Good Practice Guide
to Inclusive Pre-School Education
in the Czech Republic, England, Slovakia and Wales
The good practice guide is one of the key outputs of the Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project: Supporting Social and Emotional Competences of Pre-school Children from Disadvantaged or Culturally Different Environments, co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union: 2014-1-CZ01-KA201-001988. It reviews pre-school education systems in four project partner countries: The Czech Republic, Slovakia, England and Wales. Although Wales is a region of the UK, it has had its own government since 1999 giving it a large degree of independence in terms of educational policy.

The guide includes a summary of basic background information on pre-school education provisions in the four countries, a summary of available statistical evidence, an overview of policy approaches, outcomes from a survey of preschool teachers and professionals conducted as a part of the project, and finally a series of examples of good practice from the partner countries. The report concludes with a comparative review of statistical evidence, implications of the survey outcomes, and recommendations for future analytical inquiry into the field of preschool education and Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This guide serves as a short summary of the rationale, findings, and good practice identified by the project. For more detailed information on ECEC and methods of teaching pre-school children within the partner countries, please refer to the full versions of reports available on-line from [www.scholaempirica.org](http://www.scholaempirica.org).
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The importance of pre-primary and early years education is increasingly recognized across Europe and has begun to be addressed in educational policies. Policy makers and academics are rethinking austere and deregulatory policies in the aftermath of the recent economic crisis that has resulted in sluggish growth and stagnating or even increasing poverty. What is emerging as the number one priority for achieving inclusive growth is human capital. Supported by the OECD, the World Bank, and most importantly the EU (European Commission, 2013), investment in education and training to increase and maintain human capital is seen as the way to achieve increasing productivity, employment and the sustainability of the welfare state.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a crucial part of building human capital, as what happens in children's early years is a key determinant of their tertiary educational outcomes (Cuhne and Heckman 2007), overall skill acquisition and learning (Cunha et al., 2006), overall educational attainment (Heckman, 2006), PISA scores (Esping-Andersen, 2015) and even better nutrition and physical health (Heckman, et al., 2006). In the short term high-quality ECEC results in smoother transition to primary education as children are better developed both emotionally and cognitively (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Barnett, 1996; Puma et al., 2012; Zupanic & Kavic, 2006; Kruszewska, 2011). The experience of socialization with peers in an ECEC setting is an important part of emotional development, promoting pro-social behavior and self-regulation (Sylva et al., 2004; Harrison et al., 2009; Sammons et al., 2007). The cognitive development that ECEC fosters can help children to be more goal-oriented, independent, focused, and to have generally better learning dispositions. Furthermore, as we know from the work of James Heckman, investing in the earliest educational stages brings the greatest economic and social returns over the lifecycle relative to primary, secondary and tertiary education (Heckman, 2006; Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). The European Commission fully acknowledges this finding and the body of research supporting it (European Commission, 2008), endorsing investments in ECEC, most recently in the “Social Investment Package” (European Commission, 2013).

Another key issue, and one that is addressed by this project, is the focus on improving the inclusiveness of education in order to reduce child poverty, increase the life chances of disadvantaged children and reduce the intergenerational transfer of poverty. This can be achieved directly via improved cognitive development as disadvantage children benefit from interacting with more successful peers (Hanushek, et al., 2003) and via improved access to ECEC (Dhuey, 2011). Improvements in cognitive development at a young age increase children's ability to leverage later education opportunities more than their not-disadvantaged peers (Peisner-Feinberg et al. 2001; Barnett, 1995; Dhuey, 2007; Lazzari & Vandenbroeck, 2013; Burger, 2010). ECEC also helps disadvantaged children indirectly, as when coupled with well-designed activating labor market policies it can increase female employment (Verbist, 2016; Simonsen, 2005), which in turn increases household income thereby reducing child poverty, especially in single-parent households (Esping-Andersen, 2015).

To maximize these positive effects, ECEC provisions have to be of high quality, which is largely determined by competences of the educational and support staff. Highly educated
and specifically trained ECEC professionals can establish positive interactions with children and help to provide a secure, consistent, sensitive, stimulating and rewarding environment (Eurydice, 2009a). Furthermore, emotionally supportive teachers find it easier to establish good relationships even with children that display undesirable behavior (Buyse et al., 2008) and, thus, help them to develop the emotional self-regulation skills crucial for their success in primary education and beyond (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004, Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2008). The competencies of ECEC practitioners depend both on their initial educational qualifications for this work and on ongoing training opportunities, ensuring constant learning and professionalization of staff, particularly in times of changing social needs. (CoRe, 2011). Unfortunately, as both published research and the project survey demonstrate, very few preschool teachers are trained to use evidence-based methods to support children's social and emotional development and even fewer are delivering evidence-based social and emotional curricula. (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002)

Another important aspect of ECEC quality is parental engagement. (Hindman, Skibbe, Miler & Zimmerman, 2010; Webster-Stratton, Reid & Hammond, 2004) Intensive parent-school interactions and parental participation in school activities have a positive impact on children's academic achievement, social competence and school engagement. (Battistich et al., 2004; Domina, 2005) Parental engagement in children's learning is one of the keys to maximizing the learning outcomes in the education process, because it positively affects children's holistic development and creates a stimulating home learning environment (Eurydice, 2009a; Sylva et al., 2004): For example, parental participation in activities such as arts and crafts at home is associated with children's literacy development (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002; Nord et al., 1999). Given the importance of parental involvement for achieving optimal developmental outcomes, teachers can influence the learning that happens at home by developing good relationships with parents and transferring evidence based good practice onto them.

