



LLLP Briefing Paper

Implementing a holistic
approach to lifelong learning:
Community Lifelong Learning
Centres as a gateway to
multidisciplinary support teams

**LIFELONG
LEARNING
PLATFORM**
EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION



PURPOSE

This briefing paper aims to inform European Institutions as well as national policy and decision makers on the issue of integrated and holistic approach to lifelong learning as well as to provide the context at a high level and share a few recommendations on ways to establish lifelong learning systems at local, regional and national level. This briefing paper helps raising awareness about the main highlights and existing practice in order to make any necessary decisions or complete any similar ongoing work in this respect. The paper elaborates on the current context of learning in Europe, bringing a few examples of recent developments of community based services in education.

This paper builds on the roundtable discussion hosted by the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University in September 2017 and attended by the EU Commission and Cedefop. It was taken up by the Lifelong learning Platform and further developed in the framework of the LLLP Working Group on Wider Benefits of Learning. It will be further enriched by the upcoming Policy Forum **“What role for community lifelong learning centres? The potential of one-stop shops for preventing youth at risk from disconnecting”** Cedefop is jointly organising with LLLP in 29 May 2019. The event will be hosted by the Romanian Presidency of the Council in its permanent representation to the EU in Brussels

Cedefop within its broader mission to promote lifelong learning through vocational education and training in Europe furnished new evidence on the role of VET for tackling early leaving from education and training

and helping young people to attain at least an upper secondary qualification (Cedefop, 2016). From a lifelong perspective, tackling early leaving from education and training (ELET) is an ongoing process, which requires a multidisciplinary and whole community approach. To support policy makers and learning providers, Cedefop launched in 2017 a Europe-wide VET toolkit for tackling early leaving (www.cedefop.europa.eu/TEL-toolkit). The toolkit offers with practical guidance, tips, good practices and tools drawn from successful interventions in VET. New toolkit resources including Reflection tools for policy makers and VET providers as well as guidelines to monitor and evaluate ongoing policies facilitate a more comprehensive approach to tackle early leaving in Europe. These new tools and enriched resources of the toolkit will be launched in the above mentioned Policy Forum.

Lifelong Learning Platform ©
 “Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning”
 Briefing Paper - February 2019

This briefing paper was written in partnership with the Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University and in consultation with LLLP Members

Editorial coordination: Brikena Xhomaqi, Director, LLLP

Contributors:
 Dr Paul Downes, Associate Professor of Education, Director, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University
 Dr Irene Psifidou, Expert, Department for Learning and Employability, Cedefop
 LLLP Working Group on Wider Benefits of Learning

Design and illustrations: Andrea Lapegna, Communication and Campaign Officer, LLLP

With the financial support of the European Union



CURRENT SITUATION

2018 is destined to be a year of thinking ahead and making strategic plans for the period of the next European Multi Financial Framework. The European Union has declared the Sustainable Development Goals as their guiding principles when formulating EU policies for the next decade, and thus there is a need to aim at offering equitable, high quality education for all and to do so with a holistic lifelong learning approach (SDG 4). There has been a wide consensus of research and practice communities that building bridges between formal, non-formal and informal education is a requisite for this kind of approach - with a balanced emphasis on academic achievements, skills and competences, and social-emotional development, education for future jobs, citizenship education and well-being - and policy is also following this lead.

When rethinking education it is not only crucial to recognise and validate all forms of learning, but also to offer them the physical space necessary as well as access to professional support and bring those spaces closer to the community. In a holistic approach this should mean that a certain need - be it educational or related other - should be serviced and accessible as easily as possible. A possible and highly beneficial way could be to reinforce or set up community lifelong learning centres (offering learning opportunities from cradle to grave) that act as a gateways to more specialised services and multidisciplinary teams.

The aim of such centres would be to create a place where education and social life are closely intertwined with the neighborhood

and wider world, wherein school or any other institution is seen as a learning space of shared responsibility for professional educators, other professionals, students, parents, municipalities and civil society organisations (volunteer/youth and solidarity organisations, etc.), and that helps the educational institutions become cultural element and drivers of development for a region for children as well as for adults (derived from Teacher Manifesto for the 21st Century).

