

Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the “Breaking the cycle of exclusion for Roma children through Early Childhood Development and Education” multi-country project in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Albania

April 2017



Evaluation Report

Name of the project: “Breaking the cycle of exclusion for Roma children through Early Childhood Development and Education”. This project was funded by the Austrian Development Agency.

Countries of the project: Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia

Timeframe of the evaluation: October 2016 – March 2017

Locations (country, region, etc.) of the evaluation object: Albania: Fier, Elbasan, Korca and Shkodra regions; the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Suto Orizari, Stip, Tetovo, Gostivar, Prilep, Bitola, Radovis and Kumanovo municipalities; Serbia: National coverage with the focus on 14 municipalities in the regions of Vojvodina, Belgrade and South East Serbia (Novi Sad, Pancevo, Zemun, Pozarevac, Smederevo, Kragujevac, Nis, Leskovac, Pirot, Vranje, Bojnik, Vladicin Han, Bela Palanka, Kovin)

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Acronyms

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
BDE	Bureau for Development of Education (fYR of Macedonia)
CO	Country Office
CPU	Child Protection Unit
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CwD	Children with Dissabilities
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DB	Duty bearer
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EL	Early Learning
ELDS	Early Learning Development Standards
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EU	European Union
fYR	The former Yugoslav Republic (of Macedonia)
GE	Gender equality
HR	Human rights
HRBA	Human Rights-based Approach
ICF-CY	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth
IEP	Individual Education Plans
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
ISCs	Intersectorial-Commissions for Education Inclusion (Serbia)
MCCE	Macedonian Center for Civic Education
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (FYR of Macedonia)
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports (Albania)
MoESTD	Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (Serbia)
MoH	Ministry of Health
Mol	Ministry of Interior
MoRES	Monitoring Results for Equity System
MoLEVS	Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs (Serbia)
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PHC	Primary health care
RH	Rights holder
RHM	Roma Health Mediator
SABER	System Approach for Better Education Results
SEI	State Education Inspectorate (fYR of Macedonia)
SEN	Special Education Needs
SES	Social and Economic Status
SSE	School Self-evaluation
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by UNICEF Albania, seeks to evaluate the multi-country project entitled “Breaking the cycle of exclusion for Roma children through Early Childhood Development and Education” (hereafter referred to as “the project”), which was implemented between 1 October 2013 and 31 December 2016 in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia.

With the overall objective of improving equitable access of Roma children to Early Childhood Care and Education services, the project consisted of a total of 21 activities across different geographical areas of the three project countries, which addressed the accessibility to and availability of quality inclusive services in the fields of early learning, basic education and ECD-health for children aged 0-6.

In assessing the ability of the three UNICEF Country Offices to fulfil their commitments to this project, the evaluation aims to provide quality evidence and guidance to inform key stakeholders at national and county level (such as the Governments of the 3 programme countries, the UNICEF country offices and the UNICEF regional office, the ADA among other partners, donors and public authorities) in planning and delivering programmes/services for inclusion of the most vulnerable children in quality universal services. This evaluation’s objective was to assess the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria (i.e. relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, impact) of the project. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the lessons learnt from the project and with an emphasis on how the system barriers to early inclusion of Roma children (i.e. enabling environment, supply, demand and quality) were addressed.

The evaluation was based on an Evaluation Matrix, which provided the main analytical framework according to which data was gathered and analysed throughout all evaluation phases. The evaluation questions were developed for each of the five DAC evaluation criteria and Human Rights and Gender Equality dimensions were integrated into each of the evaluation criteria. All thematic fields and geographical areas of the activities conducted during the project’s implementation period are covered in the evaluation and the sample size was determined based on the criteria of non-random sampling: geographical scope; method; and specific types of stakeholders to be sampled. Data was collected through the use methodological pluralism – through desk reviews, focus groups, structured interviews and structured observations – with the triangulation of information, providing findings in a convergent logic for the whole project as well as for each of the countries.

The analysis of the collected information led to the identification of eight key findings across the five evaluation criteria. In terms of relevance, the project was found to be fully aligned with equity-focused development priorities at global and national level. Regarding effectiveness, three key findings confirmed the successful accomplishment of intended system level changes, such as the engagement of relevant stakeholders in ECD practices, the integration of ECD services into existing structures, the strengthening of civil registration and vaccination services (Albania), the establishment of ECD centres and kindergartens in locations where no other facilities for marginalised children had been available, the boosting of policy developments towards access to inclusive pre-school and basic education, the successful completion of capacity building services (FYR of Macedonia), and the promotion

of human rights and gender equality through the project. However, the findings also pointed to a lack of adequate indicators in the project framework that would allow a full assessment of effectiveness of these system level changes. Concerning efficiency, the project was found to have converted its resources into system level results in an economic manner, which has been proven by the absence of alternatives that would have allowed to achieve the same results at a lower cost, the projects uniqueness (i.e. no overlaps with similar interventions) while at the same time, delivering its outputs on time. As regards sustainability, the project was found to have introduced essential policy changes and improved the capacities of existing services that have paved the way for a sustainable enabling environment for inclusive ECD service provision in the three countries; moreover, the ECD centres that were established through the project were found to provide adequate conditions for the continuation of their services. However, the lack of clear exit strategies together with the need for longer-lasting awareness raising campaigns to convert shifting individual habits into social change were found to pose a threat to the sustainability of the project. As for signs of impact, the key finding is limited to qualitative evidence which suggests that the project narrowed disparities between the Roma and non-Roma children who now have more equitable access to ECD services in the area of health, pre-school and primary education although considerable gaps continue to exist.

The relevance of the project is considered to be one of its greatest contributing factors to its success in reducing inequities with focus on Roma children and children with disabilities, which are proof of its conformity with human rights and gender equality instruments and standards and equity-focused development priorities. The project is also seen to have been highly effective in accomplishing its result of building the capacities of different duty bearers responsible for the equitable realisation of child rights. However, it has shown significant weakness in its lack of adequate indicators to allow for the measurement of the effectiveness of the results achieved. The project is considered to have been both efficient in its operations and sustainable in laying the essential foundations for the continuation of the results of the intervention, nonetheless budgetary system barriers will need to be addressed in future to ensure sustainability. The project is concluded to have contributed to the narrowing of disparities between Roma and non-Roma children by ensuring access to pre-school and primary education and health services as well as showing indications towards an improvement in the preconditions for an upbringing of children in a non-discriminatory environment.

Based on the conclusions and lessons learnt from the project, the evaluation derived five recommendations for different target groups. Two recommendations address the governments of the three project countries while another two require the action of UNICEF; the fifth recommendation is directed towards Roma CSOs in the respective project countries. The two recommendations ranked with highest priority suggest (1) strengthening data collection and management systems that support data disaggregation on children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities, and (2) developing a project-specific Monitoring and Evaluation framework for any future projects with a similar objective. The other three recommendations, ranked with high priority, relate to (1) the monitoring of an effective implementation of ECD policies and programmatic components that were introduced as a result of advocacy efforts of the evaluated project; (2) the involvement of Roma CSOs in conducting an in-depth analysis of capacity gaps that may hinder Roma parents

from enrolling or accessing ECD services for their children; and (3) practical tips for future interventions.

1. Background

The multi-country project titled “Breaking the cycle of exclusion for Roma children through Early Childhood Development and Education” was implemented in the former Yugoslav Republic (fYR) of Macedonia, Serbia and Albania between 1 October 2013 and 31 December 2016 and funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), with a total budget of 1,965,000 euros. This evaluation was conducted during the last two months of the project’s implementation and was finalised after the project ended.

This evaluation’s objective was to assess the standard Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria (i.e. relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact) of the project. As an end-evaluation which collected data during the last two months of the project’s implementation phase, the evaluation also aims to present lessons learnt from the project, with a particular focus on the system barriers that were aimed to be changed.

Besides UNICEF, its implementing partners (see table 3) and the funding agency (Austrian Development Agency), the project relied on a variety of direct and indirect beneficiaries including: public institutions; government representatives at national, regional, local level; CSOs; parents; and children who were represented by their parents for the purpose of this evaluation and in line with the evaluation’s ethical standards.

The below table provides an overview of the intended direct and indirect beneficiaries in each country:

Table 1. Direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project¹

Country	Direct beneficiaries	Indirect beneficiaries
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 300 public officials adopting new professional attitudes, skills and behaviours in providing services to Roma children and communities(nationally and locally) Staff in Child Rights Units (at the regional level) and Child Protection Units operational in Fier, Korca, Shkodra and Elbasan 200 service providers skilled in inclusive and child-centred education 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 300 Roma children aged 3-6 and 400 non-Roma children – in 3 project locations 600 Roma parents, 600 non-Roma parents – in 3 project locations Nationally - 1,500 Roma children aged 3-6, 2,000 non-Roma children, 1,500 Roma parents, 1,500 non-Roma parents benefitting from awareness and communication for behaviour change
FYR of Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MLSP staff and Roma Decade implementation Unit in the MLSP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 700 Roma children aged 3-6; other 1,820 Roma and 21,500 non-Roma

¹ Information on the total number of all direct and indirect beneficiaries reached by the project was not available at the time of evaluation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 municipal staff responsible for ECD/Education and financing in 7 municipalities (Kumanovo, Suto Orizari, Tetovo, Gostivar, Prilep, Bitola and Stip) • 42 ECD service providers working directly with Roma children and families in 14 community based ECD centres • At least 5 local Roma NGOs or NGOs working with Roma children and Women • 14 local community leaders and community representatives in 14 Roma communities in 7 municipalities • 7 school principals, 56 school teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children aged 3-6 living in 7 municipalities • 350 first grade Roma children and 350 other Roma children in 7 municipalities, annually • 500 parents of young Roma children • 42 educators in 14 ECD centres in 7 municipalities
Serbia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 75 Roma Health Mediators in 60 municipalities for ECD education and care 2. 156 municipalities with ISCs; 3. 90 paediatricians and 90 patronage nurses in 10 municipalities/primary health care centres in Vojvodina, Belgrade and South-East Serbia. 4. Independent monitoring bodies – Ombudsman and Commissioner for Protection of Equality 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. 5,000 young Roma children (aged 0-6) with their families reached with ECD education and care by 75 Roma Health Mediators in 59 municipalities; 6. 2,000 Roma and children with special needs in 156 municipalities supported through trained ISCs; 7. 1,000 young Roma children, reached with ECD interventions and education by 90 paediatricians and 90 patronage nurses from 10 primary health care centres; 8. 200 Roma and children with special needs supported for education inclusion in 10 municipalities in Vojvodina, Belgrade and South-East Serbia.

The following table provides an overview of the intended geographical scope of the project, which at the same time for the geographical scope of the evaluation:

Table 2. Geographical evaluation scope

Project country	Geographical evaluation scope
Albania:	Fier, Elbasan, Korca and Shkodra regions
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:	Suto Orizari, Stip, Tetovo, Gostivar, Prilep, Bitola, Radovis and Kumanovo municipalities
Serbia:	National coverage with the focus on 14 municipalities in the regions of Vojvodina, Belgrade and South East Serbia (Novi Sad, Pancevo,

Zemun, Pozarevac, Smederevo, Kragujevac, Nis, Leskovac, Pirot, Vranje, Bojnik, Vladicin Han, Bela Palanka, Kovin)

The stakeholders of the project are presented in Table 1 above and can be summarized into duty-bearers (e.g. public authorities providing services to Roma children and communities, Roma parents, ECD service providers, staff of Child Rights/Protection Units, local community leaders) and rights-holders (e.g. Roma children, Roma parents, children with special needs, children with disabilities).

Table 3. Project partners

Project country	Partners
Albania:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roma Technical Groups in each of the four regions, • The social sector and Municipal council representatives from four municipalities, Directorates of Education in the regions • ECD network of NGOs in the country (Young Women Christian Association, Child Rights observatory, Children Rights Center Albania, Amarodrom etc.
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), Department for Child Protection- overall responsibility for financing of ECD, normative framework, quality assurance and inspection • Unit for Roma Decade Implementation, MLSP – responsible to plan and oversee implementation of Roma Decade Action Plans • Municipalities- responsibility to establish ECD services based on needs, funding, monitor delivery of ECD services • Local/Roma NGOs: ECD-COR, Lifestart, Women Forum, Sumnal- engaged in delivery of ECD services and Macedonian Civic Education Center (MCEC) – engaged in activities in primary schools • Local Roma communities- responsible for identifying premises and support the organization of ECD services, identify children out of ECD and schools, liaise with Roma NGOs on issues affecting the local community • Roma Mediators- recently established, they are not given a mandate as part of the national law, or sub-laws, they are being supported as part of IPA Twinning project on Roma inclusion. They key link between the families and services; ECD centers and schools • Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) • Local (municipal) education commissions in 7 municipalities
Serbia:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health- with overall responsibility for early childhood health and development

- Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development
- Ombudsman's Office with two deputies, one for the protection of minority rights and another for child rights;
- Commissioner for Protection of Equality's with a mandate to prevent and monitor all forms of discrimination against Roma and other vulnerable groups.
- Institute of Public Health- responsible for patronage nurses.
- Paediatric Association of Serbia – professional NGO
- Primary Health Care centres- responsible for delivery of early childhood health and development services
- Roma health mediators
- Primary schools
- Inter-sectoral commissions (ISC) with a mandate to assess the needs and recommend adequate additional support measures towards education and social inclusion of vulnerable children
- Municipalities- financing the ISC
- Roma NGOs – Roma women Network
- Center for Social Policy – NGO supporting strengthening of ISCs

The remaining were members of the Advisory boards (national and project ones) and not in any way implementing partners:

- Committee on the Rights of the Child of the National Parliament;
- Office for Human and Minority Rights
- Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities
- ECD, parents and child disability focussed NGOs
- Network for Inclusive Education
- National Health Insurance Fund
- Medical Faculties and Children's' Clinics, College for Nurses
- Agency for Accreditation of Health Care Institutions of Serbia
- Representatives of pre-schools and social welfare institutions

Moreover, it is worth highlighting that the multi-country project is of particular importance, not only for UNICEF's current global strategic plan, which has a strong ECD focus, but also in light of the priorities of the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independence States (CEE/CIS) which has identified children from ethnic and linguistic minorities (esp. Roma) and children with disabilities, among others, as vulnerable groups that require targeted action to improve their equitable realisation of rights by making societies more inclusive.

In general, it can be said that the issue of Roma inclusion, which frames the context of this evaluation, has been gaining ground as a highly relevant subject, especially in light of recent policy developments and EU-accession processes in the three project countries.

Although the Roma population is dispersed throughout the European continent, it is highly concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe. In the FYR of Macedonia, the Roma represent approximately 197,000 people (9.56% of the total population), in Serbia 600,000 (approximately 8.23%) and in Albania the figures range from 15,000² to approximately 115,000 (3.59%)³. According to the South Eastern Europe regional estimates, the proportion of Roma children comprise a higher share compared to their share in non-Roma populations, i.e. almost every second Roma person in South Eastern Europe is a child.⁴

Roma inclusion has been gaining prominence on the political agenda and the European institutions, intergovernmental institutions and NGOs have pushed several States to raise the issue. The Council of Europe, the OSCE and other institutions have undertaken several initiatives, such as the Decade for the Roma Inclusion and there has also been an increase in the work of UN Agencies in this area. At the European Union level, the European Commission and the European Council have established an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, creating a momentum for concrete, large-scale, long-term integrated action. The first specific EU legal instrument dealing with Roma inclusion, the Council Recommendation on Effective Roma Integration Measures in EU Member States, was adopted in December 2013. Most notably, this Recommendation emphasises that the situation of Roma children in Europe is particularly concerning and calls for a need to increase access to and quality of early childhood education and care.

In light of the fact that all of the project countries have entered the EU accession process, consideration should be made to all political and administrative reform processes that highlight and support Roma inclusion by paying particular attention to policies that promote ECD for Roma children. For instance, the Albanian Government approved their National Action Plans for Roma Inclusion (2010-2015), the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians (2016-2020), the National Action Plan for Children (2012-2015) and the Pre-University Education Strategy (2014-2020). Serbia has adopted a National Roma Inclusion Strategy (2005-2015) and National Action Plans (NAP) for its implementation, the Strategy for the Development of Education (2020) and Action Plans and the new Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma women and men (2016-2025). The FYR of Macedonia has passed the Strategy for the Roma in Macedonia 2014-2020 and the Law on Child Protection which guarantees all children access to pre-school education. Moreover, all three project countries have signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as committing to reaching the both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), forming the framework of international development goals which correspond to the timing of the project.

Despite such commitments to the inclusion of Roma, they remain the most marginalised ethnic group in Europe who suffer numerous rights violations related to low educational

² Roma mapping, 2011

³ Source: Document prepared by the Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues. Updated on 2 July 2012. Most estimates include both local Roma + Roma-related groups (Sinti, Travellers, etc.) & Roma migrants.

⁴ N.B. 46% according to the ToRs of this evaluation (see Annex).

levels, high unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health, and wide-ranging discrimination. Such violations are all interrelated and spawn a vicious circle of social exclusion, discrimination and limited access to rights. This cycle of exclusion perpetuates along generations and further hinders their effective possibility of realising their rights, and it is thus essential that any intervention targeted at breaking this cycle must start at the earliest age.

Against this background, it is worth highlighting that for the conceptualisation of this project, UNICEF considered that while ECD access had improved over time, there had still been limited impact on the lives of Roma children in terms of improved child outcomes, especially in the areas of education and health in the three project countries. For example, actions in the education area in Albania such as the so-called “second chances” classes for Roma children still exist in schools, which can only be regarded positive in providing additional support to these children but at the same time perpetuates segregation and differentiation among students.

In light of this, it was understood that ensuring access to quality health, nutrition, as well as education and development services and quality support to Roma children and their families in the early years would improve their chances of achieving their highest potential as well as achieving greater success both in school and life in general. This strategy also aimed at overcoming traditional beliefs that prevent the engagement of Roma parents in certain available services, such as health-related services.

The project was therefore aimed towards accelerating the equitable inclusion of Roma children in ECD and education services. The initiative sought to strengthen the capacity of duty bearers to guarantee access to quality ECD services for young Roma children and their parents or guardians by working within existing structures. It worked towards reaching the social inclusion goals and breaking the intergenerational disadvantage and poverty of Roma in each of the programme countries and thus, by empowering right-holders to claim their rights and duty bearers to fulfil their duties, envisaged the application of the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA).

In terms of existing system barriers, the below table summarises the corresponding system barriers according to UNICEF’s Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES) determinants, as defined in the original project document and the ToRs. However, it should be noted that Figure 1 of the ToRs mentions 10 determinants, while only 7 determinants could be identified in the project documents. Therefore, these 7 and their corresponding barriers are the subjects of this evaluation. Furthermore, after clarifying the ToRs, the UNICEF COs identified the corresponding system barriers that applied to their respective countries.

Table 4. System barriers

System barriers	MoRES determinant	Identified at project start in:
Enabling environment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Societal stigma and discrimination against Roma and other disadvantaged children 	Social Norms	Albania, fYR of Macedonia, Serbia

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of explicit inclusive policies and incentives for policy implementation 	Legislation / Policy	Albania, fYR of Macedonia, Serbia
Supply		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of ECD and school infrastructure in the Roma communities 	Availability of essential commodities /inputs	Albania, fYR of Macedonia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of qualified educators and teachers to deal with the challenges of inclusion 	Access to adequately staffed services, facilities and information	Albania, fYR of Macedonia
Demand		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty of Roma families and inability to pay costs related to attendance of ECD services and schools 	Financial access	Albania, fYR of Macedonia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of awareness of parents of Roma children on the importance of ECD and education and their low expectation for their children 	Social and cultural practices and beliefs	Albania, fYR of Macedonia, Serbia
Quality		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of specialized programmes to address specific needs of Roma children in kindergartens, ECD centers and schools 	Quality of care	Albania, fYR of Macedonia, Serbia (to some extent)

It should also be mentioned that after discussions with UNICEF Country Offices, the system barrier 3 “Lack of ECD and school infrastructure in the Roma communities” was identified as one of the barriers for which the programme could only leverage and advocate with the local governments. At the same time, system barrier 7 “Lack of specialized programmes to address specific needs of Roma children in kindergartens, ECD centres and schools” was classified as a determinant under “Quality” rather than as “Supply”, as stated in the project documents and ToRs.

The chain of intended results is represented in the logical framework, consisting of one overall goal, three project purposes and ten expected results, which were planned to be achieved through 21 activities. Consequently, the evaluation considered the projects performance throughout these distinct levels that are represented in the results framework that can be found in **Figure 1** on the following two pages.

