for it. Especially designed for children who, because of medical and other reasons, can not be included in a regular nursery (it is delivered at home of teachers or parents)	Short or Long term Child Care, occasionally or regularly, depending on the needs of families.	It is intended for all families with preschool children in a particular territory. They are organized by preschool institutions	This service is designed to serve as a type of mediator between parents and young professionals, without permanent employment who want to work in this profession. Appointed staff is teachers, nurses - teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, therapists, doctors, and other profiles (philologists, social workers, senior students, etc.) who have previously passed the selection procedure and appropriate training.

Family day care	child care, educational work, nutrition, rest	Short or Long term Child Care, occasionally or regularly, depending on the needs of families	It is intended for all families with preschool children in a particular territory. They are organized by preschool institutions	This service is designed as type of mediator between parents and young professionals, without permanent employment who want to work in this profession. Appointed staff is teachers, nurses - teachers, pedagogists, psychologists, therapists, doctors, and other profiles (philologists, social workers, senior students, etc.) that have previously passed the selection policy and finished appropriate training.
Family visits	Working with parents in order to improve parenting skills, parental counseling	At least once a month, at most once a week per family	It is primarily intended to families who are living in poor life conditions and whose children are not enrolled in preschool institution ... can be delivered with parents of children aged from 0 to 7 years.	This service is designed as type of mediator between parents and young professionals, without permanent employment who want to work in this profession. Appointed staff is teachers, nurses - teachers, pedagogists, psychologists, therapists, doctors, and other profiles (social workers, senior students, etc.) that have previously passed the selection policy and finished appropriate training.

Alternative types of early childhood education and care

Type	Description	Advantages
Programmes in the neighborhood Kindergartens / nurseries as family centers	Organized in urban and / or suburban areas close to the childrens` homes Adults / female and male / in the neighborhood will be working with a group of 6-8 children Adults who work with children must undergo specific training a snack and health care shall be provided Working hours vary depending on the needs of parents They are associated with educational and social welfare system They must be licensed (They must hold License) The space arrangement must be in accordance with the needs of children	The following applies to all Alternative types of early childhood education and care • These programmes are initiated and controlled by local community; • They can be supported by NGOs or public administration; • children are safe and have the opportunity to learn and socialize. (learning, socialisation and safety of the child well being must be provided)
Open Centers	These programs are delivered outdoors, under a tree, in the yard, under improvised shelters etc.	

Child Care Pro-grammes in the work-place Sponsored by the Employer They are located in a workplace They should provide some form of child-care support, in the immediate vicinity of the job		The benefits for children • Better conditions for children especially in the field of nutrition, health care and safety (children's well-being) • Improved general condition, better preparation for school enrolment of a child , and the possibility of achieving later school/academic success • Improving physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, • access to resources and materials The benefits for working mothers • Socio-emotional: • Improved self-concept and self-confidence, • Less stress. Improved physical health, and access to system of social protection (social security) • Improved social status , the ability to make decisions concerning the child well-being financial benefits • Improved productivity, • Increased ability for maintaining jobs and provision of financial independence and family support, potential capacity development • Benefits to employers • Increased productivity and profitability: • lower rates of absence from work • Less fatigue caused by caring for children • improved loyalty of employees • Greater work enthusiasm • Better relations between employers and employees
Distance Learning	They are based on usage of media - radio, TV, video cassettes, CD, - it turned out that these are particular-ly powerful tools in order to reach out to children and fami-lies who are territori-ally or otherwise inac-cessible	

Appendix No 3 – Managing the Complex Change

Reference: College Place Public Schools, School Improvement Power Point Presen-tation, website www.cpps.org.

DECIDING together: parents as partners in actually constructing the school's policy and vision, discuss and decide together on important issues (projects, use of space, food, toys, programme, development of school information, …), have parents spread the school message to other parents, have them introduce new parents and children in school…

THINKING together: parents as partners in developing the school policy and vision, develop good methods of informing them and communicating with them (e.g. not only meetings in group but also personal conversations, use of understandable language), brainstorm together about upcoming activities…

ACTING together: involving parents in school activities (reading, singing, parties, gardening, walks, school trips…), having parents in class (talk about their job, helping out…). Respect for every parent's talent and for diversity (e.g.: not assuming that a refugee parent would make a dish from the country of origin, just to make 'a' dish)…

LIVING together: providing a warm welcome, make parents feel respected for who they are, daily (informal) contact, photos of the team/the children at the entrance, a family wall, sharing a cup of coffee when parents bring their children, using welcome words in the home language of the attending children…

A powerful tool to bring the life at home closer to the life in preschool is the 'family wall'. This is a collection of photos of the children's families or significant people, places, teddy bears, pets…Anything that could make a child feel more at home in school or could bring significant parts of the home within the school group. The family wall can serve several goals: illustrate the diversity among people, strengthen the child's self-image, bring comfort to the child, inform the practitioner about the child's background, start a dialogue or storytelling, act as some kind of symbolic presence of family, connecting the families…

There are different formats that you can use: make a family wall at children's height in the classroom or in a cosy corner with pillows, have one in the hall where parents can see it too, print photos on play blocks, have small photo books where children can look in…You can have real pictures, or laminated prints. The photos can have nametags or not, can be stuck to the wall/board/maps so that children can take them off. It can be a range of photos or a set collage. You can have it as decoration or as an actively used tool in group activities. The possibilities seem endless.

