

# ICEHEARTS EUROPE SITUATION ANALYSIS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT (SANA) FINAL REPORT

Opportunities and barriers in each pilot  
country to implement the Icehearts model



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# Introduction

[Icehearts](#) is a Finnish [sport-based positive youth development \(PYD\) programme](#) with now more than three decades of experience that aims **to provide vulnerable children with one long-term mentoring relationship that lasts through childhood and adolescence**. The program is embedded within a team sport. Teams are used as a social environment where children have the possibility to experience a trustworthy relationship with the mentor leading the team. The program has been shown to support not only the mental well-being of participating children, but also to support the families and schools involved with the program<sup>1</sup>.

Each mentor is a paid full-time professional trained in youth or social work and has a knowledge or experience of sport. Finnish Icehearts **mentor gives one fundamental promise to each child** selected to the team: that he/she will stand by the child all the way through childhood and adolescent in 12 years' time. It is by means of this commitment to the child that a basis for the mentoring support is formed. This programme is thus based on two core elements.

1. **The trustworthy relationship between the child and the mentor**, which is based on idea that a single positive child-adult relationship built on trust can protect the child from problems in later life. Through this relationship, which is built on reciprocity, trust, and empathy, the mentor has the potential to promote the socioemotional, cognitive, and identity development of the child.<sup>2</sup>
2. **Organised team sport** is regarded as an effective tool for promoting positive development of participating children<sup>3</sup>. Sports can offer children opportunities to practise prosocial behaviour with peers, interact with adult role models and receive social support. In this way, it can improve children's life skills and social, psychological and emotional resources.

[Icehearts Europe](#) aims to scale up at European level the Finnish model by bringing a group of five grassroots sport partners together, from five pilot implementation countries (early adopters) and a group of expertise and associate partners (next adopters). The first five pilot countries are Spain, Italy, Estonia, Slovenia and Denmark. Results are expected both within the first 18 months of the project and in the long-term. The short-term impacts will be achieved by the early adopters' implementation of the refined Icehearts model, while its implementation in additional countries by the next adopters will guarantee the long-term impact.

<sup>1</sup> Appelqvist-Schmidlechner, K., & Kekkonen, M. (in press). Icehearts: A 12-year-long professional sport-based program for children and youth at risk. In J. M. Eddy & K. P. Haggerty (Eds.), *Handbook of professional youth mentoring*. Springer Nature.

<sup>2</sup> Appelqvist-Schmidlechner K, Haavanlammi, M, Kekkonen M (2021). Benefits and underlying mechanisms of organised sport participation on mental health among socially vulnerable children. A qualitative study on parents' perspective. *Sport in Society* 26:2, 245-262. [doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.1996348](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.1996348).

<sup>3</sup> Holt NL, Neely KC, Slater LG, Camiré M, Côté J, Fraser-Thomas J, MacDonald D, Strachan L, Tamminen KA. A grounded theory of positive youth development through sport based on results from a qualitative meta-study. *Int Rev Sport Exerc Psychol*. 2017 Jan 1;10(1):1-49. doi: 10.1080/1750984X.2016.1180704. Epub 2016 Sep 4. PMID: 27695511; PMCID: PMC5020349.

## Aims and methods

To facilitate this process, Icehearts **Europe Work Package 3**, lead by the Finnish National Institute of Health ([THL](#)) and [EuroHealth-Net](#), has gathered and assessed information about the opportunities and barriers in each pilot country to implement the Icehearts model. The reason why this work package was foreseen by the Icehearts Europe consortium is quite simple: not all countries, regions, and cities are the same. On the contrary, different sites throughout Europe vary significantly in their cultural frameworks, socioeconomic conditions, welfare systems, ethnic and language cleavages, and in many other aspects. This intercountry variation implies that if a programme – in our case Icehearts in Finland – was successful in a certain location, it does not automatically imply that it will be successful in all places and locations. Or better, it does not mean that it can be replicated it as in its original form. To make sure that a country specific best – practice can be successfully scaled-up in other European sites, we must understand which are the contextual differences between the original site – Finland – and the other implementation sites – the 5 pilot locations (Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Italy and Slovenia).

To fill in this gap, the WP3 research team developed a **Situation Analysis and Needs Assessment (SANA) template** that was then shared with the partners in the five pilot countries:

- **DGI (Denmark)**: a sports association in Denmark that works to better the conditions for our more than 6.400 member sports clubs and their more than 1.6 million members.
- **SPIN (Estonia)**: a sports-based and scientifically proven effective youth development program with a unique model in Estonia. The aim of the SPIN program is to develop and strengthen the social and self-management skills of the young people participating in it, and to bring joy to young people through sports.
- **Fútbol Más (Spain)**: an NGO founded in Chile in 2008, with the aim of promoting the well-being and happiness of children and communities living in contexts of social vulnerability. Through play and sport, Fútbol Más goes to the heart of neighbourhoods in 10 countries around the world in Africa, Europe and Latin America.
- **UISP (Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti) Italy**: is an association for sports and social promotion that aims to extend the right to sport to all citizens. Since 1948, the year of its foundation, Uisp has affirmed the social value of sport, rights, the environment, health, solidarity.
- **Sport Union of Slovenia (SUS)**: connects different sports organisations, associations, clubs and individuals working in the field of sports recreation and sports education in Slovenia. It unites over 200 organisations and has over 60,000 members scattered all over Slovenia.

Aim of the template was to understand the local needs, the factors that put youth at risk, as well as what resources are available, and what interventions are currently being implemented. At the end, goal is to identify what the gap is between the existing situation and what is needed, in order to plan Icehearts Europe project's implementation.

The SANA template was compiled by the WP3 research team with the help of the whole consortium, and was sent to the pilot countries in June 2023. To facilitate the filling in of the template, local partners could use the first two months to fill in the 'Situation Analysis' section, and afterwards two further months to complete the 'Needs assessment' section. While obviously connected, these two sections investigate slightly different aspects.

- A. The **Situation Analysis (SA)** included questions concerning the demographics of the local sites, the social context, the characteristics of the target groups, how services and school systems are organised in the local communities, and also which sports and after school activities were available in the local communities. In short, the SA aimed to get a clearer picture of the local conditions and structures related to the implementation of the programme, so that pilot sites can become more aware of their circumstances in terms of the implementation. As a result, this will also allow to compare the national, regional and local conditions in the pilot sites to the Finnish one. For this reason, while these points (welfare systems, after school activities, target groups, etc.) have been selected specifically for Icehearts Europe, the results of this part of the analysis are sufficiently general that they could be used for other interventions in these areas.
- B. The **Needs Assessment section (NA)** focused more on project-related aspects, such as mentor recruitment, team sport opportunities available, related facilities and resources available. Plus, it addressed also the recruitment of the programme participants and kind of individual support to be offered, and finally the monitoring of the progress and indications on how to maximise the long-term sustainability of the project.

This report aims to provide **a summary of the main findings for the five countries**. While the SA and the NA were filled in by partners at different timings, the report will not always present the information received separately. On the contrary, report describes by topics which are the main aspects to consider for the implementation of the Icehearts Europe programme. If reader wants to know more about a specific country, in the **annex at the end of report** it is provided a country-specific overview describing more precisely what is the situation in Italy, Slovenia, Estonia, Spain and Denmark. These annexes summarise in around two to three pages the responses provided by pilot partners in that country.

The first section provides a demographic overview of the implementation sites. This explains how many implementation sites there are in the five pilot countries, where exactly these implementation sites are, and which is their size.

Having done so, the second section presents an overview of the ethnic, socioeconomic, and language issues that may lead to social marginalization and that the program thus aims to address.

Section three describes the social instruments already available that could be used by local sites to create a network of support for children. The focus will be on the after-school activities, and in particular, on the sport facilities available that could be used for the implementation of the programme.

Section four offers an overview of the qualities individuals must have to be an Icehearts Europe mentor, and it also explains which are the main criticalities to resolve to make sure that all children targeted will be able to access the programme offered.

These four core sections will provide an overview of the challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of Icehearts Europe. Having done so, report concludes by explaining which are the key take – away from the SANA analysis, and also which are the key points of analysis that local pilots will need to consider in the coming implementation phase of the project.

# ***1. Demographics of the implementation sites***

The first important aspect to consider about the pilot countries is that not all partners are focusing on a single site, but they differ widely on the number of pilot sites that they will implement. Needless to say, but the decision on the amount of pilot sites to be conducted does not reflect more or less engagement by local partners.

This choice was taken by each partner, considering carefully the resources, network and connections available.

Therefore, each partner decided the final number of sites, considering carefully how to balance the need to maximise both the effectiveness and the reach of the project. On the one end of the continuum, **Denmark** decided to focus on one single site (Ballerup), while at the other end of the continuum, **Italy** is testing the project in 13 different sites. In between these two extremes, **Spain** has chosen 2 sites, **Slovenia** 3<sup>4</sup>, and **Estonia** 4.

While the number of local sites chosen by partners does not necessarily affect the kind of implementation foreseen, the large variety of the size of implementation locations will unavoidably do so. That is, metropolis, big cities, medium-size cities, and small cities, all have different structures, opportunities, and challenges that can not be neglected.

How cities are categorised differs significantly worldwide, and even at European level there are different views on how to best divide them.<sup>5</sup> Explaining this complex issue exceeds the purpose of this report, but to present the intra-consortium differences, we here decided to divide local sites in four main categories:

- **Small cities:** between 5,000 and 50,000 inhabitants;
- **Medium cities:** between 50,000 and 200,000 inhabitants;
- **Big cities:** between 200000 and 1,5M inhabitants;
- **Large metropolitan areas:** more than 1,5M inhabitants.

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<sup>4</sup> While all other countries specified already specific sites, Slovenia has chosen Ljubljana and two regions (Eastern Slovenia cohesion region and Western Slovenia Cohesion region), so the final number may slightly differ for this country.

<sup>5</sup> Bretagnolle, A., Guérois, M. & Pavard, A. (2019). European small cities and towns: a territorial contextualization of vulnerable demographic situations (1981-2011). *Revue d'Économie Régionale & Urbaine*, 643-671.



Table below presents how many sites, and their dimensions, for each country.

Small cities	Medium cities	Large cities	Large Metropolitan area
<p><b>Denmark (1):</b> Ballerup;</p> <p><b>Estonia (3):</b> Torva, Kohtla, Saarema;</p> <p><b>Italy (2):</b> Enna, Manfredonia, Oristano</p>	<p><b>Italy (5):</b> Ferrara, Modena, Ragusa, Sassari, Vicenza</p>	<p><b>Estonia (1):</b> Tallinn</p> <p><b>Italy (4):</b> Firenze, Genova, Napoli, Torino</p> <p><b>Spain (1):</b> Sevilla</p> <p><b>Slovenia (1)*:</b> Ljubljana</p>	<p><b>Italy (1):</b> Rome</p> <p><b>Spain (1):</b> Madrid</p>

\*As for the first note

The first point to note from this table is that aside from Torva, a small town in Estonia with less than 6000 inhabitants, most sites will be implemented in cities with at least 20000 inhabitants. Implementation will thus mostly occur in urban areas rather than in rural settings and small villages. That said, from the table it emerges that cities differ widely one from another. Some are the main centres of political and economic activity of their country, such as Madrid and Rome, others are medium urban areas, while some are located in more isolated and less developed areas of the country.

