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Preschools and Schools Responding to Vulnerable Families with Children

The systems of early childhood education have a long tradition of support and prevention programmes aimed at vulnerable families with young children. European countries are implementing diverse measures aimed at early intervention in assisting children in families with an accumulation of risk factors. Problems in these families are multi-layered and include the intersection of physical, psychosocial and other forms of distress. These are “families with multiple problems”, in which there is a circular interaction of difficulties in different areas of exerting control over one’s life. The multidimensional nature of the problems of these families is closely linked to the fact that there are many institutions in the field of education, social welfare, health care and others, in which treatment and support is more or less consistent and more or less adapted to their needs, or satisfactory.

The challenge for the modern profession is how to design innovative practices of working with vulnerable families, which would stem from their needs and specifics, be grounded in their habitat and connect with each other synergistically. In our research, narratives and experiences of professionals as well as of families in the field of early childhood education (and other related parties) were collected using semi-structured interviews. The article focuses on life experiences and difficulties encountered by vulnerable families in terms of parenting, involvement in the local environment, social capital, development of support networks, reconciliation of work and family obligations, and inclusion of their children in preschool and school; furthermore, it explores what kind of support is needed by vulnerable families in order to better cope with their life’s challenges. We will present how the institutions are responding to the needs of this population with their practices, which are becoming more flexible and of better quality.