

## Italy: case 1 (Early Childhood education and care in Emilia-Romagna)

<p><b>Period:</b> March-October 2016</p> <p><b>Target population:</b> Young children and their families, early years professionals (educators, pedagogical coordinators) and service providers, local administrators responsible for the governance and funding of the ECEC system at municipal and regional level.</p> <p><b>Life stage:</b> Early childhood</p> <p><b>Investment theme:</b> Early childhood education and care (ECEC)</p>
<p><b>Short description of the program:</b></p> <p>The Report presents the results of an eight-month research program undertaken under the INNOSI Project framework, pursuing three main <i>objectives</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- exploring in which ways ECEC services can be beneficial to a wide array of actors – children, families and local communities – who were directly involved in the project;</li><li>- collecting knowledge on how quality and accessibility of ECEC services could be improved through integrated governance (partnership between public, private NFP and community stakeholders);</li><li>- analysing, through a case study approach, the integrated system of ECEC services in Emilia-Romagna Region as an example of good practice of Social Innovation, with particular reference to social economy initiatives that pro-actively engage with local actors, including children, their families and the communities in which they are living.</li></ul> <p>Three cases of innovative ECEC services were selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• “<i>Filonido</i>”, a daycare centre attended by children aged 0-3 and located in the city of Bologna;</li><li>• “<i>Girotondo intorno al Bosco</i>”, a small educational group (home-based) attended by 0-3 aged children and located in the rural community of Serramazzoni on the modenese Appenine;</li><li>• “<i>La Gbianella</i>” &amp; “<i>L’albero delle meraviglie</i>”, an integrated service encompassing a daycare centre (attended by 0-3 aged children) and a centre for children and parents (attended by 2-5 aged children and their families) located in the small town of Comacchio.</li></ul>
<p><b>Policy Area:</b> Education and Family Support measures</p>
<p><b>The legislative and regulatory framework:</b></p> <p><i>European policy framework</i></p> <p>The European Commission has emphasized, based on the analysis of the latest cross-national evidence and discussion with high level experts, that ECEC is beneficial to all: children, families and society at large (see the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education’s study on Quality Education and Care, 2013). Not only ECEC services allow parents to better reconcile family and professional responsibilities, thus encouraging employability. They also help children to unlock their potential and contribute to engaging parents and other family members with related measures to improve parent education and job-related training, thus favouring particularly children from a disadvantaged background - including those from migrant and low income families. In this perspective, the role of ECEC in contributing to the achievement of the objectives set by the flagship 2020 – called “European platform against poverty and social exclusion” – as well as to the achievement of the headline targets of the “EU2020 Strategy” – addressing child poverty and preventing early school leaving – is increasingly acknowledged.</p> <p>According to the EU Commission Communication on Early Childhood Education and Care (COMM 66/2011), improving the quality and accessibility of education systems across the EU is a crucial prerequisite for all aspects of growth. In this context, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a critical foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability. Assuming a complementary role to that of the family (which remains central), educational and care services in early childhood have a profound and lasting impact that measures taken in the later stages of life are not able to achieve. Based on the premises that high quality ECEC is beneficial for all children – but particularly for those with a socio-economically disadvantaged or migrant background – it has been recognised by the Council of the European Union that providing high quality ECEC is just as important as ensuring its availability and affordability (Council Conclusions on ECEC, 2011, p. 4-5). In this regard, particular attention needs to be devoted to issues such as environment and infrastructure, staffing, the curriculum, governance and quality assurance. It has furthermore been stressed, that a systemic and more integrated approach to ECEC services at local, regional and national level involving all the relevant stakeholders - including families - is required, together with close cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors, such as education,</p>

culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice (COMM 66/2011; Thematic Working Group on ECEC, 2014).

Thematic Working Group on ECEC (2014) *Proposal for key-principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care*. Brussels: European Commission.

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/archive/documents/ecec-quality-framework_en.pdf)

#### *Legislative and regulatory framework in Italy*

##### National Level:

Law n. 1044 - 6 December 1971 –Piano quinquennale per l’istituzione di asili-nido comunali con il concorso dello Stato (Five-year plan for the institution of municipal nurseries (0-3 years) with the collaboration of the State).

Legge 285/1997: “Disposizioni per la promozione di diritti e di opportunità per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza” (Legge Turco)

Legge 328/2000: "Legge quadro per la realizzazione del sistema integrato di interventi e servizi sociali"

##### Regional level (for Emilia-Romagna):

a) Emilia-Romagna Region – Regional Law n. 1 - 10 January 2000, “Norme in materia di servizi educativi per la prima infanzia e successive modifiche” [Legislation regarding early childhood educational services and further amendments] (L.R 14 aprile 2004 n. 8; L.R 29 dicembre 2006 n. 20; L.R 22 dicembre 2011 n. 21; L.R 22 giugno 2012 n. 6);

b) Deliberation of the Regional Assembly N. 85 - 25 July 2012 – “Direttiva in materia di requisiti strutturali ed organizzativi dei servizi educativi per la prima infanzia” (Directive regarding structural and organisational requirements for early childhood educational services).

c) Deliberation of the Regional Assembly N. 1089 - 30 July 2012 – “Linee guida sperimentali per la predisposizione del progetto pedagogico e della metodologia di valutazione nei servizi educativi per la prima infanzia” (Experimental guidelines for the elaboration of the pedagogical project and the evaluation methodology of early childhood educational services).

##### **Main actors:**

Young children and their families; early years professionals (educators, pedagogical coordinators); service providers (public, nonprofit and forprofit); local administrators responsible for the governance and funding of the ECEC system at municipal and regional level.

