

# THE IMPACT OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICES ON THE QUALITY OF ECEC SERVICES



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#### PROJECT CONSORTIUM:



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## Table of Contents

### 4 REC OVERVIEW - ABOUT THIS REPORT

#### About the REC Partnership

### 6 REC PROJECT - BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

#### Timeline of the project

#### Local Contexts

● Belgium

● Croatia

● Slovenia

● Hungary

### 16 METHODOLOGY

● Questions

● Data collection

● Results

### 22 CHALLENGES

### 24 SUSTAINABILITY

### 25 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION-RELATED DECISION MAKERS AND LEADERS TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE REFLECTIVE METHODS, BASED ON REC EXPERIENCES

### 28 REFERENCES

### 29 ANNEX

1. Endline survey questionnaires

2. Endline survey answers

3. Final MSC stories selected by panels





## REC OVERVIEW- ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report set out to observe what happens when group reflection methods are introduced in the professional practices of educators<sup>1</sup> working with children between 0-10 years. The programme called Reflection, Education, Care - Strengthening collaborative and reflective teaching practice - Increasing Quality Services in ECEC (hereafter REC) was carried out between September 2020 – August 2023 in 10 ECEC centres/schools in Croatia, Belgium (Flanders), Hungary and Slovenia.

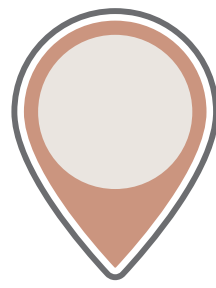
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1 Due to variety of terms used in different European countries for professionals who work with children in ECEC and primary schools, the consortium decided to use 'educator' as the common term. This term refers to a person who promotes children's development and learning by creating environment in which children can cultivate their unique learning and development capacities both in ECEC and primary school settings, and includes different types of child-care and educational practitioners and leaders.

Besides showing the impact of collaborative reflective practices on professionals working with children between the ages of 0 - 10 and ECEC organizations this report also sets out to formulate recommendations for educational policy and practice professionals regarding:

- The conditions to start collaborative reflective practices in educational institutions to strengthen the quality of teaching and care
- The importance of childfree hours regularly dedicated to professional development
- The elements that make collaborative reflection meaningful, continuous and sustainable

The REC consortium comprised of professional institutions experienced in supporting teaching staff with training, coaching and group reflection. The aim of the REC partnership was to provide ECEC professionals with a variety of possibilities for professional reflection, so instead of a compulsory and fearful element, reflection becomes an opportunity for support and growth.



## About the REC Partnership

**Partners Hungary Foundation** have been working on an inclusive society since 1995, fostering cooperation and dialogue between the individuals and within communities. Our methods rely on common decisions and agreements, which bring successful, permanent and sustainable solutions. We specialize in Roma integration, conflict resolution and education. We develop and implement of training programs in the education field focusing on inclusion and dialogue, the Step by Step program among others.

**VBJK, Centre for Innovations in the Early Years** (Belgium), is an autonomous NGO, established in 1986, and recognized as a research centre by the Federal Belgian Government. VBJK is an official partner of Opgroeien, the governmental organization responsible for services for young children and their parents in the Flemish Community of Belgium and works in close collaboration with the Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy of the Ghent University. VBJK works on the quality improvement of inclusive ECEC, through different themes, by combining research, policy and practice.

**Artevelde University of Applied Sciences** (Belgium) currently serves 15.000 students a wide variety of study programmes in the fields of Business and Management; Communication, and Media Design; Education; People and Society; and Health and Care. Artevelde University of Applied Sciences is a progressive centre of expertise for education, research and development, where internationalisation is a cross-cutting theme. In both the bachelor of Early Childhood Education and the bachelor of Preschool Education, a lot of expertise has been built up in recent years through various projects to support professionalization for educators working with children between 0 and 12 years old.

**The mission of Open Academy Step by Step** (Croatia) is to promote, advocate and support innovative and quality education practices in order to ensure welfare, development and learning of children and young people. In order to accomplish our mission, we develop partnerships, mostly with kindergartens and primary schools, and promote networking of professionals. In last 10 years, OA Step by Step is focused on given support to educational professionals (pre-school and primary school teachers, etc.) and their innovative practice through different kinds of reflective practice.

**Educational Research Institute (ERI)** from Slovenia provides professional support to ECEC professionals in becoming reflective practitioners as well as raising awareness among directors, to develop supportive systems for professionals within the institutions. The Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education which operates under the auspices of ERI manages the Step by step Network for changing quality which is aimed at supporting preschool and primary school professionals in their professional development (e. g.: through establishing professional learning communities).

# REC PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION



Although reflection is a key competence for educators, its practical realization during teacher-educator work usually takes place only briefly, informally or as a mandatory element of the teacher promotion system; and it is rarely done using structured, collaborative and personalized processes (Marcos et al., 2008). Besides, in certain contexts, it is very difficult to foresee common reflection moments for staff with diverse backgrounds working with the same group of children and families (e.g. teachers and out of school care staff). However, reflection with motivating, collaborative and creative methods facilitates the everyday work of teachers and educators and positively transforms their practice (Ghaye, 2011). Structured group reflection-on-action methods (Schön, 1983) that start from real-life situations (Dewey, 1933, Schön, 1987) and are used as a strategy for continuous professional development (Taggart-Wilson, 2005) have many positive results, among others they provide emotional and professional support, increase ECEC and school professionals' sense of belonging and esteem (Baxter et al., 2021).

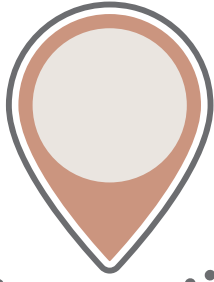
The effects of the REC program were examined using different data collection methods: questionnaire survey, focus group interviews and the MSC (Most Significant Change) method.

## Timeline of the project

The REC project started in August 2020 and ended in August 2023 in the framework of an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership programme. The 5 project partners all work in the educational environment, supporting ECEC and school professionals in their professional development.

### YEAR 1

Our plan for the first year of the REC program was to set up the partnership, get in contact with the chosen ECEC centers and schools and get all the project partners familiarised with the reflective methods. All partners have already been familiar with WANDA and Professional Learning Communities. However, Video Coaching and Peer Observation with Reflective Discussion were fairly new methods to some of the partners. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we also faced the challenges of not being able to meet within the partnership in person, so partnership meetings and part of the methodological training had to be done online. To counter the stress and frustration arising from the uncertainty of the pandemic, we made sure that during all our online meetings we make space for personal connection with icebreakers



- a habit we also developed with the teachers of the schools in the programme. Our regular partnership meetings we held throughout the project provided opportunities to connect on a personal level, to plan project activities and make adjustments to our initial plan together aligning these plans with the country contexts, to discuss questions related to the use of the reflective methods in the different country and group contexts.

Each partner benefited from the support of a designated country soundboard group - a group of education-related experts who volunteered to contribute to the project progress with their ideas and provide feedback to partners regarding the different reflective paths of the different institutions.

## YEAR 2

After getting familiar with the reflective methods, the second project year was about getting in the habit of reflections with the 10 participating institutions.

This included:

- conducting initial focus groups with the leadership and the staff of the participating institutions
- introducing the reflective methods in the schools, setting a safe learning environment
- laying out the reflective paths in the institutions, with the help of community planning so that the reflective paths match the needs of the given institutions
- meeting the school staff on a monthly basis and trying out different reflective methods. In most of the cases, the facilitators of the reflective sessions were the trained project partners, in some schools partners trained facilitators from the staff.

During the second project year, partners also learned the qualitative evaluation called Most Significant Change (MSC), a method that collects stories that represent both positive and negative change during a process. At the end of the second year, partners interviewed school staff according to the MSC method to see how the project is progressing and make changes if necessary.

## YEAR 3

The third project year was dedicated to strengthening the reflective habit of professionals in the participating schools and making the changes sustainable. The programme now comprised 11 ECEC centers/schools. The monthly meetings continued in all the institutions and preparations were made in each staff so that they can carry on the reflective work in some way after the project ends. The partnership agreed that sustainability was to be defined on a country and institutional level. This meant various activities for the different schools:

- in Slovenia and Hungary, where there are facilitators available locally, schools agreed to continue the reflective meetings on a monthly basis
- in some of the schools, staff agreed to keep the icebreakers during staff meeting and dedicate time for professional dilemmas and discuss them in accordance with the reflective methods: look at the situation through the eyes of the child, the parent and the professionals.

MSC interviews and final focus groups with individual questionnaires were carried out in all participating institutions.

## LOCAL CONTEXTS



# BELGIUM

### ECEC system in Belgium (FL)

Belgium is a federal and multilingual country comprising three autonomous Regions (Flemish Region, Walloon Region, Brussels Capital Region), three language Communities (Flemish, French, German-speaking), and four language areas (Dutch, French, German, and French-Dutch in the Brussels Capital Region). Each Region and language Community has its own ECEC system. The REC project was implemented in the Flemish Community.

The ECEC system in the Flemish Community is a split one. This means that different ministerial authorities are responsible for provisions for children under 3 years old (childcare sector, under the Flemish Ministry for Welfare, Families and Equal Opportunities), and for children from 2 ½ years up to 6 years old (pre-primary education sector, under the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training). Since 1 September 2020, compulsory education applies to children from the age of 5 (before that it was 6), thus including the last year of ECEC.

Moreover, the split between childcare and pre-primary education is also evident with respect to the qualification level of the core practitioners. Childcare professionals usually have a secondary vocational degree in childcare (EQF level 4), while pre-primary school teachers hold a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary education (EQF level 6).

Besides, the split system encourages the hierarchic division between 'education' and 'care' in ECEC centres. In line with this trend, like in many other EU countries, in some pre-primary school classes (2,5-6), childcare workers are employed to work alongside the teacher and are mainly responsible for caring tasks (during meals at midday, in the play-ground, for hygiene moments, during sleeping moments) and for looking after the children outside the classroom periods (out of school care). While meant to support the teacher, this results in a split between caring and teaching roles, whereas what is needed is a holistic approach in which education and care are intertwined (Van Laere, Peeters, Vandenbroeck, 2012; Peeters, Sharmahd, Budginaité, 2016).

In the last years, efforts have been made on a policy level to challenge the split system. For example, in 2021 the Flemish Minister of Welfare launched a 3-year pilot project with a concrete investment in childcare and pre-primary school pilots that have integrated pedagogical projects and better approaches to transitions. Despite these efforts, a structural and coherent *educare* approach to ECEC is still challenging in the Flemish Community of Belgium. The disparity in working conditions between the two sectors, the different initial qualifications and in-service training opportunities for core staff, the lack of child-free hours, make it very complex to implement structural collaboration and shared vision and practice.



## REC Needs

Organizing regular CPD (continuous professional development) activities of a certain length, involving all staff members (also with different profiles and professional status) remains a challenge and as well as a need in the sector. From the needs assessment carried out in the REC project, the Flemish team was able to discern a desire of professionals (core practitioners, teachers as well as coordinators) to have more occasions to reflect together on their practice. According to the professionals, collegial reflection not only had the potential to support children's growth and development in a more coherent way, but also to create a stronger partnership with families: reflecting on concrete situations offers the team opportunities to raise questions, negotiate meanings and look for co-constructed answers. Considering the current super-diversity within society, this is viewed as especially important.

## Choice of schools and age groups

Considering the challenges in the Flemish ECEC sector, the Flemish REC partners (VBJK and Artevelde University of Applied Sciences) decided to focus on reflection on practice, with a specific emphasis on inter-professional reflection between childcare workers and pre-primary school teachers and on the *educare* holistic approach towards ECEC, which are both underlined in the European Quality Framework for ECEC (Council of the European Union, 2019).

As such, within REC, the Flemish team decided to set up reflection pathways in two municipalities involving both childcare workers and pre-primary school teachers working in the same location (a pre-primary school).

The chosen municipalities were the city of Ghent and Zeebrugge.

- Ghent was chosen because it represents a special context in Flanders: although still challenging, in the last years the City of Ghent has been investing in team reflection and in a stronger collaboration between childcare, out-of-school care and

pre-primary education. The first selected school unfortunately ended its participation to the REC project after several months, because of an amalgam of reasons mainly related to staff turnover and change of a coordinating staff member of the out-of-school care that had a strong leading role and was very engaged in the project. The REC path went on with a second interested pilot (De Muze school and out of school). This pilot was chosen because of their strong interest in implementing the collaboration pre-primary -childcare through common reflection. Up to the start of REC, the staff didn't have a structure to reflect together on their vision and practice, although working with the same children and families. The coordinator of the out-of-school care was very aware and sensitive to this theme, and could lead the school principle and the staff in the same direction. The staff members participating to the reflection group were selected on the basis of their motivation to take part to such a group. As such, the reflection group consisted of 3 pre-primary school teachers, 3 childcare workers and the 2 directors (of the childcare and of the school). In this group, we worked especially with the WANDA method, and in order to support the sustainability of the project, the two directors were supported in trying out their role as facilitator in some of the sessions. Because of the positive experiences of the participants, the team of de Muze is making concrete plans on how to keep the reflection process alive in the next years, by involving the whole team of the school and the out-of-school care (childcare).

