

# Play Hubs in Local Communities:

the TOY for Inclusion Approach



## FAQs

# Frequently Asked Questions



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**Read on for the answers to all these questions**

# 1

## What is TOY for Inclusion?

TOY for Inclusion is an approach that promotes **inclusive community-based early childhood education and care** and brings services for children and their families to where they are needed.

It was developed by International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI in partnership with NGOs and local authorities in 8 countries. TOY for Inclusion involves different sectors and agencies working together with the community to come up with **flexible solutions and responses to the specific needs of young children (0-10 years old) and their families**.

It provides **play, learning and socializing opportunities** for children and their parents.

It also promotes **intergenerational activities** which involve grandparents and other older adults living in the neighbourhood.

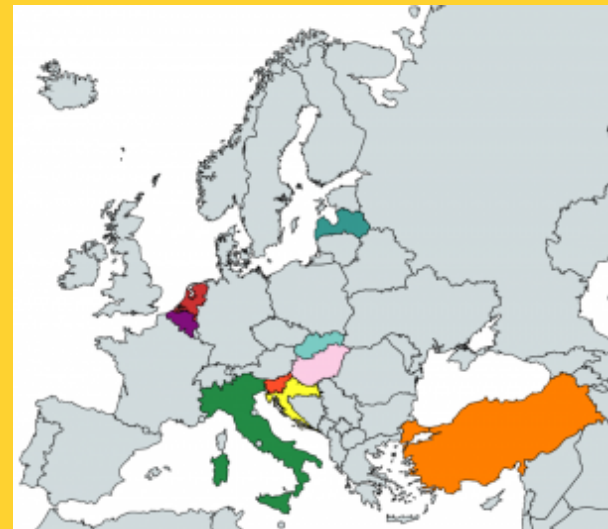
All these activities take place in a **Play Hub**, which puts TOY for Inclusion at the heart of the communities.



# 2

## When did TOY for Inclusion start and where is it implemented?

TOY for Inclusion started in 2017 and so far is being implemented by **15 municipalities in 8 countries**: Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Turkey.



In each municipality a Local Action Team has been formed and a Play Hub is operational. The first Play Hubs opened in January 2018.

# 3

## What is the vision of TOY for Inclusion?

We believe that social inclusion starts with young children and their eagerness to play and learn.







## 4 What is our dream?

Our dream is to have Play Hubs in every city in Europe and for municipalities to embed the TOY for Inclusion approach in their inclusive educational policies.



# 5

## What is a Play Hub?

Play Hubs are **safe, non-formal, high-quality, Early Childhood Education and Care spaces** where relationships between young children (0 to 10 years) and families from **all backgrounds** are built.

They are inclusive spaces where:

- children and adults of all ages meet, spend quality time together and **play** with each other;



- children can **borrow toys** and educational materials to bring home;



- parents, grandparents, and practitioners can informally **learn and exchange information about child health, early learning, and development.**



*Play-based activities are organized to support **creativity**, increase **confidence**, develop **social, emotional and verbal skills** and unlock each child's potential. This helps children in their transition to formal education.*

*This is particularly relevant for families from a Roma, migrant or **socially disadvantaged background**, to whom the Play Hubs give extra attention. In fact, Play Hubs are a flexible solution that offers educational opportunities for all those children who are often excluded from formal educational services.*



TOY for Inclusion Play Hubs can also support children and families at a distance and online as demonstrated during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, when the following services were provided:

- online support activities for children and parents (arts and crafts, reading aloud videos, etc.),
- one-to-one telephone support to vulnerable children and families,
- homework tutoring support (via phone or online),
- mentoring workshops for teachers to support them in providing online education,
- mediation between families and schools during lock down,
- materials support such as food, hygiene products and clothes to the most vulnerable households,
- mobile data packages for children to access online education,
- shared laptops and tablets to access online education.