##### **Innovative elements:**

From the case study analysed emerged that no-one model fits all. Rather, the key success factors for increasing the *availability* as well as the *affordability* of ECEC provision seems to reside in the *flexible combination of different funding sources* coming from the public sector – as well as from the private NFP sector and private sources – within a *comprehensive framework of public policies that responsively addresses the needs identified within each community while striving for universalism*. In this sense, the case studies analysed provided exemplary cases of how a diversified ECEC provision serving the diverse needs of children and families within local communities could be realised with a special focus on accessibility and economic sustainability.

Beside addressing the issues of sustainability and accessibility, the case studies shed light on how the *pedagogical quality* of ECEC provision and *its ongoing improvement could be nurtured through the co-creation and sharing of knowledge, expertise and experiences that is generated by innovative forms of public governance* (local and regional networks, partnerships with parents, coalitions for policy advocacy, inter-agency collaboration). In this sense, the evidence gathered from the case study analysis underline that the **QUALITY** of educational and care practices enacted in early childhood settings is more likely to be the **RESULT OF JOINT ACTIONS INSCRIBED WITHIN A COMPETENT SYSTEM** rather than the direct consequence of practitioners’ individual competences.

In the cases of social innovation that were examined, the key-factors contributing to the successful development of high quality ECEC practices are connected to:

- the elaboration of a regulatory framework ensuring an even level of structural quality across ECEC services in the Region in relation to: coordination, mentoring and guidance of professionals at team level, practitioners’ joint work opportunities and non-contact time for participating in collective

meetings, in-house professional development, action-research projects and meeting with parents;

- a shared pedagogical vision that actively encourages the participation of families and community stakeholders to the management of ECEC institutions: in this sense, the fact that early childhood institutions are conceived as a public good implies that parents are perceived as partners rather than as end-users ('service approach') or costumers ('private business approach');
- the presence of a coordination infrastructure and of participatory networks at municipal, provincial and regional level which sustain bottom-up innovation and the scaling up of successful initiatives through the documentation and exchange of good practices.
- a strong focus on continuing professional development activities that are organised in the form of 'laboratories for social change' – empowering ECEC professionals – rather than as 'expert led training' aimed to the acquisition of predefined skills;
- inter-agency cooperation among professionals and institutions operating across different sectors (eg. healthcare, social welfare, education) for the welfare of young children and their families at all levels of the system (from the local community level to the inter-departmental collaboration at regional level);
- policy decision-making processes that are carried out in close consultation with ECEC professionals – such as the pedagogical coordination networks (CPP) – with community advocacy groups and with other relevant stakeholders.

In particular, the analysis of the data collected through interviews and documentary sources emphasise the CRUCIAL ROLE played by pedagogical coordinators as SYSTEM FIGURES. By constantly connecting – in their everyday work – the educational and social needs emerging at local level (regular meeting with ECEC staff and families, services' supervision) with pedagogical practice innovation through guidance and professional development initiatives, the coordinators become catalysers of change both at the level of ECEC services and at the level of local policy advocacy processes. In this regard, the findings from the cases studies highlight that it is precisely the mutual interaction of bottom-up and top-down innovation processes – characterising the connection between experimental pedagogical practices and responsive ECEC policies in E-R – to be key-factors of success of local social innovation initiatives.

**Links to to key policy documents, previous research, news reports, etc.**

[http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/temi/politiche-educative/copy\\_of\\_politiche-educative](http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/temi/politiche-educative/copy_of_politiche-educative)

<http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/infanzia-adolescenza/approfondimenti/progetti-di-ricerca/progetti-di-ricerca>

**Photos:**

FILONIDO:

<https://www.societadolce.it/nidi/?id=321>

<https://www.societadolce.it/progettispeciali/vivere-il-giardino/>

GIROTONDO INTORNO AL BOSCO:

[http://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi\\_educativi/servizi\\_infanzia\\_2013\\_2014.aspx](http://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi_educativi/servizi_infanzia_2013_2014.aspx)

[https://get.google.com/albumarchive/107671688249990388335/album/AF1QipPQruLFLGFwncvqouwrDsu4HgFlgd5GUQj5LOQQ/AF1QipNTsVBhotV-uhuGX114-GhINh\\_1GcC7K8rclrZr?source=pwa&authKey=CIS7z7n7pKHFmQE](https://get.google.com/albumarchive/107671688249990388335/album/AF1QipPQruLFLGFwncvqouwrDsu4HgFlgd5GUQj5LOQQ/AF1QipNTsVBhotV-uhuGX114-GhINh_1GcC7K8rclrZr?source=pwa&authKey=CIS7z7n7pKHFmQE)

[https://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi\\_educativi/servizi\\_infanzia\\_2013\\_2014.aspx](https://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi_educativi/servizi_infanzia_2013_2014.aspx)

[https://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi\\_educativi/servizi\\_infanzia\\_2013\\_2014.aspx](https://www.comune.serramazzone.mo.it/comune/servizi_educativi/servizi_infanzia_2013_2014.aspx)

ALBERO DELLE MERAVIGLIE & LA GABBIANELLA:

<http://www.comune.comacchio.fe.it/index.php/I-Servizi/Pubblica-istruzione/Centro-Infanzia-L-albero-delle-Meraviglie>

<http://www.comune.comacchio.fe.it/index.php/I-Servizi/Pubblica-istruzione/Centro-Infanzia-L-albero-delle-Meraviglie>

<http://www.coopgirogirotondo.com/category/infanzia/>