



Report on national projects

Analysis of international/national research projects by members of EurofamNet

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This report is based on the analysis of international/national research projects by members of the COST Action CA18123: The European Family Support Network. A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach.

It includes current or recently completed research projects, which have been run by Cost Action members at international, national and local levels in 2022-2023. These research projects reflect the contribution of the Cost Action members to the EuroFam and showcase good practices, theoretical and practical implications of the research being conducted by the network. In January-April 2023, all MC and WG members were asked to submit the relevant data regarding their research projects via the Cost Action Intranet <https://eurofamnet.eu/home>. The report was prepared based on the data submitted. Its preparation was discussed during the Management Committee Meeting of the COST Action CA1812, which took place on 3-5 July 2023, in Madrid, Spain. The first version of the report was prepared in June 2023. All the participants had the chance to provide feedback, suggest changes and to add information. The revised version of the report was prepared in July 2023.

The following research methods were implemented:

intervention practices; needs analysis; quasi-experimental trial; translational research; participatory social planning; inclusive participatory pedagogy research and practice; actions research methods.

The research projects were or are being conducted in the following countries:

Belgium (1), Bulgaria (1), Czech Republic (1), Croatia (1), Italy (1), Portugal (1), Serbia (4), Spain (1).

The research projects have diverse range of topic/themes under investigation and methodology implemented.

The project in the Italy context is focused on programme of intervention to prevent institutionalization. The Programme aims to innovate intervention practices towards families in a situation of vulnerability in order to prevent the risk of maltreatment and the consequent placement out of home of children. The Program of Intervention for Prevention of Institutionalization (P.I.P.P.I.) is a national research-training-intervention program aiming at contrasting child neglect and working with families living in vulnerable situations. P.I.P.P.I. is

funded and promoted by the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Lab of Research and Intervention in Family Education (LabRIEF) of University of Padua.

The general goal is to support positive parenting in order to reduce child neglect and the consequent placement out-of-home by: articulating in a coherent way the various fields of action around the needs of children living in condition of child-neglect (challenge of integration); taking into account the perspective of parents and children in building analysis and response to these needs (challenge of participation); evaluating every family in a shared, uniform way to ensure a transparent, accountable, deep, integrated and quality assessment process (challenge of evaluation).

National project in the context of Portugal examined evidence-based parenting intervention in real-world settings to support vulnerable families. The implementation of evidence-based parenting interventions (EBPI) in diverse real-world settings is a crucial translational research step to making effective programs widely available and consequently improving the lives of children and their families. Nevertheless, these programs remain underutilized in the real world, with the transferability of EBPI from research settings to real-world contexts being complex and poorly understood. Even though several studies addressed the effects of EBPI, surprisingly little is known about how vulnerable families, such as those who use social welfare and/or engage with child protective services, benefit from community-based services to support parents in their parenting practices and dealing with child behavior problems. Supporting parents through EBPI is also a way of promoting children's rights, given the known benefits of positive parenting to children's development, and families' mental health and wellbeing.

The aim of the research project in the context of Spain is learning from the margins. Social inclusion of highly marginalised youth in urban setting. The rationale of the project is the global concern for the challenges of marginalised young people, which locally manifest in different ways. The concern addresses marginalisation in relation to education, work and everyday life. Factors that are internationally recognisable and therefore need to be addressed in a cross-national collaboration. The overall aims of the project are therefore to enhance the professional identity of social educators by strengthening their capacity to manage young people in marginalised positions in urban areas. A capacity that relies on the social educators' ability to handle the problems they encounter in innovative, creative, and open ways to explore social innovation actions with at-risk young.

The focus of the international project in the context of Belgium is on emotional intelligence: family and child support. Make Mothers Matter, Belgium is responsible for the project: *Help prepare your child for a happy, successful life. Emotional intelligence videos for mothers and their families*, International, 2023. The project provides parents and families with the resources

and tools they need to ensure an emotionally intelligent education as their children grow. These video series will help family members heighten their self-esteem, balance their emotions, communicate with each other, and strengthen family bonds by building trust and questioning perfectionist expectations.

National projects (9)

Among the national projects, the most prominent research topics are:

Advancing the wellbeing of adolescents in foster care

Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences, Serbia) together with Anita Burgund Isakov are responsible for *Advancing the Wellbeing of Adolescents in Foster Care: From Action-oriented research to better policies and practices*. This project is part of a wider initiative implemented in tripartite partnership of UNICEF, the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Political Science and Institute for Psychology University of Belgrade that aims to generate knowledge on the wellbeing of children in foster care. The knowledge generated will help formulate recommendations for advancing the roles of the guardians, case managers, fostering advisers and foster-parents when it comes to securing the wellbeing of adolescents in care.