Inspired by the wealth of evidence on the importance of good quality inclusive early education, this project reviewed some of the evidence-based preschool programmes in existence and facilitated a dialogue between preschool teachers from four partner countries (England, Wales, Czech Republic and Slovakia) and experts on the methods and approaches that support the development of social and emotional competences of pre-school children. This guide first reviews the institutional contexts in four partner countries and presents some data from national-level empirical research on inclusive preschool education (section 2). Section 3 presents survey data focused on the difficulties reported by teachers in preschools. The report then presents a summary of evidence-based preschool programmes that can help teachers with the problems that they identified in the aforementioned survey and briefly illustrates the main methods and strategies that were endorsed by this project (section 4). The teachers’ experiences with these methods were then evaluated to demonstrate whether these methods were successful at integrating disadvantaged children and at resolving the problems that teachers had reported (section 5). Finally, the report concludes with overall recommendations for future development of evidenced based ECEC in partner countries.
This section provides background information describing the preschool systems in partner countries focusing on eligible age, structure, funding and curricula. In England and Wales compulsory schooling begins at the start of the term following a child’s fifth birthday. However, all children are offered full time education from the start of the year in which they will become five (year 0). Parents can choose to delay their child’s entry to reception (year 0), until the term after their child becomes five, which for some children would not be until the start of the first year of compulsory schooling. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, compulsory school attendance starts at the beginning of the school year following a child’s sixth birthday. Children can also start school at age five, given that they will become six before the end of the first school year. Parental requests for an early start have to be approved by a counselor. The start of compulsory education can also be delayed by one year (until the age of 7) contingent on the approval of a counselor. Children that have yet to enter the first year of compulsory education are considered to be in pre-primary education for the purposes of this report.

The proportion of children under the age of six in the population is relatively high for the countries covered by this report: The EU average is 6.3%, while Slovakia has 6.4%, the Czech Republic 6.7% and the UK has the highest proportion of under six year olds with 7.5% (Wales and England are included in the UK figure). (European Commission, 2014) However, in the long term, even though birth rates are rising in all three countries, they are still significantly lower than the replacement rate (approx. 2.1): in 2012 Czech Republic had an average of 1.45 children per family or per woman, Slovakia 1.34, and UK 1.92. The actual numbers of children are expected to decrease, especially in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the estimated decrease in number of children under the age of 6 is between 17% and 22% by 2030. (European Commission, 2014)

In terms of structure, in England and Wales parents can choose to enroll their children with a range of service providers before they turn five. These different provisions target specific age groups, as shown in figure 2.1.
Despite having broadly similar structure to England, Wales has its own Ministry of Education and the uptake for the different facilities can vary. This is reflected in the attendance rates for the different facilities captured in table 2.1 (for England) and 2.2 (for Wales). The ISCED 0 and 1 statistic refers to pre-primary and primary education respectively.
Table 2.1: Attendance rate by pre-primary facility type in England.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 189)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2011</th>
<th>Under 3</th>
<th>3–4 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childminders</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day nursery</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup or pre-school</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery school</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery class attached to a primary or infant’s school</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DfE, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2011</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
<th>6 year-olds</th>
<th>7 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 0 *</td>
<td>85,7</td>
<td>67,4</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 1 *</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>29,7</td>
<td>98,5</td>
<td>99,2</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data for the United Kingdom (all parts). Source: Eurostat, UOE (data extracted November 2013)

Table 2.2: Attendance rate by pre-primary education type in Wales.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 190)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2009</th>
<th>Under 3</th>
<th>3–4 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childminders</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day nurseries/integrated children’s centres</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgroup or pre-school</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception class</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery school</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery class attached to a primary or infant’s school</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2011</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
<th>6 year-olds</th>
<th>7 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 0 *</td>
<td>85,7</td>
<td>67,4</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>(-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 1 *</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>29,7</td>
<td>98,5</td>
<td>99,2</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data for the United Kingdom (all parts). Source: Eurostat, UOE (data extracted November 2013)
In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, before preschool children can be placed in “crèche” programmes followed by preschool provider selected by the parents. There is also an important one-year “preparatory” class for children who need help when transitioning from preschool to primary school – this preparatory class is an official part of the pre-school. The pre-primary education structure in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is illustrated in figures 2.2 and 2.3 respectively.

Figure 2.2: Structure of pre-primary education in the Czech Republic.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 165)
Figure 2.3: Structure of pre-primary education in Slovakia.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 186)

Even though figures 2.2 and 2.3 are similar, there are significant differences mainly in the absence of legal entitlement in Slovakia and much longer childcare leave available to parents in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, attendance statistics are only available as an aggregate for all forms of preschool provisions. These are presented in tables 2.3 (for Czech Republic) and 2.4 (for Slovakia).
Table 2.3: Attendance rate by pre-primary education type in the Czech Republic.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 165)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2012/2013</th>
<th>2 year-olds</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mateřská škola</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSU & MEYS, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2011</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
<th>6 year-olds</th>
<th>7 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 0</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 1</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat, UOE (data extracted November 2013)

Table 2.4: Attendance rate by pre-primary education type in Slovakia.
Source: (European Commission, 2014: 186)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2012/2013</th>
<th>1 year-olds</th>
<th>2 year-olds</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
<th>6 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materská škola</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CSU & MEYS, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(%) Reference year 2011</th>
<th>3 year-olds</th>
<th>4 year-olds</th>
<th>5 year-olds</th>
<th>6 year-olds</th>
<th>7 year-olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 0</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCED 1</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>92.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat, UOE (data extracted November 2013)

From these figures and tables it is clear that the structure and attendance rates are very similar between Czech Republic and Slovakia and between England and Wales. However, there are significant differences between these “pairs”- the most significant one being the age of children entering primary education in the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Virtually no five year olds and only about half of all six year olds attend primary education, compared to the 98.5% of five year olds attending primary education in England and Wales.

