

CATALYSING CHANGE

How Places to Grow
Shapes Tomorrow
Through Early Childhood
Development

Places to Grow
Report – 2025

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Adriana Drugová, Agata D’Addato, Annamaria Cosatti, Boglárka Bata, Charmaine Bonello, Daniel Prokop, Dennis Arends, Diana Michaelis, Éva Deák, Ivanka Shalapatova, Ivett Kovács, James Cairns, Justyna Turek, Kateřina Sirotková, Lieve De Bosscher, Livia Valkova, Ľubica Dorková, Luc Kordas, Lucie Plešková, Marek Pour, Maria Herczog, Markus Janzen, Martin Faltejsek, Martina Svekusova, Michał Kociszewski, Michala Lipkova, Mihaela Ionescu, Miroslav Klempar, Nathan Koblintz, Petr Pabian, Roland Harwood, Sheena Elaine K., Shoshana Chovan, Stanislav Daniel, Thomas Moser, Veronika Miškech Fričová, Vladislav Matej

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR PARTNERS:

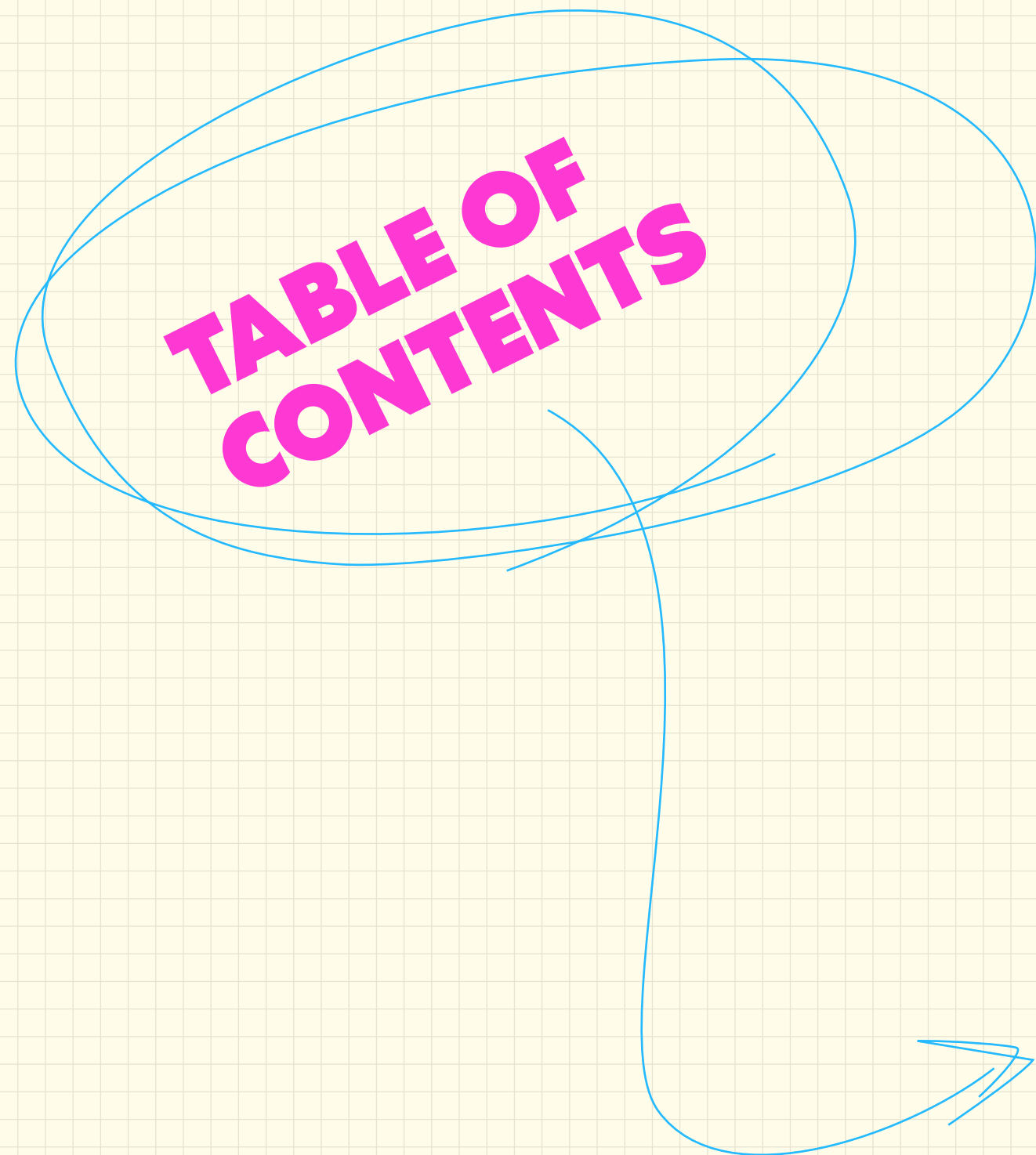


EPIGRAPH

“REGARDLESS OF WHERE THEY ARE BORN, YOUNG CHILDREN HAVE THE RIGHT TO OPTIMAL CONDITIONS FOR THEIR FULL HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT. IN PARTICULAR, THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS OF CHILDREN MUST BE SUPPORTED TO GIVE THEM A FAIR START IN LIFE. QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND SUPPORT IS THE FOUNDATION FOR A SUCCESSFUL FUTURE FOR ALL OF US.”

Eva Pavlová, First Lady of the Czech Republic





CHECK OUT OUR SUMMARY SHEET



INTRODUCTION	6
LETTER FROM JAMES CAIRNS	7
TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	8
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	9
OUR IMPACT	12
PART 1: CZECH REPUBLIC	24
ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES	26
OUR APPROACH IN ACTION	28
PART 2: HUNGARY	36
ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES	38
OUR APPROACH IN ACTION	40
PART 3: SLOVAKIA	44
ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES	46
OUR APPROACH IN ACTION	48
CONCLUSION	62
REFERENCES	64



INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development (ECD) is fundamental to shaping a sustainable and equitable future. A child's first 1,000 days significantly influence their health, education, income, and human capital, ultimately affecting their life trajectory and our society.

The economic argument is urgent and compelling. As highlighted in the esteemed medical journal [The Lancet \(2017\)](#), failing to support ECD can result in substantial financial losses, including **AN ANNUAL INCOME LOSS OF ABOUT 25%** of an individual's average adult income. At the national level, countries may forfeit an amount equivalent to up to **TWICE** their current health expenditures. According to Professor Heckman and the [Heckman curve \(2023\)](#), every \$1 USD invested in ECD can yield between **\$6 AND \$17 USD IN ECONOMIC RETURNS**.

Beyond its economic implications, insufficient investment in ECD weakens health systems, democracy, and even climate resilience globally. Recognised as one of the most effective pathways to achieving the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#), **ECD IS A POWERFUL LEVER FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE**.



As a systems catalyst agency, Holis Lab not only recognises the importance of quality and accessible ECD but also actively fosters it. Understanding that ECD is a driving force for broader social transformation, Holis Lab has focused on **SYSTEMS** transformation through the [Places to Grow \(P2G\)](#) program. By identifying and directing existing resources towards systemic outcomes, orchestrating cross-sectoral collaboration, and scaling successful solutions across the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, Holis Lab demonstrates the power of collective action. By strengthening connections between organisations engaged in social services, health, education, advocacy, and research, Holis and P2G cultivate a collaborative community united by a shared vision: to assist every child in realising their potential and contributing to society.

Through national ECD platforms, peer-learning events, Joint Action Fund (JAF) grant projects, and cross-sectoral working groups, P2G brings together diverse stakeholders to drive meaningful change. Holis and the P2G community help build a more effective, integrated, and accessible early childhood development system by tailoring services to each region's needs and facilitating a sense of shared responsibility. Ultimately, this lays the groundwork for breaking poverty cycles, empowering children to reach their potential, and creating a more equitable society.

This report shares the country-specific context of early childhood development, the progress of the P2G program, and concrete evidence of its effectiveness. By examining these outcomes, we aim to inspire and instil hope by demonstrating the program's potential for replication and its broader impact on society.

LETTER FROM JAMES CAIRNS

We know from decades of research across multiple disciplines about the importance of supportive developmental environments to promote the well-being of young children. From the foundational relationships with parents and caregivers to how the built and natural environment affects children in the places where they live, learn, play, and grow, a wide range of experiences and exposures shapes child health and development.

We also know that human development is complex and does not fit neatly into the structures and sectors by which we have often organised our societies. So, to make progress towards the ultimate goal of all children having the opportunity to thrive, it is essential to engage many different actors and institutions in efforts to support young children, helping them to understand the science of development and to see how what they do can have an impact on young children, their families, and their communities.

As important as good quality individual programs and services are for children and families, they alone are not sufficient in creating and sustaining supportive developmental environments. To succeed requires taking a systems-level approach while also fostering practical collaboration and shared learning in specific contexts. However, finding initiatives and resources focused at this level is often challenging.

What excites me about Places to Grow is that it explicitly aims to catalyse cooperation among many actors and foster learning across sectors and the three countries, which can accelerate progress towards helping all children thrive. Through its collaborative approach, Places to Grow has strengthened connections, advanced integrated ECD services, and demonstrated the power of collective action.

Throughout this report, you will find examples highlighting how the program has done this work, the progress and impact it has made, the lessons learned, and the potential for broader application.

This work of systems building and collaborative learning is not easy; it is not fast or linear. It is often hard to measure. Holis and the Places to Grow program have taken on this challenge with deep commitment and creativity. They are fostering the relationships and trust among a diverse and growing community of champions that are essential for achieving the kind of transformative change that can improve the health and well-being of children.

I hope that as you read this report, you, too, will feel inspired and look to find your place at the table to sustain and expand a shared commitment in all of our societies to ensure that all children can thrive.



JAMES CAIRNS, SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING, CENTER ON THE DEVELOPING CHILD AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

HOLIS LAB (HOLIS)

Holis Lab is a systems catalyst agency. We bring together diverse perspectives, foster collective action, and drive meaningful impact across complex social challenges. Whether you're looking to bridge divides, strengthen communities, or develop systemic innovations, Holis provides the tools, expertise, and collaborative processes to turn your vision into reality. Holis is an innovation and growth partner of Porticus and coordinator of Places to Grow.