# Who is responsible to initiate a Play Hub?



In each country a **national TOY for Inclusion partner** organization runs the programme. They have the experience, knowledge, and networks to open and run a Play Hub.

Each national TOY for Inclusion organization **guides the process, trains Local Action Teams, and works with the municipality to monitor the Play Hub**. They also have a role in connecting and coordinating learning exchanges between Play Hubs from different communities.

The TOY for Inclusion national partners are:

- International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI (international coordinator),
- Educational Research Institute - ERI (Slovenia),
- Open Academy Step by Step – OASbS (Croatia),
- Associazione 21 luglio (Italy),
- Centre for Education Initiatives – CEI (Latvia),
- Wide Open School – WOS (Slovakia),
- Partners Hungary Foundation (Hungary)
- Federation of Mediterranean Roma Associations - Akromfed (Turkey)
- Leger Des Heils (Netherlands).

International communication is coordinated by International Step-by-Step Association – ISSA.



# 7 What is a Local Action Team?

In each community, a Local Action Team (LAT) is responsible for **designing, running, and monitoring the ECEC Play Hub's activities**. Keeping sustainability and social cohesion in mind, the LATs ensure a **wide community representation**, and can include: ECEC practitioners, directors of preschools, teachers, health workers, social workers, members of municipal councils, parents, etc.

# 8 Who works in the Play Hubs?



The Play Hub is managed by the Local Action Team. Each Team has a **coordinator**, who is employed part-time by the project and/or the municipality. Generally, the coordinator of the Local Action Team also **runs and coordinates the Play Hub**. He/she organizes activities in collaboration with **volunteers and services from the community**. Coordinators are often supported by a **Play Hub assistant**. Some activities are directly facilitated by the coordinator and/or the assistant, others are offered by volunteers or professionals.



# Where are the Play Hubs located?

This is different in every community and municipality, but there is one basic criterion that is important in determining the location: **Play Hubs must be reachable for families of all backgrounds** (Roma and non-Roma, marginalized, etc.).

This means that they are **never located in segregated areas** (e.g. Roma settlements or gated communities) and are **easily reached with public transport**. When public transport is not available, adequate support to reach the Play Hub must be provided.

Locations are diverse and include: **community centres, public libraries, primary schools or kindergartens**.

In most cases, the space where the Play Hub is located is owned by the municipality or an educational institution and its use is provided as an in-kind contribution (free of charge).