To understand how to best tailor Icehearts Europe in sites that differ so much in size is the first challenge that local partners will need to overcome. One of the main factors that needs to be considered is the **child population in the selected areas**. As a reference, there is a significant difference in how Icehearts Europe intervention can be deployed if the catchment area of those below 18 years old is around a 1000, as it is the case in Torva, around 75000 as in Genova, or almost 600000 children as in Madrid, the largest city in the group.

In this regard, it is also important to stress that pilot projects will not involve and cover the schools of the whole city. This is the case also in Finland, where the programme selects the locations and schools that would benefit the most from being involved in Icehearts. Instead, selected areas, suburbs and city districts will be targeted, so that size of the pilot site best corresponds to the means and resources of our local partners. This selection of specific locations will bring a certain uniformity across the different countries and also between cities of different sizes. Nonetheless, differences will remain, as the logistics, personnel required, structures, etc., will vary significantly from city to city. Therefore, it will be important to understand what can be replicated from the original Finnish programme, what can be equally implemented in all sites, and what instead needs to be changed and adapted.

To best tailor the intervention to all cities, it is important to consider that locations differ not just in size, but each has its own social challenges and vulnerabilities that must be targeted.

Overall, there is a focus on socially deprived neighbourhoods, as there is a **lack of safe and accessible spaces** in these areas, that negatively affects people's behaviours and opportunities to practice sports and other healthier activities. However, not all socially deprived neighbourhoods are the same, and they instead differ on which are the main vulnerabilities affecting the people's lives. Therefore, understanding which are these vulnerabilities is of primary importance for the success of the programme.

## ***2. Vulnerabilities and target groups***

**Social Vulnerability** occurs when: “the disadvantage conveyed by poor social conditions determines the degree to which one’s life and livelihood are at risk from a particular and identifiable event in health, nature, or society”.<sup>6</sup> This definition is essential because it describes that vulnerability is not something that is either present or absent. On the contrary, there is a continuum of vulnerability, with certain groups that are more vulnerable than others, and with diverse types of vulnerabilities affecting different groups.

At societal level, there is a widespread agreement that children are as a group more vulnerable than adults, and this has been reflected in numerous legislations and international agreements. Of pivotal importance is the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which offers the pillars to respect for any programme aimed at involving children. The Finnish Icehearts programme is based on this convention, and thus any programme aimed at replicating this intervention must make sure that all 54 articles of the convention are respected.

Children require special attention at policy level, and in all governmental and non-governmental interventions. In an ideal world with infinite resources, we could then maintain that a mentoring programme as Icehearts should be offered to all children. However, Icehearts Europe national and local sites are unfortunately not operating in the ideal conditions of infinite resources, and they thus need to take a decision on who along the continuum of vulnerability should be targeted by this specific intervention.

While it is simple to agree that certain groups – and therefore children – are more vulnerable than others, it is more complicated to define where exactly the threshold should be posed to define who should be considered as a potential “Icehearts kid”. This would be the case in any context, but in the Icehearts Europe programme it is even more complicated, due to the fact that different countries experience different vulnerabilities. For this reason, there are country and region-specific differences that makes it difficult to list a simple set of rules on who should be included in the programme.

In the original Finnish Icehearts programme, children were selected for the program based on concerns from pre-school, school, or social and health care professionals, in collaboration with the parents. Common concerns include impulsiveness, learning and concentration difficulties, and behavioural and emotional problems. Attention is posed also to other issues, such as poverty, that might negatively impact school achievement or that could hinder participation in meaningful leisure-time activity and/or damage the formation of associated prosocial peer and adult relationships.

Concerning Icehearts Europe, it emerged that there are certain common themes that all partners analysed and identified as main vulnerabilities. Below, we provide a summary of the main findings. Each of these points is so wide and important that would require a specific report by itself. Aware of this, we present the following points not as an exhaustive guide on how to perfectly define who should be included or not in an Icehearts pilot project. Rather, these points aim to offer a general indication on what should be considered in the first place to then select the target group to be involved.

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<sup>6</sup> Mah, J.C., Penwarden, J.L., Pott, H. et al. Social vulnerability indices: a scoping review. *BMC Public Health* 23, 1253 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16097-6>

## A) Poverty and socioeconomic deprivation

Poverty can be defined as: “the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. Poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs.”<sup>7</sup> From this definition, it follows that in 2022, 95.3 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, which is equivalent to 21.6 % of the EU population.<sup>8</sup>

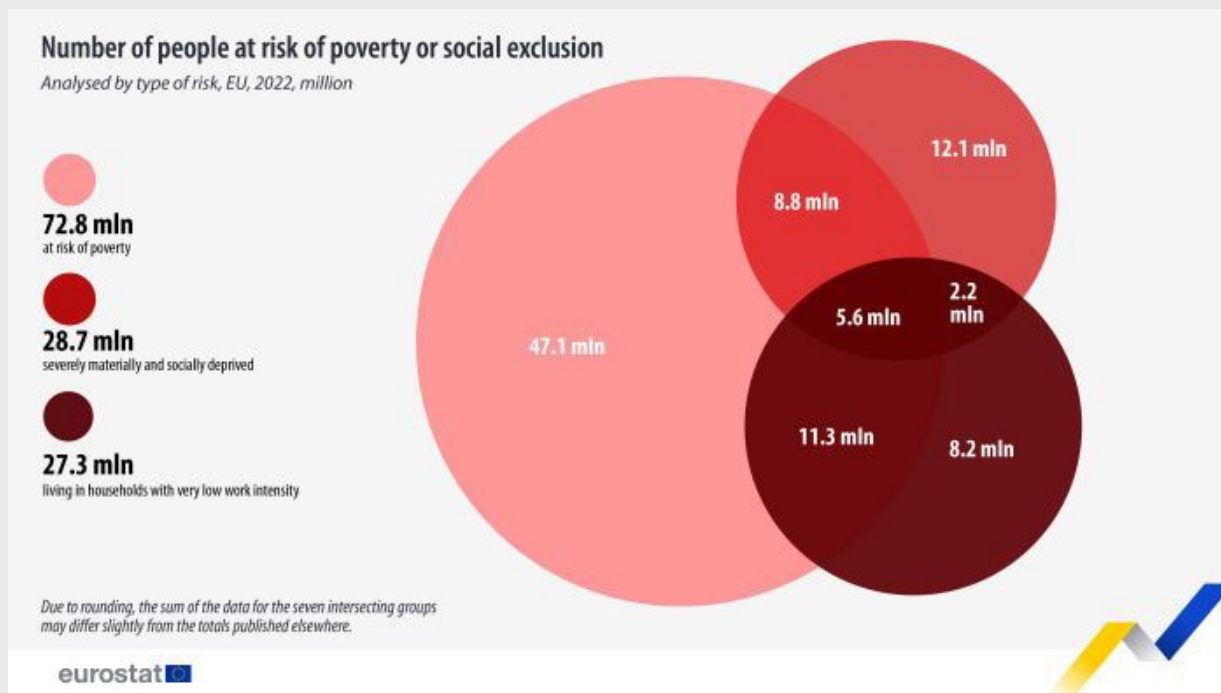


Figure 1  
Number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion, analysed by type of risk, EU, 2022 (million)

While poverty affects all areas in Europe, this problem is not equally distributed. Rather, there are differences not only between states, but also within regions and cities. Considering that fostering social inclusion of vulnerable children is the primary goal of the project, it is of primary relevance for Icehearts Europe to understand which are the areas where this socioeconomic condition is more prevalent. Answers to the SANA questionnaire showed a clear awareness of this aspect from the local partners.

**Danish partners** specified that they are implementing the project in two schools that have many children from “non-profit housing company”, which is a Danish social welfare programme that offers affordable and decent housing for all in need.

**In Spain**, Fútbol Mas is targeting the most deprived areas in both Seville and Madrid. Both these cities experience strong inequalities, since despite having a strong economy, there is a significant disparity between districts of the same city. Seville is home to some of the most underprivileged and poorest neighbourhoods in Spain, while around 22% of the population in Madrid is at risk of

<sup>7</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2009.01241.x>

<sup>8</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living\\_conditions\\_in\\_Europe\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion&oldid=584082#Key\\_findings](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion&oldid=584082#Key_findings)

being socially excluded.

**In Estonia**, SPIN aims to target the most deprived areas of the Estonian capital Tallinn, and it is also planning an intervention in a rural area in Southern Estonia, near Latvian border, which is a region that has the lowest average wage in the country.

Differences and inequalities were mentioned by local partners not only within the same cities, but also in different areas of the country. This was particularly stressed by **Slovenian** (between eastern and Western regions) and **Italian partners** (North and South part of the country), who similarly described the existence of significant differences in socioeconomic development in different areas of the country. To extend the reach of the intervention and to learn as well from the implementation in areas so contrasting, they aim to implement pilot sites in both areas.

In particular, UISP in Italy mentioned that it will be possible for them to rely upon the different abilities of the local UISP committees. The majority of the local committees has great experience in working with children and young people, mental health issues, several other issues, and some of them are managing community projects similar to Icehearts. On top of these already experienced sites, to test the model UISP is also choosing some local committees with a lower experience. To do so, the UISP network will be of primary importance, since the less experienced committees will be helped the by the closest more skilled UISP committee.

Poverty is the first risk factor for social marginalization, so it is no surprise that local partners all mentioned this in their responses to the Situation Analysis template. The implementation of Icehearts Europe should thus first start by a socioeconomic analysis of the context in which the intervention will take place. In particular, the analysis should stress which are the areas – in the country, but also in the regions and within the cities – more affected by poverty, and what are the other vulnerabilities that ought to be target.

## **B) Unemployment rate and low education levels**

Two aspects connected to poverty that stood out in the responses of local partners to the questionnaire were the **unemployment rate** and the **low education/absenteeism problem**.

On the one side, unemployment is directly related to poverty, and then in turn to social marginalization. Children directly and indirectly suffer the consequences of parents' working conditions, so unemployment rates of the area should be one of the first factors to consider in the decision of which area should be targeted by the Icehearts programme.

On the other side, families living in poorer suburbs tend to have lower levels of education. This is one of the leading factors for social marginalisation overall, and it is of particular relevance to Icehearts Europe, since children in families with lower education have higher rates of absenteeism.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, an interesting aspect was mentioned by **Fútbol Mas**, who stressed that lack of professionalization often leads to increased engagement in marginal activities within families. This, in turn, can confuse and negatively impact children, up to the point of causing family separation due to financial reasons or incarceration.

<sup>9</sup>Markus Klein, Edward M. Sosu, Shadrach Dare (2020), "Mapping inequalities in school attendance: The relationship between dimensions of socioeconomic status and forms of school absence", Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 118, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105432>.