- Zeebrugge is a village located at the Belgian coast and is a borough of Bruges that is characterized by deprivation. The three organizations that took part in the REC project were: "Zocjes", an of out-of-school care from 'De Blauwe Lelie vzw'; "Moesje", an of out-of-school care from 'De Duinhuisjes vzw'; "Roetzemoes", and a pre-primary school from the school community 'Saefthinghe'. While these are all located in a radius of 1 kilometer around each other and consequently work with the same families and children, no

contact with each other prior to the REC project was established. Both the pre-primary school and the out-of-school care are confronted with complex family situations. During the joint reflection meetings, this created a bond and common goal: how to create together good conditions for the wellbeing and learning of all children and families in Zeebrugge. As was the case in Ghent, coordinators as well as core professionals jointly participated to the REC meetings. There were some staff changes during the REC project, but each time approximately 3 coordinators and 5 core professionals (teachers from pre-primary school and childcare workers from the out-of-school care) participated in the collegial reflec-

tion meetings. The reflection methods used were video coaching (as a start in the REC process to connect around children), peer observation (learning from each other through workplace visits) and OASE (a reflection method that analyses concrete cases through different steps, similar as WANDA). In every session we started with a short reflective group exercise (an 'icebreaker'). In one meeting, after  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the REC project, the directors of the umbrella organizations of the school and the out-of-school care were invited to come and listen to the experiences of the reflection group and to think along about structural and sustainable collaboration between the organizations.



## CROATIA

### National context

#### ECEC system in Croatia

Croatian education system consists of the early childhood education and care and pre-school education, elementary education, high school education and higher education.

It is mainly a centralised system governed at all levels of education by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia and national agencies. However, there are many decentralised functions performed by the founders of ECEC institutions, primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Science and Education (MSE) is the competent ministry for the field of education and it performs administrative and other tasks related to the education system in Croatia.

The ECEC system is a decentralised system since 1993 when the founding rights have been transferred to the bodies of local and regional self-government units (LGUs).

With the adoption of the Preschool Education Act in 1997 (posterior innovations of the Act followed, the last one in 2022), the ECEC system becomes the part of the educational system of the Republic of Croatia and constitutes the starting level of the educational system.

It is divided into three educational cycles:

1. from the time the child reaches six months until the child reaches one year of age
2. from the time the child reaches one year of age until the child reaches three years of age
3. from the time the child reaches three years of age to the start of primary school.

ECEC in the Republic of Croatia is not compulsory, except for the preschool programme – a programme that is compulsory and intended for all children before starting primary school. This programme lasts one pedagogical year and is free for parents. All kindergartens must have the approval of the competent ministry for the implementation of the preschool programme. For children who do not attend kindergarten there is a special preschool programme lasting 250 hours per year, which is held in kindergarten or elementary school, depending on the possibilities of a particular local environment. The ministry in charge of education approves all programmes offered at ECEC institutions. A kindergarten can be established by the authorities of the Republic of Croatia, local and regional self-government units, religious communities and other legal and natural persons. A small number of children attend home-based provision, which falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Pension System, Family and Social Policy.

Kindergartens of optimal size have 17–20 educational groups in standard programmes or 340–400 children in total. Kindergartens gathering several local units have 30 educational groups or 600 children. Kindergartens have at least one educational group with a maximum of 25 children. There is one core practitioner per educational group. According to the Act on Preschool Education and Care, the minimum qualification level required to work as a core practitioner (odgojitelj) in any centre-based early childhood education and care provision, for any age group, is bachelor's level (International Standard Classification of Education level 6). In Croatian kindergartens, there are no assistants. A 1-year structured induction is compulsory for all staff. The number of staff members in the kindergarten is determined based on the number of educational groups, the duration and type of programmes as well as working conditions. The educators (odgojitelji) carry out the core practice of educational work with children. The number of educators per educational group is determined based on the daily duration of the programme.

Primary education in Croatia (ISCED 1 and 2) is a single structure system of compulsory education lasting eight years. It starts at the age of 6-7 and ends at 14-15. Primary education is carried out as public and private. Programmes implemented by primary schools can be regular and special. Special programmes refer to programmes for children with disabilities; alternative curricula (Waldorf pedagogy, Montessori method etc.), programmes in the language and script of national minorities, as well as art education.

Pre-school teachers and primary (also secondary school) teachers are educated according to educational level i.e., the age of children they work with and teachers in Croatia are highly qualified in their profession (trained at tertiary level) and initial education requires pedagogical education of 60 ECTS. Every teacher has ensured mentored introduction to the profession in duration of one year.

Teachers have right and obligation to continuously professionally develop, which is ensured by state and implemented by education agencies and other authorised bodies.

### REC Needs

The needs assessment conducted in February 2020 before the REC start, included **169 preschool and primary school teachers - 16.4 % of them working with children aged 0-3, 32.7 % working with children aged 3-6 and 57 % working with children aged 6-10.**

When asked about the current areas of challenge in their professional development, 41.1 % of respondents reported task distribution/workload, 39.9 % cooperating with parents, 33.7 % other working conditions, 32.5 % working with children, 24.5 % cooperating with colleagues while 20.3 % of the respondent's perceived cooperation with professionals from other institutions as a work challenge. From the above stated, it is visible that **there are multiple areas of challenge, occurring simultaneously, which impede professional development and need to be taken into account to assure teaching practice quality and prevent burnout.**

When it comes **to cooperating with colleagues**, challenges arose from differences in motivation, attitudes, experience, openness toward change and cooperation as well as generational differences. Also, teachers reported deficit of professionals in their institutions or their inadequate support and one-way communication with them. In order to encourage practitioners/teachers to develop cooperation from the very beginning, one of the goals of an initial PLC meeting concerns co-creating conditions for a safe and challenging learning environment. In addition, for all succeeding meetings, facilitators create activities that allow practitioners/teachers to get to know each other better and to understand each other's values and attitudes, in order to recognize and develop a shared vision and set of values.

Cooperation with professionals from other institutions is very rare, slow, insufficient or even non-existent and serves as an inadequate compensation for schools where there are no employed professionals working in the institution.

In our February 2020 survey, primary school teachers communicated that the majority of the opportunities they have to reflect on their work is only informal (79.2 %). Also, the current trends in CPD activities show that there are fewer opportunities for teaching professionalization and limited insight in the quality of the practice as well as teachers' well-being. Furthermore, the experimental curricular reform program School for Life is progressing in the school year 2019/2020 and is implemented in all schools which represents increased demands on the teachers. An-

swers provided by primary school teachers who participated in the conducted survey suggest negative attitudes towards the reform (leaving the teachers unprepared, lacking information or including too much information which are not presented timely, loads of administrative work and meaningless educational contents, not providing relief for pupils, etc.).

## Choice of schools

The Croatian team worked with with 2 primary schools: Fran Galović Elementary School and Gustav Krklec Elementary School (Zagreb), 130 teachers altogether. Both schools are known as schools that work with migrant children and other minorities, which represents a challenge in everyday work, from classroom management to cooperation with parents, supplementary activities, and more. All this requires additional professional training for teachers. In January 2017, 28 refugee children from the shelter for asylum seekers in Hotel Porin started attending the Gustav Krklec Elementary School in the district of Zagreb. These were asylum seekers who were assigned from 1st to 8th grade, and the largest number of them were in class. Gustav Krklec Elementary School is the first in Croatia to receive such a large group of refugee children at once.

This project brings added value to primary schools by offering information on existing high-quality practices, creating conditions for participating in high quality CPD activities, but also building on existing practices by offering guidelines for making existing reflective practice more efficient.

# SLOVENIA

## National context

In Slovenia, the leading national partner Educational Research Institute worked with two kindergartens from different regions. Kindergarten at Primary School Polhov Gradec is located in the central part of Slovenia and with Kindergarten Beltinci in the NE of the country. In both kindergartens the entire teams of professionals were involved - all together, there were around 70 kindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers' assistants, counselors and representatives of the kindergarten management included in the project.

The early childhood education and care (preschool education) in Slovenia is part of the education system and is not compulsory. Kindergartens are a single structure organization for all children one to six years of age and/or until they start primary school. They can set up homogeneous or heterogeneous groups of one-year-olds, children of the first (1-3 years old) or second age group (3-6 years old). Compulsory education in Slovenia applies for 6 year old children, who enrol in primary schools.

Groups of children are led by pairs of professionals - preschool teachers (with a bachelor's degree in preschool education) and preschool teacher assistants (with an upper secondary education in the relevant field). Teachers and their assistants plan and organize educational activities through which they aim to achieve development of various skills and abilities of children. On a daily basis, they have delegated a certain amount of time for planning further activities or evaluating and reflecting on the ones already carried out. Preschool staff are also obliged to take care of their professional development and participate in trainings in order to maintain the quality of their practice.

Primary education in the Republic of Slovenia is free, but compulsory for pupils from the age of 6 to 15. The nine-year schooling is divided into three three-year periods. In the first three-year educational cycle, children aged 6-9 are taught by generalist (class

teachers. It is recommended that the same person teaches the class for all three years. Primary school teachers (master's degree) work in primary schools. In the 1st grade classroom, they partly work with a second professional (preschool education bachelor's degree/ primary school teacher master's degree), depending on the number of children in the classroom. The additional professional was introduced in the first grade as one way of ensuring a smoother transition of children from kindergarten to school. Parents enrol children in the first grade of primary school if they will reach the age of 6 in the calendar year in which they begin to attend school - usually, children go to school in the school district where the family lives.

Primary education is implemented by public and private primary schools, institutions for the education of children with special needs, and adult education organizations for adults.

## Choice of schools and needs

Educational Research Institute (the Step by Step Centre for Quality in Education, which operates within ERI) coordinates the Step by Step Network for changing quality, through which they support kindergarten and school teachers with their professional development and sustaining quality in their work. Partners in the project were invited in the consortium through a call shared among the members of the Network. Two of them replied with a submission and including their motivation for participation. Both cooperating kindergartens are long-standing members of this Network who expressed their wish to bring reflection in their institutions to a higher level. Membership in the Network also ensures that even after the project will end, the kindergartens will receive external expert support in implementing the innovations into their practice.

## REC Needs

From the needs assessment carried out in 2020, it



became apparent from the 121 answers received that what two chosen kindergartens wanted to gain from the partnership in this project is to learn about new reflective methods which they could incorporate in the regular process of professional development in their institutions. 39% of the educators participating in the assessment were working with children between the ages of 0-3, 36% with children between the ages of 3-6, 19% with children aged 6-10. 46% reported that certain reflection methods are already implemented in their work and practised occasionally but not systematically and not tailored to the institution's needs. In their application, they also said they would like to improve their observation skills, which

would help them with better planning and conducting learning activities which are targeted at the individuals as well as at their whole group of children. They were also intrigued by the international component of the project, as they see additional value in learning about good reflection practices from the foreign kindergartens.

During the school years 2021-22 and 2022-23 the professionals from Kindergarten Polhov Gradec implemented Wanda, observation with reflective discussion and video coaching, while in Beltinci they tested Wanda and video coaching. In both kindergartens their facilitators were trained kindergarten teachers, which helped to ensure sustainability of the project results.



## HUNGARY

### ECEC system

In Hungary, state-run childcare is free and nurseries accept children between 20 weeks and three years of age. Maternity benefits are relatively long in Hungary (up to three years), which means that many children don't start until the age of two. Kindergarten education is compulsory for all children above the age of 3 (or age 4 with an official exemption requested by the parents), and all children between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school. The main institution for basic education is the 8-grade general school, which contains the 4-year lower primary and the 4-year upper primary, or lower secondary level.

In Hungary, for the past few years, there are currently more than 5,000 teachers have been lacking from the education system overall – and the number is increasing. Many teachers leave the profession and the number of college/university students applying to become a teacher decreases sharply. Low salaries, restricted professional autonomy, increasing work-

load and little or no professional-emotional support does not make the teaching profession attractive for young people. Teachers' average age is 46 years and there is a visible tendency of the average age increasing. During 2010-2019, a period examined from the age point of view, the proportion of teachers younger than 30 decreased from 8 to 7 percent, the proportion of teachers aged 50-59 increased from 30 to 35 percent, and the proportion of teachers over 60 increased from 2 to 10 percent. But the most drastic change can be seen in the proportion of teachers aged 30-39: "it decreased to an extremely large extent, by 10 percentage points, from 26 to 16 percent," the research analyzes. Teachers are often assigned extra tasks without the adequate professional support, e.g. increased number of children, children with learning or behavioral challenges, children with deprived socio-economic background without extra personnel (teaching assistant, shadow teacher, special education teacher, etc.).

## REC Needs

According to the needs assessment carried out before the beginning of the project, 70% of the professionals interviewed out of the 75 expressed the need to have more group or individual occasions to reflect on their practice. Also, at least as many practitioners would choose regular reflection opportunities as further training opportunities. This means that subject knowledge is not enough in itself, but in-service opportunities are also needed to make a competent practitioner who can support children's growth in a more coherent way, who are able to create a stronger partnership with families and better cooperate within the institution.

Only a minority of teachers had regular formal opportunities to reflect on their work in the REC countries: 40% in Belgium, 26% in Slovenia, 25% in Croatia and 0% (!) in Hungary, to talk about fairer workload division, share necessary information about families they work with, to collaborate and seek for solutions for the challenges that the diverse children groups bring in

practitioners' everyday lives. Above 40% of answers operate on a stress level higher than 7 on a 0-10 scale. Challenges mentioned are: diverse children groups with more and more children with special needs and challenges, communication and cooperation difficulties with the families and colleagues, shortage of staff and disproportionate adult-child ratio.