The research on the wellbeing of children in foster care has a quantitative and qualitative component. The qualitative research methodology is the subject of this project proposal and is the responsibility of the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Political Science. The quantitative component is the subject of a separate project proposal and is the responsibility of the Institute for Psychology to implement. The joint activities in the two projects include: development of a joint research protocol, development of a joint research report and communication and advocacy around research findings. The research on the wellbeing of children in foster care has a quantitative and qualitative component. The qualitative research methodology is the subject of this project proposal and is the responsibility of the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Political Science. The quantitative component is the subject of a separate project proposal and is the responsibility of the Institute for Psychology to implement. The joint activities in the two projects include: development of a joint research protocol, development of a joint research report and communication and advocacy around research findings, February 2018 - May 2020.

The purpose of the research is to explore the characteristics and specificity of the well-being of adolescent's on foster care in Serbia in order to improve practice of family-type forms of care and to formulate policy recommendations that are based on research insights. The ultimate

purpose of the research is to improve the wellbeing of adolescents in foster care by improving the foster-care system. The aim of the research is to generate knowledge on factors that contribute to well-being of adolescent's in foster care in Serbia, and what the social welfare system does can do to contribute to children's well-being.

The objectives of research are the following: (1) Better understand the views of adolescents in care as it relates to their wellbeing and the roles of different systems in securing their wellbeing; (2) Identify how different social actors (foster carers, parents, case managers, fostering advisers, teachers, policy makers) understand what contributes to the well-being of adolescent on foster care; (3) Analyze and compare perspectives of different actors in order to understand areas of agreement and disagreement and to build a common depth understanding; (4) Map and catalogue activities and factors that contribute to well-being of adolescent on foster care, especially what different actors in the system are doing or not doing for well-being of adolescents in foster care. Differentiate between roles and tasks that are defined in policies and those that are not; (5) Formulate recommendations for improving the policy and practice of foster care provision in Serbia.

The key research questions will be related to: (1) How well are adolescents in foster care families doing, do they have opportunities to flourish - to feel good and function effectively similar like their peers in parental families? (2) How different actors (case managers, fostering advisers, foster parents, adolescents, birth parents, policy makers) understand what constitutes well-being of children and adolescents on foster care? (3) What does the social welfare system do or not do for well-being of adolescents on foster care (and how do different actors understand that)? (4) What other circumstances (which are outside the focus of the social welfare system) contribute to the well-being of adolescents on foster care? (5) Does the social welfare system develop tailored measures to support the well-being of adolescents in the foster care who are of different ages and gender, educational, health and mental health needs, family and personal history? (6) Are there differences in the well-being of adolescents on foster care who have a support from fostering advisers and those who do not have such support? (7) What is the willingness and readiness of the various actors in the system to build a common understanding and action towards well-being of adolescents on foster care? (8) What should be improved in the policies, regulations, procedures and direct practice in order to improve well-being of adolescents on foster care? <http://www.fpn.bg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/Advancing-the-Well-Being-of-Adolescents-in-Foster-Care.pdf?jezik=lat>

Institute of Psychology, Belgrade, Faculty of political Sciences, Belgrade, UNICEF Belgrade office, Institute of Mental Health, Belgrade, Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Serbia, Republican Institute for Social Protection, Serbia, Ministry of Education and Science, Serbia" The research on the wellbeing of children in foster care in the context of

Serbian deinstitutionalization (DI) and alternative care reform. contributes to understanding the factors for providing support to their foster and biological families and themselves.

Building of expertise for the protection of children affected by migration and forced displacement

Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences, Serbia) together with Anita Burgund Isakov Violeta Markovic are responsible for the project *Co-creation of knowledge and building of expertise for the protection of children affected by migration and forced displacement*. This project was focused to curriculum development and piloting the course on Protection of Children affected by Migration and Forced Displacement. The course aims to build skills to design adequate intervention and ensure quality protection services for children affected by migration and displacement, November 2019-May 2021.

In order to support further strengthening of the protection system in Serbia in terms of responsiveness to new vulnerabilities arising from the context of migration, UNICEF and Faculty of Political Science are jointly developing a course on Protection of Children affected by Migration and Forced Displacement with focus on those moving alone. The course aims to build skills to design adequate intervention and ensure quality protection services for children affected by migration and displacement, with an additional focus on gender dynamics, gender inequality and GBV in the context of migration and forced displacement.

Aiming to generate and share knowledge and learning, the course will be developed according to learning needs assessment, through participatory process in the consultation with front line practitioners and champions from the field of Child migration, Gender studies and GBV experts, as well as relevant state authorities and institutions, such as SCRM, MoLEVSA and other UN agencies, and additionally in consultation process with children and youth affected by migration.

In order to ensure utilization of lessons learned from the field during the migration crises in Serbia as of mid 2015 and up-to date and of appropriate response according to needs of migration workforce, main approach was co-creation of knowledge and knowledge management processes.

