

SUMMARY RESEARCH REPORT



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN ECEC SETTINGS

A study conducted in five European countries



WHAT IS THE SEED PROJECT?

'SEED: Social and Emotional Education and Development' is a European project designed to draw attention to the importance of **social and emotional well-being** for children's learning and development, and support the continuing professional development of **practitioners working with 2.5 to 6-year-olds** in this area.

SEED is conducting research and improving Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) practice in **Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Norway and the Netherlands**.

The SEED Project is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission – Strategic partnerships for school education (2017-2019).

For more information about the promoters of SEED and its activities, [**visit this page**](#).



Social Emotional Education and Development

WHAT IS SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Children's long-term success at school is influenced as much by social, emotional and self-regulation skills as by academic skills and knowledge. Social and emotional development is a main contributor to **successful school transitions and a significant preventative factor of disruptive behaviour, and mental health problems**. Not paying attention to social and emotional development is harmful to children's capacity to learn and to thrive. It is also expensive in terms of the socio-economic costs associated with bullying, violence and mental health problems.

Research demonstrates that frequent opportunities to engage in all types of **play**, outdoors and indoors, are positively associated with young children's social and emotional well-being. So too is the **support and encouragement of parents and practitioners** who are responsive to young children's need for nurturance and care and their drive to **explore, play and learn**.

In early childhood settings, **practitioners are the most important partners** in providing a rich learning environment that can positively influence children's development of self-regulation and social skills. However, research points to a **lack of training and continuous professional development** on this topic, and the need to design effective methods to provide ECEC practitioners with skills and competences to promote children's social and emotional well-being.



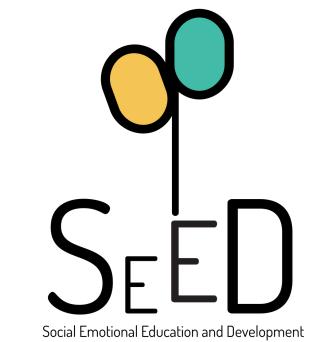
DEFINITION OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The following definition from the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (2008) reflects our understanding of social and emotional well-being:

'The developing capacity of young children to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learning – all in the context of family, community and culture'

THE SEED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed both **quantitative and qualitative methods**. We assessed the social and emotional well-being of the children using the **Universal Psychosocial Indicator for Five-Year-Old Boys and Girls (UPSI-5)**. We were also interested in whether there were significant differences in the ECEC experience and social and emotional well-being of young children in different countries; in girls compared to boys and in rural compared to urban areas. The qualitative data based on **interviews with the participating practitioners and school principals** provided additional important insights into how social and emotional well-being is understood and the place it has in everyday pedagogical work.



AIMS

1

To assess the social and emotional well-being of 5-year-old children in ECEC settings in five countries in Europe: Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands and Norway through interviews with ECEC practitioners.

2

To identify the factors in ECEC settings that promote and hinder children's social and emotional well-being in each country.

PARTICIPANTS

In total **52 ECEC settings** participated in the study, the majority of which were located in urban areas. Each country had between 9 to 12 settings participating.

1195 children (46% girls and 54% boys), **140 practitioners** and **44 principals** took part in the study.

All practitioners were women, except in Norway, where 36 percent of participating practitioners were men.

ECEC POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EUROPE



The **Ministry for Education** or its equivalent is **overall responsible for ECEC services** where 5-year-olds attend in all participating countries. Almost all 5-year-olds in Hungary, Latvia and Norway attend kindergarten or pre-primary classes in primary schools. In Croatia just 59 percent of 3 to 6-year-olds are in Kindergarten. Most children in the Netherlands attend school from age 4.

The **average group size** per country in sampled settings in this study ranged **from 20 children in Norway to 26 children in the Netherlands**.

The **level of qualification** required for all practitioners (teachers) working in kindergartens, pre-primary classes and primary schools is a **Bachelors degree** or college diploma in all participating countries, except Norway, where, at the time of data collection, one third of practitioners were required to have a bachelors degree in ECEC. Attention to **social and emotional well-being** is included in all the **National Curricula and framework documents** along with other aspects of learning and development. However, the emphasis differs from country to country.

FACTORS THAT PROMOTE AND HINDER SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Practitioners identified the following ECEC **factors** as key in **supporting** children's social and emotional well-being:

- competences and attitude of practitioners
- stimulating environments
- quality of relationships
- social and emotional education
- inclusivity and diversity
- child centred approaches.

The most common ECEC setting **factors** that practitioners reported to **hinder** young children's social and emotional well-being were:

- large group size
- the lack of staff
- the high staff turnover.



Practitioners in Croatia, Latvia and Hungary also identified the **lack of cooperation with parents** as having a negative effect on children's social and emotional well-being. Another ECEC setting factor identified as negatively impacting on children's social and emotional well-being was the **cultural and ethnic diversity in the settings**.