## C) Ethnic differences

Material deprivation was one of the two factors mentioned by all local partners. The other is the complex situation concerning ethnic and language cleavages. As a result of decades of migration from different parts of the world to the European continent, European nations, regions and cities are becoming increasingly different in terms of ethnicity, religion and languages spoken. However, relationship between different cultures and the integration process has not been simple. On the contrary, it has led to several problems across Europe, one of which is that migrants and refugee populations are more likely to experience social marginalization. To mention just one data, the risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2021 was almost twice as high for foreign-born persons (36.1 %) as it was for native-born persons (19.0 %) and it was particularly concentrated among those born outside of the EU (41.0 %).<sup>10</sup>

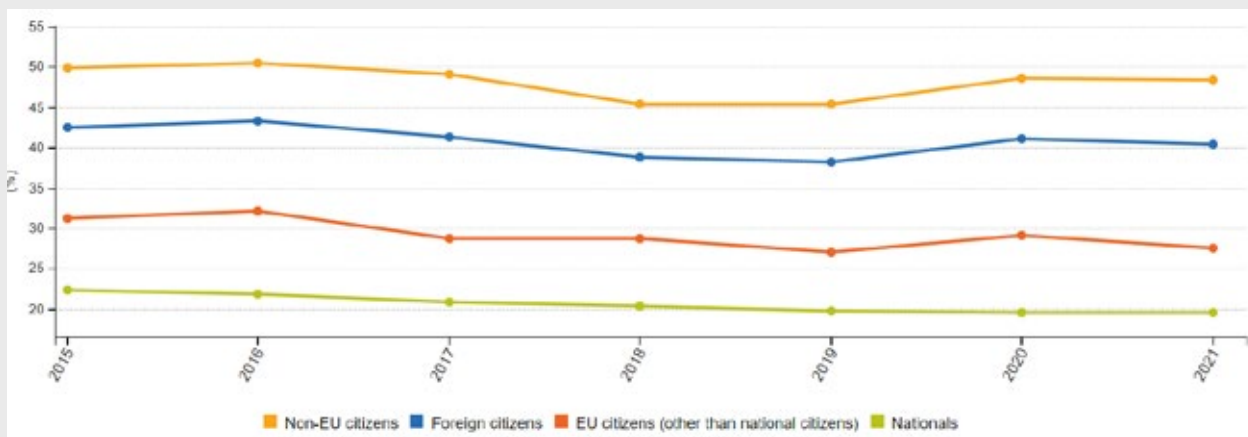


Figure 2  
Share of people aged 18 years or over at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate, by citizenship, EU, 2015–2021.

These percentages show also a pivotal aspect for Icehearts Europe. While the main factors of risk for social marginalization are here presented separately, these factors are not isolated one from another. On the contrary, they often intersect, leading to cross-sectional inequalities. Gathering a general picture of all the vulnerabilities affecting a specific area is thus central to understand how Icehearts could be best implemented in the selected locations.

These ethnic barriers were mentioned by all partners, each with its own differences. **Estonia** specified that in Tallinn there is a large community (35%) of Russian-speakers that are concentrated in certain districts of the city. These latter are considered an outcast area within Tallinn, so Icehearts could play a big role in the empowerment, integration, and personal development of the disadvantaged youth in these districts. **Slovenia** mentioned

<sup>10</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_-\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion#:~:text=The%20risk%20of%20poverty%20or%20social%20exclusion%20in%202021%20was,the%20EU%20\(41.0%20%25\).](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion#:~:text=The%20risk%20of%20poverty%20or%20social%20exclusion%20in%202021%20was,the%20EU%20(41.0%20%25).)

instead that some groups or minorities are victims of discrimination, specifying in particular the problems experienced by Roma minority and non-Slovenians of the former Yugoslavia.

**Spain** and **Italy** gave a similar overview of the problems occurring in the areas they selected, especially in the bigger cities. Both countries mentioned that children in migrant communities are often more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, especially in the neighbourhoods with several undocumented migrants. In these areas, there are several other problems, such as a large shadow economy with emerging mafia-esque structures and illicit drug trade, educational segregation, and school absenteeism.

## D) Mental health problems

Another serious concern expressed by local partners concerns children's mental health. This is a topic that, after the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, is finally receiving the necessary attention both at Member State and European level, with the European Commission presenting its own strategy to comprehensively approach mental health.<sup>11</sup>

46% of EU citizens has reported an emotional or psychosocial problem in the last 12 month. Moreover, as for previous issues, mental health problems are not equally distributed among the European population. On the contrary, certain groups are more vulnerable than others to mental health issues.<sup>12</sup>

As shown in the table below, particularly relevant for Icehearts Europe is the fact that youth and children have suffered the most the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and they now suffer a high prevalence of mental health disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Furthermore, even in this group, there is a social gradient with lower SES status adolescents suffering more than those better off.<sup>13</sup> Given that Icehearts Europe targets marginalised areas, it is likely that mental health issues are even more present in the areas considered by this programme than what described in the figure below.

<sup>11</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/european-health-union/comprehensive-approach-mental-health\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/european-health-union/comprehensive-approach-mental-health_en)

<sup>12</sup> Alegría M, NeMoyer A, Falgàs Bagué I, Wang Y, Alvarez K. Social Determinants of Mental Health: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go. *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2018 Sep 17;20(11):95. doi: 10.1007/s11920-018-0969-9

<sup>13</sup> Weinberg, D., Stevens, G.W.J.M., Peeters, M. et al. The social gradient in adolescent mental health: mediated or moderated by belief in a just world?. *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry* 32, 773–782 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01905-4>

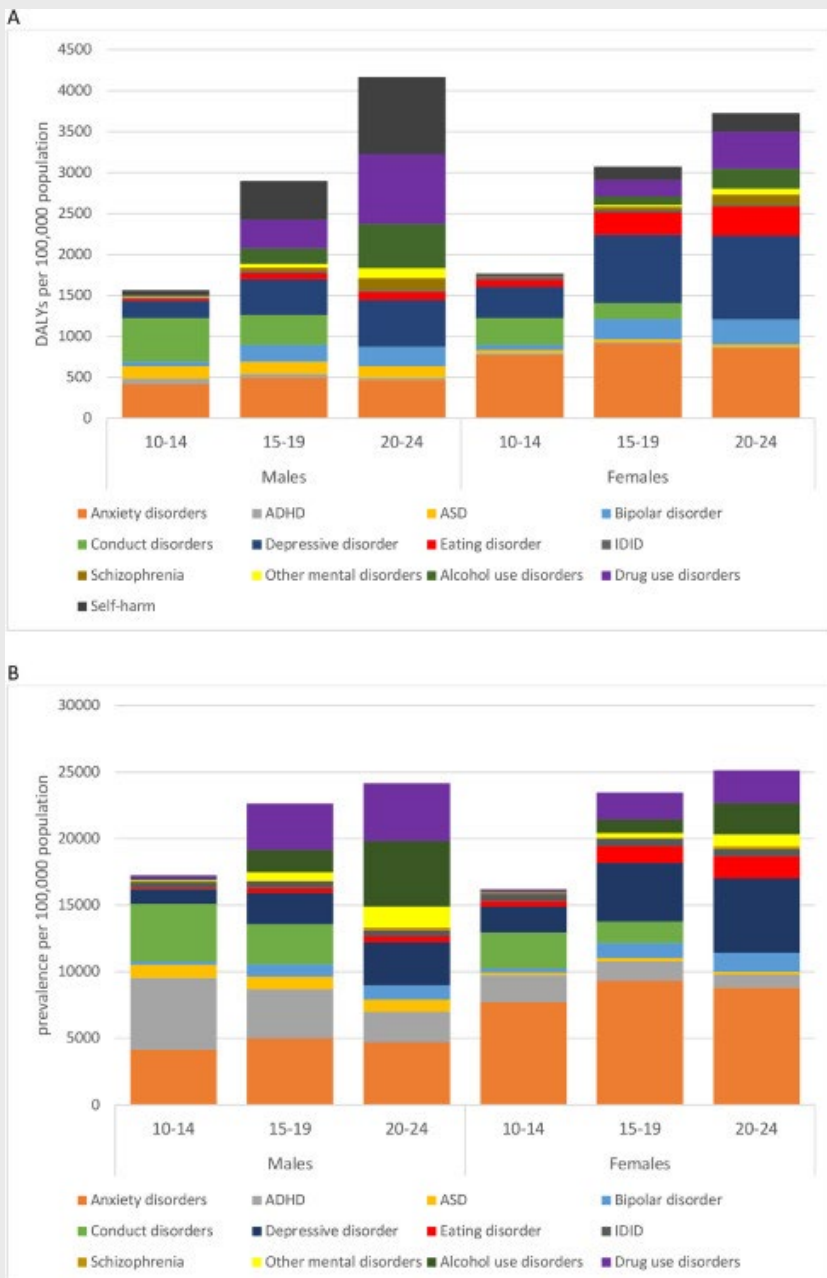


Figure 3 Prevalence of mental disorders, substance use disorders, and self-harm from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019; data by age and gender, ADHD=Attention deficit.<sup>14</sup>

Of the issues described in the table, Icehearts Europe partners mentioned that the **abuse of substances** is a recurrent problem in the areas considered. This may concern both the parents, with the direct and indirect repercussions on the children, but also the direct consumption by the adolescents. Alcoholism and drug addictions were mentioned by **Estonia** as a problem especially in the poorer districts of their capital and in rural areas of the country. Similarly, **Slovenia** reported that certain parts of the country where **SUS** aims to implement the programme have a rate of alcohol consumption well above the average both in the adult and in the adolescent population.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Castelpietra G. Knudsen A.K. Agardh E. et al. (2019), "The burden of mental disorders, substance use disorders and self-harm among young people in Europe, 1990–2019", findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019. Lancet Reg Health Eur. 2022; 16100341.



Second, several countries mentioned that there are problematic behaviours in school that go beyond absenteeism. **Bullying and cyberbullying** are a common theme in all countries, but as pointed out particularly by **UISP**, children's mental health may suffer also as a result of either excessive pressure to perform adequately (or poor performance) in the school curricula, or as a result of emotional distress at home. Tackling these issues would thus be of primary relevance if Icehearts Europe wants to help reducing the emerge of negative attitudes in children, while simultaneously fostering the development of positive values and beliefs.

Finally, **Spain** and **Slovenia** mentioned two important aspects related to the children themselves, and that will be further analysed in the other sections of the report. On the one side, the **low level of self-esteem**, which is – together with emotion recognition – a main predictor in behavioural problem in children.<sup>15</sup> On the other side, the **lack of positive role models** that could inspire children to take on healthy behaviours.<sup>16</sup>

## E) Problems in the family

The context where children live significantly affects their wellbeing, and what happens in their family context is one of the main factors leading to either positive or negative behaviour. As proven by the activities organised by the Finnish Icehearts, this is a central topic of the programme. A big part of mentors' time is devoted to cooperating with the families of the selected children, but beforehand it is also central in the recruitment of the targeted children, as families must be convinced of the benefits offered by the Icehearts programme.

The issues in the family can vary to different degrees of severity, with milder problems related to lack of supervision and absence of support, to issues related to the structure of the family. For example, all partners, but in particular **Slovenia** and **Italy**, mentioned that they find more difficulties in children living with divorced parents or in single-parent families. Children from these families will be specifically targeted by the intervention in these two countries.

However, issues can worsen, from addiction in the family up to **domestic violence and abuse**. For example, **Slovenia** reported that in the period from 2010 to 2019, 96 people lost their lives in Slovenia due to crimes committed within the family, 17 people suffered grievous bodily harm, 299 suffered aggravated bodily harm and 4,777 actual bodily harm.

<sup>15</sup> Wells, A.E., Hunnikin, L.M., Ash, D.P. et al. Low Self-Esteem and Impairments in Emotion Recognition Predict Behavioural Problems in Children. *J Psychopathol Behav Assess* 42, 693–701 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10862-020-09814-7>

<sup>16</sup> Hegarty, Lynda, Marie H. Murphy, Karen Kirby, Elaine Murtagh, John Mallett, and Jacqueline L. Mair. "The influence of role models on the sedentary behaviour patterns of primary school-aged children and associations with psychosocial aspects of health." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 15 (2020): 5345.



