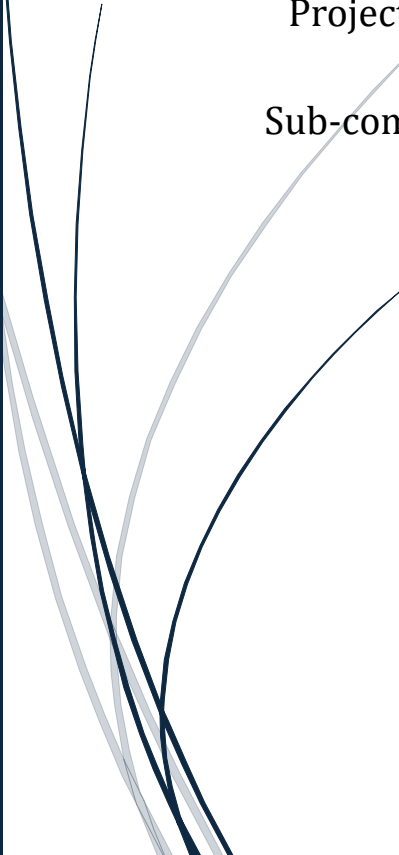




Report on Parents Survey Results

Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care Project

Survey conducted under
Project Component 3. Supporting young children and families
Sub-component 3.2. Outreach to families from vulnerable groups



Centre for Education Policy
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1. Introductory Notes

This report presents the results from the parents survey, the primary goal of which was to assess their satisfaction with the quality and effectiveness of half-day flexible preschool programmes their children attended under the Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care Project. More specifically, it is a part of the Project sub-component 3.2: Outreach to families from vulnerable groups.

One of the key results of the Project, under the previously referenced component, was around 3,800 children included in the preschool education system via half-day/flexible programmes. This is extremely important taking into account the potential benefits from including children without the opportunity to attend preschools, such as improved opportunities for learning, reduction of inequity in early childhood education and care (ECEC), greater availability, etc. Several steps were undertaken through the implementation of developmental projects and forming intersectoral teams which served as an incentive to parents, practitioners and decision-makers in LSGs to initiate changes and diversification of programmes on offer in the ECEC system. This primarily concerned children aged 3 to 5.5 years of age from vulnerable groups, and the quality of work of preschool institutions. In other words, these steps and results made the preschool education (PE) system more available, and aligned the programmes on offer with the needs of children and families in 34 LSGs, which in turn improved their quality and competence.

Assessment of the satisfaction of parents or families of children involved, as end users of these programmes, is crucial for evaluation of quality and effectiveness of these programmes and project results.

A questionnaire was created specifically for this research to collect the parents' opinions, thoughts and assessments. The survey encompassed 450 parents which is one third of the total sample of parents (from 34 LSGs across Serbia) whose children attended the said programmes in between 2018 and today. It is important to point out the survey included parents of children who attended kindergarten mostly regularly and frequently, and parents who participated to a high degree in at least basic forms of cooperation between the kindergarten and family, which makes them informed and relevant respondents, or important critical friends for evaluation of obtained results and effects on one of the key Project activities.

The obtained results provide a comprehensive overview of the quality and effectiveness of half-day flexible programmes from a very important perspective – that of parents. The final

research results show consistently and predominantly positive assessments of different crucial prerequisites and aspects of the quality of these programmes, and the satisfaction of parents, more specifically, with: the support in enrolment, a flexible offer of programmes, quality of space and resources, cooperation on key tracks (child – preschool teacher and parent – teacher), the high quality of teachers’ work, programme content, etc. Consequently, the obtained results show that a high percentage of parents recognise the effects of these programmes on socio-emotional and cognitive development of their children, speech development, development of new interests, and general satisfaction with the overall quality of the programme. On the other hand, even though their number was small, some parents found space for improvement, which needs to be carefully considered, especially in certain LSGs.

2. Brief overview of the research methodology

Research objectives

The objective of this research was to obtain data on parents' experiences, assessments and opinions on quality, relevance, and effectiveness of half-day/flexible programmes, and to create relevant and data-based recommendations for decision-makers to offer these types of programmes at the ECEC system level.

Research tasks

The above research objectives were realised through the following **tasks**:

- Assessing the satisfaction of parents/guardians with half-day/flexible programmes and their opinions on certain aspects of the programme,
Assessing the satisfaction of parents/guardians with programme activities and their opinions on individual aspects of these activities,
- Identifying the advantages of half-day/flexible programmes for families, including increased involvement of parents and improved access to early childhood education and care,
- Identifying challenges or potential liabilities of realised programmes, as well as
- Identifying potential strategies that can be used in response to identified challenges/liabilities.

Methods and techniques used in the research

The survey method of choice for this research was the telephone survey. It is a technique often used within the scope of quantitative research to obtain opinions, thoughts, and assessments from a certain group of respondents.

Among the advantages of telephone surveys are: complete and precise collection of data, constant control over the entire process of research, complete and useful responses, ability to clarify the responses. They make it easier to cover a large territory of the sample of respondents, they are cost-effective, and easier to plan out and realise. Another advantage is the speed of data collection, because experienced researchers can reach a large number of respondents in a day.

Telephone surveys also have a personal touch because of the human contact, which makes it easier to form a connection with the respondent. The data collected via telephone surveys are often more perceptive, because the researchers can ask respondents to clarify their responses or provide additional information, which can uncover useful details. Telephone surveys also ensure the anonymity of respondents. The final advantage is the availability of phones. High percentage of population, even within vulnerable groups, in our country owns a

mobile phone. All of the above methodological experiences have been confirmed in the scope of this research.

Key limitations in using this technique in research relate to responsiveness or the readiness of respondents to participate in a telephone survey. We faced the same challenge in this research as well, but the targeted number of respondents (400) was reached by raising the initial sample, which will be discussed in more detail within chapter 3.

Instrument

The questionnaire specifically created for the needs of this research was piloted before the main study, in order to ensure its quality, reliability and validity. After the piloting phase was completed, the final version of the questionnaire was developed as presented in *Appendix 1*.

The questionnaire contained a total of 38 questions. It included open-ended question (15) and closed-ended questions (23). It is important to point out here that one of the questions (26) comprised a list of 28 statements the respondents were asked to assess on a Likert-type scale. This means that the majority of questions in the questionnaire were closed-ended.

The parents needed approximately 15 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

Research plan

The complete research plan (key activities and timeline) is presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Overview of the complete research plan

Activity	Timeline				
	September	October	November	December	January
Development of research methodology and questionnaire					
Final consultations with the PMU on methodology and questionnaire					
Piloting the questionnaire					
Entry and processing of data obtained by piloting the questionnaire					
Finalising the questionnaire for main research based on piloting results					
Creating the piloting report					
Meeting with interviewers, presentation of the plan, sample and instructions with the goal to ensure the quality of the process					
Conducting the telephone survey on the defined sample based on the research plan					
Data entry and processing					
Creating the Report based on the final research results					

3. Overview of the sample of respondents, responsiveness and basic data on respondents and children

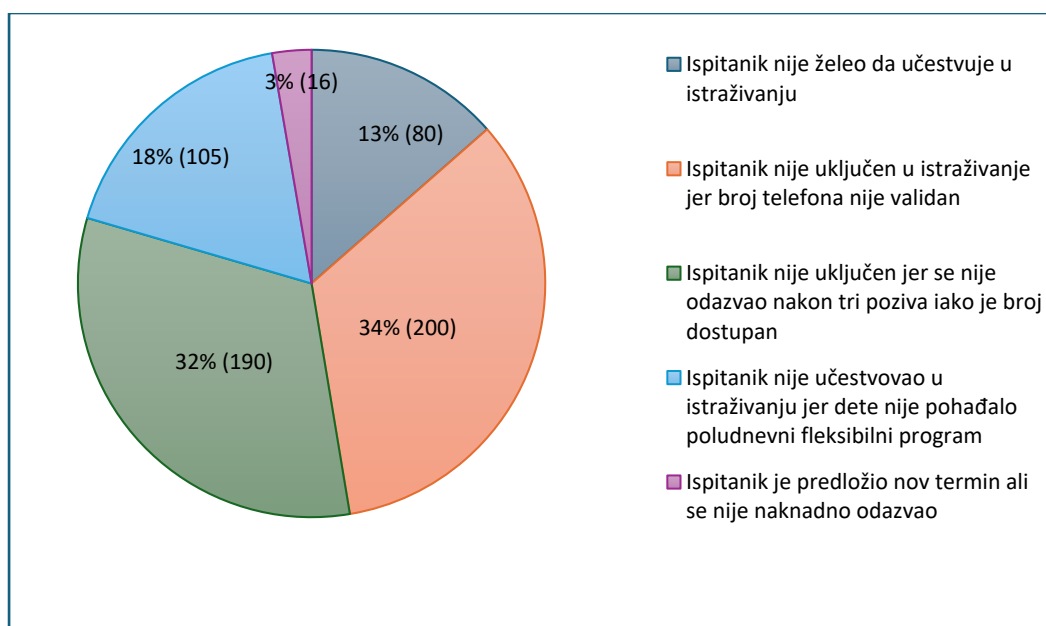
3.1. Overview of the sample of respondents and responsiveness

The Survey was completed by 450 respondents.