PLACES TO GROW (P2G)

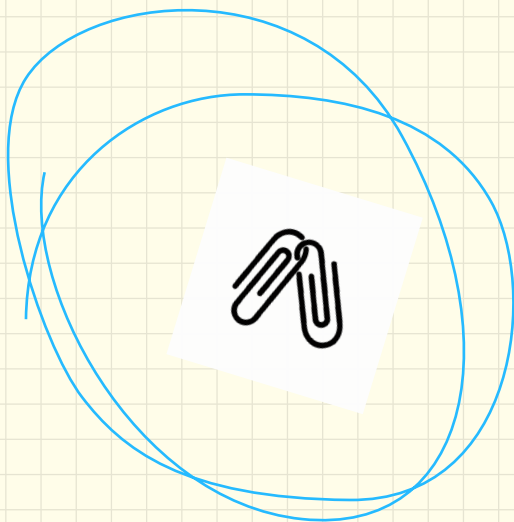
Places to Grow is active in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. This program serves as a catalyst for excellence in early childhood development, education, and care. Strengthening connections between social services, education, advocacy, and research organisations, P2G fosters a collaborative community united by a shared vision: helping every child realise their potential to contribute meaningfully to society.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD) AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

The difference between ECD (Early Childhood Development) and ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) is their scope and comprehensive approach. ECD is a holistic approach that includes children's physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development from birth to age eight. It integrates health, nutrition, play, security, and learning and recognises the interconnectedness of these aspects in a child's development. ECEC refers to the formal education of young children by individuals outside their families or in locations separate from home. (Source: UNESCO)

JOINT ACTION FUND (JAF)

In 2024, Places to Grow launched the **Joint Action Fund**. This grant scheme fosters innovation, learning, and cross-sectoral collaboration to achieve systemic change in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. This flagship initiative is designed to strengthen cooperation between Places to Grow partners and other relevant stakeholders, contributing to the creation of a robust and evolving ECD ecosystem. It provides financial and non-financial support and incorporates peer learning with the community of practice.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past four years, P2G has worked to advance ECD across Central and Eastern Europe. This report showcases our journey—highlighting challenges, success stories, and the thousands of children positively impacted by our collective efforts. Some of our key achievements include:

- **National Platforms:** P2G has supported establishing and expanding national ECD platforms in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. These platforms continue to grow, increasing their reach and impact on children. [\(see here\)](#)
- **Policy Change in Slovakia:** Through the Joint Action Fund (JAF) project with Cesta von, we successfully advocated for Slovak policy changes that secured dedicated financing for ECD. [\(see here\)](#)
- **Systemic Impact in the Czech Republic:** Our collaboration with the Czech platform has led to tangible policy shifts, including stronger ministerial engagement and integration of ECD services within municipalities. [\(see here\)](#)
- **Regional ECD Prioritization:** Thanks to the JAF, the Coordinated Services of ECD in a Selected Locality project [\(see here\)](#) and the ECD Ecosystem Mapping and Visualization project [\(see here\)](#), in Slovakia's Banská Bystrica Region, we were able to elevate ECD as a priority, leading to concrete actions in Jelšava and within regional administration. The Czech ECD Platform has also seen positive results in four municipalities in the Czech Republic through their JAF Project. [\(see here\)](#)
- **High-Level Advocacy:** The P2G Conference played a pivotal role in shaping the ECD agenda. Under the patronage of the First Lady of the Czech Republic, we brought together key experts and stakeholders, including government ministries, to drive progress. [\(see here\)](#)
- **Cross-Border Collaboration:** P2G has fostered a dynamic, cross-border learning network, enabling organisations to share knowledge and strengthen cooperation. [\(see here\)](#)

THESE MILESTONES WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE P2G INITIATIVE. HOLIS LAB HAS EMPOWERED PARTNERS TO DRIVE MEANINGFUL CHANGE FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE BY FACILITATING COORDINATION, KNOWLEDGE-SHARING, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION.



Credit: Tereza Sejkova

OUR IMPACT

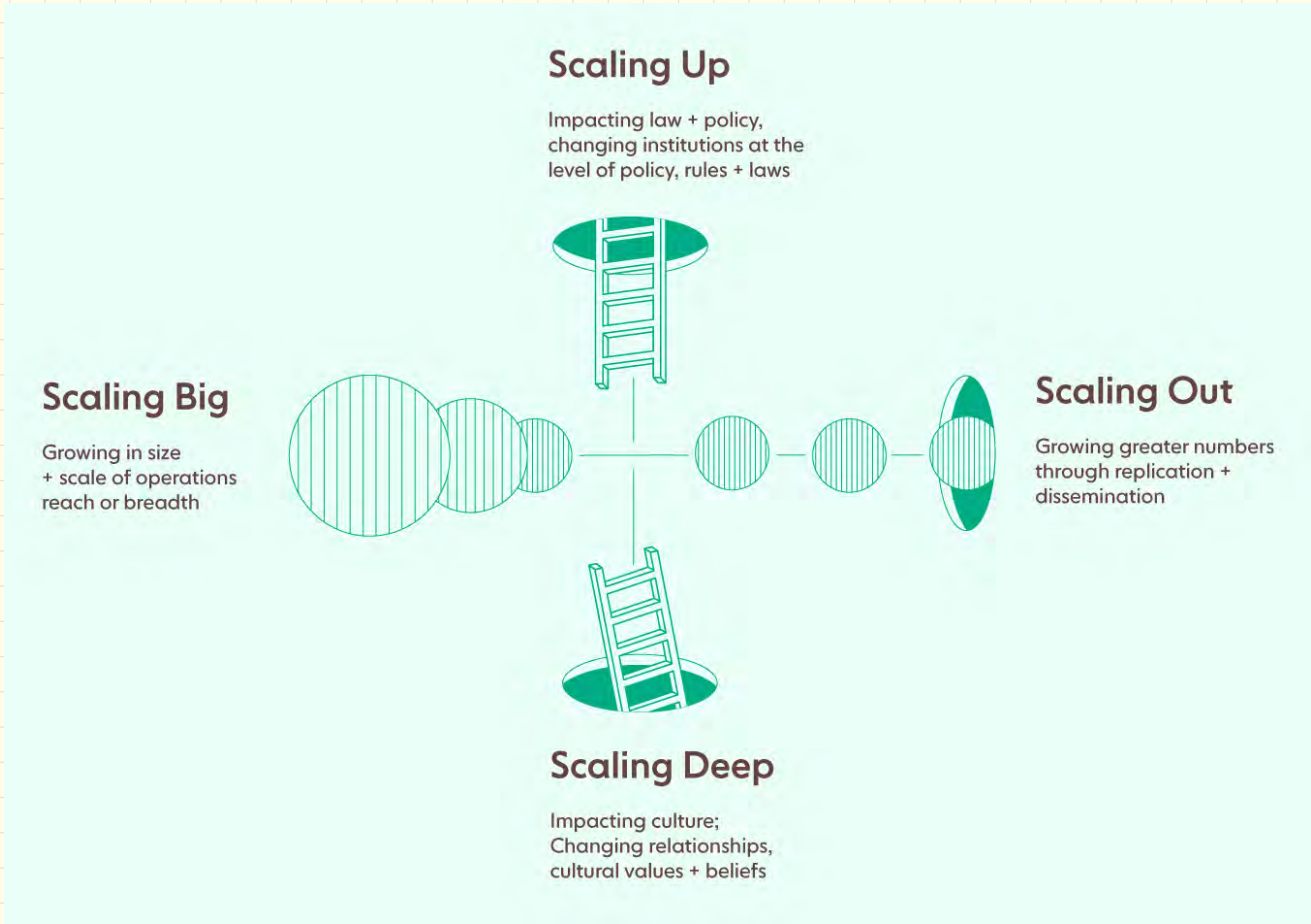


At Holis Lab, we understand that building community, relationships, and trust can often feel ambiguous and intangible. However, we view them as essential tools for achieving systemic change. For Places to Grow, these elements were integral to improving ECD services in high-quality and lasting ways.

As [The Lancet \(2017\)](#) highlights, interdisciplinary solutions are the key to lasting impact. However, creating effective cross-sector partnerships requires significant time, energy, and trust. We have learned that to scale solutions and services successfully, we must disrupt the conventional

growth narrative. Scaling "right" means simultaneously addressing broad, general issues and specific, local needs—scaling out, up, and deep (not just "big").

At Holis, we build the infrastructure for scaling through an active network that shares stories, knowledge, and ideas. We recognise that using a single model for all situations often fails due to distinct local contexts. Holis connects people, ideas, and stories to inspire local, regional and national organisations and institutions, as well as support actions tailored to each place.



Graphic A (Source: [The Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation](#))



Credit: Tereza Sejkova

THE HOLIS LAB APPROACH

How do we do that?

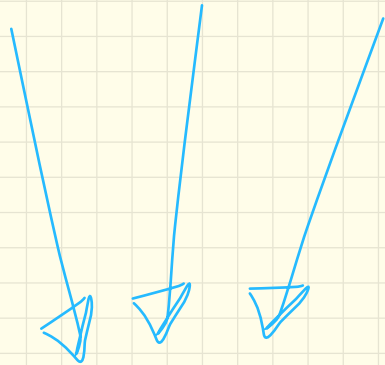
1. WE RECOGNISE THAT THE PATH IS NOT LINEAR.

We recognise that the path to systemic change is not linear. Drawing from David Snowden's [Cynefin framework](#), we understand that working with people is inherently complex. Given the complex and unpredictable nature of these environments, we believe that creating rigid, long-term plans and executing them in the social innovation space is ineffective. This is why we adopted a trial-and-error approach with P2G: we tested different options, evaluated their effectiveness with the group, and adjusted accordingly.

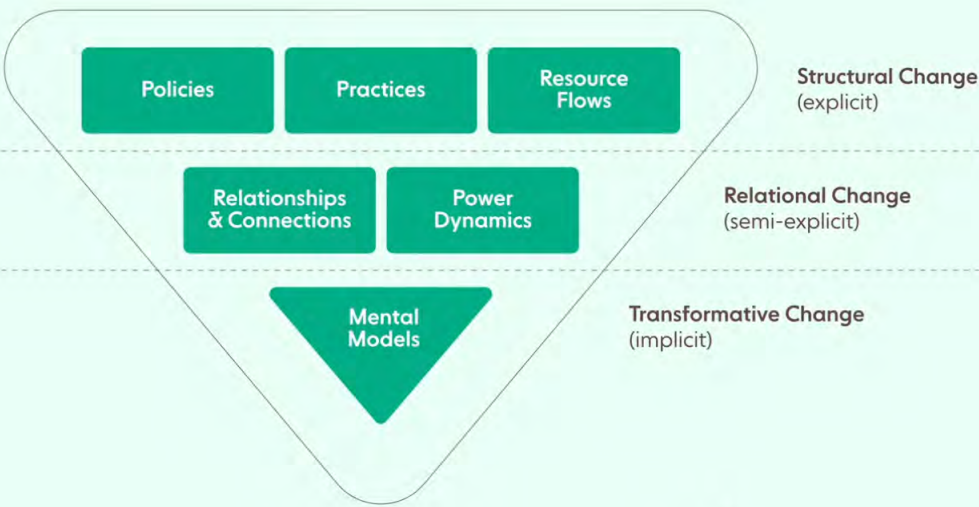
Using the "sensemaking" approach defined by [UNDP Accelerator Labs \(2019\)](#), we systematically analyse complex challenges in real time to inform our decisions. This ensures our strategies align with a changing environment and reveal new development opportunities.

2. WE KNOW WE HAVE TO BUILD THE RIGHT CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE.

We know we have to create the **RIGHT** conditions for change. Change occurs when these conditions align (see Graphic B). By improving these conditions, we can better facilitate the spark of **TRANSFORMATION**. For P2G, we began with **RELATIONAL CHANGE**. Achieving meaningful, long-lasting, and sustainable change requires cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary collaboration to address the core conditions and ultimately transform the system. We must build **INTENTIONAL** cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary relationships and connections, not just any kind of relationships.



Six Conditions of Systems Change



Graphic B (Source: Adapted from [FSG's "The Water of Systems Change"](#))

3. WE FOLLOW THE UNDP'S "PORTFOLIO APPROACH" TO DRIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

First, we define a **NORTH STAR**—a shared vision (see Graphic C). For P2G, we worked with partners to identify ours as a community: *to ensure every child receives attention, care, and opportunities to achieve their full potential*. Every P2G initiative aligns with this vision.

Next, we determine the desired **SYSTEMIC OUTCOMES**—the practices, relationships, and policies that support ECD. These include:

A critical mass in ECD within each country amplifies the voices of organisations in the field.

A learning network of ECD actors to support scaling and coordination.