## F) Children's health

Scientific literature clearly demonstrates that all the aspects mentioned so far have a negative consequence on the children's health, and also that there is a social gradient for which children in lower socio-economic status (SES) families are more exposed to health problems than those living in better off conditions.<sup>17</sup> On top of the health consequences of aforementioned mental health issues, two problems stood out in the responses provided by Icehearts Europe partners.

- I. There is a **higher level of inactivity** in the children living in the selected areas. **Slovenia** and **Denmark** stressed in particular that there is a significant lower participation rate in sports in the children living in the selected areas compared to other children. This is not due in the first place to children's lack of motivation, but to systemic issues. For example, Denmark stressed that costs for transport and equipment can contribute to children with low socio-finances being excluded and marginalized.
- II. As it is the case for the whole population, **rates of overweight and obesity** are increasing among children. At the same time, this problem is not affecting the whole population equally, but it is more prevalent amongst lower SES groups. The systemic roots of the increase in overweight and obesity are again complex, and concern mostly policy regulations (food reformulation, unhealthy food marketing, public procurement policies, etc.) that are outside the scope of Icehearts Europe. Yet, mental health problems and physical inactivity are two factors contributing to this increase. Hence, by working on these two aspects, Icehearts Europe can contribute to the health of the children entering the programme.

<sup>17</sup> Allie Goldacre, Rick Hood (2022), "Factors affecting the social gradient in children's social care", *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 52, Issue 6, September 2022, Pages 3599–3617, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab255>

This problem, as the previous ones, has an important **gender dimension**. This relates to problems related to educational segregation, but also to how the interventions foreseen by Icehearts Europe will be differently received according to the gender of the individual. While in the Finnish model there is a clear segregation between males and females, other sites may need to investigate how to best tailor the original programme to the changing needs of children throughout Europe. In certain contexts, this may also require investigating how activities foreseen may be tailored to non binary forms of gender identity.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, selecting the target group of the Icehearts Europe programme is far from being a clear-cut problem. Instead, operating in the vulnerable areas of our cities and towns entails dealing with a large spectrum of social and economic challenges. On top of this, all countries differ one from another, with each having its own specific challenges to resolve. However, while it is essential to consider carefully the differences across the sites, this section proved that there are common challenges that the Icehearts consortium can jointly target.

Identifying the target group is just the first step that needs to be undertaken to implement the Icehearts Europe programme. Once this step is completed, it becomes essential to understand which are the tools, programmes and services that are already present in the area and that could support Icehearts activities. Aim of the following section is to provide an overview of these programmes and services.

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<sup>18</sup> Diamond, Lisa M. "Gender fluidity and nonbinary gender identities among children and adolescents." *Child Development Perspectives* 14, no. 2 (2020): 110-115.

### ***3. Factors affecting implementation of the Icehearts Europe programme***

Icehearts Europe will not be implemented in a vacuum where nothing has been done so far and where there are no partners to cooperate with. SANA template distributed to local partners thus aimed to investigate also which services are already available in the areas selected, and how Icehearts Europe could best cooperate with existing structures. Having a better overview of these factors can maximise the reach and efficiency of the programme, while also making sure that this programme does not “reinvent the wheel”. To do so, it will be important to avoid using resources to start programmes that are already in place, even though possibly with limited reach and efficiency, in the selected area. Rather, existing programmes can be used as starting point for Icehearts interventions, both in terms of services and expertise available.

### 3.1. Social support schemes

The first aspect on which the SANA questionnaire focused is the governmental social support schemes available for families in difficulty. In the responses, the importance of having an **economic safety net** was mentioned by all countries. **SPIN** and **SUS** described that there are income-dependent subsistence allowances in all Estonian and Slovenian municipalities. These subsidies cover medical expenses, provide means of living, and help families purchasing school supplies, clothes and what needed to practice sports or to participate in camps and hobby groups. On top of this, certain Estonian municipalities offer training programmes for parents, especially on debt management counselling.

**DGI** reported that support is offered in Denmark particularly for the unemployed and those unable to work due to illness. Similar schemes are present also in **Italy** and **Spain**. In the former, main support comes from social allowances, guaranteed minimum income and minimum pension. There are also additional contributions for people with disabilities and invalidity. In Spain there are similar schemes, but there is a worryingly increase in the rate of the population that require access to them. In Madrid, in 2021, 11% of households said that at least one of their members had gone to their municipal social services for help. This is a significant increase, as a year earlier – in March 2020 before the pandemic quarantine – the same statistic was at 7%. Connecting this with the family issues described in the first section, of interest is the fact that single parents are the ones that request the most this service. Moreover, there is **a clear gender imbalance** in those needing this service, as women are the primary breadwinners in 84% of single parent households.

All countries reported a worsening of the situation after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a bigger percentage of households accessing the different social schemes than before.

Two problems in particular have become more pressing:

- **Request for housing assistance has increased.** As a response, **Denmark** aims to provide social housing schemes, **Spain** and **Slovenia** offer rent subsidies depending on the family's income, and **Estonia** offers both emergency accommodation and housing guarantee services.
- **Access to quality food:** the number of families who cannot access quality food has increased, so all countries offer food aid service for those living in food insecurity, either in the form of food banks, social allowances, or with direct lunch subsidies for children in school.

Overall, social programmes are of primary importance for Icehearts Europe. They clarify if families are already provided the means to participate to this programme, or if there will be the need to offer further support to make sure that the mentoring service is accessed by those more in need. To get a more precise picture of the environment where the intervention will take place, it is necessary to investigate also what is currently done by schools. This is the setting where children spend most of their time, and schools are the primary institution with which local partners will have to cooperate.

## 3.2. Support programmes in school

In all countries, children start primary school at either six (Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Denmark) or seven years old (Estonia), so schools are essential settings for the developments of healthy habits in children. The responses to the SANA questionnaire describe that in all countries schools have already some services to address the vulnerabilities presented in the first section. More in specific, there are three main issues that are prioritised.

### Mental health support

As aforementioned, mental health is increasingly recognised as a primary factor for the people's wellbeing, and for children's in particular. For this reason, schools are already trying to support students with different services. In certain cases, such as in **Estonia, Denmark, Spain and Slovenia**, there are psychologist and social pedagogues offering direct support to students. A topic that receives particular attention is **bullying prevention**, but professionals could also deal with substance abuse, issues in the family, and they can also provide extra curricula support for those struggling with their academic results.

Two best practices in this regard have been mentioned by Estonia and Slovenia.

- In **Estonia**, support is offered either via phone or with 'face to face' meetings. This service has proven to be very popular, so much that schools have reported difficulties in responding to the demand, as this service is overloaded. For this reason, schools have also tried offering parents and teachers online materials on how to help a child in case of trauma or grief.
- Since 2001, the [To sem jaz \(This is Me\)](#) programme has been successfully implemented in **Slovenia**. This programme offers web-based counselling and prevention workshops to help adolescents to develop a positive self-image and useful life skills.

### Physical health support

From a public health perspective, schools are very important settings. First, aggregating children from various locations, schools can facilitate **vaccination campaigns** and they can also facilitate carrying out **widespread health inspections** for schoolkids. This is why, in most countries, schools have nurses or health professionals who provide basic medical care and conduct health screenings. Second, children spend their developmental years in school, so they can here **learn to develop several healthy behaviours** that will then stick with them for the rest of their life.

- Schools are essential to foster **healthy eating behaviours**. In this regard, Estonia implements 'healthy eating weeks' in certain schools, while **Slovenia** and **Spain** mentioned that there are subsidies to access healthy foods in schools.
- **Physical activity** is promoted in schools as part of the

national curriculum in all countries. Slovenia stood out for the level of integration between in school and outside school sport activities. One successful example is the [“Zlati sonček” sports program](#), which is intended for children aged five to eight years, and which goal is to enrich the child’s free time with sports content in all seasons. The goal of this programme is to foster movement, not competition. On top of this, Slovenia also implements the [SLOfit Students](#): a school-based fitness monitoring programme, which aims to assist schools in effectively planning and implementing physical education classes.

- Schools can also facilitate the learning of **other important social behaviours**. Making sure that children can **safely commute** between home and school is one example. **Estonia** implements programmes in this regard, such as the “Tänavalt tuppa” (from the street to the room), to teach how to deal with traffic, water safety and how to prevent accidents while going to school. Similarly, **Slovenia** also offers traffic safety schooling.

## Equity and Inclusion

Making sure that programmes are **equally accessible by all social groups** is essential to make sure that interventions are effective, accessible, and thus ensure inclusive education. For this reason, schools have support programmes for children with different disabilities and special needs. On top of this, as aforementioned, our societies are undergoing complex transformations, especially in terms of multiculturalism and integration of different languages and ethnicities. In this regard, schools can ensure that children from migrant background integrate at best in the new context.

For example, in **Spain** some schools offer bilingual education, while in **Slovenia** primary school legislation support immigrant students in learning Slovenian as a second language, but also in continuing learning their mother tongue. To different degrees, this adaptation of methods is present in all countries, thanks also to the role played by **cultural mediators**, who can help in several interventions in multi-cultural contexts. Clarifying culture-specific expressions and concepts that might give rise to misunderstanding, they can provide information on different sets of values, orientations to life, beliefs, assumptions, and socio-cultural conventions.

These are the three main aspects on which, according to the responses provided to the SANA template, school-interventions focus. However, school programmes cover just one part of the children’s day. To complete this overview of the services already present in the five countries, it must also be considered which after-school activities already offered to children.

### 3.3. After School sport activities and related access

As presented, there is quite a uniformity across countries in the services provided within the various school premises. However, while this is the case within the school premises, the situation varies largely concerning the offering of the after-school activities. This is the case not only between, but also within countries. In most cases, there are free activities offered by schools, either within the school premises or outside. However, in other cases, activities require a fee, and this could be a significant hindrance for children living in the more vulnerable families.

In this case, as for example in **Denmark**, low-income families are provided with the means to apply for financial support to cover for these expenses. **DGI** will thus focus, together with local municipalities, on providing sport clubs and families the chance to apply for financial support to cover the expenses related to the sport activities offered. In terms of access to the facilities, DGI will rely on the municipality's after-school programme and on the sports clubs at or near the schools, as these are the most easily accessible to the children.

In **Estonia**, a variety of extra curricular activities are offered, and the ones offered by schools are usually free. Concerning sport, there are facilities that could be used both for indoor and outdoor sports. According to the pilot partner SPIN, the activities that are more likely to get the children's interest are football and group hikes/picnics or visits to places of interest (such as interactive museums, other cities). Yet, it would also be possible to use, according to the season, indoor or outdoor facilities to offer a variety of sports (tennis, judo, football, swimming, etc.). In addition, there are several cycling roads and recreational parks that could be used for Icehearts activities.

In terms of accessibility to the facilities, negotiations with the Estonian schools will need to take place, as some may not grant access to their premises to external organisations. A way to overcome this obstacle is to establish long-day groups, where youth can study together after class, but also practice sports at SPIN's premises. In both these activities, it would be easier for Icehearts mentors to offer regular support. To facilitate access to the sport premises by targeted children, SPIN will set regional centres not far from the children's houses (aiming for a max of 5km distance). In this way, children will be able to come to training either directly from school or by public transport. In case public options are not feasible, some municipalities have the possibility to compensate the commuting expenses sustained by parents.

**Slovenia** organises similar activities between 2pm and 5pm, in the school premises (school classrooms, school gym and outdoors in school sport park), and under the supervision of a school teacher (not necessarily the physical education one). Several after-school activities are for free, but they rarely include physical activities other than random play. The activities more focused on physical activity are offered by sports clubs, and they mostly involve football, basketball, volleyball, handball, floorball. These activities are not free of charge, but there are plans and support instruments to facilitate participation by vulnerable children.

