EMBRACE

Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

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1. Introduction

The project *"EMBRACE – Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care"* is funded under the Erasmus+ Programme and it is implemented in five countries in cooperation with six organizations: TeatrGrodzki (Poland), Emphasys Centre Cyprus, KMOP (Greece), PDEATTIKIS(Greece), KMOP Skopje (N. Macedonia) and EASPD (Belgium). The project aims tocontribute to the enhancement of the quality of early childhoodeducation and care and promote the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.

The first project result *R1:Mapping the Terrain: Initial and continuous training opportunities for early childhood education and care staff*will offer in-depth insights in the state of play Ineach of the participating countries regarding the opportunities for initialand continued education of ECEC staff on topics concerning inclusiveECEC of children with intellectual disabilities, the knowledge and skillsgaps, and needs, concluding with policy recommendations.

As it was decided by the partnership during the project kick-off meeting (9-10 February 2022),the research scope will be expanded by the topics belonging to Result 3 (Fostering a Culture of Inclusion Handbook), since the target groups to be reached and data collection methods in both cases are the same and the thematic fields to be covered are very similar to each other. Respectively, also the research report will cover a broader set of issues.

The report will, inter alia, address the lack of review and analysis of theinitial education and training of ECEC staff, including critical analysis onhow to improve the quality of the initial education and trainingprogrammes.

This project result will be available as an e-publication in all partner languages and in English, and it will be relevant to a) national and EU policy makers and educationalauthorities that can use it in designing ECEC staff initial and continuoustraining policies and programmes; b) ECEC settings that aim to improvethe initial and continuous training of their staff regarding inclusivepractices for children with intellectual disabilities; c) civil societyorganizations providing non-formal educational opportunities to ECECstaff; and d) ECEC researchers.

Further to this, the findings of the report will be key in informing thedevelopment of the E-learning course (Result 2) and the FosteringInclusion Handbook (Result 3).

The activities for the development of this result will be structured in two phases: i) research phase, which will include desk researchand key informant interviews(findings complied in national reports), and ii) elaboration phase, which will include synthesizing of the national reports into the e-publication, its graphic design and peer review.

This Research Protocol aims to provide the partner organizations detailed guidelines for carrying out the research phase. It outlines the overall aims of the research, the research methodology and presents the needed research and reporting templates.

The structure of the Research Protocol is broken down as follows:

- ✓ **Aim of the research** (Section 2) – Outlining the need for this research and its overall aim;
- ✓ **Research Methods** (Section 3) - Presents the methodology, the procedures and the tools and guidelines that should be used for the desk research and thekey informant interviews;
- ✓ **Reporting** (Section 4) **-** Gives further instructions on reporting on the findings from the desk research and the key informant interviews;
- ✓ **Timetable** (Section 5) - Sets up the timeframe of specific tasks and deliverables;
- ✓ **Annexes** – Including the Information Sheet **(Annex A)**, the Consent form for the interviews **(Annex B)**, the Interview protocol for the ECEC staff **(Annex C)** and the National Report Template **(Annex D)**.

2. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

Despite the wide agreement on the importance of ensuring access and inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in ECEC, there is lack of ECEC practitioners who are adequately trained and equipped to meet their needs.[1]

The initial training of educational staff (who are qualified at tertiary level), care staff (usually with a minimum qualification at upper-secondary or post-secondary) and auxiliary staff or assistants (usually either not qualified or with a minimum qualification at upper-secondary level) often fails to provide them with the knowledge, confidence and skills to support the learning of children with intellectual disabilities. Opportunities for continuous professional development in inclusive early education for children with intellectual disabilities are exceptionally limited. As a result, ECEC staff often lack basic understanding of the overall philosophy and underlying values of inclusive early years education, as well as of the different forms of intellectual disabilities, their implication the learning capacities of children and the adjustments needed to ensure they can participate in education.

However, as pointed out in the 2021 Erasmus+ and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Project Results and Analysis, there is a need for a comprehensive review and analysis of the initial education and training of ECEC staff, including an analysis on how to improve the quality of the initial education and training programmes.

