

The Butterfly Project: inclusion, participation and well-being of children with special needs in ECEC institutions.

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Background

In the European Care Strategy (2022)¹, the EU commission (EC) emphasizes that

"Participation in early childhood education has a positive impact on their [children's] development, boosts their employment opportunities later in life, their ability to lead fulfilling lives and careers and helps reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion." (2022:1).

However, EC notes that, both in terms of availability and extent, there is a significant difference between the EU countries in terms of children's opportunity to participate in an ECEC institution. This applies in particular to children in vulnerable positions, children from migrant and minority groups, and, as in the proposed project, children with special needs (c. f. *ibid.* 6-7). The EC also notices in the European Child Guarantee² a lack of participation of children with disabilities in ECEC institutions and concludes that a solution must be generated by "a framework for cooperation of educational establishments, local communities, social, health and child protection services, families and social economy actors to support inclusive education"³. Thus, the Butterfly

¹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS on the European care strategy. 7.09.2022

² European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Feasibility study for a child guarantee : final report*, Guio, A.(editor), Marlier, E.(editor), Frazer, H.(editor), Publications Office, 2020

³ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION (EU) 2921/1004 of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee, paragraph 7 h

model is built upon this a collaborative framework as essential for children' with special needs and their families' wellbeing.

It is difficult to have an overview of the number of children with special needs, their living conditions across the EU and their concrete opportunities to access an ECEC institution. In addition, the term itself is unclear. The concept "persons with special needs" has no clear definition among the EU states, and it is understood as a catch-all category, quite often synonymous with "persons with disabilities".

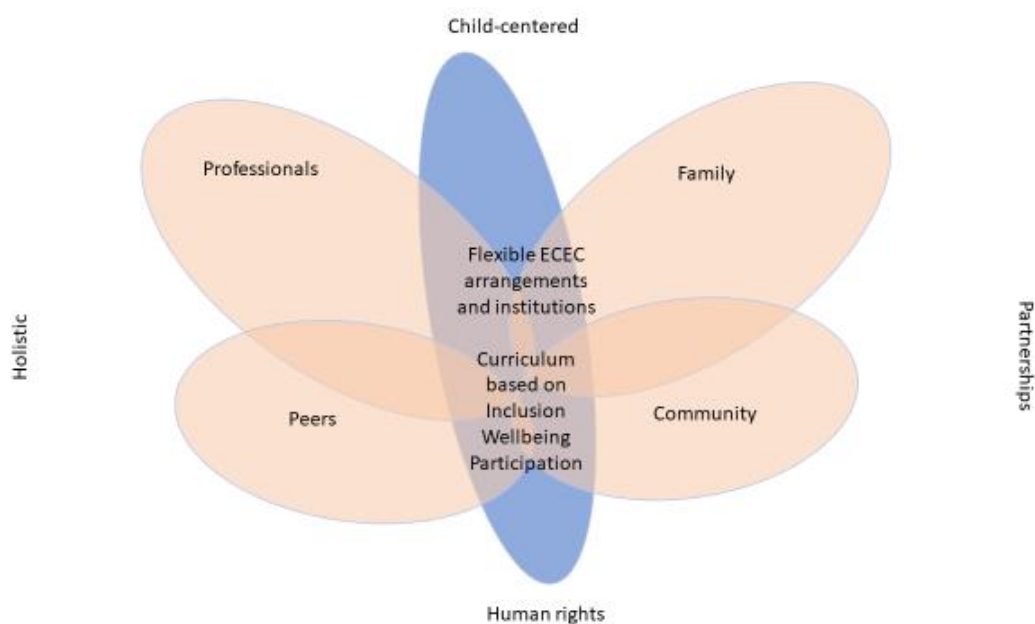
WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE – Overall objective and Output

The Butterfly Model stands on human rights' values. In order to address the needs and challenges described above, the **overall objective** of the project is to give young children - no matter of social background and personal competence - equal opportunities for inclusion and participation in ECEC institutions in order to stimulate the children's development and the child's and families' well-being.

In order to achieve this objective, the project will deliver two main **outputs**:

- *a culturally sensitive transition tool*, which can motivate and support the transition of children with special needs from home to ECEC institutions (see "the Butterfly Model" below)
- inter-professional training programs based on the Butterfly Model for staff, consultants and other agents in the field of children with special needs

The Butterfly project reflects the need highlighted in policy documents for strengthening the accessibility and affordability of education and care for young children with special needs.



The Butterfly Model

The Butterfly Model combines current experiences and local practices with new insights and pedagogical approaches in a dynamic relationship between family and child, community of the family, professionals and peers.

The project focuses on young children from zero to five years old who participate in ECEC institutions, and on children who do not have this opportunity. Having a holistic orientation towards children's participation, well-being and development, The Butterfly model will bring new approaches for collaborative activities with parents and new flexible types of ECEC arrangements, e.g. part time/ fulltime.

HOW WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IT

Specific objectives

To reach the overall objective and deliver the desired output, the project will be guided by reaching the following specific objectives through a number of dedicated work packages (see also the figure attached):

Specific objective 1: To analyze the state of art on care and well-being for children with special needs in different social and cultural contexts in at least three EU countries and by observations to identify inclusive/excluding practices for young children's transition from home to ECEC institutions.

Specific objective 2: To develop and pilot a proto type of The Butterfly Model to support children's participation and well-being in different types of ECEC institutions.

Specific objective 3: To upscale The Butterfly Model in partnership with central stakeholders by training programs of "ambassadors" of The Butterfly Model.

Organization and Funding

The Butterfly Project will be organized in work packages with VIA UC as the leading partner. It frames the priorities areas of an [Erasmus + cooperation partnership](#) by addressing priority areas and sector specific priorities. That means developing high quality early childhood education and care systems, common values, civic engagement and participation, inclusion and improving the outreach to people with fewer opportunities, including children with special needs.

The project will be implemented from autumn 2023 to autumn 2026, and the project is applying for Erasmus + grants of 400,000 EURO.

The application for The Butterfly Project is sent to The Erasmus + Department, Danish Ministry of Education, before 22 of March 2023.

The project involves at least three EU countries (for now: Denmark, Spain and Romania) with one or two partner institutions per country. Each of the six partners represents different stakeholders with expertise on specific aspects of the project. Partners differ from each other in terms of type of institution/organization, size, anchoring and perspective (university, administration, parent organization, NGO, etc.).