Concerning the use of facilities, every municipality own multiple gyms, courts, and either kayak centres on the rivers or skiing in-



infrastructures in the mountains. However, it is likely that all school gyms are used already for sport programmes in the afternoon and in the evening, while it is unlikely that all facilities can be used free of charge by Icehearts. This will be particularly the case in Ljubljana, while it will be easier to get permission from smaller municipalities. Moreover, agreements will be needed to make sure that mentors can access the schools, that they can accompany children, and that they can use the sport facilities.

In **Spain**, aim is to create an inclusive environment, with some rules related to cooperation, so that everyone can feel comfortable participating and having an important role in the group. Sport-based activities are going to be privileged, as there is an overall strong football history in the country, especially in the targeted areas in Seville and Madrid. This football culture would facilitate the work of the local partner Fútbol Más, who has a strong expertise in using football as a facilitator for other social interventions.

Spanish school sports facilities are open after school time for students, but they are unlikely to be free of charge, and also likely to be available only for a short amount of time. Moreover, it is unlikely that schools and teachers will grant access to their classes to external personnel. It will be thus be necessary to talk with local authorities to understand whether Icehearts activities could take place in school premises. On the contrary, it should be easier for mentors to support on some specific days during after-school activities. For these activities, schools are more open to cooperate, as long as they are planned in advanced and confirmed with the school managers. There are also a variety of extra-curricular activities available not necessarily linked to sports but that could encourage creativity and artistic expression, such as cultural events, exhibitions, artistic performances, and music classes. However, these activities are not offered on a daily basis and usually not free of charge. Financial support to access the activities may be necessary, together with funds to cover expenses needed for the public transport to reach the facilities.

In **Italy**, it will instead be necessary to adopt a different approach, since schools usually do not organise any after-school activities. At times, schools rent their spaces after-school time to cultural and sport associations that organise different activities (such as sport courses, music or language courses, theatres, etc). These activities are open to everyone and even though they are not free, the fees are usually inferior compared to courses offered elsewhere.

**UISP** is one of the biggest sport associations in Italy, and is already organising several sport projects, such as the 'Sport at School' and the 'Sport in classroom'. These are projects that involve children in primary and secondary school, and aim to foster physical activities, discovering new sports, promoting the educational values of sport, and offering specific know-how and tools to practice sports. On top of this, UISP has access to several infrastructures managed by UISP affiliated sport clubs – such as UISP summer camps – so this could highly facilitate the implementation of Icehearts Europe.



Sport offer will thus vary according to the cities where the programme will be implemented, even though the focus will primarily be on sports teams such as football, volleyball, etc. Overall, there will be also a focus on low-budget sports, since these allow to optimise resources and they also give the opportunity to have group agreements with big stores if some equipment needs to be bought.

Therefore, both concerning school and after-school facilities, in the local sites there are already several opportunities to cooperate with local municipalities, organisations and sports clubs. That said, this does not entail that Icehearts mentors will have unlimited access to all facilities, especially school ones. On the contrary, range of the actions could be limited, so it is necessary that time and resources are optimised to maximise the impact of the programme. In the final section, report describes two main challenges that must be tackled to implement Icehearts Europe: hiring the 'right' mentors and facilitating access to the facilities for the target group.

## ***4. The recruitment process: selecting the right mentors and reaching out to the selected children***

To summarise Icehearts in a very few words, one could say that this is a mentoring programme aimed at improving vulnerable children's mental and physical health.

Two major challenges for Icehearts Europe will thus be:

1. to define the profile an ideal mentor should have,
2. how to overcome challenges related to the recruitment of the targeted children.

## 4.1. Recruitment of the mentor

In the Finnish model, **the personal characteristics and skills of the mentor play a key role** when she/he provides socially vulnerable young people support, appreciation, security and care. Mentor can create little moments of success, and in this way give young people an opportunity for mastery experience. Further, mentors can foster life skills that will be useful within and beyond the context of sport, like working in the group, solving conflicts, and showing empathy. Expected impacts of the program include higher educational achievements, reduced problem behaviours and improved social skills.

**The work of an Icehearts mentor can roughly be divided into three areas:**

- support in school and schoolwork,
- team sport as an after-school activity,
- child-specific individual support, holistic support in partnership with families, teaches and services.

For a typical child, a day or week comprises 30% schoolwork, 20% individual support, 30% teamwork, 10% family support and 10% work within the child's service network.

In each of these activities, the mentor can offer her/his support:

- **School work.** The Icehearts mentor supports children during the school day and in their schoolwork. The specific activities in which the mentor is involved are negotiated locally with school officials. The mentor can participate in the class as an assistant and/or help children individually or in small groups according to the directions of the teacher. The mentor is an extra adult resource for the school. Their presence stabilizes the learning environment in the class and in the whole school community.
- **Team sport.** As an after-school activity, the mentor helps the children of the team with their homework and organises sport-based activities. During the afternoons, the children in the team spend time together, practice and play together, and go on excursions with their mentor. During the first years, different types of sports are tried out depending on local opportunities. Later, the team selects their most preferred team sport, most commonly soccer, floorball, or ice hockey. Team practice takes place after school. Teams regularly participate in games and tournaments of the local amateur series. As part of the team activities, summer and winter camps are organised. Besides participating in organised sport, through practice and team play, children learn co-operation, group work, taking responsibility and consideration of others.
- **Individual support.** Each Icehearts mentor also works one-on-one with each child in their team, including going on outings together (e.g., attending an ice hockey match, going swimming, going to the movies). Best approach is often simply unhurried conversation and listening to the child. The need for individual attention is particularly evident during acute crises in the life of the child or in

the phase of transitions, such as, when educational and vocational paths need to be discussed. Mentor takes care of that all children in the team have opportunities for individual encounters and connections with the mentor. Not all children maintain an interest in team sports over the years. The mentor continues to engage with these children in other activities and/or in small groups.



The role of the mentor has been perfected over the years in the Finnish model. Time frame will be more limited in Icehearts Europe, and this is why the recruitment of the 'right' mentors is on the top priorities of the Icehearts Europe partnership.

The main challenge described by all partners is how to combine the holistic effort required to the mentor with the structural constraints of a pilot project. As currently happens in the Finnish model, only by offering a full-time position to the mentor it is possible to make sure that children are followed both in schools and in their after-school activities. However, local partners reported that it could not be possible for them to offer mentors a full-time position with a permanent contract. As shown in the table below, part-time contracts, with restrictions in the hours/week may be the most feasible way forward.

COUNTRY	TYPE OF CONTRACT	TERMS OF THE CONTRACT
<b>SPAIN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part-time, based on the labour agreement of social intervention</li> <li>Mentors will be hired under the position of “social technicians”</li> <li>Background checks according to Spanish law</li> </ul>	10 to 25 hrs/week Contract duration: implementation of the pilot (18 months)
<b>SLOVENIA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freelance contract or subcontract for the pilot test period</li> <li>Clean criminal record</li> </ul>	20 hrs/week
<b>ITALY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co.Co.Co. (coordinated and continuous collaboration) contract, serving as a flexible arrangement that bridges the gap between conventional and self-employment</li> <li>Professional agreement, self-employed work, VAT-registered</li> <li>Robust safeguarding protocols, such as comprehensive training for mentors regarding their legal responsibilities when working with minors</li> <li>Open communication with legal advisors or experts well-versed in child welfare and protection</li> </ul>	Contract duration: 9 months Flexible working hour system
<b>ESTONIA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life-skills trainers already working for SPIN</li> </ul>	Additional monthly payment One season length contract (9 months) 9 hrs/week
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service Contract for those not working in SPIN</li> <li>Social workers, child protection workers and youth workers in the communities</li> <li>Background checks</li> </ul>	One season (9 months) 9 hrs/week
<b>DENMARK</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social workers/volunteers</li> </ul>	Afternoon hours/early evening

Table. Type of the mentor contracts in pilot countries.

The need to opt of part-time contracts entails that mentors may need to have some additional job to the one offered, which could be a risk as this may negatively impact the time and resources a mentor could offer to the targeted group. Partners may thus need to look for alternative ways to optimize the resources available. According to the pilot partners, the best way to overcome this obstacle is to partner with local organisations, especially public ones.

In **Slovenia, Denmark and Spain** they aim to find local and/or national stakeholders – such as schools, health professionals, so-

cial workers, etc. – to join the implementation as partners. In this way, partners could help covering part of the mentor’s salary, and to better adjust the mentor’s responsibilities according to the available budget. In particular, **Fútbol Mas** aims to overcome this obstacle by cooperating with local universities, who could allow some of the students to participate to the programme as mentors within their internship curricula.

The contractual/economic obstacle is not the only possible risk mentioned by local partners. **SUS** acknowledge that there is the risk of a **dropout rate** in the mentors, and thus the need to replace them.

**UISP** described two further issues faced by their organisation in Italy.

- First, that mentors may not fulfil the minimum requirements for English language proficiency. This would not be a problem for the interaction with the children, as there will be cultural mediators to facilitate this process. Rather, the concern is that without proper English proficiency, mentors may not be able to follow the mentor trainings offered by the Icehearts Europe consortium.
- Second, Icehearts Europe needs intrinsically motivated people rather than those applying only for financial purposes. Mentors must demonstrate instead a sincere passion for supporting and nurturing the development of underprivileged youth and for establishing meaningful connections with children and parents.

This focus on the mentors’ qualifications was not a concern of UISP only, but it was shared by all pilot partners, who wrote extensively about the qualities they expect from future mentors.

Analysing the descriptions of the local partners, there are four main qualities that the ideal candidate should have:

- **A good understanding of sports activities:** knowledge of at least one team sport to be able to plan, organise and deliver sport and physical activity programmes for beginners. This would also help children to understand the benefits of sport activities for personal growth and health.
- **Pedagogical and social interaction skills:** qualities such as empathy, patience, trust, warm and approachable demeanour, benevolence, reliability, etc. are necessary to build good and trustful relationships with the children, but also to build a trustful network with families and the whole community. Candidate should also be resilient, have leadership skills, be able to remain calm under pressure, and be good at problem resolving.
- **Previous experience with socially disadvantaged children:** Slovenia specified that this experience should be of at least three years, and all partners agreed that this experience would be best if developed working as teacher, trainer (also team sport coach), and/or social worker.
- **Experience in education and/or youth work:** demonstrated for example by a degree in social studies and social work, health, sports, physical education, or related disciplines. This would help understanding potential behavioural patterns of people from challenging backgrounds.

This list pictures the overall profile of the ideal mentor, but of course the holistic and complicated nature of the job entails that there is a large spectrum of qualities that need to be evaluated. In this regard, local partners experience in sports and social inclusion plays an important role. Above all, they have already implemented projects at local level, so they will have the experience required to adapt these requirements to the local challenges and situations. Furthermore, this expertise will be pivotal not only to recruit the correct mentors, but also to understand how to best recruit children and how to consider their vulnerabilities.

## 4.2. Recruiting children to the teams

Once the target group has been defined, and the mentors recruited, one of the main concerns will be to make sure that all obstacles impeding access to the targeted group to Icehearts programme are minimised. In their responses to the questionnaire, local partners stressed two key aspects to consider during the recruitment.