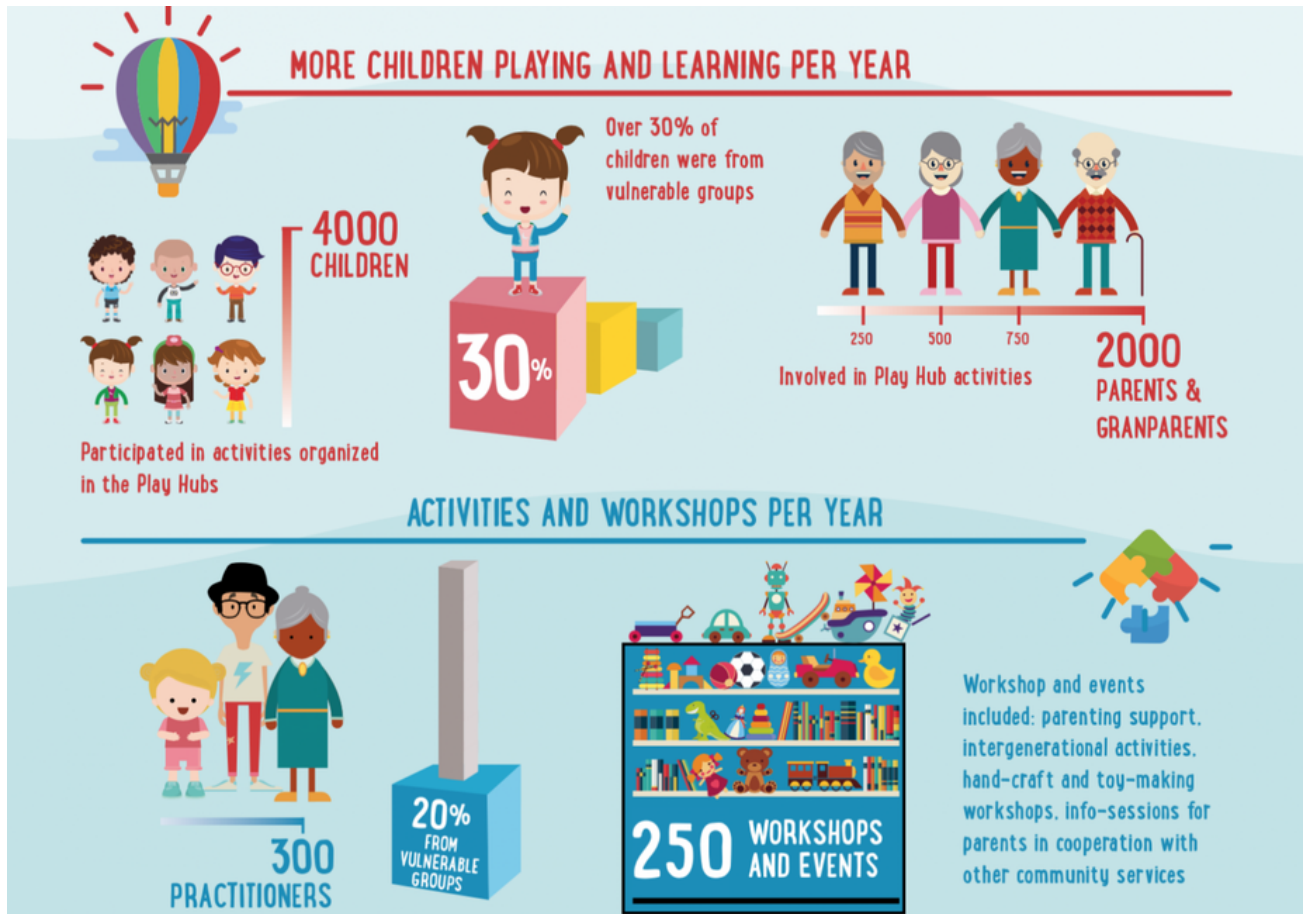
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## What does a Play Hub look like?

Every Play Hub is different, but there are some common features:

- They are **family- and child-friendly** safe spaces, where both adults and children feel welcome and are free to move and explore.
- They are **accessible to all** including children and adults with special needs and/or disabilities.
- When possible, they have both an **indoor and an outdoor space**.
- When possible, they are **located on the ground floor** and have a **dedicated entrance**, independent from the other services in the building.
- **Parents (or other carers) are required to stay with their children while they are at the Play Hub** – this is different to regular ECEC centres, where parents leave their children in the care of a practitioner.

# What are the results of TOY for Inclusion so far?



- **Strengthened inter-sectoral cooperation:** services are closer to families, who in turn feel better supported.
- **Improved transition of vulnerable children to schools and kindergarten:** Play Hubs form a bridge from home to formal schooling.
- **Increased trust between families of different cultural and ethnic background:** people from different generation and background feel welcome.
- **Enhanced social cohesion locally,** especially in smaller communities.

# 12

## How do children benefit from the Play Hub?



- Access to **high quality play and learning materials**, which can also be borrowed.
- Opportunity to **interact, play and spend quality time** with other children from all backgrounds, parents, grandparents and other caregivers.
- Develop important **life skills (social, emotional, communication and collaboration skills)**, which also helps them in the transition to formal education.
- Opportunity to **get to know other cultures and generations**, overcoming stereotypes.
- Increase **sense of belonging** to local community.