With regards to funding, in the UK all 4-year-olds are entitled to 15 hours funded early education per week since 1998. This provision was extended to all 3-year-olds in 2004. Although not compulsory, this entitlement is used by over 95% of 3- and 4-year-olds. In the most economically deprived areas of England, Wales and Northern Ireland this legal entitlement is extended to 2-year-olds. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, preschools are largely
state funded, with the final year of pre-school before entering primary education (5-6-years-olds) being compulsory and fully funded (in case of financial hardship provision for younger children can also be fully subsidized).

With regards to national-level curricula, in England the government provides Early Years curriculum guidance on delivering integrated education and care for children from birth to age 5; and a reformed regulatory framework to raise quality. The guidelines on good practice and standards are part of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England. In Wales the Early Years Foundation Phase extends to 7 year olds and both are compulsory. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there are national level priorities stated in the Education Framework Programme (Rámcový vzdělávací programme, RVP), but preschools have a lot of freedom, especially when it comes to integrating socioeconomically disadvantaged children.

All partner countries have institutions that inspect schools and preschools. In England early years facilities are inspected by the government-funded Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and in Wales by her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training (Estyn). The results of both Ofsted and Estyn inspections are publicly available on the internet. The Czech Republic and Slovakia both have national „Schools Inspection” institutions, that review preschools at variable intervals (inspection cycles).

Finally, a specific focus of the project was to report on the state of empirical research and available statistics related to the determinants of preschool exclusion. Output 1 of the project presents an overview of these determinants. The main conclusion is that four partner countries face somewhat similar issues, but adopt different approaches to dealing with them. For example, in England there are two primary determinants of exclusion from, or poor outcomes in, preschool, namely ethnicity and household income. In Wales the focus is heavily on poverty and deprivation, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia the main determinants identified are preschool capacity and ethnicity. In terms of ethnicity the focus seems to be largely on the Roma community (particularly in the Czech Republic and Slovakia but also in Wales), whose members are traditionally excluded from preschool education. It is worth noting that the relevant variables, such as poverty, household income, living in deprived areas, or belonging to Roma (or other excluded) ethnicity are correlated with each other. Despite difference in focus, the coping strategies are actually somewhat similar, for instance the Welsh focus on poverty and the most deprived localities in Wales to help excluded ethnic minorities along with other disadvantaged populations. Establishing causality between any of these variables and preschool exclusion is therefore a very difficult task for which the relevant statistics are not available.
Besides the institutional context, the situation in preschools themselves and the problems that teachers face are also highly relevant to the quality of ECEC provision in the four partner countries. This section presents data from the survey carried out by the project coordinator Schola Empirica (Czech Republic) in cooperation with partner organizations Open School (Slovakia) and Tiny Signers (England). The aim of the survey was to identify the needs of preschool teachers working with children from culturally different or socially disadvantaged environments in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the UK. In addition, the data yielded important information for the design and implementation of training programmes for pre-school teachers in order to support their professional development. The survey methodology was based on a semi-structured questionnaire, which was completed by pre-school teachers selected according to four criteria: Firstly the respondents had to cooperate with one of the project partner organizations (Open School, in Slovakia, Schola Empirica and Pedagogical Faculty of Masaryk University in the Czech Republic and Tiny Signers in Bradford, UK), secondly only publically funded preschool providers were recruited, thirdly respondents experienced in work with disadvantaged children were preferred and finally, the location of the preschool provider had to come from a “disadvantaged” region (by respective national definitions). In total, 126 questionnaires from pre-school teachers and education staff were collected, 48 from the Czech Republic, 41 from Slovakia and 37 from the UK. The sample consisted mainly of full-time teachers, but also included some advisors, part-time teachers and head teachers.

When designing and testing the survey questionnaire the problem of defining children from socially disadvantaged or culturally different environments arose, as there are no common or official criteria to define such children in the three examined countries. Identifying children as socioeconomically disadvantaged was thus left up to the experience of participating teachers, meaning that the samples might not be entirely comparable. The exception is the UK, where social disadvantage is clearly defined and refers to specific income criteria that entitle children to free school meals. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia these children are often defined as children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The survey included questions to provide background information on both the teachers and the children teachers’ work with. The majority of respondents in Slovakia were very experienced, with more than 20 years of work experience. The respondents in the Czech and UK samples were less experienced than in Slovakia, but majority still had more than three years of experience (see Figure 3.1).
The numbers of children teachers work with during a day in pre-school setting varies considerably across three countries. The majority of teachers in UK reported working with groups of 11–20 (and more) children, whereas in Slovakia teachers/staff more often work with groups of 2–5 children within a classroom of more children (see Figure 3.2). It is important to bear in mind that the structure of group work is also different and the high percentage of teachers reporting to work with groups of 2–5 students in Slovakia and the Czech Republic do not necessarily have a class of that size, but perhaps prefer to help children on a more individual basis, while the rest can play on their own. This is also apparent from figure 3.3, which shows that the average number of children that teachers are responsible for is around 20 for the UK and Slovakia and 26 for the Czech Republic. More importantly, figure 3.3 shows the proportion of children that teachers would label as socially or culturally disadvantaged.
Figure 3.2: Size of the group teachers work with

How big is the group of children you usually work with?

- More than 20 children: 2% United Kingdom, 22% Slovakia, 30% Czech Republic
- 11–12 children: 43% United Kingdom, 30% Slovakia, 8% Czech Republic
- 6–10 children: 1% United Kingdom, 14% Slovakia, 34% Czech Republic
- 2–5 children: 21% United Kingdom, 34% Slovakia, 32% Czech Republic
- Individual work: 3% United Kingdom, 2% Slovakia, 41% Czech Republic
Figure 3.3: Classroom sizes and percentage of socially disadvantaged or culturally different children

The average total number of children and the average percentage of children from socially disadvantaged or culturally different environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Average Total Number of Children</th>
<th>Average Percentage of Children from Socially Disadvantaged or Culturally Different Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The substantial difference in proportion of children from socially disadvantaged or culturally different environments does not represent the real picture in three countries; rather, it illuminates the situation in the pre-school settings included in the survey. The majority of surveyed preschools in Slovakia were located in poor and socially excluded areas around Zdar nad Hronom, where the project partner organization is operating.