Program is based on strong commitment to child participation and safeguard measures according to evidence-based knowledge regarding child development, child rights approach, GBV, learning of adults, supporting social service workforce in promoting interlinked activities and interventions in a culturally sensitive, child friendly and family supportive manner. Final part of the project focused on the systematization and presentation of acquired knowledge and experiences in the form of a university textbook, in order to provide high-quality, standardized and modern learning material for future generations of students in Serbia and in the region <https://www.fpn.bg.ac.rs/49286> University of Belgrade – Faculty of Political Science; UNICEF,

Belgrade office; Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs and Commissariat for Migration and Refugees; Republic Institute for Social Protection, Belgrade. The development of the course "Protection of children in migration" for BA social work and political sciences students and the accompanying handbook and workbook contribute to the systematization and improvement of knowledge and skills about the protection of children in these situations and family-oriented approaches in providing support and protection. The project was realized in the time of COVID- 19. Adaptation of course planning in the conditions of on-line teaching.

Evidence-based parenting interventions

Ana Catarina Canário (Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal) together with Orlanda Cruz (co-PI) and Patty Leijten (consultant) are responsible for the project: *Delivering an Individual Format Evidence-Based Parenting Intervention In Real-World Settings To Support Vulnerable Families. Evaluation of Implementation, Effects, And Cost-Effectiveness of An Individual Format Evidence-Based Parenting Intervention Delivered To Vulnerable Families In Real-World Settings*, March 2023 to August 2024. The implementation of evidence-based parenting interventions (EBPI) in diverse real-world settings is a crucial translational research step to making effective programs widely available and consequently improving the lives of children and their families. Nevertheless, these programs remain underutilized in the real world, with the transferability of EBPI from research settings to real-world contexts being complex and poorly understood. Even though several studies addressed the effects of EBPI, surprisingly little is known about how vulnerable families, such as those who use social welfare and/or engage with child protective services, benefit from community-based services to support parents in their parenting practices and dealing with child behavior problems. Supporting parents through EBPI is also a way of promoting children's rights, given the known benefits of positive parenting to children's development, and families' mental health and wellbeing. Some of the most disseminated EBPI are part of the Triple P - Positive Parenting Program system, consisting of cognitive-behavioral EBPI underpinned by a self-regulatory framework. Several studies support the efficacy of Triple P interventions in the promotion of positive parenting, revealing positive effects of the interventions on child behavior problems, parenting practices and families' social support network. However, despite the Triple P system's dissemination, little is known about the interventions' cost-effectiveness, with few studies identifying Standard Triple P (STP) as a cost-effective intervention in treating child behavior problems. Triple P interventions can be useful resources to provide parenting support in community-based services. In particular, STP, being an individual-format intervention tailored to each family's needs, has an increased potential to support vulnerable families. However, when implementing an EBPI in real-world practice, a fundamental challenge is ensuring flexible

implementation, i.e., introduce adaptations that fit the family's and setting's needs, yet without compromising fidelity to the program's core components.

To fully understand the potential of STP delivered in community-based services to Portuguese vulnerable families, four important questions need to be answered: How is STP implemented in community-based services? Is STP effective? What are the benefits for different families? And to what extent is the intervention cost-effective?

The proposed research plan to answer these questions includes one quasi-experimental trial to evaluate the characteristics of the implementation, effects, and cost-effectiveness of STP delivered in community-based services to vulnerable families with 6- to 12-year-old children. Trial data will be collected from parents, children, and social services over 3 assessment time points until 10 weeks after the intervention, comparing those who receive STP to those who receive care as usual. Additional data will be collected regarding STP implementation, including program fidelity checklists, and the costs and benefits related to STP and CAU. This research will advance the understanding of STP implementation in real-world practice and STP effectiveness, addressing the benefits of STP on improving parenting practices and children's development, and for which families and under which circumstances is STP cost-effective. The outputs will strengthen translational research by demonstrating the implementation characteristics, effects, and cost-effectiveness of STP delivered to vulnerable families in community-based services, and informing practice and policymaking. Contributions to society and decision-making will be achieved by informing on STP as a preventive intervention for vulnerable families and demonstrating when STP can be most effectively implemented to reduce family and societal burden and costs. Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto (organization)

Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (funding agency). The research questions of the project fits well the contents of the WG3 related to the EBPP evaluation strategies and quality standards.

National Strategy of Family Policy

Eliška Kodyšová (Aperio, Czech Republic) together with Hana Hašková are responsible for the National Strategy of Family Policy 2023-2030, Czech Republic, National level, Czech Republic, 2023-2030.

The new National Strategy of Family Policy summarizes objectives, indicators and action plans to improve the situation of families in the Czech Republic, ranging from preventive measures promoting healthy parenting to interventions supporting vulnerable or high-risk families. The link below lists only main goals of the strategy - the governmental approval of the strategy is still

pending." https://www.mpsv.cz/documents/20142/4552532/Cile_strategie_grafika.pdf/98027e7f-d6ef-11d9-2c61-196fb3fb3c3a Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The contribution of the EurofamNet members was to propose the inclusion of evidence-based programmes promotion and implementation, in line with the results of the WG3, and to make sure that the Strategy reflects collaboration between research, policy makers and practitioners (WG2).