In accordance with the research plan, a sample of 691 respondents was initially formed, having in mind the lessons learned from the piloting phase and a general projection that 1/3 of the respondents may not be willing to participate in the research for various reasons, and/or because their contact information might be incomplete. The targeted sample of parents was set at 400. Due to insufficient responsiveness of participants, the targeted sample was not achieved, so the additional respondents were sampled from the initially sampled LSGs, forming an additional replacement sample of respondents. *Appendix 2* gives an overview of initial and additional (replacement) sample and responsiveness of individual respondents including reasons why a respondent was not included in the survey. The total number of contacted potential respondents was 1043, out of which 593 did not take part in the survey. It is important to point out here that the total number of available contacts in the provided project database was 1380.

Chart 1 shows the most common reasons respondents were not included in the survey and they are as follows: invalid phone number, no response after the third call despite the phone being available and not parents of children attending the half-day but the full-day programme and therefore they were excluded from the survey.

Chart 1. Most common reasons the respondents were not included in the survey



Below is the table illustrating the **ratio between the planned and realised sample of respondents** in each LSG. The greatest disparity between the number of planned and realised respondents was in LSGs of Prijepolje, Bela Palanka, and Kragujevac. A completely opposite situation happened in LSG Merošina, where in addition to the largest number of enrolled children the parents were most responsive as well. We could not include even a single respondent from LSG Knjaževac, and while a relatively small number of children attended the half-day programme in Čačak, Krupanj, Bela Palanka and Smederevo, their parents were not responsive, and they form a very small part of the sample. Additionally, in LSG Palilula we had contacts data of 45 parents available (most of them turned out to be duplicates or invalid) but only 7 respondents were willing to cooperate.

Table 2. Overview of the ratio between the planned and realised sample of respondents in each LSG

LSG	Total no. of parents in the Project database	No. of initially sampled parents	No. of respondents included from the initial sample	No. of sampled respondents in the replacement sample	No. of respondents included from the replacement sample	Total no. of respondents participating in the research	% of included respondents compared to the total sample of parents
Vranje	182	91	38	91	14	52	28.6
Krupanj	44	22	12	22	11	25	56.8
Prokuplje	38	19	10	19	3	13	34.2
Kruševac	15	7	6	8	1	7	46.7

LSG	Total no. of parents in the Project database	No. of initially sampled parents	No. of respondents included from the initial sample	No. of sampled respondents in the replacement sample	No. of respondents included from the replacement sample	Total no. of respondents participating in the research	% of included respondents compared to the total sample of parents
Ruma	52	26	16	26	9	25	48.1
Prijepolje	89	45	18	44	5	23	25.8
Kraljevo	47	23	10	24	12	22	46.8
Velika Plana	23	12	5	11	2	7	30.4
Beograd Palilula	47	24	5	23	2	7	14.9
Smederevo	88	44	6	44	0	9	10.2
Leskovac	106	53	29	53	22	51	48.1
Odžaci	55	27	15	28	10	25	45.5
Titel	65	30	15	35	7	22	33.8
Šabac	43	21	11	22	4	15	34.9
Kragujevac	66	33	10	33	1	11	16.7
Novi Sad	50	25	5	25	13	18	36.0
Šid	30	15	4	15	0	4	13.3
Merošina	145	76	45	69	10	90	62.1
Čačak	11	5	3	6	0	3	27.3
Beograd Voždovac	37	19	3	18	17	20	54.1
Bela palanka	51	26	1	25	0	1	2.0
Knjaževac	18	9	0	9	0	0	0.0

LSG	Total no. of parents in the Project database	No. of initially sampled parents	No. of respondents included from the initial sample	No. of sampled respondents in the replacement sample	No. of respondents included from the replacement sample	Total no. of respondents participating in the research	% of included respondents compared to the total sample of parents
Sombor	35	17	8	18	0	8	22.9
Vladičin Han	43	22	3	21	19	22	51.2
TOTAL	1380	691	278	689	162	480	34.8

3.2. Basic data on respondents and children

The research collected data on gender, place of residence, education level, living conditions, etc. They provided insight into the socio-demographic profile of respondents, which in turn was valuable for analysis and interpretation of the final results of the research. The obtained results are shown within *Table 3*.

Table 3. Overview of socio-demographic profile of respondents

Chart 2. Gender distribution of respondents

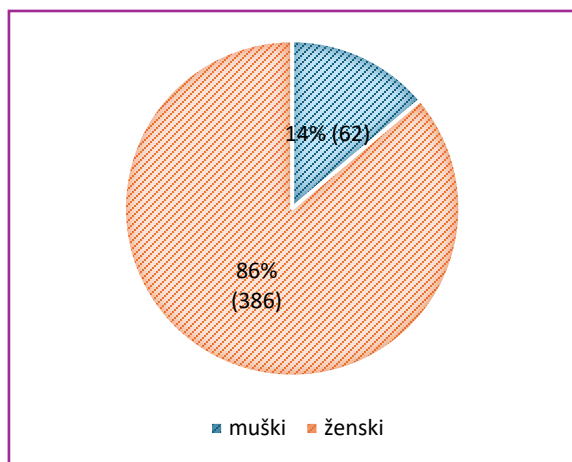


Chart 3. Residential distribution of respondents

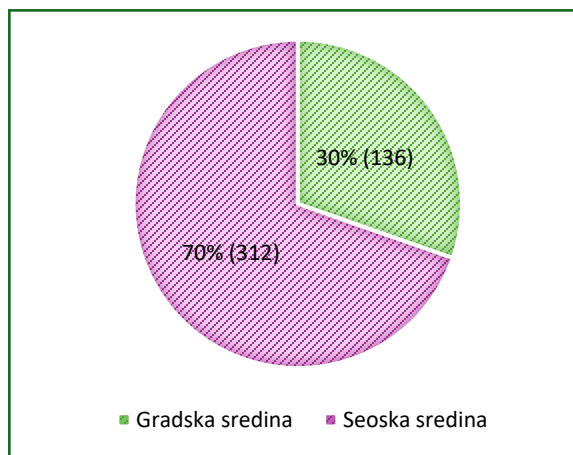


Chart 4. Distribution of respondents by their education level

Chart 5. Distribution of respondents by their employment status

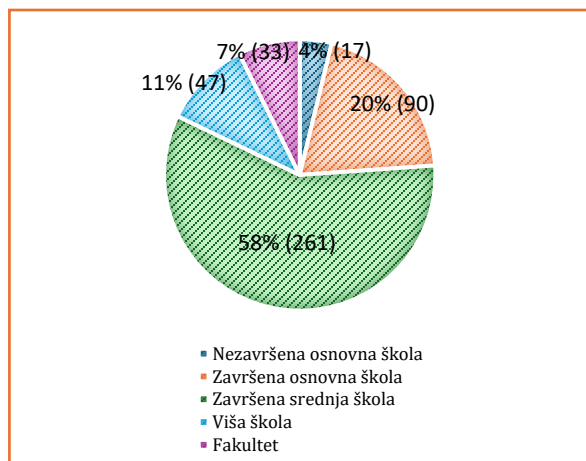


Chart 6. Ethnic distribution of respondents

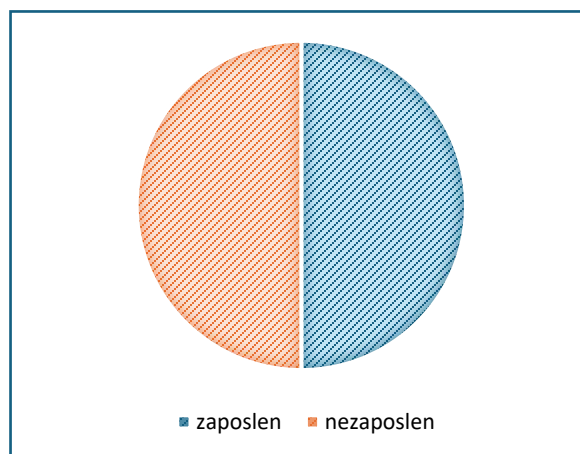
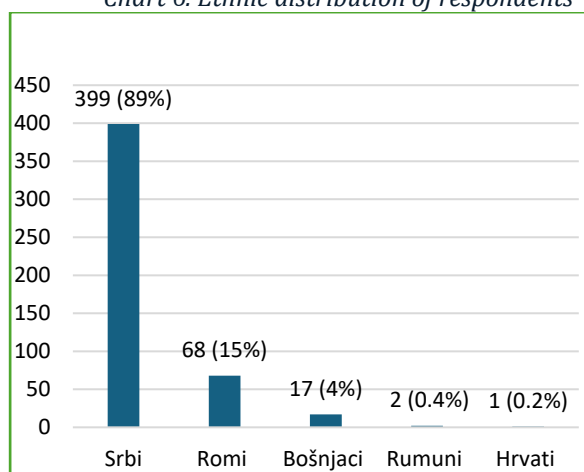
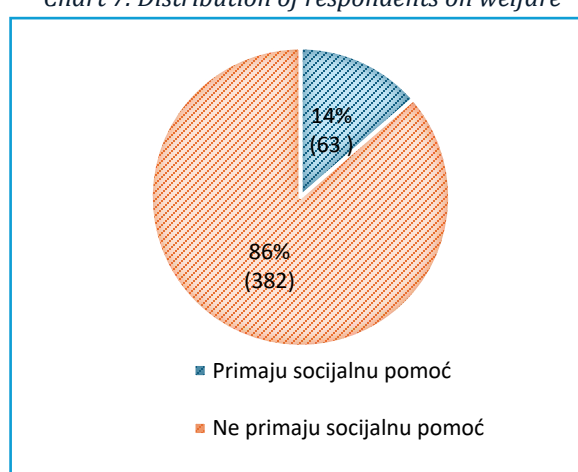