After describing teachers' professional backgrounds and their classrooms, the survey identified three main problems that teachers faced in their everyday work. The first problem was that children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), defined very broadly, are much more demanding (figure 3.4). This is an issue for most respondents who identified the lack of teaching assistants or the lack of an “individualized” teaching approach as the main areas in which they would like to see improvement. Many of the respondents teach classes of over ten children (some even over 20), which makes it very difficult for them to focus on individual children, even if they need individual attention.
The second problem was the undesirable behavior some children display in classrooms, more specifically aggression, emotional instability, bullying, and insufficient hygiene (figure 3.5). Emotional instability and signs of aggression are reported by most respondents as an occasional occurrence, but some even report it to happen quite often or often. Children exhibiting this type of behavior lack the necessary “emotional maturity” and self-regulation skills to understand what their feelings in a way that would enable them to cope with them in a controlled way. Incidents of aggression do not imply deliberate behavior rather they are indicators of children’s inability to process their own feelings, recognize the feelings of others and try to resolve the situation in a reasonable way. The last problem of insufficient hygiene is an issue that is likely rooted in the lack of emphasis on good hygiene in the child’s household, or the lack of resources necessary for good hygiene in a child’s household.
Figure 3.5: Behavior problems in children

**Aggressiveness of children**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite often</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very often</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Lack of basic hygiene skills**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite often</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very often</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Signs of emotional instability

- not at all
  - United Kingdom: 31%
  - Slovakia: 31%
  - Czech Republic: 11%
- occasionally
  - United Kingdom: 51%
  - Slovakia: 52%
  - Czech Republic: 23%
- quite often
  - United Kingdom: 13%
  - Slovakia: 12%
  - Czech Republic: 23%
- very often
  - United Kingdom: 5%
  - Slovakia: 2%
  - Czech Republic: 2%

Bullying by children

- not at all
  - United Kingdom: 38%
  - Slovakia: 47%
  - Czech Republic: 47%
- occasionally
  - United Kingdom: 24%
  - Slovakia: 50%
  - Czech Republic: 53%
- quite often
  - United Kingdom: 13%
  - Slovakia: 24%
  - Czech Republic: 23%
- very often
  - United Kingdom: 22%
The third identified problem was the **different understanding of the importance of education** and the expectations of behavior that children are exposed to in their own households. This can lead to other problems such as **frequent absence from classroom, disinterested parents, or difficulties when communicating with parents** (figure 3.6).

**Figure 3.6: Attendance and parental involvement**

*Frequent absence of children*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>53 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
<td>17 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>59 %</td>
<td>37 %</td>
<td>57 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite often</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td>19 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very often</td>
<td>6 %</td>
<td>12 %</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uninterested parents

Different concept of education in family
A significant number of professionals reported that children had poor role models at home and brought **improper habits from home** to school. A significant number of professionals also reported experiencing **language barriers** when communicating with the child (figure 3.7).
Figure 3.7: Improper habits and language barriers

Child with improper habits brought from the family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite often</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very often</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Language barrier in communication with the child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not at all</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quite often</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very often</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey further focused on the issue of cooperation with parents, which was for the most part rated as good (figure 3.8)

**Figure 3.8: Is the cooperation with parents good?**

![Bar chart showing cooperation with parents]

Participants from the UK seem to be the most positive about their cooperation with parents, whereas there was poorer cooperation with parents in Slovakia and the Czech Republic as well as an inability of teachers to meet the educational expectations of parents. This lack of communication can be largely attributed to the methods used for communication, as 94–95 % of teachers/staff in the Czech Republic and Slovakia post messages for parents on notice boards in the pre-school hall, whereas in UK the most frequent method to communicate information to parents is by regular letters and individual notes. 75% of Czech teachers use a website to share the information with parents, but do not write e-mails to parents, whereas 30% of teachers in UK also write regular e-mails to parents (figure 3.9).
Figure 3.9: Channels of Communication with Parents

- **irregular e-mails and letters**: 13% United Kingdom, 27% Slovakia, 3% Czech Republic
- **questionnaire for parents**: 25% United Kingdom, 25% Slovakia, 3% Czech Republic
- **your pre-school facebook**: 13% United Kingdom, 8% Slovakia, 3% Czech Republic
- **notice boards in your pre-school**: 68% United Kingdom, 83% Slovakia, 75% Czech Republic
- **website of your pre-school**: 68% United Kingdom, 83% Slovakia, 75% Czech Republic
- **regular letters and notes for parents**: 2% United Kingdom, 8% Slovakia, 8% Czech Republic
- **regular e-mails to parents**: 30% United Kingdom, 8% Slovakia, 8% Czech Republic
The activities that teachers/staff introduce to support parental engagement vary from country to country and are, to some extent, determined by the regulations in education policies and available resources. The majority of Czech and Slovak teachers and pre-school staff organize regular class meetings with parents, during which they deliver key information about organizational issues in relation to their pre-school. The second most frequent activity, as indicated by the Czech teachers, were thematic afternoons with parents in pre-school. These are usually dedicated to some kind of creative activities and musical performances. 65% of teachers/staff in the Czech Republic organize one-on-one meetings with parents, whereas there are no such meetings arranged in Slovakia. By contrast, in the UK, the most frequent form of communication with parents is a one-on-one meeting. It is also quite common for parents to be directly involved in the pre-school activities during the day (as volunteers) and some preschools in the UK organize parent group meetings in their pre-school. In the UK it is also common to make household visits, especially where small children are involved, which is culturally unacceptable in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. A full breakdown of activities is presented in figure 3.10.
Figure 3.10: Activities to Encourage Parents Participation