Striving to address this need, this research aims to provide a critical analysis of the opportunities for initial and continued education of ECEC staff on topics concerning inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities, explore the knowledge and skills gaps, and needs of ECEC staff, and outline key policy recommendations on furthering the quality of education in the field.

Moreover, in reference to Result 3, the research will also include the following topics: assessing quality of already existing programs, practices and methodologies aiming at enhancing the collaborations of ECEC settings with children, parents and community members in fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities guardians (methodology, transferability, accessibility, applicability to local/ national/ current/ EU/ European context and needs, etc.)

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[1]UNICEF (2014). Teachers, Inclusive, Child-Centred Teaching and Pedagogy.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

I) DESK RESEARCH

Scope

Each partner organization should conduct desk research to explore the opportunities for education of ECEC staff on issues concerning inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities. In addition, the research should include also specific strategies and actions that nurseries and kindergartens can take to increase the engagement of children, parents, staff and the whole communities in the inclusive processes.

In respect to Result 1

In particular, partners should explore whether and to what extent ECEC staff's *initial and continued education* addresses relevant topics including:

- the overall philosophy and underlying values of inclusive early years education;
- the different forms of intellectual disabilities (such as autism, Down's syndrome, fragile X syndrome, Williams syndrome, Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder);
- the implication of the different forms of intellectual disabilities on the learning capacities of children;
- the approaches for ensuring children with intellectual disabilities can participate in ECEC.

'ECEC staff' includes educational staff, care staff and auxiliary staff/assistants, as well as leaders/heads of ECEC settings.

'Initial education' encompasses any formal initial education or training that prepares ECEC staff for working with children. It usually includes general education and professional training.[2]

'Continued education' refers to the formal in-service training undertaken that allows ECEC staff members to broaden, develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout their career. It includes both subject-based and pedagogical training through different formats, such as courses, seminars, peer observation and support from practitioner networks.[3]

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[2] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019. Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe – 2019 Edition. Eurydice Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
[3]Ibid.

In respect to Result 3

In particular, partners should explore the field of the already existing strategies, approaches and activities meant for increasing the involvement of four key target groups in creating an inclusive early education and care environment for children with intellectual disabilities:

-Children

-Parents

- Staff

- Community.

Methodological approach

The desk research should entail an analysis of relevant national documents, including policies, strategies and planning documents, country level situation analysis, studies and reports, as well as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, reports from government agencies and nongovernmental organizations, and Web sites.

II) KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Each partner organization should conduct key informant interviews to explore the knowledge and skills gaps, as well training needs of ECEC staff in regards to practices for ensuring inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities.

Participants, sampling and recruitment

As per the project application, the total number of key informant interviews should be 7-10 in-depth interviews with key informants who have particularly informed perspectives, such as professionals involved in education and training of ECEC staff, ECEC staff or leaders with long-standing work experience, ECEC policy makers etc.

Obtaining informed consent

When inviting potential participants, partners should provide them with the **Information Sheet** (provided in **Annex A**) and **Consent Form** (provided in **Annex B**). The *Information Sheet* entails information on the overall objective of the research, the duration of the interview, their rights related to participation, information on confidentiality, recording, transcription and use of data acquired. The *Consent Form* includes a number of statements related to the participation in the

interview and the use of data, presented in separate sections, enabling the participants to select the ones that they consent to. If needed, partner organisations should adapt the content of the *Consent Form* to ensure its compliance with the relevant national laws.

The participants should be asked to read both documents, raise any questions they may have, as well as fill in and sign the *Consent Form (*with electronical signature, or include their name and email address or scanned). Besides obtaining written consent, before the beginning of the interviews, the participants should be once again explained the interviewing, their rights and other aspects of the Information sheet and *Consent form*.

Setting and duration of the interviews

The interviews should be conducted face-to-face, online or via telephone. The face-to-face interviews should take place in a comfortable room at a convenient location, meeting the needs of the participants. The COVID-19 protection measures in the respective country should be strictly followed.