## Choice of schools

Kindergartens were chosen for the REC programme because they have more institutional autonomy regarding their time management and the professional activities than schools. Because of the above-mentioned lack of professionals and resources from the ECEC/education system, our main criteria for choosing the institution was their willingness to cooperate. We presented to programmes to 6 kindergartens to see which 2 of them sees the programme as an inspiring opportunity for professional development and for strengthening the community. Based on our previous experience, a high motivation from the in-

stitution's side is necessary for a meaningful cooperation. Out of the kindergartens presented with REC, we worked with:

- Balaton Kindergarten, a municipality-owned kindergarten working with 12 teachers, 4 teaching assistants, 7 technical assistants involved also with the children, operating with 5 groups of altogether 92 children between the ages 3-6.
- Pitypang Óvoda, a municipality-owned kindergarten comprising 10 teachers, 8 teaching assistants, 10 technical assistants involved also with the children, operating with 6 8 teaching assistants, 10 technical assistants involved also with the children groups of altogether 127 children between the ages 3-6.
- Habakukk Alapítványi Óvoda joined the programme in 2022 June due to the fact that some of the project budget freed up because the pandemic did not make one of the personal trainings possible to happen in 2021. Habakukk kindergarten got to know about REC through a school social worker and they expressed their will to join, they were happily taken. Habakukk is a private kindergarten works with 10 teachers, 3 teaching assistants, 3 technical assistants involved also with the children, operating with 5 groups of altogether 80 children between the ages 3-6.

When the programme started in the kindergartens, teachers expressed their wishes to get professional and emotional support along with their concerns: will the reflective sessions be safe enough? In Hungary, observing someone's practice is usually linked with exam in the teacher training and during professional development (in Hungary, there are 4 different stages within the teaching profession: intern, teacher level one, teacher level two and master teacher). Teachers experienced giving and receiving feedback is rarely about strength within the traditional professional development process but about looking for what could be done better and professionals rather felt exposed than supported. This was one of goals in REC that we set out to change.



# METHODOLOGY

## Questions

We started the research process for the impact report by posing the following questions:

1. How reflective are educators and the institutions in the beginning of the project and what has changed throughout the project? 'Reflection in REC includes stepping and looking back on the role of being a teacher/ECEC practitioner, reflecting on daily practice and asking (colleagues or mentors) for feedback and improving practice. Educators actively consider each practice and reflect on its values and context. Such an approach enables employees to learn from their own or others' experience, share it, and initiate changes when and where they are needed.
2. How have changes in the reflection practices improved the quality of ECEC in the institutions? The concept of quality to be defined by practitioners, but focusing on children's needs should be at the heart of it.
3. What has been the impact of the project on the relationships between professionals and parents and between different professionals? In this part we were also interested in the level of consciousness in practitioners' interpersonal relationships

with children, other teachers, the principal, parents and other professionals. We were also curious how self and group reflection affects the cohesion of the school staff and the atmosphere in the institution.

4. How much do we think the changes are sustainable- got well integrated into pedagogical practice at the individual/group/institutional level?

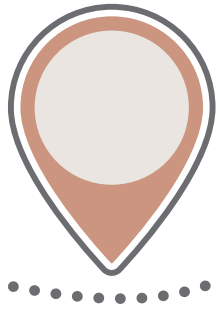
## Data collection

In order to answer these questions, we applied both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

For the purpose of getting a sense of the average experience we conducted initial and a final focus group interviews with the participation of all involved practitioners in our selected partner schools and ECEC centres in accordance with the questions above. We complemented this with an endline questionnaire<sup>1</sup> at the end of our project. A separate questionnaire was prepared for practitioners and principals

- 1 For the endline questionnaire we used the same questions in every country, but we translated them to the national languages (so that people could fill in in their mother language). Afterwards the answers were translated to English by the project partners.





/ coordinators to be able to assess individual and organizational level as well (please find the questionnaires in the annex). Eventually we had 79 respondents for the questionnaire of practitioners and 11 respondents for the questionnaire of principals/coordinators.

We were also interested in collecting ‘extreme cases’, that is to capture the most salient experiences of impact of participants. For that purpose, we used the most significant change – MSC method.

The most significant change (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the program as a whole.

Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by ‘searching’ for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on program impact. (RJ Davies and J Dart, 2004)

We completed two cycles of MSC story collection, one mid-project and one at the end of the project

in each country. Each country then had a story selection panel which chose one or two stories that in their opinion incorporated the most significant change. (Find the selected stories of the final round in the annex).

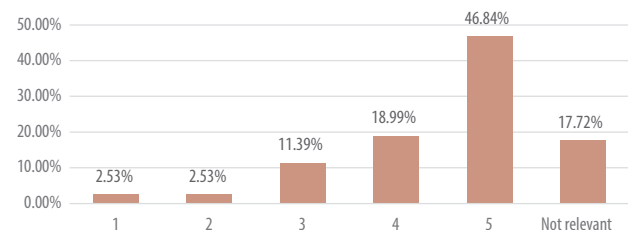
## Results

In order to be the most end-user friendly possible, we are going to present our results based on the important common themes emerging from the data collected.

### Positive impact

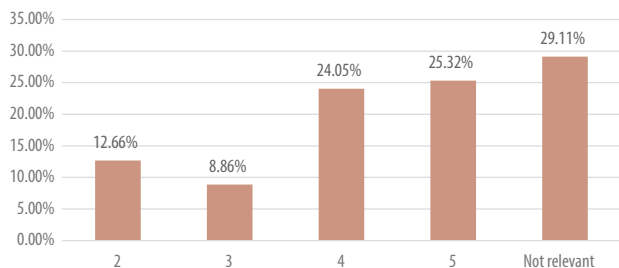
The majority of participants claimed that all three methods tried during the project were helpful for their professional reflection. We got the best results for the WANDA method, which was the most frequently used method and when it was used most participants were convinced that it was helpful: 46,86% of respondents gave maximum score (5) and 18,99% gave almost maximum score (4) on a scale of 1 to 5.

WANDA: To what extent does this method helped you in the process of professional reflection?



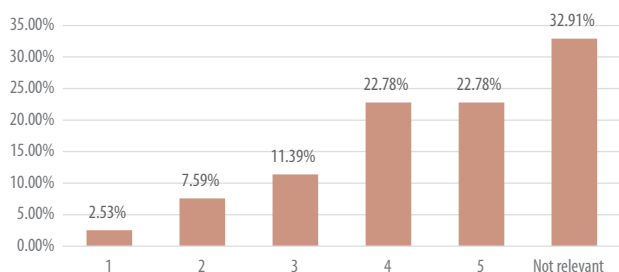
The second most popular method was videocoaching: <sup>2</sup>

VIDEOCOACHING: To what extent does this method helped you in the process of professional reflection?



However, peer observation did not lag far behind:

Peer observation: To what extent does this method helped you in the process of professional reflection?



Generally, all the results of our quantitative research were positive as the majority of professionals scored 3 (rather yes) or 4 (totally with a sustainable impact) on a scale of 1-4 for all of our statements. (See details on charts in the annex).

We managed to learn more details through our qualitative research completed with the MSC and the focus group methods.

The following common themes of positive impact emerged from the data:

### Time

In many cases it was very positive for the professionals that the project provided them extra time to spend getting to know each other and bond, and discuss cases:

<sup>2</sup> The answer “not relevant” means the method was not tried by the participant.

“It helped me a lot that we really took the time to sit together, because that’s not so easy on an ordinary day. We sometimes see each other pass by at the pick-up, but then sometimes there are also parents and then you cannot talk about a specific situation. But now we’ve really taken the time to put problem situations on the table and chat about them.” (MSC story Zeebrugge)

„The others have become people I know and not “the zocjes”, “the school”, ... A lot has changed in imaging and getting to know each other”. (Zeebrugge focus group)

“Before we didn’t have structured time to sit together as school and out of school. But we work with the same children and families, so it’s important to reflect together. Now, with dedicated time and with a structure, we see that the relationship and communication between us changed, we are softer towards each other.” (Gent focus group)

### Change of perspective and understanding the needs of others

It is an unquestionable achievement of the project that most participating professionals underlined that they learnt to change perspectives as a result of the project, in other words they learnt how to take in to consideration someone else’s perspective and think about the situation from another point of view. This helped them understand the needs of colleagues, children or parents and thus resolve problems better.

„Before the project, I would have dealt with the case differently. I only saw our point of view. This project allowed us to look at the matter from the other’s point of view, we had to consider why the parent would do things differently. So, when we sat down to talk with the parents, we were able to formulate our position well and we were able to listen to theirs as well.” (Hungarian MSC story)

“Practitioners in all three institutions agreed that they can change perspectives more easily when they face a challenging situation: several said they were more able to get in the shoes of the parent even if they feel

that their point of view is far away from theirs thanks to the WANDA sessions. Also, they feel a higher-level empathy and understanding towards parents and children, which results in a decrease in tension. Three participants reported that thanks to the video coaching sessions, they ask themselves the question more: „What is the need of the child? What do they want to communicate through their interaction?“ Overall, participants reported an increased sense of professional awareness and that they can take a step back more often so they can react calmer in challenging situations.” (*Hungarian Focus group report*)

“The most interesting part was for everybody the perspectives phase of WANDA. Looking at a case from different perspectives was a new discovery, a new way to look at children and families. This is definitely a lesson learned.” (*Gent focus group*)

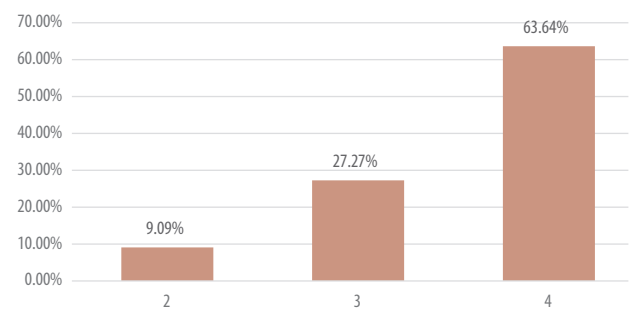
“They are now more aware that it is important to consider different perspectives of people involved in a certain situation.” (*Slovenia focus group*)

„Since they became more conscious of the needs of each child, the teachers said they think through how to best respond to those needs and, as a result, act in the way that is best for the child’s further development”. (*Croatian focus group*)

### Communication, cooperation, information sharing, new ideas

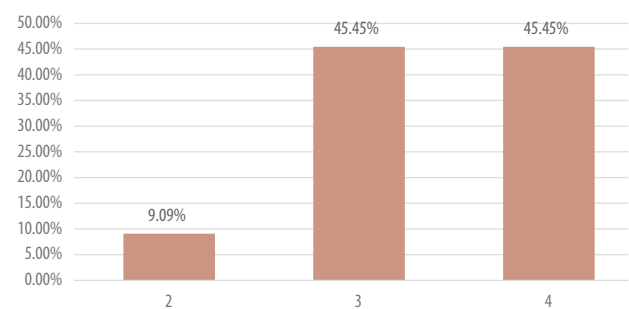
The project definitely brought results in the area of communication and cooperation. On the one hand it was reported by more than 60% of principals that the willingness to cooperate in their organisation is higher. (Scale: 1-4).

Principals: Our willingness to cooperate across our organisation is higher



90% of them also reported positive impact on teamwork:

Principals: The teamwork in our institution is better



Time and methods could lead to better communication and cooperation between staff members:

“By bringing together school and out of school staff around a table, and by guiding them in this reflection process, I have the impression that the staff members became ‘softer’ towards each other, meaning that their communication takes now more each other into account, they listen to each other. Before, it was easier to stick to one’s own point of view. Now, also thanks to the use of the different ‘Wanda glasses’, there is more openness.” (*Ghent, MSC story*)

“We also see that our communication towards each other changed. We know each other better as school

and out of school team, we know better what the work of the others is. So, we have more knowledge and respect towards each other. This communication is very important, it is the basis to look at our practice in a more coherent and respectful way." (*Gent focus group*)

„I am new in the staff and the reflective process helped me a lot to integrate into this community, I have never experienced such open communication before in previous workplaces." Hungarian focus group

Communication and information sharing could lead to better cooperation and problem solving, not just between staff members, but with parents and external partners as well:

"And actually, as teachers, we did not know what it was like in out-of-school care. By sitting down with the colleagues from the shelter, I really got to know how they work. I thought the kids are just there and playing but they really do activities with kids, I didn't know that. And I've also heard a lot about what children are like in daycare. Because as a teacher I sometimes wonder 'what would this child be like at home or in daycare?' 'are the children different with other people?' I want to assess a child's ability to respond well in different situations. Usually parents say 'everything is fine at home' but if I could now talk to the supervisors of the daycare about certain children or situations, it gave confirmation that they are facing the same challenges. That really reassured me as a teacher: it's not my fault, I'm not doing a bad job." (*MSC story Zeebrugge*)

"And we also more easily go and look for the colleagues of the other team (school and out of school) to talk about specific cases, while before we would do it in our own team." (*Gent focus group*)

„Some teachers tried out discussing all points of views with parents in a specific situation, just like in WANDA to see a fuller picture and parents were open to this idea. Some other teachers tried out the icebreakers, check-in questions that were used in the reflective sessions during parent meetings to en-

gage them more in the conversation. Two teachers started the year with the question for the newcomer's parents: "How do you feel about the change that your child started kindergarten?" They used Dixit cards to talk about feelings and thought and teachers saw how parents were relieved and grateful that they could share what it was like for them. This set a friendly and open tone for the communication, which was a lot easier compared to previous years' groups" (*Hungarian focus group*)

Professionals also found it fruitful to share ideas, or get inspiration from each other and learned to appreciate feedback:

"Professionals who were involved in the process see positive impact on their practice and report that they appreciate ideas and solutions for their challenges and the possibility of discussing them with their colleagues." (*Slovenia focus group*)

"The feedback from our colleagues is also very important to us, it worked well continuously here." (*Hungarian focus group*).