The latest European Commission communication contributing to the Leaders' Meeting in Gothenburg, in November 2017 reaffirms the need to address learning from early ages. According to the European Political Strategy Centre among the 10 trends transforming education as we know it, statement; "the earlier, the better" as the first important step towards modernising our education systems. Numerous studies affirm that learning is understood to be a fundamentally social process therefore making the case for more social interactions at early ages to develop the full potential of an individual throughout the life.



BACKGROUND - EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

There is an increasing recognition at EU Policy level of the importance of combining services for marginalised groups in a common community based location as one-stop-shop multidisciplinary teams (Eurochild 2011; Frazer 2017; Downes 2011 a; European Commission TWG 2013, European Commission WG 2015). Such a model allows for a more flexible, accessible model which aims to engage socio-economically excluded groups. It helps overcome fragmentation of services and allows for a continuity of strategic interventions in services familiar to individuals and families, many of whom have found it difficult to trust and engage with other services.

Moreover, the EU Council Conclusions (2017) on *Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education For All* gives such examples of multiprofessional teams as including, 'social services, youth services, outreach care workers, psychologists, nurses, speech and language therapists...' (see also Council Conclusions on early school leaving 2015).

We observe however that a number of these models already exist in the European context. For instance, in the Danish context, there are multidisciplinary teams located in and around every school. A key feature of such one stop shop teams is not only a community outreach aspect but also an individual or family outreach approach. A key rationale for multidisciplinary teams located in a common location is to acknowledge that complex multifaceted needs require a

multidimensional response. Another is to avoid disparate services 'passing on bits of the child' (Edwards & Downes 2013). One such community based one stop shop that involves a multidisciplinary team engaged in family outreach and working in and around schools is Familibase, Ballyfermot, Dublin. Moreover, a range of examples of community based lifelong learning centres exist across Europe and can combine nonformal with formal education options (Downes 2011).

A number of examples of multidisciplinary, community based family support centres are available in European contexts.

An example is the SPIL centre in Eindhoven,,: The municipality of Eindhoven has chosen for a family support policy based on multifunctional services directly linked to primary schools in these SPIL Centres. This choice had been made based on the principle of the early detection of children at risk as early as possible and as close to the family as possible. The main reason for this is that schools, day care centres and kindergartens are places with the best access to 'find' children at risk and their parents (Eurochild 2011, p.21.

Another example is also the General Learning Centres (Általános Művelődési Központ, ÁMK) from Hungary. They existed from the 1960's until 2010. A place where usually the local cultural centre, library, sports centre and very often the kindergarten and primary school existed under one roof and under one leader. They were typical in smaller settlement and

strong communities in big cities like living areas of a large factory. They offered services for adults - courses, hobby clubs, often in cooperation with the main employer of the area.

Latvia has another interesting example on ways to transforming schools into Multifunctional Community Learning Centres (Aija Tuna 2014). The goal of this initiative is to prevent threatening social disintegration by supporting revival and development of (small) schools and multifunctional community centres in economically and socially depressed areas. Demographic decline, growing migration and other factors resulted in small rural schools to be put under the threat of closing as the number of students was decreasing bringing in schools fewer funds for sustaining education process. At the same time the quality of education in these schools in general, as measured according to the formal learning outcomes, was questioned. The solution was to open up schools, and while maintaining and expanding typical functions of schools, they added adult education activities, specific services for young children and their families, activities supporting entrepreneurship and increasing employability potential with the help of building partnerships and civic participation.

We observe other trends towards such community centers also in the scout movements where for example in Lithuania there has been regular usage of school facilities during weekends for extracurricular activities or just as a space for youth organisations to run their activities, to assembly and design new strategies. Similar examples are taking place in Malta where volunteering weeks

are organised in schools on regular basis providing space for non-formal and informal learning for young people.

This approach resonates strongly with the Commission Recommendation (2013), Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage which explicitly seeks to 'enhance family support' and 'promote quality, community-based care' as part of a common challenge to combat the abject effects of poverty and social exclusion in education. Basically, such a centre is a 'one-stop shop' where a range of vital services across health and education are available in an accessible local location to engage marginalised families:

For example Nordrhein-Westfalen state programme Familienzentrum has been launched by the government in order to develop up to 3,000 children's day-care facilities into family centres by the year 2012. It is an evidence informed joint project of the state government, local authorities (youth welfare offices) and non-governmental organisations. An ever increasing number of parents benefit from the family centres because these centres offer excellent care and education plus counselling and support to children and parents. Family centres are designed to strengthen parenting skills as well as to improve compatibility of working life and family life. Acting as the hub of a network of family and child welfare services, the family centres offer parents and their children advice, information and assistance in all phases of life at an early stage (Eurochild 2011, p.6).

