

HOW TWO CITIES GREW WITH THEIR LITTLE ONES

Examples of good practice and guidelines for decision-makers in cities/towns and municipalities on the inclusion of vulnerable groups of children in preschool education



unicef 
for every child

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INTRODUCTION

In each country where it operates, it is common for UNICEF, in cooperation with the government of that country, to agree and sign a five-year plan and for results to be achieved in that period for the benefit of children. UNICEF's activity supports government efforts in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child and strategic plans in the field of children's wellbeing, including, in the current period (2017 – 2021), the Plan of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the part that relates to securing a place in kindergarten for every child. UNICEF advocates the inclusion of vulnerable groups of children in preschool education based on evidence which shows that kindergartens are places for the development of children and for helping to deliver equal living conditions and not just to provide child care services for busy parents. The groups include Roma children, children with disabilities, children who live in isolated, small places, and children who live in poverty. The European Commission, which supports and monitors the progress of Member States in ensuring quality early education for all children, shares a similar approach. High-quality early education has a positive effect on the social, economic, and educational development of every person and on the community itself.

Over the past few years, there has been a noted increase in the number of children with disabilities and Roma children in preschool education programmes in Croatia. Children who live in poverty and in remote, rural areas, in view of the criteria for enrolment and the network of preschool education programmes, still only rarely attend.

Further efforts should be made to involve vulnerable groups of children in early education to help them exercise their rights and diminish inequality. The responsibility of the state and local self-government is shared: the central level sets the state pedagogical standard for preschool education, while local self-government units provide the service. In Croatia, local self-government accounts for more than two-thirds of preschool education service providers. Four in five children in Croatia attend programmes funded by local self-government.

Until a national framework to enable all children in the country to attend preschool education is established, it is important to strengthen local communities in the process of ensuring places at kindergarten for all children.

Therefore, UNICEF, in cooperation with two local self-government units, proceeded with the development of a model for including all children in high-quality early education, which might be beneficial for others as well. Development of the model was approved and supported by the Ministry of Science and Education within the wider plan of activity of UNICEF in the field of early education. To help us develop the model, we also invited representatives of civil society with experience and knowledge of how to involve vulnerable groups of children in early education and how to work with communities in which the regular approach to the inclusion of children in educational processes has not yielded the desired results.

In Slavonski Brod and Sisak, our joint forces have achieved that goal and, from 2018, all children in both cities have been involved in some sort of preschool education. In early 2019, we asked all participants in the processes to tell us, based on their roles, what, in their experience, helped them reach this goal. Based on these observations, and on other documents, we have drawn up an expert overview of the experiences of Sisak and Slavonski Brod¹ which served as a template for this booklet. We hope that the experiences and messages recorded will be an inspiration to decision-makers in other cities/towns and municipalities.

¹ The expert overview was prepared by Biserka Tomljenović.

WHY IT MATTERS THAT ALL CHILDREN ATTEND KINDERGARTEN²

Research shows that children who attend early education programmes:

- find it easier to cope with the syllabus when they begin to attend primary school;
- have better chances of continuing their education (to reach further or higher education);
- fall behind the rest of pupils to a lesser extent, especially children from families where parents have a lower level of education and live in poverty;
- acquire key skills during the phase of the most intensive brain development;
- in adulthood, they have the potential to earn more (in view of the correlation between early education and work productivity).

Research shows that communities that invest in early education:

- at a later stage, need to spend less to remedy poor educational outcomes and possible problems in children;
- reduce inequality and create equal chances of success for every child, regardless of the socioeconomic status of the parents;
- have parents who are more satisfied and who, thanks to kindergartens, find it easier to strike a balance between their private and work obligations;
- for every 1 kuna invested in quality preschool education for vulnerable groups of children, up to 10 lipa is generated as these children grow up.

Therefore, it is important for the future of local communities to ensure early education for every child.

² UNICEF, *A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education*, New York, April 2019.



WHAT THIS BOOKLET CONTAINS AND FOR WHOM IT IS INTENDED

Following success in ensuring early education for children in Sisak and Slavonski Brod, we felt it important to record and share this experience with other cities/towns and municipalities. We believe that the two cases can serve as inspiration and support for decision-makers in local self-government. In this booklet, we record the beginning of our experiences and the first steps, how we conducted the activities and programmes, the obstacles we faced on our path to success, and how we ultimately ensured that the programme was sustainable. Approximately four years (2014 – 2018) were needed from the launch of the initiative to the full implementation of the programme. We believe that with these experiences others can achieve results faster. Children grow rapidly and they will not need these services once they are in school.

This booklet is intended for everyone involved in and with responsibility for making decisions in counties, cities/towns and municipalities. We believe that it will be useful for anyone who wishes to raise the quality of life of children and their families in their communities by providing early education for every child, regardless of the difficulties that a child might face, and irrespective of isolation or poverty. It is not just intended for the heads of social affairs services because investing in the development of children and young people is the task and responsibility of the community as a whole.



THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO WAYS TO REACH A GOAL

“To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.”