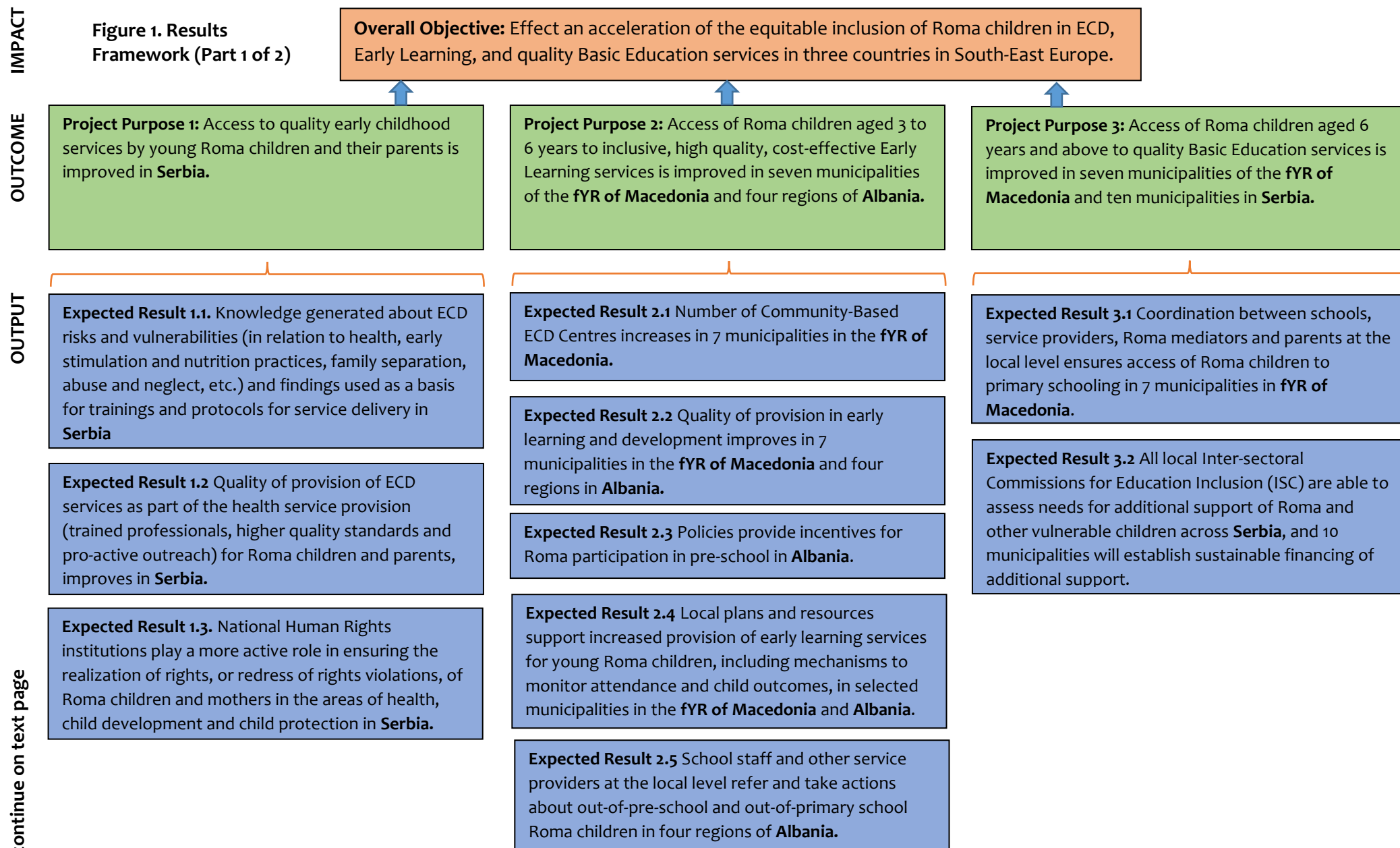
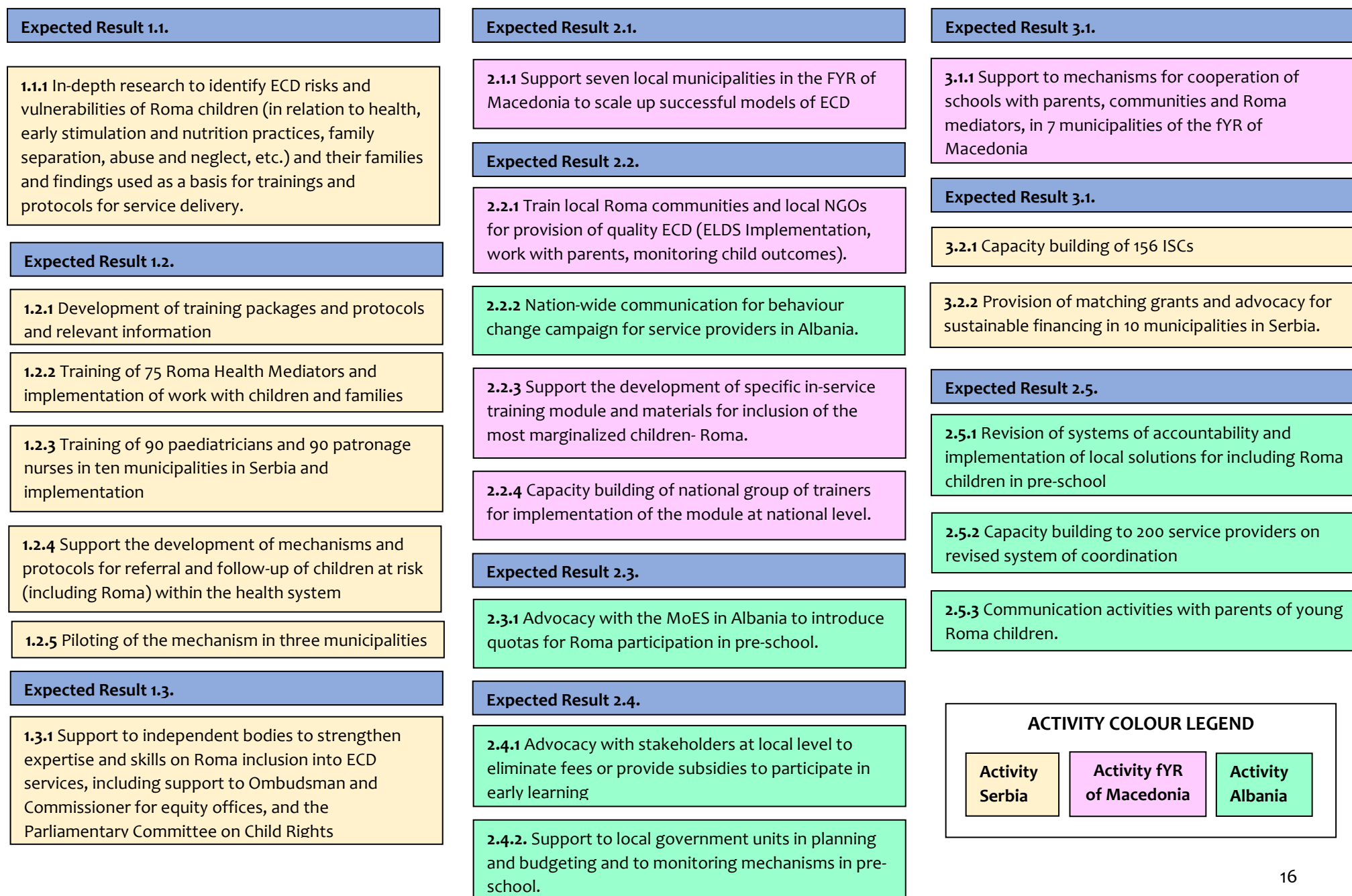


Figure 1. Results Framework (Part 2 of 2)

OUTPUT
ACTIVITIES (see colour legend)



The articulation of the Results Framework is based on assumptions of change explicitly included in the form of indicators in the logical framework of the intervention (Annex 9). Each set of assumptions refer to different lines of action leading to each outcome (project purpose) as follows:

Project purpose 1: Access to quality early childhood services by young Roma children and their parents is improved in **Serbia**. The achievement of this project purpose is based on three key changes:

- *Generation of key knowledge* about ECD risks and vulnerabilities through the development of a study and the use of key findings generated for the development of training protocols for participant service providers.
- *Provision of quality ECD services* as a result of the increase in the number of related service providers (paediatricians, patronage nurses and RHMs) sensitized and engaged in promoting ECD practices and developing positive parenting standards and risk identification protocols. A key indicator in this sense is the improvement in the number of Roma children reached and followed up by the intervention.
- *Engagement of National Human Rights institutions* to play a more active role in ensuring the realization of rights, which considers the evolution in the number of recommendations and complaints address by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality and the Ombudsman.

Project Purpose 2: Access of Roma children aged 3 to 6 years to inclusive, high quality, cost-effective Early Learning services is improved in seven municipalities of the **fYR of Macedonia** and four regions of **Albania**. The achievement of this project purpose is based on the following key changes and assumptions:

- *Establishment of new ECD centres in 7 municipalities in the fYR of Macedonia.*
- *Improvement on the quality of ELDS services;* by increasing the number of highly trained service providers applying ELDS, leading to an improvement in the combined score measuring child development. The evolution on the number of ECD centres using child centred and inclusive policies is also an essential indicator for this outcome. In the fYR of Macedonia, the development and implementation of local action plans to expand the provision of ECD services was expected to contribute to this change. Finally, in Albania, municipalities were also expected to subsidize preschool for the most vulnerable children, including Roma and contribute to the expected change.
- *Establishment of policies providing incentives* for Roma participation in pre-school in Albania, which involves the enforcement of decisions to provide enrolment quotas for Roma children in settlements with Roma population.
- *Establishment of referral mechanisms* in Albania to ensure the participation of children in pre-school. A key indicator is the number of Roma children newly enrolled or reintegrated to pre-school.

Project Purpose 3: Access of Roma children aged 6 years and above to quality Basic Education services is improved in seven municipalities of the **fYR of Macedonia** and ten municipalities in **Serbia**. The achievement of this project purpose is based on the following key changes and assumptions:

- *Improvement on the coordination of key stakeholders,* to ensure access to primary schooling in the fYR of Macedonia. This result is expected to be achieved through the development of referral mechanisms, and measured by an increase in the results of Roma

children in the combined score measuring child development. Finally, the proportion of disabled children attending primary education in implementing areas was also considered as a key indicator.

- ISCs assess and treat the needs for additional support of Roma and other vulnerable children in Serbia. This result is expected to be achieved thanks to the training provided to ISCs and the number of municipalities allocating resources to provide additional support Roma/vulnerable children. Pre-post test to ISCs measure the increase in their capacities to assess vulnerable children and the evolution of cases treated by these ISCs measures its implementation.

2. Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

The **purpose** of this evaluation is to assess the ability of the three UNICEF country offices to fulfil their commitments as stipulated in the original project document (2013), its result framework (figure 1) and the requirements specifically envisaged by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). Furthermore, the evaluation aims:

- To provide quality evidence to inform key stakeholders at national and county level in planning and delivering programmes/services for inclusion of the most vulnerable children in quality universal services.
- To shed light on remaining barriers and bottlenecks that have a significant influence especially on sustainability and explicability of results, especially relevant to early inclusion of Roma children.

The **main objectives** of this evaluation are to:

1. Assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and, to the extent possible, impact of the project interventions;
2. Identify any unintended outcomes;
3. Identify and document lessons learnt in relation to strategies and interventions used to address certain critical bottlenecks; and
4. Provide recommendations and guide the strategic planning for improved programmes for Roma early inclusion and education as part of the joint partnership programmes with respective Governments.

The findings and recommendations of this evaluation, as with any monitoring and evaluation activity, are intended to lay the ground for UNICEF and respective stakeholders in the three COs to improve their programming of Roma early inclusion and education interventions as part of the joint partnership programmes with the respective Governments.

Specific planned dissemination activities, laid out in Annex 7 of the ToRs, will guarantee the dissemination of the evaluation findings and recommendations to the relevant stakeholders. In particular, it is foreseen that UNICEF disseminates the evaluation to a large and diverse audience, as presented in the figure below.

Table 5. Expected users and intended use

Expected users	Intended use
The Governments of Albania, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	To improve programming of Roma early inclusion through ECD (development / health/ Early learning) and education interventions as part of the joint partnership programmes with respective Governments.
UNICEF: three Country Offices	
UNICEF Regional Office CEE/CIS	
Other UN agencies	To draw lessons from the experience in the three programme countries and incorporate learnings into the future programming of Roma early inclusion and education interventions.
International Cooperation Partners and Donors, including the Austrian Development Agency	
Authorities at regional and local level	To improve the inclusive early development and education practices based on the recommendations in the evaluation report.
Relevant sectorial service providers and Civil Society Organization (CSOs).	

It should also be noted that during the inception phase, several project characteristics that were wrongly described in the evaluation ToR were identified and clarified through verification with project documentation and discussions with the respecting UNICEF COs. All these deviations were clarified and are highlighted throughout this report.

All thematic fields and geographical areas of the 21 project activities conducted during the project's implementation period are covered in the evaluation, i.e. between October 2013 and December 2016. This means that the data collection for this evaluation was carried out before the project had ended and may explain why some of the data was not available for the evaluation.

Although the details of the activities varied, in broad thematic terms the interventions can be categorised as activities that aimed to improve equitable access of Roma children to Early Childhood Care and Education services, including: Early Learning services; basic education services; and ECD-health services.

Table 6. Thematic evaluation scope

Project country	Thematic evaluation scope
Albania:	Equitable access of Roma children and their parents to quality ECD services; children aged 3-6)
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:	Equitable inclusion of Roma children in Early Learning services (children aged 3-6) and equitable inclusion of Roma children in Basic Education services (children aged 6 and beyond)

Serbia:

Equitable access of Roma children to quality ECD-health services (children aged 0-6); Equitable inclusion of Roma children, including children with disabilities, in Basic Education services (children aged 6 and beyond)

For the geographical evaluation scope, please refer to **Table 2** above.

With regards to the above-described geographical and thematic scope, the following characteristics should be highlighted, as they differed from the description in the ToRs but were clarified with the UNICEF Cos in the inception phase. Firstly, for the FYR of Macedonia, the municipality of Radovis was missing in the ToRs which was identified as a mistake, as this municipality formed part of the project and should therefore also have been evaluated. Secondly, the age range of improved equitable inclusion in Early Learning services was specified incorrectly in the ToRs for the FYR of Macedonia. While the ToRs stated the range to be “0-6 years”, the correct range was “3-6 years” and was therefore corrected in the above-presented thematic scope. Moreover, the thematic scope in Serbia was also wrongly defined in the ToRs where it read as “Equitable inclusion of Roma children in Early Learning services (children aged 3-6); Equitable inclusion of Roma children in Basic Education services (children aged 6 and beyond)” which did not include ECD-health services, neither children younger than 3 nor children with disabilities that were a focus of the project there. Therefore, the thematic scope in the above-presented table was corrected to “Equitable access of Roma children to quality ECD-health services (children aged 0-6); Equitable inclusion of Roma children, including children with disabilities, in Basic Education services (children aged 6 and beyond)”.

With reference to the intended **system changes** of the project, the evaluation focused on observed changes at national, sub-national and local level within the specified timeframe.

Although the ToRs stated that the evaluation should not cover (explicitly) improved equitable access or inclusion of any other marginalized group in particular, after revising the available project documentation and discussions with UNICEF COs, taking into account the inclusive approach of the project, it was decided to extend the scope of the evaluable target population to **children at risk of developmental delays or with disabilities**⁵. Moreover, it should also be noted that evaluation focuses on improved equitable access and inclusion of **children who self-identify as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians**.

3. Evaluation Methodology

3.1 Evaluation Criteria

As per the ToRs, the Evaluation Matrix formed the ‘spine’ of this evaluation, providing the main analytical framework against which data was gathered and analysed throughout all evaluation phases. To this end, the Evaluation Matrix was designed as a first step in the

⁵ N.B. Especially relevant for project interventions in Serbia and FYROM where effects on this target group were measured in addition to Roma children.

inception phase – even before the desk review. It included five **evaluation criteria** as stated in the ToRs, namely:

1. Relevance, defined as the extent to which the objectives of the intervention addressed the rights and needs of most marginalized groups, especially Roma children, reduced inequities, and were consistent with equity-focused development priorities at global, national and /or local level.
2. Effectiveness refers to the extent to which intended results and system changes were met, and the extent to which UNICEF'S contribution in meeting those results has been demonstrated.
3. Efficiency, or the measure on how economically resources/inputs were converted to system level results.
4. Sustainability, understood as the likeliness of the continuation of intervention's results after major development assistance is completed.
5. Impact, which comprises pieces of evidence on early signs of project contribution towards positive changes in the life of children and the most marginalized groups targeted by the intervention.

It should be noted that after clarifying the ToRs, it was decided that “Coordination and coherence”, the sixth criterion mentioned in Annex 4 of the ToRs, was not to be used as a separate evaluation criterion. However, judgement criteria on these aspects were to be included under the relevant criteria (i.e. mainly relevance and efficiency).

Evaluation questions were developed for each of the five criteria; furthermore, these were equipped with anticipated data gathering methods and judgement criteria to allow for the validation of the proposed evaluation questions. It should also be mentioned that Human Rights (HR) and Gender Equality (GE) dimensions were integrated into each of the originally proposed evaluation criteria by following the UNEG guidance⁶, such as for example:

Table 7. Examples of HR and GE dimensions of the evaluation

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation question	Anticipated judgement criteria
Relevance	How was the intervention designed and implemented to align and contribute to HR & GE?	Extent to which the intervention is aligned with international instruments (e.g. CRC, ICERD, CEDAW, CRC), standards and principles on HR & GE and contributes to their implementation.
Effectiveness	Were results on HR & GE defined, monitored and achieved?	Extent to which the Theory of Change and results framework of

⁶ UNEG 2011, Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation -- Towards UNEG Guidance. Available at: <http://www.uneval.org/document/download/1294>

		the intervention integrated HR & GE.
Efficiency	Were the project interventions cost effective in reaching Roma children (boys and girls alike)?	Extent to which management systems supported or hindered the realization of results. Timeliness of delivery of outputs.
Sustainability	What are people's resources, motivation and ability to continue advocacy on delivering messages of importance of ECD, and Roma inclusion and HR?	Extent to which communities have gained knowledge and skills to better claim their rights in the areas of health care, education and social welfare.
Impact	To what extent is the realization and enjoyment of HR & GE by rights holders and capacity of duty-bearers expected to be long-lasting?	Whether rights-holders have been able to enjoy their rights and duty bearers have the ability to comply with their obligations.

These items are included in the Evaluation Matrix which also includes all respective evaluation questions and can be found in Annex 2.

In order to measure result achievement (effectiveness and impact), the evaluation team took for reference the indicators defined in the logical framework of the intervention (Annex 9). As for the rest of evaluation criteria (relevance, efficiency and sustainability), the anticipated judgment criteria was based in the content analysis conducted as part of the qualitative analysis. This process refers to the reduction and sense-making effort that converted a high volume of raw qualitative data into patterns, consistencies and meanings. Therefore, no specific indicators were designed for these criteria given the qualitative approach the evaluation gave priority to. Moreover, some of the findings under effectiveness and impact criteria (especially impact) were also based on the content analysis conducted. This is the reason why the anticipated judgment emphasizes the term "extent to", since there is no corresponding scale of assessment under this qualitative approach.

Subsequent to reviewing the available material during the desk review, the evaluators assessed which contents and data already provided answers to the proposed research questions for each evaluation criteria, resulting in the performance of information gap analysis. This analysis enabled the identification of those evaluation questions whose answers were to be sought during the data collection phase. In addition, this also facilitated the selection of complementary research methods to obtain the remaining data (e.g. focus groups, interviews, field visits and additional desk reviews). An overview of the information gap analysis based on the Evaluation Matrix can be found in the attached Annex 2.

3.2 Data collection methods

This non-experimental evaluation searches for the lessons learnt in the implementation of the project, which are particularly interesting with regards to the previously identified system barriers that the project aimed to address. Considering the specific intended results at national and local level in each country where the project was developed, the project followed a common overall objective with the same logic but with different actions and instruments in each country.

It was not possible to create control groups for either the data or stakeholder consultations due to the fact that the evaluation focuses on system level changes that impact across one country or across all countries. Thus, the methodology aims to compare the different experiences and trajectories in order to understand the pathways by which UNICEF interventions have contributed to these system changes. Consequently this evaluation considers the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and the impact of the project. It presents results per each country but also aims to demonstrate whether the approach and logic of the whole project has made any difference compared to previous approaches.

Through the use of methodological pluralism, this evaluation triangulates information and provides findings in a convergent logic for the whole project as well as for each of the countries. The four complementary methods follow those listed in the ToRs, comprising of:

1. **Desk review:** to gain an overall understanding of the project's context, design, implementation and monitoring during implementation as well as identifying crucial information gaps. It was conducted during the inception phase of this evaluation and formed the basis for further developing evaluation methods. It was based on secondary sources (project progress reports, other reports and information on the project, governmental policies, strategies and plans, statistics, etc.) including those listed in the ToRs together with additional relevant documentation submitted by the respective UNICEF. The entire list of documents reviewed for this evaluation can be found in Annex 5 (Bibliography). The crucial information gaps identified were complemented by the below mentioned evaluation methods (i.e. focus groups, structured interviews and structured observation) together with a complementary desk review of material gathered during the data collection phase.
2. **Focus groups:** to cover and contrast the opinions of different stakeholders involved in the project. They were held with public institutions, service providers and civil society organisations involved in the project but also with the Roma parents as this is the best way to consult beneficiaries so as to gain their opinion and to understand the effective impact of the project on their lives.
3. **Structured interviews:** to gather specific information on concrete aspects of the project and to validate the consistency of the project. This allowed for triangulating information, views and opinions of different stakeholders that were either involved in the project or able to report on its observed results or effects. Interviewed stakeholders included: Government representatives; civil society; parents, local key stakeholders (including parents, Roma community leaders); as well as ECD and education specialists from UNICEF at both national (i.e. Country Office) and regional level (i.e. Regional Office). Their project donor (i.e. ADA) and other international

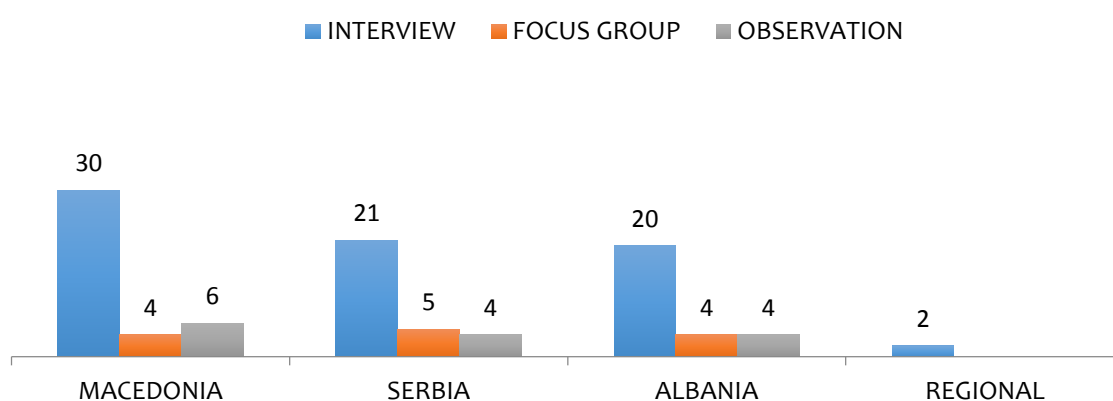
donors with funding priorities similar to the objectives of the project were also interviewed.

4. **Structured observation:** undertaken during the field visits to directly examine the extent to which the changes, presented in the project documents, had occurred in the field. This contributed to the completion and interpretation of the data and findings from the desk review, the interviews and focus groups. Site visits allowed for *in situ* questioning of different issues, deepening the understanding of the project and gathering information that would be unattainable through other methods.

The potential development of an on-line survey mentioned in the TORs as method of evaluation was considered by the evaluation team but it was concluded that no potential added value could be identified in using this method for this evaluation. This conclusion was reached also taking into account the difficulties of the process, such as: the need for three different questionnaires in three different languages; the possibility of a limited response, etc.

The following chart therefore represents the number of interviews, focus group discussions and direct observation visits conducted per country. A detailed list of interviewees, focus group participants and sites visited can be found in Annex 3.

Figure 2. Data gathering techniques per country and region



The data analysis was conducted in accordance with the questions in the Evaluation Matrix designed during the inception phase (see Annex 2). The information obtained on each question through the different data collection methods was regularly updated throughout the data collection process, allowing for the application of different analytical methods and techniques during the collection process.

The main method used was **qualitative data analysis** for which the collected data was coded and categorized using specific software (i.e. Dedoose) for qualitative and mixed methods analysis. The data was coded following the evaluation matrix structure, first by key evaluation criteria, sub-criteria and evaluation question. The data was also coded based on its validity by giving greater weight to those pieces of evidence which were triangulated and confirmed through two or more of the data-gathering techniques. Therefore, the analysis presented in the next chapter (Evaluation Findings) gives priority to this type of information, but also considers recurrent pieces of evidence brought out by informants under the same data-gathering technique.

A **quantitative data analysis** was also applied to quantitative secondary data obtained through the data collection (e.g. statistics, databases); however, it should be noted that the interpretation of quantitative data also included qualitative elements allowing for the contrasting and comparison of both types of data collected during the evaluation.

Additionally, the following data techniques, suggested in the ToRs, were also used in order to ensure the reliability validity of collected data:

- 1) **Triangulation:** Both quantitative and qualitative data was analysed to assess evaluation questions and criteria. Findings based on qualitative data were triangulated across key informants, compared with available documentary evidence and validated in the focus groups (for applicable questions or criteria) before drawing conclusions and formulating recommendations.
- 2) **Complementarity:** Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to measure overlapping, but distinct, facets of the evaluation question and criteria.
- 3) **Interrogation:** In the case of detecting diverging findings by applying data triangulation or complementarity, the obtained data was re-questioned before any conclusions were drawn. Any conflicting findings were highlighted in the respective evaluation question or criteria.

3.3 Sampling

The sample size of this evaluation was determined, giving regard to the evaluation conditions and time limits established in the ToRs and based on the following criteria: geographical scope; method; and specific types of stakeholders to be sampled.

After assessing the feasibility of applying the respective data collection methods in each country-context, it was decided to cover the main direct and indirect beneficiary groups through focus group discussions. A deciding factor of this decision was the results of the earlier-mentioned information gap analysis, which revealed that the mentioned stakeholders would be able to answer the majority of identified research questions for which information was still lacking during the inception phase and it would therefore be most convenient to ask them in a group.