- **shared lunches/coffee meetings**: United Kingdom (20%), Slovakia (10%), Czech Republic (10%)
- **visits to households**: United Kingdom (30%), Slovakia (19%), Czech Republic (23%)
- **trips with parents**: United Kingdom (35%), Slovakia (23%), Czech Republic (10%)
- **training for parents**: United Kingdom (27%), Slovakia (19%), Czech Republic (10%)
- **regular parents group meetings**: United Kingdom (38%), Slovakia (10%), Czech Republic (10%)
- **regular one-to-one meetings with parents**: United Kingdom (58%), Slovakia (8%), Czech Republic (8%)
- **parent involvement in pre-school daily activities**: United Kingdom (45%), Slovakia (33%), Czech Republic (65%)
- **afternoons (trips etc.) with parents**: United Kingdom (85%), Slovakia (24%), Czech Republic (18%)
- **one-to-one meetings**: United Kingdom (93%), Slovakia (65%), Czech Republic (88%)
- **class meetings**: United Kingdom (92%), Slovakia (66%), Czech Republic (88%)
Teachers in all three countries agreed that, in order to encourage cooperation with parents, it is important to use special methods to involve parents in pre-school activities, write emails and letters to parents as well as arrange personal meetings. In Slovakia, teachers/pre-school staff involved in the survey reported “catching the parents in the pre-school hall”, which is a common and potentially hostile method of initiating conversations with parents. In the UK teachers rather try to invite parents to attend parent group meetings or make individual appointments.
The institutional contexts and problems described above led the project to design and implement a set of methods and good practices to support teachers’ professional development in four partner countries. This set of methods presented in this part of report is inspired mainly by the American Incredible Years® programme (Webster-Stratton, 2011), that has been delivered and extensively evaluated by the Center for Evidence Based Early Intervention, CEBEI in Wales (partner organization of the current project), and by the Tiny Signers, programme developed by the British Tiny Signers partner organization. The Incredible Years set of programmes is complex, well-structured and comprehensive, and includes interventions for teachers, children, and parents. This set of programmes has been rigorously evaluated over the last 30+ years in multiple studies including randomized control trials in a large number of different contexts and countries. The body of literature on the effects of “Incredible Years” programmes is too large to be summarized in its entirety, but can be accessed via www.incredibleyears.com website. Independent relocations of the programmes have demonstrated effective outcomes both in developed and developing countries (Baker-Henningham, et al., 2009). The programmes are more effective than eclectic treatment (Taylor et al., 1998), they have reduced child behavioral problems and shown positive economic returns on investment (O’Neill et al., 2013), and they are able to help children with many specific disorders, including ADHD (Azevedo et al., 2014). The Incredible Years programmes for teachers and children have also shown promise in enhancing teachers classroom management strategies and children’s behavioral and emotional difficulties (Hutchings et al., 2013). The programmes have been shown to benefit disadvantaged children, reducing their externalizing behaviors, as well improving parenting behavior (Hutchings et al., 2007; Hartman et al., 2002).

The Tiny Signers programme has promise for providing valuable classroom management tools. The problem of preschool capacity cannot be addressed by teaching methods (as that would require hiring more staff), but managing a classroom correctly can reduce the perceived need for extra staff. Tiny Signers uses the British sign language fundamentals to teach teachers and children to communicate using signs. This does not imply that teachers will talk less to the children, as signing is used in conjunction with spoken language. Signing has been shown to captivate children’s attention and keep them focused (Felzer, 2000) and, to help communication with children who otherwise face a language barrier, or to accelerate communication with children suffering from language impairment. Other evaluations show, for example, improved scores on IQ tests when children who have experienced early signing reach eight years of age (Acredolo & Goodwyn, 2000), improved language capabilities of children (Goodwyn, et al., 2000) and better emotional development, especially if parents also use signing with their child at home (Vallotton, 2012). This makes Tiny Signers a useful programme to complement Incredible Years as it further supports inclusivity by facilitating the communication between children who are not fluent in the language of instruction or have other impairments.

Inspired by the Incredible Years® and Tiny Signers programmes, the preschool teachers who participated in training and monitoring activities as a part of the current project were taught new methods and approaches to help them cope with the difficulties they face in
their work environments. It is important to note that it is not possible to outline one clearly delineated methodology as “the one” that all of the participating teachers were taught since different courses in the participating countries introduce different methods, strategies and concepts to preschool education. A large part of the project was to facilitate teachers’ dialogue with relevant experts, in which teachers highlighted different problems and took away different insights. Despite this, it is possible to provide some illustrative components of good practice. These activities and good practices fall into five main categories: respecting the rules, coping with aggression and self-control, establishing relationships, signing, and cooperating with parents.
4.1 Respecting the rules

**Example activity:** What we should not forget

**Organization:** Mixed group work (4–6 children) and a whole-classroom discussion

**Difficulty:** Intermediate to advanced

**Materials:** Pencils, crayons and (color coded) cards to draw on

Children will be split into groups and discuss amongst themselves the rules they would like to have in place in the classroom. They will draw these rules as simple pictograms, for example, the rule to be quiet can be a raised finger over the mouth. The teachers will provide guidance and assistance, possibly supplying some “example rules” to begin with, but the children should ultimately come up with these rules themselves to internalize them better. The rules should be formulated in a positive way: without using negative/prohibitive vocabulary, “for example “no running in the classroom” should be replaced by “use your walking feet”. To make this exercise more interactive, pieces of paper can be color coded as either green (positive behavior, such as raising your hand and cleaning up after yourself) or red (negative behavior such as shouting or fighting). Following the group session, the entire class will convene and the proposed rules will be placed on a board, grouped by whether they represent negative or positive behavior. Then, the teachers and children debate, which rules are good and which are not, eventually coming up with a set of rules for the classroom that everybody should follow. This discussion should also include the question of why the children drew certain behaviors in the way they did, and also what are the consequences for breaking the set rules. The rules that are adopted can also be voted on.