### A. The cooperation with other institutions already involved in the targeted areas

In the recruitment phase, cooperation with other local organisations, especially schools, to determine which are the groups most in need will be essential. All pilot partners acknowledged this point, stressing that they already have expertise in this field, and that they already have a network of partners with whom they can cooperate. This is an important point, as it entails that the Icehearts implementation will not need to be developed from scratch, but it will rely on an organised structure already in place.

Pilot partners will cooperate with social services, municipalities and other organisations to target youth in disadvantaged areas, with a specific focus on schools, juvenile centres (UISP), and centres dealing with alcohol and drugs. Some partners have also experience in setting programmes for the inclusion of people with disability, so this will also be a specific focus of the intervention.

A different approach has been taken by **DGI in Denmark**, who will not use the funds for individual support from mentors for social problems in the families, as the municipality and the social housing organisation already offer similar services to the families. Rather, they see mentors as a solution to enter into cooperation with the social authorities in the municipality and the social housing organisation. In this way, they can build a better coordinated help for families and children, for whom it will be easier to receive necessary help in the already existing services.

### B. Cooperation with families and children

All pilot partners mentioned that local organisations, and especially mentors, will need to properly explain the benefits, limits, and boundaries of the Icehearts programme to the children's families if they want to maximise their recruitment. In particular, it is necessary **to explain parents the benefits of the programme**, while also reassuring them that the intervention will respect the children's wellbeing. An example of how to structure this dialogue is offered by **UISP in Italy**, where they developed



an “Educational Pact” with families. With this pact, UISP grants to provide a detailed set of information of the project to the families, thus aiming to increase the trust of the parents for the programme.

In **Slovenia**, SUS mentioned that the focus will not just be on the parents, but also on the children themselves. To increase their motivation, children will be allowed to decide which sport they want to play, and activities will be regulated according to children’s capabilities and fitness level. Moreover, to make sure that children maintain their interest and will to continue, mentors will set goals that are small, frequent, and they will celebrate their accomplishment. Finally, **DGI** stressed that, together with some of the cultural and social issues mentioned above, there will be a specific focus on the economic barriers, as many children may not have the funds to access the activities.

### 4.3. Holistic approach to children’s needs

The mentor – as a professional and trustworthy adult with a wide range of knowledge about the child’s situation – works closely with school, teachers and social, health and educational services and builds bridges between these parts. The mentor does so by helping children’s parents and families with problems arising in everyday life, by giving parents material, mental and social support, as well as tips and advice on how to communicate and interact with the child in case problems exists.

In Icehearts Europe, while the recruitment will aim to target specific groups in the area selected, there will also be the need to screen, and of course address, for children’s individual vulnerabilities. In case specific vulnerabilities emerge, there may also be the need to provide individualised support. This could complicate the work of the mentor, as it may exceed the abilities of the person hired, or it may complicate cooperation with other institutions. For example, **Fútbol Mas** explained that in their context, educational and service providers in schools are easier to work with, while social, health or mental health services would be more challenging to reach. Given the limited amount of time and resources available to test the pilot project, understanding which partners will better offer support to resolve the different challenges will once again be pivotal. In this case, it will be key to identify who will be more likely to provide the individual support needed to address the vulnerabilities previously screened.

**A significant challenge** in this regard will also be, as stressed by **Slovenian partners**, to balance the management of a group of 20 children with the specific attention needed by those requiring extra support. In the case of children with fragilities deriving from difficult family history (i.e., a parent alcoholic, a parent with long-term disease, etc.), it could be more difficult that the children open to the mentor and for the latter to obtain his/her trust. This is why it will be pivotal to have mentors with previous experience in this field, and also why it will be necessary to cooperate with other organisations, as it is likely that children will be part of other programmes or services.

A different solution is proposed by **UISP in Italy**, who do not foresee individualised mentoring according to the needs of each

child. Rather, focus will be on identifying a mentor with a specific experiential and training path. For example, if the territory hosting the group has special needs with respect to structuring inclusive pathways through sports for children with disabilities, the mentor who will work in that territory will have specific expertise in inclusion and paralympic sports. As for disabilities, this can be done with all other vulnerabilities. In this regard, the role of cultural mediators could be of help when dealing with difficult to reach migrant communities.

As stressed by **SPIN**, a challenge in this regard is also to **define the boundaries of the mentor's work**. For example, there is now an increased focus on the children's mental health, but dealing with this issue requires skills and preparation that not all mentors may have. Therefore, 'forcing' mentors to exceed the boundaries of their skills may not only not lead to the expected outcomes with children, but it could also have negative repercussions on the mentors themselves. In this regard, it is thus preferable to privilege cooperation with other institutions with a higher expertise in this field.

Implementing Icehearts Europe will thus require finding a balance between children's needs, Icehearts programme structure, and time and resources available to the pilot sites. This section, described that the programme's resources must be optimised to find and recruit vulnerable children, while also looking for the best individuals that could fill in the delicate role of a mentor.

Before concluding with the key takeaways from this SANA report, the table below provided a summary of the main strengths and challenges related to the implementation of the Icehearts Europe programme.

Theme	Strengths /opportunities	Challenges /difficulties
Social support schemes of the pilot countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>available for families with children in all pilot countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>number of users increased significantly (f.ex. Spain)</li> <li>single mothers targeted</li> <li>gender imbalance</li> <li>increase in housing assistance</li> <li>access to healthy food</li> </ul>
Support programmes in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mental health prevention and prevention of bullying</li> <li>schools as central places in terms of support for physical health and healthy nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>integration of children with immigrant background</li> <li>lack of cultural mediators in case of cultural differences</li> </ul>
After School sport activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>activities provided in school premises free of charge</li> <li>free access to school facilities and equipment</li> <li>possibility to make agreements in terms of facility use</li> <li>good reputation of the local actor of the Icehearts Europe (for ex. Futbol Mas)</li> <li>co-operation opportunities with existing sport clubs and actors</li> <li>low-budget sport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sport activities outside school facilities mostly subject to charge</li> <li>restricted access to school facilities (for ex. Estonia)</li> <li>no access to school facilities (Italy)</li> <li>unlikely that agreements about use of facilities will be achieved</li> </ul>
Recruitment of mentors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>potential mentors already available to be hired</li> <li>possibility to combine IH-contract with existing contracts (for ex. Estonia)</li> <li>shared understanding of core qualifications of the mentor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limited budget</li> <li>limited time frame</li> <li>part-time contracts</li> <li>very short-term contracts</li> <li>ignorance of qualifications requirements</li> </ul>
Assembling children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>local knowledge about vulnerable children</li> <li>existing networks with local services</li> <li>existing tools for motivation and persuasion of parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>difficulties in identifying children belonging to target group</li> <li>non-access to schools</li> <li>language barriers</li> <li>cultural barriers</li> <li>economic difficulties of families</li> </ul>
Holistic approach to children's needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>network of mentors</li> <li>mentors' good skills and qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hard to reach services; health, mental health, social services</li> <li>time limits</li> <li>traumatized children /children with special needs</li> </ul>
Vulnerabilities and target groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A thorough mapping of vulnerabilities and possible target groups in the pilot sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to define where exactly the threshold should be posed to define who should be considered as a potential "Icehearts kid"</li> </ul>

Table. Summary of strengths / opportunities versus challenges / difficulties of the needs assessment of the pilot countries.

***Conclusion:  
key takeaways  
from the SANA  
analysis***

The holistic approach to children's wellbeing and the trustworthy mentoring relationship between the child and adult are the main pillars of the Finnish Icehearts. By making sure that children are supported by mentors in the school, after-school sport activities, and thanks to the cooperation between mentors and families, the Finnish model creates a network of that continuously supports the targeted children.

Icehearts Europe aims to replicate successfully in five other countries the Finnish model. However, a simple copy and paste from the original to the pilot sites is not a feasible option for such a comprehensive and structured programme. The SANA questionnaire thus aimed to investigate the possible challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of the programme.

Focus has been given to both external and internal factors. On the one side, as described in the section one and two, all societal and local factors, such as the demographics and socio-economic conditions, may influence the piloting phase in very different ways. On the other side, it must be investigated how local facilities and expertise can be adapted to replicate the practices adopted in the Finnish context.

What has emerged throughout the document is thus that there is a fundamental question that needs to be addressed by the whole consortium:

***“How far can Icehearts Europe distance its methodologies from the Finnish model, and what instead are the necessary pillars that must remain for the project to be successful?”***

As described in the previous sections, there is no clear answer to this question. However, responses to the SANA questionnaire offered a richness of information that helped both the research team, and local pilots themselves, to understand main challenges to consider. In this regard, the results from the SANA analysis prove that this methodology offers essential insights for the development of the project, and especially to all actors involved:

- **The research team:** information collected with the questionnaire are central to the implementation of the project. As described in the previous table, there are several delicate challenges, but there is also a wealth of expertise on which Icehearts Europe can draw. At the same time, considering the bigger societal picture, this report offers also insights into what could affect related projects in the considered areas. In this way, this report can act as a cornerstone for any project aimed at scaling up a best practice from a specific country.
- **Local partners:** the exercise of having to fill in the questionnaire related to the implementation of the programme has allowed pilot sites to reflect on several topics. Local partners analysed what are the obstacles that could hinder the implementation, and how they could overcome this. Being in a consortium with partners from different parts of Europe has proven to be a significant added value, as Icehearts Europe allows local partners

to exchange, discuss, and favours mutual learning from each's expertise. By fostering this 'collective wisdom', local partners can develop mutual strategies for overcoming difficulties that will unavoidably arise in the implementation phase of the programme.

- **Finnish team:** A group of researchers, mentors and management of the original programme is supporting Icehearts Europe. By offering insights in their experience, daily work, and motivation, the Finnish team is a central support for all local partners. At the same time, by offering the Finnish team the chance to observe how local partners conceive the issue, and how they will afterwards address these points, the SANA report can also add valuable information to the work already done in Finland.

This report has thus resulted in a win-win situation for all Icehearts Europe partners involved. However, the increase in knowledge and information does not entail that local partners have now solved all problem related to the implementation of the programme. On the contrary, previous sections demonstrated that there are several conundrums that have to be addressed. In particular, the aforementioned question offers a chance to reflect on what can be changed and what instead is so structural in a Icehearts programme that cannot be neglected. In this regard, there are two points that will need further internal debate to find an optimal solution.

**First, the role of the mentors.** As described throughout the report, the Finnish programme relies on the holistic work of the mentors. This entails that mentors have a lot of responsibilities, but also that the work performed is intensive both in terms of time involved and physical and mental energies required to follow the children. For this reason, Finnish mentors are offered a full-time and long-term contract. The **12 year commitment** from the mentor is a crucial aspect in the Finnish model, since this is the pillar that makes sure that mentors will be able to follow the selected children, while offering them the stability needed to develop healthy social relationships. If mentors changed frequently, children would find it more difficult to trust the new person and to develop a strong connection with him/her, which in turn would complicate the development of the Icehearts activities.

The SANA responses from the local pilots yet underline that it may not be possible to offer the same contractual stability to mentors in the pilot sites. Different countries have diverse contractual typologies available, and the time-limit of the project implies that children will not be followed from the first year in school until the last one.

Moreover, several pilot partners have foreseen part-time contracts during the week, which unavoidably clashes with the holistic effort required by the mentor. Therefore, local pilots will have to work together with the Finnish and research team to make sure that the optimal compromise between the Finnish and European model is found. This will require in depth discussion between the whole consortium on what can change and be adapted, and what instead is so structural to the Icehearts model that it will need to remain the same. To this end, internal meetings and debates are foreseen in the months following the end of the report.