Chart 7. Distribution of respondents on welfare



In short, the survey results as presented in above charts provide the following **socio-demographic profile of respondents**:

- The majority of respondents were female parents, or guardians, comprising about 3/4 of the sample (86%, 389), while a total of 62 fathers /male guardians participated in the survey (14%).
- The majority of parents (70%, 314) reside in rural areas.
- As regards the education level, more than half of the respondents (58%, 263) completed secondary education, while 7% of respondents (37 parents) were college or university graduates. The smallest portion of respondents (3%, 17) had not completed primary education.
- As regards the employment status, the sample was evenly comprised of employed and unemployed parents. It is important to note that 14% of respondents (63) were users of some sort of welfare, with the largest number of them receiving child benefit support (43%).
- The majority of parents were Serbian (75%, 339), followed by Roma population, comprising 15% of the total sample. The participation of other nationalities (Bosnian, Romanian and Croatian) was small, ranging from 4% to 0.2%. A small percentage of respondents (4.6%) chose not to respond to this question.

The respondents were further asked about **the age of their children, how long they attended kindergarten** in the course of the project, and the **type of programme** they attended. The obtained results show the following:

- The majority of respondents, slightly over half, were parents with children aged between 5 and 6 (52%, 237), while parents with children aged between 3 and 4 (7%, 33) were in the minority.
- The majority of respondents' children (80%, 362) attended kindergarten between 2020 and 2022, while the others enrolled their children between 2018 and 2020 (20%, 89). In fact, close to half of parents have children currently attending half-day programmes (48%, 211), which makes their experience quite current.
- Over half children attended mixed groups (69%, 313), or groups with children of different ages. This result points out that different LSGs often opted for this modality of work as necessary and appropriate, even though it is not used often at the preschool level in general (despite its specific advantages and effectiveness as evidenced by results of different researches). This resulted in an improved offer of preschool practice in different LSGs, where this type of work was new, and increased competence of teachers who did not have previous professional experience with mixed groups.

The respondents were additionally asked if they attended kindergarten themselves.

The obtained results show that only slightly over half of parents (56%, 254) were part of the preschool education system.

This research finding is important because it supports in part the successful promotion of early education and the importance of inclusion of children into preschool and project activities.

Before moving on to key research results, below are the following survey results that:

- Relate to **kindergarten attendance and frequency** by children *and*
- Answer the question **if and how much the parents cooperated with the kindergartens their children attended** and **what forms this cooperation took**.

Both these groups of findings and the overview of socio-demographic profile of parents are important in order to interpret and provide context for the final research results .

In general, the obtained results confirmed that parents who participated in this research had access to information needed to provide insight into quality and effectiveness of half-day flexible programmes as most of them were involved in at least basic forms of cooperation with the kindergarten. Additionally, most of their children attended these programmes regularly and for a significant length of time, which makes them informed and relevant respondents.

When it comes to **frequency and regular attendance of half-day programmes**, the parents' responses indicate the following:

- **A total of 90 or 4% of respondents have children who attended the half-day programme for more than half a year.** Most parents (46%, 208) have children who attended the half-day programme for over a year, a quarter of parents (25%, 113) have children who attended it for more than two years, while almost a fifth (19%, 87) have children who attended the programme for more than half a year. The rest of the parents have children who attended the programme for less than half a year, while only a small number of respondents (1,6%, 7) have children who attended the programme for less than a month.
- **A total of 96% of parents who participated in the research responded that their children attended the half-day (flexible) program **regularly** (every time – 40%, 182) or **mostly regularly** (two thirds of the time – 56%, 252).**

The quality of cooperation between parents and kindergartens and especially between parents and teachers is one of the key prerequisites and indicators of programme quality and regular attendance of kindergartens by children. Although the primary responsibility to initiate different types of cooperation falls to preschool institutions, this is a two-way process dependant also on the parents' willingness to get involved. We will address these research findings in more detail in the overview of key results, and in the context of overview of basic information on respondents it is important to highlight the following research results.

A total of 86% of parents responded positively to the question: *Have you as a parent taken part in any way or form in the half-day flexible programme?*

This question included the following forms of cooperation: workshops, discussions, lectures, participation in activities intended for children and/or parents, parenting school, parent-teacher meetings, etc.

Research results also indicate that the **majority of parents (89 %) reacted positively to invitations by kindergartens to get involved in activities in the course of half-day programmes.**

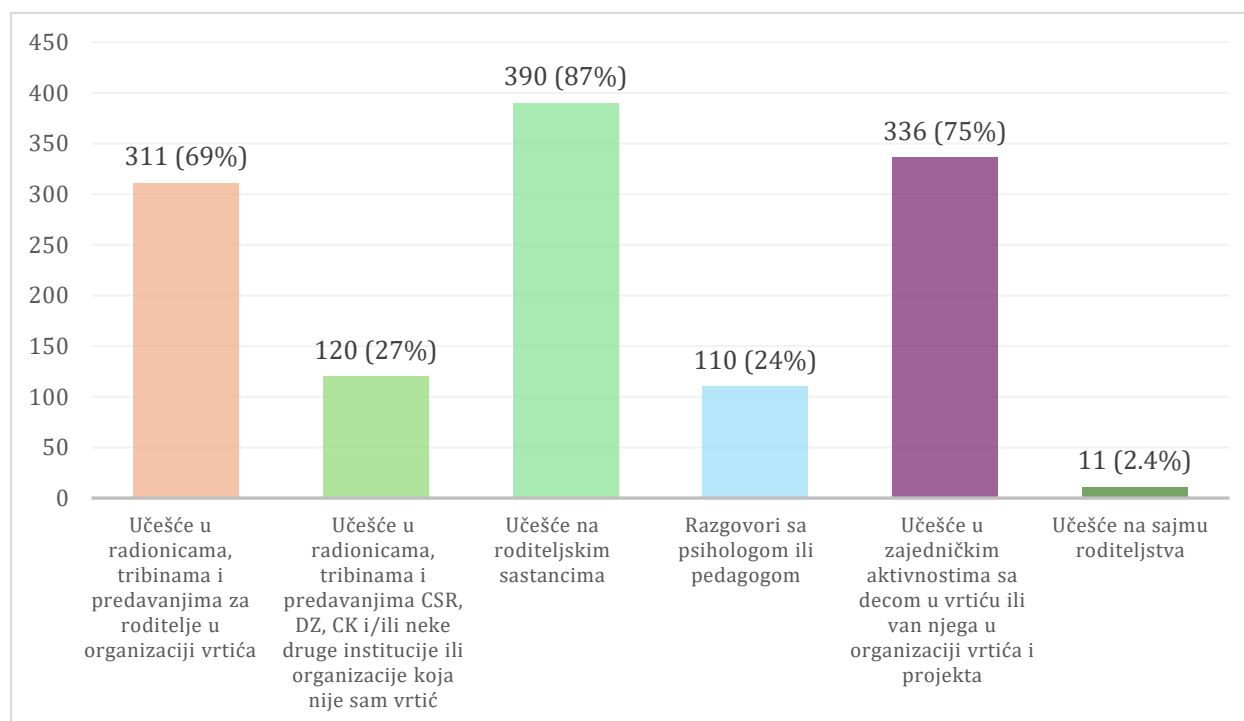
More than half of the sample, or 55% (247), stated that the kindergarten often invited them to join their activities. A smaller percentage, 34% (154), said they were invited rarely, while the rest of the sample stated that their kindergartens did not invite them to participate in any events.

The kindergartens' offer or invitation for cooperation was accepted by around 90% of respondents.

Less than 10% of parents did not participate at all in activities organised by kindergartens, the majority of them responding that they could not find the time to participate (8%, 36), while a small number said they were not interested in kindergartens' invitations (1%, 5).

As regards the forms of cooperation the parents took part in, the obtained results are shown in detail in *Chart 8* and as expected, the most regular form of cooperation between the kindergartens and parents were parent-teacher meetings. A total of 87% of respondents participated in this form of cooperation. Participation in joint activities with children (in and out of kindergartens) as organised by kindergartens or the project, placed relatively highly as well (75%, 337), while the parenting fair had unexpectedly low attendance, by only 2.4% of the participants. Concerning the last mentioned and other offered forms of cooperation (cooperation with a pedagogue, psychologist and participation in workshops, discussions and lectures organised by Social Work Centres for, Health Centres, Cultural Centres, and institutions other than kindergartens), there is room for increased cooperation and/or its improvement, or further research by kindergartens along the following lines – if there is a need to improve the content of these forms of cooperation, if they meet the needs of parents, if the option of these forms of cooperation is adequately presented to parents, if they were promoted enough, if the time slots are adequate, etc.