– Chinese proverb

Working with local communities and civil society organisations, parents and children, we collected valuable experience in ensuring early education for every child. While in Slavonski Brod we were building on the positive experience of the programme “Ready Together”, which was implemented in cooperation with the Open University “Korak po korak” and the city, in Sisak we attained the same goal with this programme and with other innovative projects that strengthened our local partners and the initiatives undertaken, in cooperation with the association “Mi”, the Open University “Korak po korak”, and the city authorities. The goal was a kindergarten for every child.

In terms of their demographic and developmental indicators, Sisak and Slavonski Brod are similar. Both cities belong to the same group of local self-government units based on the development index and are located in counties having the status of assisted area. The share of the population with lower education in the two cities is higher than the Croatian average, while the proportion of those who are highly educated is below the Croatian average.

Both cities have a rather large Roma community. It is estimated that there are around 2,164 Roma in Sisak and about 1,142 in Slavonski Brod. In both cities, efforts to ensure the social and educational inclusion of the Roma community have been made since 2000. Both cities have the title “child-friendly city”.

Which vulnerable groups of children do we recognise in our local self-government?



Slavonski Brod: “Ready Together”

“Sometimes we are insensitive to children: ‘You haven’t done your homework’ or ‘You haven’t brought your materials’, and so we open a new wound right on top of an existing one. This is why I love this training in particular: it has really helped us change people’s attitudes and freed us from prejudices in work with children.”

– Statement by teacher during the evaluation of the programme “Ready Together”

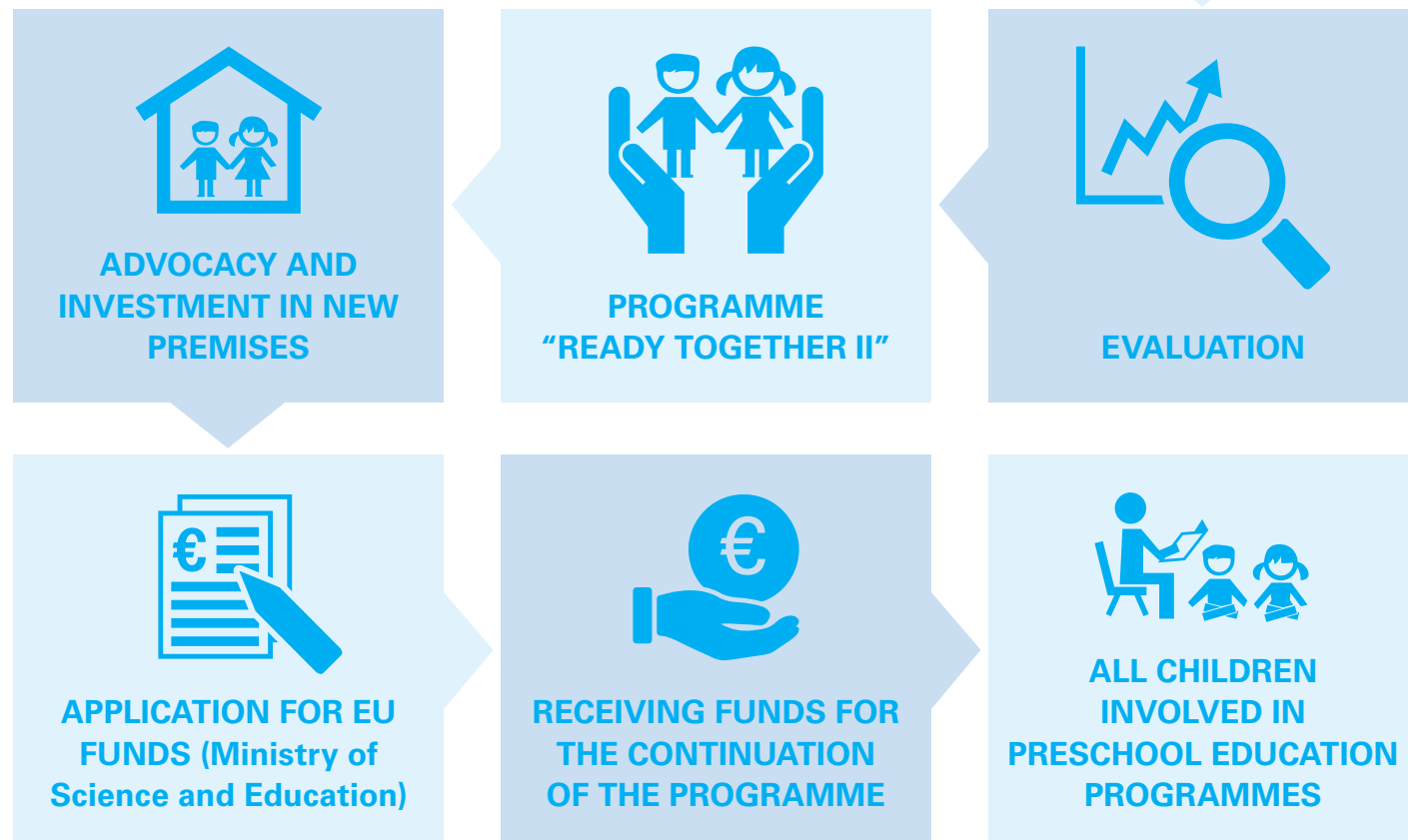
On UNICEF’s proposal and with its financial support, the City of Slavonski Brod supported the programme “Ready Together”. This programme was developed and is implemented by the Open University “Korak po korak”. Before Slavonski Brod, it was also put to effect successfully in several local communities in Međimurje. It helps Roma children, but also other vulnerable groups of children, who mostly do not have the opportunity to attend kindergarten regularly so that they can prepare for the beginning of their primary education. This is achieved through work with school and kindergarten staff, parents, representatives of the local community, including those in the health and social welfare sector, and with children. The programme aims to build good relations amongst families, the school/kindergarten, and the community at large, with the aim of supporting children, their developmental and educational achievements, since children’s progress is better in a supportive environment (parents, teachers, and the community).