What is clear, is that children very often turn to the family wall, tell others who are in the pictures, compare home situations, question each other…This way they work on diversity, respect and identity in a very natural and playful way. Some children have a mother and a father, some have divorced parents, and some may have 2 mommies. Some children have a grandparent living with them, have many brothers and sisters while others are a single child, some have pets, and some live in the country, others in a small flat…

Asking parents to bring these private pictures can be a delicate issue. A lot depends on how the question is asked and whether it is explained how and why the family wall is used. In case parents do not want to bring such photos, alternatives are also possible. E.g. at the school party, all

families can have the photo taken on the playground. Or you can start making the wall and maybe they will change their mind at a later phase when they hear their children talk about it. Again, it is important how you talk about that. It is also important that you know how the people in the pictures are actually called: grandmother = Nanna, the dog is Baloo…

'Wanda' is a method for reflection and inquiry within a team to improve the competencies of practitioners in early childhood settings aimed at increasing professionalism in this area[90]. The name Wanda is an acronym that stands for a series of Dutch words: 'To value, to analyse, to act'. Based on the existing methods of 'analyse des pratiques' and the 'appreciative inquiry', Wanda was developed as a reflection method in teams in early childhood settings, but it can also be used among (pedagogy) students or teachers.

The appreciative inquiry is all about valuing the best in people, recognising talents and possibilities and about investigating and exploring. Cases are questioned and discussed to figure out new potentialities. The starting point is what works or not ('why can't I work with this child?'), but positive experiences, what does work or what could work ('what has gone well with this child? Where is this child good at, enthusiastic about?'). The search is for what can give people energy, new views and an open mind, rather than for what paralyses people or raises resistance. It is looking for strengths, for what causes passion in people. A question in such context of appreciative inquiry gets people enthusiastic and incites them to take their responsibility in a process of change and improvement.

Essentially, it is a process in which cases from practice are critically analyzed in group, questioned, looked at from different angles to come to new ideas and insights that can improve the professional practice on the floor as well as the and the policy of the early childhood center or preschool. It is a challenging way of looking at every day practice and incidents. It is also a collective effort: people work as a group, as equals and can learn from and with each other.

Very often, when an incident occurs or a problem arises, people tend to react immediately or stick to the known behavior or standards. Here, people are invited to take a step back and think some more about what happened, why it happened and what it means. By adding ideas and views from others, by questioning why you act like you do, you can grow and maybe better understand what is at stake.

The process is built up by several consequential steps and supported by a facilitator (either external or from the center or school). The facilitator plays an important role in asking the challenging questions, creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere, helping to formulate the case, making sure everyone can have a say, keeping track of time, reporting on the outcome and the process…. The facilitator needs to guard that the people in the learning group can feel safe, that the rules within the

90   More background information can be found in PEETERS, J., The warm professional … and in Wanda p http://www.vbjk.be/en/node/3949 CoRe research

process are respected (e.g.: everyone has an equal say, no privacy will be violated…)

Wanda is all about reflecting together, learning in depth together, valuing together and building knowledge and practice together.

A Wanda 'session' lasts for about 1,5-2 hours in which a group of colleagues sits together and will work on a given case: a meaningful situation or incident that happened on the work floor. One person brings on the case, not a hypothetical one, but a real case from the daily practice (an incident, a problem, an experience from the work floor). Starting from this case practice, the team tries to discover what could be possible, what are different perspectives on the issue, what could be the reason for things that happen the way they do…Then, a realistic choice of working points can be made together and the whole team constructs a practice together. Once it is put into practice, the team will evaluate and possibly re-discuss at a later time.

It is very important that such reflective practices are not simply done on an ad hoc basis, but that this becomes a systematic part of the work. Only then, reflection, discussion and changing mindsets can really sink in and become part of the working attitude.

What are possible positive themes that can be formulated by the team? A team should have the autonomy to decide among themselves such a positive theme. But the principles of preschool education that are described in the Serbian Law on Preschool Education are an important framework for PI's and for teams inside this ECEC provisions to focus their actions. We discuss as an example the principle of availability of the Law on Preschool Education.