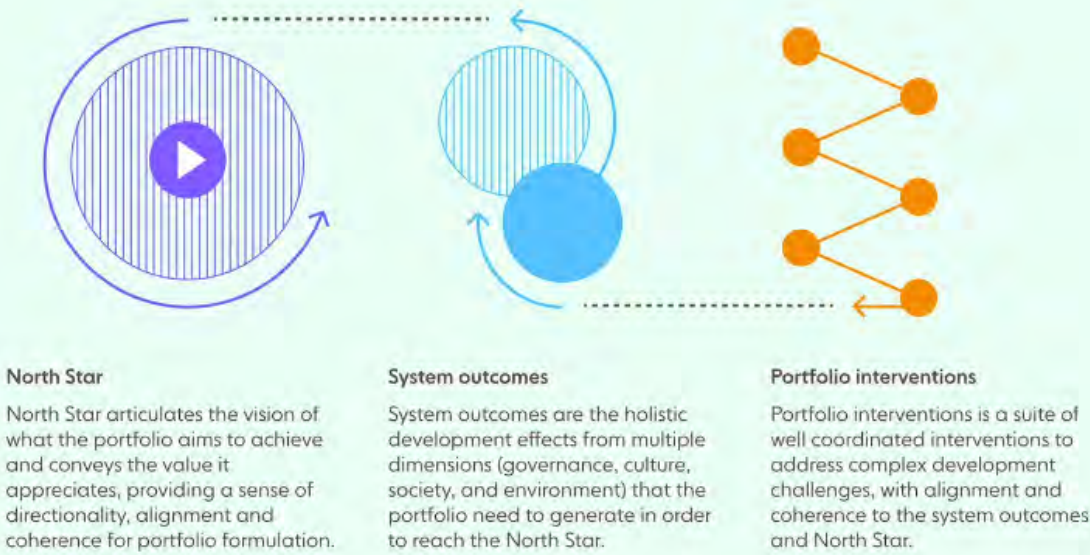
Stronger relationships between the ECD sector and relevant ministries to influence policy changes.

Improved coordination between institutions and organisations that previously operated in silos.

Stronger partnerships with health institutions to integrate ECD into existing healthcare systems.

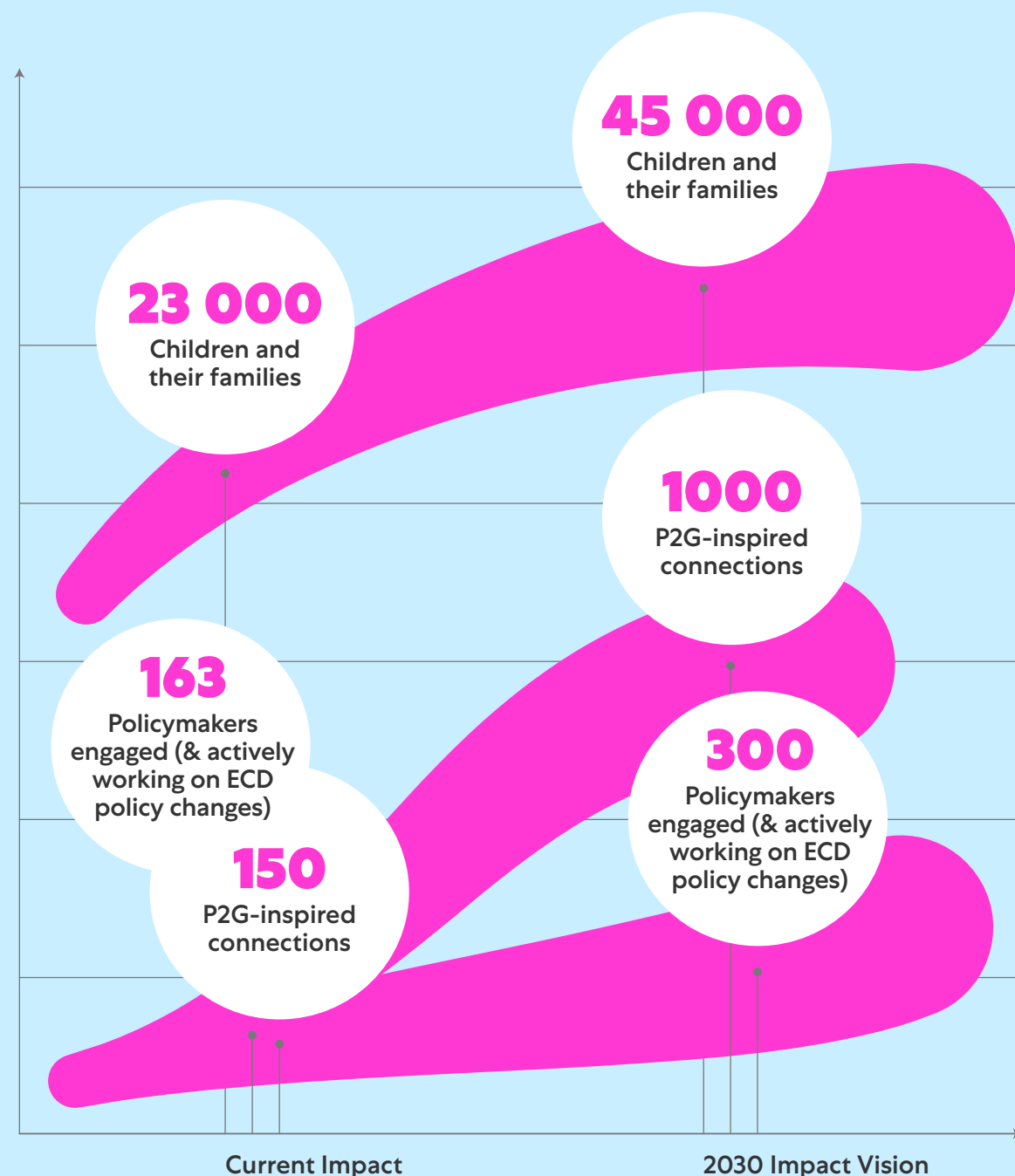
Coordinated interventions drive change, as within the JAF projects, where small projects are strategically directed toward systemic impact. Below, we outline key ways to create the right conditions for progress toward our North Star.

Portfolio architecture



Graphic C (Source: Adapted from [UNDP's "System Change: A Guidebook for Adopting Portfolio Approaches"](#))

PLACES TO GROW OVERALL IMPACT



CATALYSING SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH TRUST, COLLABORATION, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

"HOLIS' STRATEGIC VISION AND SUPPORT HAVE BEEN PIVOTAL TO ADVANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE PLACES TO GROW PROJECT. BY FOSTERING CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION AND PEER LEARNING, HOLIS HAS EMPOWERED ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS TO CREATE MEANINGFUL, LASTING CHANGE."

Markus Janzen, Country Manager for Central and Eastern Europe, Porticus



Everything is relationships—and relationships are everything. As human beings, we work best with people we trust. However, building deep and trusting relationships is increasingly challenging in an era of digitalization, individualization, and information overload. The compartmentalization of educational and professional fields further complicates cross-sectoral relationships. But without a deep and trusted relationship, change won't happen.

Through P2G, Holis Lab has focused on strengthening relationships within our network and across the broader ecosystem. Rather than addressing surface-level issues, we work to transform the root conditions that perpetuate challenges. This is how we create lasting change: this is **SCALING DEEP** (see Graphic A).

Over the past three years, we have built strong, trusting relationships within the ECD community at local, regional, and national levels. We have encouraged experimentation and interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as facilitated coaching and learning opportunities. Through our flagship project and grant program, JAF, we have developed small-scale examples of the whole-child approach and integrated services as practical solutions. We have also gathered best practices for Central and Eastern Europe.

This work also demonstrates how we **SCALE OUT** and **SCALE UP** (see Graphic A). Scaling up involves our advocacy at local, regional, and national levels across three countries. Scaling out happens through our peer learning events, the replication of successful JAF projects, and sharing effective practices with a wider audience.

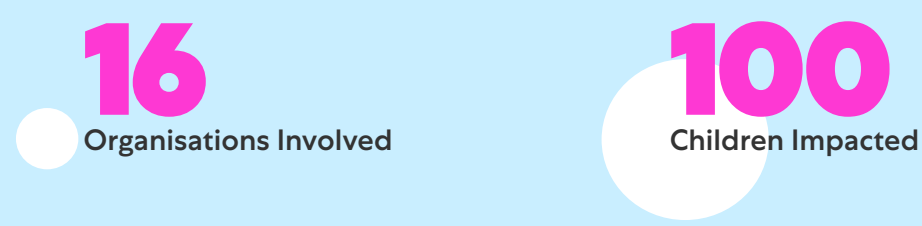
Holis also strongly emphasises serendipity and its role in collaboration and co-creation - and this approach informs everything we do. We intentionally create space for serendipitous encounters—unplanned but valuable interactions that spark new ideas and collaborations. Our in-person and online meetings are open-ended, allowing participants to set the tone and agenda based on their interests and needs. Similarly, our study visits enable P2G partners to exchange insights in a flexible, engaging way. By fostering these organic interactions, we cultivate a culture of innovation and collaboration.

IMPACT OF THE JAF GRANT SCHEME PROJECTS

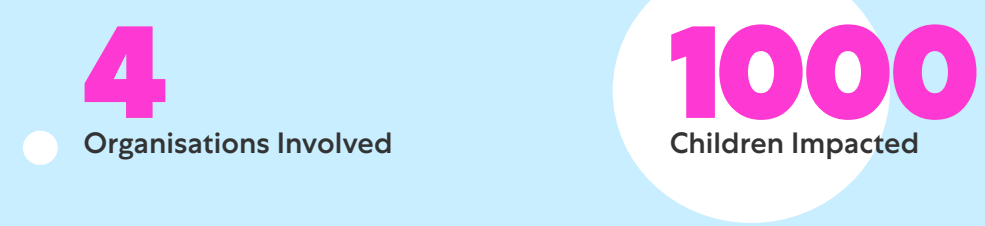
LOCAL INCUBATORS OF ECD:



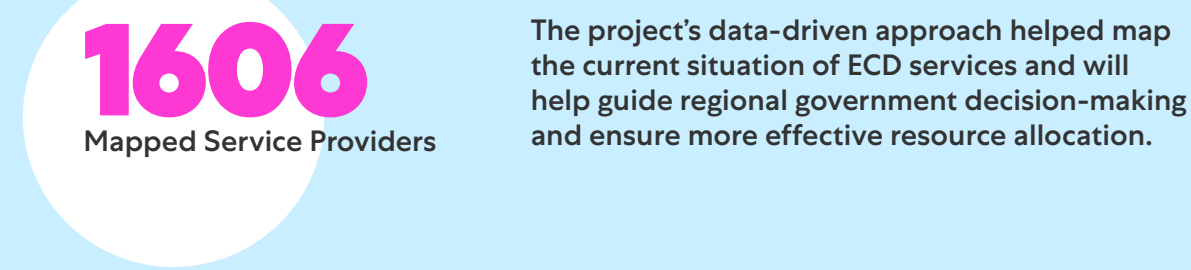
COORDINATED SERVICES OF ECD IN A SELECTED LOCALITY IN THE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA REGION:



TOWARDS IMPROVED QUALITY OF OMAMA AND THE SUBSEQUENT ECD SOCIAL SERVICE:



ECD ECOSYSTEM MAPPING AND VISUALISATION PROJECT IN THE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA REGION:



STRENGTHENING THE REGIONAL ECD ECOSYSTEM

“NOTHING STANDS ALONE. ALL AREAS INTERSECT WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD.”

Kateřina Sirotková, Director, Czech ECD Platform



Every child deserves accessible, high-quality care. However, across Central and Eastern Europe, ECD services remain fragmented, and there is a lack of leadership advocating for their long-term benefits. Coordinated services are key to making this happen.