**Examples of rules:** Helping each other; listening to each other; being nice to each other; listen when someone is talking; using nice words; washing your hands before meals; staying in pairs when outside; listening to the teachers; greeting the teacher and children in the morning with a handshake; cleaning up after yourself; tiding up toys after play.

**Benefits:** Children will learn how to debate and set rules as a group; internalize them better by “drawing” and exercising them. In case a child breaks the set rules, the drawing should help explain why his or her behavior was not nice and not right.
4.2 Aggression and self-control

**Example activity:** How am I feeling today?
**Organization:** Group work (8 – 10 children)
**Difficulty:** Intermediate

Children sit in a circle and are asked to “rate” how they are feeling today using their fingers (10 fingers up means very happy and no raised fingers means very sad). This helps children to understand their own feelings and gives the teachers, as well as children, the option to cheer up those at the bottom of the spectra.

**Alternative 1:** A “tree of feelings” will be set up in the classroom and every morning children attach a smiley face to their picture/symbol on the tree (visually the tree can have “apples” and signs that represent each child). The range of smileys can be a traditional green, yellow, and red, but can also include moods such as sadness, anger, etc.

**Materials:** A pin board with a tree on it and children’s pictures/symbols. Smiley faces (cards)

**Benefits:** Young children often do not express their feelings, but it is very important to acknowledge that they are heavily affected by what is happening in their life outside of preschool. Peers, but more importantly teachers, need to be aware of the moods and problems that children bring to the preschool from home in order to help them.

**Alternative 2:** A “feelings board” will be set up in the classroom by the teachers. This board will have three basic feelings on it: happy/content, sad, and angry. In the morning children pin their symbol or picture in one of the three categories, and also have the option to move their symbol/picture into a different feeling area throughout the day as their mood changes.

**Materials:** A “feelings board” (can be normal pin board with three large color coded pieces of paper). Symbols or photos of all children.

**Benefits:** Children will further understanding of their feelings and will start to understand what causes certain feelings, as they and their peers indicate a change in mood through the day.
4.3 Establishing relationships

Example activity: I want to know you better
Organization: Entire classroom
Difficulty: Intermediate
Materials: Ball or a favorite toy

This activity is best used as one of the first activities of the day, as a form of a “warming up” for social interactions during the day. The children and their teacher sit in a circle and pass around a ball. Whenever a child receives the ball, they have to say something about themself; this should not only be limited to names, but should include favorite colors, favorite toys, or any other topic that comes to mind. Children and the teacher can also say why they are passing the ball to someone by highlighting something nice about them (eg. I am passing the ball to Lucy, because she shared a toy with Anna yesterday/me). Teachers can also use this activity to involve and compliment children that are less popular in the class, by passing the ball to them and saying something nice about them.

Alternative: A child will select one of their favorite toys from home (a small one) and together with parents prepare small talk about the toy (where they got it, what it is, why they like it). They will then bring it to school and share this with other children. Children can also share toys afterwards.

Benefits: A good “informative” start to the day. Children will learn more about their peers, helping them to form relationships with them and understand them better throughout the day.
4.4 Signing

Signing is not really something that can be summarized as an activity; it is something that should be integrated into generic classroom activities and daily routines. However, it is possible to give an example of a few signs and to outline a few good uses of signing. An example of signing a greeting to the children is: “Hello children, it is nice to see you.”

Signing can be used to calm the classroom. Instead of introducing instructions over the voices of twenty children, the teacher can begin singing and signing a song to get children’s attention, lowering his or her voice until everyone is just signing silently. The teacher can also communicate with children who are far away without shouting – signing can be used at times when it is inappropriate to be loud, like nap time. For example: if the teacher is reading a story or teaching a lesson, instead of interrupting with: “Can I go to the toilet”, the children can make eye contact and sign.

Another use of signing is helping children express their emotions, making learning signs for feelings an early priority. Signs for feelings can be dramatic and use a lot of facial expression, so that children enjoy making them and emotion is conveyed clearly enough to be easily understood. This gives children alternative ways to express themselves emotionally without fighting; they can use their bodies to make a dramatic sign like furious, angry, or frustrated (allowing them to do something physical, but not destructive).

Lastly, signing is useful in helping children with certain developmental challenges. With children who have language delays signing will help to increase their communication skills, both in terms of understanding and being understood. This increase in communication can help to avoid frustration and behavioral issues, and improves interaction with other children. For autistic children who find it difficult to process spoken language sign language facilitates understanding and signs can be used as visual reminders to give directions or explain an activity. Using signing also benefits children who are ‘active learners’; children who are very active and cannot sit still. Signing helps these children focus and calm down by engaging all their senses.
4.5 Cooperating with parents

Cooperating with parents, like signing, is something that should be happening continuously and cannot be reduced to an “activity”. Furthermore, the barriers to smooth cooperation with parents can be very varied, meaning that the approach a teacher should adopt also varies from context to context. Despite this, establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents is a crucial part of the overall preschool experience for the children, making it an important priority for teachers. The biggest problems often arise in communicating with parents of socioeconomically excluded children (as they are likely to be socioeconomically excluded themselves).

Good practice for reaching these parents is through professionals who can offer assistance from different governmental agencies (social services, education, welfare services, employment departments, etc.) and who can ideally visit the most at-risk or deprived households. For preschools, an effective strategy would be to cooperate with such professionals to the fullest extent, as they can be an important factor in children completely excluded from preschool joining, as well as in encouraging parents to provide an environment more conducive to development and education of children. However, this is more of a managerial-level strategy.

