

ARISE

Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education

Policy Road Map for Enhancing Efficiency of Family and Child Support at the Local Level

Republic of Serbia

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Family and Child Support at the Local Level

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List of abbreviations

HC	Healthcare Centre
ICS	Intersectoral Committee
LSG	Local Self-government
Intersectoral team	Local intersectoral team for additional support to families and children
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
SWC	Social Welfare Center

Project:

„Reducing Inequalities in Education“ - ARISE

"Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education" – ARISE is a regional project implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey funded by the European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

The project aims to support inclusion of students with low socio-economic status (SES) by building national and regional partnerships among civil society organisations from six aforementioned beneficiaries in order to engage in advocacy and constructive policy dialogue with governments, raise awareness among education stakeholders and pilot interventions targeting low SES students at the school level.

The project addresses the impact of poverty on students at two levels.

On the one hand, it is necessary to implement long-term solutions for creating equity in education through educational, social and healthcare policies. On the other hand, by piloting interventions at the school level that focus on supporting students with low socio-economic status, the project provides examples of best practices for the development of the mentioned policies.

In order to influence public policies at the national level, the project's intention is to establish a mechanism that will engage and connect relevant stakeholders that deal with the impact of poverty on education and support for students with low socio-economic status. Specifically, the project aims to create a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration - the National Platform - in all beneficiary countries.

National collaboration platforms have brought together representatives from relevant institutions and experts, including decision-makers and policy creators, school representatives, civil society and research/academic organisation representatives that address poverty and social exclusion issues, as well as other relevant organisations.

The National Collaboration Platform was preceded by the development of the National Report on Equity in Education[1].

[1] Available at https://www.cep.edu.rs/public/National_report_Serbia_ARISE.pdf

National context - equity in education

Based on the analysis of strategic documents and legislative framework, existing research, along with data obtained through questionnaires for decision-makers containing questions about the equity in the education system, social and healthcare, consultations with relevant institutions and experts, as well as subsequent conducting of focus groups and interviews with policy makers, school directors, teachers, school support staff, students, parents, civil society organisations, and education experts, a National Report on Equity in Education has been developed. The key findings of the report are presented below.

The impact of socio-economic status (SES) on equity and school achievements is still visible in Serbia. Although the legal framework has been well-established, there are still challenges in implementation, observed at all levels of education.

In preschool education, the enrollment rate is highest in the most developed municipalities and major cities (local self-government units of the 1st category). In these areas, the majority of children are enrolled in public preschool institutions. These local self-government units also have the highest, and continually growing, number of private preschool institutions. The 69% gap in preschool attendance between the wealthiest and poorest quintiles is additionally exacerbating the situation of children in poverty, among whom only 48% have at least 3 books at home, compared to 90% in the wealthiest quintile. Children from the poorest quintile are also less likely to participate in the compulsory preschool programme a year before starting primary school (83%, compared to 100% in the wealthiest quintile) (UNICEF, 2020 [2]). In secondary education, 79% of the poorest attend school compared to 98% of the wealthiest.

[2] UNICEF (2020). MICS6 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for 2019, Belgrade: UNICEF.

In the following paragraphs, key findings are systematized, indicating the barriers for students with low SES, despite the seemingly non-discriminatory legislative framework and additional support measures at all levels.

Key finding 1: Poverty and low SES of students are addressed in education legislation, however, the support provided to these students (especially on the local level) is still vague. There is, also, an overlap in jurisdictions between education and social welfare systems. Some important issues like securing clothes, food, school supplies etc. are left to schools or local communities to provide, and they often do not have enough resources. Social welfare system provides financial aid but except for child's allowance, it is not connected to educational needs. Also, support measures recommended by inter-sectoral committees often cannot be implemented since there are no resources available at the local level. Red Cross and other organizations with project activities fill the systemic gaps, but this is not sufficient and universally available.

Key finding 2: Inclusive education encouraged schools and teachers to use different methods to satisfy student needs, but the general context has not changed. Financing is still insensitive to differences between and within schools, and school professional associates are not present in every school full time in order to support teachers and students.