Between 2006 and 2012 approx. 3,000 of the

total 9,000 child care centres in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) are being developed into certified "Familienzentren" (family centres). Family and adult centres are designed to bundle services for families in the local community. The concept of the state programme "Familienzentrum NRW" acknowledges the significance of early support and intervention for children and families (Eurochild 2011, p.44) Eurochild (2011) argue for such family support centres to be universally available: (Eurochild 2011, p.10).

In a climate of scarcity of resources there is also a compelling argument to target such centres to areas of highest need, be it early childhood services in diverse forms, parental empowerment for early school leaving prevention, provision of non-formal learning opportunities, engagement with community through volunteering, widening the extracurricular to offer better support and more diverse learning outcomes, to support local community's needs for better employment or recreation. It is to be recognised that such local based community, multidisciplinary 'one stop shop' centres require substantial investment but also that a lot can be done with existing infrastructures that can be adapted to these new ways. A further reason for a targeted approach is to a) be sensitive to issues of location and territory for families in areas experiencing high levels of socio-economic marginalisation and b) acknowledge that unless active efforts are made to ensure that such community centres relate to the needs, experiences and lives of those experiencing socio-economic exclusion, then those groups at highest levels of need for support will not attend such services.

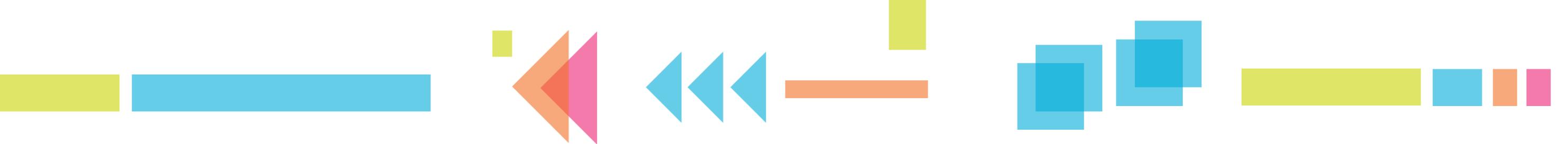
There is a need to examine the strategic potential for establishing a number of such one stop shop community based multidisciplinary teams on the basis of lifelong learning centres across European contexts of high poverty. The question would also be asked of the potential for combining community lifelong learning centres with such multidisciplinary teams as part of a community based one stop shop to meet the needs of communities experiencing high levels of socio-economic exclusion.

Discussing the potential of a community based one stop shop also requires reflection on its impact on all aspects of Europe's education systems. Psifidou (2017) acknowledges from Cedefop's research on early leaving from VET (2016) that:

- Active outreach approach is needed to reach early leavers from education and training;
- Multidisciplinary teams have been key to address potential early leavers with complex multifaceted kinds of needs;
- Intergenerational learning is an untapped human capital;
- Complementarity between formal and non-formal education system allows an holistic approach of personal development.

Potentially, the added value of the one shop stop includes (Psifidou 2017) :

- Stopping the fragmentation of services;
- Preventing individuals "falling through the net";
- Helping individuals in need to build up trust;
- Strengthening families and communities' role and contribution in



education;

- Ensuring accessibility (e.g. for minority groups);
- Providing Flexibility (to select support services needed);
- Placing ECEC, compulsory education and VET within a LLL framework supporting development of people's soft skills;
- Combining informal, non-formal and formal education including VET;
- Making use of shared public infrastructures to its best potential.

