TOY for Inclusion in Slovakia

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During Autumn 2024, an evaluation was conducted to examine **the role of Play Hubs in supporting transitions from early childhood education and care (ECEC)** to primary school, particularly for marginalized Roma and Ukrainian refugee children. The study combined desk research with focus groups and interviews with 12 professionals selected and authorized by Škola dokorán, focusing on insights from Play Hub coordinators, staff, and program stakeholders.

In Slovakia, Play Hubs promote developmental continuity by **providing spaces** and **activities** that support social, emotional, and cognitive readiness through literacy workshops and play-based learning. **Familiarity with school environments**, facilitated by coordinated visits and shared spaces, helps ease the transition and reduce adjustment challenges.

- Play Hubs encourage parental involvement through collaborative and family-centered approaches
- Transitioning from kindergarten or nonformal education to primary school through Play Hubs practically involves activities fostering literacy, social and emotional readiness, physical readiness, and cultural integration
- Play Hubs adapt to diverse needs, such as focusing on language inclusion for Ukrainian refugees or integrating marginalized Roma children, emphasizing the role of cultural and linguistic acclimatization in successful transitions

Play Hubs effectively address the importance of continuity but face challenges in achieving systemic consistency. Their role as a bridging space between nonformal and formal education, particularly for marginalized communities and refugee populations, underscores their potential as a model for advancing transitional strategies while highlighting the need for continuous adaptation and policy support to overcome existing barriers.

Challenges include disparities in parental engagement, language and cultural differences, and infrastructure limitations. Strengthening family involvement and ensuring long-term sustainability require further efforts.

Aligning teaching methods and structures with formal education systems requires further development. Future improvements to the initiative should focus on:

Ensuring Sustainability Through Stable Financing

Long-term financial support is essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the Play Hubs. Embedding Play Hubs in national frameworks ensures stability, resource planning, and continuous community engagement.

Balancing Play Hub Integration with Schools and Parental Involvement

Aligning Play Hub activities with Školský klub while maintaining their unique role enhances school collaboration. Ensuring accessibility and strengthening parental engagement fosters participation. Play Hubs should complement, not replace, structured learning.

Training Play Hub Personnel in Transition Strategies

Specialized training equips staff to support school readiness, social-emotional development, and language acquisition. Collaboration with schools and families ensures consistent approaches, particularly for marginalized children. Ongoing mentoring enhances staff effectiveness.

Aligning Educational Priorities Through Policy Communication

Stronger engagement with policymakers ensures Play Hubs align with national education priorities and receive long-term support. Recognizing their role in transitions improves funding stability and integration into formal education systems.

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Read the full evaluation report for a detailed analysis and findings.

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