The time date and venue of the interviews should be arranged in agreement with the participants. Each interview should last approximately 40 minutes.

Interview protocols

Partner organisations should utilise the interview protocol developed for the purpose of this research(provided in **Annex C**).

The interview protocol encompasses a sequence of questions providing a logical structure of the interview. The order and formulation of the questions is flexible in order to ensure logical follow-ups to participants' responses. This format should ensure that all the themes of importance for the research will be addressed, while at the same time it was flexible enough to allow the participants to come up with new ideas and speak broadly on the questions raised.

Data recording and transcription

The interviews can be recorded via audio taping or by taking written notes. Obtaining an audio record of the interview is dependent on the participant's consent. Audio-recorded interviews should be transcribed.

Confidentiality and anonymity

For the purpose of ensuring anonymity, neither participants' names, nor identifiable characteristics should be used in the transcripts or the National Report.

The raw data (audio recordings and written notes) and transcripts should be kept separate from identifying information, while all information collected should be securely stored on the password-protected computers, ensuring confidentiality. Audio recordings should be deleted after completing the transcription. All other raw data should be destroyed after the completion of the National Report.

4. REPORTING

Upon conducting the desk research and key informant interviews, each of the partner organisations should present the analysis of the findings, alongside the main conclusions and policy recommendations within a national report. The template for the national report is provided in **Annex D**.

The national reports will be later compiled into a transnational report, providing a comparative analysis of the state of affair the participating countries regarding the opportunities for initial and continued education of ECEC staff on topics concerning inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities, the knowledge and skills gap and needs. The report will be concluded with country specific and EU level policy recommendations.

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5. TIMETABLE

Description of Activities	Time	Partner
Activity A1: Design of research protocol and national reports template	February – March	KMOP Skopje &TeatrGrodzki
Activity A2: Implementation of desk research in partners' countries	April – June	All partners
Activity A3: Implementation of key informant interviews	April – June	All partners
Activity A4: Production of national report	April – June	All partners
Activity A5: Drafting of the Transnational Report	July – August	KMOP Skopje &TeatrGrodzki
Activity A6: Drafting Policy Recommendations	July – August	All partners
Activity A7: Review of Transnational Report & Policy Recommendations	September	All partners
Activity A8: Finalization and design of the Transnational Report & Policy Recommendations	October	All partners
Translation of the Transnational Report & Policy Recommendations	November	All partners

ANNEXES

ANNEX A – INFORMATION SHEET

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project "EMBRACE –Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care" is funded under the Erasmus+ Programme and it is implemented in five countries: Poland, Cyprus, Greece, N. Macedonia and Belgium. The EMBRACE project emanates from the need for supporting continuous professional development of ECEC staff and leaders in working with children with intellectual disabilities, and in building partnerships and collaborations among themselves and with children, parents and community members.

THE RESEARCH

Currently, the partner organizations are conducting interviews withECEC professionals, including professionals involved in education and training of ECEC staff, ECEC staff or leaders with long-standing work experience and ECEC policy makers. These interviews have the aim to explore the opportunities for initial and continued education of ECEC staff on topics concerning inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities, the knowledge and skills gap and needs. At the same time, the research aims at assessing the already existing practices and methodologies which enhance cooperation between ECEC settings with typically developing children, their parents and community members, meant for inclusion of children with disabilities.

The findings of the interviews will be presented in two e-publications:*Mapping the Terrain: Initial and continuous training opportunities for ECEC staff*, which will provide a comparative analysis of thestate of affair in the field in the countries that participate in the project and in *Fostering a Culture of Inclusion Handbookwhich* which will present specific strategies and actions that nurseries and kindergartens can take to increase the engagement of the key stakeholders in creating a truly inclusive environment in ECEC settings.

TIME COMMITMENT

We would like to invite you to take part in an interview. The estimated duration of the interview is approximately 40 minutes. It can be conducted remotely over the Internet, via telephone, or face to face, depending on your preferences. The date and time will be arranged according to yours the interviewer's availability.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any stage, including during the interview. You can also skip any questions you do not want to answer.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

Your answer will be anonymous and confidential. The information you provide will be used solely for the purposes of this research and no one other than the research team will have access to it.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

[Insert the name of the responsible person from your organization] will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact him/her at *[Insert the responsible person's email and/or phone number]*.