Combining community based lifelong learning centres with community based multidisciplinary teams (linked with schools) in 'One stop shops' offers a range of potential benefits for quality and inclusive education for all. It combines the strengths based, welcoming and non-threatening approach of community lifelong learning centres, with colocated multidisciplinary teams built around needs of those with high, complex needs. The community lifelong learning centre dimension can act as a gateway service within co-located teams, where some attending the lifelong learning sessions may receive additional supports if needed, such as emotional, social and multicultural counselling, family supports, volunteering opportunities etc. Other key features of a combined model as a One Stop Shop are:

- Continuity of support over time, Flexibility of levels of support, Tailored to levels of need and not simply prepackaged programmes
- Outreach: Reaches groups missed by prepackaged programmes, including through home visit family support outreach

- Drop-in dimensions
- Peer supports over time
- Go beyond 'passing on bits of the child' (Edwards & Downes 2013) so that referrals of families and children can take place within a team based approach in a common location to help address the fragmentation of the existing support services.

An outreach approach to parental and community (society) involvement for schools and municipalities requires active efforts to engage with groups in contexts where they feel most comfortable, such as in their homes and local community based contexts. This requires a sensitivity to location and territory (Downes & Maunsell 2007; Downes 2011a) which ensures that the physical location of outreach efforts are not in places alien to the parents who are experiencing structural and systematic socio-economic marginalisation. In communities experiencing high levels of social and economic exclusion, there needs to be neutral spaces where a range of groups can feel comfortable and professionals may not often be aware of local mindsets, territories and divisions with regard to location.

It has already been highlighted that the report of the EU Commission Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving (2013) explicitly refers to the need for schools and services to engage in outreach to marginalised parents. An individual outreach approach is especially relevant to those parents and families at highest level of need (indicated prevention). In the words of Carpentieri et al., (2011):

As a method of providing services to families, home visiting has an extensive

pedigree, not only in health and social services but also in education (Bryant and Wasik, 2004). Advantages of home visiting include the fact that is family focused, meeting parents on their own terms in their own homes at times suitable for their 30 own schedules. Home visitors can gain a great deal of information about the child's home learning environment and cultural and/or socio-economic issues that may impact on the child's literacy development. Home visitors can identify and potentially build on family strengths uncovered on visits that may not be evident in classrooms or centres, particularly if parents lack confidence in educational settings (p.103).

A community based outreach approach may also be needed for groups of parents at moderate risk (selected prevention). Outreach must also be firmly distinguished from mere information based efforts to reach socio-economically marginalised adults.

For example the Munich municipality has established community education centres, a Bildungslokale, as part of an outreach approach to engaging migrant groups, with approximately 90% of attendees being from migrant background. There are currently 6 Bildungslokale running with 4 more are accepted to be opened in the next 2 years. The age profile is mainly between 20 - 40 years. These offer a range of courses. For therapy, family support services are offered through special social and youth services, which

work together with the Bildungslokale to cooperate in a close way.

Putting the concept of Community Lifelong Learning Centres into operation also requires reflection on the physical spaces and infrastructure that can be used for fulfilling such a purpose. The discussion of how to upgrade and make best use of education infrastructure has recently come to the fore at the EU level, notably in the 2018 report by the High-Level Task Force on Investing in Social Infrastructure in Europe. This report refers to the scenario of "broaden(ing) the concept of education infrastructure to encompass a range of more flexible options" where the school becomes a "learning centre of a local community" making the space and resources available to all potential learners and bringing important social returns on investment (p42).

Thus, investing in CLLCs as an innovative solution for integrated community-based service provision and learning opportunities is also underpinned by an economic rationale - the same infrastructure may be adapted and utilised to cater for the needs of several target groups. Backed by the findings of the report by the High-Level Task Force, the concept of CLLCs should therefore be treated as an opportune target for EU funding programmes, including the InvestEU programme 2021-2027, succeededly the Investment Plan for Europe or "Juncker Plan", which will seek to place greater priority on social infrastructure investment than is currently the case - although, evidently, this should not negate the possibility of pilot funding for such Centres before 2021.



EXEMPLIFYING «LEARNING FOR WELL-BEING»

The life-long, life-broad, equitable and community-wide approach to education advocated in this paper invokes the 'Learning for Well-being' paradigm (O'Toole 2016). 'Learning for well-being' principles will – as described below -- enable lifelong learning community centres to achieve a number of goals with long lasting and multifaceted impact in the society:

1. A **living systems** perspective encompasses humans within all elements of their environments and strives for a dynamic wholeness which ensures true well-being along the life course – in contrast to the mechanistic fragmentation that now challenges individuals, families, schools, communities and societies.