Therefore, P2G has supported the creation of National ECD Platforms to increase cooperation and influence policy. By fostering relationships and aligning efforts at the national level, we can create a shared vision for systemic change. Advocacy and funding are most effective when stakeholders unite, amplifying their collective voice to drive meaningful policy and investment in ECD. By strengthening national ECD platforms, we are laying the foundation for long-term cooperation, advocacy, and systemic change—this is **“SCALING UP”** (see Graphic A).



Credit: Martin Faltejsek

CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION IN ACTION

"WHAT'S GOOD FOR CHILDREN IS GOOD FOR EVERYONE."

James Cairns, Senior Director for Strategic Engagements and Organizational Learning, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University



In 2024, Holis brought together the state-of-the-art ECD from and to Central and Eastern Europe for the first Places to Grow Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, held **UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF THE FIRST LADY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, EVA PAVLOVÁ**. The conference convened **OVER 130 PROFESSIONALS**—from practitioners to theorists, public and civic sector representatives, policymakers, educational and health institutions, or philanthropic organisations—united by a shared commitment to positively impacting the lives of young children.

P2G's mission is to create an equitable and discrimination-free ECD future by focusing on efforts involving the public and civic sectors. This conference fostered these partnerships through various formats, including keynote speeches, panel discussions, surrounding policy meetings, and networking. At the same time, it showcased our activities and highlighted the collaborative projects from our Joint Action Fund. This one-day event sparked discussions on best practices and catalysed new collaborations across Europe and the USA. This exemplifies how we **"SCALE DEEP"** and **"SCALE OUT"** (see Graphic A).

A joint effort led by Holis in close partnership with Porticus and the P2G program partners, the vision of this event was fueled by our united goal to foster a thriving ECD ecosystem that empowers every child to realise their full potential, hence its slogan: **"SUPPORTING CHILDREN, TRANSFORMING TOMORROW"**.



Credit: Martin Faltejsek

TRANSFORMING ECD NETWORKS THROUGH LEARNING



From the Collective Learning Event, **"Empowering Early Years: Collaborative Projects Enhancing Early Childhood Development"**

Our online **Collective Learning series** started as a way to support P2G members but has grown into a space for sharing knowledge and collaboration among ECD practitioners, NGOs, and other stakeholders—another way we **"SCALE DEEP"**.

These short, engaging online events cover key topics—from building networks to intergenerational learning and advocating for inclusive policies. The series is free and open to all, with recordings available on **Youtube** and key takeaways published in brief articles on **Medium**. Connecting organisations across social services, education, advocacy, and research, these events help strengthen early childhood development in Central and Eastern Europe.



CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED, & NEXT STEPS

"I'M PROUD OF OUR COLLABORATION WITH HOLIS. INITIALLY, WE SOUGHT AN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT EXPERT BUT REALISED WE NEEDED A SKILLED NETWORKER AND FACILITATOR FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY GROUPS. PARTNERING WITH HOLIS WAS THE PERFECT CHOICE."

Stanislav Daniel, Programme Manager,
Porticus



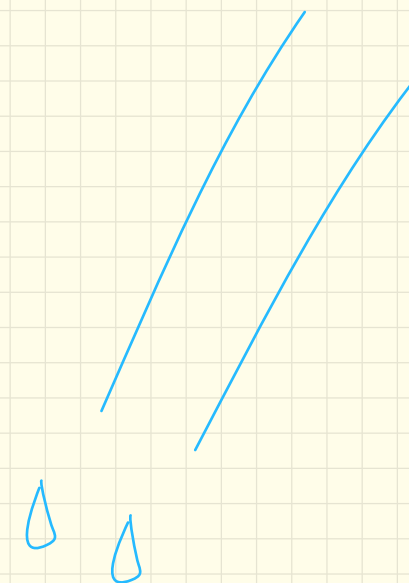
Even with years of experience, we continually face challenges and valuable lessons. From the outset, we recognised some key hurdles: building trust (especially since we're not ECD experts), engaging and motivating partners (who are already overwhelmed), aligning individual goals, and the complexities of collaboration.

We want to acknowledge that, at the outset, we aimed to build a Czech-Hungarian-Slovak program with more intensive international collaboration. However, over time, we realized that while these countries face similar challenges, their contexts differ, meaning that the same approaches may not work across all three. However, with that said, we still believe there is significant potential for international cooperation.

What did we learn? Building trust starts with personal relationships, which we nurtured through in-person visits and actively listening to individual goals and challenges. Knowing someone makes it easier to communicate, empathise, and collaborate effectively. Sharing knowledge within the P2G community has been incredibly valuable, and we learned that overcommunication is crucial—repeating messages across multiple channels ensures clarity. We also found that action drives progress: don't wait for everyone to be on board—move forward with those who are motivated—"push what moves".

The JAF exemplifies this approach—connecting knowledge with action. Looking ahead, we aim to strengthen relationships and connections further. We would love to see the JAF evolve into the Collective Action Fund, emphasising the importance of a web of stakeholders, not just P2G partners, in creating meaningful change. We see significant potential in policies, practices, and resource flows. We have already started working on structural shifts, such as government collaboration (see Graphic B).

Additionally, we recognise the importance of transformative and relational change. Although power dynamics and mental models are challenging, they are essential for systemic change. We are actively seeking organisations and initiatives that target these critical areas to strengthen all six conditions needed for systemic change.



Credit: Martin Faltejsek

CZECH REPUBLIC



ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES

Early childhood services in the Czech Republic are divided into children's groups and kindergartens. However, these services are governed by multiple governmental bodies, causing a fragmented national system.

While national strategies exist, their implementation remains problematic, particularly within the education sector. The Czech education system is decentralised, leaning on other sectors, including healthcare. Unfortunately, intersectoral communication is weak, hindering effective collaboration. Further obstacles to successfully integrating services and inclusion include piecemeal funding and a lack of accurate data pointing to the most pressing service gaps. There is also a lack of strong leadership advocating for the positive outcomes of ECD, preventing systemic changes that could improve service accessibility and quality.

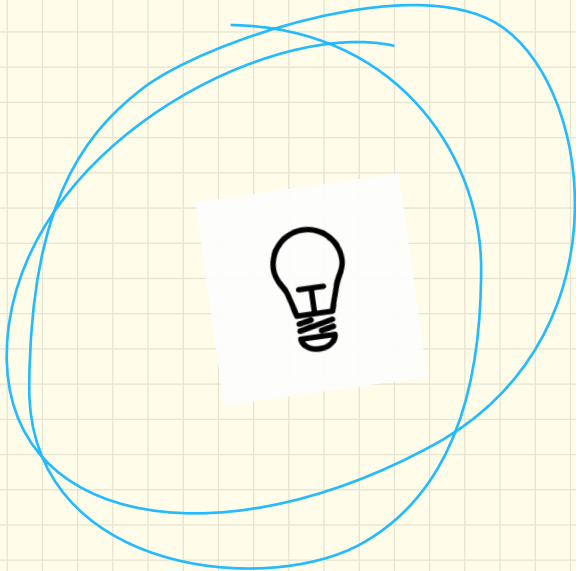
The capacity of preschool education remains insufficient in small towns and large cities. However, early childhood services are a low political priority, and systemic funding vehicles are missing. According to the Czech Education Act (No 561/2004), "pre-school education should provide educational support and help to parents as well as children" (OECD, 2006). Yet, in practice, this is often not the case. Families living in poverty face even more significant challenges, as high levels of distrains are a considerable barrier. In the four most affected regions, one in ten people faces property seizure due to debt, further exacerbating their difficulties accessing quality early childhood education.

For more, read the [Places to Grow Publication](#).

KEY NUMBERS FOR CONTEXT

- Few children attend kindergarten for at least three years. (EU average 81%, Czech Republic 73%).
- Participation in childcare groups is very low; it is the 2nd lowest in the EU (EU 34%, Czech Republic 8%).
- Early support for at-risk children and families: only 11 % of funding goes to preventive services for families with children.
- Universal services and family centres: There is a one-sided mix of public spending, and supportive services are lacking (OECD average 43%, Czech Republic 0%).

(source: Czech ECD Platform)



"WE HAVE TO START DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY. WHEN ONE ORGANISATION IS DOING A GREAT JOB BUT HAS NO SUPPORT FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OR POLITICIANS, IT IS INSUFFICIENT. I SEE MANY GREAT PEOPLE WHO ARE ACTIVE, SMART, AND HAVE A GREAT EXPERIENCE BUT ARE EXHAUSTED — PROBABLY FROM ONGOING BATTLES AND A FEW SYSTEMIC CHANGES. SO, WE MUST START APPROACHING THINGS DIFFERENTLY, AS WE ARE WITH THE CZECH ECD PLATFORM AND THIS METHODOLOGY!"

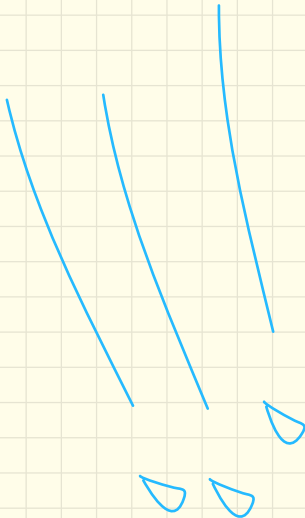
Kateřina Sirotková, Director, Czech ECD Platform



STORY

Dana's Story from [Centrum inkluze](#) (Inclusion Center), Vitkov, a part of the Czech ECD Platform

Mrs. Dana Horak lives with her partner and seven children in an excluded locality in Vitkov. The Inclusion Center has been helping the Horak family for eight years by enrolling them in mainstream schools. Five of their children attended the Early Care Club and are now in a mainstream school, while the two youngest still attend the club. Initially, the children lacked the necessary skills for school enrollment. Thanks to the Early Care program, these children do not attend segregated schools and increase the chances that their younger siblings will follow the same path. The program's focus on early education has provided a strong foundation for their future success.



OUR APPROACH IN ACTION

JAF: LOCAL INCUBATORS OF ECD

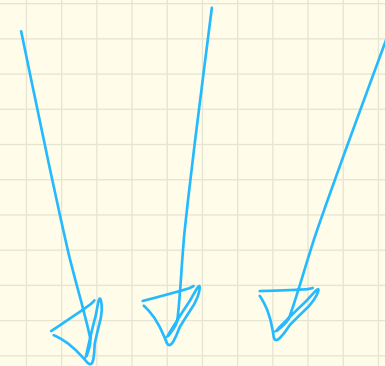
platforma
pro
včasnou péči



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

Collaborating with four local governments in the Czech Republic to better understand the early childhood development (ECD) needs and find ways to address them.

Serving as an umbrella organisation coordinating different groups and professionals involved in ECD in the Czech Republic.



Credit: Czech ECD Platform

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A PROJECT LIKE THIS?

“The Local ECD Incubators project is very important in the sense that we bring the experience from the territory into a larger context, which means that we bring various case studies, data and specific stories of children and their families to the national level, where we can then work on systemic changes.”

**PAVLÍNA KRÁČMAROVÁ, CHAIRWOMAN,
CZECH ECD PLATFORM & DIRECTOR OF THE
ECCE HOMO ASSOCIATION**



“It is precisely by informing politicians, government workers, and experts that we can witness the needs of children growing up in socially disadvantaged environments. I am convinced that each piece of information is a drop in the ocean that will eventually lead to that help being reflected in the child welfare system.”