Table 8. Determinants for non-random sampling scope

Determinant	Sampling scope	
	Regional scope	Country scope
Geographical scope:	Overarching: all 3 countries or region	Country: each of the 3 countries
Method:	Interviews: 2 interviews at regional level	Focus Groups/country: 3-4 Field visits/country: 3-4 Interviews/country: 10-15

Specific types of stakeholders to be sampled:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS (ECD/Education Specialist) • Project donor ADA (desk-officer in charge of the multi-country project)⁷ 	<p><u>Direct and indirect beneficiaries⁸:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public administrations represented by officials or civil servants (national, regional, local) acting as either service providers and/or duty bearers • Civil society acting either as service providers, implementing partners, representation of interests of target population or as capacity builders of rights holders and/or duty bearers • Equality body or Ombudsman (if relevant to the intervention in the country) • Any other service provider that was a direct beneficiary of the project but may neither be a public administration nor a civil society (e.g. teacher, nurse etc.) • Roma children aged 0-6 represented by their parents or legal guardians <p><u>Other relevant stakeholders:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International organisations, donors and civil society with similar priority areas to the project, especially Roma inclusion through ECD
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Consequently, different sampling criteria had to be applied to the respective data collection methods in order to cover all of the specific types of stakeholders sampled. The below table (Table 6) therefore provides a brief overview of the sampling criteria used for each method in each country.

Regarding the interviewed national stakeholders, it should be noted that this selection was made through an interactive process of discussion between the Evaluation Team and the UNICEF COs, ensuring that all stakeholder groups were covered within the constraints of the time available. Whilst drawing on UNICEF's knowledge and links within the sector, the Evaluation Team took the final decision on who to consult: based on an assessment of their role and influence in the respective countries and relevant sectors.

⁷ Tentative date: 13 December 2016

⁸ Direct and indirect beneficiaries were grouped according to the criteria presented in the original project document.

Table 9. Country-specific non-random sampling criteria based on intervention logic

Method	Albania	fYR of Macedonia	Serbia
Focus Groups	<p><u>Stakeholder types covered:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ECD service providers (public institutions and local branches of NGOs) 2. Roma parents <p><u>Geographic sampling:</u></p> <p>The totality of FGs (4) covered all four regions where the project was implemented. Two FGs with service providers were held in the two regions with the highest number of Roma population⁹ in order to leverage the multitude of service providers to participate in the FG. The other two FGs with Roma parents were held in the remaining two project regions¹⁰ in order to cover all four regions.</p>	<p><u>Stakeholder types covered:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ECD service providers 2. Primary schools with inclusion teams 3. Roma parents <p><u>Geographic sampling:</u></p> <p>The FGs for the first two stakeholder types covered all geographic areas where the project was implemented. <i>Note: participants moved to the FG site.</i></p> <p><u>Beneficiary-specific criteria:</u></p> <p>Regarding the FG with Roma parents, the location was chosen in order to the invitation of 1. parents of children who had attended the ECD centre for more than one year 2. parents of children from which one used to attend ECD activities 3. other older children who did not attend ECD (in order to make</p>	<p><u>Stakeholder types covered:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECD service providers • Inter-sectoral commissions (ISCs) • CSOs: Roma NGO network = 10 organizations/ implementing partners <p><u>Geographic selection criteria:</u></p> <p>The totality of FGs covered all 14 municipalities that cooperate in the project. Other geographical project areas were complemented with other research methods.</p>

⁹ Elbasan and Fier

¹⁰ Korca and Shkoda

Method	Albania	fYR of Macedonia	Serbia
		comparisons about the differences in the children's development). ¹¹	
Interviews	<p><u>Government representatives:</u> Ministry of Education and Sports: deputy Minister of Education</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institution of Education and Development 2. Roma focal Point/specialist at MoES <p>Directory of Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth</p> <p>National Civil Registration, Ministry of Internal Affairs</p> <p><u>UNICEF CO:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. ECD/Education Specialists <p><u>Civil society:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Implementing partners at national level 5. CRCA 	<p><u>Government representatives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MLSP-Department for Child Protection 2. MLSP-Roma Decade Unit 3. MLSP-Non Discrimination Unit 4. Bureau for Development of education (BDE) 5. Ministry of Education and Science 6. State Education Inspectorate (SEI) <p><u>UNICEF CO:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. ECD/Education Specialists <p><u>Civil Society:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Parent Resource Center-Skopje 9. Roma Center-Skopje 10. Daja-Kumanovo 11. Sonce-Tetovo 12. COSV-Prilep 	<p><u>Government representatives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ministry of Health (including people responsible for coordinating RHMs) 2. Ministry of Education, Science and Technological development 3. Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs/ Republic Institute for social protection 4. Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit 5. Commissioner for Protection of Equality's <p><u>UNICEF CO:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. ECD and Education Specialists <p><u>Civil Society:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. CSO Bibija

¹¹ UNICEF has 2 ECD centres in Bitola that allow to match this criteria.

Method	Albania	fYR of Macedonia	Serbia
	6. Observatory for Children Rights 7. Young Women Christian Association 8. Center for Research and Development 9. Disutni Albania NGO <u>Local stakeholders:</u> 10. ECD centre 11. Regional Directory of Education 12. Municipalities: Child protection units 13. Roma community leader 14. Project coordinator 15. Civil registration 16. Health representatives at local level <u>Other relevant stakeholders:</u> 17. ADA Representative in Albania ¹²	13. Roma Perspective Bitola 14. Step by Step Foundation-Skopje 15. Sumnal-Bitola 16. Sumal Skopje 17. Macedonian Civic Education Center 18. ECD-CoR <u>Local stakeholders:</u> 19. Mayors 20. BDE Advisors 21. SEI inspectors 22. Primary school directors <u>Other relevant stakeholders:</u> 23. Roma Education Fund (donor) 24. Pestalozzi Children Foundation (donor) 25. EU Delegation Representative for Education and disabilities 26. British Embassy (donor) 27. T-mobile (donor)	8. Paediatric Association of Serbia 9. Centre for Social Policy <u>Local stakeholders:</u> 10. 3-4 Roma parents (combined with field visits, see below) 11. Visiting nurse(s) 12. Paediatricians 13. Roma Health Mediator(s) 14. Institute for Public Health of Belgrade 15. City of Belgrade 16. Local Authority representatives <u>Other relevant stakeholders:</u> 17. Centre for Interactive Pedagogy & CSO 18. Ombudsman's Office incl. deputies for the protection of minority rights and for child rights 19. Swiss Development Cooperation

¹² Tentative date: 1 December 2016

Method	Albania	fYR of Macedonia	Serbia
Field visit (structured observation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4 ECD centres in all 4 project regions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive education school ECD centre 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Primary health care centres Home visit of Roma family by visiting nurse Accompanying a Roma Health Mediator interacting with a Roma family <p><u>Geographical sampling:</u></p> <p>Field visits gave the opportunity to also interview local stakeholders (see above) due to time and budget constraints. Covered an even geographical distribution of project sites (i.e. central, north, south) and a balanced population size of municipalities (i.e. large, small).</p>

3.4 Methodological limitations and risk mitigation

The approach of this evaluation considers both the requirements established in the TORs as well as the potential constraints in the development of the evaluation. The two critical limitations identified by the TORs include both 1) the available time to develop the evaluation (four month time constraint) and 2) the limited relatively resources despite the support of the three country offices.

Furthermore, the project itself presented specific difficulties which hindered its effective evaluation to some extent, such as:

1. The evaluation overlapped with the last two months of the projects implementation (November-December 2016) which led to the fact that data collection had completed (15 December 2016) before the project ended (31 December 2016) and explains why some of the final monitoring data was not available and could hence not be evaluated.
2. Difficulties with the sources of information, especially when looking for quantitative data related to the objectives of the project: data not available in some cases, data not updated or unreliable data.
 - Institutional changes, which have been occurring in the three countries, influenced the development of the project and had to be taken into account in this evaluation as external factors affecting the project in its realisation and in the sustainability of the results.
 - In the case of the FYR of Macedonia, the elections posed an additional challenge to the data collection phase which partly overlapped (15 November-15 December 2016) with the election date (11 December 2016) and resulted in unavailability of potential stakeholders for interviews shortly before the election.
 - In the case of Serbia, elections led to a new government in August 2016 which led to the disappearance of some of the previous stakeholders from state administration that were familiar with the project.
 - For some of the expected results it was difficult to identify what the effective contribution of the project had been or to what extent they have been influenced by external factors.

The approach and methodology of this evaluation takes into account the above limitations and is aware of the complexity of this multi-country project and the need for a use of complementary methods that may gather different perspectives. To this end it was considered that different sources of information would need to be triangulated to verify the findings and cross-checking lessons learned.

This evaluation mitigated these limitations through the following approaches:

- **Combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis:** quantitative data gathered by secondary sources (e.g. official statistics, annual reports, records and data provided by the intervention of the project, previous research actions) provided substantial information on the effectiveness and efficiency of the project while data gathered through qualitative methods provided meaningful information about all criteria, notably the project's sustainability and impact (or potential impact). While quantitative methods provided evidence based on results and outcomes to inform key stakeholders at national and county level in planning and delivering programmes/services, qualitative methods were able to provide better information

in the identification of barriers and bottlenecks, lessons learnt and recommendations.

- **Using different and complementary sources of information:** Different sources of information were used in order to fill the gap between the absence of information in some cases, non-updated information or unreliable information. Data was complemented by individual opinions (structured interviews), debates (focus groups), and field observations. Different sources allowed for triangulation of information especially when searching for lessons learnt and recommendations for the future.
- **Adapting the research tools** to the different countries, in order to effectively evaluate this unique project that followed both shared and common objectives in the different countries and developed different actions with both common and different results. The contents of the interviews, focus groups, etc., were adjusted accordingly.
- **Paying special attention to the Roma beneficiaries,** their opinions and perceptions as these were crucial in the understanding of the project results and achievements of its objectives. Roma parents were involved in the evaluation through specific focus groups where they were invited to share their stories and express their views on the different evaluation criteria.
- **Following an open and flexible approach.** The evaluation objectives – such as identification of lessons learnt, recommendations, barriers and bottlenecks, potential impacts, evidence in the short term - required open and flexible approaches which were reflected in all three stages of the evaluation.
- With regards to the potential impact of the elections in FYR of Macedonia on the evaluation, the **data gathering phase was intensified** in order to complete all interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders well before the election date (no later than 10 December 2016).

3.5 Ethical standards and safeguards

In order to assure that the evaluation was conducted in an ethically sound manner, throughout the data collection phase special attention was paid to ensuring that the process was ethical and that participants could openly express their opinions and have the confidentiality of their answers ensured and protected.

Strict respect was afforded to the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation,¹³ especially evaluator obligations (i.e. independence, impartiality, credibility, conflicts of interest, honesty and integrity, accountability), their obligations to participants (i.e. respect for dignity and diversity, respect of rights, confidentiality, avoidance of harm) as well as the principles of the evaluation process (i.e. accuracy, completeness and reliability of the report, transparency, reporting, omissions and wrongdoing) and its intentionality (i.e. utility, necessity). The evaluators were sensitive to manners and customs, were unbiased and acted

¹³ UNEG 2008, UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. Available at: www.uneval.org/document/download/548

with integrity and honesty in their relationships with all stakeholders, ensuring that their contacts with individuals were characterized by respect and protection of the anonymity and confidentiality of individual information.

It should be noted that, children were not be directly interviewed during this evaluation, as stated in the ToRs, instead the evaluation followed a participatory approach by including the voices of parents (as representatives of children), teachers, and other stakeholders.

4. Evaluation findings

The following chapter presents the findings for each of the five evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. In each sub-chapter, the key findings are highlighted in boxes; the form the basis for the conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations presented in the following chapters.

4.1 RELEVANCE

This evaluation criterion comprises seven key evaluation questions, as specified in the following sections.

Key Finding 1: The intervention proved to be aligned with key national priorities on improving access to quality ECD, Early Learning and quality Basic Education services for Roma children and their parents in implementing countries. The project addressed some of the most pressing needs of the targeted population based on the needs analysis conducted with key local stakeholders (e.g. public authorities, service providers, Roma community etc.) and available secondary information. The intervention is aligned with international instruments, standards and principles of HR & GE. Finally, the project is clearly aligned with UNICEF's country programs in Albania, the fYR of Macedonia and Serbia as well as the UNICEF 2014-2017 Strategic Outcomes.

4.1.1 Project alignment with relevant national priorities and objectives

The Government of Albania has set high standards and goals in order to guarantee the protection of child rights and has adopted a vast number of laws and strategies with this aim. The evaluated project is particularly aligned with key policies and strategies aimed at improving access to high quality ECD services and education for Roma children and their parents, such as:

- The following human rights instruments to which the country is signatory: the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1992; the ILO Convention "On the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment" in 1998; the ILO Convention "On Prohibition and Action for the elimination of all forms of Child Labor" in 2001; "The European Social Charter" in October 2002; "The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction" in November 2005; "The Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings" in November 2006; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict in

December 2008 and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in February 2008.

- The National Inter Sectorial Strategy for Social Inclusion (2007-2013), the Action Plan for Roma inclusion (2010-2015) and the Decade Action Plan for Roma Inclusion (2005-2015).
- The National Strategy on Action Plan for Children (2012-2015)
- The Pre-University Education Strategy (2014-2020), which commits to improving quality of and increasing access to pre-school by adopting inclusiveness as one of its main principles.
- The National Strategy for Development and Integration (2015-2020), which for the first time focuses on the universalization of pre-school education through an inclusive approach.
- The National plan for European Integration (2015-2020).
- The National Plan for Roma and Egyptian Integration (2016-2020), which reflects a scaling-up of measures in promoting early learning for Roma and Egyptian children, setting objectives such as total completeness of pre-school education by the end of 2020.
- The New Standards for Pre-school Education and the new draft agenda for child rights (2016-2020), which focuses on the expansion and quality of pre-schools, especially for the most vulnerable children.
- The project's overall objective is directly aligned with the Order No.21 of the MoES, which aims at increasing pre-school attendance by Roma children.
- EU accessing policy documents, in particular recommendations on inclusive education for Roma.

In the FYR of Macedonia, the intervention is aligned with a considerable number of national strategies and plans, key policy documents and EU pre-accession documents, which include, among others, the following:

- National Strategy for Education (2005-2015) in its sub-programme for preschool education, calls for inclusion of all children aged 3-6, especially the disadvantaged groups (children from rural areas, children from socially marginalized families, Roma children, children with disabilities and others).
- The National Plan for Action on the Rights of the Child (2006-2015)
- The National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010-2020), which focuses on maximizing the number of pupils in elementary and secondary education, raising literacy and educational levels and adapting the educational system to the labour market needs.
- The National Strategy for Social Protection and Development 2011-2021.
- The Roma Decade Strategy on social inclusion (2012-2014) and its specific education action plans, aiming at including Roma population at all levels of the education system, reducing the drop-out rate of Roma children and strengthening the capacity of educational staff and school management to identify and manage conflict situations provoked by lack of understanding of culture-sensitive differences. In addition, it includes the Action Plan for Improving the Social Situation of the Roma Women in Macedonia, which covers issues concerning the education, employment, health, public and political participation of Roma women, anti-discrimination and human rights.
- The Law on Child Protection and sub-laws adopted in 2013, addressing key bottlenecks related to the provision and quality of ECD services.
- The Strategy for Roma in the Republic of Macedonia (2014-2020), which, among other key issues, focuses on raising the education level of the Roma community. This strategy is aligned with the EU framework for Roma integration.

- The National Strategy for equality and anti-discrimination 2016-2020 and particularly its priorities focused on children with disabilities and the situation of segregation in the education system. Priorities 1.2; 2.2 and 3.2 are related to the establishment of programmes and provision of learning materials for children with disabilities.

In addition, the European Union is pushing for access to pre-school education for Roma children, which increases the relevance of the intervention in the country, particularly when it comes to the support provided to the government to increase pre-school enrolment.

In Serbia, the project is particularly aligned with the Healthcare Development Plan (2010-2015), as it ensured that Roma children and parents are better informed about their entitlements in the areas of health care as well as education and social welfare, and that Roma children can enjoy early childhood development and care through specific interventions, services and education opportunities provided by the relevant service providers (e.g. health mediators, paediatricians and patronage nurses). In addition, the intervention also aligns with the Strategy for Education Development in Serbia 2020. Activities also supported the development of capacities and the use of effective tools for early identification and follow up of developmental risks and psychosocial issues affecting children.

Furthermore, the project was designed to improve access to inclusive education (quality ECD services and basic education) for the most vulnerable groups, including young Roma children and their parents. In this line, the project was designed to respond to the major strategic objectives defined by the Law on Foundation of the Education System in 2009. These strategies are specifically oriented towards inclusive education, its values and principles, including equal access without discrimination, adaptation to individual educational needs, and solidarity. In addition, one of the key national strategic goals is intended to increase the number of children accessing pre-school education and ensuring total coverage of children in basic education.

Other important policies and measures aligned with the intervention goals are:

- The National Roma Inclusion Strategy (2005-2015). This strategy covers a wide range of issues relevant for Roma children, including pre-school education and inter-sectorial cooperation with the health sector.
- The Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Women and Men in the Republic of Serbia (2016 – 2025), which intensifies the work of public institutions at the national and local levels regarding issues of Roma social inclusion and discrimination, as well as creating conditions for the full access to human rights for the Roma community.
- The Global Gender Action Plan and the national Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2020), which is aligned with the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- Decree on the National Programme for Health Care of Women, Children and Youth (2010)
- Decree on the National Program for Improvement of Early Childhood Development (2016)

4.1.2 Project alignment with the needs of most marginalized groups

The project's objectives and activities in each country respond to the relevant national needs analyses as follows:

In Albania, the Roma mapping (2011) is the reference study in terms of ECD Roma needs conducted in the country. Data from the study confirmed that only 26.4% of Roma children aged from 3 to 6 years attended pre-school facilities in 2011. This study established a clear link to poor housing and employment conditions which were identified to cause barriers for Roma children to access kindergarten. Other studies have demonstrated that before the project start, the level of pre-school attendance of Roma children was very low compared to non-Roma children.¹⁴ Furthermore, indicators on illiteracy among members of the Roma community showed the constraints faced by this population group (56% illiterate in 2011), as included in the UNDP study "Assessment Study of Roma and Egyptian Community needs in Albania"¹⁵. Moreover, another study from 2012¹⁶ showed that only 25.3% of Roma completed primary education. These findings were used for the project design for which they were complemented with other quantitative data, such as the census, which provided quantitative figures that could be used as a baseline for the planned intervention.

During the project, meetings with the Roma community and youth leaders were organised to address the issues and concerns at the local level. A mechanism of dialog between community and local institution was established for a better identification of the problems that Roma children face. The involvement of the community has been constant and central to the project which allowed for the adjustment of the project to the needs of the target group during the course of the project.

Based on this evidence, the project objectives set for the country (i.e. increase in pre-school enrolment through, among other strategies, the provision of incentives), provision of quality Early Learning services, development of capacities and skills of both service providers and parents, raising awareness etc. clearly respond to the needs expressed in relevant national analyses.

Moreover, community mobilisation for the education of Roma children aimed at establishing mechanisms of dialogue between citizens and local authorities in order to highlight and identify problems and challenges faced by Roma children as well as to propose adequate solutions and recommendations to local governments. As a result of these processes, a set of priorities for pre-school education focusing on Roma children for each region was drafted and shared with local authorities. This process sought to empower communities and stimulate communication between local authorities and the community. Simultaneously, in the four implementing regions, community mobilisation was initiated to identify the priorities and issues that concern the Roma community and families in Albania. Meetings with Roma community members and youth leaders were organised in the four regions; the identified issues were shared with the city council members so as to address them.

¹⁴ Brüggemann, C. (2012). Roma Education in Comparative Perspective. Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011.

¹⁵ UNDP. 2011. Assessment Study of Roma and Egyptian Community needs in Albania – February 2012.

¹⁶ CESS in Brüggemann 2012

In FYR of Macedonia the project proved to be consistent with national priorities aiming at strengthening social inclusion, inclusive education and providing opportunities for the most marginalized groups by increasing the coverage of children in pre-school, ECD centres and primary education as well as reducing drop-out rates. In addition, the project tackled the problem identified by the government concerning the need to strengthen educational staff capacities in both pre-school and primary education. In this line, the intervention provided specific support for the development of capacities of educational staff on inclusive education and their coordination and cooperation to better address the needs of children with disabilities, special education needs and other vulnerable groups. The promotion and establishment of inclusive school teams and individual education plans also contributed to responding to the needs of the most marginalized students. Finally, the intervention in the country also aimed at raising levels of awareness about the importance of inclusive primary education among local community members, Roma and non-Roma parents.

Concerning community participation in identifying priorities and approaches, implementing partners and other relevant Roma NGOs organised a series of workshops, door-to-door visits and informal meetings with Roma parents in all relevant communities to identify their needs, problems and suggestions for the intervention, inform them about the project activities and its potential benefits. During the project implementation, UNICEF was continuously consulting, advising and working directly with local community representatives, local implementing organisations and Roma Civil Society Organizations, for example, to identify premises for ECD centres and engage local authorities to support these initiatives.

In Serbia: On the one hand, the project aimed at ensuring that most vulnerable groups, including Roma children and their parents access early childhood development and care services through the development of capacities of key service providers (health mediators, paediatricians and patronage nurses). Activities also supported knowledge improvement, and development and use of effective tools for early identification of developmental risks and psychosocial issues of vulnerable children, including adequate follow-up, support and protection. The project also ensured that Roma children and women are better informed about their entitlements in the areas of health care, education and social welfare; facilitating access to existing services and benefits. Finally, UNICEF continued to focus on setting up a policy environment conducive to reducing inequities in accessing quality inclusive education by expanding coverage and improving the quality of pre-school education (PSE). Governmental informants considered this advocacy aspect of the intervention very relevant, since UNICEF and its partners are considered a major force in driving change of policy priorities in the area of education. Although these actions are supported through projects complementary to the ADA intervention, they ensured a better coordination between health and pre-school institutions at the local level and better usage of local resources for supporting ECD related interventions.

On the other hand, the intervention aimed at enabling identified vulnerable groups (children aged six and above) access to basic education. The intervention worked with local Inter-Sectorial Commissions (ISC), built their capacities and advocated for sustainable financing in providing additional support to children/students in implementing areas.

It is also worth highlighting that a workshop that was held at the beginning of the project gathered relevant partners and the local expert community who identified the pressing

needs of marginalised children as well as ways of action to address them. In addition, an in-depth study with Roma families was conducted to identify early childhood development risks and vulnerabilities of Roma children. Findings were used as a basis for trainings and protocols in service delivery. Finally, consultative meetings were continuously carried out during the project implementation cycle through advisory boards.

In order to align the intervention to the needs of the target population, Roma CSOs were actively involved in project design, which brought their knowledge and experience to this process. Implementing partners were responsive to CSOs suggestions and experiences, taking into consideration their recommendations, carefully planning approaches and activities to enhance project relevance.

4.1.3 Contextual deprivations and system barriers

For the project design, a series of **contextual deprivations and system barriers** had been identified in implementing countries to prevent Roma children from accessing quality ECD services (see Table “System barriers” in Chapter 2). The intervention design therefore aligned its key activities at tackling these dimensions, such as the following:

Enabling environments:

- Trainings for educational staff and ECD health staff (the latter in Serbia), aimed at addressing issues related to stigma and discrimination against Roma and other disadvantaged children. Topics included aspects related to human rights, child rights, non-discrimination, Roma culture and gender equity.
- Trainings with Roma and non-Roma parents to foster mutual understanding knowledge about human and child rights.
- Advocacy for addressing the needs identified by the project which led to important changes in existing laws.
- Inclusion of additional segments in existing protocols for ELDS such as multiculturalism, respect for diversity and inclusive education.
- National campaign to raise the awareness about ECD for the overall population in the country (fYR of Macedonia and Albania). In Serbia, an intensive communication and social mobilization activities about ECD were implemented.