At the classroom level the good practice varies, but some activities have generated positive results, such as inviting a parent to be a “teacher for a day”. This tends to be more work for the teacher, as they have to help the parent (some children can be disruptive in the presence of a new “teacher” who cannot control the classroom so well). However, these activities can prove very beneficial for the cooperation between parents and school, and many parents who have tried to be a teacher for the day have understood the preschool environment better as well learned how to complement it better at home.
There are significant differences between the four participating partner countries as well as within the specific regions or even individual preschools, making it difficult to label one set of activities as “good practice”. Furthermore, teachers structure the classroom experience differently, requiring methods to be adapted to fit the local experience as seamlessly as possible; if an activity is very different to what the children are used to it disturbs the daily schedule and the children might not react well. Teachers’ experiences with the methods and techniques introduced by this project were assessed via a survey, which provides evidence for how the methods were adjusted: For example, teachers in the UK integrated some of the insights on behavioral and classroom management into their regular activities (singing time, tidy up time, playtime, etc.), whereas teachers in the Czech Republic implemented special activities to support social and emotional development of children (talking about feelings, establishing new contacts) – activities that were already occurring in the UK within the foundation phase curriculum. Because of this it was not possible to evaluate individual activities and the evaluation part of the project reports on teachers’ experiences as a whole, aggregating and analyzing the feedback on all of the activities that teachers have applied in their settings.

The evaluation of activities was based on monitoring sheets filled in by teachers involved in the project: 35 monitoring sheets were gathered from pre-school teachers in the Czech Republic, 25 from Slovakia and 55 from England. The evaluation consisted largely of ratings of different aspects of activities on a five-point scale, with five denoting the best score (“excellent”) and one denoting the worst score (“poor”). There are two main aspects relevant for this evaluation, the first being the outcomes from the activities themselves (figure 5.1), for which the three relevant criteria were solving the addressed problem (such as aggressive children or other types of problematic behavior), integrating disadvantaged children, and educational outcomes (for all participating children). In general, the evaluations were good for all three criteria (averaging around 4), of which solving the addressed problem rated highest. Of the three the educational outcomes criteria received the lowest mean rating at 3.88 but that can be understood, given that many of the methods endorsed by this project had to do with integrating children or managing the classroom better. These are the underpinning skills that subsequently lead to academic attainment and are not necessarily focused on short-term educational outcomes with the rationale that more inclusive and controlled environment will foster better educational outcomes in the future.
The second part of the assessment evaluated how children behaved during the activities, focusing on participation and cooperation with the teacher as well as with other children (figure 5.2). These criteria were also evaluated very positively, with cooperation with other children receiving the lowest average of 3.58. However, given that problem of establishing and maintaining relationships between children is one of the largest one in preschool classrooms, it is positive and encouraging that even on this criterion the mean rating is positive. A better evaluation would have been to assess improvements in children’s behavior, but given the short timeframe of the implementation phase of the project longer-term monitoring data was not possible to obtain.
Perhaps the most important outcome from the evaluation relates to children’s behavior during activities in general, but also specifically to outcomes for disadvantaged children (figure 5.3). According to teacher observations, disadvantaged children on average perform worse on all three criteria, but the differences in the means are not very large, suggesting that the methods and activities endorsed by the project are inclusive. Again, disadvantaged children in general tend to participate less and cooperate less than their peers, meaning that a longer-term evaluation of any change in their behavior would provide a more valid assessment, which the timeframe of this project does not allow for. Another limitation is that no assessment of children was undertaken prior to the implementation of the project strategies. Therefore, it is impossible to observe the change in behavioral patterns of children introduced activities might have caused.

Figure 5.3: Children’s behavior during the activities disaggregated for disadvantaged children

The three criteria of participation, cooperation with the teacher and cooperation with peers can be also disaggregated by country (figure 5.4), showing that there are consistent differences across the three criteria as observed by the teachers. Teachers from the Czech Republic were the most positive about children’s behavior and teachers from the UK were the least positive (despite still evaluating the methods positively on average). It is also apparent that cooperation with other children remains the most problematic aspect, averaging over four only in evaluations from the Czech Republic. However, children participated and cooperated with the teacher extremely well, especially in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, where the average rating is around four and a half (between good and excellent). It is possible that existing inclusive methods in the UK mean that children already had higher levels of these skills and therefore less room for improvement.
A qualitative analysis (based on questions where teachers could highlight the successes and problems in their own words) corroborates that teacher in different countries made use of the different project methods. In the Czech Republic the most commonly adopted methods were associated with establishing and maintaining relationships and developing empathy, in Slovakia the focus was on talking about and understanding feelings and in the UK the most used practices have to do with the management of challenging behavior. Some activities such as supporting and careful praising of positive behavior, ignoring unwanted behavior, creating and teaching classroom rules, and various forms of “roleplay” (eg. using dolls and toys) were all evaluated positively. Among the difficulties reported by teachers were issues of internalization of new classroom management tools: For example, some teachers reported not being used to ignoring disruptive behavior and praising good behavior and, therefore, especially in stressful situations they tended to revert back to their old habits. Teachers seemed to be positive about the personal change these methods are bringing, but also acknowledge that they needed more time to internalize these methods, especially if they are to teach them to their colleagues. Another problem reported was that some teachers had significantly different approaches to the education of pre-school children and were not receptive of new ideas. This is challenging for children, since being confronted with different strategies and approaches from teachers can confuse them.