ANNEX B – CONSENT FORM FOR THE INTERVIEWS

I, _____ hereby declare that:

☐ I consent to participate in the research, organized by *[Insert the name of your organisation]*, in the ambit of the European project "EMBRACE – Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care".

☐ I have been informed about the project and the research and I understand what they are about and what they aim to achieve.

☐ I agree the interview to be recorded and I understand that the recording will be used exclusively by the researcher for the purpose of data analysis and that it will be deleted after the transcription of the interview is completed. I understand that I may choose not to answer one or more of the questions that I will be asked. During the interview, or at its end, I can ask to modify or remove some of my answers.

☐ I understand that my name will not be published or communicated to anyone outside of the research team.

☐ I understand that the information I will provide will only be used for this research.

☐ My participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

☐ I would like to be informed about the next steps of the project.

Place and date: _____

Participant's signature

ANNEX C – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION PHASE (5 MINUTES)

- Thank the participant for taking part in the interview
- Introduce yourself and your organisation
- Brief introduction to the EMBRACE project
- Brief description of the purpose of the interview and how the findings will be analysed and reported
- Explanation of how issues of confidentiality will be dealt with (e.g., anonymity, confidentiality); request permission to record the interview (if answer is negative then for note taking); signing of the Consent form for the interviews and explanation of its purpose *(Annex B)*
- Setting the ground rules (e.g., duration; there are no right or wrong answers etc.)
- Address any questions the participant might have
- Explain to the participant that the interviewit is structured in threemain parts:
- ➢ Part I – Background Information
- ➢ Part II – Mainquestions
- ➢ Part III – Additional comments

MAIN PHASE (20 MINUTES)

- Keep eye contact and maintain neutrality by not verbally or not-verbally approving or disapproving opinions.
- Present each of the interview questions one by one and by the order provided below.
- Use probe questions to elicit more information from the participant when necessary. For example:"Could you elaborate?"; "Could you clarify and explain in detail?"; "Can you give us an example?".

PART I: YOUR BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Participant's age

Please insert the interviewee answer.

Answer:

2. Participant's gender

Please mark one choice.

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

☐ Prefers not to state

3. Highest education level

Please mark one choice.

☐ Primary education

☐ Secondary education

☐ Bachelor's or equivalentin _____ *(please specify in which discipline)*

☐ Master's or equivalent_____ *(please specify in which discipline)*

☐ PhD_____ *(please specify in which discipline)*

☐ Other_____ *(please specify)*

4. Can you tell us a bit about your work? What is your work position? What are your main tasks?

Please insert the interviewee answer.

Answer:

5. How many years of work experience in ECEC do you have?

Please mark one choice.

☐ Less than 2 years

☐ 2 – 5 years

☐ 6 – 10 years

☐ 11 – 15 years

☐ Over 15 years

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PART II: MAIN QUESTIONS

1. Have you completed <an initial education or training programme> that papered you to work with young children?

An <initial education or training programme> refers any formal initial education or training that prepares ECEC staff for working with children. It usually includes general education and professional training.

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on the type of initial education or training programme you have completed.*

*If**no**, please elaborate more on the type of initial education or training programmeyou think it is/it was missing in order to prepare you to work with young children.*

Answer:

2. Have you completed any <continuous education or training programme> that papered you to work with young children?

<Continuous education or training programme>refers to any the formal in-service training undertaken that allows ECEC staff members to broaden, develop and update their knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout their career. It includes both subject-based and pedagogical training through different formats, such as courses, seminars, peer observation and support from practitioner networks.