Supply:

- Establishment of ECD centres in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and rural zones, and provision of activities for inclusion, integration and socialization of Roma children with non-Roma children.
- Forums with educational staff to discuss ECD issues, difficulties and achievements.
- Workshops about multicultural and diversity aspects, life skills, inclusive education and child-centred teaching as well as ECD learning methodologies and standards for educational staff from ECD, pre-school and primary school level (fYR of Macedonia).
- Development of capacities and better cooperation between the social, health and education systems. Trainings and workshops were organised for paediatricians, patronage nurses, Roma Health Mediators, Roma CSOs and Developmental Counselling Units (Serbia)

- Support to strengthen the capacities of primary health centres and local communities to address the needs of the most vulnerable children and their families (Serbia)
- Advocacy activities targeting local governments in order to raise their awareness about the priorities and needs of Roma children.
- Support the process of dialogue between parents, teachers and institutions.
- Support to ISCs through trainings, mentoring and peer review events, and the elaboration of a guide for ISCs (Serbia).
- Provision of grants to meet the additional education needs of children in 10 municipalities (Serbia)
- Curriculum reviews conducted and curriculum frameworks developed
- Development of the draft guide for visiting nurses integrating a complete ECD framework (Serbia)
- Organization of conferences for national and international experts to share and generate knowledge about the results of the ADA intervention (Serbia)

Demand:

- Awareness-raising of Roma families about their rights and how to exercise them, with the support of existing mechanisms (e.g. Ombudsman, CSOs) and the establishment of specific procedures.
- Promotion of the critical importance of the early childhood period and education in general among parents through activities such as the Parent's clubs.
- Identification of out-of-school Roma children and mobilisation of all mechanisms to bring them back into the kindergarten and school.
- Cooperation with NGOs and businesses, which led for example to the provision of education materials and clothes.
- Introduction of more flexible diversified forms of pre-school education that meet the needs of Roma families and children.
- Facilitation in providing free access to ECD centres (fYR of Macedonia & Albania), subsidised books and free transportation (Albania) and grants for local communities to purchase assistive technologies for children based on a needs assessment (Serbia) as a result of advocacy.

4.1.4 Evolution of original intervention design

The intervention experienced **contextual challenges** at different levels and degrees of importance. Project management responded to those challenges, compensating to some extent with alternative strategies.

Project partners in **Albania** met annually to share their emerging needs, complications and solutions. The intervention proved to be flexible and adaptive to respond to contextual challenges. For example, the intervention had to adapt its procedures to be aligned to the new competences given to municipalities as a result of the decentralization process experienced in Albania. The original implementation plan to establish ECD centres in the **fYR of Macedonia** had to be changed due to administrative, political and logistical issues. These adaptations in both countries proved to be successful, as they allowed the completion of the planned activities. Finally, during the project implementation in **Serbia**, several challenges

affecting the original project design were identified, and the intervention was redesigned accordingly. These challenges refer to the high fluctuation of responsible staff in relevant ministries, the lack of paediatricians and visiting nurses, the reduced community visits conducted by paediatricians and the delays of processes within the MoH. These challenges were respectively addressed through the project's advisory board, the inclusion of paediatricians from other municipalities, the introduction of child development and risk assessment tools and referral protocols within primary health centres and the inclusion of indirect partners such as the Roma Women Network, consisting of 10 Roma NGOs working in 40 settlements who were, to some extent overcoming the delays occurring with capacity building of RHMs.

4.1.5 Criteria applied for selecting intervention locations

In Albania, the main criterion applied for selecting intervention locations was the proportion of Roma population under the ADA funding. Therefore, locations with the highest number of Roma families were selected (e.g. Elbasan, Fier, Korca and Shkodra). This selection criterion was used only for the ADA funded project, given its national coverage. The same selection criterion for selecting ECD applied in the case of **the FYR of Macedonia**. Schools were selected based on the proportion of Roma students and their proximity to ECD centres. Finally, several criteria were taken into consideration for the selection of locations **in Serbia**, including the number of Roma population, geographic distribution, level of development of municipalities and local communities and the interest and motivation expressed by local stakeholders to be involved in the project (a public call was published for municipalities interested in participating in the ISC component).

4.1.6 Alignment of intervention design to Human Rights and Gender Equity standards and principles

The information available confirmed the alignment of the intervention with international instruments, standards and principles on HR & GE, and more specifically to:

- The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC, article 2-5, 7, 15, 18, 19, 23,24 ,27-31)
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, articles 1-16 with focus on 9,10,12 and 16)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, articles 7, 8, 24, 25)

When it comes to the application of **the HRBA and GE crosscutting issues in the project countries**, implemented strategies focused on empowering communities (right holders) to better understand and exercise their rights as well as on build capacities of duty bearers (services providers) to deliver services that foster non-discrimination and provide access to services that promote gender equity at the community level, progressively changing traditional practices and roles. The empowerment of children and the organisations/institutions working on representing and protecting their rights was also central within the implementation framework. Furthermore, the project worked against

discrimination of Roma children and children with disabilities, including their segregation in special schools, which is directly aligned with the ICERD (articles 2 and 5) and the CRPD (article 24). All this was addressed through awareness raising activities and targeted communication interventions that addressed traditional social norms including attitudes and behaviours of mothers and fathers as secondary duty bearers, to equally support and engage in ECD / Early Learning and quality Basic Education. Finally, the intervention also supported the development of the legal framework for the protection of child rights.

In Albania, the HRBA was also central to the design of the United Nations-Government of Albania Programme of Cooperation (2012–2016). In 2015, UNICEF supported the State Agency for Child Rights Protection (SACRP) in monitoring the situation of children in the country, and participated in the preparation of the United Nations Country Team’s confidential report to the CEDAW committee. In 2015, the project contributed to further consolidating its interaction with and support to the national government and human rights institutions, to strengthen the system of democratic governance in support of the realization of child rights, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children, providing necessary remedies to addressing inequalities.

In the case of the FYR of Macedonia, the intervention sought to ensure that national policies provide a better framework for the protection of child rights, advocating for legislation amendments to comply with CRC and CRPD principles, and developing administrative frameworks and institutional development support to provide an effective implementation of the programme. During the intervention, UNICEF regularly collaborated with the Government, international and local organisations, donors, civil society organizations, media, children, young people and parents to:

- Advocate for effective policies to benefit children,
- Support innovative programmes to care for and protect children, and
- Ensure that policy makers and community representatives will encourage and facilitate the meaningful participation of children and young people in their communities.

In addition, the project provided support to other NGOs and institutions (e.g. Ombudsman, relevant ministries) responsible for monitoring child rights, and developed campaigns to raise awareness about, among other, the discrimination and exclusion faced by children with disabilities. As an example, the campaign “Fight Unfair” was developed to spur action to change the way society sees and treats children with disabilities. Moreover, UNICEF in partnership with national authorities developed a five-year communication strategy to increase support and inclusion for CWD. Moreover, UNICEF and implementing partners conducted activities with Roma families, oriented towards women empowerment, self-esteem development, and active participation in society, family position and access to the labour market. Finally, UNICEF recently produced a video aimed at empowering Roma children and increasing attendance rates of Roma children in preschool and primary education.¹⁷

¹⁷

https://www.facebook.com/unicef.mk/videos/1433166783395318/?autoplay_reason=gatekeeper&video_container_type=0&video_creator_product_type=2&app_id=2392950137&live_video_guests=0

In Serbia, HRBA and GE related actions focused on empowering children, their parents and the organisations representing those key stakeholders. In addition, the intervention equipped policy makers and parents with information to take actions and achieve equitable development for all young children, and in particular young children of Roma ethnicity, as well as other marginalized children. HRBA and GE crosscutting issues were incorporated in key project components, and particularly in capacity building and awareness raising activities (e.g. discrimination within health system as well as gender and Roma culture were part of training programmes for paediatricians and visiting nurses). The support provided by the representatives of the Ombudsman office and commissioners for the equality was crucial to ensure the incorporation of these crosscutting issues. In addition, in co-operation with independent bodies and CSOs, families with young children were empowered to recognise their rights in the areas of health, education and social protection and claim violations if occur. Activities with Roma families were also oriented towards the empowerment of Roma women, bringing out changes in stereotypes of traditional gender roles within the Roma communities. The Roma Women Network played an active role in this particular issue. Additionally, the active involvement of fathers in ECD related workshops in Roma settlements contributed to changes in understanding gender roles. Parents were empowered to take an active role in the decision-making process about their children's education and concerning the use of available services through consultation processes. Also, the instrument for the assessment of child development and recognition of early risks (i.e. "Ages and Stages") that was translated and piloted in 9 primary health centres significantly influenced redistribution of power between professionals and parents. Youth and children discussion panels were organised with the support of the Ombudsman and the Commissioner for Equality, while several anti-discrimination events contributed to raising the awareness about equality issues among the general public.

4.1.7 Alignment of intervention design to UNICEF objectives

The key project objectives (access to quality early childhood services, access to inclusive Early Learning services and access to basic education) are fully in line with the outcomes of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2014-2017¹⁸, in particular with outcomes in education, health, social inclusion, gender equality and human rights.

- **Education Outcome:** Supporting global efforts to provide access to quality education for both boys and girls through improved learning outcomes and equitable and inclusive education.
- **Health Outcome:** Supporting global efforts to reduce under-five mortality through improved and equitable use of high impact maternal, new-born and child health interventions from pregnancy to adolescence and promotion of healthy behaviours.
- **Social Inclusion:** Supporting global efforts to reduce child poverty and discrimination against children through improved policy environments and systems for disadvantaged children.
- **Gender equality:** Emphasize the empowerment of girls and women and address gender-related needs of girls, boys, fathers, mothers and communities.

¹⁸ https://www.unicef.org/strategicplan/files/UNICEF_Strategic_Plan__2014-2017_e-version.pdf

Moreover, the intervention is also in line with each of UNICEF country programmes in Albania, the fYR of Macedonia and Serbia all of which include an inclusive education and ECD priority with a focus on closing equity gaps for specific groups of children, such as ethnic minorities and children with disabilities.

4.2 EFFECTIVENESS

4.2.1 Access to ECD, Early Learning and Basic Education

The analysis of effectiveness is based on the quantitative information available: in the case of Albania it comes from the 2015 progress report, and in the case of Serbia and the fYR of Macedonia, from the latest project reports from 2016 and available data. This quantitative information has been combined with the qualitative information obtained during the evaluation process. However, this information should be taken with caution for two main reasons. First and most importantly, it is impossible to estimate the level of achievement when no targets were defined for some of the indicators. Secondly, the level of contribution of the programme to these results could not be quantified given the lack of information available including baselines.

Key finding 2: The lack of adequate systems to monitor and evaluate the intervention prevents a solid analysis about the project's effectiveness. Nevertheless, positive results in indicators referred to stakeholder engagement in ECD practices, student's enrolment in pre-school and basic education and home visits of health staff to marginalised communities which reflect the project's success in improving access to ECD services. This is confirmed to some extent by the perceptions (qualitative analysis) of key stakeholders. Civil registration and vaccination services in Albania are considered key activities to spur children enrolment in pre-school and parent's engagement in positive health habits. The establishment of ECD centres and kindergartens in locations where no other facilities for marginalized children are available has been considered a key result in this area in the fYR of Macedonia.

No local action plans were developed in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as expected. However, UNICEF worked directly with targeted municipalities to ensure their commitment to increase awareness, access and ensure the sustainability of ECD services for the Roma children. This was done through direct meetings with relevant municipal officials and formalised by the signing of MoUs with all 9 municipalities, which means ECD became part of the formal network of kindergartens in the country.

4.2.2 Access to quality ECD services

Includes information for Project purpose 1 and result 1.2

This section only applies to the intervention in Serbia, where services provided at both national and local levels have positively affected the access of Roma children and their parents to quality ECD services.

Indicators of success for this outcome (Project purpose 1) refer to positive changes in key ECD indicators for children, increase in the number of families actively applying early

stimulation practices and number of Roma children with chosen paediatrician in targeted communities. **The first indicator was modified to accommodate the information from the reports of paediatricians and visiting nurses given the absence of a RHM database and the lack of routine statistics and health data disaggregated per ethnicity at national / regional levels.**

Paediatricians reached a total of 5,500 children (1334 Roma). Their services included in-depth analysis of 1429 children (out of which 430 were Roma). Visiting nurses' services reached a total of 11,510 children, of which 4,809 were Roma. In terms of ECD indicators, it could be highlighted that:

- Of 59% of children that were assessed by paediatricians with some developmental difficulties – 49% to 64% of them (depending on the developmental domain) had improvement in developmental outcomes after paediatric interventions. Roma children, more than in general population, were assessed with difficulties in socio-emotional domain.
- Parent child interaction assessed by visiting nurses improved from 46% to 70% for the Roma families reached. In the paediatric assessment 47% of Roma families improved parent-child interaction.
- Safe and simulative environment in families also increased although remaining extremely low. It rose from 33% to 46% of Roma families after interventions of visiting nurses.

In addition, Roma NGO activists, who conducted community workshops and raised their awareness on the importance of ECD and positive parental practices, reached almost 1,100 Roma parents.

On the other hand, indicators for early stimulation practices and paediatrician and visiting nurses services are positive, as expressed in the following results:

- Responsive feeding practices rose from 58% to 83% within Roma families.
- Using age specific adequate play for stimulation rose from 29% to 43% within Roma families.
- Non-violent disciplining had the least increase – from 34% to 41% in Roma families.

According to paediatricians reports, close to 50% of Roma parents improved their practices in terms of reducing identified risks for child development, using adequate developmental play activities and positive interaction between parents and children. As for the related result (1.2), six key indicators were defined to measure the level of success in providing quality early childhood development services as part of the health service provision. A total of 90 visiting nurses from 10 health centres used their knowledge and skills on child development and parental support in ECD and risk reduction in home visits and 2,666 health education activities in the community, of which 28% were done in Roma settlements. The overall improvement of parental knowledge and practices on ECD achieved through the group sessions and home visits increased from 41% to 68% among Roma parents. Visiting nurses made 27% of visits to new-borns, 43% to infants, 20% to children aged 2 and 10% to children with 4 years old. In addition, 10 Primary Health centres have improved their mechanisms and develop action protocols for the early identification/response to childhood development risks. Thanks to these protocols, the cooperation between paediatricians and nurses was improved, as well

as the cooperation between health centers and other community services (pre-schools/school, social welfare services etc.).

The contribution to improve ECD infrastructure at ground level is expressed in the MoU signed by eight municipalities, which formalizes the cooperation and communication among the health, social, and education systems at the local level. Local Health Councils are in the process of being established at the municipal level, taking over responsibility for the local implementation of the national health policy. They are potentially an important stakeholder to move the social inclusion agenda forward at the local level through the health system and its co-ordination with other relevant areas. In addition, cooperation protocols between different actors within the health system have been developed, improving the cooperation between different service providers. All 10 PHCs introduced new procedures in their everyday practice while 8 out of 9 targeted municipalities signed MoUs between health, pre-school and social welfare institutions to promote and support ECD in their communities and developed draft action plans to improve early development and intervention services.

Moreover local action plans to improve ECD and intervention services at the local level were developed. Finally, assistive technology has been purchased with the support of matching grants included in the individual plans recommended by ISCs.

Although the evaluation process did not capture relevant information concerning the evaluation of this system of protocol/referrals and the follow-up process for vulnerable Roma children, they were implemented in 10 PHCs and according to UNICEF they have been assessed as useful by management and professional in the PHC, and documented as a good practice in some PHCs.

4.2.3 Access to inclusive, high quality, cost-effective Early Learning services

Includes information for Project purpose 2 and expected result 2.1, 2.2, 2.4 & 2.5

In Albania, a survey was conducted in 2014 to determine the percentage of Roma children (aged 36-59 months) attending early learning services in targeted municipalities/regions. The results show that 55% of Roma children attended pre-school in the academic year 2014-2015, compared with 26% in 2011.¹⁹ Project data from the 2015-2016 academic year shows that an additional 385 children have entered pre-school for the first time during this year. Considering that the target for this indicator established 300 newly enrolled students, the result has been largely achieved, and is most likely to be higher once updated information is available.

Table 10. Evolution of Roma children attendance in preschool

Year	Total number of Roma children	Number of Roma Children attending preschools	Percentage of attendance
2011	1,156 (Roma mapping, 2011, UNICEF)	383 (Roma mapping, 2011, UNICEF)	26
2014	1,246 (Roma census, 2014, Soros)	686 (Roma children survey, 2014, UNICEF)	55

¹⁹ <http://www.sidalbania.org/romacom.html>

In terms of children improvement in combined scores on the dimensions measuring child development (i.e. literacy-numeracy, physical, social-emotional learning) based on ELDS for children aged 36-59 months, no baseline is available for Roma children to estimate the result's achievement or a lack thereof (expected result 2.2). According to the information gathered, each municipality should have determined the baseline information, while the target was to achieve a 20% increased from that baseline. The information was expected to be available by 2016, but no relevant data could be gathered during the evaluation process. The same applies for the number of ECD centres that apply child-centred and inclusive policies. According to UNICEF Albania, this information is not available since the ELDS entered into force during the academic year 2015-2016 and the instrument for measuring children achievements had not yet been approved by the MoES.

In order to prompt access to Early Learning services, the intervention also considered the involvement of school staff and other service providers at the local level to take actions about out-of-pre-school Roma children (expected result 2.5). The process involved the **establishment of protocols** to monitor and ensure participation of children in pre-school. These protocols were established in four municipalities. However, although the target was achieved, implementers still consider that financial schemes should be further developed to facilitate the enrolment of children. It should therefore be noted that UNICEF still continues its advocacy efforts to promote these schemes.

According to informants, infrastructure in the rural and remote areas needs improvements. Lack of materials, insufficient physical space and other similar problems are widespread. Communities support kindergartens by providing basic materials and infrastructure, but this support is not enough. Although infrastructure development was not part of the intervention, some local partners in Korca, Elbasan and Tirana have prioritized these issues and put efforts to improve kindergarten infrastructure. In Shkodra, advocacy efforts led to the construction of a new kindergarten in the community. UNICEF and partners have lobbied with local authorities to address the identified infrastructure needs.

Roma and other vulnerable groups face pressing **financial barriers to access ECD services**. In this regard, during the course of the project, six municipalities in Albania have started providing financial support to Roma families to enrol their children in pre-school, complying with the target of at least four municipalities (expected result 2.4). The municipality of Bilisht (Korca) covered the initial fee of kindergarten registration for Roma children who had never attended pre-school before; the municipality of Korca funded the Summer Camp for 100 vulnerable children in collaboration with a CSO and provided free textbooks for Roma and Egyptian children. The municipality of Lezha (Shkodra qark) financed the transportation costs for Roma children. The Municipality of Roskovec (Fier) financed the construction of the road that enabled the transportation of Roma children to school.

The qualitative analysis reflects the satisfaction of different key stakeholders with the project results in increasing access to Early Learning services. Informants from NGOs, kindergartens and other institutions confirm that the number of Roma children enrolled in kindergartens has increased, as well as the number of children regularly attending ECD services. The support provided by the project to register Roma children's ethnicity is considered very

positive, and a key strategy to increase the enrolment rates. Unregistered and unvaccinated Roma children were identified through mapping activities in the field, and were helped to access these services. These children were provided with health care visits, free medicines (with support from local businesses) and vaccines. In addition, a number of informants claim that the number of families seeking medical services has increased as a result of the vaccination services provided. The civil registration and vaccination services for Roma children were key results for their integration in ECD centres. Additionally, informants considered the efforts made to gather together civil society organizations, Roma community leaders and other key stakeholders as a crucial element for a successful project implementation. In this regard, discussion forums were highlighted as most effective to define the needs and requirements for the municipality council to address.

It should also be noted that Roma parents expressed their recommendation to include additional support to help them overcome financial barriers, in the form of food packages, school materials and clothes.

In the case of the FYR of Macedonia, data available to estimate the changes produced on the number of Roma children (aged 36-59 months) attending Early Learning services confirms an increase in the overall coverage of children in pre-school education between 2013 and 2016.

Table 11. Children coverage in pre-school institutions - kindergartens²⁰

Year	Total number of children (0-6)	Roma Children	CwD ²¹	Gender Male	Gender Female
2013	29752	380	-	-	-
2014	30543	548	165	15790	14753
2015	32660	840	194	16745	15915
2016	39321	860	387	18739	16844

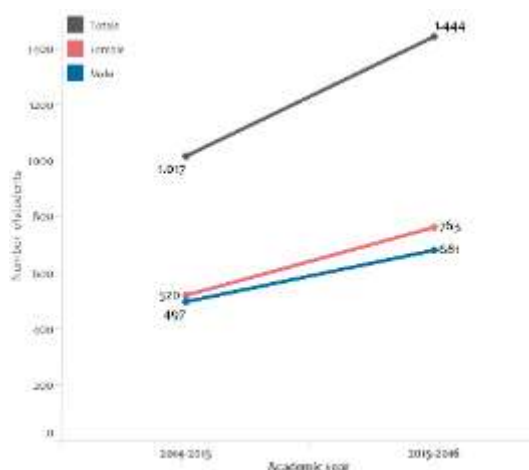
The number of Roma children attending public pre-school institutions across the country has also increased. In 2013, Roma children represented 1.3% of the total number of children in public kindergartens, which steadily increased to 2.3% in 2016. During the academic year 2015-2016, the total coverage in the project's supported Roma ECD centres was 1,444, which is higher than the coverage in the period 2014-2015 (1017)²².

²⁰ Data from MLSP-Child Protection Unit & ECD-COR

²¹ Children with Disabilities

²² ECD-COR Report "Assessment results of children achievements from 3-6 for 2015/2016"

Figure 3. Roma children attending ECD centers in the FYR of Macedonia



In terms of child development indicators, the latest data available was collected in December 2016, as part of an assessment conducted on a sample of 906 Roma children attending ECD centres. This assessment identified significant changes in all dimensions measuring child development (literacy, numeracy, physical and social-emotional learning). Furthermore, it proved that through implementation of developmentally, culturally and linguistically appropriate classroom practices, preschool attendance of Roma children helped in boosting their development and improving their preparedness for school. However, irregular attendance and instability in attendance were the main challenges in operating of ECD centers in Roma communities which has contributed to the overall results in the level of achievements. Based on the qualitative information gathered, these challenges are partially explained by the lack of/difficult access to the ECD centres, the lack of school packages (food, materials, clothes, etc.), migration due to seasonal work and the lack of awareness of parents on the importance of ECD.

During the project implementation period, 11 ECD centres were established in 9 municipalities (Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Suto Orizari, Chair-Topaana, Stip, Radovis, Tetovo and Gostivar). All ECD centres are functional and located in rural, socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods with poor infrastructural capacities, mainly populated with Roma families with young children. **The target in the indicator for this result (expected result 2.1) states that at least two centres per municipality or a total of 14 centres should be established.** The initial plan included the establishment of two ECD centres in the Suto Orizari. However, after consideration, only one ECD centre was established in an existing kindergarten in this municipality. Additional centres were opened in the municipalities of Kumanovo and Gostivar. Although the reasons for this change in plans are plausible and explain the delay in plans, it remains unclear why the planned result (i.e. a total of 14 or 2 ECD centres in each municipality) has not been achieved.

All 11 targeted ECD centres now implement ELDS, multiculturalism and diversity programmes and maintain child portfolios. ECD centre staff was trained in reducing **the learning gap in 5 developmental domains:** health and motor development, socio-emotional development, approaches to learning, language, communication and literacy development and finally, cognitive development and general knowledge acquisition.