**RADKA RŮŽIČKOVÁ, OBLASTNÍ
CHARITA ZNOJMO**



Credit: Czech ECD Platform

MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Implemented the Primokiz methodology** to strengthen early childhood systems, ensuring more effective local and national interventions.
- **Organised tailored study visits and workshops** to share best practices with ECD professionals in Czechia.
- **Conducted regional research** to inform national policy and practice by gathering critical data on early childhood.
- **Brought together policymakers, educators, and community leaders** to create stronger, more integrated support systems for children and families.
- **Developed a unified vision for ECD at the national level** by facilitating a shared strategy among key stakeholders.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[YOUTUBE VIDEO](#)
[CONFERENCE PANEL](#)
[MEDIUM ARTICLE](#)



Credit: Czech ECD Platform

CZECH ECD PLATFORM: PLATFORMA PRO VČASNOU PÉČI

platforma
pro
včasnou péči

Founded in 2020 by the Albatros Foundation, Česká spořitelna Foundation, and OSF Foundation.

THE PLATFORM'S OBJECTIVE & MISSION:

THE PLATFORM BRINGS TOGETHER ORGANISATIONS ALL OVER THE CZECH REPUBLIC DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE. ITS MISSION IS TO PROMOTE AND DEFEND THE SERVICES AND PROGRAMS PROVIDED TO AT-RISK CHILDREN AND TO SUPPORT THE BUILDING OF A FUNCTIONAL NATIONAL EARLY CARE SYSTEM.

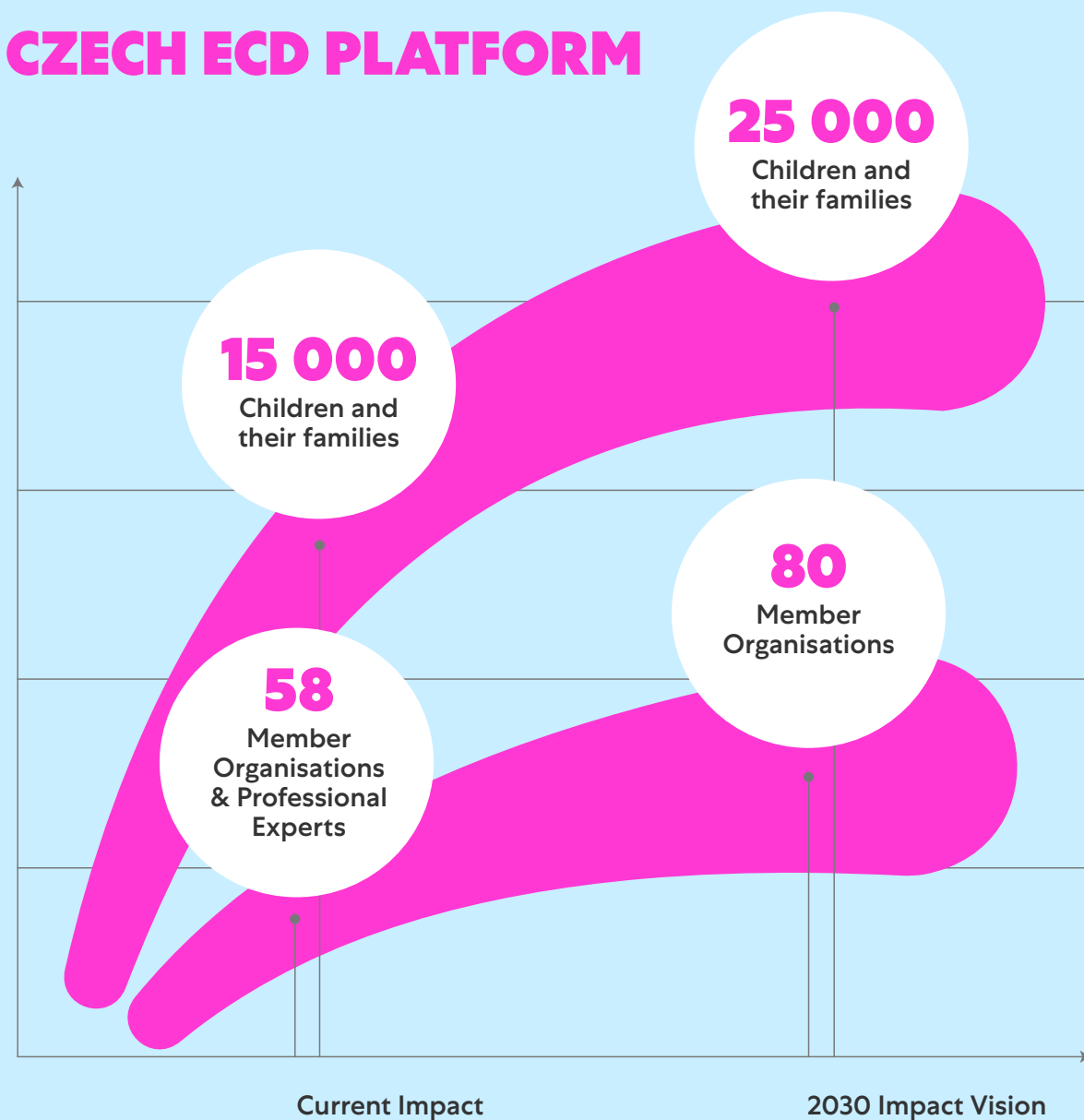
WHY CREATE A PLATFORM?

"As part of our activities, we offer our platform members various methodological sessions and news from our practice. This allows us to bring some new work methods or experience from other countries directly to the localities. Through this methodological support, the platform allows the development of social services, different training programmes, and the health sector. In terms of concrete examples, we can say that at least ten organisations have started working with children under the age of three."

PAVLÍNA KRÁČMAROVÁ, CHAIRWOMAN, CZECH ECD PLATFORM & DIRECTOR OF THE ECCE HOMO ASSOCIATION



CZECH ECD PLATFORM



"Our platform aims to make early childhood development and support for the youngest children both a concern and a solution to many current problems."

VLASTA HOLÉCIOVÁ, COMMUNICATION AND PR, CZECH ECD PLATFORM



MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Developed a collective vision for ECD at the national level**, ensuring a more coordinated and sustainable approach to supporting young children and their families.
- **Strengthened collaboration across the ECD ecosystem** by bringing together policymakers, educators, and NGOs.
- **Achieved official recognition as an independent association (2023)**, increasing their ability to advocate for child-centred policies and secure funding for impactful programs.
- **Secured a Joint Action Fund Grant and completed the Local Incubators of ECD Project**, which benefited 15,000 children and 58 organisations.
- **Co-hosted the Places to Grow Conference (November 2024, Prague)**, which engaged over 130 experts, practitioners, and policymakers.
- **Organised and led high-impact policy discussions** in the Czech Republic, resulting in actionable recommendations.
- **Co-hosted the Early Childhood Conference (October 2024, Znojmo)** in partnership with Charita Znojmo, leading to new commitments for expanding early childhood support programs.
- **Launched an informal ECD working group** to share experiences, exchange best practices, and drive long-term improvements in ECD policies and programs.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[YOUTUBE VIDEO](#)

[CONFERENCE PANEL](#)

[MEDIUM ARTICLE](#)

[CZECH ECD PLATFORM WEBSITE](#)



Since its launch in 2020, the Czech ECD Platform has achieved significant milestones, paving the way for developing national platforms in Hungary and Slovakia.

58

Organisations Involved

150 000

Children Impacted

9

Contributions to strategic public administration documents

32

Online methodological meetings

30

Strategic negotiations with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

5

Working groups that they are a part of in the responsible ministries



Credit: Czech ECD Platform



Credit: Czech ECD Platform



Credit: Czech ECD Platform

HUNGARY



ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES

In principle, the Hungarian government has developed several policies aimed at inclusion, intersectoral collaboration of early childhood services, and a whole-child approach towards child development (European Commission, 2023). These policies include increasing the number of available places in nurseries and kindergartens for marginalised and disadvantaged children and a special policy to reduce classroom sizes when a child with special needs is present. Health workers are encouraged to cooperate closely with kindergarten teachers and social workers to ensure intersectoral collaboration and whole-child development. In 2015, the compulsory starting age to attend a kindergarten was lowered from five to three to increase early childhood participation.

However, in practice, it tells a different story. There is a significant shortage of professionals to ensure smooth and effective collaboration between different ECEC sectors. As a result, high-quality ECEC services are usually only available to middle-class families. The goal of inclusive education is often not reflected in practice, with Roma children facing significant barriers. 29% of local municipalities do not even have kindergartens in areas populated by Roma majority (European Commission, 2021).

For more, read the [Places to Grow Publication](#).

KEY NUMBERS FOR CONTEXT

As of 2020, only 16% of children under three attended formal childcare services. [\(Eurochild\)](#)

323,000 children enrolled in preschool in 2023-2024 school year. There were 300,500 teachers. [\(Statista\)](#)

For more, see [Description of Early Education and Care](#).

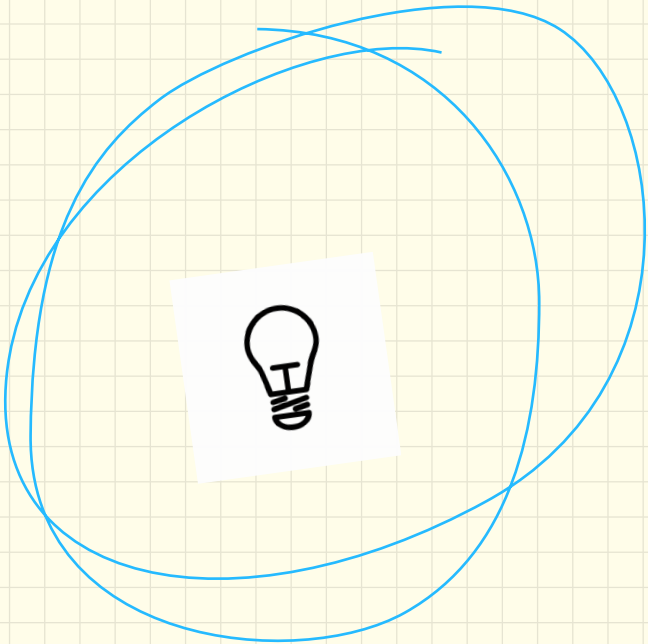
STORY

Ivett's Story from Partners Hungary Alapítvány, a part of the Hungarian ECD Platform

"At the moment in Hungary, the actors involved in early childhood education work very separately, and it is challenging for good practices, examples and methods used throughout the country to reach each other. They don't know about it. Everyone works in their institution, field, or region, and the most they know is what they are doing.

These are values that are very important to share. This early childhood platform is an excellent opportunity to bring together these people who are fighting for the same goals, to share knowledge, to think together about challenges and to try to advocate together, which is very much needed in this country."