However, before the programmes that involve direct work with children and families, it is important to change the social climate in the community. A positive social climate for the inclusion of vulnerable groups of children in education, such as Roma children or children with developmental difficulties, is the prime condition for creating trust and partnership between schools and parents. In order to build such a positive climate in the community, the programme begins with intensive education that lasts several days: “To Live Diversity – Education for Social Inclusion”. The training includes representatives of the local community, headteachers, professional assistants in schools and kindergartens, representatives of the Roma community and of parents. The training raises awareness of the ways in which prejudice and stereotypes appear in the community and shows how they affect behaviour, decisions, and the social climate. For example, teachers and parents alike often have low expectations of Roma children. Such expectations contribute to their lower educational achievements. These expectations need to change, and this is achieved through the programme “Ready Together”.



Which impediments for the inclusion of all children in early and preschool education do we recognise in our local self-government?

Flowchart of creating change in Slavonski Brod



"I knew that this teacher [workshop leader] is a good teacher because she was also my older child's teacher, but now I also know she is a very good person."

– A mother from Slavonski Brod who took part in the workshops

After the first steps to create a positive foundation for changing the social climate, the programme strengthens the competences of teachers, professional staff, and headteachers for cooperation with parents and communities. This takes place through professional development entitled "Teaching children for whom Croatian is not the first language" and "Building partnership between the school and parents/families".

Most of the activities in the programme consist of the workshops "Parenting Support" intended for the parents of pre-schoolers (not specifically for poor families or those from other vulnerable groups) and are connected with school. The workshop leaders are mostly school teachers and, whenever possible, kindergarten teachers, thus promoting the easier transition of children from kindergarten (if they are enrolled) to school. In the workshops, parents learn about the games they can play with children in daily and planned activities, so that their children can develop pre-reading, pre-maths, and pre-writing skills. During the workshops, parents lose their fear and unease about school, so they begin to feel welcome in the school and as a result cooperation between the school and parents becomes stronger.

At the end of the programme, participants from various cities and schools gather and exchange experience via the REYN Croatia Roma Children Support Network and study visits are also organised.³ In the programme "Ready Together", implemented with UNICEF's financial and technical support, the premises for preschool activities in the "Hugo Badalić" Primary School were also equipped.

Programme leaders and creating change: members of the city authorities headed by the mayor and deputy mayor of the City of Slavonski Brod, the headteacher and teachers of the "Hugo Badalić" Primary School, the head and kindergarten teachers of the "Ivana Brlić Mažuranić" Kindergarten, the representative of the Roma community, employees of the Open University "Korak po korak", employees of the UNICEF Office for Croatia.

³ Read more about the programme "Ready Together" on the website of REYN – Roma Children Support Network: <http://www.reyn-hrvatska.net/index.php/2019/04/02/krenimo-zajedno-2-u-sisku-grad-sisak-i-unicef-hrvatska/>.

Sisak: “Ready Together”, “For a Better Start” and “Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion”

“The City of Sisak recognises the need to invest in sustainable programmes targeting Roma children, which is a precondition for their social integration and for bridging the gap in equality between the Roma and the non-Roma community, but also for bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. In this project, we see an opportunity to strengthen schools and parents, but also to produce a shift in attitudes in public institutions and to create an atmosphere where differences are accepted, which will also have a positive impact on the position of other vulnerable groups of children, such as children with disabilities, children from socially vulnerable families and children in foster care. The City of Sisak recognised the importance of educational inclusion a long time ago, and this project is the pinnacle of its efforts and the guarantor of sustainability.”

– Statement by the Mayor of Sisak during the presentation of the project “Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion” in February 2016

Just as in Slavonski Brod, the programme “Ready Together” was also conducted in Sisak on UNICEF’s initiative and in cooperation with the Open University “Korak po korak”. Besides this programme, UNICEF also supported in Sisak an additional initiative, “For a Better Start”. It was conducted by the association “Mi” in cooperation with local partners. The goal of the initiative was to recognise local partners who could launch new services for the youngest children in cooperation with the City of Sisak. That is how the programme “Sisak’s Colourful Summer” came about. During the summer months, children learned more about their city and there were numerous free activities organised by various city institutions.