With regards to the creation of **local action plans** to increase the provision of ELS, the project progress report of 2015 states that all project municipalities took action to ensure the sustainability of these services. **However, based on the interviews conducted with representatives from these 9 municipalities, none of them have developed local action plans.** According to UNICEF, these local action plans were not developed due to the lack of capacities of the municipalities and the overall political situation in the country. UNICEF together with MLSP organised a workshop for representatives of 84 municipalities (including those targeted by the project) to raise awareness about ELDS and promote the elaboration of child development programmes as part of the education and social protection programmes of each municipality. In addition, UNICEF worked directly with targeted municipalities to ensure their commitment to increase access and ensure the sustainability of ECD services for the Roma children. This was done through direct meetings with relevant municipal officials and formalised by the signing of MoUs with all 9 municipalities.

In terms of effort put in overcoming **financial barriers faced by the target population**, the intervention has established the provision of free access to ECD services to more than 4,000 children in the 11 ECD centres. By opening ECD centres in rural and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the intervention facilitated children from marginalised and isolated neighbourhoods with access to ECD and early learning services.

Informants considered that the **overall access to Early Learning** services has improved, and that every year there is an increase in the number of children enrolling in ECD centres. They pointed out that one of the key areas of success was the establishment of ECD centres in locations where no other facilities for children, especially those marginalised, were available. Moreover, informants highlighted the importance of establishing well-equipped ECD centres (adequate furniture, teaching and didactic aids, toys, etc.) to offer quality pre-school services/activities free of charge for Roma children. UNICEF and implementing partners, in cooperation with local Roma NGOs, promoted the concept of mentorship and afterschool activities for Roma Children in order to improve their school results. These activities were also implemented with parents in order to engage them in the project and raise their awareness on child rights, inclusive education and health habits.

Although some ECD centres were considered not to be fully accessible for CWD (e.g. Kumanovo, Bitola), the majority was considered relatively accessible during the direct observation process.

4.2.4 Access to quality Basic Education services

Includes information for Project purpose 3 and expected result 3.1

In the case of the FYR of Macedonia, only information from visited schools was available to estimate the level of achievement of indicators for project purpose 3, which refer to the number of Roma children at school-entry age attending first grade. Notably, neither baselines nor targets had been defined either. Nevertheless, based on the assessment made in 7 project-targeted primary schools included in the last Inclusive Education progress report from December 2016, the overall enrolment rate of Roma children in primary school between 2014 and 2016 has increased which indicates progress towards the project purpose (i.e. improved access to quality basic education). Moreover, the assessments of students show

that results in literacy, writing, reading, and mathematics were better in 2016 than in 2014, also indicating an improvement in quality.

BDE and SEI representatives confirmed the improvement of the overall school environment towards the inclusion of Roma children and vulnerable groups during the project, stating that a positive environment was developed in all implementing schools. According to the BDE and SEI, and as confirmed during observation activities, these positive results include the reduction of prejudices towards Roma and pupils with disability by educational staff, other students, parents and the community, and the creation of school inclusion teams to assist and support students with disabilities and learning difficulties to achieve better results in the three cycles of primary education. Moreover, through the training courses, dissemination of training materials, toolkits and guidelines, the work and capacities of the teachers in the schools were strengthened which was considered to have resulted in improvements in the students achievements in mathematics, reading and writing.

In order to ensure access to primary schooling, the intervention also worked on developing coordination between schools, service providers, Roma mediators and parents at the local level (expected result 3.1). Indicators for this result measure the establishment of referral mechanism between key stakeholders in implementing municipalities, the results of Roma children in mathematics and language and the number of CWD attending primary education in participant schools. Information available from the progress report confirmed the creation of **inclusion teams** and school support teams in all seven targeted schools, which meets the relevant target. These teams, composed of directors, teachers, social workers, pedagogues, psychologists and special educators developed individual education plans and assisted children in completing school activities and improving their success (afterschool activities with children and Roma parents). They also assisted teachers in conducting school programme activities for Roma children, children with special education needs and children with disabilities. **The school inclusion teams constantly received assistance, guidance and help from the BDE advisors. In-school support visits from BDE advisors (63 visits – on average 8 visits per school) were provided to assist teachers in implementing inclusive programmes and develop individual education plans.**

Based on the Inclusive Education progress report (2016)²³, the Roma student achievement results in mathematics, and literacy (reading and writing) in the first and second cycle of primary education were raised in the 7 targeted schools. **The average achievement of all students on the literacy test in grade 3 was 45.8% in 2016 (a significant improvement of nearly 12 percentage points compared to results from 2014); the average score on language literacy in grade 6 was 45% (an improvement of near 6 percentage points compared to 2014).** The achievements of all students in grade 3 on the mathematics test improved compared to 2014 by 11 percentage points. For the grade 6, the results were similar in 2016 and 2014 (36,6% average score).

However, the average score was still found to be below the expectations and slightly below the prescribed demands in the curriculum. Most notably, a large gap was identified between Roma and non-Roma student achievements in the first and second cycle of primary education in mathematics, literacy, writing and reading. The average task score among the Roma students in grade 3 was by 22 percentage points lower compared to the average score of

²³ https://www.unicef.org/tfymacedonia/Inclusive_Education_Progress_study_2016_EN.pdf

other students in 2016. The average task score among the Roma students in grade 6 was by 15 percentage points lower compared to the average score of other students in 2016. According to the study, the difference between the achievements of Roma students and the students of other ethnicities in grade 3 had increased since 2014. The report provides some key findings that explained these results, such as the fact that students whose parents have completed primary/secondary education and are employed have greater achievements. In this line, it is proved that Roma parents have lower level of education and face higher unemployment rates than the parents of other students. Other facts usually affecting Roma children such as a lower level of the language of instruction or poorer learning circumstances (lack of books and other materials) at home are linked to lower academic results.

Quantitative information on an improvement in access to quality basic education in **Serbia** was unavailable for this information. It should be noted that at project design, no baseline had been defined for this indicator and that the MICS data from 2014 on attendance was added at a later stage (see project progress report 2014 and later), as they were considered to represent figures closer to the project start. However, due to the unavailability of comparable data at project end, it is not possible to assess the extent to which the intervention was successful in achieving this outcome. It can therefore be said that access to quality Basic Education services of Roma children aged 6 years and above was addressed through improvement of ISCs. For example, the number of requests for assessing children in need increased from around 6.5 thousand in 2014 to around 8 thousand in 2015. By 2015, a total of 645 children were assessed in the ten implementing municipalities, and overachievement compared to the 200 children targeted.

Furthermore, it should be noted that a UNICEF research about special education states that the number of Roma children in special schools has decreased notably since the beginning of 2000. The CSP report, which compares data from the ten participant ISCs highlights a decrease in the share of children referred to “special education” from 35% in 2014 to 24% in 2015.

4.2.5 Contribution to boost policy development consistent with project’s objectives, Human Rights and Gender Equality.

Key finding 3: The intervention succeeded in generating policy developments towards access to inclusive pre-school and basic education in the three countries of intervention. Nevertheless, it is not possible to estimate a clear indication of effectiveness towards the contribution to the development of these policies given the lack of indicators for this particular result.

This section includes information about expected result 2.3, but is not limited to it.

In Albania, the key expected result (2.3) aimed at advocating for the government to adopt and enforce policies to provide incentives (enrolment quotas) for the Roma population, and increase their engagement in pre-school activities. A high level meeting held in 2014 aimed at discussing the best strategies to increase Roma enrolment in pre-school led to the approval of a Ministerial decree (MoES), including guideline 21 to facilitate the process of Roma children inclusion in pre-school. This constitutes a significant step forward in terms of the

policy framework for Roma pre-school inclusion, setting a yearly 5% increase in Roma enrolment for the period 2015-2020. The strategy has already resulted in a significant increase in enrolment of Roma children (i.e. +33%) in pre-school.

In addition, UNICEF has mobilised technical assistance and resources to assist the MoES in the development of the new draft of the strategy of pre-university education (2014-2020) and the National Development Goals under National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI). The process also entailed a series of consultations with various stakeholders on the strategy of education, resulting in a more inclusive strategic document that highlights the importance of participation in early learning, especially for the most vulnerable groups of population, such as the Roma. Furthermore, with the assistance of UNICEF, the MoES is currently revising the standards of pre-school based on ELDS as well as curricula for pre-school; this revision is expected to improve the quality of provision of early learning while ensuring equity, with a focus on inclusion of vulnerable children. Supported by UNICEF, a formal protocol was signed by the MoES, Mol and MoH in January 2015 identifying inter-sectorial accountabilities, timelines, data collection formats and mechanisms to identify and respond to the situation of out-of-school children.

The nationwide “Every Roma Child in pre-school” initiative supported by UNICEF continued to unfold, holding local authorities accountable in ensuring Roma children’s access to early learning and leading to an estimated 50 per cent of young Roma children accessing pre-school in 2014–2015, compared with only 26 per cent in 2011. This initiative is in the process of being approved by local governments. Some municipalities, such as Roskovec, Fushe and Kruja have already approved this guideline and include them in the social plan of the municipalities. This initiative also supports the upgrade of the education management system to better track out-of-school children.

Moreover, a series of pro-vulnerable children policies have been implemented as a direct result of the evidence-based advocacy work of UNICEF and partners. Thanks to these policies, Roma and vulnerable families can access subsidised, free transportation to pre-school children, additional teachers for children with learning difficulties and financial waivers for newborn children. In this regard, two new financial schemes are expected in Korca and Shkodra to facilitate the enrolment of vulnerable children in pre-school.

Concerning GE, steps have been taken to comply with the National Strategy for Gender equality 2016-2020, which harmonizes national legislation with international laws in GE issues, guarantees equal treatment without discrimination for all individuals and gives priority consideration to the needs of vulnerable groups, especially female victims of sexual assaults, women with disabilities, adolescent mothers, Roma and Egyptian women, older women and LBT women. This law is expected to expand current services available and improve their effectiveness in accordance with adopted standards. An important objective of this strategy is the aim of increasing women’s roles in policy and decision making processes at the local level, guaranteeing the representation of women from marginalized groups, women with disabilities, Roma women, and older women in these spheres of influence.

The Institution of Education and Development supported by UNICEF has drafted a manual on gender equity, social inclusion and non-discrimination, which was designed under the new curricular demands. The manual is provided as a booklet for all the staff included in the process of delivering education with a gender-equity dimension in the pre-school education.

Finally, participatory gender budgeting is implemented at the local level, such as in the case of Elbasan.

In the FYR of Macedonia, the intervention succeed in advocating for law and policy reforms, resulting in the following:

- **Law for Primary Education: (articles 10; 13; 15; 30; 33; 39; 41 and particularly 51 (1-4)):** These amendments established the obligatory creation of school inclusive teams and development of Individual Education Plans for children with special education needs, disabilities and learning difficulties. Given the constraints and difficulties experienced by the educational staff in applying these requirements, UNICEF together with the Macedonian Center for Civic Education (MCCE) and BDE are preparing a guide on how to comply with these educational plans. Moreover these amendments include the provision of “block dotacii”- grants for activities related to inclusive education of children with disabilities. However, as confirmed by the MoES, these financial incentives for inclusion tend to be used for other purposes by schools (covering salaries, paying bills, administrative costs, etc.).
- **Law for teachers in primary and secondary schools:** Reforms focused on strengthening the competencies of teachers and other professionals in kindergartens, ECD centres and schools about ECD, ELDS, multiculturalism and diversity and inclusive education.
- **Regulation on the form and content of the pedagogy documentation and evidence in primary school.**
- **Changes in policy documents and strategies** such as the New Strategy for Comprehensive Education 2017-2020, which put special focus on pre-school education and provides funds for the implementation of strategic priorities in pre-school education. The New Strategy for equality and non-discrimination 2016-2020 includes strategic priorities 1.2, 2.2 and 3.2, related to education, culture and sport.

In Serbia, the intervention was not specifically design to contribute to policy development. However, some key results were achieved in this line of action.

According to the MoESTD, a new bylaw aiming at providing additional support to children/students in the area of social welfare, education and health is being prepared. This process gathers different stakeholders and takes into consideration opinions of ISC members, representatives of institutions at the local and national level and parents. Materials developed through the project (analysis, training materials, ISCs guides) are also used as a basis for the development of the new by-law. Thanks to the support provided by UNICEF, the Group for Social Inclusion became fully functional, thus strengthening institutional capacity for the coordination, development and implementation of early learning and inclusive education.

The National Early Childhood Development Programme for the health system was finalised by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and approved by the Government in March 2016. Its full endorsement and implementation is likely to have a positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of all ECD-related activities that are initiated within the health system. In addition, the MoH has formally established a special working group for strengthening the visiting nurses service that should, among other duties, develop and adopt new improved guidelines for this service, relying to a large extent on the guidelines and recommendations

developed by the project. All relevant stakeholders had an opportunity to provide comments and suggestions and they were actively involved in the programme design. One of the priorities defined in different strategic documents (Action plan for Chapter 23, Roma Strategy) was to increase the number of RHM and ensure their institutionalization within the health system. The development of this new policy framework continued during the project, prioritising its alignment with the Europe 2020 Strategy and EU acquis.

However, according to governmental officials, the lack of recognition about the importance of ECD is still widespread. The Government of Serbia will use World Bank loans to further develop ECD and pre-school education, but it is not a priority within the sector budget support planning (EU funds).

At the national level, relevant priorities are addressed and budgeted through the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma women and men, draft Action plan and the Employment and Social Reform Programme. At the local level, UNICEF and project partners advocated to include ECD priorities in local budget plans.

4.2.6 Contribution to mobilization/capacity building/awareness raising of key stakeholders

This section analyses the project's contribution to build capacities, raise awareness and mobilize services providers, Roma parents and children. **Information contained refers to expected result 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 & 3.2.**

Key finding 4: In terms of capacity building services, indicators of success in Albania, the FYR of Macedonia and Serbia were accomplished. Moreover, information obtained also indicates the application of this knowledge by service providers and even an early indication of changes in the behaviour of parents towards inclusive education to service providers to applying ECD practices. However, the success on the application of this knowledge could not be defined based on available indicators, and particularly, given the lack of targets. Nevertheless, institution representatives, parents and other stakeholder provided positive feedback about the mobilization of service providers both in the education and health sector.

Concerning awareness raising results, parents clubs were pointed out as an effective strategy to work with parents and engage them in positive parenting habits, inclusive education and health related issues. They are better informed about their children's needs and rights, and available services to address them, although some cultural barriers persist. Nevertheless, there is no clear measure on the extent to which awareness-raising activities were effective.

In Albania, capacity building services were focused on service providers working directly with parents and children. This includes educational staff, health centre personnel, civil registration officials, NGOs, and other partners/collaborators. Besides, training sessions with Roma and non-Roma parent were carried out. All capacity building efforts addressed issues of stigma and discrimination and were design to raise parent's awareness about the importance of early education for children.

Latest data from 2016 shows that a total of 4,577 persons were trained by the project in Albania. This represents a considerable overachievement of the project in this area, since the target established a minimum of 200 service providers trained. Additionally, lunch forums with teachers/educators allowed them to have discussions about ECD issues; constraints faced and best practices to address them.

The project has encouraged direct communication with Roma communities and leaders under the motto "Nothing for the Roma without the Roma". Examples of this strategy are the priorities of early learning for Roma children developed by communities or the empowerment of parents clubs so that they express their rights and needs with education authorities and/or local governments.

Finally, community mobilization trainings were organised with service providers (teachers, educators, health officials, child protection officers, social workers, etc.) and the Roma community to strengthen the voice of Roma CSOs in their regions. Simultaneously in all regions, community mobilisation activities were initiated to identify local priorities and issues that concern the Roma community. Community mobilisation for the education of Roma children has been aimed at establishing mechanisms of dialogue between citizens and local authorities, in order to highlight and identify the problems and challenges faced by Roma children and to propose solutions and recommendations for local governments.

From the parent's point of view, these trainings have changed the way they interact with service providers. Parents now feel understood and accepted, service providers such as educators and doctors have changed their attitudes and approach towards them. This particularly applies to older educators who have been trained in these approaches. Open day activities with teachers, parents and children were held, and different activities carried out. Such activities were considered particularly important, since the interaction between parents, teachers and children creates rapport and helps stakeholders to better understand the importance of ECD by sharing their experiences and difficulties.

In terms of awareness raising, the objective was twofold. On one hand, capacity-building services offered to service providers aimed at raising their awareness about the constraints

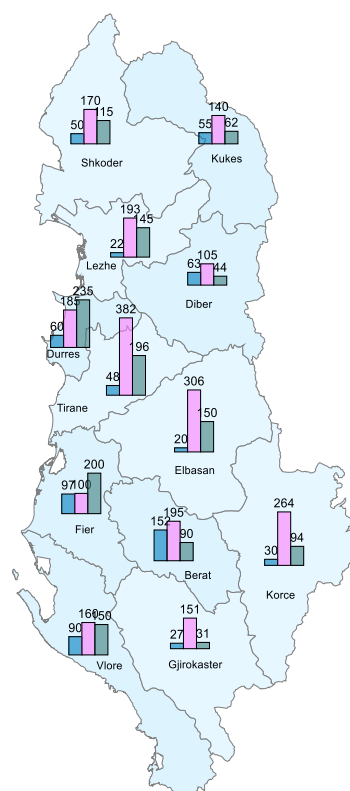


Figure 4. Albania

Number of persons trained by the project
 Year I (October 2013- September 2014)
 Year II (April 2015- March 2016)
 Year III (May -October 2016)

faced by the Roma community and develop effective strategies to tackle them. On the other hand, the objective was to engage Roma parents and change their position towards ECD and positive parental practices.

The work with parents was intensive and included a wide range of different topics (ECD, anti-discrimination behaviour, gender mainstreaming, health, hygiene habits, work with teachers, educators and other representatives from relevant institutions, etc.). **As of 2015, communication activities had reached 4,597 parents who were contacted and informed about pre-school enrolment. In addition 1,562 parents of young Roma children had acquired skills in ECD through implemented activities.** These activities included round-tables, trainings and the creation of parents clubs. The latter were followed with interest, and included sessions and discussion groups about basic concepts of parenthood (violence within the family; importance of safe environments for children both at home and school, etc.). These sessions have been helpful for parents to share their experiences. At those meetings, Roma parents and non-Roma parents discussed problems they faced concerning their children's education.

As a result, the evaluation could confirm that parents who participated in these activities, are now more open and cooperative to address issues related to children education and health, are involved in their children education, take part in discussions, and sustainable dialogue, and are aware that only through these dialogues integration can be achieved. They are better informed about children's needs and rights, including available services to address them, although some cultural barriers persist.

Moreover, awareness results do not only refer to education issues, as parents also expressed their change of views concerning health-related issues such as vaccination and basic hygiene standards. According to health service providers, some traditional beliefs concerning health issues were overcome through this process, and parents are now more proactive and visit health centres more often. Additionally, it was also pointed out the importance of home visits to improve parental skills and to raise awareness of fathers' responsibilities in child rearing.

Finally, a nation-wide communication campaign was launched, intended to improve the accountability of service providers to their users, and ensuring vulnerable communities equitably benefit from these services. A series of activities involving local officials were organized under the communication campaign "Roma reach out Campaign" (R-ROC), which included the support of service provider in registration campaigns in those communities where children were often not registered at birth, and the involvement of preschool teachers in raising parents' awareness on the benefit of preschool and the need for enrolment.

Nevertheless, institutions still find constraints to raise awareness and to sensitise the community. Language barriers to reach the Roma population play a key role in this regard, as well as the lack of compromise and interest shown by target population to engage in these activities.

In the FYR of Macedonia, capacity building activities focused on strengthening the capacities of pre-school and primary school staff such as educators, caregivers, teachers, school inclusion teams and other professionals in charge of organising and managing activities in the ECD centres and schools. Capacity building services also aimed at raising awareness of

professionals working in local government units, and increase the capacities and skills of professional working in the BDE and SEI.

Workshops about multiculturalism and diversity were carried out for 428 kindergarten and ECD professionals, representatives from municipalities, BDE representatives and other key service providers. The modules included aspects concerning ELDS, monitoring and measuring progress in child learning and development, development of child portfolios, general children development, pedagogical administration, evidence regulation and creation of e-diaries. In addition, between 2013 and 2016, **47 on the job trainings were** conducted, including aspects related to the development of plans to increase attendance rates, the development of record keeping systems, assessing the overall indoor environment, providing technical assistance for planning daily activities based on the ELDS, assessing practices for cooperation with parents and discussing strategies for increasing enrolment rates. **These trainings were complemented with 14 workshops for 155 participants** about standard based pre-school education and school readiness, implementation of ELDS in ECD, improving inclusive practices in ECD, the role of local self-government in promoting ECD among marginalised communities and establishing inclusive teams in ECD and kindergartens.

In-service trainings were delivered for 844 teachers and school staff (713 female and 131 male), of which 25 were Roma teachers and staff (15 female and 10 male). With regards to inclusive education (3 modules), over 1,080 trainees took part in dissemination workshops within the schools. The indicator for these results was largely accomplished, since the target was established for a total of 42 school staff or 3 school staff per school.

In addition to 3 inclusive education training modules, the following trainings were conducted:

- Acquisition of second language of instruction and providing additional support to Roma children for 263 teachers (227 female, of which 3 Roma female) and 36 male (of which 11 were Roma).
- Formative assessment of the students with learning difficulties for 480 teachers (402 female, out of which 10 were Roma, and 78 male, out of which 7 were Roma).
- Conducting action research for educational practices as a tool to evaluate and improve school practices based on research data, conducted for 20 school pedagogues, psychologists and special educators and rehabilitators (18 female and 2 male).
- “Differentiated instruction in the inclusive classroom and individual support for students with learning difficulties”, a three-day training for 62 representatives from schools’ inclusive teams (including 28 representatives from 7 ADA-funded schools).

Besides training courses for teachers, ECD-educators and kindergarten teachers, **UNICEF delivered training courses for the State Education Inspectorate (25 inspectors) and 3 MLSP representatives.** These courses focused on presenting the concept of inclusive education, multiculturalism, diversity and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY), the assessment of student’s needs and individual educational plans and the development of strategies to acquire the first and second language of instruction. The main objective was to strengthen their competencies in inclusive education and involve these institutions in providing support visits to ECD centres and schools. Within this programme, all seven targeted schools received intensive in-school support from 8 advisors from the BDE, 7 inspectors from the SEI and 6 inclusive education

teacher-mentors. They assisted in the process of establishing school inclusion teams, the preparation of the inclusive education programme, dissemination of materials on ECD (guidelines) and delivered training of trainers to school staff.

Moreover, teams from ten pilot kindergartens were trained and supported to improve their ECD practices (mainstreaming respect for Diversity and multiculturalism in ECD), inclusion of the most marginalised children and implementation of strategies to engage every child in early learning activities. All these efforts aimed at supporting cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development so that all children can develop their abilities to their fullest potential.

Finally, UNICEF and MLSP conducted **regional workshops for local municipalities' representatives (sector for social and education department)** from all over the country (including the ADA targeted municipalities) **about the importance of ECD, ELDS, multiculturalism and diversity.**

Different types of manuals, toolkits and guidelines for professionals working in pre-school and primary schools were published and disseminated, such as the guidelines for teachers about ELDS, guidelines for caregivers about ELDS and the inclusive education manual based on ICF-CY, which was published and disseminated to all schools and is available on the UNICEF website. Based on this toolkit, an e-tool for social education and inclusion was developed for one primary schools (Brakja Ramiz and Hamid), which can be used to document and monitor individual educational programmes.