Key finding 3: Low SES families are often not familiar with measures in the field of social welfare, especially child allowance, preschool attendance benefits, financial social assistance, educational and non-educational support and they do not know their rights and opportunities for help.

Key finding 4: Low SES severely impacts students' achievement and participation. SES has a cumulative effect on education, so these students would rather choose VET profile than gymnasium or they enrol in non-attractive VET profiles without perspective on the labour market but approachable to them. All of these examples prevent students from breaking the chain of poverty.

Key finding 5: Absence of functional education management information systems (EMIS) in education with valid statistical data linked with other information systems (social issues, employment etc.).

Key finding 6: There is room for improvement of the use of data collected during schools' external evaluation and self-evaluation in the way to be used for real improvement of schoolwork rather than for a formal purpose. Some data show the gap between external evaluation results and school self-evaluation results, which indicate that schools are not objective when they conduct a self-evaluation process.

Key finding 7: Low value of education within families with low SES.

Key finding 8: Initial teacher education does not equip the future teacher with competencies for work with diverse groups of students including working with students from vulnerable groups.

Key finding 9: Influence of COVID-19 pandemic on equity in education and lack of digital tools and digital competences of students for education.

Key finding 10: The sustainability of results in educational development projects is not assured.

Importance of intersectoral cooperation at the local level

One of the biggest obstacles to systemic support for students from vulnerable groups is the lack of alignment of jurisdiction among different systems: education, social welfare, healthcare, local self-government, and other institutions and organisations that can be resources; their insufficient connectivity and collaboration at the operational level.

The significance of inter-sectoral collaboration, although essential at the national level, is most easily observed at the level of local communities. The local self-government unit is the level at which various measures supporting the education of students from vulnerable groups are initiated, funded, and implemented. Functions of the local self-government unit, regulated by legislative and sub-legislative acts, have an indirect or direct effect on the development and implementation of support measures, and some of the most crucial functions include providing conditions for work of inter-sectoral committees and securing financial resources for children from vulnerable groups based on various criteria.

Although there is national legislation, many measures are described as options for LSG units to implement, rather than obligations. A recent policy mapping revealed, for example, that despite the significant need for the integration of the Roma population into education, the support provided by LSG at the local level is insufficient (SIPRU, 2020 [3]).

For example, among the 116 LSG units contributing to the mapping (out of 174 total), only:

- 9 of them provided scholarships for high school students, and 6 for university students,
- 34 of them provided funds for free textbooks for Roma students.

Approximately half of the analyzed municipalities funded the transportation costs for Roma students in primary schools (69 LSG units) and school meals for Roma students (54 LSG units).

[3] SIPRU (2020). Overview of data of cities and municipalities about measures of social inclusion of Roma in 2020. Team for social inclusion and reduction of poverty, Belgrade.

Analyses of the capacities of LSG units to provide support for the needs of other projects have yielded several important findings [4]:

- Certain LSG units classified in the 4th category based on the level of development have reduced capacity to support students at risk due to widespread poverty and underdevelopment.
- Even these LSG units are developing, or have developed, measures aimed at improving the social status of the most vulnerable groups in their area. This indicates an awareness of the importance of supporting vulnerable groups, providing a good foundation for further development of these measures and improving the well-being of students.
- Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating planned and implemented measures are lacking, which is not exclusively a characteristic of the state of strategic/action documents at the local level but is a common occurrence at the national level as well.

- LSG units often fail to timely adopt and publish publicly available documents related to the implementation of various support measures at a given time, even though such documents were developed for the previous period. A significant number of analyzed documents expired in 2019, and new ones, according to publicly available data, have not yet been created.
- Funding of various sectors and services by LSG units is only partially transparent.

The collaboration between schools and the local community reflects in ways that families, schools, and the community work together and create a network of shared responsibility for the success of students. Such an approach contributes to the overall well-being and strengthens the capacity of schools to support their students. For this support to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to establish coordination among all stakeholders and base their actions on an assessment of user needs.

[4] COP (2021). Analysis of the capacities and current state of local self-government units in providing support to at-risk students based on publicly available data, unpublished.