Programme of intervention to prevent institutionalization

Paola Milani (University of Padua, Italy) together with Sara Serbati are responsible for the project: *P.I.P.PI. Programme of Intervention to Prevent Institutionalization*. The Programme aims to innovate intervention practices towards families in a situation of vulnerability in order to prevent the risk of maltreatment and the consequent placement out of home of children.

The area of family vulnerability is recognised as a space of special opportunity to implement appropriate interventions oriented towards the prevention of poverty and social inequalities, as required by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, the target goals are: Goal 1: zero poverty; Goal 4: quality education; Goal 10: reduce inequalities; Goal 16: peace justice and strong institutions." 2011-2021: First phase; 2022-2026: Next Generation EU Plan phase "The Program of Intervention for Prevention of Institutionalization (P.I.P.P.I.) is a national research-training-intervention program aiming at contrasting child neglect and working with families living in vulnerable situations. P.I.P.P.I. is funded and promoted by the Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Lab of Research and Intervention in Family Education (LabRIEF) of University of Padua.

The recommendations of the World Bank (Knowles, Behrman, 2005) of the WHO (CSDH, 2008), of the European Union (REC (2013) 112; REC 2006/19/UE), of the 2015-2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (<http://www.unric.org/it/agenda-2030>) (goals: 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere, 4 Quality of Education, 10 Reduced inequalities, 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions), the European Child Guarantee, have underlined the importance of strengthening efforts to implement innovative policies for families, through the extension, quality and accessibility of health (from prenatal period to adulthood), educational services (Education child care centres and schools) and of interventions to accompany the parental function (Milani, 2018).

Starting from these recommendations and being a Preservation Family program that leverage on intensive and integrated home care intervention, P.I.P.P.I. aims at innovating the practice of intervention with families with children 0-11 y.o. living in vulnerable situations and facing child neglect. The general goal is to support positive parenting in order to reduce child neglect and the consequent placement out-of-home by: (a) articulating in a coherent way the various fields of action around the needs of children living in condition of child-neglect (challenge of

integration); (b) taking into account the perspective of parents and children in building analysis and response to these needs (challenge of participation); (c) evaluating every family in a shared, uniform way to ensure a transparent, accountable, deep, integrated and quality assessment process (challenge of evaluation) (Milani, 2018).

The acronym is linked to the resilience of Astrid Lindgren's fictional character Pippi Longstocking and her extra-ordinary way to face her challenges and to develop and grow in her environment. The "I" of Institutionalization refers to child placements out-of-home in situations of neglect where other interventions seem more appropriate (Sellenet, 2007), and to practice leading to institutional capture (Lacharité, 2015) such as poor planning, no/poor involvement in assessing the situation, lack of evaluation, vague definition of time and goals etc." <https://pippi.unipd.it> Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare; Italians Regions, Padova University "PIPPI recognised the area of family vulnerability as an area of special opportunity to deploy interventions effectively geared towards the prevention of poverty and social inequality, as required by a number of European directives and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Between 2011 and 2021 PIPPI is implemented with 60 Local Authorities per year and 10 families for each Authority, for a total of 6,000 families and more than 10,000 professionals trained in all 20 Italian Regions.

On 17.12.2017, the National Guidelines on Intervention with Children and Families in Vulnerable Situations were published. Given this approval, the implementation of the Programme is therefore to be considered, from December 2017 onwards, as the elective tool to convey, at the local level, the implementation process of the same Guidelines in a uniform manner in the country. The punctual accompaniment in the training and action processes, supported by the research actions described below, such as that provided for by the Programme, is in fact configured as a tool to guarantee the uniform dissemination and implementation of the Guidelines themselves.

In addition, the approval of Legislative Decree no. 147 of 15 September 2017, Provisions for the introduction of a national measure to combat poverty, on the Inclusion Income, referred to in Legislative Decree of 9.03.2017 and the subsequent Legislative Decree 4/2019, and Law no. 26 of 28.03.2019 on the Citizenship Income provide for the presence at the local level of multidisciplinary teams capable of carrying out multidimensional need analysis activities, which accompany families in innovative paths of construction of Social Inclusion Pacts (PaIS) to facilitate the exit from poverty. In this sense, P.I.P.I. can be considered a specific tool to accompany these phases of work for families in a vulnerable situation, with minor children, who are also beneficiaries of the national anti-poverty measure.

On 26.11.2018, the decree on the National Social Policy Fund (FNPS) registered at the Court of Auditors on 14.12.2018 under no. 3492, stabilised and financed P.I.P.P.I. in child and adolescent policies for the coming years. P.I.P.P.I. which becomes a national policy in all respects.