### **The feeling of not being alone**

Another important benefit for practitioners was that due to the opportunities of sharing they felt not being alone in dealing with their problems anymore. We consider this an especially valuable result after the isolation educators experienced during the COVID pandemic.

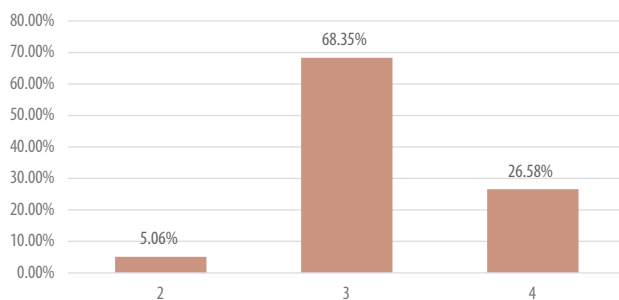
„And by thinking together, I now know better that it is not only a problem for us, that the school and the other childcare centres encounter the same problems." (*Zeebrugge focus group*)

„Practitioners also reported that it is reassuring to see similar issues in different classrooms, this reduces the feeling of isolation." (*Hungarian focus group*)

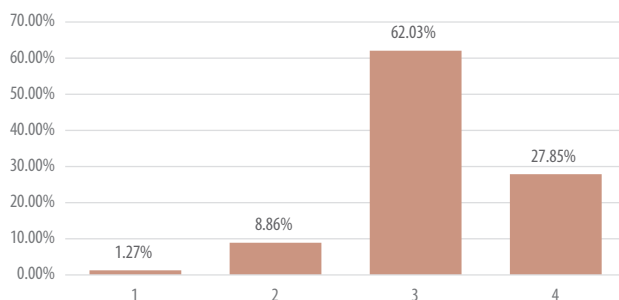
## Self-awareness

The positive impact on the self-awareness of practitioners is already visible from the quantitative results, where 95% percent of respondents perceived the change. (Scale: 1-4).

Individuals: I reflect more on myself as a person (personal reflection)



Individuals: I reflect more on my role as an ECEC professional (professional reflection)



This aspect was repeatedly mentioned in the focus group and MSC results as well:

“Preschools report about the improvement of quality of work within the pairs of teachers and assistants and raise of their self-awareness.” (*Slovenia focus group*)

“Overall, participants reported an increased sense of professional awareness and that they can take a step back more often in order to react calmer in challenging situations.” (*Hungarian focus group*)

“Video coaching helped me to see how much I should get involved, what my support means to them, where my boundaries are and where is the point where I have to let go of the situation, which is no longer my business.” (*MSC Hungarian story*)

„One of the teachers said: “I was having a hard time in the classroom when children were making trouble, during class I was never at ease. So, during video coaching sessions, I realized that I was always tense during class.” (*Croatian focus group*)



## CHALLENGES

### Time

While additional time for reflection was beneficial for practitioners, lack of time was also one of the major challenges for the implementation of reflective practices and thus will be a crucial factor for sustainability as well.

“Finding childcare in the classroom (someone who takes over the work with the children) to be able to participate as a teacher in the reflection meetings, that is not easy. Challenge: coordinating hours (to be able to get together with colleagues across organizations) is not easy.” (*Zeebrugge focus group*)

„In order to make this process sustainable certain things are needed. For example, time is very important. Now we had time, but what about next year.” (*Gent focus group*)

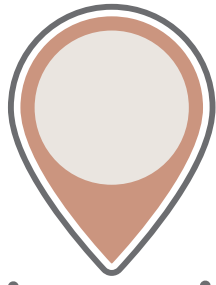
“Reflective meetings take time, the phases of a WANDA meeting are time-limited: choosing a case, formulating good learning questions and so on. The fact is that some participants could not attend the meetings regularly because one meeting lasts two hours, sometimes more, and it is important for the group to be permanent and continuous”. (*Croatian focus group*)

### Teacher turnover

Changes in staff composition could cause difficulties for implementation as well.

“There were often personnel changes in Moesje during the project. As a result, there was no continuity in the participants. What we noticed: there was always enthusiasm from those who participated but there have been many different people who have participated”. (*Zeebrugge focus group*)

In Croatian schools there were changes in the school’s employees, which caused the Learning Community to slightly change its composition. That’s why one school decided to use the same method for another year (WANDA). They wanted “new” practitioners to try the method as well. (*Croatian organizers*)



### Difficulties in opening up

In some cases, it was difficult for practitioners in the beginning to open up about their weaknesses, or to share cases to struggle with.

“In one environment, the biggest dilemma which they faced with Wanda members was that the participants did not come to the meetings with their own cases. The facilitators wondered if that was the result of the teachers’ lack of interest as the process requires some effort and knowledge or it was the lack of understanding what self-reflection is that restrained them. The facilitators reported that they tried different things to encourage them but did not think they were very successful. They questioned what could be the reason for not preparing and sharing their cases, but did not actually come to a conclusion. In another reflection group they had certain difficulties with following the meeting structure, where the group analysed a challenge, exposed by one of the members. The opinion of one of the facilitators is that her colleagues prefer to share their good practices or some interesting ideas instead of pointing out something they are not good at or having troubles with.” *(Slovenia focus group)*

“One of the challenges that teachers from Primary School Gustav Krklec pointed out was that the school psychologist, pedagogue and speech therapist were part of their reflective meetings. For example, one of the teachers mentioned that she was having a hard time opening and sharing her case during WANDA meetings in front of the school support staff because she was afraid of their judgement such as that she did not take all the right measures while facing difficulties.” *(Croatia focus group)*

“It was challenging to find the right question “I want to learn how to...” because in the beginning some participants showed resistance and said “I don’t think I have to learn anything; I think he/she has to change” but such situations were less frequent as the process progressed. The fear of being filmed also disappeared in a very few weeks” *(Croatian organizers)*





# SUSTAINABILITY

## Keeping the change

Some of the participants claimed that the change they experienced will live on.

„While talking about the suitability of the changes in their professional praxis, all teachers in Fran Galović Primary School pointed out that their praxis is changed long term. One of them pointed out that “we could not ever get back to the way it was.” (*Croatian focus group*)

“Feeling supported, a lot of positive experience in the group, the new perspectives—no one can take this away from us. Also, the feeling stays with us that we don’t think that it’s our failure if we face a challenging situation, we will rather ask: can we get to know the situation more before we try to solve it?” (*Hungary focus group*)

## Keeping the methods


All the Hungarian and Croatian practitioners mentioned during focus group discussions that they intend to keep peer observations as a method in the long term. WANDA also has a good chance to live on. Hungarians talked about that they took up the habit of doing ‘mini-Wandas’ in case of facing challenging

situations. In Hungary in all three institutions there will be trained WANDA facilitators by the end of 2023. Hungarian practitioners also mentioned the possibility that they could keep the video coaching method by recording the videos themselves with their phones. Belgian practitioners in Zeebrugge would like to keep the regular meetings of reflection as it would “keep them on their toes”. They mentioned the format of ‘coffee consultation’ as a possible way of realization. Gent practitioners came up with the idea of creating two reflective groups that would meet regularly each having participants who were part of the project and people new to the methods as well. The two groups would also have “bridges” moments of exchange between them. Croatian practitioners also mentioned the need to involve more staff members into the reflective practices to move forward. In Slovenia, all reflection groups in both environments were facilitated by internal staff (pairs of preschool teachers, counsellors, management) with the aim of ensuring the sustainability of these groups also after the project’s end. In one of the preschools, they are sending more educators to the training for Wanda facilitators in order to be able to form and facilitate more reflective groups following the Wanda process.





## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EDUCATION-RELATED DECISION MAKERS AND LEADERS TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE REFLECTIVE METHODS, BASED ON REC EXPERIENCES**



Our recommendations for education policy are inspired by the experience of educators and facilitators of the reflective processes in the 10 ECEC institutions and schools participating in the REC programme in Belgium, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia. The below recommendations are also based on the results of this impact report – main conclusions from the questionnaires, focus group and Most Significant Change interviews carried out with the participating professionals. The data from the questionnaires and the Most Significant Change stories, together with the reports from the soundboard-group meetings (a group of education-related experts who volunteered to contribute to the REC project progress with their ideas and feedback), also gave insights on necessary conditions to strengthen collegial reflection and quality ECEC practice. They were analysed cross-country in search for recurring topics, closely related to the participants' experiences in the REC reflective meetings. As such, the REC data led to 8 well-founded policy recommendations on the EU level.

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**1.**  
**Recognize and promote collaborative pedagogical reflection as a motor for quality education.**

Educators who have an opportunity to cooperate with others on analysing their own practice become more competent but also more committed to their job. Regular team reflection enhances professional self-awareness, a sense of value and belonging and helps to reduce stress. Reflective group thinking contributes to the professionalisation of educators' practice, since educators will start to perceive themselves more intensively as professionals who make impact on all levels, from classroom to community and society and finally on the level of decision-making in education.

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**2.**  
**Provide structures for regular, collaborative, personalized pedagogical reflection**

Regular, structured pedagogical reflection with motivating, collaborative and creative methods facilitates the everyday work of teachers and educators and positively transforms their teaching practice. Structured and regular group reflection sessions have numerous positive results, among others they provide emotional and professional support, increase ECEC and school professionals' sense of belonging and esteem. Sharing experiences, getting the support and the development of togetherness helps to build resilience, feel more supported and build more self confidence.

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**3.**  
**Promote an inclusive and supportive institutional culture**

For a supportive reflection atmosphere, it is necessary to promote an institutional culture where:

- respecting diversity and child-centeredness are common values;
- educators are encouraged to have open discussions how they can work towards sharing norms and expectations of quality teaching;
- quality improvement is no longer considered to be the sole responsibility of leadership or a single teacher, but rather a collective one.

A supportive institutional culture is also necessary to help to overcome the commonly held belief that 'good educator' should always and immediately know the 'right' answers for all the issues and can help to perceive challenges in an atmosphere where it is encouraged to pause, challenge, reflect on old and create new pathways together when needed.

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**4.**  
**Involve leadership**

It is important to have a regular communication with leadership (principals, vice-principals, maintainers, etc.) to make the importance of collaborative reflection visible. By providing regular opportunities for leaders to get information about the reflective process – which can range from separate meetings to involving them in reflective sessions with the consent of educators – increases their commitment to creating a supportive and inclusive institutional culture.

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5.

**Dedicate childfree hours  
regularly to professional  
reflection conducted in a  
safe and inspiring learning  
environment.**

Adequate and fair working conditions are necessary for educators so they can support children in their care better and for reflective processes to be beneficial. Among these conditions it is of utmost importance that ECEC institutions and schools guarantee regular paid hours without children to educators during which they can reflect on their practice.

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6.

**Make pedagogical reflection  
sustainable**

The aspect of sustainability should be present in the reflective process from the beginning, and what sustainability means on a personal and institutional level should be reflected upon together. When designing a reflective path in an institution, enable professional learning communities and reflective teams to be sustainable through participatory methods (e.g. community planning). When institutions invest in making reflective processes through participatory methods, it results in engaged professionals taking responsibility over their professional development collectively and individually as well.

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7.

**Ensure visibility and  
celebrate success.**

The purpose of a reflective professional learning community is to have a broader impact on its members and on the institution as a whole. In order to influence the quality of work of all educators in the ECEC/school, it is encouraged to present the PLC's work in teacher rooms and meetings to other educators, celebrating successful activities they tested. These displays have a purpose to draw attention not only to improved practices but so that other teachers can join or rethink their own practices even if they are not PLC's members.

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8.

**Ensure monitoring of the  
learning process within the  
community.**

The facilitator(s) of the group reflection process should ensure that community members have the opportunity to give feedback on the process and facilitation after each session. Also, it is a good idea to ensure at least twice a year educators give feedback on the whole path of learning and professional development. Feedback can be organised in various ways, from giving written feedback to group conversation with attached notes to collecting and analysing stories that describe the experience of the participants. The feedback should be used only for the improvement of the educators' process of group reflection and professional development. Monitoring, as any other content shared within the stakeholders, should never be shared with outside individuals, such as institution leadership or administrators, without the consent of everyone.

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## 1. ENDLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

We used the following two questionnaires for our endline survey.