Chart 8. Overview of respondents' participation in different forms of cooperation by individual forms of cooperation



4. Survey Results

This chapter summarises the total results of the survey per key research tasks, i.e. thematically grouped survey questions:

- 4.1. Assessment of quality of promotional activities, awareness, and support in the process of enrolling children in the half-day programme;
- 4.2. Assessment of programme flexibility and attendance frequency;
- 4.3. Assessment of quality of the learning space and resources;
- 4.4. Overall satisfaction, assessment of the programme quality and effectiveness, and
- 4.5. Feedback on challenges related to child retention and recommendations for programme improvement.

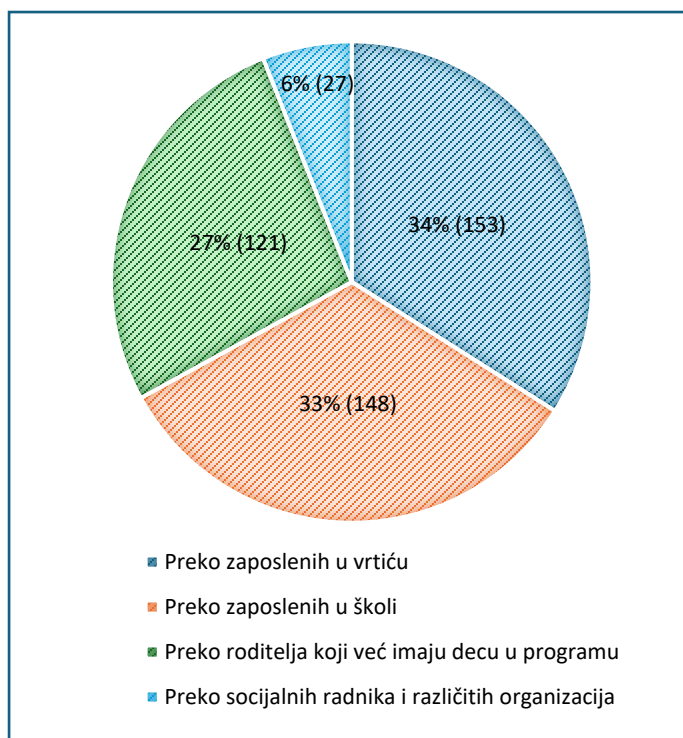
Parents' opinions on the above thematic units should provide a complete picture of their perspective on the quality of half-day (flexible) programmes, which is very important for re-evaluation, creation and improvement of quality of these programmes, teachers' work and overall operation of kindergartens. Assessment, evaluation and appreciation of the parents' perspective is an integral part necessary to build a partnership between the preschool institution and parents, which is one of the key prerequisites of quality and realisation of the complex role played by the preschool education system, and programmes such as half-day (flexible) programmes. Additionally, parents' opinions and assessments serve as one of key starting points for evaluation of quality and effectiveness of crucial project activities.

4.1. Assessment of quality of promotional activities, awareness, and support in the process of enrolling children in the half-day programme

Raising awareness about the benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and linking the provision of ECEC with other services is an effective way to encourage participation of vulnerable families in the system and also to gain benefits from it, as well as to generate greater public demand for high quality ECEC. This was the reason why the questionnaire included questions intended to provide insight not only into the familiarity of parents with ECEC service or LSG efforts in promoting it, but also into the parents' decision-making process when enrolling their children in a kindergarten. As a result, the questionnaire included questions about how parents/guardians learned about the possibility of enrolling their child in the half-day/flexible programme, what was the key reason for enrolling their child in the kindergarten, and whether the information regarding enrolment was relevant and accessible, and if the enrolment procedure was in line with the needs of parents. Below are research results related to said questions.

Regarding the question of how the parents learned about the possibility of enrolling their child in the half-day programme, the results obtained from this open-ended question are shown in *Chart 9*, indicating different sources of information. Still, the majority of parents found out about the programme from kindergarten teachers or schoolteachers (67%), and the third ranked category was word-of-mouth, from friends and acquaintances who already had children enrolled in these programmes and had positive experience with them. A small minority responded that they were informed by different institutions (most often SWC) and organisations (most often the following: Novak Djokovic Foundation, RomaniPen and Centre for Youth Integration).

Chart 9. How parents found out about the programme availability

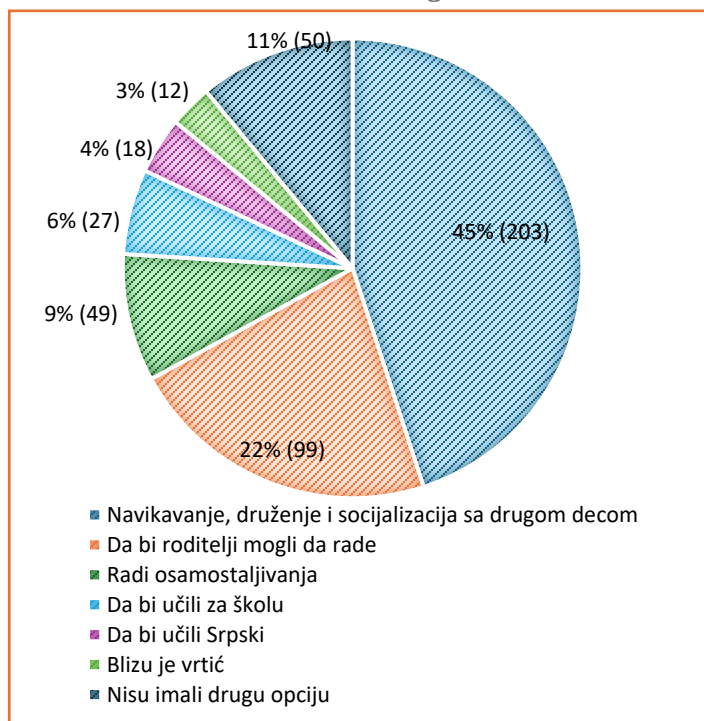


As regards the key reason for enrolling their children in kindergarten, the parents gave a spectrum of different yet expected answers, categorised according to the degree of representation and shown in *Chart 10*. The top three ranked responses to this open-ended question are the following:

- Socialising with other children,
- Enabling parents to go to work, and
- Preparing children for school.

Most parents saw socialisation and spending time with other children as the key factor for enrolling their children into kindergarten, while a small number of them saw kindergarten as “preparation stage” for school, or a “day-care place” which are certainly neither

Chart 10. The key reason parents enrolled their children in kindergarten



only nor primary functions of kindergartens.

In addition to the above, parents had the opportunity to express their agreement with a set of statements related to **programme promotion and enrolment of children**. The obtained results are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Parents' opinions on different aspects relating to programme promotion and enrolment

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Half-day programme was promoted in our area via different channels (e.g. the internet, television shows, kindergarten fb pages, health centre, social work centre, printed materials, leaflets, etc.).	233 (52%)	23 (5.1%)	20 (4.5%)	26 (5.8%)	145 (32.4%)
The promotion of half-day programmes gave a much better understanding of the importance and role of kindergartens in the overall development of my child.	154 (34.4%)	16 (3.6%)	36 (8%)	119 (26.6%)	123 (27.5%)
Enrolling my child in the half-day programme was not complicated.	7 (1.6%)	3 (0.7%)	29 (6.5%)	408 (91.1%)	1 (0.2%)
I was given adequate support and pertinent information in the process of enrolling my child in the half-day programme.	11 (2.5%)	21 (4.7%)	32 (7.1%)	384 (85.7%)	0 (0%)
The process of enrolling may discourage the parents from enrolling their children in the half-day programme.	416 (92.9%)	5 (1.1%)	4 (0.9%)	21 (4.7%)	2 (0.4%)
Before I found out about the half-day programme option, I hesitated about enrolling my child in kindergarten at all.	371 (82.8%)	20 (4.5%)	14 (3.1%)	39 (8.7%)	4 (0.9%)
Before I found out about the half-day programme option, I preferred leaving my child at home with others, because I did not have confidence in the quality of care and education on offer and conditions in the kindergarten.	405 (90.4%)	11 (2.5%)	8 (1.8%)	23 (5.1%)	1 (0.2%)

The results presented in the table above show the following:

- According to more than half of respondents, **promotion of half-day programmes** via different modern communication channels was not available, while almost a third of respondents could not give their assessment on this. On the other hand, a third of respondents agreed that the promotion helped give them a better understanding of the kindergarten's importance and role in the overall development of their child.

- When it comes to **enrolment of children** the obtained results show that the parents predominantly and to a high extent (over 90%) agreed that the process of enrolment was not complicated and that they were given proper support during the enrolment of their children. A small percentage of parents (11.8%) hesitated to enrol their children before finding out about this programme, and a small number of parents (6.9%) did not have confidence in the education, care, and conditions on offer in kindergartens before finding out about the half-day programme option.