This programme encouraged better cooperation between the City of Sisak and city institutions in providing quality services for the youngest children. Good cooperation between partners and the positive results of the programme inspired the creation of a longer-term programme for the educational inclusion



of children called “Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion”. The initial implementation of the programme was also supported financially and technically by UNICEF, in cooperation with the city and the Open University “Korak po korak”.

“Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion” included training and workshops for teachers, children and parents. One of the key results was strengthened intersectoral cooperation, that is, the networking of city institutions, such as the museum, library, tourism board, theatre, and local Roma and non-Roma NGOs, health institutions and social welfare institutions. The aim was to organise sustainable activities for Roma children and for children from families who live in difficult conditions within the regular activities of the partner. With support from UNICEF and IKEA, part of the Hrastelnica Branch School for preschool and extended stay activities was also renovated and equipped.

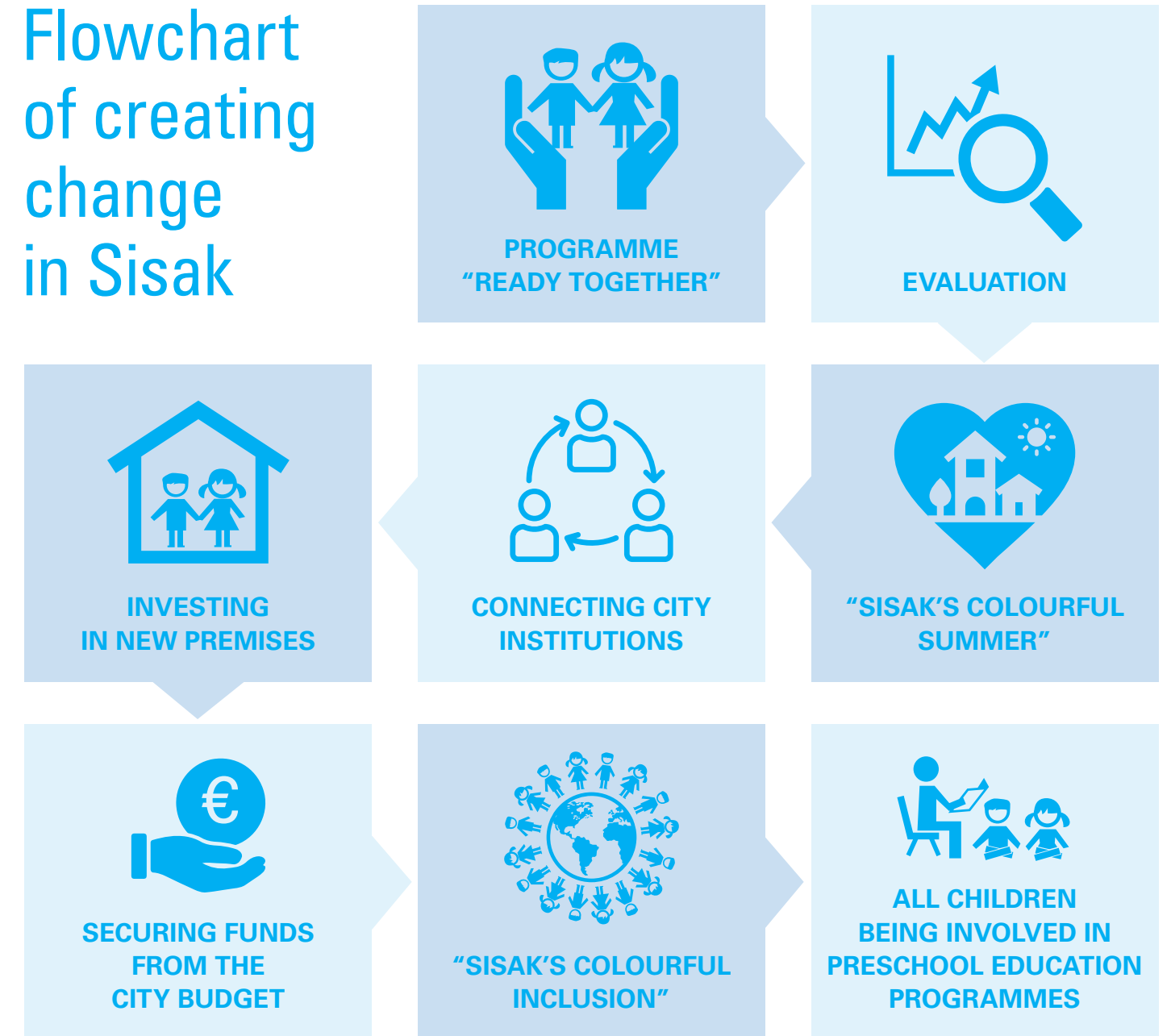
Programme leaders and creating change: members of the city authorities headed by the mayor and the head of the Department of Preschool Education, Education and Sports of the City of Sisak, representatives of UNICEF and of the Open University "Korak po korak", members and associates of the association "Mi", coordinators in the Roma community, heads and teachers from Galдово Primary School / Hrastelnica Branch School, "Braća Bobetko" Primary School, and the head and kindergarten teachers of Sisak Novi Kindergarten and Sisak Stari Kindergarten. The following institutions from the local community were also involved in implementing the programme:

- "Vlado Gotovac" Public Library and Reading Room
- Sisak City Museum
- "Kristalna kocka vedrine" Culture House
- Tourism Board of the City of Sisak
- Radio Sisak d.o.o.
- Sisak Association for Early Intervention in Childhood
- Association of the Roma of Sisak-Moslavina County and the City of Sisak "Nevo Drom"
- Civil Rights Project
- Local Democracy Agency
- Sisak Health Centre
- Sisak Social Welfare Centre/Branch Office Family Centre
- "Dr. Ivo Pedišić" General Hospital
- "Auto promet" Sisak
- Sisak Home for the Elderly and the Infirm
- Urbina Children's Home
- Sisak City Museum
- Tourism Board of the City of Sisak
- Sisak Health Centre
- Arts and Craft Centre
- Croatian Readers' Society, Sisak Branch Office
- Children's City Council of the City of Sisak
- "Ivan Kukuljević" Primary School
- Civil Rights Project Sisak

Who are the
key stakeholders in the
field of early and preschool
education in our local
self-government?

Thanks to the improved awareness of the importance of early education, and following some encouraging results and the efforts of various stakeholders, from the autumn of 2018, all children in both cities now attend some form of preschool education.

Flowchart of creating change in Sisak



HOW WE ACHIEVED THE RESULTS AND WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY



In both cities, the programme that UNICEF proposed to the city and the community (“Ready Together”) proved to be a good start for cooperation and for examining new opportunities. Other than helping a generation of children to be successful in primary school, it also affected the social climate and helped gather key stakeholders whose participation is important for involving vulnerable groups of children in early education. The process of evaluation of programmes conducted by all participants helped gain insight into the contribution of the programme to improving the life of children, which encouraged discussion about the future and about sustainability.

As a path towards the financial sustainability of the programme, the City of Sisak opted to finance activities from its own budget, while the City of Slavonski Brod selected the route of seeking external co-financing (European Social Fund and the programme “Professional and financial support for the education of Roma children and pupils”) and to include it in its budget at a later stage. Both options yielded the desired results. The funds for continued activities have been secured and children are enrolled

in preschool education programmes. In Sisak, achieving the right to preschool education is recognised as a priority of the city, which has also secured funds. Further, most decisions have been adopted at the level of the city. In Slavonski Brod, the city clearly supported early education, but there were no financial resources. Therefore, in Slavonski Brod, members of the Roma community and employees of the primary school and kindergarten advocated finding a solution for financing the agreed activities in the city. Their effort was supported by the UNICEF Office for Croatia and by the Ministry of Science and Education. In 2018, this support resulted in the successful application of the city for EU funds, so that financing was secured.

Experiences from these two cities show two models of sustainability for quality programmes. The combination of an independent and external model of financing can also contribute to sustainable results. It was shown that openness and readiness to cooperate in local self-government are important in creating opportunities for every child.

Change in attitudes of education workers

In the description of the “Ready Together” programme at the beginning of this booklet, we talked about changing the social climate as an important condition for the educational success of children belonging to marginalised groups. When drawing up an overview of experience from both cities, it was seen that the first stepping-stone was training on how “To Live Diversity – Education for Social Inclusion”, which helped education workers, first and foremost, change the ways they work with Roma children and parents. In this process, teachers visited the Roma settlement for the first time, held a parents’ meeting in the open, gained parents’ trust and changed the beginning (and probably the end) of the story on the education of Roma children.

Training enabled them to see their own attitudes, which are often founded on personal experiences, stereotypes, and prejudice, in a different way. With new awareness and knowledge, education workers were more ready to step beyond the habitual ways of working with Roma parents and children, which yielded new, encouraging results. This primarily relates to better relations between kindergarten and school employees on the one hand, and parents on the other.



Making connections and establishing cooperation

“We had been trying to resolve matters for years, and were just going around in circles; we did not have any results, and were becoming less and less motivated. Children were not attending school, parents did not come for information, and nothing was working as it should. If it weren’t for the project, I have no idea how we would have resolved the situation. After the training and the project, people felt empowered and were more aware. We realised that we had the strength and we began to connect with each other, to draw closer, to apply new methods of work, which yielded results that motivated us to move on. We felt again that we could change things, that our work was not for nothing. Within the school, we also began to cooperate more, to support each other. This was the missing piece, this feeling of empathy, community and mutual support. When we got that feeling back, everything was easier and nothing seemed impossible anymore.”