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on the type of continuous education or training programme you have completed.*

*If **no**, please elaborate more on the type of continuous education or training programme you think it is/it was missing in order to prepare you to work with young children.*

Answer:

3. If you have answered __yes__on the first and/or thesecond question,can you elaborate more on the extent to which the following topics have been included your initial and/or continuous education and training:

- the overall philosophy and underlying values of inclusive early years education;

- the different forms of intellectual disabilities (such as autism, Down's syndrome, fragile X syndrome, Williams syndrome, Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder);

- the implication of the different forms of intellectual disabilities on the learning capacities of children;

- the approaches for ensuring children with intellectual disabilities can participate in ECEC.

Answer:

4.Do you work/have you worked with children with intellectual disabilities (such as autism, Down's syndrome, fragile X syndrome, Williams syndrome, Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder)?

    Please mark one choice.

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

If __yes__, please briefly elaborate on your experience

Answer:

5. Do you think that you have sufficient knowledge and skills to work with children with intellectual disabilities?

    Please mark one choice.

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

If __no__, please briefly elaborate on the knowledge, skills and competence you think you need to help you feel better prepared to work with children with intellectual disabilities?

Answer:

6. Do you know any existing programs, practices and methodologies aiming at enhancing the collaboration between typically developing children and children with intellectual disabilities that foster a culture of inclusion?

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on how typically developing children can help their peers with intellectual disabilities feel safe and welcome at the setting, develop a sense of belonging and reach their full potential?*

Answer:

7. Do you know any existing programs, practices and methodologies aiming at enhancing the collaborations of ECEC settings with parents (of both children with and without intellectual disabilities) in fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on how the parents can be involved in ensuring the successful inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities.*

Answer:

8. Do you know any existing programs, practices and methodologies aiming at enhancing the collaborations of ECEC settings with community members in fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on how different individuals and local organizations/institutions can be involved in creating/supporting inclusive approaches in ECEC settings.*

Answer:

9. Do you know any effective approaches and solutions that support ECEC staff in fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities?

Please mark one choice.

☐ Yes

☐ No

*If **yes**, please elaborate more on how to facilitate an open discussion among ECEC staff within the workplace about challenges and solutions in relation to working with children with intellectual disabilities.*

Answer:

PART III: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Do you have any additional comments you would like to share?

Answer:

CONCLUDING PHASE (5 MINUTES)

- Thank the participant for taking part in the interview.
- Ask the participant if they have any questions regarding the interview and the use of the data.

ANNEX D -NATIONAL REPORT TEMPLATE

1. INTRODUCTION *(Approx. 200 words)*

Briefly outline the overall country context related to ECEC, including key policies, children's attendance rates, ECEC staff-children rations and targeted measures to facilitate ECEC access of vulnerable groups of children. Use any relevant national research/document, as well as relevant comparative analyses (e.g., Eurydice's 2019 report - Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe).

2. FINDINGS FROM THE DESK RESEARCH (*Approx. 300-500 words*)

Present the findings from the desk research on the opportunities for initial and continued education for ECEC staff on topics concerning inclusive ECEC of children with intellectual disabilities and also the findings on strategies for involving children without intellectual disabilities, the parents and community members in creating a culture of inclusion in ECEC settings.

3. FINDINGS FROM THE KEY INTERVIEWS (*Approx. 600-800 words*)

3.1. Interview participants/Sample
Outline the number of participants, their demographic characteristics and background (including, age, education, work position and work experience)

3.2. Key findings
Present the analysis of the key findings from the key informant interviews. Participants' direct quotes can be used to illustrate some of the findings.

4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (*Approx. 200-300 words*)

Present the main conclusions stemming from the findings from the desk research and the key informant interviews, as well as your policy recommendations for (1) improving the quality of the initial education and training programmes for ECEC staff in the field of intellectual disabilities, (2) improving the strategies for involving different parties in the creation of an inclusive environment in ECEC settings.

FORMATIVE AND LAYOUT GUIDELINES

✓ Use the format as of this text (space: 1.15)

✓ For Headlines: Font: Calibri Light, size 14, Bold

✓ For main text: Font: Calibri Light, size 12

✓ Number tables in sequence. Each table should have a title that describes it accurately and briefly. Use the same format as with headline.