For individuals:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdPOxenyEROKDyPng3MIfWGgBA3QP9DD6qxcSugSNlo0Ckf\\_Q/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdPOxenyEROKDyPng3MIfWGgBA3QP9DD6qxcSugSNlo0Ckf_Q/viewform)

For organizations:

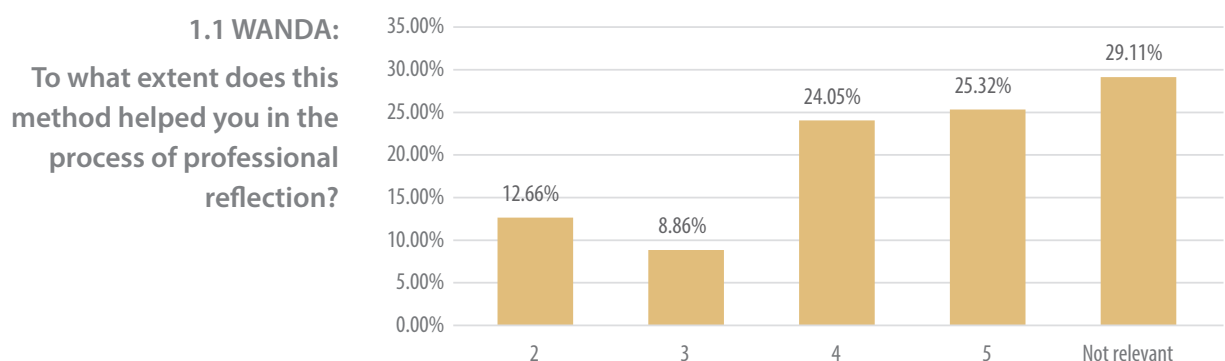
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScEOd-cZDVLoBmXxCtnRIBHdTqcicPhCHfUxgYaH6j3lrJfBSQ/viewform>

The questionnaires were created in English, the translated to national languages. The answers were then translated back to English for analysis.

## 2. ENDLINE SURVEY ANSWERS

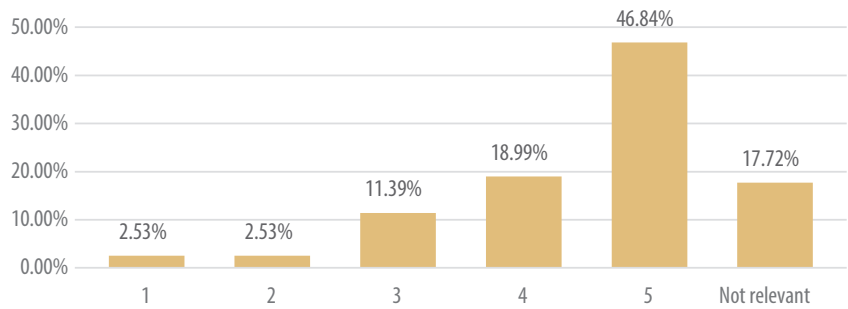
Please find below the results for our endline questionnaires. The questionnaire for individuals was filled in by 79 respondents.

Scale 1-5:



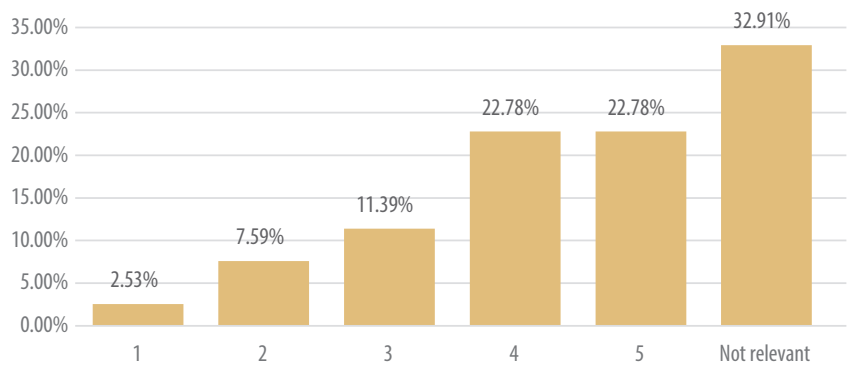
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**1.2 VIDEOCOACHING:**  
To what extent does this method helped you in the process of professional reflection?

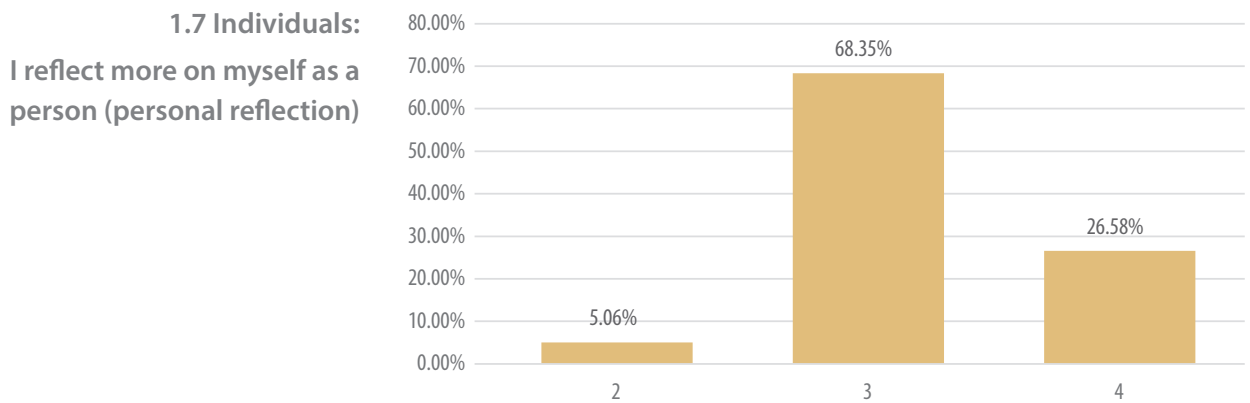
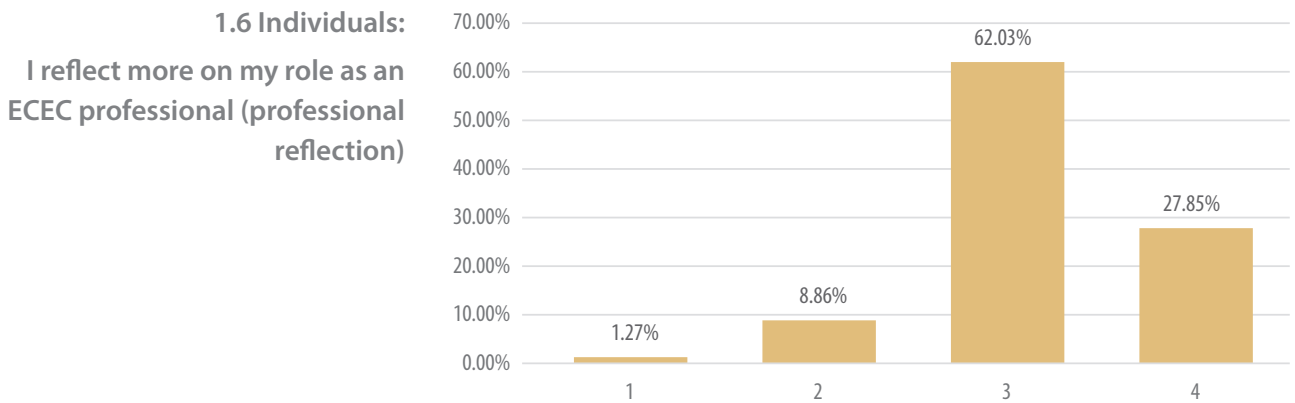
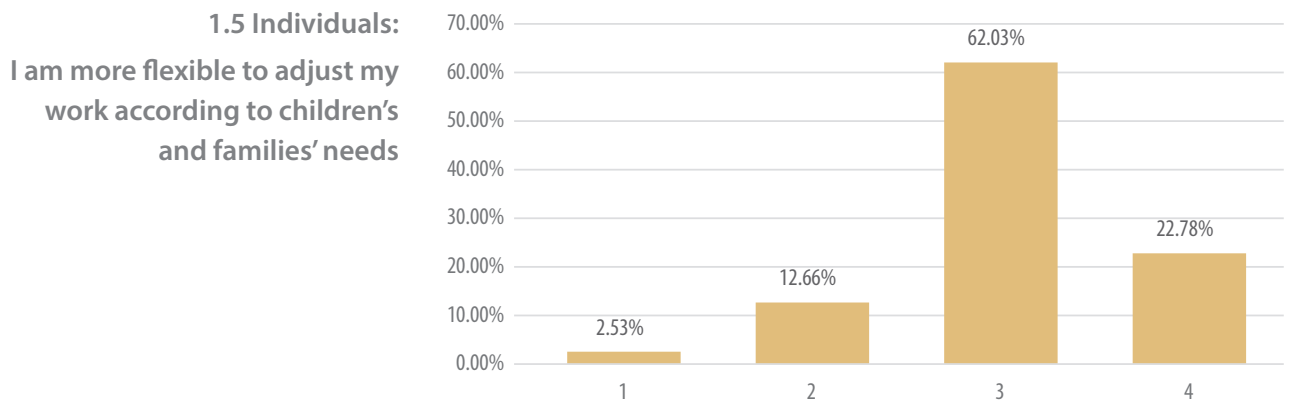
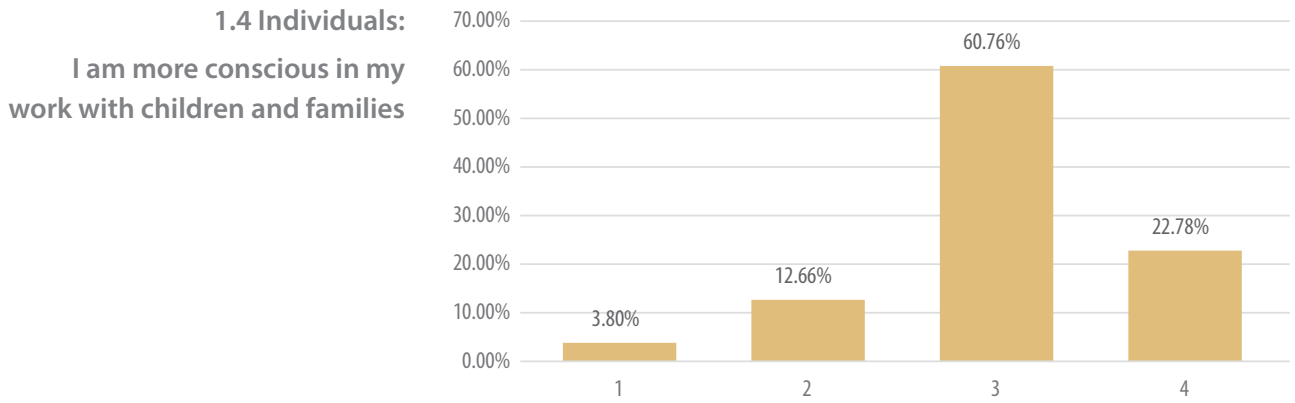


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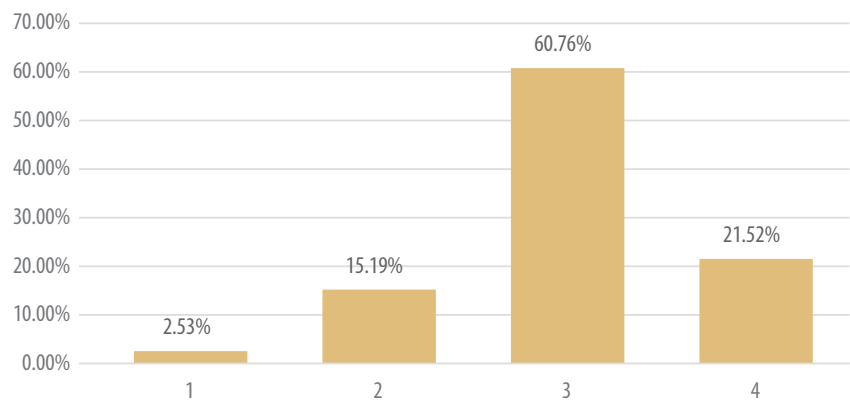
**1.3 Peer observation:**  
To what extent does this method helped you in the process of professional reflection?