4.2. Assessment of programme flexibility and attendance frequency

Parents who work overtime or non-conventional hours (night shifts, late evenings, and/or weekends) face significant challenges in ensuring adequate care for their children while they are at work. The appropriate timing of the programme's start and finish and the flexibility in that regard in response to parents' needs were seen as especially important for enrolment and regular attendance in the kindergarten. Additionally, access to ECEC services can be additionally challenging for single parents and in cases where there is a significant distance between the kindergarten and the workplace (European Commission, 2019). In this regard, below are the research results related to the extent to which parents find the programme's opening and closing hours suitable and whether and to what extent they face challenges in taking their child to the kindergarten or picking them up from the kindergarten due to the distance between the kindergarten and their work place, and the lack of transportation.

Table 5. Level of agreement with a series of statements regarding the suitability of working hours of the half-day programme and availability of kindergartens

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
I find the programme's opening and closing hours suitable.	10 (1.8%)	15 (3.3%)	46 (10.3%)	374 (83.5%)	5 (1.1%)
I often face challenges in taking my child to kindergarten and picking them up due to distance and lack of transportation.	323 (72.1%)	34 (7.6%)	24 (5.4%)	61 (13.6%)	6 (1.3%)

The obtained results show that the vast majority of parents find the programme's opening and closing hours suitable (83%, 374). Just under three quarters of parents do not face distance-related challenges in bringing their children to the kindergarten or picking them up (72%, 323). However, it is important to note here that a certain number of parents strongly agreed with the statement that bringing their children to the kindergarten and picking them up was difficult (14%, 61), indicating that the availability of kindergartens was still an issue for parents in certain LSGs.

Parents were also given the opportunity to indicate **how regularly their children attended the kindergarten** (*Chart 11*) and if not to specify the reasons for non-attending the half-day (flexible) programme (*Chart 12*). According to the results, the vast majority of children (96%) attended kindergartens over two thirds of the time, while a small number of children (15) did not do it, mostly because they did not wish to go or due to health issues. Regular attendance depends on a complex range of factors, but it was certainly partially affected by the previously presented results, as well as the results that follow, which relate to the assessment of the overall programme quality, as well as satisfaction with the work, communication, and cooperation with preschool teachers as key participants in the educational process. In that respect, regular attendance of programmes, as evidenced by the results of this research, indirectly and partially points to and confirms the satisfaction expressed by parents and children with the programmes.

Chart 11. How regular was your child in attending the programme?

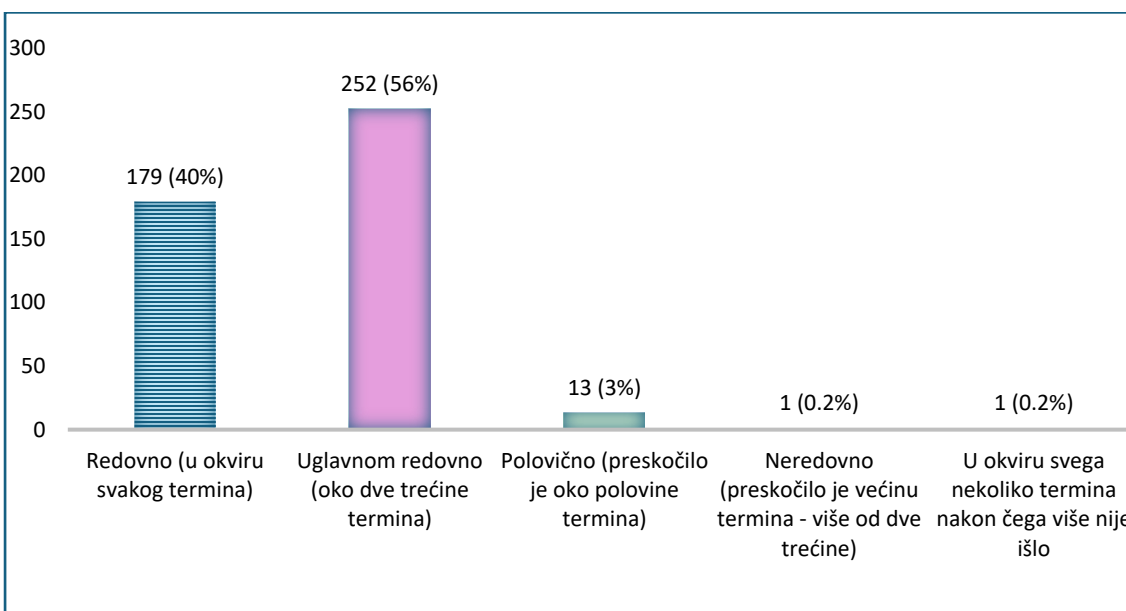
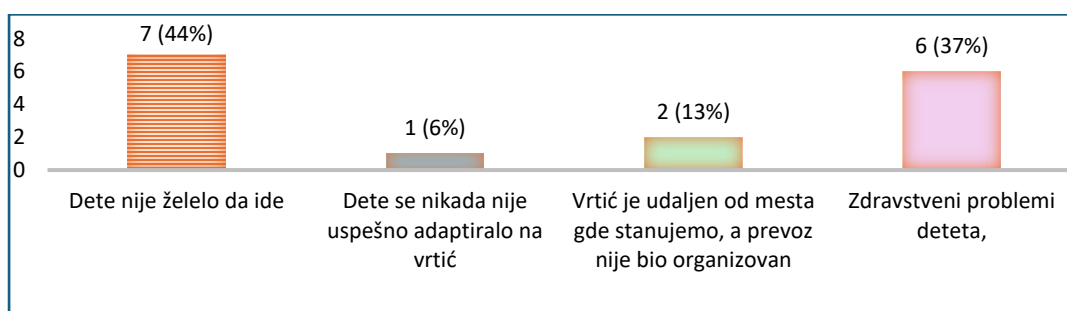


Chart 12. Reasons the children attended less than half of times



4.3. Assessment of quality of the learning space and resources

A high-quality ECEC programme, provided in a thoughtfully designed, well-maintained and physically, emotionally, and socially supportive environment and space for development and learning is the best combination for positive developmental outcomes. Studies show that the quality of learning environments greatly impacts children (Shaw, 2010). In other words, children learn and develop better when they feel comfortable in their surroundings. Most half-day/flexible preschool programmes are organised in existing educational facilities, but many preschool classrooms are being reconstructed or renovated, and some of them are even newly built for this particular purpose. This is the reason why the respondents were given the opportunity to provide their assessment of the quality of space and resources used by their children.

Below are the obtained results presented in a table, which indicate that over 90% of the parents were satisfied with the spatial conditions in kindergartens, materials, and toys which they predominantly found diverse and stimulating. On the other hand, parents' responses differ when it comes to availability of facilities for children with disabilities, as one of the basic features of inclusive space, culture, and practice, indicating that there was room for improvement in certain LSGs in this regard. Nearly 50% of the parents were unable to respond to this statement, while almost 30% of the parents negatively scored the availability of kindergartens for children with disabilities.

Table 6. Assessment of quality of the learning space and resources

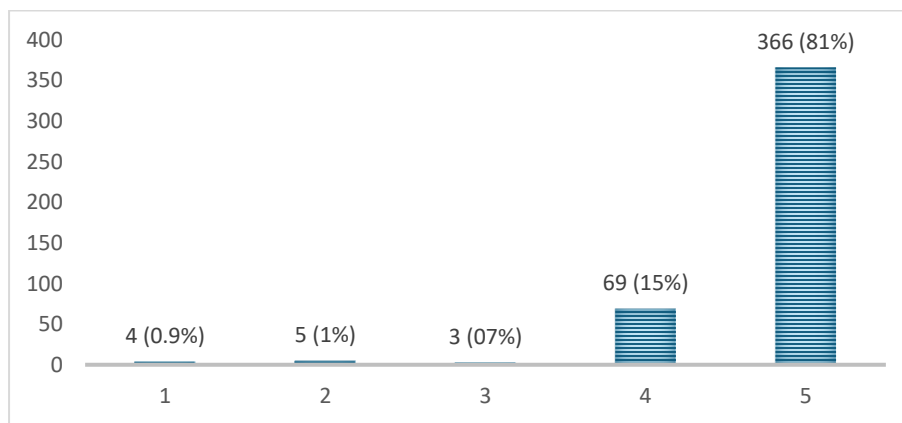
Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Kindergarten conditions are adequate (the space is safe, nicely decorated, clean and ventilated etc.)	9 (2%)	30 (6.7%)	70 (15.6%)	338 (75.4%)	1 (0.2%)
Materials and toys available to children are diverse and stimulating.	5 (1.1%)	16 (3.6%)	58 (12.9%)	396 (82.4%)	0 (0%)
Kindergarten facilities are available for children with disabilities.	104 (23.2%)	29 (6.5%)	11 (2.5%)	83 (18.5%)	221 (49.3%)

4.4. Overall satisfaction, assessment of programme quality and effectiveness

Among researchers, there is a consensus that ECEC programmes should have a holistic approach to children by stimulating their learning, development, and well-being. High quality ECEC encourages children to learn and develop to their full potential in multiple dimensions, regardless of their socio-economic background, native language, and other specific needs. Therefore, the survey also attempted to assess the perception of parents'/guardians' of the quality of the service provided. In addition to the general assessment of quality, the parents were given the opportunity to assess various aspects such as: the number of children per group, the group size, the quality of work done by preschool teachers, staff turnover, the monitoring of children's development, communication between children and teachers, and teachers and parents, etc. with the research assumption that good communication between parents/guardians and teachers is crucial. Certain case studies in which the results of monitoring the child's development in relation to their strengths, interests and child's learning were communicated between parents and teachers, showed greater effectiveness in the child's progress not only as a form of support for preparation for school, but also for their overall development in the zone of proximal development (OECD, 2020). Also the competence and professionalism of teachers play a crucial role in assessing the quality and effects of half-day flexible programmes. Below is the presentation of parents' opinions regarding the above aspects of assessment.