– Headteacher of “Hugo Badalić” Primary School, Slavonski Brod

The “Ready Together” programme and “Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion” initiative opened the doors for links and cooperation between various city institutions, but also with the Roma community. It was this cooperation that was recognised by various stakeholders in Sisak and Slavonski Brod as one of the elements that brought about positive change.

Cooperation enabled stakeholders to get to know each other better, which resulted in the creation of a network of associates. In this network, it was those individuals whose enthusiasm and perseverance helped gather and motivate others to change that were recognised as the key change-makers. They did not necessarily hold leading positions, but they were ready to invest more of their time and effort to ensure a better future for children.

We get to know others best through cooperation and joint work for a common cause.



Enthusiasts

“Joint commitment is the key to success! Someone who cares more than the rest of us must always be more engaged than others, and others will join when they see results.”

– Head of “Ivana Brlić Mažuranić” Kindergarten, Slavonski Brod

Conversations with individuals who were recognised by other stakeholders as change-makers revealed some common values that guided them in their work. They are:

- dedication to the common good;
- the conviction that effort and perseverance pay off;
- commitment to continued personal growth and development;
- readiness to meet challenges;
- feeling of satisfaction and reward arising from their results (not necessarily short-term personal gain).

Further, these individuals emphasised the importance of support, and they singled out the following:

- they were able to work and act without any impediments, without any interference in their professional competence (they felt they were respected as professionals);
- they were able to attend quality and appropriate professional development;
- additional, common programme activities helped them establish stronger, collegial cooperation within institutions and connect with enthusiasts in various sectors and in the community at large, which strengthened their space for action,
- during the establishment and implementation of the programme, they received professional and technical support from the Open University “Korak po korak” and the UNICEF Office for Croatia.⁴

⁴ Biserka Tomljenović, in an overview of the programme of inclusion of vulnerable groups of children in preschool education in Slavonski Brod and Sisak.



**Personal effort,
enthusiasm and perseverance help
in overcoming obstacles and finding
permanent solutions.**



Good results encourage even better action

“Our enthusiasm, and we as teachers ourselves, have changed a lot: we have become more competent, we have developed new skills, we have become more sensitive to the children’s needs and living conditions, we have become more creative and informed – a visit to a [Roma] settlement opens one’s eyes. Closeness with parents creates a feeling of belonging and it motivates us further. We have become more ambitious and have set new goals – our job satisfaction is greater. Because it is nice to see the results of one’s work, to see progress. When children attend school regularly, when they have their homework done, when parents take part in meetings and support the education of their children.”

– Class teacher in “Braća Bobetko” Primary School, Sisak

Those participating in change for the sake of children pointed out that the results of activities in the programmes “Ready Together” and “Sisak’s Colourful Summer” were also an important incentive for further work on ensuring preschool education for all children. The results include:

- improved cooperation and understanding between the school and parents;
- greater motivation of teachers for work;
- children attending classes regularly;
- achieving better results.

Good results arising from joint activities strengthen stakeholders to proceed with work on engendering permanent change.

Ready to learn

“For me, these workshops are a wonderful experience. I worked in secondary school for a long time, so these methods were like remembering old skills and knowledge. It was excellent to remember the various methods of working with children and communicating with parents. Everything that we learned about work with parents was very well designed and it helped us understand the parents’ perspective better. We always tend to look at things from our own perspective, but this type of work helped us see parents from other angles.”

– Member of staff, “Braća Bobetko” Primary School, Sisak

In both cities, it was seen that programme participants were willing to learn, especially stakeholders from schools and kindergartens, but also parents who had the opportunity to see how regular household tasks can be turned into opportunities to learn and acquire skills in the “Parenting Support” workshops. The social and educational inclusion of vulnerable groups requires a change in access to and in the work of public institutions and also a change in attitudes and in the habits of the community, which is most frequently a process that can take years. For such a change, it is necessary to be willing to learn and to acquire new knowledge and skills.

The same approach to resolving old problems cannot lead to a solution. New approaches can be learned and it is necessary to organise training.



Secured funds and commitment

Those responsible for change recognise UNICEF's vital role, which, in addition to continued advocacy for essential change with the aim of ensuring children's right to kindergarten, also secures financial resources and technical support for implementing the "Ready Together" programme, "Sisak's Colourful Summer" and, also, in part, "Sisak's Colourful Inclusion". The support lasted several years and was recognised as key for creating the foundation for long-term change. UNICEF supported local efforts in Slavonski Brod and Sisak by adjusting to local needs and to the leadership of local change-makers.