**Second, Icehearts is a programme based on team sport.** Sport is at the core of the Finnish programme, since sport offers the basis to create the team that will be afterwards essential to help children feeling more included at school and in society overall. In this regard, local partners have a large expertise, as they are all organisation already involved in sport activities, with connections and structures that could be used for the Icehearts programme. However, the responses to the SANA questionnaire described that it is still unclear which are the precise activities that will be selected in the after-schools sessions. Team sports like football or basketball still seem to be the privileged ones, but other responses pointed more towards recreational activities not necessarily linked to sports. Whether or not the same results will be achievable without a central focus on team sports is thus the second core point that Icehearts consortium will need to jointly investigate.

Icehearts Europe consortium agrees that the optimal balance between the Finnish model and the local needs to be found. However, this tension between what has been achieved in three decades of work by the Finnish model, and what is achievable in the three-year available to Icehearts Europe is a constant and will remain present in the implementation phase in the local sites.

This tension is connected to the last point that was investigated in the SANA questionnaire, namely which are the goals that local partners aim to achieve. Setting precisely what are the goals Ice-

hearts Europe aims to achieve is an essential step to take a decision concerning aforementioned conundrums.

From the responses, three main points stood out as the key benefits that could result from the implementation of the programme:

- Icehearts can **enhance children’s social and socio-emotional skills**, thus helping them to positively interact with other people, and at the same time reducing risk of social exclusion and of several risk behaviours.
- Icehearts can **increase children’s school attendance and related learning outputs**. Sport and physical activity in teams is a central part of the process, since they can empower children at risk of social exclusion, while offering the social belonging needed to feel supported.
- Icehearts can **increase children’s self-esteem and self-confidence**, thus leading to an emotional self-regulation and less noticeable behavioural disorders. Icehearts mentors can contribute significantly to this goal, as they can offer an adult role model and help children in their educational experience.

Given the holistic approach of this programme, outcomes are expected not only in children, but in all actors involved. For what concerns **parents**, Icehearts can make the families aware of their rights, of the benefits organised sport activities can bring to their children, and of the social services already available and that can be used. This could improve not only the relationship between families, social services and schools, but also the network between families. By creating this network, it would be possible to create mutual-aid groups where parents find support from their community. Mentors would be once again essential, since they can help families to understand how they can best conciliate work and family duties. Moreover, once received the trust of the families, mentors could centralise information on the children’s development, thus facilitating the communication between families and the different social and public services (school, health services, social services, etc.).

Furthermore, Icehearts Europe can **support both schools and the local community**. On the one side, by connecting school and sport activities available in the community, Icehearts can improve the relationship between schools, sports clubs and all key local stakeholders for youth development. Mentors could contribute here as they would make sure that the work done in one setting is not lost afterwards, but it is rather continued and well-connected. This would highly contribute to making sure that the programme responds holistically and comprehensively to the children’s needs. On the other side, Icehearts Europe can demonstrate actors in municipalities and other pivotal institutions the benefits offered by this programme. In particular, Icehearts Europe could not only help to demonstrate the benefits of involving more sport clubs in projects related to the social inclusion of disadvantaged minors, but it could also enhance a “learning by doing” process thanks to which the whole support network would improve their methodology of working with minors in condition of fragility.

In turn, this could enhance these actors’ willingness to invest in Icehearts Europe, thus building a positive “community educa-



tion” for vulnerable children. In a context of economic and social crisis, there is the risk that vulnerable groups may be marginalized, with their needs and requests being neglected. The Icehearts Europe network would target this issue, as it would put at the centre of the local agenda the need to support the target group, thus also preventing critical situations from emerging in the future.



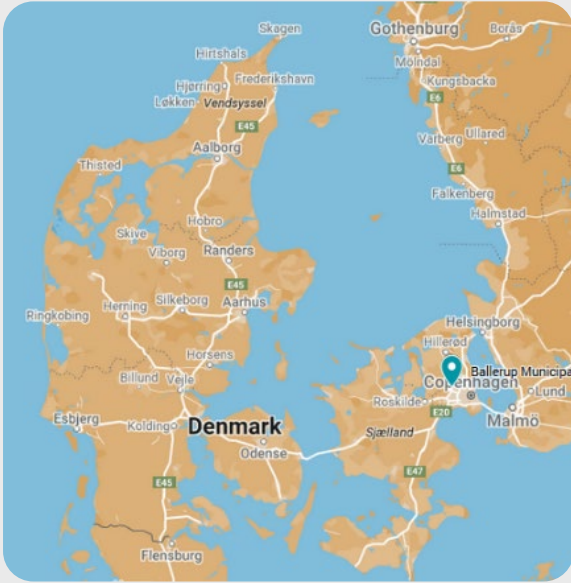
To conclude, while these are the main goal that local partners aim to achieve, it will be important to remind stakeholders of the project that Icehearts Europe impact should be measured more at the procedural level than at an instrumental one. These goals are very ambitious and may require years to be achieved. In a three-year pilot programme, it could thus not be possible to achieve full results on this regard. Instead, looking more at the procedural side, it would already be a great success to prove that it is possible to start replicating the project in contexts that differ so widely socially, culturally, and politically.

This should not be considered as a limit, but rather as a first step to prove the value of this programme. Once this procedural goal will be achieved, stakeholders and policymakers will recognize even more clearly the opportunities offered by Icehearts Europe. This will lead to a higher likelihood of finding resources and means to continue the implementation, thus inspiring also other countries and sites to follow in the steps of these five pioneering partners.

Therefore, the final result of the SANA analysis is to prove that while there are many obstacles to be overcome, it will be possible to structure successful programmes thanks to the richness in expertise and knowledge of local partners. In this way, these three years will prove to be a first crucial step in the long journey of the scaling-up across all Europe of this excellent Finnish best – practice.

# ***Annexes***

# Country Annex: Denmark



## Implementation sites in numbers:

	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE WOMEN	CHILD POPULATION (<17)	TARGET GROUP
<b>BALLERUP MUNICIPALITY</b>	48553	50.4%	9919	Children aged 7-10

## Location description:

The municipality has two schools, both have many children from [non-profit housing companies](#). Many socially and economically vulnerable children; many people in the area have low income or are unemployed; often low education levels.

## Vulnerabilities:

Significantly lower participation rate in sports compared to other children in Denmark.

## Risk factors for social marginalisation:

Costs for transport and equipment can contribute to children with low socio-finances being excluded and marginalized; many citizens in the area place low value on leisure activities.

## Means of living:

A national economic safety net exists for unemployed people and those unable to work due to illness; families can apply for financial support for sports.

## Programmes and after school activities:

Physical activity is part of national curriculum; schools have bullying prevention programmes, some pay specific attention to mental health; Ballerup Kommune has nurses and psychologists

at the schools to support the health among the students in general. Local school leisure programmes exist: they are not free, but low-income families can apply for financial support; lower uptake of these programmes is observed in economically disadvantaged areas.

### **Sports activities:**

Some sport facilities exist and could be used by IceHearts for implementation of the project; there are also existing organised sports activities.

## **PLANS FOR MENTORS**

**Challenges** in recruitment include the short period of employment. Full-time employment is not affordable – the implementation team will cooperate with schools, the municipality's social/health staff and sports club, so that they can take on the role of mentor in their current work.

**Qualifications** of a mentor should be:

- understanding of sports clubs;
- understanding of socially disadvantaged children and young people's challenges;
- pedagogical skills;
- building good relationships with children.

The ideal **employment contract** would be to have two mentors employed under contract in the social housing organisation the implementation team has a working relationship with. Working hours should be in the afternoon. The other mentors in the sports clubs must have working hours in the afternoon or early evening when the children are going to be in the clubs. No legal challenges are anticipated.

## **RECRUITMENT PROCESS, CHALLENGES, AND FACILITY ACCESS**

The recruitment process will be facilitated through collaboration with teachers in schools and educators in the school's after-school program. Health professionals and social services in schools will also be included, as well the social housing organisation. **The biggest barrier** may be lack of support for parents, including economic, social and cultural diversity – it is therefore crucial that cooperation with the actors who are familiar with the families is established, so that they can assist in recruiting and initiating a dialogue. It was decided to **design the mentoring role in a different way than Icehearts in Finland**, as we will not use the funds for individual support from mentors for social problems in the families, since the municipality and the social housing organisation already offer similar services.

The implementation team sees this as a solution to enter into cooperation with the social authorities in the municipality and the social housing organisation to build a better coordinated help for families and children, so that they receive necessary help in the already existing services.

Facilities of other partners and organisations will be used in the programme. Mentors will have the opportunity to collaborate

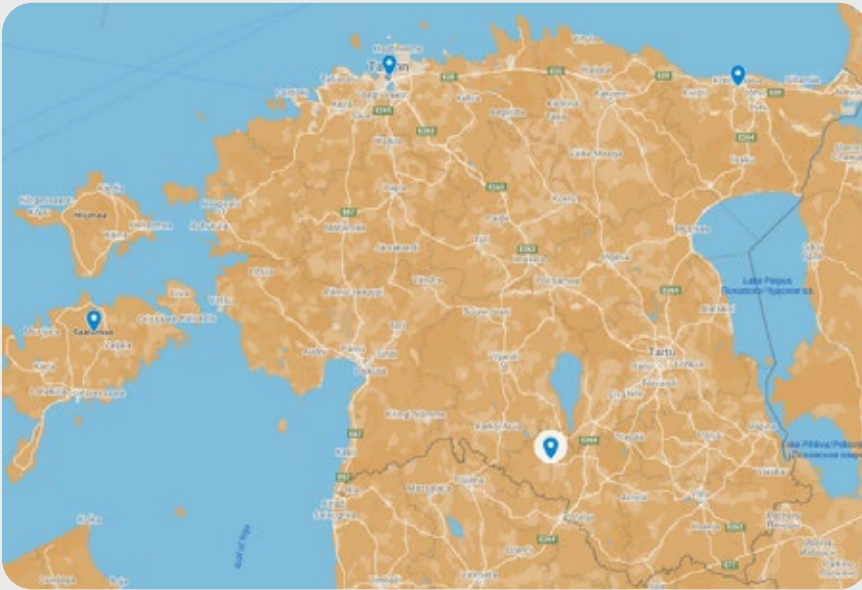
with schools and the municipality's after-school programme so that they can help children in vulnerable positions into sports clubs; children at the two schools live in the local area, and teams will be placed in the sports clubs at or near the schools so that they are easily accessible to the children.

The kind of sports will be based on the wishes of the children, who will then be **integrated into existing teams in associations** and here the volunteers are trained as mentors. No challenges are foreseen in terms of the childrens' motivation because of this scenario. **No additional equipment is needed**, but Mentors support parents and children so that the children get the right equipment for the sports activity: for example, sports clubs and families can apply for financial support from DGI and the municipality if they need it.

## MAIN OBJECTIVES

The main objectives are for children to join the local sports clubs and to receive the necessary social support from the municipality and the social housing administration. Parents should receive the necessary support to include their children in voluntary activities, and necessary social assistance from municipality and the social housing organisation. The implementers aim to build a network and cooperation across schools, health professionals and social workers, with clear division of roles, and to build knowledge about integrating activity into community life.