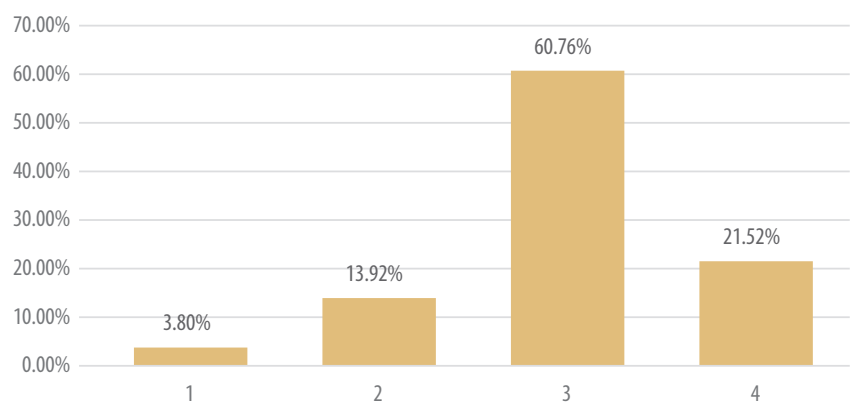
Scale 1-4:



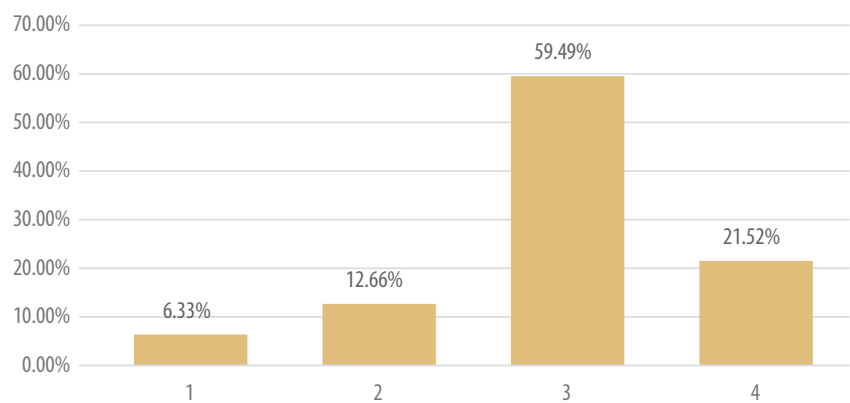
**1.8 Individuals:**  
I feel more confident in my pedagogical approach towards children



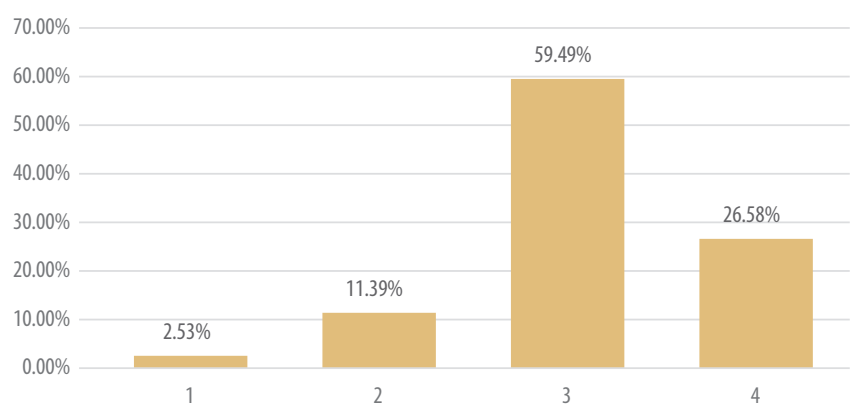
**1.9 Individuals:**  
I feel more confident in communication with parents



**1.10 Individuals:**  
I feel more confident in cooperation with parents

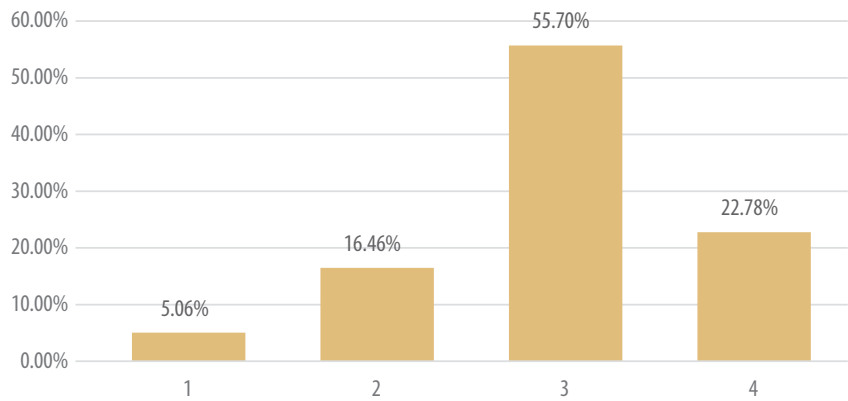


**1.11 Individuals:**  
I feel more confident in communication with colleagues

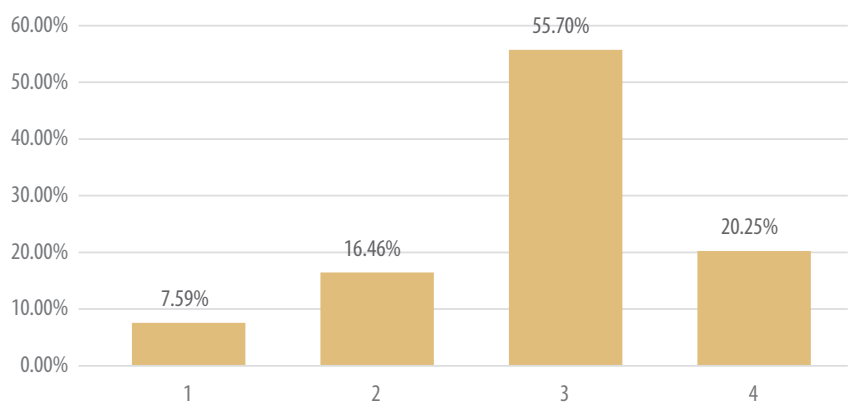




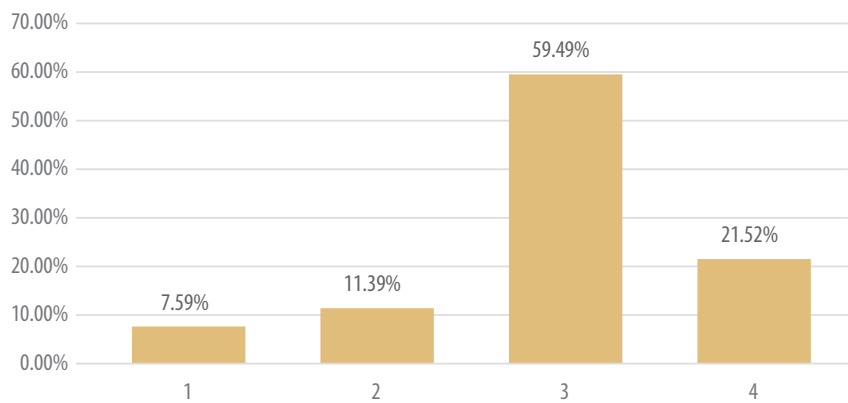
**1.12 Individuals:**  
**I feel more confident in cooperation with colleagues**



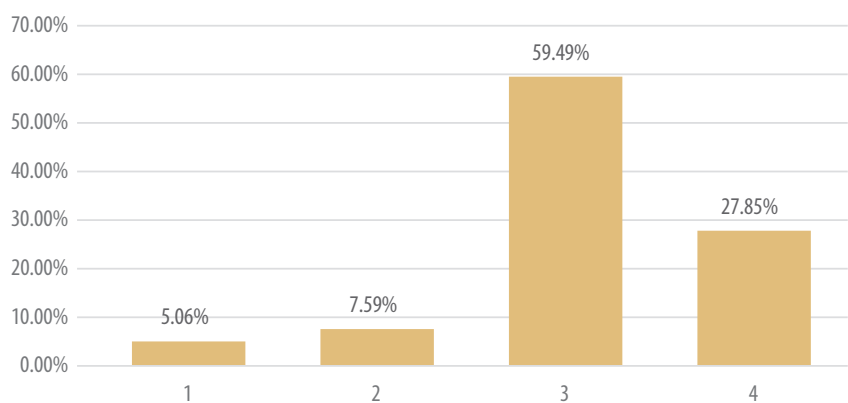
**1.13 Individuals:**  
**I feel more confident in communication with external partners**



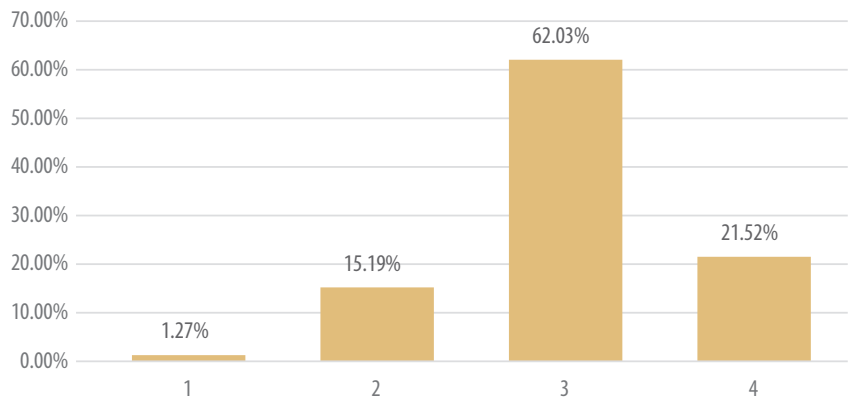
**1.14 Individuals:**  
**I feel more confident in cooperation with external partners**



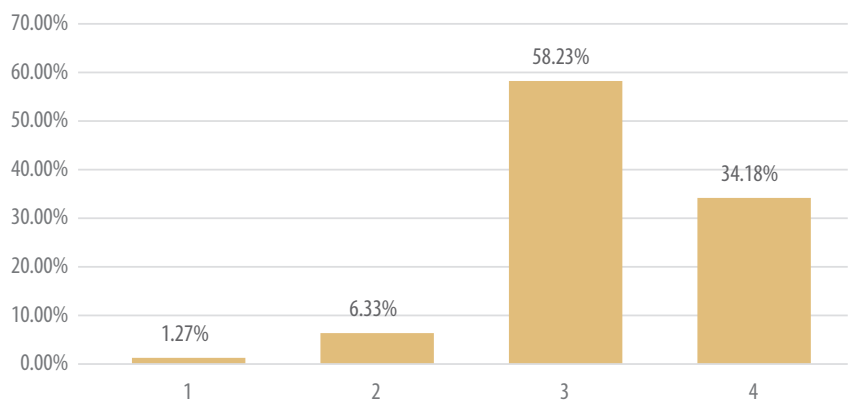
**1.15 Individuals:**  
**I am more able to handle difficult/challenging situations in my work**



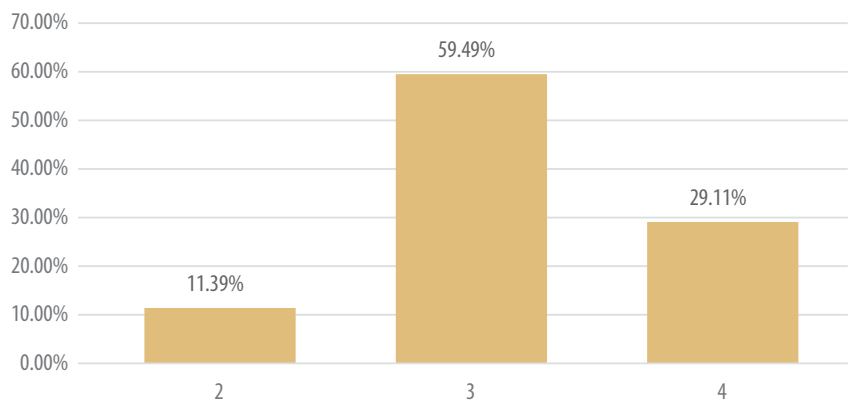
**1.16 Individuals:**  
I have more willingness to talk about / to ask feedback about my work



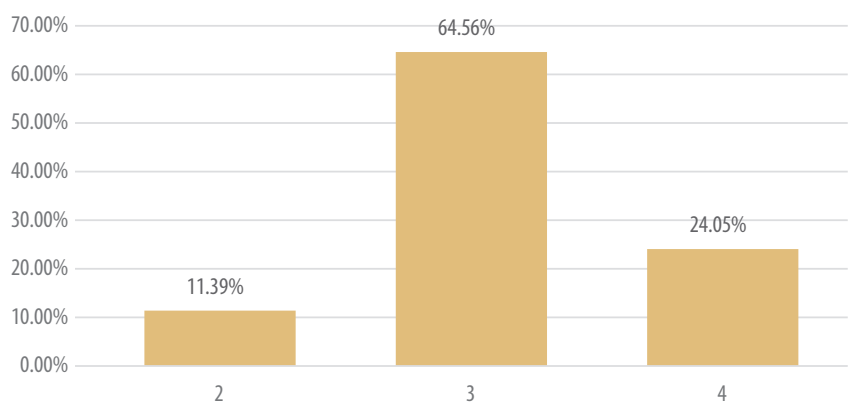
**1.17 Individuals:**  
I am more conscious about the strenghts in my work

