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Developing a Comprehensive Framework for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Early Childhood Education and Care in the Czech Republic

A brief on the EU TSI project in the Czech Republic



Background of the reform

Early childhood offers a critical window of opportunity to shape the trajectory of a child's holistic development and build a foundation for their future. The European Pillar of Social Rights states that all children have the right to affordable and quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). It is in the earliest years of a child's life that the foundation and capacity to learn is laid, and this is built on throughout life. Learning is an incremental process; building a strong foundation in the early years is a precondition for the development of higher-level competencies and future educational success, as much as it is essential for health and the well-being of children. Participating in ECEC is beneficial for all children and especially beneficial for children from disadvantaged

backgrounds. Quality ECEC holds transformative potential in bridging inequities early in life. It helps by preventing the formation of early skills gaps and is thus an essential tool to fight social inequalities and educational poverty. Quality, affordable and accessible ECEC also allows for increased parental workforce participation.

Despite the increasing demand for services for the youngest children, the Czech Republic has one of the lowest enrolment rates in ECEC for children aged 0–3 years in the EU, with only 6.8% (2022) attending the childcare/education, significantly falling behind the EU average of 35.9% and the initial Barcelona target (33%) agreed at EU level. Insufficient capacities of existing services, lack of locally available and affordable quality ECEC (especially for children aged 0–3 years) have been identified as some of the key drivers of gender inequalities in the workforce.

The responsibilities of the Czech ECEC system are split between the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) responsible for children's groups and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) responsible for kindergartens. Children's groups are legally for children aged 6 months–6 years, in practice they are mainly attended by children under the age of 3 years. Personnel supporting children's learning, development and care in children's groups are referred to as caregivers and are required to have a professional qualification, which can be a qualification in the field of education, health or social care, or a professional qualification of a caregiver. From the age of three, a child has a legal entitlement to a place in a kindergarten, however kindergartens can also enroll two-year-old children, if they meet the specific conditions. Kindergartens are legally for children up to the age of 6 years and children fulfill the compulsory pre-school year there, which is not possible in children's groups. The education process in kindergartens is guided by the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education. Educators in kindergartens are teachers with a minimum qualification at the level of specialised secondary education.

While municipalities are responsible for provision of ECEC in public kindergartens, they are entitled, but not obliged to provide childcare services for children under the age of 3. Available data demonstrates that municipalities often do not provide childcare services for children under the age of 3, and services are especially limited in socially disadvantaged localities, contributing to perpetuation of poverty, social exclusion, and low female participation in the labor market.

While capacities for ECEC services for children aged 0-3 years are gradually increasing, including through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the European Social Fund+, an effective monitoring and evaluation framework providing data on access and quality of these services is missing. MOEYS has in place

a monitoring and evaluation system for kindergartens, and data on ECEC for the respective age group is integrated into the national education management information system. The split responsibility for the ECEC system between MOLSA and MOEYS demands the development of a comprehensive and integrated monitoring and evaluation system that would link both systems (for under 3 years old and children aged 3–6 years) to enable strategic planning in the ECEC sector, children’s smooth transitions between the ECEC services, and consistency of quality and approaches across the services to create a continuum of early education and care for young children (0–6 years) in the Czech Republic.

Intended impact and outcomes of the project

At the request of the Czech authorities, the European Commission supports the envisaged reform via the EU’s Technical Support Instrument (TSI). Launched in September 2023 as a 2-year project, the Czech Republic will benefit from technical support measures to increase the quality of and equitable access to ECEC, particularly for the services for children aged 0–3 years. This will be achieved by developing an overarching monitoring and evaluation system and by providing technical support to municipalities in expanding access to and increasing the quality of ECEC services, including for the most vulnerable. This will contribute to better access to and quality of ECEC services in the country. The specific objectives of this TSI Project will be achieved through the following outcomes:



Outcome 1:

The Czech authorities have gained comprehensive understanding of the current status, provision and gaps regarding the monitoring and evaluation of early childhood education and care.



Outcome 2:

The Czech authorities have at their disposal an effective and comprehensive system for the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC (children aged 0–6 years) with a twin focus on raising quality and improving access, created jointly with all relevant authorities and stakeholders and validated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport.



Outcome 3:

The Czech authorities have specific tools to promote and support municipal expansion of ECEC services, including on communication, strategic planning, financing and quality assurance of ECEC at local level.

Key outputs

The following outputs will contribute to achieving the above outcomes:

- A project inception report and kick-off meeting.
- A mapping of supply and demand for formal and non-formal ECEC services.
- A report on current monitoring and evaluation system and practices in ECEC in the Czech Republic.
- A report on European good practices in ECEC monitoring and evaluation and decentralisation.
- Consolidated recommendations to inform the Framework for the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC (services for children aged 0–3 years) and the proposals for a comprehensive, integrated framework for monitoring and evaluation (services for children aged 0–6 years), including recommendations relevant to the Preschool Care Concept.
- A framework for the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC (children’s groups for children aged 0–3 years).
- Proposals for a comprehensive, integrated framework for the monitoring and evaluation of ECEC (children aged 0–6 years).
- Guidance material on developing integrated data systems and oversight procedures.
- A toolkit for municipalities to support expansion of municipal ECEC services.
- A concept for a communication strategy on importance of quality ECEC.
- A final summary report with next steps and recommendations.

About the project partnership