Although the data from the PI are mainly focused on the capacities of the PI's and give little information about the children that are not enrolled, we know from that focus groups that IMPRES and UNICEF - Kindergarten without borders have organized that the accessibility for vulnerable groups is very low.

Another important principle that is mentioned in the Law is transparency, building relationships with the parents. A possible positive theme can be to gather more information on the negotiations between parents and preschool teachers about meaning that parents from disadvantaged background are given by preschool. Further inquiry is necessary to explore what parents and professionals expect from preschool in Serbia, and to identify push and pull factors, as well as possible mismatches between the meanings attributed by diverse parents and the school.

We can also use this model to demonstrate the reasoning for introducing special and specialized programmes. Positive theme in this case can be to find ways to enrol more children from vulnerable groups (see the diagram below).

The work of learning communities is founded on two assumptions: the first is that knowledge develops during everyday group work and that it is best understood through critical reflection with others with similar experiences. Another is that educators, who are actively involved in the work of the community, improve their professional and personal knowledge (Vescio and associates, 2008). Therefore, the work of learning communities aims to support educators' professional development both emotionally and professionally. Learning communities are **collaborative** (members of the community learn together from one another, at all professional levels throughout the community), **examination and dialogue–oriented** (creating a culture that values questions), **social change-oriented** (they work on creating conditions for social inclusion). In the community, everyone is competent to reflect and entitled to participate, everyone is responsible for the learning process, everyone is both a student and a teacher and questions/examines his/her own and everyday knowledge in that process and critically reflects on his/her own teaching.

This is the so-called competent system, where all employees become engaged in the field of joint learning and critical reflection. On a practical level, this means good working conditions, constant pedagogical support, paid work time for consideration and discussion,… (which is still easier said than done in many countries). Three elements, needed for the development of learning communities and which should be built into the structure of the work of the community, are usually identified. These elements are as follows: *cooperation*, *vision and reflection*.

When we say **collaboration**, this does not mean that educators work in a pleasant atmosphere, but that they mutually respect each other, share experiences, knowledge, skills, uncertainties, etc. In accordance with the definition of a community, McMillan (1976, acc. McMillan and Chavis 1986, p. 9) argues that 'collaboration, in the context of community development, includes a sense of belonging, a sense of interdependence, a sense of individual importance and benefit and positive emotional connection with other team members.

In accordance with the definition of community McMillan (in 1976., According to McMillan and Chavis in 1986., P.9) argues that 'cooperation in the context of community development, includes a sense of belonging, a sense of mutual zavisnostii, a sense of individual importance and the benefits and positive emotional connections with other team members'.

Vision is an image of our educational practice in the future. It responds to a question: What is it that we want to create? What kind of an institution / kindergarten we want to become? What kind of kindergarten we want for our children? Communities of educators exist so that they can work toward a common vision of a kindergarten, a kind they want for children they work with. Having a shared vision does not mean to agree on one activity that all educators will apply (e.g. create 'corner for parents' on behalf of all groups). Shared vision is much more – it is a mental picture about the operation of the kindergarten, which demonstrates high-quality in all areas of its work and contributes to the development and learning of all children and each child, but also of the teachers themselves and the entire system of education.

Reflection is the process of reviewing the professional experience in order to describe analyze and evaluate it (Reid, 1993.). It answers questions like 'Where are we now?' and 'How good are we considering what we want to be?' What from the applied had effects on children, and what did not? On what basis was this concluded? What from what we have tried had most effects? What behavior of children indicated that we were on the right track? (Caine and Caine, 2010). While answering these questions, educators should include the following three components: meta-cognitive (thinking of their own thinking processes, such as beliefs), emotional (thinking of their

own emotional states) and behavioural (analysis of their own behaviour and consequences of that behaviour) (Vizek-Vidović, 2011).

Written by Sanja Brajković, program director of the Open University Step by Step, Zagreb, Croatia

Appendix No 6a - Dialogue and Connections – Dealing with assumptions

We will show how connecting between the members of the learning community takes place through an example of the process in Ghent Early Childhood Education Center (via Vanda scheme):

1. Reflect on the previous case

2. **Choose a case**

One of the practitioners brings forward her case (2): she has been quite upset about a Polish mother who had apparently criticised her for being too lazy and not too hygienic. The mother had noticed that her son had been outside in the garden barefoot and she had complained about this, saying that the practitioner had been too lazy to help him put on his shoes.

3. **Ask questions**

The colleagues listen to the case and ask questions from the perspectives of all parties involved (3): How does she feel about that? Where could this comment come from? Why was the boy barefoot? What is the practitioner's idea on playing outside? What is the center's vision on playing outside, getting in touch with nature and is there a vision on this? What were they doing in the garden? Are there any rules on this in the center? What was the weather like that day? Who did the mother complain to and in what kind of words? How could the practitioner deal with her feelings? Could the fact that the mother is Polish have something to do with it? Did the child mind about this? ....