NORWAY

CROATIA

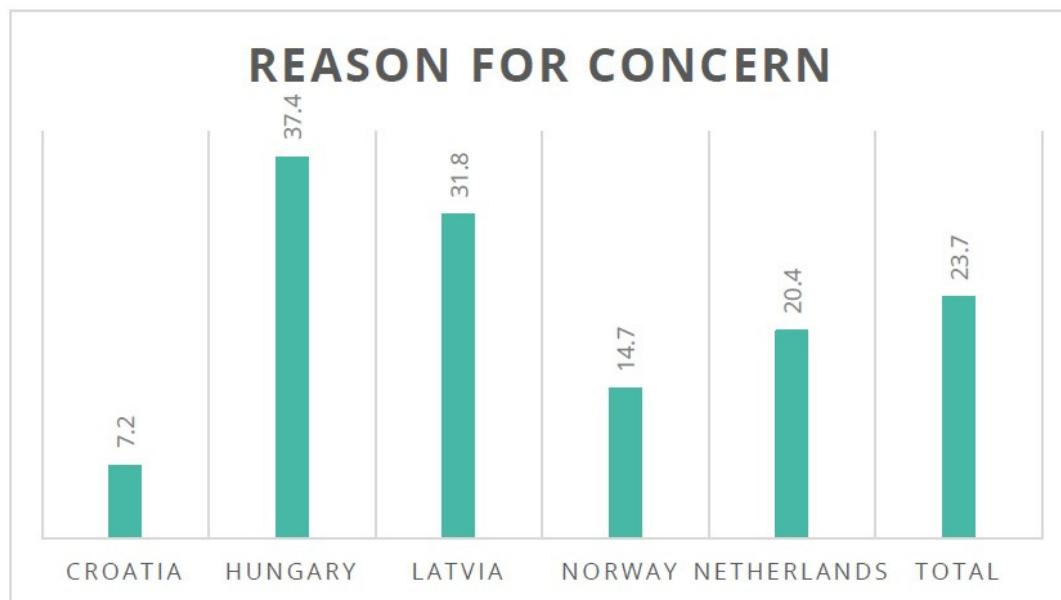
"The staff must be skilled and have knowledge about children and their well-being. And they must be interested and available to the children. We talk to the children about feelings and friendship; that is important."

Practitioner from Norway

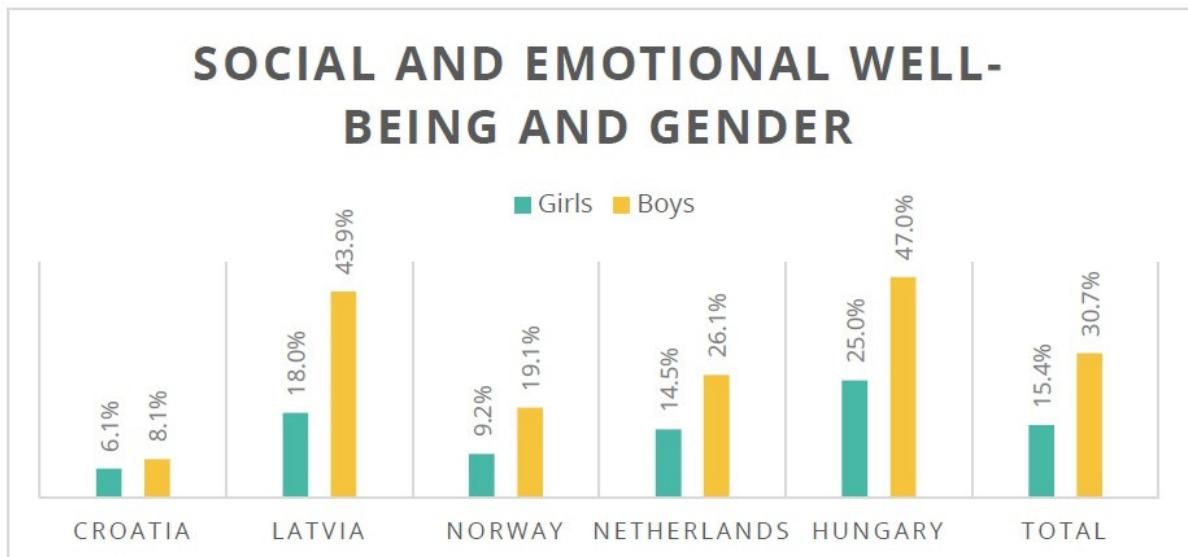
"Lacking time for each child individually, everyone feels under pressure, both us teachers as well as the children. Children need more contact with nature, working in fresh air, jumping and exploring. Strong adherence to rules, staying in a closed room, closeness for new things don't promote their well-being." Practitioner from Croatia

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN NUMBERS

The average percentage of children where there was **reason for concern (RFC)** about social and emotional well-being per country ranged from **7% of sampled children in Croatia to 37% of sampled children in Hungary.**



In all countries the percentage of children with reasons for concern was **higher for boys**, (from 8% in Croatia to 47% in Hungary) **than for girls** (from 6% in Croatia to 25% in Hungary). In Latvia, the percentage of children with reasons for concern about social and emotional well-being was more than double for boys (44 %) than for girls (18%). There was also a large difference between boys and girls in Hungary, 47% and 25% respectively.



CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study all point to the **importance of highly competent practitioners** who are skilled in promoting all aspects of children's development.

Many of the factors which practitioners reported that **promote social and emotional well-being** are in their control. These factors are respectful relationships, working with parents and provision of indoor and outdoor play opportunities. In other words, things that practitioners do on a daily basis can make a difference to children's social and emotional well-being.

More attention in pre-service and **continuing professional development** of ECEC practitioners is needed to building positive and supportive relationships with parents and families and considering families as co-educators.

Particular attention also needs to be paid to **diversity and inclusion**. Practitioners are dealing with diversity daily, and it is understandable that they 'theoretically' know this should be valued, but in practice they find it not always easy.

Social and emotional well-being is a complex concept necessitating a holistic approach in ECEC settings, within an overall competent ECEC system. We need an ecological approach involving children, family members of all ages, communities as well as ECEC practitioners and local and national policy makers to ensure that ALL children thrive in ECEC and school as well as in their lives in general.

NEXT STEPS

To support practitioners to pay more attention to social and emotional well-being, a selected group of practitioners from the SEED countries will participate in a group reflection method of continuing professional development, the **WANDA method**.

This will take place between October 2018 and June 2019.

SEED Project Consortium (2018), *Social and Emotional Well-being of Young Children in ECEC Settings - Summary Report*, Leiden: SEED Project.

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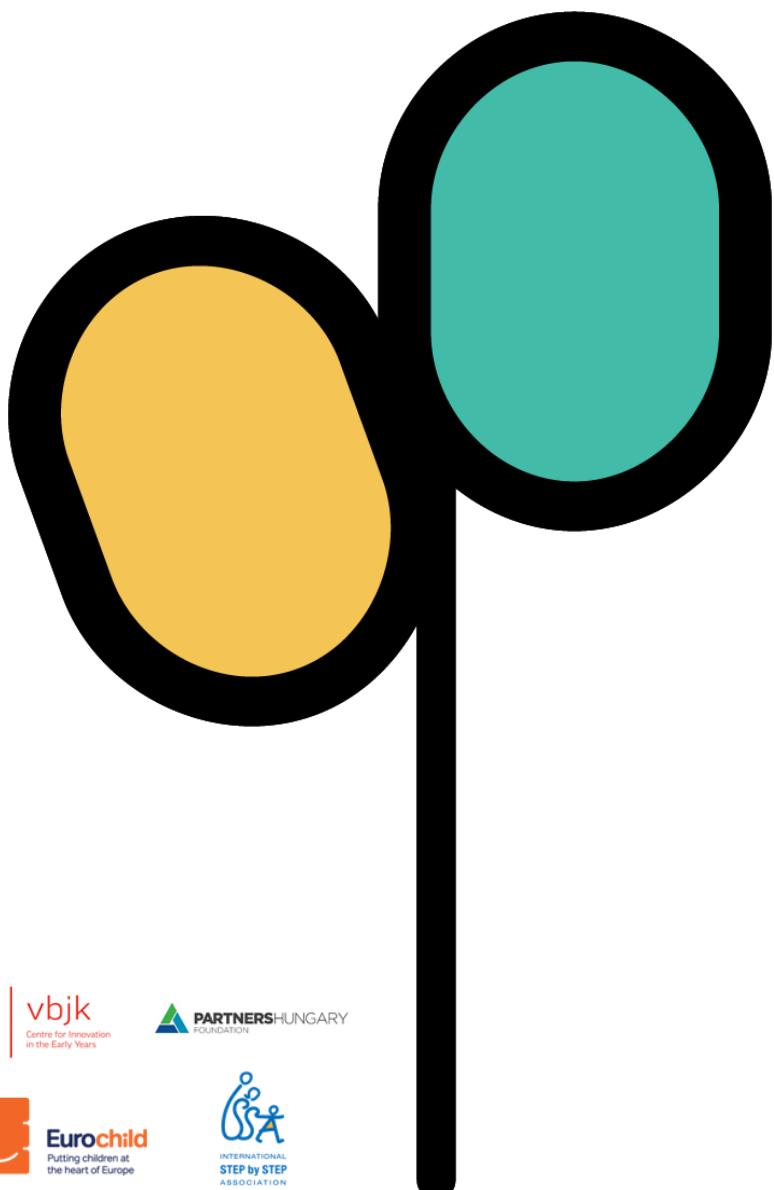


**International Child
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