IVETT KOVÁCS, PARTNERS HUNGARY ALAPÍTVÁNY



OUR APPROACH IN ACTION

HUNGARIAN ECD PLATFORM: KORAGYEREKKORI PLATFORM



Founded in 2024 by Partners Hungary Foundation, Carpathian Foundation-Hungary

THE PLATFORM'S OBJECTIVE & MISSION:

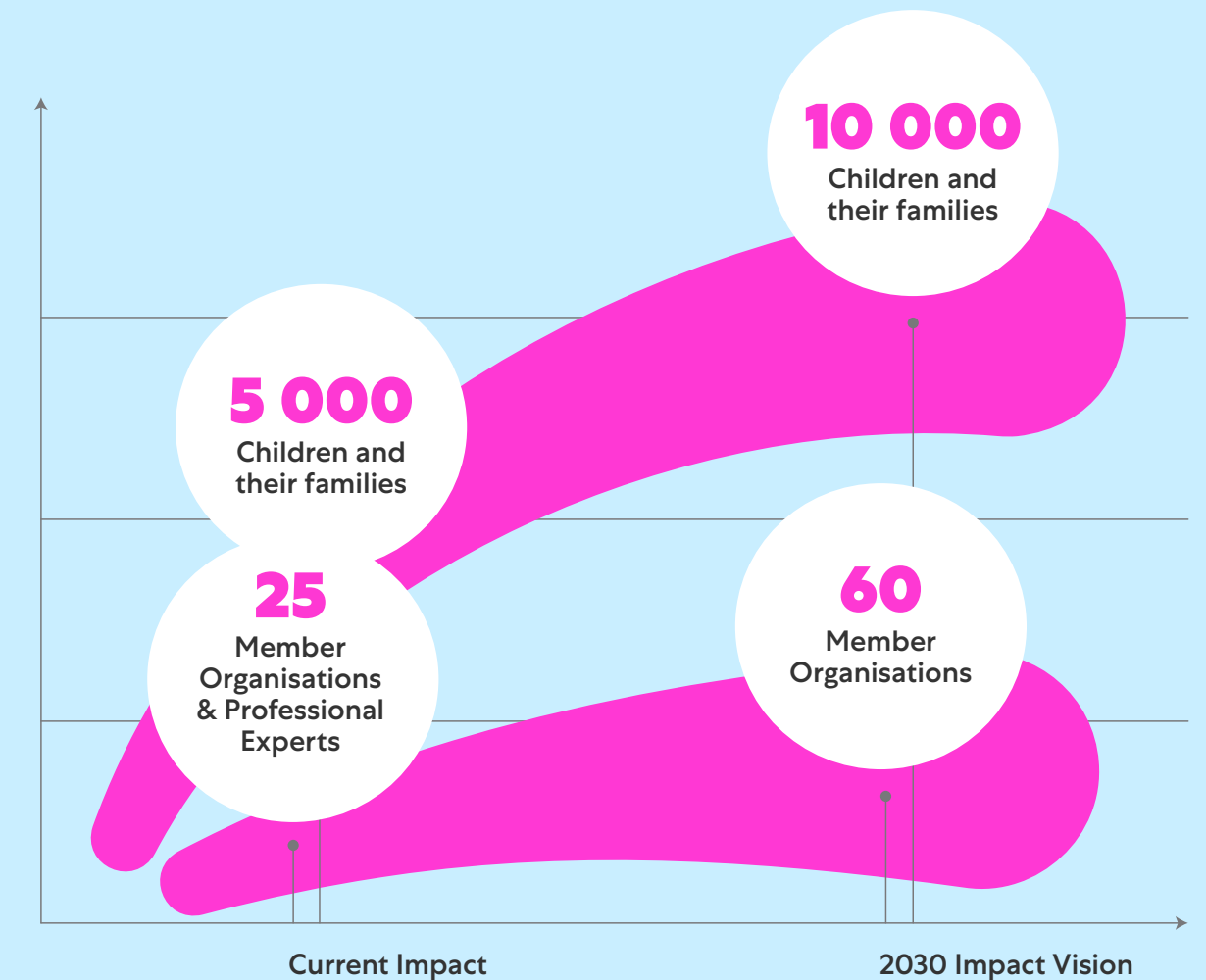
"THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PLATFORM IS A NON-FORMAL COMMUNITY BASED ON INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND MODELS, OPERATING IN HUNGARY SINCE 2023. PROFESSIONALS, REPRESENTATIVES OF NGOS AND INSTITUTIONS WORKING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES ARE WORKING TOWARDS CREATING AN INCLUSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES NETWORK IN HUNGARY."

Beáta Csomós, Program Manager, Carpathian Foundation Hungary



The platform's vision is for Hungary to be a place where every young child's abilities, skills and personality can develop to their full potential in a supportive environment, enabling them to lead happy and successful lives regardless of where they are from or their economic or social status.

HUNGARIAN ECD PLATFORM



WHY CREATE A PLATFORM?

"I think these platforms are essential, especially when considering early interventions in different areas such as education, health, social care, and local policy. I think that if there is genuine cooperation, which is more than just meeting twice per year, but "real" collaboration between actors, which might even be about specific cases, then it is definitely important and can push the matter forward."

ZSOMBOR FARKAS, EÖTVÖS LORÁND UNIVERSITY



“More organisations should work together because early childhood development does not happen only in the school or kindergarten. For me, the Places to Grow platform is inspiring because everyone brings their knowledge and good practices from their field, and we put it all together. We collaborate because we are still in the early stages of working on ECD in this region.”

ANDREA BOCSI, HUNGARIAN
KINDERGARTENS ASSOCIATION



"Thanks to the Places to Grow program, we learned about the Czech Early Childhood Development (ECD) Platform and its establishment. This inspired us to launch a similar initiative in Hungary. The main goal of the Hungarian ECD Platform is to improve the accessibility and quality of early childhood services, education, care, and programs in Hungary. We are strongly committed to building an alliance of professional and civil society actors in Hungary to work together towards these goals."

BOGLÁRKA BATA, CARPATHIAN
FOUNDATION, HUNGARY



MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Established key partnerships with the help of Porticus, P2G, and Holis**, fostering cross-sector collaboration to strengthen early childhood advocacy and program development.
- **Launched the National ECD Platform**, creating a unified structure to drive systemic change in ECD, drawing inspiration from the Czech ECD Platform.
- **Developed a strong visual identity for the Platform** by working with P2G, ensuring clear communication and stakeholder engagement.
- **Set a strategic vision at its inaugural meeting (June 2024, Galyatető, Hungary)** by defining long-term goals.
- **Strengthened its organisational strategy at the Eger Meeting (November 2024)** by finalising key planning elements for the 2025 spring conference, ensuring a clear direction for growth.
- **Achieved official recognition of the Platform (November 2024)**, increasing its ability to advocate for ECD and secure resources for national initiatives.
- **Planned a collaborative conference (May 21, 2025)**, fostering cross-border knowledge exchange and strengthening regional ECD efforts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

YOUTUBE VIDEO
CONFERENCE PANEL



SLOVAKIA



ECD LANDSCAPE & CHALLENGES

In Slovakia, ECEC services are split into two categories: nurseries for children under three and kindergartens for children aged three to six. Nurseries are governed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, while kindergartens (offering both education and care) are regulated by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Due to low investment in ECEC, Slovakia falls behind the EU 2020 targets for children's preschool education. Access to ECEC is particularly limited for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the Roma community (Roma Early Childhood Inclusion, 2017).

Similar to Hungary and the Czech Republic, early care services in Slovakia are fragmented. For example, nurseries and kindergartens are governed by separate political bodies. The fragmentation of services puts every child at risk of experiencing difficulties in education. It disproportionately affects those growing up in difficult circumstances, particularly Roma children, who often struggle to access the services they need.

The lack of integration across services and gaps in information make it difficult for the government to assess needs and allocate resources effectively. Families also struggle to navigate the system and identify where to seek support. Furthermore, early care programs often lack long-term support and are not legally recognised as expert services.

For more, read the [Places to Grow Publication](#).

KEY NUMBERS FOR CONTEXT

Preschool has been mandatory in Slovakia since 2021 for children aged five.

While Slovakia is still lagging behind the EU average, participation in early childhood education has improved from 72.2 % in 2015 to 78.1 % in 2020 (European Commission, 2022), indicating gradual progress.

Every year, ~3,000 children in Slovakia are born into generational poverty.

“WE HAVE ALMOST 35,000 CHILDREN IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN SLOVAKIA, AND ABOUT 20,000 OF THEM ARE FROM MARGINALISED ROMA BACKGROUNDS.”

Vladislav Matej, Executive Director, SOCIA

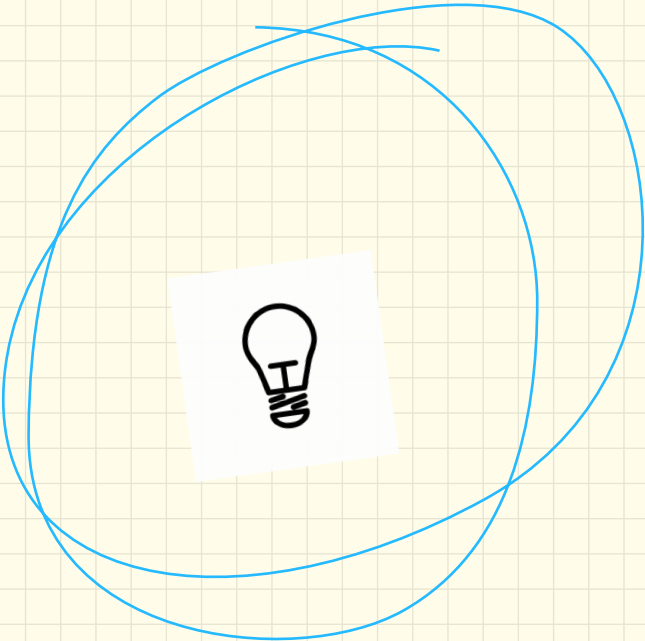
STORY

David's Story, a young father from Jelšava, Slovakia

Finding housing in Jelšava is difficult, especially for Roma families. For David, a young father, securing a stable home for his child felt impossible—until local coordinator Ľubica stepped in.

Thanks to the project of coordinated early childhood services by Socia in the Banská Bystrica Region, Ľubica could mediate with landlords and help David's family find a small studio apartment.

Stable housing means more than just a roof over their heads—it gives David's child a secure start in life, creating better conditions for early learning, health, and future opportunities.



Credit: Luc Kordas

OUR APPROACH IN ACTION

JAF: COORDINATED SERVICES OF ECD IN A SELECTED LOCALITY IN THE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA REGION



socťa



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

Piloting a program that coordinates early care support services in segregated communities in the Banská Bystrica Region, Slovakia.

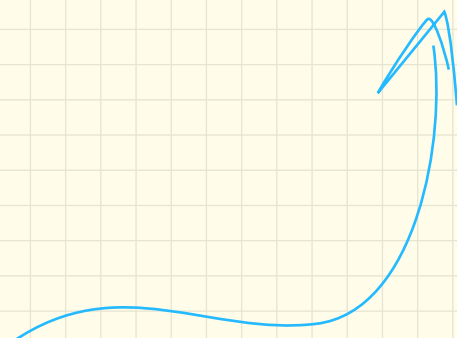
Setting up a cooperation agreement or memorandum, employing a local coordinator of ECD, and creating an agreement on coordinating services across the social, health, and education sectors.



WHY THIS PROJECT?

"Often, even if organisations are based in the same or nearby towns, they don't know about each other. Let alone how they work. So many times, I'll learn that three different professionals from three different services will work with the same family, but they do not communicate with each other. So this project aims to create some synergy between all of those good services active in those localities so that it can help children in the kind of development we think and know is best for them."

**DENISA NINCOVÁ, DIRECTOR OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS
AND SOCIAL POLICIES IN THE BANSKÁ
BYSTRICA SELF-GOVERNING REGION (BBSK)**



"This JAF project has enabled us to employ an early years coordinator here in Jelšava, which is a brand new thing. And many of those organisations still operating here have to somehow tune in to the fact that we are offering them something like this."

**VLADISLAV MATEJ, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, SOCIA**



"What I am trying to do, and what has worked for me, is perhaps to point out the benefits of potential cooperation in the future and draw attention to the fact that we should all have a common goal. And that goal is to help those who need it."