On 15.05.2019, the P.I.P.P.I. Programme was awarded as the most significant in Goal 2, Goal "Inequalities, equal opportunities, resilience", thus as one of the top 9 projects among the 100 winners, in Rome, at the "Public Administration Forum, 100 projects to achieve the goals of Agenda 2030". Furthermore, it won in Brussels on 06.12.2019 the first Prize for the Methods and Tool Award Section of the European Social Network Award 2019: <https://www.esn-eu.org/events/european-social-services-awards-essa> "On 30.04.2021, the European Commission approves the EU Next Generation Plan - PNRR: in Mission 5, Inclusion and Cohesion, following the Covid pandemic, loan of 80 million Euros is made available to 400 local authorities for P.I.P.P.I.: all Italian territorial areas in the period 2022 -2026 can implement the Program (PNRR, p. 211, <https://italiadomani.gov.it/it/home.html>).

On 28.07.2021 the National Plan of interventions and social services 2021-2023 was approved which recognizes P.I.P.P.I. as one of the first 6 Essential Levels of Social Services ever approved in Italy.

The implementation of P.I.P.P.I., starting from the end of 2021, is therefore configured as the most appropriate tool to guarantee, after the design and approval phase, entry into the implementation phase of the Plan and therefore the implementation of the LEPS relating to "respond to the need of every child to grow up in a stable, safe, protective and 'nourishing' environment, actively countering the emergence of situations that favor social inequalities, school dropouts, inappropriate separations of children from their families of origin, through the identification of suitable actions, of a preventive nature, which have as their purpose the accompaniment not only of the child, but of the entire family nucleus in a vulnerable situation, as they allow the exercise of positive and responsible parenting and the construction of a social response to the developmental needs of children as a whole" (National Social Intervention Plan, file 2.7.4, p. 38).

For this set of reasons, the period 2022-2026 sees the continuity of the current funding from the National Social Policy Fund for 65 Local authorities per year and additional funding for 400 Local authorities deriving from Next Generation Plan Funds.

Promoting non-violent disciplining of children, curriculum for professionals' development

Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences, Serbia) are responsible for the project *Be the hand that loves and the word that guides*, National campaign for promoting non-violent disciplining of children, curriculum for professionals' development, training

development and delivery and handbook for professionals and parents, November 2019-December 2022. During the last 15 years in Serbia, we have witnessed a significant change in the attitude of parents regarding which disciplinary practices yield results when it comes to forming desirable child behaviours. Today, over 90 per cent of parents agree that violent disciplining is not good for the child. The experience from professional practice and research also confirms its harmfulness. Corporal or psychological punishment harms and humiliates the child, develops mistrust and insecurity, and undesirable behaviours are often repeated. Because the authority built on fear and violence generates fear and violence that the child transfers into relationships with others, often throughout their entire life.

However, almost half (45 per cent) of children aged 1 to 14 still experience corporal and psychological punishment. Such disciplining methods are most often used with small children who start receiving corporal punishment already at the age of 2 to 3.

Today, we know for sure that there are non-violent alternatives that are more effective and many parents in Serbia are already using them. We encourage all other parents to stop, think, and take a brave new step. Listening to and understanding the child's needs and adopting non-violent parenting practices is the best way to be a positive example for your child for establishing boundaries that are based on understanding, patience, consistency and respect.

Guide for Parents - Count To 5: (1) Provide - When children understand instead of being afraid, they accept boundaries and rules as their own; (2) Reconsider -Parents also learn and grow with new knowledge, to provide the best in the field of parenting; (3) Avoid - Self-control is an important skill, so that the child can grow up safe and without pain; (4) Apply -Choose non-violent parenting methods, so that the child can acquire new knowledge in a calm and safe way; (5) Seek help -Parents know better what is best for their child when they research and ask for support and advice" <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/be-hand-loves-and-word-guides-campaign>. UNICEF, Belgrade office, UN Women, UNFPA and UNDP in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the support of the Government of Sweden

DEPAS - Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Related Professions of Serbia. National campaign for promoting non-violent disciplining of children, curriculum for professionals development, training development and delivery and handbook for professionals and parents is directly related to the activities of EurofamNet.

Strengthening social service workforce

Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences, Serbia) together with Anita Burgund Isakov are responsible for the project *KonekTas - Connect, share, support - Strengthening social service workforce* at the National and region level, April 2020-July 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted even more the environments in which children grow and develop, and to have several negative consequences for their well-being and protection. Children and families who are vulnerable due to socio-economic exclusion or those who live in residential settings are particularly at protection risks. Increased demands put on the social welfare system in the current situation to ensure protection of the most vulnerable beneficiaries place an additional burden on professionals. Being responsible for their own health as well as of their beneficiaries, they are at higher risk to cope with the demand and delivery quality services. This is particularly important within the ongoing efforts and some of the challenges the system and professionals are facing in particular in relation to their already limited capacities to perform in a timely and quality manner.

Having in mind the system capacities and additional constrains faced within the COVID19 context, the proposed project AIMS to contribute to strengthening social service workforce in ensuring continuity, relevance, timeliness and quality of protection of social services' delivery for the most vulnerable children and families, by establishment of volunteer service and interactive platform for practitioners and faculty students.