In both cities, even before the implementation of the "Ready Together" programme, there had been several attempts in primary schools, and on several occasions funds were also provided, to implement additional activities for children who require further assistance in mastering the syllabus. Enthusiasts from various institutions and without any external support had been putting in extra effort for years to help children in need directly within their scope of work. Roma assistants were already employed in schools, i.e., persons who helped schools establish better contact with the community and who made the transition to primary school easier for Roma children. Employees and heads of educational institutions and activists from the Roma community took part in various seminars, training sessions and projects organised by the Ministry of Science and Education, the Education and Teacher Training Agency, the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the Roma National Council, the Roma Education Fund, the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, and many others. At the level of the community, there were numerous NGO projects that also promoted the social and educational inclusion of the Roma and other vulnerable groups. Therefore, for at least a decade, individual enthusiasts had been seeking solutions actively, with only sporadic support provided by state, international and European actors. The path to the first visible results was not easy. Those involved learned, tried various tactics, made mistakes, started again from scratch, encountered resistance and obstacles, some within their own institutions, some in relations to the Roma community, some in relation to state bodies or other public institutions, while the lack of secure financing was an impediment faced by everyone.⁵

⁵ Biserka Tomljenović, Pregled programa uključivanja ranjivih skupina djece u predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje u Slavanskom Brodu i Sisku [Overview of the programme for including vulnerable groups of children in preschool education in Slavonski Brod and Sisak] the chapter on factors of success.

Sometimes a third party, such as a donor or a partner, can contribute both financing and a fresh perspective that helps decision-makers and enthusiasts when other attempts to bring about the desired results fail.



When talking about change to enable the inclusion of vulnerable groups of children in early education, it is necessary to think about how to work with all levels that can contribute to this goal. In bringing together the community and stakeholders around the wellbeing of the child, it is important to cherish the spirit of openness and respect for all voices that have something to say.

Exchange of knowledge and experience

Those participating in change in Slavonski Brod and Sisak also recognised the exchange of experience as one of the important elements of the success of a programme. The opportunity to meet colleagues on the same or a similar path of change was invaluable for further progress: an exchange that began with study visits continued through the Roma Children Support Network REYN Croatia that gathers school teachers, kindergarten teachers, assistants, institutions, NGOs and other organisations, as well as individuals in the field of education of Roma children. Apart from the exchange of experience, there was also collegial and human support that also helped to motivate and advance the activities.

It takes a community to raise a child

Wide-ranging partnerships, the principle of participation and inclusion, and work with vulnerable groups, education workers, social workers and decision-makers in cities proved to be a good way to achieve the goals. Children's growth and development is the shared responsibility of parents, the community, and society as a whole.

Programmes implemented in Slavonski Brod and Sisak took into consideration change necessary at the family level as well as at the institutional level (kindergartens and schools) and at the level of the community as a whole. By acknowledging the role that everyone plays in raising children, we reached a solution that will in our opinion be beneficial for generations of children to come.

People going through similar situations understand each other very well. Study visits help us see there are at least two solutions to any single problem.



CHILD-FRIENDLY CITIES AND MUNICIPALITIES

In addition to the given examples from Sisak and Slavonski Brod, we would like to indicate the importance of the dedication of decision-makers in cities and municipalities to the wellbeing of children. Considering that Sisak and Slavonski Brod each bears the title of child-friendly city, we believe that such commitment helps in the prioritisation of decisions that change the lives of children for the better, focusing on the most vulnerable groups.

Other cities and municipalities can be of great help on that journey, but so can criteria that persuade decision-makers to focus attention and commit effort to the growth and development of children. The “Child-friendly Cities and Municipalities” programme in Croatia has been implemented since 1999. It encourages local communities to invest in services for children, a safe and healthy environment, health, education, culture, sports, free time for children, and to offer support for parents in raising their children.

The programme “Child-friendly Cities and Municipalities” leads to:

1. building a sense of unity amongst adults in creating programmes for children;
2. intersectoral cooperation;
3. active participation of children in the community;
4. connecting cities and municipalities with shared commitments to children;
5. helping define a national strategy for children.

Cities and municipalities that take care of children and their needs need not worry about their future. Children supported by their communities become adults who take care of the wellbeing of the community and all its members. To find out more about the “Child-friendly Cities and Municipalities” programme, visit the website of the Union of Societies “Our Children” Croatia (useful links can be found at the end of this booklet).



ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF CHANGE-MAKERS

At the end of this booklet, we would like to pass the word on and convey advice from change-makers who work for children in Sisak and Slavonski Brod.⁶

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

“It is necessary to find enthusiasts in all organisations and to begin to cooperate with them. We should identify the potential in the community – institutions and associations, and connect them, creating synergy. This is the most important role of the city.”

– *Employee of the city authorities, City of Sisak*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CHANGE AND LONG-TERM THINKING

“In every city, regardless of the vulnerable group involved, there should be workshops such as ‘To Live Diversity’. Only when people meet, look at themselves in the mirror and look at each other in the eye do relationships change. I have a message for young Roma activists: it pays off to volunteer, to learn and to invest in oneself! Don’t rush and think only short-term, because effort does pay!”