2. The **unique potential** of each individual can be nurtured, within a specific community context where the life of each member can unfold with purpose, meaning and direction.

3. **Generative diversity** - within and across the communities that compose a society -- encourages richly plural perspectives and multiple expressions that offer ways to address the difference between people and communities with respectful awareness.

4. **Emphasis on relationships and processes**, as well as on outcomes, stimulates engagement and negotiation with others in mutually respectful and rewarding ways that enhance the ability to see from others' perspectives, and affirms that children and adults can work as competent partners.

5. The **engaged participation** of everyone concerned involves people in decisions that have varying impact on their lives, especially within marginalized communities and among vulnerable individuals.

6. **Nested systems** recognized as influencing one another will provide opportunities for different sectors and disciplines to work together across 'silos,' notably in education, health and welfare. Individuals, groups, organizations, communities and institutions will be stimulated to develop their capacities within competent systems, building continuity from early childhood through school education (Gordon and Ionescu 2018) to the education of adults.

7. **Feedback and self-organization** will ensure measuring what matters for the well-being and sustainability of people, communities and societies.

The "well-being" dimension of learning is becoming key in today's society. Learning plays an important role in improving the quality of people's lives, in particular the most deprived. Research shows that countries that invested in health and education decades ago have shown outstanding progress in social mobility (OECD 2016). This adds further weight to the argument for investing in CLLCs as holistic spaces that promote well-being and as a compelling example of how to modernise education systems for the benefit of all.



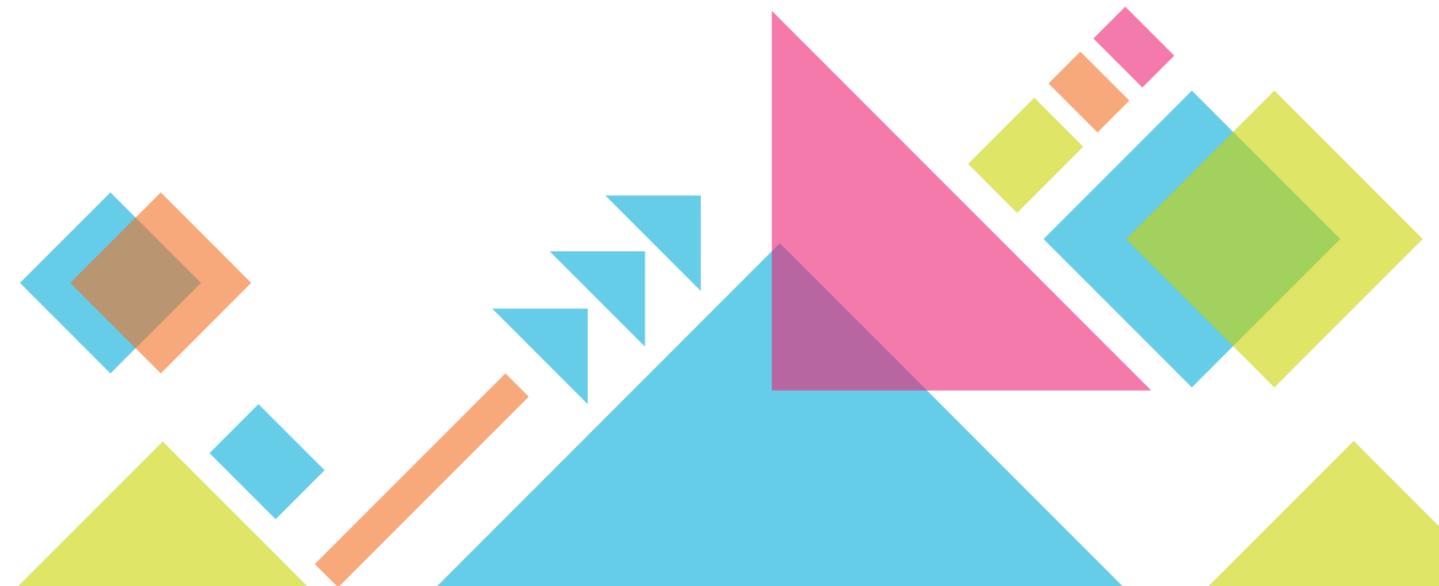
KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In the current EU landscape with ongoing discussions and negotiations for the next EU budget Multi Financial Framework 2021-2027, LLLP seizes the opportunities to call for an early intervention in people's life by investing in Community based Lifelong Learning Centers with multidisciplinary teams.