More specific objectives include: (a) Expanding knowledge on alternative methods for follow-up with clients when home visits are impossible; (b) Increasing knowledge on increased distress among children and families (including among children in alternative care, children with disabilities, etc.) so as to mainstream psycho-social support into the service provision; (c) Enhancing timely respond to incidents/emergency cases with particular focus on victims of neglect, violence and abuse.

The main expected result of the project is establishment of a coordinated on-line information, knowledge and good practice sharing platform at the FPN web-site, including through the following outputs: (1) Needs based repository of relevant documents and practical professional guidance established and continuously updated; (2) Establishment and continual running of interactive platform for knowledge sharing, including through realization of thematic webinars and different forms of discussions" <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/en/stories/konektas-volunteer-service-and-interactive-platform>

University of Belgrade - Faculty of political sciences. UNICEF, Belgrade office

United States Agency for International Development (USAID): Connecting the social service workforce in Serbia through an interactive platform, organizing a large number of round tables, discussions and exchanges, as well as creating materials for professionals who work with families with children during the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic, represented an innovative approach and is directly related to the objectives of the Action. Connecting the social service workforce in Serbia through an interactive platform, organizing a large number of round tables, discussions and exchanges, as well as creating materials for professionals who work with

families with children during the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic. Numerous practitioners, students from other faculties, experts from non-governmental organizations, psychologists, pedagogues, and sociologists from the country and the region responded to the invitation to actively participate in the work of the platform. The total number of participants in three months reached 600, after 12 months 2800. The topics, chosen by the practitioners through a questionnaires, covered a wide range of needs during the COVID-19 crisis: from the urgent care of women and children due to domestic violence, the role of the Red Cross and shelters, to the protection of refugee and migrant children, support for the homeless and phone counselling, to examples of good practice and community initiatives.

At the same time, in order to obtain the information and resources, the volunteers and the faculty staff translated and published on the KonekTas platform and social media the latest instructions and recommendations from all relevant global institutions in the field of health care and social protection.

The right of every child to a school meal

Ivana Dobrotić (University of Zagreb, Croatia) is responsible for the project *Advocacy initiative "The right of every child to a school meal"*. It was an initiative - informal - of four UNI professors. We have run it on voluntary basis, with no funds attached (see abstract for details), June 2020 - October 2022. "Ivana Dobrotić, Associate Professor of Comparative Social Policy at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law, Department of Social Work, Social Policy Chair and Associate Member in the Department of Social Policy and Intervention together with her colleagues Associate Professor Olja Družić Ljubotina, Associate Professor Marijana Kletečki Radović and Associate Professor Antonija Petričušić at the University of Zagreb succeeded to get the Croatian government to introduce one free school meal per day for every child of primary school age.

They have been campaigning and advocating for this policy change since June 2020, when they teamed up after seeing media reports about primary-age children being left without school meals. The latter was a result of both the pandemic and the fact that the money from the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) was reduced, and schools had to approach the problem differently. For example, some closed the free school meal scheme to new pupils, and others limited it to one child per family even when all children in the family were in need. Many families were put in a difficult position, especially those that had to pay the school meals from social assistance, which is very low and inadequate. Moreover, with the pandemic, the parent's ability to pay for school meals has significantly decreased, and school principals have increasingly faced the need to initiate enforcement proceedings.

Through their advocacy, leveraging on their research and expertise, they began to warn that every fifth child in Croatia is at risk of poverty and social exclusion and that funds coming via the FEAD are insufficient to cover all the needs. In addition, they were warning that due to administration barriers and lack of funds, many children in need could not enter the free school meals program, and there was always a risk of stigmatising children in the program. Namely, there were no transparent, uniform and coordinated system of financing school meals in Croatia, and there were significant regional differences in availability. Only 20% of children were fully, and 13% of children partially subsidized, while parents were covering the full costs of school meals for 33% of children. As high as 37% of primary-school children were not included for various reasons, that is, they are not eating during the school day.

Faced with these facts, Ivana, Olja, Marijana and Antonija started the initiative “The right of every child to a school meal” and argued for a universal system where all children would have equal rights. Their advocacy, which started with an open letter, has led to numerous meetings with senior politicians – including the Prime minister and President of Croatia – and more than hundred media appearances. At their meeting with the prime minister and the minister of education on October 13th 2022, the government finally committed to introduce one free school meal for every child of primary school age since January 2023. Starting in January 2023, the government provides schools with HRK550 million from the central budget. This is an important improvement as, for example, only around HRK27 million was allocated to schools through FEAD fund in a previous year, and funding was project-based and insecure. Therefore, this change brings both a significant increase in funding and a much more secure funding base." <https://www.facebook.com/pravonaskolskiobrok/> Ivana Dobrotić, Olja Družić Ljubotina, Marijana Kletečki Radović, Antonija Petričušić, Policy impact. It started during the COVID when problems became more visible (see abstract).