– *Representative of the Roma national minority and associate in the implementation of the projects, Slavonski Brod*

ON THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERS FOR CHANGE

“You should serve as an example to your employees. I am like a boss; the role of headteacher is important, of course. Not everyone is happy about extra work, this is never the case in any collective. However, when the headteacher is proactive, not only formally, but when she attends workshops and works all those Saturdays from 10 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon, people become uneasy and they think, ‘She’ll be there, so we have to be there, too.’ We should not take things lightly, we should always think about our practice, and sometimes, if necessary, repeat it three or four times, and not only once and think it is done. For example, we realised that it is not enough to visit the settlement only once, as we observed that it is always the same parents who visit us. We understood that we have to keep getting back to our relationship with the parents, because the more parents we attract, the better it is for the children.”

– *Headteacher of “Hugo Badalić” Primary School, Slavonski Brod*

⁶ Based on interviews with stakeholders conducted by Biserka Tomljenović.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTRIBUTING, REGARDLESS OF ONE’S FUNCTION OR POSITION, AND COMING TOGETHER

“The first step that a teacher can make is not to wait for someone to provide the answer, but to be the instigator. Someone with a vision should push. Sometimes it is necessary to put in effort and do some pleading. However, in this case, we have not encountered any resistance. A colleague should put her ideas on paper and ask at a session of the teachers’ council whether someone wants to join. If the headteacher joins, we should move towards the city and the community at large, involve the social welfare centre and organise joint training and only after such training move on to something more serious. There is nothing to be done without coming together with others, teachers can do nothing on their own.”

– *Class teacher in “Braća Bobetko” Primary School, Sisak*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION WITH THE ROMA COMMUNITY

“Persons from the community are key, because they are the only contact with the community. They can launch things within the community, they have authority in the community. It is necessary to include people who prove that they can do this well. There is no need to be afraid, and everyone in the system, especially headteachers, should do their job fully aware of the following: ‘We are not here just to be headteachers, we must do something for the community and use our free time for the common good.’ This should change in Croatia – people in leading positions should be an example and offer encouragement.”

– *Head of “Ivana Brlić Mažuranić” Kindergarten, Slavonski Brod*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

“Organise training that encourages empathy. For example, ‘To Live Diversity’ was a turning point for us. Start with that training first and build a wider circle of actors from the community, from associations, various sectors, institutions, especially representatives of vulnerable groups and then find people who are enthusiasts and continue to cooperate with them. Think about the community – you can do much more than you think. If nothing else, influence people in your institution, work with colleagues on raising awareness.”

– *Headteacher of “Braća Bobetko” Primary School, Sisak*

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY

“In order to integrate the Roma population into the majority community, we should first suppress negative stereotypes about the Roma community and learn about their past, their culture, their everyday life and language, and treat them as if they are equal members of society. It is precisely through the systematic education of young Roma and through their inclusion in all spheres of the social life of the local community that we can ensure that they acquire conditions for personal development and progress, and to begin to create better living conditions for themselves. In this way, it becomes possible for them to recognise the significance of the history and culture of the Roma national minority as a unique value that may never be grounds for discrimination in any form, but quite the contrary, something which should encourage respect of diversity. In order to achieve these goals, it is essential to ensure the synergy of all societal actors in the local community, while the City of Slavonski Brod is in this sense truly one of the examples of good practice.”

– *Deputy Mayor of the City of Slavonski Brod*

USEFUL LINKS WITH MORE INFORMATION

The “Ready Together” programme:

Krenimo zajedno, Razvoj poticajnog obiteljskog okruženja i škola spremnih za djecu i njihove obitelji.

Pučko otvoreno učilište “Korak po korak” (online).

URL: http://www.korakpokorak.hr/upload/Dijete_vrtic_obitelj/dvo-83/izdvojeno-dvo-83.pdf

UNICEF: “Krenimo zajedno” – Sisak i Slavonski Brod. YouTube (online).

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H41GL26TToE>

UNICEF: “Lea želi biti učiteljica”. YouTube (online).

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Cx38wDa52Y

UNICEF: “Igralište Slavonski Brod”. YouTube (online).

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TSsLHep7N8>

The Roma Children Support Network – REYN: REYN Hrvatska (online). URL: www.reyn-hrvatska.net

“Sisak’s Colourful Inclusion” programme:

Sisačka šarena inkluzija u 2016. godini. Grad Sisak (online).

URL: <https://sisak.hr/wp-content/uploads/Sisačka-šarena-inkluzija-u-2016.godini-brošura.pdf>

UNICEF’s publication on the importance of early education for every child “A World Ready to Learn”:

A world ready to learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education, global report. UNICEF (online).

URL: <https://www.unicef.org/media/51746/file/A-world-ready-to-learn-2019-eng%20.pdf>

The “Child-friendly Cities and Municipalities” programme:

Gradovi i općine – prijatelji djece. Savez društava Naša djeca Hrvatske (online).

URL: <http://savez-dnd.hr/gradovi-i-opcine-prijatelji-djece/>

The City of Slavonski Brod: Grad Slavonski Brod (online). URL: www.slavonski-brod.hr

The City of Sisak: Grad Sisak (online). URL: www.sisak.hr

About UNICEF: UNICEF Office for Croatia (online). URL: www.unicef.hr