Between 2014 and 2016, UNICEF collaborated with the local company NEOCOM to establish an ECD database for ECD service providers in all public and private kindergartens and ECD centres in the FYR of Macedonia. The aim of the database is to obtain accurate and disaggregated data about children's age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and disability, as well as quality based early learning and development standards. According to informants, the ECD database is fully functional and the process of incorporating data in the database by the service providers is still ongoing. It is expected that this process will be finalized in the first quarter of 2017, which will enable MLSP to have complete information for making evidence based decisions.

As a result of these efforts, professionals working with children become more capable to adequately respond to children's needs, develop individual programmes for ECD and monitor the progress of child development. Different groups of informants pointed out the importance of these capacity building activities to create a better environment for children at school, namely through the establishment of school inclusion teams, the development of Individualized Education Program (IEPs), and by enhancing cooperation between school staff and parents as well as between SEI and BDE. Finally, informants expressed the need to further develop their practical skills in developing IEPs, as training only covered the theoretical aspects but they lack practical experience. Study visits could be helpful in this regard, or the support of experts. Targets for specific activities in this area of intervention (2.2.1, 2.2.3 & 2.2.4) were not defined; therefore, the overall analysis on achievement could not be established.

Awareness raising activities in the FYR of Macedonia included the following:

- In 2013, UNICEF, with the support of T-Mobile launched the campaign "The first five are the most important", aimed at promoting the importance of the five development

domains (socio-emotional development, physical-motoric development, language and literacy, cognitive development and development of an approach to learning) during the first five years of a child's life. In 2016, UNICEF launched an additional raising awareness video about the importance of inclusion in preschool facilities and highlighting its benefits. The video was filmed in the ADA financed ECD centre of Suto Orizari.

- In 2015, the agency launched the campaign “Fight Unfair”, an initiative with local activists calling on the public to take a pledge to change the way society sees and treats children with disabilities.
- Informative workshops for Roma parents were conducted with the support of Roma NGOs, which included door-to-door visits to Roma settlements and the distribution of leaflets.
- Ten multicultural promotional events were carried out, where parents, children and service providers participated as main drivers for developing effective practices in early learning process. This was complemented with the organisation of 24 conferences where videos were presented and disseminated to all relevant partners.
- A teachers' manual for implementing workshops and activities in early childhood education based on the “Druzinata MELA” picture book series was produced and posters to reinforce respect for diversity topics were printed.
- Promotional materials (videos, posters, leaflets) were disseminated among public and private kindergartens, and all 52 ECD centers (not only ADA centers) all over the country.

Aforementioned activities were designed and implemented to:

- Raise the level of awareness among governmental institutions, local community members, mayors, school staff and managers about the importance of ECD and the inclusion of the most marginalized groups (especially Roma children and CWD), promoting their enrolment in regular schools rather than in special or segregated schools. **However, according to a 2015 study on inclusion of children with disabilities in regular primary schools²⁴, educational staff still considers special or segregated schools as an option for certain groups of students.**
- Increase the interest of Roma parents about their children's school life and promote their participation in counselling activities and school bodies/entities.

Results in this area can be differentiated between the micro and macro level. On a macro level, results may be more visible, since the intervention managed to raise the awareness of local governments and governmental representatives, who took ECD centres under their responsibilities and led to a higher number of licensed ECD service providers as a result of the reform on the Law on Child Protection. National, municipal and local government representatives expressed their interest in getting more involved in the area of education and social protection. Informants pointed out that local government, BDE and SEI representatives are now more committed towards inclusive education thanks to the awareness raising and capacity building activities. On a micro level, the project raised the awareness about ECD and Roma needs at local level, by disseminating materials (leaflets and brochures) in schools, kindergartens and among Roma and non-Roma households. Some parents also got to know about the ECD through door-to-door visits, word-of-mouth communication and informal meetings. Activities aimed at involving parents in ECD include

²⁴ https://www.unicef.org/tfymacedonia/media_27904.html

²⁵ https://www.unicef.org/tfymacedonia/Towards_inclusive_education_ENG_final.pdf

creative workshops together with children in ECD centres. Counselling services about health, social and housing issues were provided in these meetings. Parents expressed their satisfaction with their children being included in the ECD centre, and pointed out the trust and friendship developed with the service providers. **However, little information was available to estimate the level of achievement in increasing Roma parents' involvement in school related activities. Moreover, there is no clear measure on the extent to which awareness-raising activities were effective.** Although there are recorded cases of higher enrolment rates in different schools and municipalities, informants from NGOs and ECD teams still consider that the level of awareness and interest of Roma parents about ECD and education is not at satisfactory levels. Informants also pointed out that in order to reach those that are most in need of ECD services, strategies such as door-to-door/ on the spot visits should be further strengthened.

Finally, in Serbia, capacity-building services were provided to paediatricians, patronage nurses, RHMs, ISC members, local authorities, institutions, CSOs and parents.

The result were the following:

- Total of 80 paediatricians were fully trained, 33% of paediatricians increased their knowledge (reaching total of 95% of those with correct answers on the post-test). All of them introduced child development screening instruments and counselling cards in their everyday practice.
- Total of 60 of 68 RHMs were fully trained through 3 rounds of trainings with the average 20% of increase in knowledge.
- Total of 90 visiting nurses from 10 health centers were trained on child development and parental support in ECD and risk reduction.
- All 10 ISCs in target municipalities were trained, and additionally, a session for 156 ISCs was conducted within the project's framework.

Capacity building activities included the following:

- Trainings on discrimination and protecting the rights of children in the health care system were delivered according to plan. **All trainings were assessed as highly valuable, reaching average scores over 80% in post-test evaluations (with a 20-60% increase in the average knowledge of all participants by the end of the course).** In addition, eight additional trainings were developed about ECD, stimulation, early detection of difficulties, early interventions, parental counselling, etc. A total of 11 modules for paediatricians and 11 modules for visiting nurses were developed. All of them have been accredited by the National Health Council of Serbia and are thus contributing to the licencing assurance of these health professionals.
- The training on protecting children's rights in the health system, organised jointly with the Ombudsman's and Commissioner for Equality offices, included health professionals, representatives of the local health councils from 10 municipalities (i.e. persons that are acting as local health protection ombudsmen) as well as representatives from NGOs and ISCs.
- Apart from training modules for front-line paediatricians and visiting nurses, additional training for national experts was held on the implementation of the ASQ-3 questionnaire, the internationally recognised questionnaire for monitoring early childhood

development. An internationally certified trainer from the University of Oregon, USA, carried out the training for 47 participants. This training also contributed to building the capacity for future ECD research that would help define developmental norms for all children living in Serbia. Moreover, trainings on the Guide for Monitoring Child Development (GMCD tool) as well as training for developmental counselling units were conducted by national and international experts.

- Trainings for ISC representatives, school teachers and Roma Health Mediators were also conducted. Three regional trainings were conducted for participant ISCs, in which pre-post test analysis showed a 20% increase in participant's score on acquired knowledge. Additional trainings on assistive technology and inclusive education were conducted for ISC members and teachers respectively. Finally, peer review sessions were implemented throughout the project implementation period.
- Within the community, a total of 762 group sessions with parents about ECD were conducted, 255 of them with Roma parents (34,3%).

Trainings, protocols and other raising awareness materials were designed based on the research conducted at the beginning of the project implementation (study about early childhood development risks/vulnerabilities of Roma children and their families). Three important guidelines for the capacity building of 156 ISCs on inclusive education were developed.

UNICEF organised regional conferences to introduce innovative, evidence-based practices in managing child development and early intervention to service providers. In addition, the Association of Paediatricians presented the results and knowledge from this project to approximately 700 paediatricians through conferences organised throughout the year (annual schools and courses for paediatricians) while the Institute of Public Health of Belgrade did the same with approximately the same number of nurses through conferences organised by their associations (with a total of 1400 health professionals).

The additional activities of the Youth panels of independent institutions were implemented in selected municipalities. The Youth panel aims at engaging primary and high school children and increase their awareness on the status of marginalized groups to act as agents of change in their communities. Together with other actors they organized awareness raising activities at both the school and municipality levels.

The indicator 1.2.b (Percentage of Roma health mediators apply improved early stimulation, development and positive parenting standards and risk-identification protocols in Serbia) could not be assessed, since the information available referred to trained RHM, and not to the actual application of gained knowledge. Nevertheless, information gathered from interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders reveal the following:

The training programme, systematic mentoring support and cooperation between different actors and peer learning contributed to the mobilization and increase in the knowledge of health professionals about Roma ECD needs and the traditions of this community. They learnt to recognize and to react differently on some specific issues, and to involve Roma parents in decision-making processes towards their children. Part of the training programme contained information related to the violation of rights of Roma families, and health professionals are now able to recognize them and to support the parents to react on

violation of their rights, especially those related to health issues. As a result, they are more responsive to Roma family's needs, and the needs of other vulnerable groups. **The study conducted at the beginning of the project contributed to ensure the alignment of capacity building activities to service providers and Roma families' needs.**

Roma CSOs were involved in the design of these training, contributing to the development of parent's capacities. They gained significant knowledge about ECD, human rights protection and existing treatment and procedures in cases of rights violation.

In terms of awareness raising, and based on the information provided by NGOs, Roma families are now more aware of the importance of child education, book reading, nutrition habits and other positive parenting and health strategies. They had the opportunity to discuss their difficulties during the workshops, to exchange some challenges in raising their children and to get some concrete professional advices about health, education and social welfare issues.

4.2.7 Extent to which new skills are incorporated in regular activities

ALBANIA

According to the information gathered through interviews, focus groups and direct observation, the new skills gained by educators became part of their daily routine. Educational staff use the training module about ECD issues developed when they organised meetings with parents. The use of other materials and guidelines produced has been confirmed through direct observation. In addition, Roma children have now priority to register in kindergartens. As literally expressed by one informant: *"What the project has done is to stress the importance of accomplishing these responsibilities that service providers have, they have not reinvented the wheel, but these duties were already established, there are no new duties or responsibilities, but awareness of kindergarten staff made possible their accomplishment"*.

The new agenda for child rights (2016-2020) recently prepared a set of objectives for the expansion and quality of pre-school with a focus on the most vulnerable, including the following:

- The "reaching out" strategy is part of the directive of MoES to teachers and school headmasters (Order of Minister of Education and Sports, No. 21 dated 08.08.2014)
- Standards of pre-school and new curricula highlight the work with parents and children from vulnerable families (Development and Learning standards for children 3-6 years old, No. 388, dated in 15.10.2015)
- Inclusive education teacher standards comprise educational staff practices in terms of inclusiveness (Education and training of teachers for inclusion "Profile of Inclusive Teacher", No. 195, dated in 25.4.2016)
- Includes two new financial schemes in Korca and Shkodra for financing access to school for vulnerable children.

FYR OF MACEDONIA

In terms of pre-school education, professionals working in the ECD centres confirmed integration of multiculturalism and inclusive components in the national programme for Early childhood education based on ELDS. Moreover, during the observation process it could be noted the use of e-diaries; the preparation and update of child portfolios. In terms of primary education, staff confirmed the application of new work dynamics and teaching approach focused on the students and the use of Individual Education Plans in the classes where children with disabilities and special education needs are integrated. This was also confirmed during the observation process. In all 7 schools, School Inclusion Teams are actively involved in the school activities, assisting in designing IEP and implementing indoor and out-door activities. They also use the materials, guidelines and tools elaborated in their daily work, as confirmed during direct observation sessions. Annual work plans include inclusive education approaches and practices, as a result of the use of the materials provided.

SERBIA

Based on information from interviews and focus groups, new skills and knowledge are incorporated in the regular work of paediatricians, visiting nurses and RHMs. For example, visiting nurses count now with new tools/checklists to guide them on the most relevant areas for intervention. According to informants, new knowledge is integrated in the regular work of 10 pilot ISCs, better cooperation with schools is also evident, and data protection systems has been improved. Most of the local municipalities systematise the position of the ISC coordinator. For other municipalities, it will be important to organise modular training and to use experiences from these pilot municipalities. ISCs have increased their offer to support children, with an increase of near 100% of types of additional support offered from 2014 to 2015. As expressed by an informant: *“New skills are incorporated in regular jobs of paediatricians, patronage nurses, RHM and professionals in Development services. UNICEF has provided quality expert support, and has invited excellent national and international experts to support the project activities.”*

4.2.8 Key results on HR & GE

Key finding 5: Effectiveness on GE was difficult to measure, since no specific indicators were included in the project framework. All the information contained in this section refers to the perceptions of key stakeholders, but no objectively verified information could be gathered in this regard. Overall, and based on informants ‘perceptions’, the results on HR & GE in the three countries are satisfactory.

In Pre-school and Primary school (Albania & FYR of Macedonia)

The analysis for this section is mainly based on the information gathered through direct observation at pre-school centres. **Overall, the results on HR & GE observed in these countries are satisfactory.** ECD learning was delivered through games, creative workshops, painting, singing and other participatory activities aimed at enhancing children attitudes to respect each other and to accept the concept of diversity. Gender equality issues were also delivered through MELA products. Concerning child rights in the classroom, personnel was observed to respect the opinion/wish of children about their participation; they give them

the opportunity to decide what they want to do and how to do it (suggesting games, songs, and theatre roles).

Also, freedom of expression was observed in all pre-school centres visited, where the students were allowed to freely express their ideas and information using participatory methods and different techniques (talking, drawing, and writing). The environment was arranged in a specific way, to facilitate children's participation, and in general terms, children were confident to share their thoughts. Basic hygienic rules were developed (washing hands after lunch, clean environment, etc.). Children from ethnic or linguistic minorities have the right to learn about and practice their own culture, language and religion, and in some cases it was noted that the daily activities include activities about different cultures, religions, holidays, traditions and languages. No major issues with language were identified in visited schools. School books also included activities about the development of social and personal skills.

In terms of equality in teaching contents, different topics were covered during classes linked to diversity, gender equality and non-discrimination. This is a part of the curricula that teacher discusses with children as they learn about their rights. The balance in numbers of female and male students varied between visited schools though no extreme imbalances of children from either sex were observed which can be considered evidence for school curricula promoting equality between girls and boys.

In terms of primary education in the fYR of Macedonia, very limited activities related to child rights are present in current subjects. The school inclusion teams informed that the most relevant activities in this line are the creative workshops and counselling activities for parents and school staff about child development and children rights. Topics related to gender balance, national, race, ethnical non-discrimination, multiculturalism are incorporated in two subjects: civic education and life skills.

In terms of preschool education in the fYR of Macedonia, parents of children attending ECD centres and educational staff have identified ECD results concerning children's behaviour (positive discipline, politeness, ability to stay concentrate in activities, to learn to talk politely and use correct Macedonian language, hygienic habits, etc.). In addition, early indications of positive results in school readiness for children attending ECD centres were expressed by parents, which considered children attending these centres better prepared for primary school.

In Serbia, key results expressed by informants concerning HR & GE issues refer to:

- The support provided by CSOs in dealing with cases of rights violations, and the coordination provided between Roma communities and public institutions (especially independent bodies).
- An increase in the number of complaints about cases of rights violations, as a result of trainings and awareness raising activities implemented by the project and the direct support of Roma NGOs. It should also be noted that the Ombudsman Office provides direct support in Roma settlements, however, the lack of human resources limit the capacities to react to all complaints, especially since the increase in cases of rights violations.

- Capacity building of professionals in health care centres, which are now not only able to support in health-related issues but also to provide information about HR and GE issues. Moreover, the trained health professionals are now putting a particular focus on changing traditional gender roles, e.g. by increasing fathers' awareness of their responsibility in child rearing activities.

4.3 EFFICIENCY

Key finding 6: In general terms, project activities and outputs were delivered as scheduled. The project has been flexible enough to respond to new emerging priorities and situations while respecting main deadlines, and no significant delays were experienced. Informants could not provide alternative implementing strategies to accomplish the same results at lower costs. In terms of coordination, a variety of donors expressed their satisfaction with the work of the agency. Only inter-ministerial and inter-donor coordination was considered an issue affecting the efficiency of the intervention. Cooperation among other stakeholders at the national and local levels was also considered successful. No overlaps with similar interventions were identified.

4.3.1 Management systems

This section analyses the extent to which management system supported or hindered the realization of results.

Project-specific monitoring systems were not available in any of the implementing countries, and monitoring activities were conducted based on the project's logical framework. As already mentioned in the effectiveness section (4.2), the lack of targets and baseline for certain key indicators prevented a holistic and systematic follow-up of the implementation of the project and its achievements. Given this constraint, the decision making process based on monitoring data was limited during the project cycle.

According to UNICEF Albania, they invested considerably in general result based management and monitoring systems, not only building the capacities of project staff, but also by using specific software to keep track of the progress towards result in terms of time, allocation of funds, reporting period and achievements. On the government side, an Education Management Information System (EMIS) is being financed by ADA. UNICEF has worked with the MoES to include indicators for identifying out of school children (based on international indicators) into the EMIS. The indicators measuring Out of School Children (OOSC) have been approved by an order of the MoES based on the technical assistance offered to MOES by UNICEF. The data is currently being collected, and will be available as soon as the EMIS becomes operational.

In Serbia, implementing partners state that project management was responsive to contextual changes. Partners defined a common ground and shared values at the beginning of the project implementation. Advisory/steering boards were created with key stakeholders as part of the coordination and management system. As a result, four key bodies were active during the project cycle; the overall ADA Advisory Board, the steering committee for ISCs,

the steering committee for paediatric component and the steering committee for visiting nurses. Participant pilot municipalities and ISCs (10) had different internal capacities, support from local authorities, organizational structures, etc. The capacities of ISCs were lower than expected (such as attitudes towards inclusive education, level of information and knowledge) so the implementation shifted focus to provide additional capacity building to these bodies. Changes of ISC coordinators in some municipalities (e.g. Pozarevac) slowed down the implementation of some activities and created certain level of discontinuity. However, partnership between UNICEF and main implementing partner Centre for Social Policy (CSP) as well as constant communication and good coordination between CSP and the 10 ISCs supported the realisation of results.

In the FYR of Macedonia, all implementing partners stated that project management was responsive to contextual and political changes in the country. It was also highlighted that the overall coordination, communication and project management system was on a high level. UNICEF has been consistently advocating for the development of quality assurance systems and monitoring frameworks for education throughout the implementation period.

4.3.2 Timeliness

Key stakeholders in implementing countries (donors, partner organizations, NGOs and governments) confirmed that, in general terms, project activities and outputs were delivered and achieved as scheduled. The project has been flexible enough to respond to new emerging priorities and situations while respecting main deadlines. No significant delays were experienced, only in the case of Serbia it was mentioned that internal issues with ISCs generated some delays, but the support provided from implementing partners at the last stage of project implementation alleviated this constraint. Training for RHM in Serbia were delayed due to the need of input from the MoH and overlap with other capacity building sessions already scheduled for RHM, but activities were carried out eventually within project implementation period.

In the FYR of Macedonia, most of the project activities and outputs were delivered on time. Only the process of registering 3 ECD centres in Kumanovo, Prilep and Bitola was prolonged due to administrative and logistical issues detected in 2014 as well as the political situation (Bitola and Kumanovo). Nevertheless, by the end of 2015, 11 ECD centres were established.

4.3.3 Potential alternative and more efficient strategies

Primary information gathered confirms that the strategy implemented in mainstreaming equitable realisation of child rights, access to pre-school and primary school, especially for Roma and children with disabilities, have proven to be adequate, and no alternative strategies could have accomplished the same results at lower cost. Informants from a variety of institutions confirmed that implementing modalities were properly chosen based on a situation analysis conducted and aligned with the need of targeted children and parents. Several international donors considered that some NGOs could have achieved similar results, however, only at the micro level but not at national (macro) level, such as those delivered by the project. In Serbia, informants even considered that the available budget was actually quite limited given the final results achieved, proving the interventions efficiency in delivering services.

Some informants also pointed out recommendations and potential areas of improvement for future similar projects or an expansion of this project, for example:

- Encourage the provision of more incentives to engage a higher number of potential beneficiaries such as free transportation to schools, food packages, clothes, etc.
- Further explore and reinforce the engagement of psychologist in health centres and developmental services for children and families. This would provide the opportunity strengthening the concept of holistic development of children and families.
- Focus on developing higher engagement from local municipalities.
- Strengthen capacities of service providers to increase the coverage and number of door-to-door and on-the-spot visits to potential beneficiaries.
- Extend training content and duration to school inclusion teams and include pre-service training to teachers and educators.

When it comes to the use of **items purchased under the project**, the only relevant information obtained refers to the issue experienced in Serbia, where local authorities in some municipalities understood that they could purchase items without prior consultation with ISCs. This created some problems, such as the purchase of inadequate wheelchairs and some delays. However, items purchased for the project were used as planned. In the fYR of Macedonia, items such as didactic materials, teacher aids, furniture for adaptation of the ECD centres, toys, and games were purchased, and used as planned.

4.3.4 Funding leverage

In Albania, funding was leveraged mainly by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the local government and by UNICEF Albania through other resources.

In the fYR of Macedonia, the T-mobile Foundation provided financial support to launch the awareness raising campaign “the first five are the most important”, publishing promo materials, leaflets, booklets, TV advertisement, billboards and radio spots. In addition, the British Embassy financially supported the implementation of the multiculturalism and diversity project component (publishing picture books, leaflets, radio materials and TV advertisement).

In Serbia, funding for ECD/health services was leveraged through cooperation with the private business sector, mostly from the companies Nordeus, EPS, and Telenor (Telenor specifically for RHMs – equipment). Here too, the SDC approved a reallocation of their funds to expand the UNICEF project activities for the ISC component in the city of Belgrade and 17 Belgrade municipalities. This expression of interest to replicate UNICEF activities to support ISCs is an acknowledgment of the project’s success. SDC further stressed UNICEF’s systematic approach and the organisation’s role in developing systemic strategic partnerships with other international as well as national relevant stakeholders.

4.3.5 In-kind support

As part of UNICEF’s granting policy, implementing partners are requested to provide in-kind contributions such as volunteer work, use of their premises, use of vehicles for field visits and activities, etc. In-kind contributions for the project were provided in Serbia, the fYR Macedonia and Albania. **Among these contributions in Serbia** are the trainings provided by

the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, and the in-kind contribution in the form of services provided by mentors, supervisors, CSP representatives, paediatricians, patronage nurses, ISC members and professionals in Developmental Services. Other in-kind contributions included transport expenses and the use of technical facilities. Other project partners such as the Social Inclusion and Poverty reduction Unit (SIPRU), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) and the Standing Conference of Towns and Cities (SCTC) contributed with in-kind services to the intervention. **In the FYR of Macedonia**, the implementing partners provided in-kind contribution by using their own premises for meetings and workshops, equipment, vehicles and additional professional staff time. In addition, the Bureau for Development of Education advisors and State Education Inspectors provided in-kind contribution by coordinating the project activities in the ECD centres and schools, and conducting in-school visits to support the education staff. Furthermore, all eight municipalities provided facilities for establishing ECD centres and fully covered the utility and maintenance costs. **In Albania**, in-kind contributions were provided by NGO partners in the form of additional staff time, use of premises and additional budget lines. Other in-kind contributions provided by local and central governments included facilitation of premises for seminars and workshops and allocation of staff time for project activities.

4.3.6 Harmonization & Synergies

In Albania, UNICEF harmonized the intervention by engaging key stakeholders such as the donor ADA, as well as the SDC, the Roma Education Fund (REF), and other NGOS working at grass-roots level such as Save the Children. An example of this harmonization was the fact that the intervention was originally piloted in certain municipalities and with the support of SDC, it was scaled up later on.

In the FYR of Macedonia, UNICEF together with the Center for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution and financial support from the British Embassy also implemented activities about multiculturalism and diversity aspects. In addition, the project is aligned with other interventions such as the UNICEF project for Early Numeracy and Literacy, the BDE project for Teacher Professional and Career Development (social and educational inclusion) and the REF project “Inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education”.