In presenting this part of the research results, we will start with the **general assessment of satisfaction of respondents**. Parents were given the opportunity to rate, on a five-point scale (1 – least satisfied, 5 – most satisfied), their satisfaction with half-day flexible programmes attended by their children. The obtained results presented in *Chart 13* show that parents were predominantly very satisfied with the programme, with a high percentage opting for the highest rating (366, 82%), while only 12 parents (2.7%) reported ratings lower than 3.

Chart 13. General assessment of satisfaction of parents with the half-day (flexible) programme



Furthermore, parents were given the opportunity to assess the programme quality, considering their children's overall experience and perspectives, by expressing their level of agreement with the statements presented in the table below. The obtained responses can be considered as positive research results, further elucidating overall satisfaction of parents with the programmes their children attended. The results indicate that:

- The **adaptation process** went successfully for the great majority of children (446, 98.1%),
- Children found the **time spent in kindergarten interesting** (446, 99.6%)
- Children **gladly and often talked about their kindergarten activities** (432, 96.5%); and consequently
- They **gladly attended the programme** (442, 98.6%).

Table 6. Satisfaction with the programme based on children's perspective

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
The adaptation process went successfully.	4 (0.9%)	1 (0.2%)	7 (1.6%)	439 (97%)	0 (0%)
Children found their time in kindergarten interesting.	0 (0%)	2 (0.4%)	83 (18.5%)	363 (81%)	0 (0%)
Children gladly and often talked about their kindergarten activities.	13 (2.9%)	3 (0.7%)	33 (7.4%)	399 (89.1%)	0 (0%)
Children gladly attended this programme.	4 (0.9%)	2 (0.4%)	32 (7.1%)	410 (91.5%)	0 (0%)

Parents were also asked to express their level of agreement with the below list of statements related to the satisfaction of both children and parents with the **teachers' work and communication and collaboration with them**. This particularly important aspect of the programme's quality significantly coloured the overall experience and satisfaction of the respondents with the programme. The obtained results show that parents are predominantly and to a high extent satisfied with the quality of collaboration and communication with the teachers on both key tracks: teacher – child and teacher – parent. Over 95% of parents provided such assessment.

Table 7. Satisfaction of parents and children with the work, collaboration and communication with teachers

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
My child was very pleased with their teachers.	3 (0.7%)	2 (0.4%)	10 (2.2%)	433 (96.7%)	0 (0%)
The communication between teachers and my	5 (1.1%)	0 (0%)	21 (4.7%)	422 (94.2%)	0 (0%)

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
child was exemplary.					
Teachers successfully resolve communication and conflicts between children in the group.	4 (0,9%)	2 (0,4%)	29 (6,5%)	412 (92%)	1 (0,2%)
The communication between teachers and parents is easy and pleasant.	1 (0,2%)	2 (0,4%)	14 (3,1%)	430 (96%)	1 (0,2%)
Teachers informed me regularly of my child's behaviour and progress.	3 (0,7%)	0 (0%)	22 (4,9%)	422 (94,2%)	1 (0,2%)
Teachers informed me about my child's strengths and interests.	3 (0,7%)	3 (0,7%)	33 (7,4%)	409 (91,3%)	0 (0%)
Teachers gave me useful advice and pointers for education of my child and support of their development.	4 (0,9%)	7 (1,6%)	39 (8,7%)	396 (88,4%)	0 (0%)

Parents had the opportunity to assess the **effectiveness of the programme by evaluating the progress of their children in various key aspects of their development** under influence of the programme itself. The obtained results indicate predominantly positive assessments, showing that the vast majority of parents noticed progress primarily in socio-emotional development (416, 92.9%), followed by the development of new interests (394, 87.9%) and speech development (375, 83.7%). A slightly smaller number of parents noticed progress in the development of hygiene routine (347, 77.5%) and independence in dressing and eating (347, 77.5%), which could be partially attributed to the fact that about half of the respondents had children aged 5–6, who had already predominantly mastered such routine and skills. The charts below show the distribution of respondents' answers relating to said individual aspects of development.

Chart 14. Was there any progress in your children's speech development under the influence of the programme?

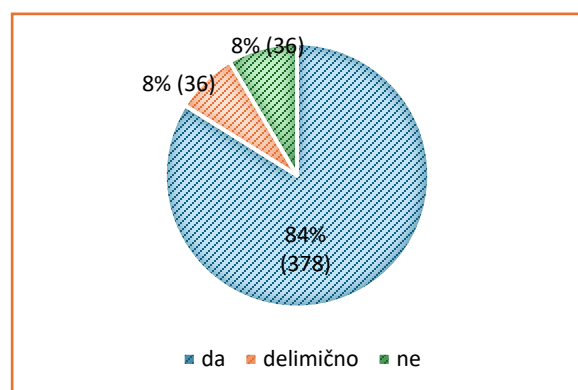


Chart 15. Were there any new interests your children developed under the influence of the programme?

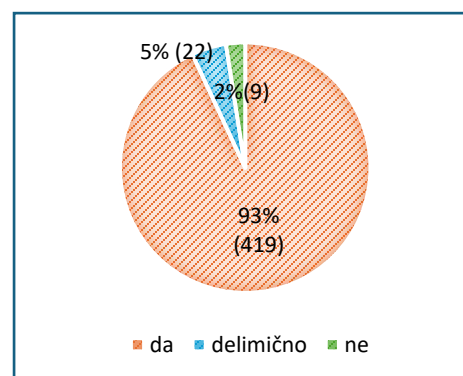


Chart 16. Have the children shown any progress in their socio-emotional development under the influence of the programme?

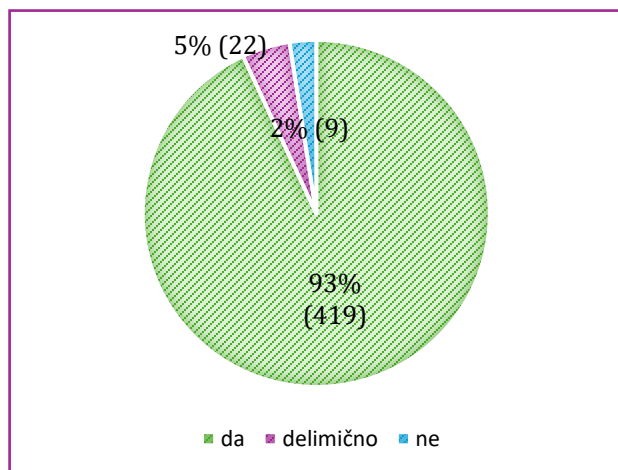


Chart 17. Have the children developed hygiene routine under the influence of the programme?

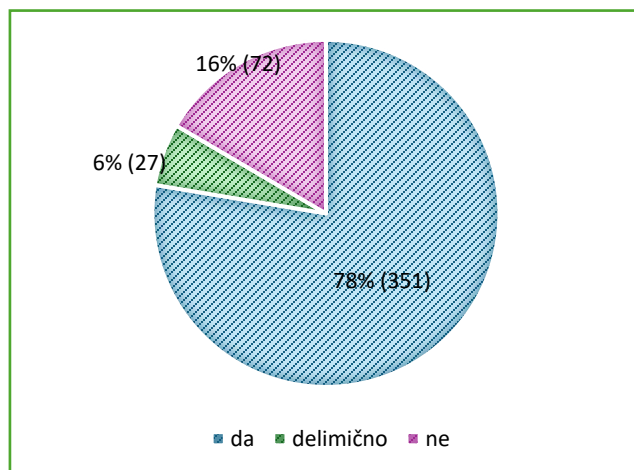
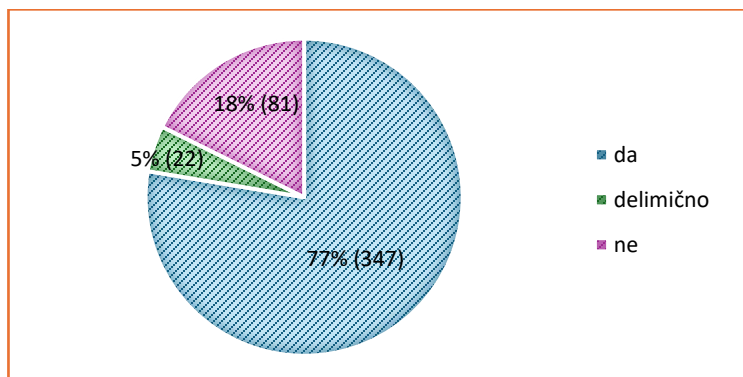


Chart 18. Did you notice any progress in independence in dressing and eating under the influence of the programme?