**ĽUBICA DORKOVÁ, LOCAL ECD
COORDINATOR, SOCIA**



Credit: SOCIA

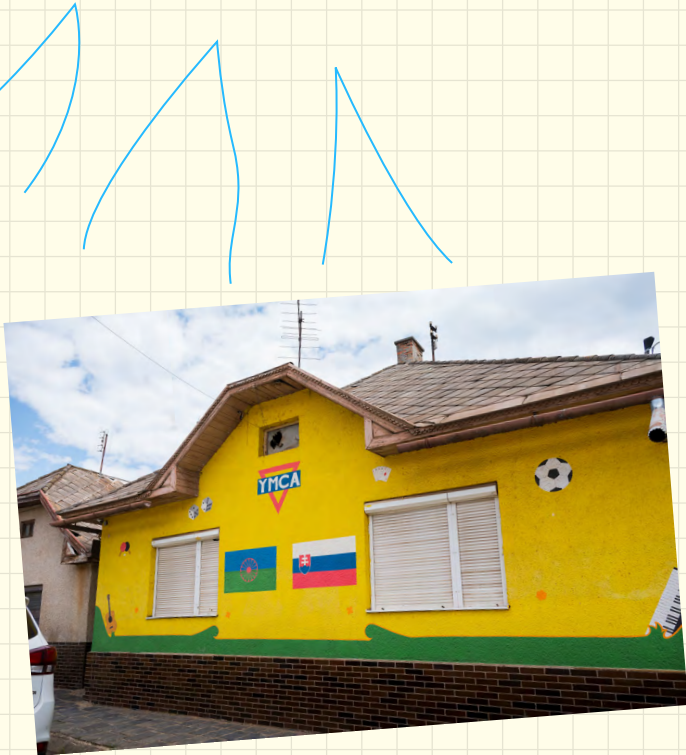


Credit: SOCIA

MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Strengthened community support** by hiring a full-time local ECD coordinator to lead family and child-centred initiatives.
- **Launched key local activities** such as an afterschool programme for children in Jelšava and a series of parenting support activities helping caregivers build stronger relationships, called Rodinkovo.
- **Established cross-sector collaboration to support families** by fostering regular partnerships among 16 local organisations. These included collaborating with five mayors, as well as with the Office of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family (Coordinator for Child Protection Against Violence and Primary Schools and Kindergartens) and with primary schools and kindergartens.
- **Built trust and encouraged families to seek support** through sustained engagement, meaning that families became more open to accessing services, leading to stronger community ties and improved well-being for 100 children.



Credit: SOCIA

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- [MEDIUM ARTICLE](#)
- [YOUTUBE VIDEO](#)
- [CONFERENCE PANEL](#)



JAF: TOWARDS IMPROVED QUALITY OF OMAMA AND THE SUBSEQUENT ECD SOCIAL SERVICE



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

Evaluating and promoting the Omama program* as a systemic approach to early childcare through research and advocacy.

Conducting an in-depth evaluation of their Omama program - assessing existing data and collecting missing data to objectively identify the impact, benefits, and areas for improvement.

Engaging relevant ministries and shaping an effective model for a new law that would recognise early childhood development as an expert activity within social services legislation sectors.

*For the last 7 years, the program has trained and supported women from marginalised Roma communities to deliver early childhood education and care within their neighbourhoods.

WHY THIS PROJECT?

"If the early childhood care service is included among the social services that are provided in Slovakia and funded, then more and more children, and indeed their families, will get the support they need for early development. That lays the foundations for a successful life into adulthood. Ultimately, we will all benefit from it as a whole society.

We want to provide recommendations for the design of a state-supported early childhood education and care (ECEC) social service. We want the government to take ownership and provide funding. To do this, a legislative change is necessary. Otherwise, project funding is very limiting as it is often unsustainable, and short-term funds from grants or the European Union. This makes it difficult to create long-term interventions. The work with the JAF is focused on advocacy, co-creating, and legally establishing this social service. This will involve adding a definition of this service into the law that clearly states the quality and how the funding should be managed effectively and responsibly."

SHOSHANA CHOVAN, POLICY OFFICER, CESTA VON





Credit: Cesta von



Credit: Cesta von

MILESTONES & IMPACT



This initiative:

- **Strengthened partnerships for data collection** to support evidence-based advocacy and policy reform in ECD.
- **Engaged ministries for legislative reform** to co-shape an effective model for a new law that would recognise ECD as an expert activity within social services legislation.
- **Collaborated with P2G partner Schola Empirica** to gather comprehensive data on the OMAMA program, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective ECD practices.
- **Partnered with P2G partner SOCIA** to support joint advocacy efforts.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

MEDIUM ARTICLE

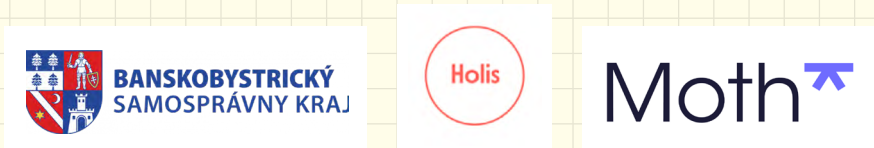
YOUTUBE VIDEO

CONFERENCE PANEL



Credit: Cesta von

JAF: ECD ECOSYSTEM MAPPING AND VISUALISATION PROJECT IN THE BANSKÁ BYSTRICA REGION



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT GOAL?

Working closely with the BBSK, Holis has been tasked with creating an ECD Ecosystem Map that highlights the existing early childhood development (ECD) network and integrates relevant data, such as demographics, to provide a comprehensive view of the situation of ECD in that region.

Reorganising data that was previously scattered across many different sources and then visualising it on maps in order to create a more transparent, more interconnected future for early care in the Banská Bystrica Region, Slovakia.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A PROJECT LIKE THIS?

“As an office of the regional government, we would like to provide as much help, assistance, and advice to people in need, especially families with small kids. This mapping is helping us collect information about different kinds of social services and providers in our region, and we are happy to share this information with the general public.

This mapping is helping us, as the office is assisting the other providers in building better, more robust networks. It also assists the general public with all the necessary information they can find in one space.

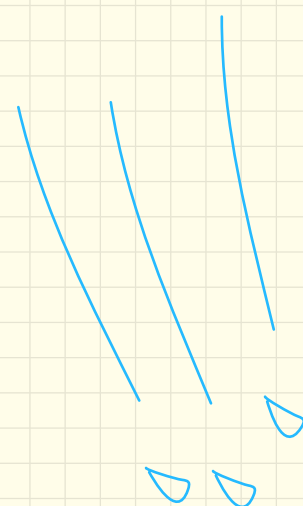
The mapping project is also important for us in the BBSK because it will help us to get to know better the missing services or underfunded services so that we can focus our attention, whether financial or not and thus help the areas where we perceive that there is a problem with the lack of services or with the quality of services.”

MILAN KAJO ZBOŘIL, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PLANNING COORDINATOR, BBSK



“FROM THE BEGINNING OF THIS PROJECT WITH HOLIS, IT WAS APPARENT THAT EVERYBODY AT THE TABLE WAS LOOKING FOR THE MOST HOLISTIC AND COMPLEX SOLUTIONS TO OUR ISSUES. IT WAS ALL ABOUT HOW WE COULD BEST CHANGE THIS OR CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGING THIS PROBLEM AND COME UP WITH THE BEST SOLUTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS.”

Zuzana Sojková, Head of Teacher Support for the Department of Education in the BBSK



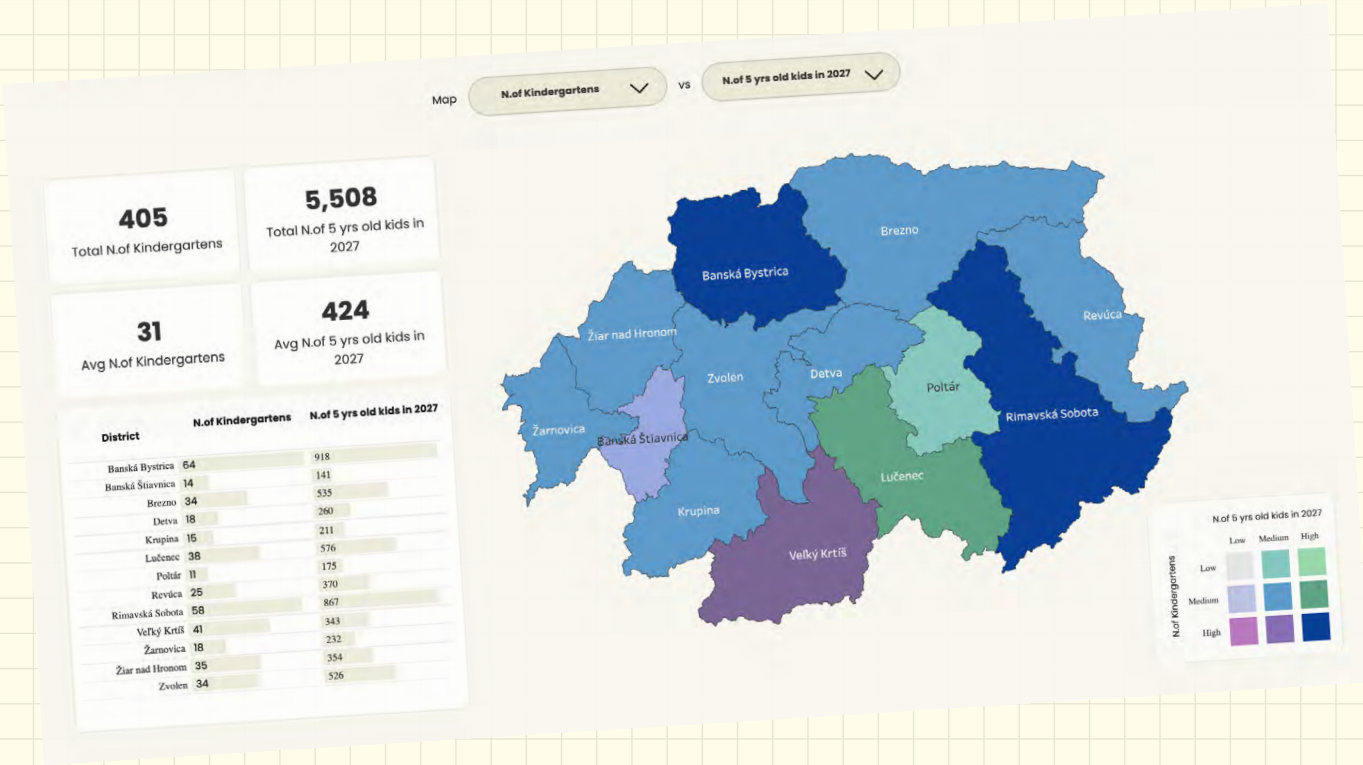
MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Built strategic partnerships and strengthened regional ECD systems** by establishing strong collaborations in the Banská Bystrica Region.
- **Forged a close working relationship with the BBSK** to ensure alignment and support for ECD initiatives at the regional level.
- **Gathered data on the regional ECD network** by conducting comprehensive data collection on existing early childhood services and identifying gaps and opportunities.
- **Created ECD ecosystem maps**, visualising 1606 current services and pinpointing areas that require additional support or the establishment of new services, guiding future regional planning and resource allocation.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- [MEDIUM ARTICLE PT 1](#)
- [MEDIUM ARTICLE PT 2](#)
- [YOUTUBE VIDEO](#)
- [CONFERENCE PANEL](#)



SLOVAK ECD PLATFORM: ODPERINKY



Founded by Carpathian Foundation, Centrum včasnej intervencie Košice, n.o., SOCIA Foundation, Cesta von in 2024.