In Serbia, project activities are complementary to other initiatives without any evidence of overlapping, such as the SDC-funded project, the Telenor project and the Novak Djokovic Foundation. UNICEF is considered one of the main actors coordinating different activities in the area of inclusive education and ECD in partnership with MoESTD and the MoH. The cooperation with the City of Belgrade is another example of harmonization of activities with local partners. As expressed by a donor, *“UNICEF is perceived as the organisation that successfully connects different partners and coordinates harmonisation of different initiatives for achieving systematic changes in the country. UNICEF is doing that like a puzzle, piece by piece.”*

4.3.7 Coordination

In Albania, governmental informants expressed their satisfaction in terms of inter-ministerial cooperation with the Moe, MoH and Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth (MoSWY), working together to implement the Action Plan for the integration of Roma and Egyptians. They also

pointed out the role played by UNICEF as a key stakeholder coordinating other institutions and NGOs working in the same areas, such as the Observatory for Children Rights, Save the Children, World Vision and local partners such as Child Protection Units (CPUs), which helped to identify potential beneficiaries.

The coordination with these key actors working at national and local levels was accomplished by organising coordination meetings and joint actions, which, as expressed by participants, helped to get a sense of ownership of the activities and therefore boosted results. However, this approach had also pitfalls, as in some cases a project-driven approach would represent a barrier for cooperation. For example, in some cases NGOs would consider this project a risk to their secure funding for implementing out-of-school/pre-school activities with Roma children.

Cooperation among donors has been reported to be weak, occasional and focused on short-term results. Donors confessed that in most cases, they are only focusing on achieving the results on their development cooperation agenda, but do not exploring ways of collaboration and expand their influence. In this regard it should be noted that in general, UNICEF (being an organisation funded by voluntary contributions) has limited possibilities to influence the respective donor environment through the capacities of its Country Offices.

In the FYR of Macedonia, UNICEF has established a long-term cooperation with the MLSP and MoES, and has collaborated with key stakeholders such as the British Embassy, the World Bank, USAID, the Pestalozzi Children Foundation and the EU Commission. Governmental partners claimed that project results could not have been accomplished without the expertise of UNICEF. The agency provided training courses, seminars and workshops to governmental representatives that were reported to be unique. In addition, they highlighted that UNICEF is the only institution that works on ECD, ELDS and IE at policy level. Cooperation between the agency and the government was considered a success, as well as with the implementing organisations, especially with MCEC and ECD COR. **However, inter-ministerial cooperation was reported to be low.**

Donors also expressed satisfaction with the collaboration with UNICEF. Finally, local partners such as BDE, Lifestart, Roma Perspective, Women forum, Sumnal, and other Roma organizations, municipalities and primary schools expressed high levels of satisfaction with regards to the coordination and the joint work with UNICEF, the implementing partner NGO ECD-COR and MCEC. Moreover, other organisations working in similar fields expressed their interest in either joining the project or collaborating with UNICEF in similar interventions.

Some of the schools have established good relations and cooperation with NGOs providing afterschool activities, tutoring, mentoring support of students from 3-6 grades in schools. Representatives from schools also considered that the project enhanced their relation with BDE. On the other hand, cooperation with Local Government Units was reported to be low or non-existent at all. Cooperation among schools and the private sector seems to be non-existent, apart from the case of the school “Naim Frashari” in Tetovo. This school managed to receive sponsorship from the business sector, including the donation of a bank to buy new equipment.

Finally, in Serbia, several coordination mechanisms were established during the project implementation with key project partners, such as regular meetings of national and specific

advisory boards within each project components. A variety of partners expressed great ownership towards project activities and their gratitude for the opportunity to expand their work and coverage.

A national ADA advisory board gathered all three sectorial ministries and other national institutions/stakeholders relevant for social inclusion with particular focus on Roma and those important for the development of the health and education system. It also brought representatives of CSOs as well as representatives of parents of children from vulnerable groups. Bringing all these stakeholders and implementing partners together ensured that activities are strategically sharpened to address the most important areas, and at the same time, ensured co-ordination between project components and other relevant initiatives.

With regards to the ISC component, UNICEF worked closely with key stakeholder such as the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU), the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MoESTD) and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (SCTM). Also, UNICEF established advisory boards at the beginning of the project and gathered representatives of Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, and other relevant government institutions and CSOs; regular meetings were organised, project results and bottlenecks discussed and recommendations for improvements were made. Partners had an active role in the selection of local municipalities involved in project implementation; defining grant procedures; defining recommendations for new bylaws relevant for improvement of inclusive education and lobbying for reestablishment of a joint body at the national level. Cooperation between institutions from different sectors was strengthened, which was very relevant to combine the efforts of partners working in the health, social and education areas. In most of project cities, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed.

4.3.8 Overlaps

No specific information regarding potential overlaps is available for **Albania. In the FYR of Macedonia**, UNICEF is considered the leading institution in terms of advocacy and lobbying effort towards ECD based on ELDS in the country, and a key partner in providing ECD and pre-school education to Roma children and other vulnerable groups. Stakeholders mentioned a large number of interventions being implemented in the country that are aligned to the project objectives (access to pre-school and primary education, inclusive education, building educational opportunities for vulnerable groups of population, provision of health, legal and social support, raise awareness about children rights, etc.). **However, these interventions were considered complementary to the ADA project and none of interviewed stakeholders could point out specific areas in which these interventions and the ADA project could be overlapping**, with the exception of the Roma Education Fund which could not confirm any overlaps as they were not familiar with the details of the project. Other NGO stakeholders mentioned potential overlaps due to the lack of coordination's among donors, but again, no specific areas, activities or examples were provided.

No specific information about overlaps was available in the case of Serbia.

4.4 SUSTAINABILITY

4.4.1 Stakeholder's resources, motivation and ability to continue advocating about the importance of ECD, Roma inclusion and HR

Key finding 7: Changes in policies and everyday practices of professionals, engagement of the Roma community and other organisations with local government and parents is expected to ensure the sustainability of project results to some extent. Established ECD centres are expected to continue providing services, but their sustainability will depend on their capacities to manage public financial support and provide quality ECD services.

Moreover, changing habits was considered a long-term process which needed more awareness raising and capacity building efforts in order to reach a larger coverage and induce real social change. In addition, the lack of exit strategies and formalised agreements between partners could have negative effects on the sustainability of results.

In Albania, the project has put efforts to influence the government and change policies, which would encourage and oblige service providers to comply with a series of equitable criteria, as well as the adoption of new practices and mind-sets in how to address HR issues. This enabling environment and shift in mind-set at policy level creates a good basis for the continuation of sustainable practices in equitable rights realisation for Roma children.

Stakeholders agree that Roma organisations are more empowered to continue advocating for the rights of Roma as a result of the intervention. Different collaboration experiences during the project increased and developed the skills of the members of these organisations. Moreover, the fact that the majority of non-Roma community supports them increased their confidence and responsibility to bring about more changes. Roma leaders have been positioned as a crucial resource for the community to support, refer cases and receive the response for their needs. Since they are now better informed about human rights, including child rights, it is expected that they will continue to raise awareness about the importance of education and early learning within the community. Many Roma communities have increased their collaboration with institutions and NGOs working on the promotion and protection of their rights. As expressed by one informant, *“communities have awoken, they did not only become part of meetings in city halls but have gone further, like going to protests to demand their rights”*. This result, which was not directly reflected in the project framework, can be considered a strong element of the HRBA and good indication for the sustainability of the project, as not only the capacities of rights holders were strengthened through the project, but immediate effects of rights holders directly claiming their rights have been demonstrated.

In relation to Roma parents' engagement, they claim to have learnt to recognise and addressed violation the of child rights, especially those rights related to education, health and non-discrimination. Parents know that children have the right to free educational books, the right to access certain health services (vaccination and other health needs), and the right to be register in the civil registry. Roma parents who participated in the project expressed

trust in institutions and stated that they also asked for their support. Furthermore, trust in educational staff has increased and the parents now feel safe when they send their children to the educational institution. Moreover, they support and encourage their children to attend kindergarten and school and also share this information with other parents, raising awareness among them. Such engagement of parents is key to ensure delivering messages to other parents, and therefore the sustainability of achievements in this area.

Teachers are more empowered and feel confident to address issues about ECD and Roma inclusion. Kindergarten directors, pre-school teachers and other education staff are motivated to advocate for ECD. They educate and raise awareness of parents continuously in order for them to take more responsibility for the needs and problems faced by their children. ECD staff is more qualified to raise awareness among Roma parents and institutions, and state that they will continue to raise awareness on early education for Roma children.

However, changing habits and consequent social change were considered long-term processes by several informants who also stressed that more work would be needed with parents and educators or teachers, because they still reflect a lack of willingness to change.

In the FYR of Macedonia, the general opinion of Roma NGOs is that beneficiaries are now more motivated and proactive to continue advocating for ECD, social inclusion and HR. They know their rights and feel confident to exercise them. Moreover, they are better informed about available services and how to access them. They have experienced the benefits of accessing available services and now share this information with other families. **NGOs also considered that the increase in the number of enrolled students is partially explained by the awareness raising efforts of this project.**

Furthermore, informants from educational institutions claimed that school staff gained knowledge, skills and have access to new tools to promote inclusive education for present and future generations. Moreover, they openly talk about Roma children issues among themselves, share ideas and create solutions to overcome barriers and achieve better results.

Mandatory school inclusive teams are also considered a key project achievement to ensure future sustainability. Furthermore, all ECD centres now are part of the formal network of kindergartens, meaning that municipalities are obliged to provide additional resources to them. This includes ECD centres opened within the project framework, which is a key result in terms of ensuring continuation on the provision of services.

However, this sustainability will depend on the ECD centres' capacities to adequately manage this public financial support, since, as previously mentioned, additional funding for inclusion has been allocated to cover other non-related expenses in the past. Besides, these funds are also granted to facilitate CWDs' access to education; however, in many cases, educational institutions lack the capacities to adequately develop individualised education programmes, while in other cases, the lack of flexibility and adequacy of these funds to meet the needs of different schools (e.g. same funds apply for different kinds of schools) may also lead to inefficiencies and lack of sustainability.

The information packages delivered to institutions and Roma community have significantly contributed to enhance people's motivation and ability to deliver positive messages about ECD and HR in Serbia. According to the information gathered through focus groups with NGOs, the support has increased and improved. Also, parents identified that they are still

missing more psycho-socially oriented support in addition to health and human rights support. Nevertheless, they recognize that Roma families were empowered to detect rights violations claim them with the support of Roma NGOs. **More than 60 complaints have been proceed and this work has increased the trust of Roma community towards Roma NGOs and the Ombudsman Office, ensuring to some extent the sustainability of service demand from them.** In addition, the Roma network established good cooperation with local authorities and other local actors.

The new procedures and instruments developed by the intervention (draft guides for visiting nurses, capacity building modules accredited by National councils, etc.) and the development of new capacities in the everyday work of service providers (paediatricians and visiting nurses) is expected to ensure the sustainability of results overtime. This also applies to ISCs. Moreover, the provision of grants to municipalities is expected to ensure the allocation of funds to further develop and improve the quality and magnitude of additional support to the education of children.

Nevertheless, Roma institution representatives still consider that Roma NGOs need to have a stronger connection to developmental services within the health system and to support Roma families to use those services in greater degree. Moreover, persistent levels of distrust in institutions still prevent some Roma families from visiting, for example health centres, thinking that these institutions may assess them as bad parents and would take away the child.

4.4.2 Capacities of independent bodies to continue beyond project time-frame

In Albania, the information gathered about the capacities of independent bodies to continue developing results beyond the project time frame mainly refers to efforts to continue identifying the needs of the most vulnerable Roma population and their inclusion in local plans and strategies, with the support of NGOs and institutions such as the Ombudsman Office. **However, no clear indication of exit strategies and/or formalised agreements to continue developing activities to produce results could be found.**

The evidence of references about the importance of ECD for Roma children, as a means of equitable rights realisation, could be found in the following policies and legislation:

- The law for the protection from discrimination, which provides special duties to the Ministry of Education and expresses its obligation to issue bylaws for the elimination of discrimination in the field of education.
- The law on Pre-university education includes relevant bylaws to facilitate the registration of Roma children in schools, even without birth certificate. The “Second Chance” project, an initiative of the MoES, determines the possibility of schooling even when it was not realized in the proper time. However, the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) in some cases has identified schools that have refused to admit students belonging to these communities.
- The recommendations provided by the Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination, in compliance with article 32, paragraph 1/f.

- Reports from the people's advocate in 2015, stating that Roma population is a vulnerable group at risk.
- The Commissioner for Antidiscrimination report present the initiative of UNICEF to integrate the Roma children in ECD areas and areas experiencing social problems.
- The EU progress report, which contains recommendations of high political dialogue between Albania and the EU on Roma inclusion, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report for Albania.

In relation to the **monitoring and reporting systems of governmental bodies**, the State Agency for Child Rights is the key institution responsible for monitoring the legal framework and protecting children's rights and also coordinating actions on protection of children. The State Agency for Protection of Children's Rights regularly monitors the implementation of the Action Plan and the situation of rights of children by reflecting the situation through the published annual reports. In addition, the Statutory Child Rights Units (CRU) operates in 9 out of 12 regions, monitoring and supporting the implementation of the National Plan of Action on the Rights of the Child. The Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) compiles and publishes data from governmental and administrative sources, including specific data on CWD and ECD collected by the MoES.

In the FYR of Macedonia, the key relevant reports providing evidence about the importance of ECD for Roma children are:

- The UNDP - Decade of Roma Inclusion Progress Report
- SABER Country Report 2015- Early Childhood Development²⁶
- Analysis of the educational aspects- National Strategies for Roma in Macedonia²⁷

The following independent bodies play a key role in monitoring and reporting ECD-related issues:

- State Agency for Protection of Children's Rights (SAPCR) is the key institution responsible for monitoring the legal framework and protecting child rights and also coordinates actions about protection of children.
- UNICEF is a key player in promoting equitable access to ECD and will hence be able to provide reliable data on the progress of closing equity gaps, particularly for Roma children and CWD. Future UNICEF studies, surveys and evaluations will continue to contribute to the monitoring of this progress.
- MICS data on health, education and school readiness is available from the 2010-2011 data collection round (MICS4), notably, allowing a comparison of the school readiness indicator between children from Roma settlements and the overall population. The next MICS planned for the FYR of Macedonia in 2018 will therefore serve as a valuable tool for monitoring equitable access to ECD services.
- The planned ECD database run by the MLSP, which receives data from kindergartens and ECD centres. The database is designed to obtain accurate and reliable information about

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http://wbfiles.worldbank.org/documents/hdn/ed/saber/supporting_doc/CountryReports/ECD/SABER_ECD_Macedonia_CR_Final_2015.pdf

²⁷ V.Petreska-Beska and M. Najcevska, 2014, Skopje, Analysis of the educational aspects-National Strategies for Roma in Macedonia, available at: <http://www.soros.org.mk/CMS/Files/Documents/nacionalnite-strategii-za-romite-vo-rm-analiza-na-obrazovnite-aspekti.pdf>

ECD programmes, modules, enrolments, attendance and performance, including the option of disaggregation in order to obtain data on ethnicity and level of abilities.

- The Education Management Information System (EMIS) run by the MoE, also including these disaggregation options.

The information on the availability of disaggregated data in public monitoring systems was ambiguous according to different informants and the actual availability of data could hence not be verified.

In Serbia, informants from NGOS stated that independent bodies in charge of monitoring equality and rights issues do not have executive power; they collect complaints and draw opinions and recommendations for the institutions to react and take corrective measures. They are however not obliged to monitor all cases, but they prepare regular monthly reports about the number, types of complaints and proposed measures.

The established wide partnership around ECD, which has been facilitated through the project, is strengthened by the critical insights of the independent mechanisms available (e.g. Ombudsman, Commissioner for equality and Roma NGOs) and the mutual capacity-building of the latter on ECD issues and of other partners in understanding and addressing discrimination and child rights violations.

The main independent institutions dedicated to the protection of child rights in Serbia are the Commissioner for Equity and the Ombudsman, through the Deputy Ombudsman for Children. Both institutions submit annual reports to the parliaments, presenting number of complaints concerning child rights issues, the most frequent child-rights violations and systemic recommendation for improvement. Moreover, the Office of Human and Minority Rights is part of the executive government in charge of the regular reporting on the CRC. Thanks to UNICEF work and advocacy actions on ECD issues, these aspects have been included in both the state report and the observations of the Committee.

In terms of monitoring, the statistical system in Serbia does not produce data disaggregated by ethnicity, which limits the results of monitoring activities. Serbia conducted three previous rounds of MICS on samples of the general population and population from Roma settlements, and plans to conduct the next MICS in 2019. MICS data were the main source of information for the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma Women and Man. Thanks to these data and UNICEF advocacy, the Strategy has a set of distinctive measures related to ECD of Roma children, particularly related to health and education.

4.5 IMPACT

Key finding 8: The measurement of the project's overall objective based on defined indicators is problematic, since these indicators refer to national enrolment and completion rates. Given the scope of the intervention, it would not be possible to estimate impact or lack thereof based on variations of national data. As in the effectiveness analysis, the impact analysis is limited to the qualitative information gathered during the fieldwork, since no targets and primary quantitative data generated by the intervention was available.

Disparities between the Roma community and non-Roma community were narrowed in recent years in all implementing countries, and the project has significantly contributed to this trend by ensuring access to pre-school and primary education, as well as access to improved ECD health services. However, based on the qualitative information gathered, the gap between Roma and non-Roma children is still considerable in all three countries, mainly due to multiple reasons that affect the Roma community disproportionately. Impact on GE is difficult to measure since no specific indicators were included in the project framework. Early indications of a possible impact on Roma mothers could be identified, since the project empowered them to participate in decision-making processes.

No relevant unintended effects were identified, apart from activities organized under the initiative of parents that could be considered as unintended positive effect of the intervention.

4.5.1 Indicative evidence of contribution to potential structural changes

In **Albania**, the most relevant information about the project's contribution to structural changes refers to the facilitation of institutional partnerships between public authorities and Roma communities. Information available also mentions the contribution to alleviate societal stigma and discrimination against Roma. The intervention has clearly contributed to inform and empower Roma organisations and individuals to exercise their rights, facilitate their access to available services and enhance their cooperation with local institutions. Informants also consider that attitudes and practices of the community began to change in relation to the right for services such as education, health care and registration of children.

From the point of view of service providers, professional capacities have been improved and service providers are more aware of how to deal with prejudice and stigmatization towards the Roma population.

From an institutional point of view, the impact of UNICEF's advocacy efforts are clearly visible in the currently ongoing reforms regarding access and improvement of quality in the pre-school system. In this context, MoES has undertaken a series of measures which can be considered an impact of the project, such as:

- Universalization of pre-school years (age group 5-6), as a component of the reviewed package to establish a set of pre-school education standards.
- Preparation of the pre-school system curriculum;

- Development of a teacher training package, setting new standards concerning access to preschool for the most vulnerable groups of population, including Roma children.
- Specification of monitoring indicators for assessing learning quality and results; and
- Strengthened coordination between the key ministries MoES and MSWY which now collaborate to improve the early inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education

In the FYR of Macedonia, UNICEF's direct and indirect advocacy efforts contributed to a series of structural reforms, such as:

- Establishing 11 ECD centers in Roma communities and providing access to quality ECD services for the most marginalized Roma children. All ECD centers established with this project have been fully taken over by the municipalities and are part of the national ECD system.
- Providing Roma children from the project municipalities with access to quality and inclusive ECD programme delivered by qualified and trained educators. The assessment of developmental outcomes for the Roma children regularly attending ECD center in a period of one year show significant progress in all developmental domains.
- Achieving progress in the learning outcomes of Roma students in numeracy and literacy (reading and writing) in all 7 project schools.
- Mobilizing all relevant education stakeholders at national and local level and training them to provide full support to the inclusion of Roma children in the education process. The approach was targeting the schools as a whole and guided them in the process of establishing proper school structures in support of inclusion. As a result from the programme the supportive networks involving the Bureau for Development of Education as well as the State Education Inspectorate continue to provide ongoing guidance and support to the schools.
- The enactment of the new Law for Primary Education with a focus on Inclusive Education (inclusive school teams are mandatory for every primary school).
- Contribution to the development of the New National Strategy for Comprehensive Education 2017-2010
- Furthermore, UNICEF and the Ombudsman's office conducted an in-depth analysis of the key bottlenecks faced by children with disabilities to enrolment in mainstream schools.

In Serbia, UNICEF is considered to have been successful in:

- Making ECD a priority issue in the health system, demonstrated by the fact that the country has introduced a national ECD programme and included ECD in the university curricula for medical students. Moreover, the project components concerning the protocols of visiting nurses have been translated into a new national guide to ensure these professionals comprehensively address ECD and increase the outreach of these services to vulnerable families. The National Early Childhood Development Program for the health system was finalised by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and adopted by the Government. Its full endorsement and implementation is likely to have a positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of all ECD-related activities that are initiated within the health system. Informants from NGOs emphasized the importance of the adoption of the National Programme for ECD in 2016 as a key result on structural changes, since it is expected to further strengthen efforts and results in this area.
- Providing significant inputs related to child rights throughout the development of the new Strategy for Roma Inclusion including inputs to its monitoring framework, the new

draft Law on Public Health and the draft Gender Equality Strategy which all recognise the need for greater investment in the most vulnerable Roma families.

- Developing the capacities of ISCs by, among others, producing a guide, recommendations and changes in their rulebook for them to better assess the needs of children and adequately provide related services.
- Supporting the creation of the Group for Social Inclusion, which became fully functional in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, thus strengthening institutional capacity for the coordination, development and implementation of early learning and inclusive education. Mirroring the Group for Social Inclusion established in the Ministry of Education, the City of Belgrade has decided to appoint a person who will co-ordinate the secretariats for education, social care and health and thus facilitate inter-sectorial responses and strengthen social inclusion primarily of the most vulnerable children in Belgrade.
- In addition, the MoH has formally established a special working group for strengthening the visiting nurses service that should, among other duties, develop and adopt new guidelines for this service, relying to a large extent on the guidelines and recommendations developed by this project.
- Trained service providers working in the education, health and social sectors now practice learnt skills and use established referral mechanisms that correspond to their responsibilities as duty bearers.

4.5.2 Contribution to alleviate disparities between Roma and non-Roma children in health and education

Overall, the project made great efforts and achieved substantive results to alleviate disparities between children from Roma and non-Roma origins. **However, informants from different sectors still consider that the gap between Roma and non-Roma children remains considerable, due to several often-combined reasons affecting the Roma community, such as parents' financial instability, illiterateness, and lack of commitment to school life.** In spite of that, stakeholders considered that significant results were achieved in a relatively short period of time under the project framework. **As in the effectiveness analysis, the impact analysis is also limited to the qualitative information gathered during the fieldwork, since no baseline data, targets and primary quantitative data generated by the intervention was available.**

In Albania, overall enrolment rates for Roma children increased slightly during the academic year 2015/2016. Based on data produced by the MoES, the enrolment rate in 2015/2016 increased by 4.9 % in pre-school education and by 25% in elementary schools compared to the school year 2014/2015.

NGO representatives confirm that disparities between the Roma community and non-Roma community were narrowed in recent years, especially during this project implementation. The cooperation with local Roma NGOs has resulted in better recognition of the situation and orientation to working with the community. As previously mentioned in this report, the registration procedures established for Roma children have increased significantly their

opportunities to access different kinds of services (e.g. education and health, legal protection, etc.) and therefore narrowed disparities with non-Roma children.