To make an objective assessment of needs, data and analytical capacities at the LSG level are required, which, as previously mentioned, often lack.

Considering all the aforementioned, members of the National Platform agreed that one mechanism that needs to be established is an Intersectoral Team that would include all relevant stakeholders, from employees in the LSG, schools, and regional school administrations to employees in social welfare centres, healthcare centers, representatives of non-government organisations dealing with support for vulnerable groups, to parents.

The main tasks of the Intersectoral team would be to collect and analyze available data from different sectors, and propose targeted additional measures to the LSG, ensure coordination of activities at the local level, and ensure monitoring and transparency in the implementation of local policies.

Additionally, the proposed activities align with the Strategy for Development of Education in Serbia by 2030, which envisions establishing intersectoral collaboration and forming joint bodies as a means to implement measures requiring collaboration among different ministries and institutions.

Roadmap development methodology

Since the establishment of the National Platform, five meetings and several online consultations have been organized. In the initial meetings, members defined a mechanism at the local level that could respond to diverse challenges specific to each LSG unit. Instead of focusing on a single policy or support measure, it was assessed that LSG would benefit more from having the ability to assess needs based on evidence and strategic planning rather than working on establishing a specific support measure (e.g., nutrition, transportation, etc.).

Based on forms, standardized at the project level, members worked on Goals and Activities as elements of the roadmap in subsequent meetings. The roadmap is a dynamic and strategic document that does not include specific deadlines but defines results and outlines goals, how they can be achieved, as well as priority level, so that implementation partners can appropriately focus on specific tasks.

The roadmap also indicates the division of roles and responsibilities and assumes that changes can always occur at the micro level in the LSG; therefore, it does not specify all stakeholders by the specific name of the institution/organisation or individual but rather by the authorities they possess.

The formulation of Goals and Activities underwent several revisions, and after adoption of the final version by the National Platform, comments from partner organisations on the project were integrated into the roadmap to ensure that it is understandable, operational, and feasible for implementation.

The **Roadmap for enhancing efficiency of family and child support at the local level** developed by the members of the National Platform is enclosed on the following pages.

Roadmap for enhancing efficiency of family and child support at the local level

Table 1. Roadmap objectives

General objective: Enhanced efficiency of additional family and child support[5] through establishing local Intersectoral teams within the Local Self-government units jurisdiction.

Specific objective 1: Enhanced local policies and mechanisms to support families and children based on evidence and data.

Specific objective 2: Enhanced capacities at the local level for collecting and analyzing data and evidence relevant to supporting families and children.

Specific objective 3: Ensured transparency and operational efficiency of the Intersectoral team for coordinating the implementation of additional support to families and children.

[5] The term "additional support" in this document refers to support measures that include intersectoral services, coordination of existing services in the education, social welfare, and healthcare systems, ensuring the overcoming of physical, communication, and social barriers within educational institutions and the community. Local intersectoral teams should not be equated with other teams existing at the local level that aim to support specific vulnerable groups and teams providing additional support to children, students, and families at the local level. Additional support is provided, without discrimination on any grounds, to every child and family to facilitate their inclusion, participation, and progress in education.

General objective:	Enhanced efficiency of additional family and child support through establishing local Intersectoral teams within the Local Self-government units jurisdiction			
Specific objective 1:	Enhanced local policies and mechanisms to support families and children based on evidence and data			
Activity	Target group ⁶	Activity leaders	Risks	Priority level (low, medium, high)
Establishment of a local Intersectoral team for coordinating the implementation of additional support measures for families and children (hereinafter referred to as the Intersectoral team)	Local Self-government Regional School Administration Educational Institutions ⁷ Healthcare Centre Social Welfare Centre Civil Society Organisations Local Parents Council and other relevant local institutions (ICS ⁸ , Youth Office, mobile team for Roma inclusion, Office for Roma affairs etc.)	Local Self-government	Non-responsiveness of representatives from institutions and organisations in the work of the Intersectoral team	High
Development and adoption of internal documents on the work of the Intersectoral team (procedures, annual work plan, budget proposal etc.)	Intersectoral team	Intersectoral team	Postponement of internal documents adoption on the work of the Intersectoral team	Medium

[6] The term "target group" does not refer to end users (families and children), but rather to whom it pertains, or who the participants of the specific activity are.