Parents had the opportunity to express their level of agreement with statements on how, generally speaking, project activities influenced **their perception of the kindergarten, its significance for early child development, as well as the development of parental competencies**, as one of the key objectives of the Project. The overall results are shown in *Table 8*. The responses show that over 90% of parents agree that the experience with half-day programmes helped them:

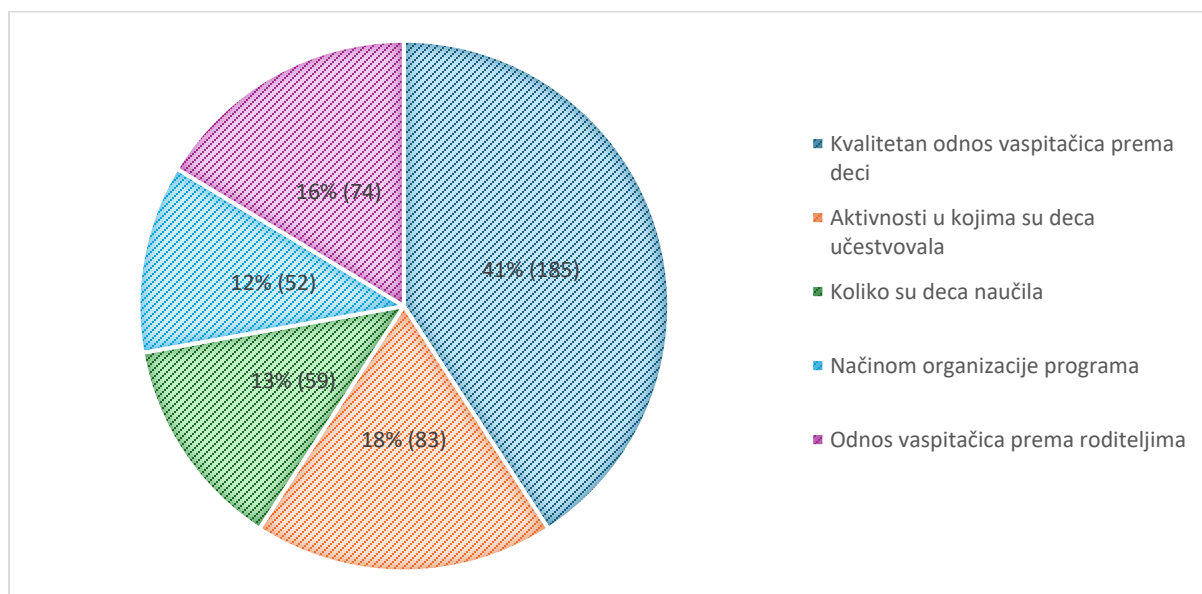
- Realise the kindergarten's positive effect on the overall child development,
- Change the way they see kindergarten as a place beyond the sole function of taking daily care of children while parents are at work;
- Enhance their parental competencies.

Table 8. Parents' perception of the kindergarten and development of parental competencies after attendance of the half-day programme

Statements	I strongly disagree	I mostly disagree	I mostly agree	I strongly agree	I neither agree nor disagree
Only after my child enrolled in the kindergarten did I realise the positive effect it can have on their overall development.	19 (4.2%)	7 (1.6%)	68 (15.2%)	352 (78.6%)	2 (0.4%)
After my experience with the half-day programme, I do not see the kindergarten simply as a place that looks after children, but as a safe and encouraging space contributing to overall development and progress of my child.	12 (2.7%)	10 (2.2%)	84 (18.8%)	340 (75.9%)	2 (0.4%)
While my child attended the half-day programme, I was given support in developing parental competencies (knowledge, skills and values relating to successful care and support of overall development of my child).	23 (5.1%)	13 (2.9%)	87 (19.4%)	321 (71.7%)	4 (0.9%)

Finally, instead of a conclusion on parents' satisfaction with the overall experience of children attending kindergarten, we want to present the results of an open-ended question: *Please describe one thing you are most satisfied with regarding the overall experience with the half-day programme your child attended.* The obtained results are shown in Chart 20.

Chart 20. One thing parents are most satisfied with regarding the overall experience with the programme



The responses show that parents were mostly satisfied with:

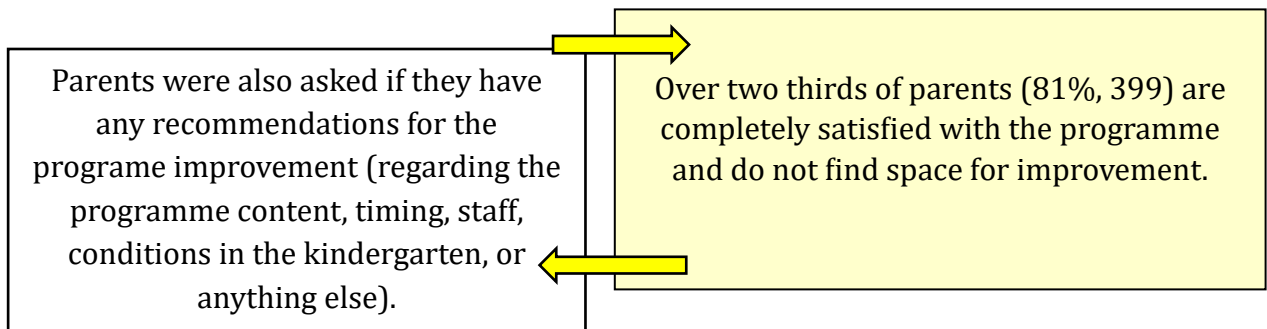
- **The relationship teachers built with their children** (*"I am most satisfied with the teacher's relationship with children, it is just great", "The teachers treat all children equally, mine as well, regardless of us being Roma", "The development and advancement of my child is evident and we have our teacher to thank for that", "The teacher knows how to approach any child and resolve any conflict, and also teach children how to act in situations when other children are behaving badly".*).
- **The activities in which children participated** (*„The activities are diverse and my child finds them interesting“, „My child often talks of what they did in the kindergarten, what they learned and what was interesting, therefore I am satisfied with the programme“, „The children learn different things in creative ways“, „There is a large number of workshops“, „Children often sing, draw, learn new things, all while playing, and that is why the children progress so well“...).*
- Also, parents expressed great satisfaction with **the programme itself** (*"The programme is good, workshops and activities for children are creative", "My child enjoys kindergarten, and I especially liked the organized lectures for parents", "I like the entire programme, all the topics they cover are well thought out", "The programme is excellent, adapted to the capabilities and interests of children, yet challenging; they learn a lot", "The programme is of high quality, the child constantly acquires new knowledge and skills" ...).*
- In addition to the satisfaction with the relationships teachers built with children, parents often expressed satisfaction with **their relationship with teachers** (*"The collaboration between teachers and parents is exemplary", "Teachers are very dedicated to children", "The teacher knows my child excellently and she has shown me his new interests and talents", "When I complained to the teacher about the behaviour of children from the group and peer violence, she reacted very constructively, gave me advice and the issue was quickly resolved", "The teacher advised me on how to resolve conflicts between my younger and older child at home, since they got along very well in kindergarten with other children" ...).*
- Finally, parents were very satisfied with the fact that their children learned new skills, that is, with the effects of the programme (*"My child seems somehow more mature, more open to other children, prefers to play and socialise with others even outside the kindergarten", "I am often surprised by what my child has learned, he is starting to read and write", "I did not know how well my child sang, how many new songs she has learned, and that she loves to perform, which she has perfected in the kindergarten, and that makes me very happy" ...)*

4.5. Feedback on challenges related to child retention and recommendations for programme improvement

Alongside the presented results on the regular attendance and reasons for potential irregular attendance of the programmes, it is important to identify potential challenges the parents faced and their recommendations for programme improvement, as well as to establish whether and why they would recommend enrolment in a certain half-day programme to other parents.

