

MAPPING REPORT FROM POPULATED AREAS IN BORDER REGION FOR PARENTAL NEEDS FOR PRE-SCHOOL CARE

Introduction

Largest part of existing kindergartens in the Republic of Macedonia is located in urban areas in where is the highest density of children. This, in reality makes difficult for children and parents who live in rural areas and the areas that are in the border region. The reasons for this are partly due to the traditional understanding of the basic function of the kindergartens, which is to take care of the children while the parents are at work. This function is very important; however we cannot neglect the large role and meaning of the kindergartens for the overall development and the wellbeing of the children.

Large number of studies have shown that inclusion in pre-school education have positive effect in all domains of the children development, especially over the socio-emotional and cognitive development, which directly affects their learning capabilities and academic success, not only in the period of adolescence, rather in the entire life. In this way, investing in early child development represents one of the most important ways of investing in the future human potential of the community where the children live and for the country as a whole. It is also very important to respect the principle of equal availability of the kindergartens to the children, especially to the children that are facing with certain hardships in life, and to give them equal opportunity for a good beginning in life. Investing in early child development is key in order to enable the children to develop to their full potential, for its better social inclusion, as well as to lower the social, health and educational inequalities.

Main goal of the mapping was to identify the needs, attitudes of parents, families and barriers with which are faced trying to secure care and education of the pre-school children in populated areas in the border region.

Metodology

We conducted a field research/mapping in certain populated areas in Municipalities: **Bitola, Mogila and Novaci**. The methodology of the mapping was carefully developed by all involved parties over exchanging experiences of the partners from both sides of the border.. As an instrument for the mapping we used a specially created questionnaire/guideline.

The mapping was conducted in two phases. In the first phase we identified the populated areas in which there are families that have pre-school children, where the data was collected and put in a specially designed form for field surveys. We visited 72 populated areas in total. The data was collected through discussions with the local population and its representatives. Conversing with the families was done in their homes, for which they were informed in advance on advertising boards set in visible areas in the local communities. At the beginning of every visit of the home, parents were informed about the goal of the visits and we asked for an approval to continue the conversation. This activity was conducted with collaboration with our partner organization **LIFE START**. In the second phase we conducted a door to door visit of 707 families in order to fill in the form to estimate the needs of the family for caring and pre-school education of the children in the border region.

Short description of the results

According to the number of families with pre-school children, populated areas were divided in 3 groups:

Populated areas with **15- 20 families** with pre-school children (**Bukovo и Grashenica**)

Populated areas with **20 to 40 families** with pre-school children (**Karmini, Kravari, Kukurechani, Logovardi, D. Orizari**)

Populated areas where we have identified more than **40 families** with pre-school children (**Bairo, G. Orizari, Novaci and Vero**)

Profile of the border region according to the characteristics concerning the access and the needs of the families with little children to the services of early care and education.

Identified characteristics of families	
Percentage of families with children 0-6 years of age according to the number of children	1 child -66% 2 children 29.5% 3 children- 4.5%
Access to the pre-school facility	38% - Yes 62% - No
Percentage of children that attend a pre-school facility	66% do not attend 34% attend
Awareness of the parents for the significance of the pre-school facility	89% - Yes 11% - No
Reasons for not attending	76,8% - are unaware of the facility 14.6%- it does not exist near by 8,6% - They believe there is no need to
Employment of the parents	76,8% - are unaware of the facility 14.6%- it does not exist near by 8,6% - They believe there is no need to
Desire of the parents for attending a pre-school facility	Yes – 90,3%
Preferred location for a pre-school facility	In the village -92% In the nearest school -3,4% As close as possible -4.6%

In the populated areas there is and dominance of families with one child (**66%**) and one employed parent (**63,5%**). Only 38% of families have an access to pre-school facilities (**New Bitola, Bukovo, Kukurechani, Novaci, Bair**), where in certain areas parents travel few kilometers to the closest pre-school facility (**Bratin Dol, Bukovo, Dobromiri, Karmani, Krklino, Lavci, Poeshevo, Trn, Trnovo**) Larger portion of children (**66%**) do not attend pre-school facility. The most common reason is that parents are uninformed about the existence of such a facility, another reason is because of non-existence of such a facility in their area, and a small portion of them believes that children do not need to attend such a facility because they have someone to give care to them at home. Largest part of parents (**89%**) believe that pre-school facilities are necessary and useful for development of the children which is why they prefer such a facility to be located near by (**92%**).

Conclusion and recommendations

The mapping has shown that a very small portion of the children from the border region attend a pre-school facility, mostly because of lack of accessibility, even though there is a need for the parents and a strong and positive attitude concerning the importance of such institutions for the development of the children. The results are showing that there is a need for opening stationary centers in the populated areas: **Logovardi and Orizari**, where the mobile centre should include the villages: **Zabeni, Optichari, Medzitlija, Porodin, Sredno Egri, Poeshevo, Germijan (Kreenica) and Lazec**.

Besides the primary goal of the mapping (data collection), this activity had indirect benefits. It helped in strengthening the “visibility” of project activities financed by **EU** grants for cross-border cooperation. The local population had the opportunity to discuss with members and experts of **ECD COR** and **LIFE START** and to get informed about the benefits from this program in order to improve the quality if the life of their children and family, the community as a whole, and the rural border region in general.

The whole process has benefited for the strengthening of the partnership of the organizations involved in cross-border cooperation through exchanging experiences, joint planning and implementation of mutual programs and activities, which indirectly has positive effect over the strengthening of the capacities of partner organizations, institutional capacities for working in this segment from the both sides of the border as well as bigger social participation of the population that lives in this area. All of this is an important pre-condition for successful collaboration in mutual defining priorities that concern the everyday living, in creating of mutual strategic frameworks and implementation of project activities, as well as maintaining such cooperation in the future after the implementation of all activates defined in the action plan. The strengthen cooperation and partnership will help in setting up strong foundation in future sustainability of activities.