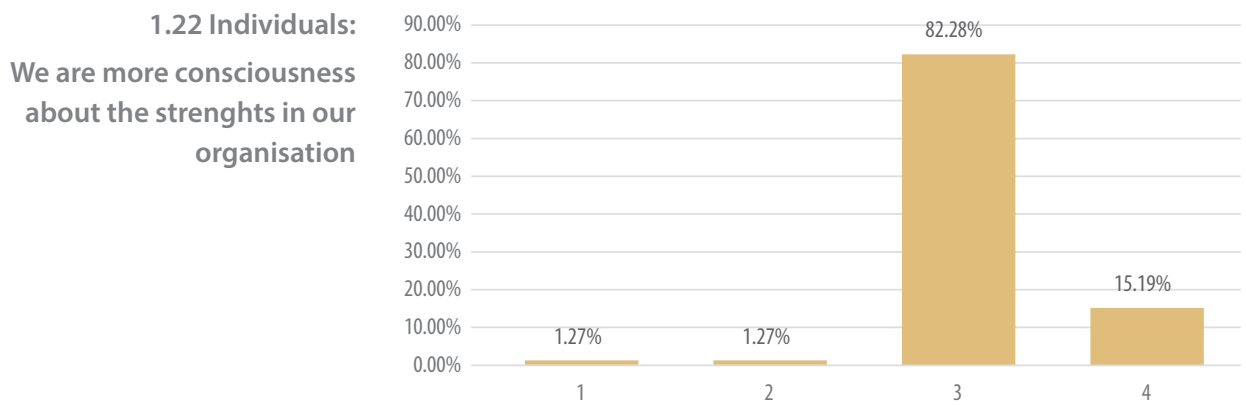
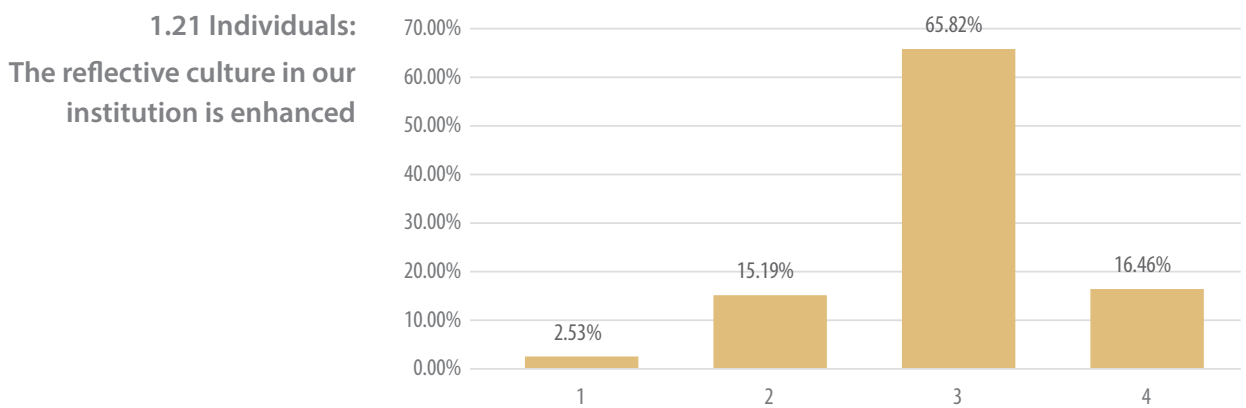
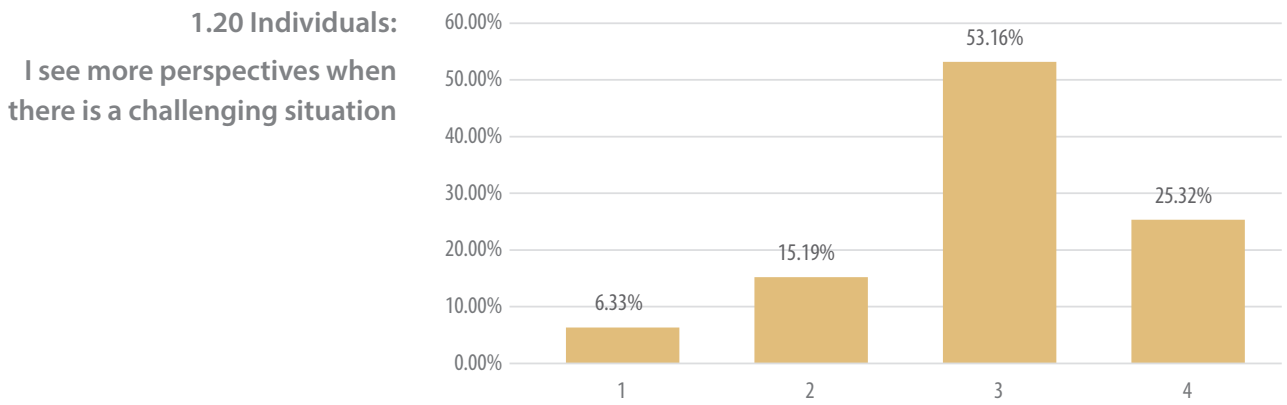


**1.18 Individuals:**  
I gained new insights (ideas, inspiration) during the process

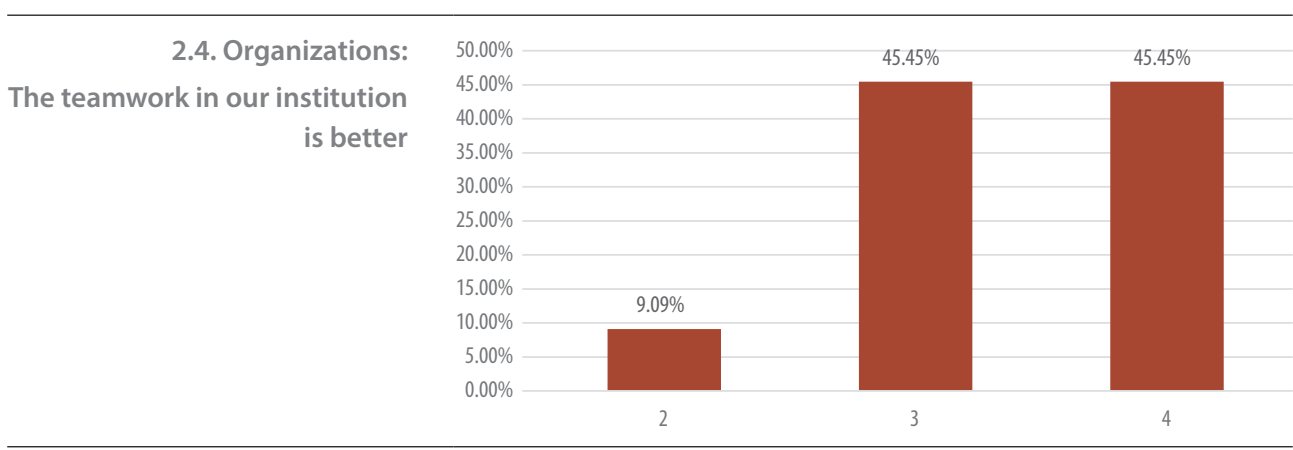
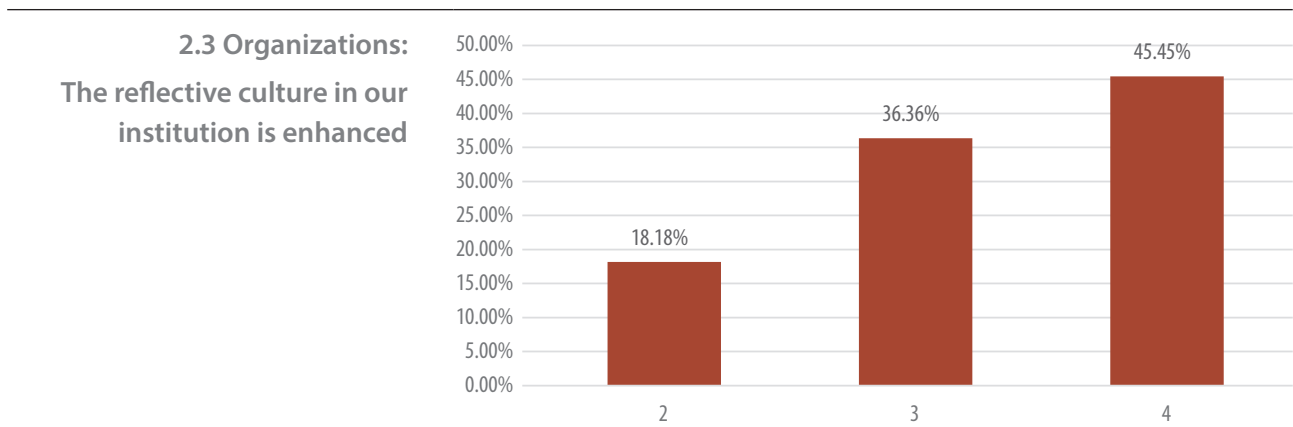
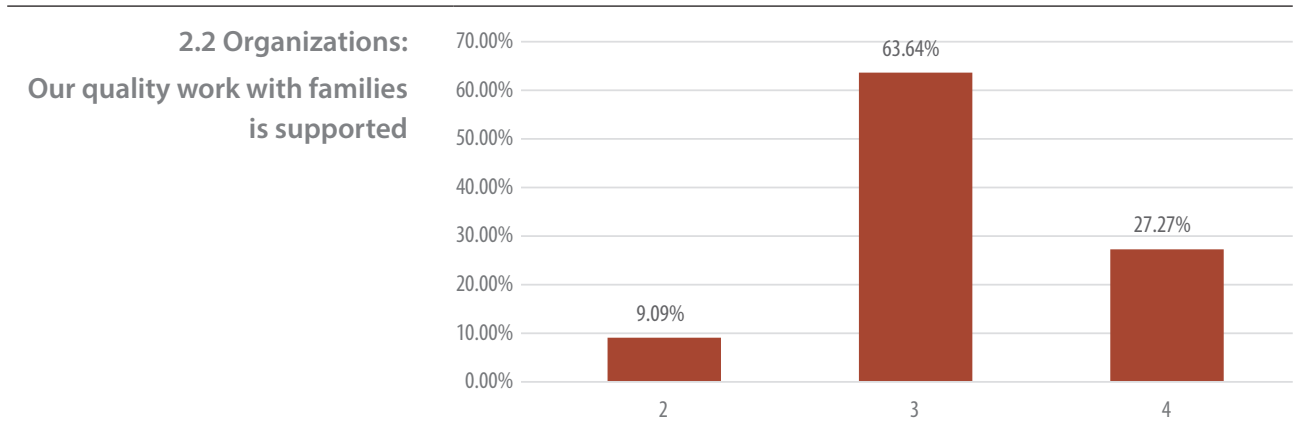
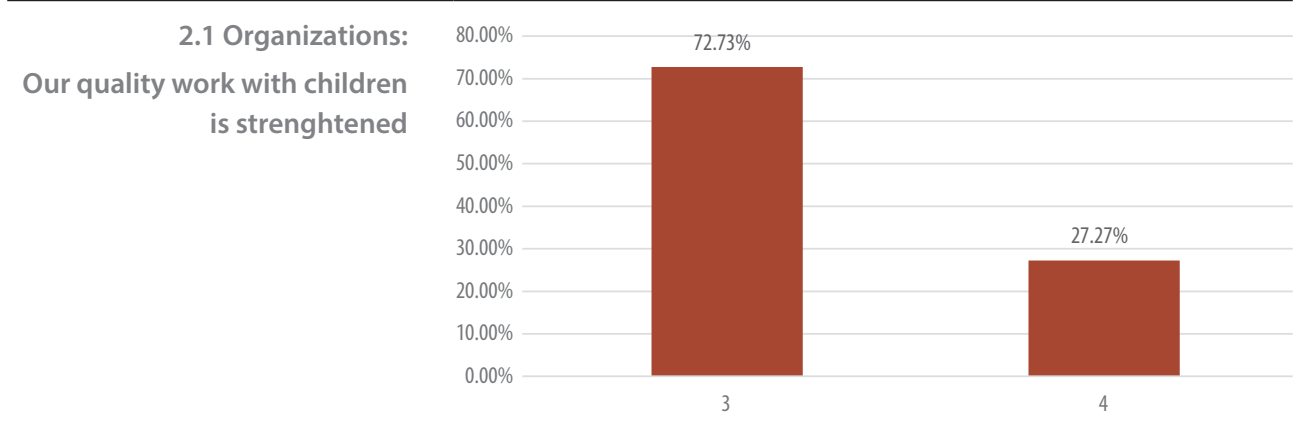