4. **Collect ideas**

Based on the questions and answers, the group then starts to collect ideas (4): work in the team on the issue of play, discuss that with the children and their parents, discuss issues of hygiene, and clarify communication to parents …

5. **Offer advice**

Then, the group gives different types of advice to the practitioner who introduced the case (5): talk to the mother when there is enough time to explain, ask her why she was so upset about it, not make such a big deal of it, talk about and explain the center's vision on how important it is to get children in touch with nature, elaborate a clear vision on nature with the team and the parents, communicate more in detail on the importance of play and how the team works on that with the children…. It is important to know that these recommendations are in no way binding, they are inspiring.

Looking back on the case in the next session, the practitioner can tell how she did or did not follow some of the given advice, how she felt afterwards, whether it helped or not...There may also have been some actions or changes in the center's policy or the way they communicate on the issue with the parents.

What actually happened in this case was that the practitioner talked to the mother and could in fact rely on a clear vision in the center's work on children and their contact with nature, since this is a very important issue in this center. They often go play outside in all kinds of weather, they have a vegetable garden that they keep with the children, and, for example, they think it is important for the children to actually feel grass, stones, sand…with their hands and feet. The children all seem to enjoy these activities very much. That is why she let the boy play outside barefoot. The mother, on her turn, explained how strongly she feels about hygiene and what she thought she could expect from the center. Talking about this and explaining their feelings to each other could clear all these misunderstandings and assumptions.

Essential is the input of different perspectives, different views of looking at a given situation, questioning your own views and opening up to others.

Appendix No 7 - Pedagogical documentation – making practice visible

In its largest sense, pedagogical documentation is a method to work on quality, on reflecting on one's professional practice, discussing about it and continuously improving it. As other reflective approaches, it is not always easy to communicate about that practice or to find the right vocabulary. By making things visible, you make it possible to talk about it and this can support processes of change and of improvement. This support is the underlying purpose of documenting. By making the documented practice so visible and tangible, you start talking about it, interpreting it, reflecting upon it, and thinking about your own way of working. This requires a safe environment, an atmosphere of equality and respect and a willingness to learn from each other and grow professionally at all mentioned levels in a competent system. By documenting you don't only reflect on your own learning processes but it shows how and what children learn, what they are interested in and what they discover. The same applies to parents and the surrounding neighborhood. Pedagogical documentation is in fact work in progress: using different materials to show what happens in the daily life in classes, playgroups, early childcare centers…it gives opportunities to discuss the practice, to raise questions, to see where improvement is possible and how. It can be supportive in many ways:
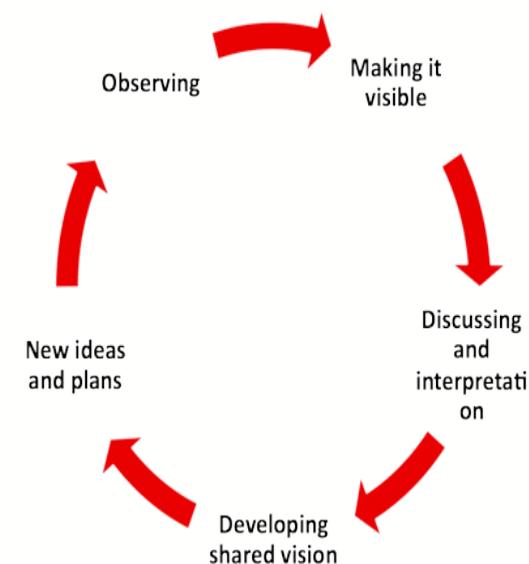
- it helps team development, discussion and good reflective practices
- it promotes the concept of the competent child
- it supports the child's wellbeing and belonging in the group
- it supports learning among children

- it facilitates the parent-staff dialogue and offers opportunities to discuss ideas on quality

- it visualizes diversified programmes and processes of change.

Documentation is an attempt to gain understanding and insight about how we understand and build knowledge, what meanings we attribute and how that connects with the ways of action in pedagogical work. Careful documentation and monitoring can improve educator's understanding of the programme, assist in understanding of own concepts and theories and strengthen educator's abilities to think about developing programs through the lens of reflexivity and critical attitude towards meanings he/she describes. Visibility of the process of understanding and construction of meaning is ensured through documentation that may include: ideas, stories, maps, shared meanings that we arrive at during the process of negotiation and reconciliation with children, parents, photos, audio recordings, reports. Pedagogical documentation allows educators to take responsibility for creating their own meanings and decisions about what is happening in the learning community. In that way, the documentation becomes a process of visualization of a true reality – social construction of educators and a valuable document of their own participation in the process.

The documentation tells us about how construction of meanings of educators took place and thus enables us to see, understand and read what happens in practice, and becomes open to discussion and change.