[7] The term "educational institutions" refers to institutions of preschool, primary and secondary education.

[8] Inter-sectoral Committee for assessing the needs for providing additional educational, healthcare or social support to a child and student.

Adoption of the annual work plan and budget by the Local Self-government Assembly	Local Self-government	Local Self-government	Discrepancy in the adoption of the annual work plan of the Intersectoral team by the Local Self-government with planning and adoption of the LSG budget	High
Coordination of reporting among local organisations and institutions in the field of child and family support, as well as monitoring activities in order to provide recommendations for improving the implementation of existing measures and introducing new additional support measures	Regional School Administration Educational institutions Healthcare Centre Social Welfare Centre Civil Society Organisations Local Parents Council and other relevant local institutions (ICS, Youth Office, mobile team for Roma inclusion, Office for Roma affairs etc.)	Local Self-government Intersectoral team	Lack of research and analytical capacities for monitoring and reporting. Inconsistent reporting on the status and implemented activities.	Medium
Specific objective 2:	Enhanced capacities at the local level for collecting and analyzing data and evidence relevant for family and child support			
Strengthening the competencies of the Intersectoral team members	Intersectoral team	Programme facilitators	Insufficient financial resources for the implementation of capacity building programs	Medium
Creating databases with shared data and linking existing ones	Intersectoral team and all other organisations and institutions at the local level that provide additional family	Intersectoral team	Lack of IT support Incompatibility of databases	High

	and child support Local Self-government			
Conducting an analysis, at the local level, of the current situation and needs for additional support to families and children	Intersectoral team and all other organisations and institutions at the local level that provide additional family and child support	Intersectoral team	Insufficient research and analytical capacities for conducting analysis Lack of reliable data for an objective situation assessment	Low
Involvement of the Intersectoral team in the creation of local policies related to family and child support	Intersectoral team	Local Self-government	Lack of experience among certain team members in the process of creating local policies	Medium
Adoption of new additional support measures for families and children	Local Self-government	Intersectoral team	Insufficient capacity of the Local self-government, individual institutions and organisations for implementation of the recommendations given by the Intersectoral team	Medium
Specific objective 3:	Ensured transparency and operational efficiency of the intersectoral team for coordinating the implementation of additional support to families and children.			

Development of the Intersectoral team integrity plan	Intersectoral team	Intersectoral team	Insufficient capacity of the Intersectoral team members for identification of risks to the integrity of the team's work and policy implementation	Medium
Development of annual Intersectoral team's progress report	Intersectoral team	Intersectoral team	Untimely delivery of progress reports	Medium
Adoption of the Intersectoral team annual progress report by the LSG Assembly	Intersectoral team Local Self-government	Intersectoral team Local Self-government	Postponement of the session of the LSG Assembly where report adoption is on the agenda	Medium
Informing the public and promoting the Intersectoral team's work and examples of best practices in providing additional support to families and children	Academic and general public	Intersectoral team ARISE project National platform	Insufficient capacity of the Intersectoral team for promotional and informational activities for both academic and general public	High

Table 2. Roadmap activities

General objective:	Enhanced efficiency of additional family and child support through establishing local Intersectoral teams within the Local Self-government units jurisdiction			
Specific objective 1:	Enhanced local policies and mechanisms to support families and children based on evidence and data			
Activity 1.1.	Establishment of a local Intersectoral team for coordinating the implementation of additional support measures for families and children (hereinafter referred to as the Intersectoral team)			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
LSG representatives (sector(s) responsible for education, social protection, healthcare).	Regional School Administration Educational institutions Healthcare Centre Social Welfare Centre Civil Society Organisations Local Parents Council and other relevant local institutions (ICS , Youth Office, mobile team for Roma inclusion, Office for Roma affairs etc.)	Identification of institutions, and organisations at the local level that would be members of the Intersectoral team and sending invitations to the identified stakeholders to appoint members	Identified institutions, and organisations that will be members of the Intersectoral team. Appointed members of the Intersectoral team from the chosen institutions, and organisations	Advocacy actions for establishing the intersectoral team Familiarizing local-level stakeholders with the importance of the intersectoral cooperation in the field of providing additional support to families and children