Disparities between Roma and non-Roma children have been also reduced due to the sensitization of service providers, who are now more open and willing to provide services to the Roma community. Furthermore, educators and teachers are better qualified to address challenges of inclusion and to work with other parents on the rights of vulnerable children. The project training courses gave clear directions for the teachers to implement inclusive education programmes, by identifying children with special education needs, learning difficulties, disabilities, and preparing IEP for vulnerable and CWD, etc. Nevertheless, so-called “second chances” classes for Roma children still exist in-schools, which can only be regarded positive in providing additional support to these children but at the same time perpetuates segregation and differentiation among students. ECD education has proven to be very effective for Roma children to learn the Albanian language before starting school, and therefore ensuring an easier integration. Informants from the education system ensured that children receiving ECD in the past are more integrated and getting better results in primary school. The activities with parents and follow-up activities have also made possible better results in terms of regular attendance to classes.

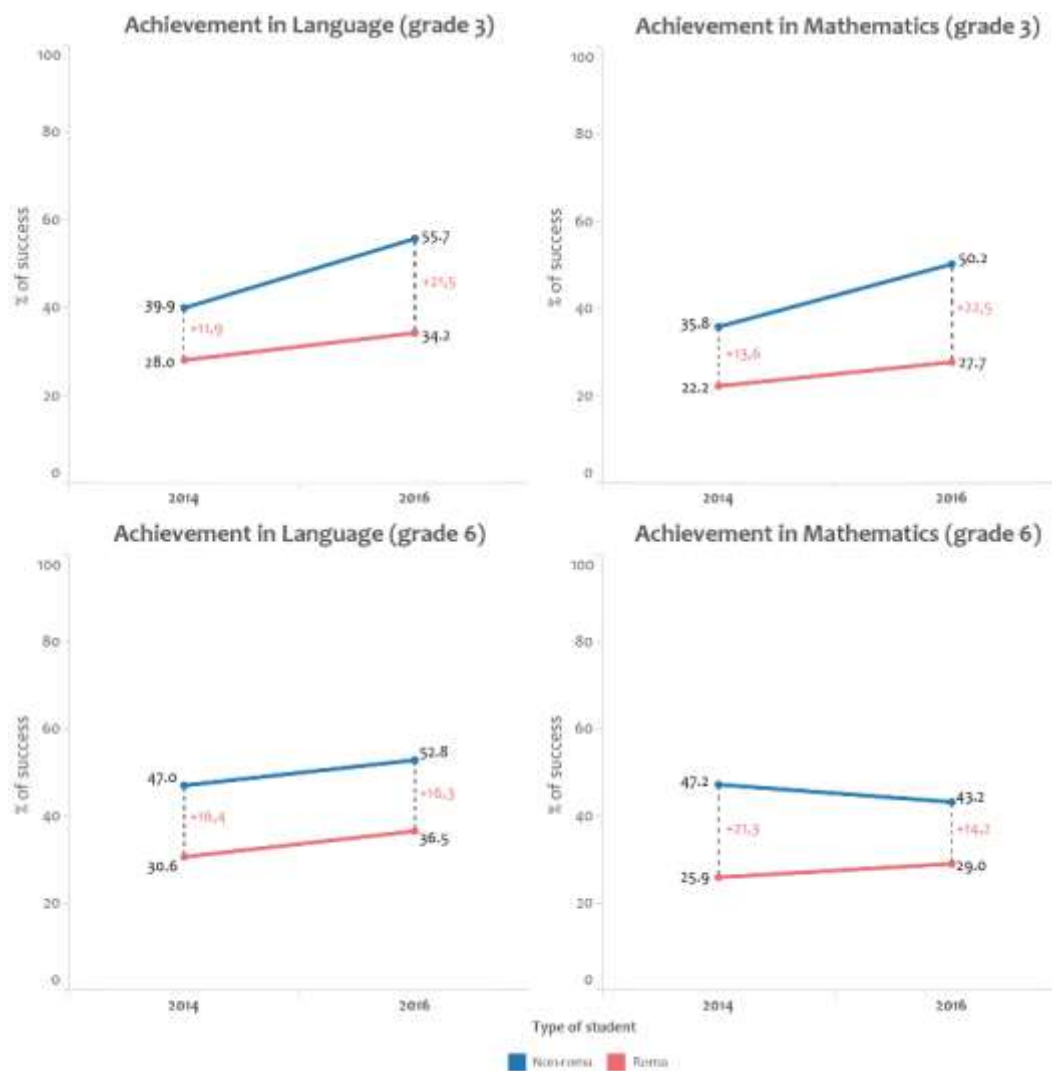
However, participation and involvement is the first steps towards integration, and issues concerning proper living conditions, mobility and positive health practices are still disparities that affect a large number of Roma families and prevent other communities to accept them, as expressed by Roma families during focus groups discussions.

Governmental informants agree that disparities have been reduced due to the higher number of kindergartens available and the awareness raising campaigns. They also pointed out the important steps taken by the Roma community towards their integration in the national education and health system.

In the FYR of Macedonia, a progress study on inclusive education²⁸ reveals important insights regarding closing disparities between Roma and non-Roma in the education system. The study compared survey findings between 2014 and showed the following:

²⁸ MCCE, 2016, Progress Study Report from Inclusive Education Programme for marginalized groups.

Figure 5. Disparities in achievement between type of student



The positive effects of the programme are evident, although the gap between the Roma and non-Roma children still remains large. However, the development of language literacy and mathematic achievements are highly influenced by the socio-cultural background and family environment, including students' attendance in preschool and preparedness before commencing school.

These results are also significantly aligned to project results in the areas of the intervention, as expressed by different informants, which could be considered an early indication of positive correlation in results at different levels. According to key stakeholders, the key constraints preventing a higher degree of achievement are the low levels of education of Roma parents, the parents' low involvement in the school life and migration and high mobility as a result of financial instability. There are indications of modest results on Roma parents getting more involved in the school life of their children and, in some cases, they are part of the school bodies/entities which could mean they know where they can express their problems and needs. Moreover, Roma children are involved in their respective school bodies, for instance acting as presidents of school councils or in coordinating functions, indicating that they are actively involved in the school life together with their non-Roma colleagues.

Finally, **in the case of Serbia**, limited information about potential contribution of the project to alleviate disparities between children from different origins is in line with the information available for the two other project countries. NGO informants consider that the project contributed to some extent to improve the health status of children in risk and provide access to pre-school and primary education. However, they also consider that the number of Roma families visiting developmental services is still low and additional awareness raising efforts are considered necessary.

Considering the fact that the statistical system in Serbia is not designed to collect data disaggregated by ethnicity and that base line was not produced, it is not possible to report whether disparities between Roma and Non-Roma children have been narrowed. However, partner's reports provide insights on the number of children targeted by different project interventions and at the outcome level, it is proven that a large number of children benefited from project activities.

4.5.3 Realization and enjoyment of HR & GE by right-holders

Impact on GE is difficult to measure since no specific indicators were included in the project framework. All the information contained in this section refers to the perceptions of key stakeholders, but no objectively verified information could be gathered in this regard.

In Albania, as expressed by informants, beneficiaries from project communities have expressed an improvement in the enjoyment of their and their children's rights thanks to the project. Moreover, duty bearers have expressed their willingness to comply with their obligations regarding HR & GE as a result of the capacity building they have received during the project. **In the case of Serbia**, informants pointed out the fact that the intervention focused on developing the capacities and raising awareness of duty-bearers (service providers) in order to better comply with their obligations. However, it was also confirmed that activities contributed to raising awareness among Roma families on their rights and how to execute them. In this line, parents had continuous support from Roma CSOs to proceed with cases of violation of rights. **Finally, in the FYR of Macedonia**, the project strengthened the capacities of duty bearers such as the school staff to better implement inclusive education programmes, and to some extent, raised awareness of parents to be more involved in the school life of their children.

In terms of GE, no clear indication of related results could be identified through the evaluation process. Some informants pointed out early evidence on impact concerning the empowerment of mothers who decide to enrol their children in pre-school, in order to have time to look for employment opportunities. In addition, the earlier-mentioned observed change in mind-sets of some Roma fathers who have become more aware of their child rearing responsibilities can also be pointed out.

Groups of stakeholder not originally targeted by the intervention have benefitted from it to different extents. For example, the project begun targeting Roma children but also included other vulnerable groups, such as CWD and children living in poor households. Finally, the non-Roma community in general can be considered as an indirect beneficiary of this intervention, since their knowledge about non-discrimination was strengthened and their awareness about respecting rights has been increased.

In terms of unintended effects and added activities, some health services were not originally included in the project design but, as the intervention unfolded, they rose as a necessity and can be considered as a further improvement to the right to health. This mainly refers to services concerning positive hygiene habits for children.

The enrolment of Roma children in school as part of the project interventions can be considered as one of the unintended effects, since the project objectives in Albania had originally only foreseen to increase access to preschool education. According to information from the Observatory report²⁹, during the third year of project implementation, 375 children of various ages were registered in compulsory education.

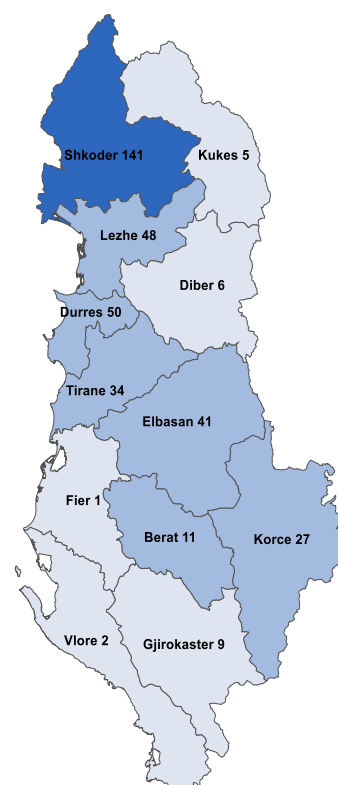
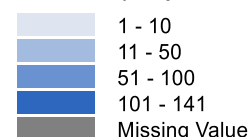


Figure 6. Roma children attending Primary education in Albania.

Year III (May -October 2016)



²⁹ Observatory and YWCA data for period (May-October 2016), CRCA data for period (August -October 2016)

5. Evaluation conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the Key Findings presented in the previous chapter. A comparison analysis on the similarities and differences among target countries was considered inconsistent and therefore not included in this section. The heterogeneous nature of the intervention in each country prevents a solid comparison to study and determine generalizable conclusions.

RELEVANCE

Conclusion 1

The objectives of the intervention addressed the rights and needs of most marginalized groups. Adequate alignment with international instruments, standards and principles of human rights and gender equality confirm the project's aim of reducing inequities, while the intervention's focus on Roma children and children with disabilities are proof for its conformity with global and national equity-focused development priorities. This alignment can be considered one of the project's great strengths which is also likely to have contributed to the project's success. **(Linked to Key Finding 1)**

EFFECTIVENESS

Conclusion 2

The project was highly effective in accomplishing the intended results of building the capacities of key stakeholders, particularly of different duty bearers (parents, service providers, public institutions) responsible for the equitable realisation of child rights. The intervention also succeeded in achieving most of the intended system changes by boosting policy developments that facilitate a more equitable access to ECD services and inclusive basic education. The contribution of UNICEF in meeting these results effectively is clearly demonstrated. **(Linked to Key Findings 2, 3 and 4)**

Conclusion 3

Despite the achievement of the intended results and system changes, the project framework lacks specific indicators that would allow to measure the actual effectiveness of achieved results, such as capacity building activities, policies or human rights and gender equality promotion. This lack of adequate indicators can be considered a major weakness of the project. **(Linked to Key Findings 3, 4 and 5)**

EFFICIENCY

Conclusion 4

In view of the successful achievement of intended system changes, the project is considered to have efficiently converted the invested resources into the planned results. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that no overlaps with similar interventions nor alternative implementing strategies, that could have achieved the same results, were identified. ([Link to Key Finding 6](#))

SUSTAINABILITY

Conclusion 5

Having introduced major policy changes that promote ECD for early inclusion, the project has laid the essential foundations for the continuation of the results of the intervention. Demonstrated system strengthening and higher levels of engagement by the Roma community, public authorities, service providers and parents further contribute to the sustainability of the project. Both of these sustainability aspects represent strong attributes of the project. ([Linked to Key Finding 7](#))

Conclusion 6

Factors that may negatively contribute to the sustainability of the project in the FYR of Macedonia relate to the capacity of ECD centres to manage public funding and its consequent impact on the actual disbursement of intended resources. However, this conclusion has shed light on a new, previously unidentified determinant (i.e. Budget / Expenditure) for the project's system barrier analysis. Moreover, it highlights a capacity gap of a duty-bearer that would need to be addressed in the future. ([Linked to Key Finding 7](#))

IMPACT

Conclusion 7

The project has contributed to the narrowing of disparities between Roma and non-Roma children by ensuring access to pre-school and primary education and ECD health services. In view of the absence of quantitative data, this conclusion is drawn from qualitative data which suggests significant improvements in the access to ECD services by Roma children and children with disabilities. Further qualitative evidence indicates a change in traditional gender roles among Roma parents as a result of the

project; this is an early indication for an improvement in the preconditions for an upbringing of children in a non-discriminatory environment. **(Linked to Key Finding 8)**

6. Lessons learnt

6.1 System barriers and capacity gaps

An important lesson can be drawn from the system barriers that were targeted by several components of the project. While the project effectively addressed two crucial determinants on the demand side – namely “financial access” and “social and cultural practices and belief” – the evaluation has shed light on a potential capacity gap of secondary duty-bearers (Roma parents) that appears to affect these very same determinants, consequently posing new barriers to the enjoyment of rights by Roma children. One capacity gap relates to the financial instability of many Roma parents which make the indirect costs of ECD services (e.g. transport, material, food etc.) unaffordable (financial access) in those regions where no subsidies exist. The other capacity gap refers to the level of education of parents which was observed to have a direct impact on social and cultural practices and beliefs; or more precisely, low levels of education, especially illiteracy of parents, were reported to weaker parents’ willingness to enrol or access ECD services for their children.

It should be noted that these observations are based on anecdotal evidence obtained through the evaluation and would need to be studied further into depth in order to draw specific conclusions. Nevertheless, these findings give insight into the complexity of system barriers and the interdependence of their determinants that provide important lessons for any future interventions that aim to improve the equitable realisation of rights by Roma children.

Furthermore, the evaluation was able to shed light on the capacity gaps of service providers, which limit their abilities to address ECD issues in a comprehensive way. While such a capacity gap had been detected among educational staff in the original system barrier analysis (see chapter 2.), the evaluation further identified limited capacities of health services providers who, in cooperation with social welfare personnel, would be essential in the provision of comprehensive ECD services. Hence, the system barrier under the determinant “Access to adequately staffed services, facilities and information” needs to be expanded to “lack of qualified ECD-health service providers”.

Moreover, despite the capacity-building efforts of this project, the current availability of ECD services that can adequately address early development risks can still be considered insufficient. This adds another barrier to the determinant “Availability of essential commodities/inputs” on the supply side, which is a bottleneck that should be addressed by future projects with a similar objective.

6.2 Lack of disaggregated data and poor coordination mechanisms

The lack of disaggregated data remains a major obstacle to effectively monitor the equitable realisation of child rights. Lack of comparable data (i.e. using the same disaggregation categories) not only hampers the monitoring of rights enjoyment by Roma children but also impedes any assessment of improvement or deterioration in inequities faced by any other groups of children (e.g. children with disabilities, children affected by migration, children from other ethnic or linguistic minorities, children affected by gender inequalities etc.) that are believed to experience these.

While the evaluation clearly detected an inefficiency of the project that had been caused by poor inter-ministerial and inter-donor coordination, the absence or unavailability of disaggregated data can also be attributed to inefficient coordination mechanisms between different actors that fail to share knowledge and data collection practices but would have the potential to create synergies for increasing the availability of disaggregated data.

Hence, “management / coordination” can be identified as a new system barrier which determines the capacity to provide disaggregated data on children experiencing inequities. Both the system barrier and the capacity gap (of different duty bearers) would need to be addressed by interventions that pursue a similar objective in the future.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the key conclusions and lessons learned, fully supported by the evaluation findings. Although some of the recommendations were developed based on the key priorities identified by stakeholders, they are the result of the analysis and interpretation of the information conducted by the evaluation team and the validation/consultative process carried out with UNICEF representatives from the three UNICEF country offices.

The recommendations are addressed to UNICEF country offices in the three countries, to the respective Government and non-governmental stakeholders at national and local levels, in line with the ToR and the need to engage all major stakeholders to achieve results in the field. Each recommendation has an addressee and an indication of the priority level to better orient organisational and programmatic responses.

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p>It is recommended that UNICEF continues and further strengthens its advocacy and technical advice to governments and relevant ministries with the aim of strengthening data collection and management systems that support data disaggregation and other data collection mechanisms in order to facilitate the provision of high-quality, timely and reliable data on children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities, in line with SDG 17.18.³⁰</p> <p>On one hand, the availability of such data can be improved by continuing technical support to line ministries and institutions that have a data collection mandate; on the other hand, it is essential that UNICEF further contributes to the alignment of collected data between various sectors as well as to enable inter-sectorial data sharing.</p>	UNICEF and Governmental partners	Very high

³⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg17>

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p><u>Country-specific recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Albania and the former fYR of Macedonia, the respective Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) should be further strengthened to collect disaggregated data at all educational levels, from pre-school (esp. Albania) to primary and secondary school (esp. fYR of Macedonia). Particular attention should also be paid to data collection for children with developmental difficulties and disabilities. • For fYR of Macedonia and Serbia, the upcoming MICS6 in 2018 will include an additional sample for Roma children and families and should therefore be used to collect relevant data to monitor equity gaps in health, development, early learning and the well-being of all children aged 0-6. • For Serbia, the inter-sectorial alignment of data should be strengthened between health, education and social welfare at both the national and local level not only to increase the availability of disaggregated data, but also in order to identify and respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children and families in a more efficient and effective manner. <p><i>This recommendation is based on the lessons learnt from the project and on firm indications of the existence of such raw data which strengthens the potential for their future disaggregation possibility.</i></p>		
<p>In order to ensure the sustainability of the initiative, the momentum of ECD for the inclusion of so-called vulnerable groups of children must be maintained in the region. Hence, it is recommended that UNICEF ensures the continuation of project results with a clear commitment from national stakeholders who should be engaged in this process. Therefore, UNICEF should continue its advocacy and technical capacity support by prioritising ECD in relevant national and local strategies and/or budgeted plans in order to ensure commitment, ownership and funding of ECD services. Similarities and differences from ECD experiences in the three countries provide</p>	UNICEF & Partners	High

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p>essential lessons for using ECD as an essential means of inclusion in the region and should therefore be used to form a solid platform of exchange between the countries. Hence, continued collaboration between the UNICEF Country Offices in the sub-region is recommended.</p> <p><i>This recommendation is based on Conclusion 6.</i></p>		
<p>As part of the future project design with similar objective, UNICEF should develop a project-specific Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework with clearly defined outcomes, outputs and activities and aligned with the Theory of Change UNICEF aims to pursue. It is also highly recommended that each of these elements (i.e. outcomes, outputs, and activities) include objectively verifiable indicators which not only allow for a sound monitoring of progress and the evaluation of results but also contribute to the knowledge generation during and after project implementation</p> <p>When defining indicators, particular attention should be paid to the measurability of common evaluation criteria, such as Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability and Impact while applying human rights and gender equality aspects across all types of indicators transversely.</p> <p>It is important to stress that the development of a result based management framework must be consultative, engaging relevant key stakeholders, such as governmental and civil society partners in order to foster commitment and collaboration at all stages of project undertaking.</p> <p><i>This recommendation is based on Conclusion 3.</i></p>	UNICEF	Very high

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p>Roma CSOs should continue to be engaged in conducting an in-depth analysis of capacity gaps that may hinder Roma parents from enrolling or accessing ECD services for their children and taking into account all potential system barriers. It is recommended that such analysis followed a HRBA and participatory methods that involve Roma parents as primary and secondary duty bearers.</p> <p><u>Country-specific recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Albania, it is recommended to conduct a knowledge, attitude and practice survey providing a deeper analysis on the Roma barriers to ECD services access. Whilst the survey should be conducted together with Roma CSOs, it would be essential that the Ministry of Education of Sports is fully engaged in this initiative. • For Serbia, qualitative studies assessing Roma family perception and experiences related to ECD services have been conducted and it is therefore essential that the identified barriers (e.g. documentation, discrimination, financing for pre-school, knowledge of positive ECD practices etc.) continue to be studied in order to track progress/change while at the same time, continuing to addressing them on the supply and demand side. For collaborating with Roma CSOs, the experiences from participatory processes with the Roma Women's Network and Roma health mediators should serve as positive lessons learnt for future studies. • For the FYR of Macedonia, such an analysis should also include an assessment of parenting skills, parents' awareness of ways to promote their children's personal and social development as well as knowledge of and attitudes towards disability risks and inclusive education. <p><i>This recommendations is based on the lessons learnt from the project and the recommendation from the ECD Advisor at the UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS.</i></p>	Roma CSOs (led by UNICEF)	High

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p>For future interventions, the following proposals should be taken into consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop mechanisms to work with parents (e.g. parents clubs, door-to-door visits, paediatricians, visiting nurses, health mediators etc.) to inform them about different issues (parental skills for ECD, family planning, nutrition, inclusive education, formal education, etc.) and to enhance their participation in school life and decision-making processes. • Further develop identified good practices and work to strengthen partnerships among development partners around ECD and Roma early inclusion as well as advocate for the prioritisation of ECD in the IPA negotiations. • Continue developing the capacities of service providers, especially for education staff to better address the needs of children with different levels of ability. • Continue influencing policy development for ECD towards inter-sectorial coordination, inclusive education and the promotion of the rights of the child at national and local level. <p><u>Country-specific recommendations:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For Albania, with more responsibilities of preschool being allocated to local governments, an assessment of the new situation with regard to local government capacities to handle this new task should be undertaken in order to better inform the response that UNICEF will need to continue to provide regarding equitable access to ECD services for all children. Also, pre-service teacher preparation should be informed and influenced so as to better new inclusive practices standards and realities of the pre-school. • For Serbia, existing services (e.g. paediatricians, visiting nurses and Roma health mediators) should be used and improved or new modalities (e.g. workshops for parents or similar) should be created to 	UNICEF & Partners	High

Recommendation	Responsible stakeholder	Priority
<p>support parental competencies for ECD and also ensure early developmental assessment and assessment and response to risks and vulnerabilities of a family and early interventions when needed (in co-operation with other relevant sectors). Future activities should also address existing challenges, such as sustaining mechanisms for pre- and in-service capacity building in ECD of relevant professionals, introduction and scaling up of assessment tools, new national methodological guidance that relies on learnings from the project and endorses its scaling-up, prioritization in organizing outreach service provision, strengthening community-based and culturally and context appropriate behaviour change approaches as well as co-operation for joint support to families. In order to strengthen Inter Sectoral Commissions, further efforts should be put in improvement of policy and monitoring system relevant for inclusive education, including introducing common tool for assessment of the needs of children, as well as in development of national and local policies for sustainable financing of additional support. Capacity building of ISC members and other professionals relevant for implementation of the inclusive education should be continued as well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the FYR of Macedonia, it is recommended that future activities also address parenting skills to support and stimulate children's development, strengthen inter-sectorial cooperation (e.g. health, social workers, and teachers), improve the transition of children from pre-school to primary school, emphasize the importance of inclusion of children with disabilities in early learning services. <p><i>This recommendation is based in key evaluation findings and priorities identified by stakeholders.</i></p>		

8. Annexes

See separate file for annexes

List of Annexes:

Annex 1: TORs

Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Annex 3: List of interviews, focus groups and observations

Annex 4: Data collection tools

Bibliography (Literature used for the desk review)