# 13

## How do parents and caregivers and other family members benefit from the Play Hub?

- Opportunity to **get to know other families** from the community and from all backgrounds and share parenthood experience with them.
- **Access to services for young children and families** in the community, where to find support when needed.
- Opportunity to **get to know practitioners and services** in a friendly way and be introduced to the importance of education early on.
- Opportunity to **spend quality time** with children doing playful activities without other sources of distraction.
- Opportunity to **participate in workshops** on parenting, health, education.
- Opportunities for **intergenerational contact** which values the role of older adults in the lives of young children.
- Give parents a voice in their children's education and promote **parental involvement** in children's education.





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## How do communities benefit from the Play Hub?

- Promote **ownership and shared responsibility** for young children's well-being amongst the community.
- Opportunity for municipalities to **get closer to citizens**, to hear their needs and pass on important messages regarding education, health, etc.
- **Connect services in the community and prepare and transform education system** to welcome children in an inclusive way.
- **Bridge educational services and families** so that especially vulnerable families increase their trust in the school and feel welcomed and accepted.
- **Increase social cohesion** between citizens of different communities/origins/backgrounds.
- Offer **employment opportunities** for practitioners from vulnerable backgrounds.

# 15

## Can TOY for Inclusion be a model for other communities in other countries?

**Yes!**

**TOY for Inclusion** started with 7 Play Hubs in 2017 and has now more than doubled this number after only 3 years. It provides a **common, but flexible framework to respond to the local needs** of young children and families.

**Think globally, act locally!**



# 16 How does one start the process of establishing a Play Hub?



## 1 COMMUNITY MAPPING

Understand who is doing what in relation to young children's education, health and well-being in your community and form your Local Action Team (LAT).

## TRAINING

A special training for the members of the LAT on the approach and the practicalities of designing and running a Play Hub.

## 3 NEED ASSESSMENT

Research the needs and desires of families with young children in your community, giving special attention to the most vulnerable ones.

## PREPARATION

Select a location, do the necessary renovation and furnishing of the space, purchase toys & educational materials. Connect with services in the community, agree on opening times, promote the Hub to families.

## 5 OPEN THE PLAY HUB

Welcome children and families for Play Hub services and workshops every week.

## (ONGOING) MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Collect data on activities and reflect on their results and users' experiences. Introduce changes if needed.

Get in contact with the national TOY for Inclusion partner organization, or, in case there isn't one yet in your country, get in contact with the international coordinator, [International Child Development Initiatives – ICDI](#). They will guide you through the process and can also help you in finding financial support if needed.



## 17 How much does it cost to run a Play Hub?

Different Play Hubs choose different locations, have different furniture, toys and materials and offer different workshops and activities. However, all Play Hubs have common costs.

These can be organised in four categories: **staff, infrastructure, promotion, and activities.**

For more information, see the [Community Play Hubs: a cost assessment](#).

# Still have questions?

Feel free to contact ICDI or a local partner organization:



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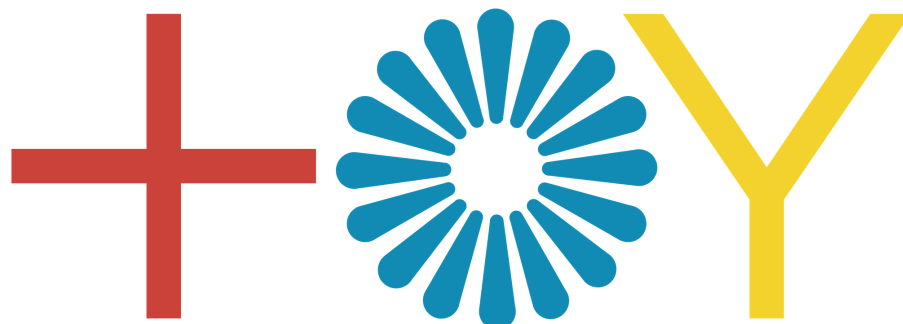
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