Legal LSG team, LSG representatives (sectors responsible for education, social protection, healthcare), and the Mayor or the Municipality president	ARISE project National platform Responsible LSG units	Drafting and issuing of the Decision on establishment of the Intersectoral team and the appointment of the President, Vice President, and members	Issued Decision on forming of the Intersectoral team and the appointment of the President, Vice President, and members	Familiarizing local-level stakeholders with the goals and scope of the Intersectoral team's work.
Activity 1.2.	Development and adoption of internal documents on the work of the Intersectoral team (procedures, annual work plan, budget proposal etc.)			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members Legal LSG team Other intersectoral bodies from different LSG units	ARISE project National platform	Development of the Rules of procedures of the Intersectoral team, which define the subject, scope of work, composition, rights and obligations of members, work organisation, work transparency, resources, and other relevant topics for the work of the Intersectoral team	Final version of the Rules of procedures	Setting the deadline for Rules of procedures adoption within the Decision on forming of the Intersectoral team
President of the Intersectoral team	Intersectoral team members	Adoption of the Rules of procedures	Adopted Rules of procedures	

Intersectoral team members President of the Intersectoral team	Other relevant organisations and institutions at the local level that are not members of the Intersectoral team	Defining the priority work areas for the Intersectoral team and adopting the Annual work plan	Adopted Annual work plan of the Intersectoral team	Setting the deadline for adoption of the Annual work plan within the Intersectoral team's Rules of procedures
Intersectoral team members	LSG Financial department	Development of the budget proposal for the Intersectoral team	Defined annual operating costs of the Intersectoral team Drafted budget proposal for the operation of the Intersectoral team	Setting the deadline for adoption of the Annual work plan within the Intersectoral team's Rules of procedures
Activity 1.3.	Adoption of the annual work plan and budget by the Local Self-government Assembly			
Members of the Local Self-government Assembly	Intersectoral team	Adoption of the Intersectoral team's Annual work plan with the budget by the Local Self-government Assembly	Adopted Intersectoral team's Annual work plan with the budget	Introducing members of the Local Self-Government Assembly to the importance of the Intersectoral team's work Aligning the dates for adoption of the annual work plan with the convening of the Assembly

Activity 1.4.	Coordinating the reporting of local organisations and institutions in the field of support for children and families, and monitoring activities in order to provide recommendations to improve the implementation of existing measures and to introduce new additional support measures for families and children			
Local Self-government Assembly	Intersectoral team	Aligning the reporting deadlines of local organisations and institutions and issuing a Decision on the schedule for reporting about measures in the field of support for families and children	Issued Decision on the schedule for reporting about measures in the field of support for families and children	Introducing members of the Local Self-government Assembly with the importance of regular and objective reporting for development of relevant improvement recommendations
Specific objective 2:	Enhanced capacities at the local level for collecting and analyzing data and evidence relevant to supporting families and children			
Activity 2.1.	Strengthening the competencies of Intersectoral team members			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members	ARISE project National platform	Identification of areas requiring competency enhancement through the self-assessment process	Identified areas where competency strengthening is needed	Financial resource planning in the budget proposal as part of the Intersectoral team's Annual work plan.
LSG responsible unit	Intersectoral team	Implementation of the public procurement procedure for selecting training programmes and training facilitators	Selected training programmes and training facilitators	

Training facilitators	LSG	Implementation of activities to strengthen the competencies of members of the intersectoral team in identified areas	Enhanced competencies of Intersectoral team members in identified areas	
Intersectoral team members	Intersectoral team from other Local Self-governments ARISE project National platform	Horizontal exchange with Intersectoral teams from other Local Self-governments	Shared experiences and practices in work of Intersectoral teams	
Activity 2.2.	Creating databases with shared data and linking existing ones			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members	ARISE project National platform Associates from institutions and organisations that are members of the Intersectoral Team	Analysis of available local data and collection of additional data in case of incomplete reports from relevant institutions.	Unified data from relevant institutions and organisations are available for analysis,	Defining a procedure for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of activities related to providing additional support to families and children