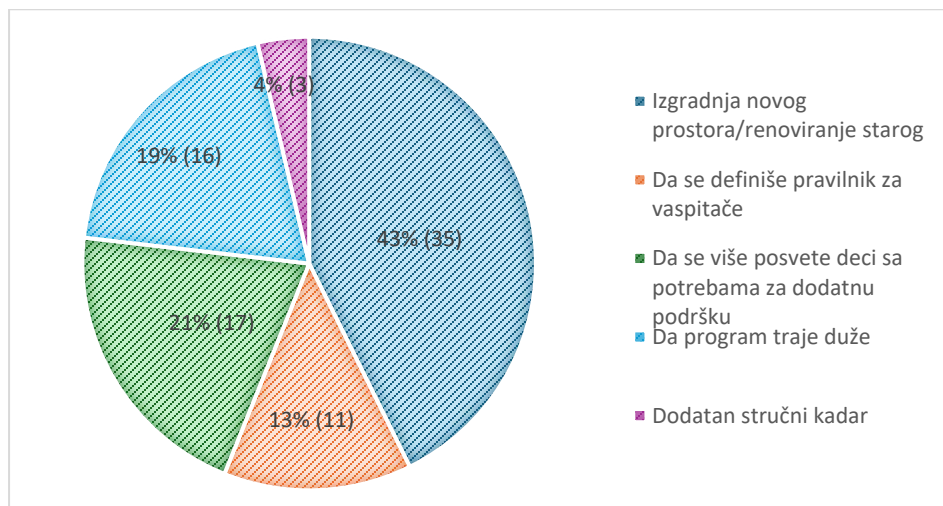
Regarding the question of **necessary support that might not have been provided to parents or children during the programme**, the obtained results show that as much as **99.3% (445)** of parents claim that this was not the case, which indicates that the parents rated the support that was provided as comprehensive.

A total of 3 (0.7%) parents that needed support that was not provided stated that the support they needed was in the form of provision of resources such as: supply of water, power, clothing, footwear etc.



Although less than 20% of the respondents find the space for improvement in certain aspects of the programme, their responses can be considered very important for further consideration. The categories of responses from respondents who were willing to specify and share suggestions for the programme improvement as shown in *Chart 21* show that the majority of parents (35) believed adaptation of existing space or construction of a new facility was necessary to ensure adequate or optimal conditions. According to the opinion of 21 parents, additional support is needed for children with disabilities, such as including additional specialised staff, primarily special education teachers. A similar number of parents believed that the programme should last longer, to align with parents' working hours. A smaller number of parents was of the opinion that the rule book on preschool teachers' work should stipulate that teachers should not be appointed to a different group of children in less than a year and that teachers should have continuous support in their work from special education teachers, psychologists, and pedagogues when working with children with disabilities. They also suggested the reduction of the number of children per teacher.

Chart 21. Respondents answer the question on key suggestions for programme improvement



Finally, it is important to highlight one of the key findings of the general research, which in a certain way confirms and completes the picture of overall experience of parents with half-day (flexible) programmes and parental satisfaction, and it is the fact that **as much as 98.2%, 440 of respondents would recommend enrolling their children in the half-day preschool programmes to other parents.**

5. Final conclusions and recommendations

Final research results, as corroborated by the parents' perspective, show that the activities within the ECEC project sub-component 3.2: Outreach to families from vulnerable groups, made important strides towards making the ECEC system more available in multiple LSGs. Furthermore, the diversification of programme and services on offer made it more appropriate to needs of children and families, which improved its quality, inclusivity and competence.

It is important to point out that findings evaluated in this report represent the opinion of approximately a third of the total sample of parents, who may be considered as informed and relevant respondents, key critical friends, taking into account the fact that the majority of their children attended half-day flexible programmes regularly for a longer period of time, and that they continuously cooperated with the kindergarten at least on a basic level, and many of them in all forms of cooperation.

Total research data show consistent and predominantly positive assessment of key prerequisites and aspects of quality of these programmes and parents' satisfaction primarily with: support with enrolment, flexible offer of programmes, quality of learning space and resources, cooperation on key tracks (child – teacher, as well as parent – teacher), quality of teachers' work, programme content, etc. Consequently, they indicate that the majority of parents recognised the effects of these programmes on socio-emotional and cognitive development of their children, speech development, development of new interests, and they expressed their satisfaction with overall quality of the programme. On the other hand, even if they were in minority, some of them saw room for improvement which needs to be carefully considered, especially in certain LSGs.

Below are some key indicators to support the above very positive general satisfaction of parents:

- In assessing their **overall satisfaction with the half-day flexible programme** (on a five-point scale, 1 – least satisfied and 5 – most satisfied), over 80% of parents (366, 82%) opted for the highest rating, while only 12 parents (2.7%) reported ratings lower than 3.
- **Over 96%** of parents assessed that: **adaptation process** was successful (446, 98.1%), the children **found their time in kindergarten interesting** (446, 99.6%), they **gladly and often talked about their kindergarten activities** (432, 96.5%), and consequently they **gladly attended the programme** (442, 98.6%).
- **Over 95%** of respondents expressed their satisfaction with the **quality of cooperation and communication with teachers** on both key tracks, teacher – child

and teacher – parent. It is important to point out that this result was also confirmed by the open-ended question asking parents to describe one thing they were most satisfied with – the majority of respondents singled out the quality of teachers' work and the relationship they built with their children.

- **Over two thirds of parents** noted that their children showed **progress in various aspects of development**, under influence of the programme they attended. This was primarily in *socio-emotional development* (416, 92.9%), followed by development of *new interests* (394, 87.9%) and *speech development* (375, 83.7%). A slightly smaller number of parents noticed progress in the development of *hygiene routine* (347, 77.5%) and *independence in dressing and eating* (347, 77.5%).

It is also important to point out key research results relating most directly to parents themselves:

- **over 90% of parents** agreed that their experience with the half-day programme helped them: realise the kindergarten's positive effect on the overall child development, change the way they see kindergarten beyond its sole function of taking care of children while the parents are at work, and to enhance their parental competencies.
- As many as **99.3%** of respondents agreed that they were **given necessary support** in the process of enrolling and attending the programme.

Even though the obtained results are predominantly positive (without going into specific aspects of the assessment), they also show room for improvement in the following areas:

- In the opinion of slightly over half of parents (52%), half-day programmes were not adequately promoted in their area via different channels (e.g. the internet, television shows, kindergarten FB pages, health centres, social work centres, printed materials, leaflets, etc.). The majority of respondents found out about the half-day programme from kindergartens, schools or other parents who already had children attending the programme. Therefore, in order to increase the inclusion of children in the preschool system in certain LSGs, it is necessary to ensure continuous and better promotion by using different modern communication channels.
- Despite the overall highly positive rating of cooperation between parents and teachers, the research results indicate that some forms of cooperation, such as attending Parenting Fairs, cooperation with pedagogues or psychologists, as well as participation in workshops, discussions and lectures organised by the SWC, HC, CC, or institutions or organisations other than the kindergarten itself were not well attended. Therefore, there is room to intensify these forms of cooperation in certain

LSGs and/or to improve them, or to encourage further research by kindergartens along the following lines – if there is a need to improve the content of these forms of cooperation, if they meet the needs of parents, if the option of these forms of cooperation is adequately presented to parents, were they promoted enough, were the time slots adequate, etc.

- Even though slightly less than three fourths of parents do not face challenges with taking their children to kindergarten or picking them up from it due to distance (72%, 323), it is important to point out that a certain number of parents experience difficulties in taking their children to the kindergarten (14%, 61), therefore the availability of kindergartens remains a real problem in certain LSGs for a small number of parents, and remains an important challenge for local project teams and LSGs to resolve.
- The obtained results indicate that 90% of parents are satisfied with the spatial conditions in kindergartens, didactic materials and toys, which they predominantly found diverse and stimulating. On the other hand, parents' assessments differ when it comes to availability of facilities for children with disabilities, as one of basic features of inclusive space, culture and practice, indicating that there was room for improvement in certain LSGs in this regard. Specifically, nearly 50% of parents were unable to respond to this statement, while almost 30% of parents negatively scored availability of kindergarten facilities for children with disabilities.
- Around 20% of respondents gave recommendations for improvement of the programme, and they were mostly aimed towards improving spatial conditions, followed by the need to provide a more comprehensive support for children with disabilities, as well as the suggestion to extend the programme working hours (in certain LSGs half-day programmes were not available, and the programmes lasted only two hours).

Finally, instead of a conclusion, we would like to highlight one of key research results, showing that 98.2% (440) of respondents would recommend the programme their children attended to other parents.

The overall research results may serve as an important argument in support of sustainable key project activities organised by local project teams in different LSGs via intersectoral cooperation, especially introducing half-day flexible programmes as parts of regular kindergarten offer in different LSGs even after the completion of the ECEC project.

More specifically, these research results, together with:

- Evaluated findings relating to assessment of progress of programme activities and recommendations for their sustainability based on **Evaluation of performance and operational audit for the grant programme for improving the inclusive preschool education at the local level**, prepared by Centre for Education Policy within the first and second cycle of developmental projects,
- self-evaluation and SWOT analysis results from local intersectoral teams and
- additional research results taking into account opinions of teachers, professionals, directors of preschool institutions and representatives of social services in LSGs about the needs, advantages, possibilities and effectiveness of diversification of offer in kindergartens with half-day programmes, and
- systematisation and publication of examples of good practice from different LSGs,

may serve as a comprehensive, data-based foundation for a sustainable project initiative, with the goal of ensuring continued support to half-day programmes as one of key results of the Inclusive Early Childhood Education and Care project. This would make the solutions that were tried and implemented in practice sustainable, courtesy of acquired and improved professional experience of various experts, institutions and organisations forming intersectoral teams. At the same time, they may serve as adequate and necessary response to key strategic and developmental goals of the preschool system, such as increasing the coverage, availability, equity, and quality of this level of education.