Roma children and families in the heart of provision of integrated services – challenges and successes

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Roma population in Medjimurje County

- 1/3 (5,107) of the total Roma population in Croatia lives in Medjimurje, estimations are much higher
- around 5% of total population of Medjimurje, but with share of ¼ of the newborns every year

While implementing the Child Guarantee in Medjimurje County, we met:

• child who has first meal in the late afternoon, because their mother had to beg first so she could put some food on the table
• child wearing light shoes and clothes in the middle of the winter
• children who share a bed with their siblings, and often with their parents as well
• children who are not vaccinated regularly and sometimes not even registered at the doctor
• children who do not own a picture book, didactic toy or anything that can support their early development
• a child/girl with developmental disabilities and visual impairment, whose mother has hearing and speech impairment, which makes it difficult for her to access health and other institutions and services
• children with disabilities, who have not been identified before
• children who live in constant tension and fear of quarrels, threats, fights and weapons
• children who do not have appropriate conditions for learning at home and lack parental support
• a girl who does not dare to dream of becoming a policewoman, because she carries the burden of her parent’s crimes
• girls who drop out of school as early as primary school, because their only purpose is considered to be marriage and childbirth...

This is not the childhood that any child deserves!
Child wellbeing → in the center of all actions and our joint responsibility

- Social welfare centers, service providers, center for special guardianship
- Croatian Employment Service
- Police
- Justice system
- Education system (preschool and school institutions)
- Health institutions (primary health care)
- CSOs
1. Integrated approach and services
   - The “responsibility” for the situation of children growing up in poverty goes beyond the social welfare system

2. Availability of the high quality services (financially and spatially)
   - a package of basic services available to every child
   - Network of services and free access / remove "hidden" costs

3. Child-sensitive data collection and monitoring system
   - including planning, evaluation and revision of services / interventions

Key of the successful programme implementation & service delivery in Roma community:

1. Adjustments of the working methods, content and concept
2. Outreach & community engagement
3. Broad platform of implementation partners & community stakeholders

Implementation of the programme in the community, with community and for the community
Specific objective 1.

Access to integrated child protection and family support services

- **Establishing community resource centres** - places for providing integrated community and family-based services in Roma settlement or near them

- **Strengthening the capacities of professionals** and intersectoral cooperation

- **Developing and piloting parenting support programme adapted for Roma families, parents and children**

- **Improving/adjusting working methods and case management** in the field of child protection, including Roma language lessons for child protection professionals

- **Adolescent and youth empowerment** for initiating positive changes in the local communities: 3-day workshop held through which selected teams got financial and mentor support to implement their project idea
Specific objective

1. Access to integrated child protection and family support services

„I did not receive any support from my parents, but I realized that I could give support to my children, I realized that children needed attention…. My child came home from the workshop, talked to me and showed me what they learned. He was cheerful all day, motivated and he passed that energy on to his sisters. I thought this was really nice.“
Supporting work of 1 existing + establishing 2 new play hubs - places for informal play and structured learning activities to ensure play opportunities for the most vulnerable groups of children – more than 200 children involved so far; assistants from Roma community engaged in these activities.

Strengthening Faculty of Teacher Education to ensure within their curricula diversity and inclusion and better prepare future kindergarten teachers to work with children who are excluded from kindergarten.

Development of costing methodology for municipalities to better calculate the kindergarten price to improve kindergarten funding policies and enable more children access to kindergartens.

Position paper on the results of the inclusion of Roma children in the regular pres-school education system from the age of 4 is developed.
Specific objective 3.

Access to early childhood intervention services

- **Analysis of Early Childhood Intervention needs and services** and other ECD resources for children 0-7 in Međimurje County; based on the analysis Working Group for Early Childhood Intervention of Međimurje County drafted an Action plan for Early Childhood Intervention in Međimurje county

- **Community outreach**
  - timely identification of children with developmental delays or risks - *child find concept* - around 200 children with potential developmental delays or risks in the need for further assessment identified so far within the pilot
  - preventive health programme provides information to families on their child’s development and how to support it, how to engage fathers, offer information on ECD resources available in the community, as well as support in accessing specialized services when needed

- **Team for piloting a model of ECI service**; providing ECI Assessment and Support Point to children identified by community outreach team and their families & providing necessary interventions;

- **Strengthening the capacities of health professionals for ECI** - online learning platform developed
Next steps and potential challenges:

- **Support sustainable investments** in the areas where the most vulnerable children live and areas with no service providers.

- **Ensuring sustainability of the models developed** through the testing phase of the Child Guarantee.

- Improve and maintain **effective and of high quality inter-sectoral cooperation** in providing services to the most vulnerable children.

- **Ensuring scalability of models and services** in other counties with high number of children living poverty.

- **Integrating findings from the deep dive analysis** of the situation of children living in risk at poverty into the National Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Child Guarantee (NAPCG) in the Republic of Croatia.

- **Ensure sufficient funding for the implementation of NAPCG** and develop sound monitoring and evaluation system.

Integration of findings from the deep dive analysis of the situation of children living in risk at poverty

Integration of existing strategic framework

National Plan For Roma Inclusion 2021. – 2027.
National plan for development of Social Services 2021. – 2027.
National plans on the area of education, health etc.
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