Violence against children: Solutions through advocacy and research

Nevenka Zegarac (University of Belgrade Faculty of Political Sciences, Serbia) together with Anita Burgund Isakov and Violeta Markovic are responsible for the project *Violence against children on the Balkans migration route - solutions through advocacy and research*, National (Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina), Regional (West-Balkan countries) and European (extensive advocacy activity for presenting project results in the region, Germany, Norway and before representatives of European institutions and bodies), June 2021- December 2022

The main topic of this research project deals with understanding types and manifestation of violence against migrant children as well as pushbacks experiences for those who tried to cross the border against the rules of the countries they wanted to leave. Purpose of this study is to explore and interpret violence against migrant children and its characteristics in Serbia and

Bosnia and the factors that contribute to violence and/or protection of migrant children in order to: a) gain insight in current level of violence against migrant children as well as provision of support policies and practice; b) to identify specific types of violence that migrant children are faced with and circumstances/places of occurrence; c) to establish a foundation for national and regional framework for design, implementation and evaluation of gender and culturally responsive child protection and support policies and practices.

The main research question is: Which aspects of child protection against violence are pertinent for improvement in order to respond to needs of migrant children in region (Serbia and Bosnia)?

The specific research questions are: (1) What are types and levels of violence against children in migration in region (Serbia and Bosnia)? (2) In which circumstances does violence manifest itself? (3) Who do children go to for help when they experience violence? (4) Which types of services do children perceive exist to protect them? (5) What are the informal types of support for children experiencing violence? What do they do to protect themselves? (6) What are the characteristics of violence in unaccompanied children and children travelling with families? (7) What are the gender differences between children and are gender differences affecting experienced and survived violence?

In order to support further strengthening of the protection system in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina-BiH in terms of responsiveness to new vulnerabilities arising from the context of migration, in-depth interviews were performed during autumn 2021 with sample of 48 (N=38 boys and N=10 girls) both unaccompanied and travelling with families, currently residing in camps in BiH, on their experiences of violence and it's impacts on their wellbeing, while using trauma informed approach.

All children experience a range of severe violence and traumatic experience on the journey. Even though concept of emotional violence is not clear, most of the children plainly describe traumatic experiences, while their tendency to normalize violence is noticeable. Almost 2/3 of respondents were willing to describe sexual violence incidents they have witnessed or heard in some way. Children mostly report and recognize physical violence as police push backs on the borders and violence by smugglers.

The results of this research contribute to the scarce resources that exist in the scientific understanding of children's experiences of violence and on the understanding of traumatic experiences among migrant and refugee children.
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/wherever-we-go-someone-does-us-harm-violence-against-refugee-and-migrant-child> SVRI - Sexual Violence Research Initiative; Save the Children (SCNWB); University of Sarajevo Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies and European Regional Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights / Global Campus SEE (UNSA CIS / GC SEE ERMA; University of Belgrade, Faculty of Political Sciences.

Research on violence against children in migration on the Western Balkan route contributes to knowledge about the protection of rights and the necessary support for families and children traveling unaccompanied.

International projects (3)

Among the international projects, the most prominent research topics are:

Emotional intelligence: Family and Child Support

Johanna Schima (Make Mothers Matter, Belgium) is responsible for the project: *Help prepare your child for a happy, successful life. Emotional intelligence videos for mothers and their families*, International, 2023. Online Emotional Wellbeing resources. A collaboration, MMM and La Granja aiming to provide parents and families with the resources and tools they need to ensure an emotionally intelligent education as their children grow. These video series will help family members heighten their self-esteem, balance their emotions, communicate with each other, and strengthen family bonds by building trust and questioning perfectionist expectations. Some of the topics that will be covered in the videos: The Perfect Family Syndrome; Demand vs. excellence; Emotions – allies or enemies? Overprotecting is underprotecting: 8 tips to burst the bubble; Preoccupation versus occupation: what do you choose?; Impatience and 0 tolerance to frustration; Weakness or vulnerability – for a Human Education; When anxiety and stress rule, how does it affect our children? Joy or happiness: the danger of confusing the two The pressure of success" <https://www.youtube.com/@makemothersmatter9064/playlists>, La Granja and Make Mothers Matter. Family resources on emotional intelligence.

Social inclusion of highly marginalised youth in urban setting

David Herrera (University of Malaga, Spain) together with Isabel Bernedo are responsible for the project: *Learning from The Margins. Social Inclusion of Highly Marginalised Youth In Urban Setting* (2019-1-DK01-KA203-060285). "The rationale of the project is the global concern for the challenges of marginalised young people, which locally manifest in different ways. The concern addresses marginalisation in relation to education, work and everyday life. Factors that are internationally recognisable and therefore need to be addressed in a cross-national collaboration. The overall aims of the project are therefore to enhance the professional identity of social educators by strengthening their capacity to manage young people in marginalised positions in urban areas. A capacity that relies on the social educators' ability to handle the

problems they encounter in innovative, creative, and open ways to explore social innovation actions with at-risk young.