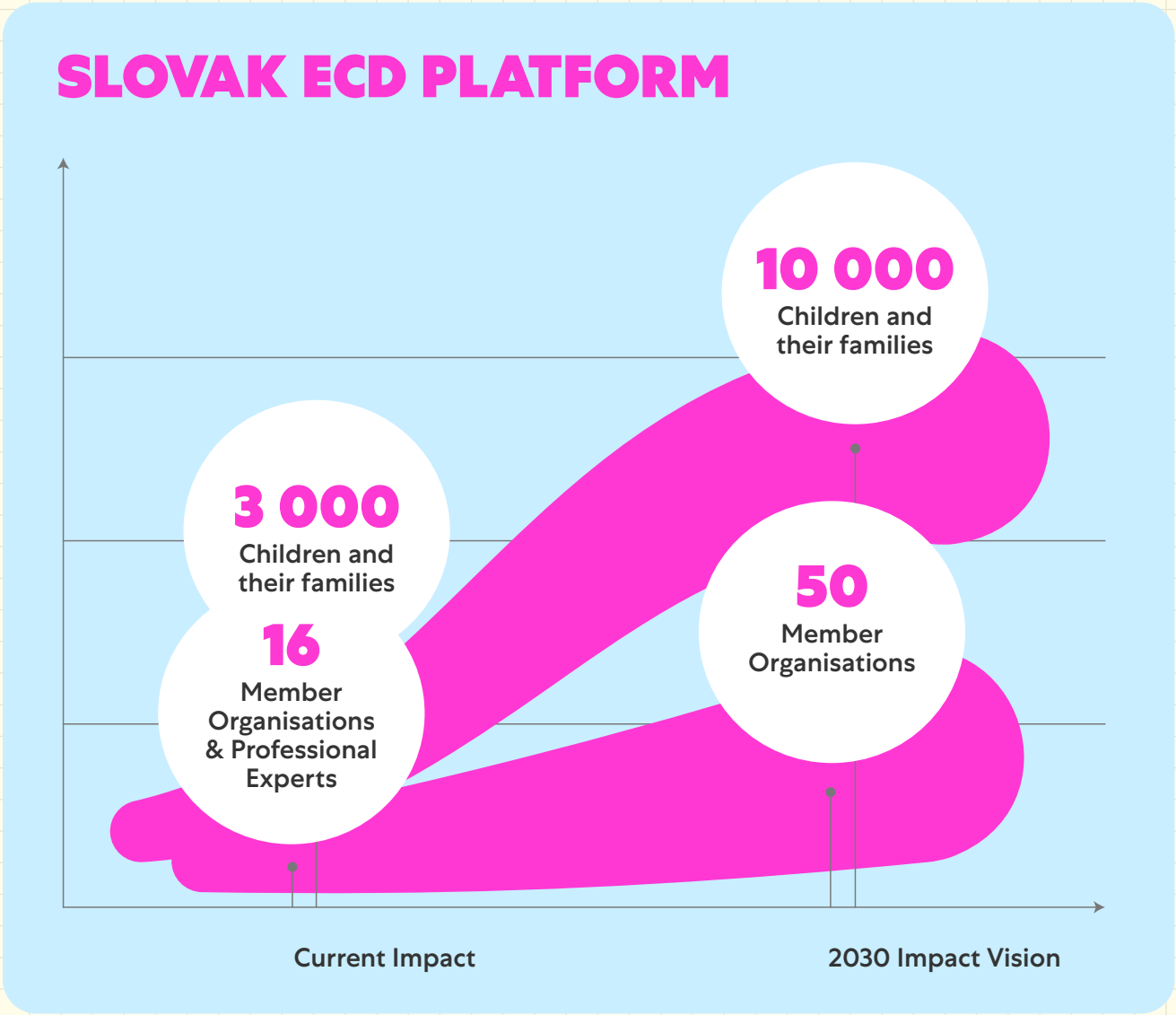
THE PLATFORM'S OBJECTIVE & MISSION:

“OUR PLATFORM AIMS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE CHANGE, SPECIFICALLY SYSTEMIC CHANGE, TO INFLUENCE THE SYSTEM SO THAT WE PAY ATTENTION TO AND VALUE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES. THIS MEANS PAYING ATTENTION TO THE EARLY YEARS, RIGHT FROM BIRTH, PARTICULARLY FROM THE PRENATAL STAGE, SO THESE CHILDREN WILL THRIVE LATER IN LIFE BECAUSE WE KNOW THIS IS THE MOST CRUCIAL PERIOD OF OUR LIVES.”

Pavel Hrica, Executive Director, Cesta von



- Contribute to the advancement of the early childhood development support system so that it is inclusive and accessible to all children and families in Slovakia.
- Bring together professionals and organisations and encourage their knowledge and data sharing to develop expertise in ECD.
- Support the creation and development of a functioning system that identifies early on at-risk children and provides appropriate solutions and family-centred support.
- Focus on the children and their families— ensuring that all have access to the necessary services and information for optimal development.



Credit: Tereza Sejkova



Credit: Tereza Sejkova

WHY CREATE A PLATFORM?

“The early childhood development platform “OdPerinky” in Slovakia was started by a group of people who met through Places to Grow. We were motivated by our Czech colleagues who founded such a platform and saw its importance for Slovakia.

As I am active in two other platforms, I can say that, in Slovakia, it works in such a way that if you create an umbrella organisation for a particular topic, you have a better chance to be a partner to those central bodies in the creation of legislation, in funding changes and key systemic changes. It's hard to deal with individuals and small organisations, but you can achieve more when you are under one umbrella.”

**VLADISLAV MATEJ, EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, SOCIA**



Credit: Tereza Sejkova

MILESTONES & IMPACT

This initiative:

- **Established key partnerships with the help of Porticus, P2G, and Holis**, fostering cross-sector collaboration to strengthen early childhood advocacy and program development.
- **Launched the National ECD Platform in autumn 2024** by bringing together diverse organisations in the Places to Grow network, inspired by the Czech ECD Platform.
- **Created the "OdPerinky" brand with Holis** and developed a strong identity to build trust and engagement.
- **Hosted the first national ECD conference (November 2024, Slovakia)** that brought together thought leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to shape Slovakia's future ECD strategy.
- **Led two workshops** to help municipalities identify gaps in local ECD services, encouraging active participation and strategic planning.
- **Hosted a planning meeting** to enhance the platform's effectiveness in advocacy, communications, and capacity building.
- **Collaborated on a cross-border proposal with the Czech Platform**, jointly developing a project idea for the Erasmus+ grant scheme.
- **Aligned fundamental principles for unified early childhood frameworks**, ensuring consistency and quality across all sectors in Slovakia.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[YOUTUBE VIDEO](#)

[CONFERENCE PANEL](#)

[SLOVAK ECD PLATFORM WEBSITE](#)



CONCLUSION



“IF WE CHANGE THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY, WE CAN CHANGE THE ENTIRE STORY OF THE CHILD'S LIFE.”

Martina Švekušová, MD Paediatrician, ECD/ ECI Consultant, Early Childhood Intervention Center Košice, NPO

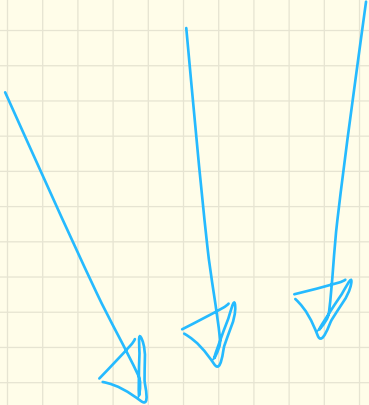


Investing in ECD is one of the most effective ways to create lasting, positive change for individuals and society. Through its collaborative approach, P2G has strengthened connections, advanced integrated ECD services, and demonstrated the power of collective action. The progress outlined in this report highlights the program's impact and potential for broader application. By continuing to prioritise and invest in high-quality, accessible ECD, we can build a future where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

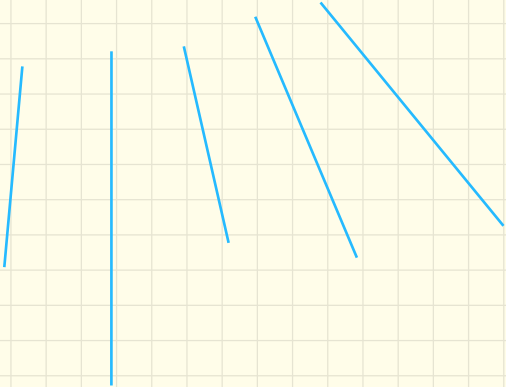
Our work is just beginning. Together, we can transform the future by deepening collaboration and trust, scaling and localising best practices, and advocating for investment in ECD.



Credit: Martin Faltejsek



Interested in learning more about or supporting this initiative? Send us a message at HELLO@WEAREHOLIS.ORG. Follow us on [SOCIAL MEDIA](#) and sign up for our [MONTHLY NEWSLETTER](#) to stay updated on how we're driving systemic change and helping every child realise their potential to contribute to society.



REFERENCES

Eurochild (2021). First Years First Priority: Early Childhood Development in Hungary. Country Profile 2021. <https://eurochild.org/uploads/2021/09/Hungary-Country-Profile.pdf>

European Commission (2021). Hungary: Funding, strategy, facts and figures and contact details for national Roma contact points in Hungary. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamentalrights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-andparticipation-eu-country/hungary_en

European Commission (2022). 2022 Country Report - Slovakia. Commission Staff Working Document. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/2022-european-semester-country-reportslovakia_en.pdf

European Commission (2023). Early childhood education and care. <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/hungary/early-childhood-education-and-care>

Heckman Equation (2023). Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program. <https://heckmanequation.org/resource/lifecycle-benefits-influential-early-childhood-program/>

OECD (2006). Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2006/09/starting-strong-ii_g1gh7238.html

Places to Grow (2023). Inclusive Early Education and Care in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary: Compendium of Inspiring Practices. <https://placestogrow.eu/compendium-of-inspiring-practices>

Roma Early Childhood Inclusion (2017). Special Report on Roma Inclusion in Early Childhood Education and Care. <https://www.reyn.eu/resources/reci-slovakia/>

Statista (2024). Number of children and teachers in kindergartens in Hungary from the academic year of 2009/2010 to 2023/2024. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094928/hungary-number-of-preschool-children-and-teachers/>

The Cynefin Co (2025). The Cynefin Framework. <https://thecynefin.co/about-us/about-cynefin-framework/?srsltid=AfmBOoq8ODCqOLiXONxtQPVxBF8k95lu4TA-5EuddBKI2il9dclKtZ3P>

The Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation, Griffith University, and TSI and Auckland Co-Design Lab (2022). Everyday Patterns for Shifting Systems <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62ba62e280289e7a54f551e9/t/67abf180a4aabe5f7d711d23/1739321846233/Everyday+Patterns+Combined.pdf> (Adapted from Based on Moore, Riddell and Vocisano, 2015; <https://tinyurl.com/4eybdju>)

The Lancet (2017). Early Childhood Development Series. <https://www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016>

UNDP (2019). UNDP Accelerator Labs Brochure. <https://www.undp.org/acceleratorlabs/publications/undp-accelerator-labs-brochure>

UNDP (2022). System Change: A Guidebook for Adopting Portfolio Approaches. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-03/UNDP-RBAP-System-Change-A-Guidebook-for-Adopting-Portfolio-Approaches-2022.pdf>

UNESCO (2015). The Evidence base on early childhood care and education in global contexts. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232456>



We thank all individuals and organizations who contributed to this report. Their insights, expertise, and dedication were invaluable in shaping this work.

For any questions or further inquiries, please contact us at **HELLO@WEAREHOLIS.ORG**

How to Cite This Work:

Holis Lab. (2025). Catalysing Change:
How Places to Grow Shapes Tomorrow
Through Early Childhood Development.
<https://www.weareholis.org/>