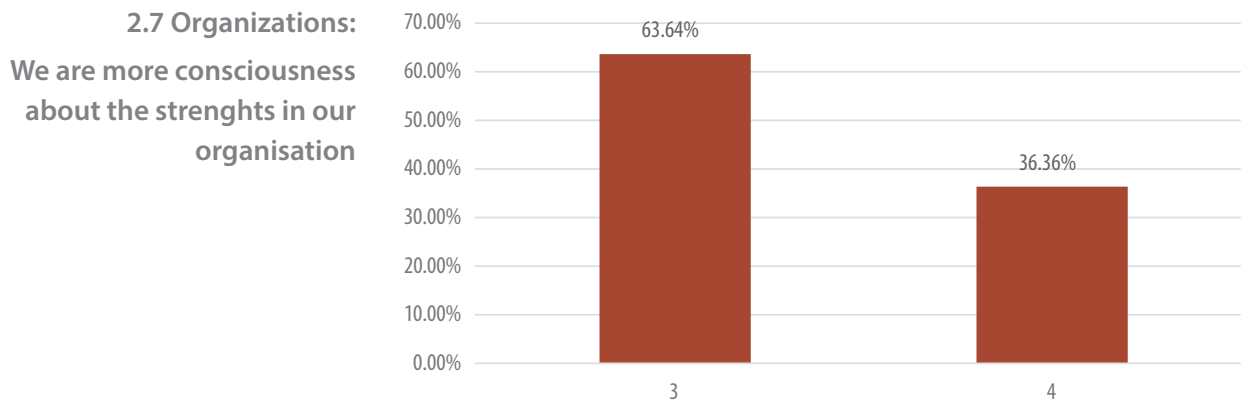
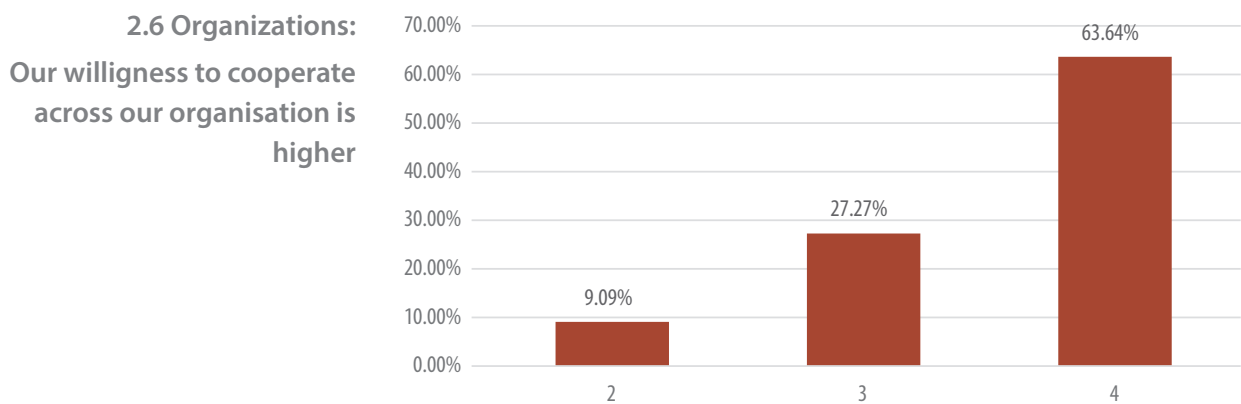
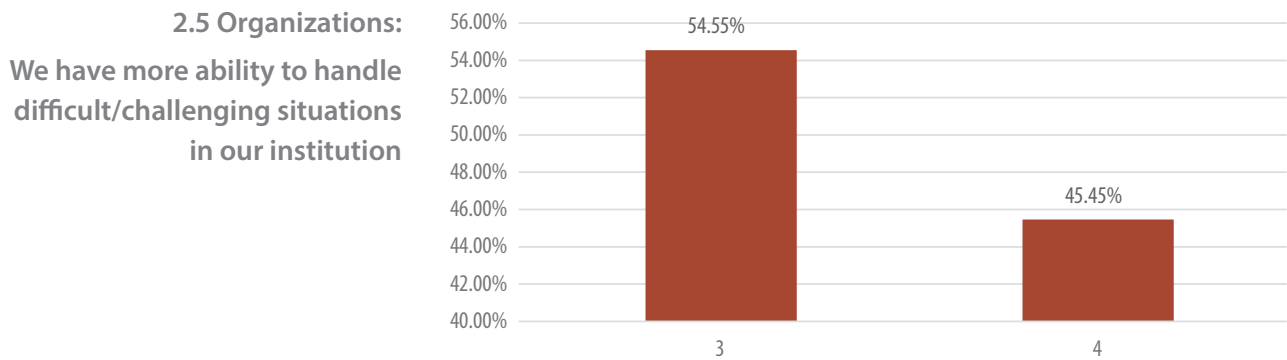
**1.19 Individuals:**  
I feel more supported in my work





Our questionnaire the for organizations was filled in by 11 respondents. (Scale 1-4)





# 3. FINAL MSC STORIES SELECTED BY PANELS

## Slovenia

### 1. Watch me and learn about me

This is a story about a kindergarten teacher who works in one of the kindergartens near Ljubljana. She just finished her formal education and is very eager to learn about new methods which can support her professional development. After joining the professional learning community (PLC) she has become more aware of how can you see a situation from another angle, how you can approach a challenge in a constructive way and consider experiences and opinions of your colleagues. This community gives you the feeling of not being alone.

The teacher sees a special advantage in writing the action plan. This action gives her additional push to start observing her children more regularly, to take notes and react to what she detects. She works with a group of the youngest children. There is also a boy who had quite a short attention span at the beginning of the school year. None of the toys did not attract him in that way he would play with it for a while or just explore it a bit. Time passed and the teacher did not see any progress with this boy. But when she started following his play more regularly and in a structured way, she reacted to what she had seen. She planned activities based on his interests, she got involved in his play and tried to get him involved more and more and also got to know him better. After that she reflected what she had done, how he reacted, what worked and what did not.

Now, after some months passed by, she notices that the boy is more persistent with his play, he is more interested in toys and explores them. He also expresses the need for interacting with her, is more eager to communicate with his peers which has consequently led to his speech development.

This way of following the boy does not only help her with her relationship with him, but bring useful information which she can share with his parents. They have noticed the same difficulties as the teacher did and wanted to help their son in gaining his attention. They can now discuss the child's progress together.

The teacher sees many positive effects in such structured way of following her work, observing her children in the group, taking notes and reflecting them. She sees advantages of such practice in her work as well as with the children.

### 2. Reflection brings changes

Irma is employed in a kindergarten in the vicinity of Ljubljana. She has 30 years of working experiences during which she realized that life, children and herself has changed significantly. After becoming part of the professional learning community (PLC), she began to think more about herself and her way of working. She noticed that her work became too much of a routine for her, but her involvement in the PLC pushed her to start thinking deeper about the learning process, the children and herself. She is aware that she does not feel alright at the moment, she notices that she does not handle her work anymore as she used to.

In this school year, she is working with a group of children aged 1 to 5. Some of them need additional help, which they do not always receive as their special needs are not officially recognized. This means that Irma and her colleague have full responsibility of these children despite the fact that they do not have special education to work with certain disabilities. They only receive assistance for one girl once a week, but there are at least two other children who would need additional help from a professional.

Irma feels that with her pedagogical ways, with

which she was successful in the past, do not have the same impact as they used to. She has the urge to for further learning with the aim of helping the children, of strengthening herself, gaining back the confidence, knowledge and skills she knows she has gained during her career.

She has no difficulties in sharing her doubts within her reflective group of colleagues. She is aware that together they can discuss on how to approach children to become more involved, responsive and motivated for cooperation. Within the PLC, the kindergarten teachers think together how not to overlook the children who do not call or need special attention. She wants to see the whole group of children.

Irma would like to feel again the true mission of her being a kindergarten teacher. She would like to overcome the constant feeling of being tired and would like to gain new knowledge and bring it to her practice. She thinks that this could help her be sovereign again, feel pleasure with her work and being capable of give the right response to her children in the group. She is aware of the fact that if she feels good in the classroom, the children will feel the same as well.

## Belgium

### 1. A whole child's day together in pictures

I have been the teacher with the toddlers and first kindergarten at our school for 6 years. I didn't think about it very often in the past, but by sitting together with the colleagues from the daycare, I now see better that a child's day lasts a long time and we at school only have a little bit of fun. I now realize that the preschoolers arrive at my place but have already experienced things in daycare sometimes, and vice versa also in the evening in daycare, things still happen after they leave my classroom.

And actually, as teachers, we did not know what it was like in out-of-school care. By sitting down with the colleagues from the shelter, I really got to know how they work. I thought the kids are just there and playing but they really do activities with kids, I didn't know that. And I've also heard a lot about what

children are like in daycare. Because as a teacher I sometimes wonder 'what would this child be like at home or in daycare?' 'are the children different with other people?'. I want to assess a child's ability to respond well in different situations. Usually parents say 'everything is fine at home' but if I could now talk to the supervisors of the daycare about certain children or situations, it gave confirmation that they are facing the same challenges. That really reassured me as a teacher: it's not my fault, I'm not doing a bad job.

It helped me a lot that we really took the time to sit together, because that's not so easy on an ordinary day. We sometimes see each other pass by at the pick-up, but then sometimes there are also parents and then you cannot talk about a specific situation. But now we've really taken the time to put problem situations on the table and chat about them. I found those cases of certain children really interesting to discuss and everyone to hear their opinion about them. Also by showing the videos, others can see what it is like, because you can describe a situation, but that is not the same as what you see on video. And if that colleague from daycare says 'ah, we have that too, I'll deal with that in a minute' 'it works for us if we do that with that child', then you can also try that out in your class and try to think about that. I handled some things differently and that improved the situation. You hear ideas from other people and that means that you don't always have to think in the same pattern. And in this way it is also possible to hear how they deal with certain children or situations in daycare, and so we can respond better to each other. If the children come to me from daycare or they go from the classroom to daycare, the line is a bit the same. Otherwise, children don't know 'it's like this in daycare or it's like this in the classroom'. It is important that the line is extended a bit.

In that way, I really feel like we've been watching a toddler's day together, from start to finish, and that gave a lot of inspiration and recognition!

### 2. Small steps towards 'softness'

By bringing together school and out of school staff around a table, and by guiding them in this reflec-

tion process, I have the impression that the staff members became 'softer' towards each other, meaning that their communication takes now more each other into account, they listen to each other. Before, it was easier to stick to one's own point of view. Now, also thanks to the use of the different 'Wanda glasses', there is more openness. I see it during the Wanda sessions. But I also see changes in their practice. For example, when they have to discuss a specific child, the teachers of the preschool now look if a professional of the out of school can be present too. They are more aware that they are working with the same families and children, and that their reciprocal meanings can enrich their practices and be helpful for everybody. The same also in the relationship towards us, as directors: I see that the communication between me and the staff is now also 'softer', we take each other more into account and we are aware that we are into this path together, we are all learning. I have to say that guiding this process as director has not been easy. I underestimated the engagement and time that such a process requires. So I felt the weight of my responsibility. But now, seeing the result, even if we are talking about small steps because the process was short, I am happy I've done it.

## Croatia

### 1. Zoom into the community

Danijela Gracin is a primary school teacher who participated in the PLC during two pedagogical years: the first year she participated in the WANDA method, and the second year in the video coaching method. As a result of the analysis of recordings of her practice (as part of the video coaching method), she believes she became more considerate of her students' needs in class and started to pay more attention to the behaviors of each student.

The experience of participating in the Videocoaching method helped her notice that one student was constantly trying to get her attention and was asking for the teacher's confirmation for every task and action. She shared this observation with the boy's mother, who confirmed the boy's similar behavior at home.

Danijela and the mother concluded that they should work together to empower the boy, encourage his independence, and reduce his fear of making mistakes.

In addition to the Videocoaching method helping her to notice the student mentioned, it also prompted her to change her approach toward the boy. She states that now she does not encourage his behavior but tries to encourage him to find the answer by himself, thus reducing his insecurity and fear of making mistakes.

Danijela sees the experience of participating in PLC as extremely useful. The whole experience helped her broaden her perception and take into account the perceptions of students and parents. As well as that, after participating in WANDA and Videocoaching, she began to think more about how to approach parents and how to point them to the behavior and needs of students at school. Also, she began to think more about the behaviors and actions of all the students in the class.

### 2. The togetherness is wonderful

Gordana Vuglec is a classroom teacher who participated in the meetings of the PLC based on the principle of the WANDA method during two pedagogical years.

She noticed the biggest change in her work when she started observing situations from the perspective of others. As she states, "When I used to come across a challenging situation, I would always look at it from my point of view. Then that situation frustrated and angered me, I didn't see a solution. However, when I started looking at the bigger picture and saw it from the perspective of some other people who are in that situation together with you, then you had the opportunity to understand that you are not the only one who has to solve it and that not all the burden and responsibility is on you".

Teacher Gordana also points out that the WANDA meetings have led to a deepening of relationships and the development of a sense of understanding and support among the meeting participants. The



experience of reflective practice enabled them to more freely express the difficulties they encounter: “I can more easily say that I have a problem, I don’t know how to deal with it, I don’t know every time if I did the right thing, and I know that I won’t be condemned”.

Although she has successfully cooperated with the support staff of the school (psychologist, speech therapist, and pedagogist) many times, she believes that WANDA meetings would be more successful if the members of the meetings were only teachers. In that case, she believes, teachers would be more relaxed and freer to present cases without thinking about how the support staff of the school would understand them. On the other hand, she believes that the WANDA meetings helped all the participants get closer. She points out that there was also a connection between the teachers and members of the support staff because the teachers realized that the support staff also faces various difficulties in their work. “We realized that even the support staff, despite their professional knowledge, has problems that are difficult for them to deal with and that are as difficult for them to solve as they are for us”.

She believes that the experience of participating in WANDA meetings helped her in her professional as well as personal development, and this was primarily contributed by the experience of togetherness: “We all kind of swim in our classes when the doors close—you are alone, and WANDA meetings caused that we no longer feel alone”.

## Hungary

### 1. Trustful Relationship

Talking to a new parent is easier thanks to the REC programme. Now that the programme is over, when I found myself in challenging situations, I immediately think about what might the child or parent be thinking, feeling, when I imagine myself walking in their shoes, it helps me to communicate better with them. In the past, I just told the new parent the necessary information about the kindergarten: how the days go, what parents need to bring in, etc. Today, I prefer to start our conversation with questions to get to know them better first. Only after that I will tell you about the kindergarten in such a way that I have already assessed his personality a little. I can respond better to what he needs, as I can calm him down. The most important thing is that I am better able to build trust with him and the child. I also approach the child slowly to get to know them better. If he is communicative, then I talk to him, if he is more shy, then to the parent first. In many cases, it used to be difficult to accept the parents’ choices concerning their child in a challenging situation. Today I can accept their decisions, points of view better. We will have parent meetings soon. I think with the help of REC, I will also understand parents better during these meetings, why they decide one way or another in certain situations, and I will be able to give advice taking their points of view into consideration. This is important to me because I have always found it difficult to communicate with parents. It’s easier with children. So I have improved in this and I can keep improving.



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