The objectives are to develop a pedagogical model for working with the extremely marginalised youth – participatory social planning (PSP) and gain wider knowledge on the connection between an urban setting and the marginalisation processes of young people to the benefit of the young people themselves and the society. The resulting product will be a free, interactive online APP for smartphones or PADs providing guidance and practical tips/advice, in which teaching materials and other inspirational resources will be available for professionals, students, target groups and others actors involved in inclusive participatory pedagogy research and practice. The APP is intended as a knowledge transfer between project partners and a learning toolkit on relevant participatory approaches and experiences to support reflection, engagement and implementation of new pedagogical ways of social planning, 2019-2022. The baseline problem and needs analysis for the project 'Learning from the Margins' (LEMA) show that marginalised youth in European urban areas display low levels of inclusion and participation in the societal arenas that we know develop the individual and which can also contribute to bringing individuals out of marginalisation. At the same time, it is clear that on the professional level we are more or less checkmate compared to working with precisely the inclusion of the most marginalised young people. This is partly due to societal inequality structures, but it is also because the professionals are not yet trained in understanding the extent of the young people's situations, which are particularly complex in urban settings.

By professionals we refer to all those working professionally with marginalised youth in urban areas and they encompass social workers, pedagogues, social educators and teachers. The lack of professionalism in this field is probably because until now it is not common practice to understand social and educational work as a matter of planning individual, social and contextual (including socio-spatial) solutions concerning young people at risk.

The overall goal of the LEMA project is therefore to develop a sustainable pedagogical model for working with extremely marginalised youth – a model for Participatory Social Planning (PSP), which includes:

- The development of a participatory context-sensitive social pedagogy for innovative solutions (cross-national)
- A wider knowledge on the connection between an urban setting and the marginalisation processes of young people
- Repertoires of practice for professionals, welfare officials, NGOs, policy makers, educators and researchers in relation to understanding, recognising and responding to the complex social problems that marginalised young people have to face.

The participatory aspect will be crucial in that context-specific solutions must always take their point of departure in the parties involved. It is therefore significant that the marginalised young people are key partners in the development of new innovative solutions. They are, as it were, the real experts, and learning from their marginalised position is essential to the innovative solutions of this project. The target groups of the project are thus both youth at risk in urban areas and the professionals and educators working with them.

Thus, the project partners are higher education institutions and organisations working with marginalised youth in three different urban contexts: University College Copenhagen and 3B Housing Association in Copenhagen, Denmark; Malmö University and Malmö City in Sweden; University of Malaga and the NGO Asociacion Marroqui in Malaga, Spain. The partners all share a mutual interest in connecting social work and participatory design concerning at-risk youth in urban settings. At the same time, their common interest is in the transferability of actions research methods and values to social work and professional development.

In order to change the realities of the marginalised youth and thereby the structures of inequality, the professionals need profound new knowledge and repertoires of practice. Both the field of research and the field of social practice have need of the international exchange of practice-based knowledge, research and the innovative spin-off from the different urban contexts to respond effectively to the challenges of inequality. The shared reality is that the local solutions are not sufficient in bringing young people at-risk out of marginalisation and a transnational innovative initiative is therefore necessary.

The absolute social innovation of the LEMA project is to bring marginalised young people, professionals and researchers together in an analytical work that can create and develop a new international practice within pedagogy and social work. This will be composed in the Participatory Social Planning model (PSP). The model will enable professionals in working with overcoming marginalisation of youth in urban areas. At the same time, the new approach of this model will be implemented locally in the organisations of the participating partners. Additionally, the impact of the LEMA project is directly transferable and complementary to the everyday work in both HEI and in the kinds of organisations represented by the participating partners.

Un/equal childhood: deep dive in child poverty and social exclusion

Tatyana Kotzeva (Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria) is responsible for the project *Un/equal childhood: deep dive in child poverty and social exclusion in Bulgaria, Unicef Europe and Central Asia regional office*.

This in-depth analysis provides the basis for the European Child Guarantee National Action Plan in Bulgaria. The deep dive analyzes policies, services, budgets, and mechanisms addressing

barriers to access for children's services and unmet needs in the key areas of the European Child Guarantee: early childhood education and care, education, health, nutrition, and housing, 2021-2022.

There are two reports as part of this deep dive. A policy brief brings together all the findings from the research. It has been designed to help government to identify the children who should be prioritized in the Bulgaria National Action Plan and to recommend the policy measures that need to be put in place at national, regional and local levels to complement existing policy measures that have been effective in providing positive outcomes for children.

Furthermore, a main deep dive report identifies children in need and the barriers they face in accessing services covered by the Recommendation, and thus contributes to the preparation of the European Child Guarantee National Action Plan for Bulgaria. It identifies children in need with a view of targeting the most effective measures towards those children who could benefit the most from the European Child Guarantee.

<https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/media/12976/file/Unequal%20Childhood%20Deep%20Dive%20Analysis%20EN%20.pdf>