Intersectoral team members	<p>ARISE project National platform</p> <p>Associates from institutions and organisations that are members of the Intersectoral team</p>	Establishing a database	At the LSG level, there is a unified database containing reports and other data relevant for making recommendations for the implementation of measures for family and children support	<p>Planning monitoring and reporting activities within the Intersectoral team's Annual work plan,</p> <p>Strengthening the research and analytical capacities of the Intersectoral team members.</p>
Activity 2.3.	Conducting an analysis, at the local level, of the current situation and needs for additional support to families and children			
Resources	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members	Associates from institutions and organisations that are members of the Intersectoral Team	<p>Organisation of Intersectoral team meetings in order to evaluate the activities implementation and provide recommendations for improving the implementation of existing and adopting new additional support measures for families and children.</p>	<p>Minutes with evaluation of the implementation of activities and recommendations.</p> <p>Identified areas for improving the provision of additional support.</p>	

Intersectoral team members	ARISE project National platform	Development of proposal of recommendations to improve the implementation of existing and introduction of new additional support measures for families and children	Adopted proposal of recommendations to improve the implementation of existing and introduction of new additional additional support measures for families and children in identified areas.	Identifying local resources (material, human, etc.) to overcome insufficient capacities of institutions and organisations within the Intersectoral team.
Intersectoral team members	ARISE project National platform	Analysis of local stakeholders who are not members of the Intersectoral team but could be involved in the implementation of additional support activities.	Identified local stakeholders who are not members of the Intersectoral team but could be involved in the implementation of additional support activities.	
Activity 2.4.	Involvement of the Intersectoral team in the creation of local policies related to family and child support			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Local Self-government unit	Intersectoral team	Sending invitations for the involvement of the Intersectoral team in working groups on developing local policy documents	Intersectoral team is recognized by the LSG as a relevant body to contribute to the work of working groups	Improving competencies of the Intersectoral team members in developing local policies based on evidence and data.

Intersectoral team members	Working groups at the LSG level	Participation of the Intersectoral team in the work of working groups developing local policies.	Members of the Intersectoral team actively participate in the work of working groups and submit their proposals and initiatives for the development of local policy documents.	
Activity 2.5.	Adoption of new additional support measures for families and children			
Relevant LSG authorities	Working groups at the LSG level ARISE project National platform	Consideration of feasibility of the recommendations given by the Intersectoral team Adoption of recommendations by the relevant authorities of the LSG	New measures, or improved existing policies, in the field of supporting families and children have been integrated into local policies.	Advocacy at the local level Support of LSG in conducting feasibility assessments for specific measures
Specific objective 3:	Ensured transparency and operational efficiency of the Intersectoral team for coordinating the implementation of additional support to families and children			
Activity 3.1.	Development of the Intersectoral team integrity plan			
Activity leaders	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact

Intersectoral team members LSG legal team	ARISE project National platform	Defined risk areas for compromising integrity in the implementation of family and child support policies	Developed Intersectoral team's integrity plan	Trainings on ethics and integrity
Activity 3.2.	Development of annual Intersectoral team's progress report			
Resources	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members	Educational institutions, SWC, HC, LSG	Collecting data on the fulfillment of planned activities in accordance with the Annual Work Plan	Collected relevant data for report writing (e.g. school reports, SWC, HC etc.)	Setting the deadline for submission of the Annual progress report within the Intersectoral team's Rules of procedures
Intersectoral team members	N/A	Development of Annual progress report	Developed annual progress report on the Intersectoral team activities	
Activity 3.3.	Adoption of the Intersectoral team annual progress report by the LSG Assembly			
Resources	Partners	Tasks	Results	Strategy for reducing the risk impact
Intersectoral team members	Local Self-government unit	Presentation of the annual progress reports of the Intersectoral team at the session of the local self-government assembly	Members of the LSG Assembly familiar with the Intersectoral team work.	Publishing the draft annual progress report of the Intersectoral team on available online platforms



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