In the Czech Republic some of the implemented activities were recorded on video and the analysis of these recordings revealed that Czech teachers had acquired a number of new skills during their involvement in the project, specifically:
→ Commenting on and describing children’s activities without asking many questions: suggesting different strategies or solutions.
→ Targeted praising: being specific in praising children, always for a concrete immediate action or movement, achievement or change in behaviour noticed by the teacher.
→ Teaching children to praise each other
→ Saying, „thank you“ to children: specifically for helping the teacher or each other or other positive behaviour that teachers notice.
→ Discussing with children the consequences of different behaviours and what feelings they could evoke. How would children feel in certain situations?
→ Using activities presented during this project and adapting them to make them more fun for children or to help children to internalize certain concepts better
→ Giving precise instructions and positive commands
→ Using puppets to establish contacts with children and involving children with integration difficulties
→ Organizing individual meetings with parents.

These new abilities are examples of the activities and methods endorsed by the project, showing that it is possible for teachers to adopt some of them and use them in a classroom even in a relatively short space of time.
As the outcomes of the project have demonstrated, the four partner countries are all very different in their institutional structure, national strategies, ages of children involved in ECEC and the problems that teachers face. Despite this, the key motivation for improving preschool education and making it more inclusive is similar: To effectively develop human capital of our children allowing them to thrive in the knowledge-based economy and to foster equity from the very start of the life course providing every child with an opportunity to succeed in life. The ECEC provisions within the four countries focus on slightly different determinants of exclusion, but the determinants of disadvantage within each situation are highly correlated and the national policies and strategies are essentially tackling the same problem of academic underachievement.

The problems that teachers face in partner countries are somewhat different, with some problems more pronounced in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (such as insufficient hygiene skills, different conceptions of education among families, and low take-up or frequent absences from pre-school). These are much less pronounced in the UK, as is the emphasis that teachers place on the need to hire more staff and to have a more individualized approach. However, all of the three problems identified by the survey (capacity, behavioral problems, and parental involvement) are reported from teachers in all three countries. These problems may not be major, but all countries are aware of their importance and that there is room for improvement. The fact that these problems are not that pronounced in the UK where policies for more inclusive education are better embedded, provides a possible explanation for why the teachers’ experiences of implementing project strategies were on average less positive (despite still being positive).

The methods, that are the central focus of this project, are derived from evidence-based programmes that have proved to be effective in a variety of contexts and in dealing with the specific problems identified in partner countries. The fact that the activities were positively evaluated by all partner countries attests to the applicability of these evidence-based methods. Despite the positive evaluations, it is important to recognize the limitations that the project evaluations faced: Not all teachers participated in final evaluations and only a small number of preschool providers were involved from each country in all of the project activities (training of teachers, application of new methods and monitoring), partly due to monetary and time constraints. More rigorous pre- and post-intervention evaluation would be needed to demonstrate clear positive benefits of the chosen methods on children’s behavior, as well as their social and emotional development. Teacher reports are not a good proxy for actual cognitive development and were also subjective. The best test of such methods would be an independent randomized controlled trial or a quasi-experimental study design implemented by independent researchers and involving objective assessment of children’s social and academic skills.

The goal of this project was to establish the case for a further, more rigorous implementation and evaluation of evidence based interventions at the preschool level in the context of Czech Republic, Slovakia, England and Wales. This project was largely an exploratory effort to establish a comparative baseline and examine whether the four partner countries shared
common problems and whether these problems could be addressed using evidence-based methods. Such interventions have been adopted and evaluated to some extent in the UK and Wales, but in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, partly due to the very de-centralized educational structure and broad national-level curricula, no such interventions have yet been implemented. Despite this project being a pilot exploration and implementation of new strategies, its significance should not be downplayed. 45 teachers and education staff from four countries have been trained in some of the best evidence-based strategies available and they (and the children in their classrooms) have benefited from participation in project activities, hopefully also transferring the best practice onto their colleagues.


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Pre-school and kindergarten classrooms are among the earliest social environments that a child encounters outside of the family. For young children with different cultural backgrounds and social disadvantages, this transition can be a challenging one. Therefore, it is important that programmes are in place in early educational institutions to facilitate the integration of such special needs children with their peers and thereby promote social development across the board. Evidence indicates that such programmes, if executed properly and at an early age, help to negate pre-existing obstacles for young children with special needs and have a positive long-term impact on their social and emotional development, as well as academic capabilities.

In this spirit, the strategic partnership among educational organizations from Czech Republic, England, Slovakia and Wales aimed at the development and implementation of innovative methodologies for the inclusion and adjustment of children with special needs, especially those coming from socially disadvantaged or culturally different environments. Instead of considering disadvantaged children to be an insurmountable challenge, ECEC practitioners must be familiar with effective ways to integrate and address the individual needs of such children. This includes familiarity with techniques for dealing with the many different kinds of behavioral difficulties children may have as well establishing partnership with parents.

Therefore, the strategic partnership project targeted at development of new curriculum consisting of inclusive activities for pre-school children, methodological instruments and tools, and training program for pre-school teachers enabling them to use the methodology to support social and emotional competencies of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Further, project activities included the implementation of training for pre-school teachers and education staff, introduction of inclusive methods and activities in pre-school settings in partner countries, and monitoring and evaluation of their impact on children behavior.

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Project Coordinator: Schola Empirica z.s., Czech Republic
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in the Czech Republic, England, Slovakia and Wales

Coordinating Author: Egle Havrdova, PhD. (Schola Empirica)
Contributing Authors:
Prof. Judy Hutchings, Ph.D. (CEBEI – Bangor University)
Gwilym Siôn Ap Gruffudd (Bangor University)
Shân Elin Williams (Bangor University)
Mojca Williams (Tiny Signers)
Simon Vydra (Schola Empirica)
Janka Handzelová, Ph.D. (Škola dokorán-Wide Open School)
Zora Syslová, Ph.D. (Masaryk University)

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