Following the launch of a new European Commission led Thematic Working Group in the framework of the current ET2020 on Early Childhood Education and Care, the Lifelong Learning Platform seizes the opportunity to draw attention on the need for a European response to early intervention in people's development using the potential of various learning opportunities and environments. Such call is fully in line with recent

developments across Europe and the need to deliver on a Social Europe as proclaimed in 2017 by Member States. EU policies and initiatives support such ambition but haven't yet thought of concrete enough solutions. This is why we propose the LLL community centers with multidisciplinary teams as one of the many possible solutions which truly encompasses the social dimension.

There is a need for coordinated actions at EU level to support Member States in establishing lifelong learning systems. The ILO report on Future of Work 2018 states the states that investment in learning at an early age facilitates learning at later stages in life and is in turn linked to intergenerational social mobility, expanding the choices of future generations.





BIBLIOGRAPHY

Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J., Vorhaus, J. (2011). Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development. London: NRDC, Institute of Education. Report for European Commission, DG EAC.

Cedefop (2016). *Leaving education early: putting vocational education and training centre stage. Volume I: investigating causes and extent, and Volume II: evaluating policy impact.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper; No 57.

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on Inclusion in Diversity to achieve a High Quality Education For All (2017/C 62/02)

Downes, P. (2011). *Multi/Interdisciplinary Teams for Early School Leaving Prevention: Developing a European Strategy Informed by International Evidence and Research.* NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training), Brussels: European Commission

Downes, P. (2011). *Community Based Lifelong Learning Centres: Developing a European Strategy Informed by International Evidence and Research.* NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training), Brussels: European Commission

Downes, P. & Maunsell, C. (2007). Count us in: Tackling early school leaving in South West Inner City Dublin, An integrated response. Dublin: South Inner City Community Development Association (SICCDA) & South Inner City Drugs Task Force

Edwards, A. & Downes, P., *Alliances for Inclusion: Developing Cross-sector Synergies and Inter-Professional Collaboration in and around Education.* EU Commission NESET (Network of Experts on Social Aspects of Education and Training) Report, 2013

Eurochild (2011). The role of local authorities in parenting support. Family and Parenting Support Thematic Working Group Round Table Report. Brussels: Eurochild.

European Commission Recommendation (2013). Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage. 20.2.2013 C (2013) 778 final.

European Commission, 'Reducing early school leaving: Key messages and policy support', *Final Report of the Thematic Working Group on Early School Leaving*, 2013.

European Commission, 'A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving. Policy messages', Education & Training ET 2020, Brussels, 2015.

EU COUNCIL, *Council Conclusions of 23 November 2015 on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school (14441/15).*

Fransen, L., del Bufalo, G. & Reviglio, E. (2018) *Boosting Investment in Social Infrastructure in Europe: Report of the High-Level Task Force on Investing in Social Infrastructure in Europe.* Luxembourg: Publications Office. Discussion Paper 074. January 2018.

Frazer, H. (2017). Invited Presentation. *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures, National Advisory Council Roundtable on Child Poverty*, Dublin, June 22, 2017.

Gordon, J., Ionescu, M. (2018), *Towards systems competent for nurturing children's holistic development from birth through school: Coherence and Continuity.* Brussels: Learning for Well-being Foundation.

O'Toole, L. (2016) 'Cultivating capacities: A description of the Learning for Well-being Approach to Core Practices,' Chapter 2 in *Improving the Quality of Childhood in Europe: Volume 6*, Alliance for Childhood, Brussels.

Psifidou, I. (2017) Invited Presentation, Roundtable on 'One Stop Shop' Community based Services Combining Multidisciplinary Teams and Community Lifelong Learning Centres, Educational Disadvantage Centre, Institute of Education, Dublin City University, September 20, 2017.

Aija Tūna Initiative „Change Opportunities for Schools”, Soros Foundation – Latvia (SFL)

For further information please contact: policy@lllplatform.eu