## Country Annex: Estonia



### Implementation sites in numbers:

	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE WOMEN	CHILD POPULATION (<18)	TARGET GROUP
<b>KOHTLA-JARVE</b>	33675	54.3%	5487	Children aged 9-16
<b>SAAREMA</b>	32278	50.8%	5762	Children aged 9-13
<b>TALLINN</b>	445002	54.4%	88585 (<19)	Children aged 9-18 already enrolled in SPIN programme
<b>TORVA</b>	5862	52.1%	1059	Children aged 11-16

### CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL SYSTEM AT AGE 7

#### Locations:

**Kohtla-Järve:** The municipality's five distant districts hamper administration and organisation of education, social activities, and public transport. There is a decreasing number of jobs and a high unemployment rate. Well-being and income rank below the national average. A large number of children are part of disadvantaged families. **Risk factors for social marginalisation** include bilingualism and poverty.

To support **means of living** families receive subsistence allowance; the system is the same in all municipalities. Families in poverty also get a medicine allowance, and support for the purchase

of firewood. Children are supported by the local government in purchasing school supplies and clothes. Some after school activities are available free of charge and students get help from the psychologist and the social pedagogue at school; school-based interest groups and sports clubs exist.

**Programmes at school include:** Entrepreneurial school, School that encourages movement, School that promotes health, Proge-Tiger, student exchange program VeniVidiVici. Most schools have KIVA (an antibullying programme) and VEPA (to promote better learning environment for students). A wide range of facilities are available.

**Saaremaa:** The largest municipality in Estonia, located on Saaremaa island and surrounding islands. Many education institutions exist (including special needs). Risk factors include family problems, poor mental health, social and economic insecurity, and lack of parental awareness.

**Means of living** are provided/supported through income-dependent social support, potential one-time support, emergency support; support for hobby education and hobby activities for young people from low-income families; training programs for parents; free debt counselling. A variety of 65 extra-curricular activities is available for different age groups, some school-organised (these are free) and some which have to be paid.

**Programmes** include KiVa; Support services through Saaremaa Toetava Education Center (e.g. social pedagogue, special pedagogue, psychologist); In cooperation with Police- and Border Guard, the Red Cross and other partners, different security, traffic, water safety and accident prevention projects; Study help; Different theme weeks (e.g. healthy eating); some preventive programmes: Saaremaa Youth Centre implements the pilot project "Tänavalt tuppa" ("from the street to the room"), analogous to the SPIN program. A wide range of facilities is available.

**Tallinn:** Capital divided in 8 districts, home to 1/3 of Estonian population, with large community (35%) of Russian-speakers. Some of the districts are considered an outcast region within Tallinn – economically and culturally disconnected and under Russian media influence, with barely any contact to rest of the city. Empowerment, integration, and personal development of the disadvantaged young people are key targets for Icehearts here. **Risk factors** include family problems, poor mental health, social and economic insecurity, and lack of parental awareness.

**Means of living** are supported through income-dependent subsidies, covering various expenses if the income insufficient (medicines, extraordinary expenses, support for children's hobby and sports education, etc.); a housing guarantee service – 4,903 housing units to tackle housing problems) with 4,775 tenants living there; a management consulting service supports economic survival before the debts arise or get worse; emergency accommodations are available.

Available **programmes and support** include: health promotion at school; school children subsidies paid by the city; support for children with disabilities; income related subsidies; free psychological counselling and supportive social services for families and children; parents and teachers can find materials on how to help a child in case of trauma or grief on the website of the Children and Youth Crisis Program; emotional support phone for people in crisis and f2f receptions for psychological crisis counselling; most schools employ psychologists and social pedagogues, however, the service is overburdened; 3 programmes to prevent bullying;

12 schools have programmes for safer learning environment; 4 schools feature well-being improvement programmes; Ethics and values programmes; cooperation with psychologists and police.

The following **facilities** are available: 539 sport facilities across the city; use for children by agreement, generally through sports groups; SPIN already has contracts and seeks to extend them for the implementation of IceHearts.

**Torva:** A rural area in Southern Estonia near the Latvian border, the region has lowest average wage in the country. Children have less opportunities; high rates of poverty and alcoholism prevail. The main risk factor is poverty.

In most cases, needs regarding means of living are covered by subsistence allowance; separate food aid and support for youngsters' participation in camps and in hobby groups is available; extra funding for medicines and glasses exists; as well as debt counselling.

Various **programmes** are available, including various supporting activities in schools. Social workers, school psychologists, learning advisors, support specialists, and speech therapists are available in schools. Various programmes develop learning activities and support mental health. Some options, but not many, exist for vulnerable children: KIVA, T.O.R.E; SPIN is the only sports-based programme. Children can participate in trainings, events and activities organised by the school and sports clubs. School activities are usually free, sports clubs take a participation fee; these tend to be rather small.

**Facilities** include stadiums, football pitches, volleyball pitches, swimming pool, pentank pitches, disc-gold areas, a skateboard park, hiking trails, running trails, ski trails, bike trails, skating rings, gyms, outdoor basketball courts and are available for IceHearts by prior agreement with the municipality.

## PLANS FOR MENTORS

The biggest identified **obstacle** is finding people with the appropriate educational background and experience for the selected groups. The implementation team will be looking for highly skilled individuals, who can find time to participate in the Icehearts project in addition to their main job. However, it is hard to find that level of expertise under the conditions. The aim is to recruit at least 50% of Icehearts mentors from the pool of life skills trainers who already work in SPIN and have connections to the communities, another 50% of mentors will be hired using SPIN's partners network, which includes social workers, child protection workers, and youth workers in the communities. In terms of **qualification**, mentors should know the community and show networking skills, have knowledge of legislation and opportunities offered by state, communication skills, as well as soft skills to interact with youth to build trustful relationships (empathy, trust, benevolence). They should display an ability to set boundaries, management skills, educational experience, and experience in youth work. **Employment** will partially be facilitated through existing contracts: Mentors who are already on SPIN's payroll will receive additional monthly payment as part of their existing contract. Mentors who are not part of SPIN require a service contract. In both cases, the length of the contract would be for one season (August 2024 to June 2025). The total amount would amount to 500 Euros (gross) per month with 9h of work per week. Background checks for mentors will likely be conducted.



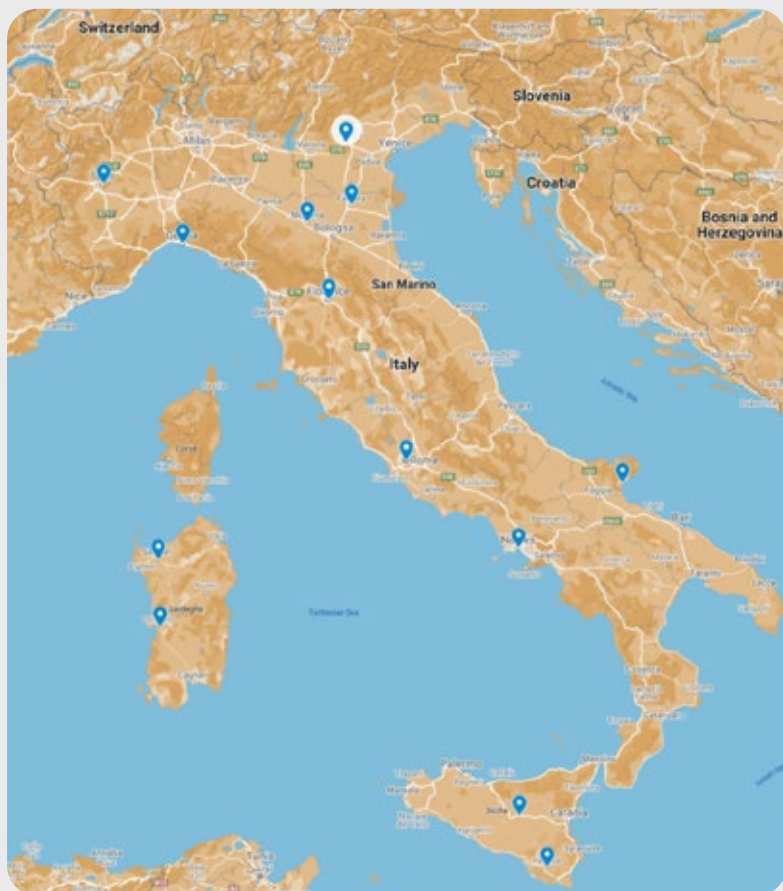
## CHILDREN'S RECRUITMENT PROCESS, CHALLENGES, AND FACILITY ACCESS

It is planned **to recruit children** from regular trainings to the IceHearts programme. In addition children may be recruited using available contacts in schools, in cooperation with school social workers. Social services and local police will be asked for advice. Specific goals and activities are likely to convince parents and expectations will be discussed with them in detail. It is important to find suitable mentors who, with their skills and knowledge, create the right prerequisites for the emergence of a trusting relationship. **When motivating children** to participate in the programme, it is important to take into account their specific needs and preferences, and also negotiate the expectations and boundaries of the programme with them. **Challenges** lie in recognising boundaries of a mentor's skills and competencies: overstepping the boundaries as mentor with changing Estonian mental health system is a risk. Training to identify mental health problems and how to react crucial. It is likely that the majority of young people who would join the IceHearts programme are already involved in other programs and services by local governments and child protection services. SPIN representatives will need to meet with representatives of other services to coordinate and better understand what is offered already. Whether an IceHearts mentor can be available for young people at school depends largely on the school. **The plan is to have cooperation** with schools in the form of a long-day group where young people can study together after class. Young people can train at SPIN's basic training, where, depending on the group, one of the coaches can be an IceHearts mentor. SPIN has already created a local coordinating body with members of the key stakeholders, and SPIN groups are operating in the regional centres. Youth usually live approx. 5 km away from training places and can come to training either directly from school or by public transport or school bus. Transportation of some children is organised by the parents, some municipalities have the possibility to compensate for driving to the parents, some do not. Sport equipment will be provided and is not needed.

### MAIN OBJECTIVES

Goals are to increase school attendance; improve learning outcomes; decrease risk behaviour; improve prosocial behaviour and socio-emotional skills. Given the short time of the project and limited resources, there are no plans to target any interventions at parents. An improved network between SPIN and schools could be an additional preferred outcome.

# Country Annex: Italy



## Implementation sites in numbers:

	<b>POPULATION</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE WOMEN</b>	<b>CHILD POPULATION (&lt;18)</b>
<b>ENNA</b>	25512	52.4%	3429
<b>FERRARA</b>	129340	52.4%	16256
<b>FIRENZE</b>	360930	52.8%	50742
<b>GENOVA</b>	558745	52.3%	74563
<b>MANFREDONIA</b>	53902	50.3%	8484
<b>MODENA</b>	184153	51.5%	28686
<b>NAPOLI</b>	913462	51,2%	155631
<b>ORISTANO</b>	30363	52,9%	3492
<b>RAGUSA</b>	73159	51.2%	11398
<b>ROMA</b>	2748109	52.5%	422795
<b>SASSARI</b>	121021	51.9%	15898
<b>TORINO</b>	841600	52%	119576
<b>VICENZA</b>	109823	52%	15971

## CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL SYSTEM AT AGE 3: PRE-SCHOOL

**Target Group:** Children currently experiencing poverty or social exclusion.

**Location description:** The locations have been chosen as they represent territories covering all areas. The three areas (North, Central, South) present a lot of differences especially in the social services, the school services, and the available assistance to the family. The social problems for young people are different from North to South. The northern part of Italy features more social services and the level of unemployment is lower, with more opportunities for young people. The implementation sites differ in size and composition of the population. Different targets and target groups were identified: some are towns try to improve more specifically on mental health, others focus on young people struggling with cognitive problems and social exclusion, other towns are working with young migrant/refugees and people facing exclusion for their ethnic backgrounds. Another factor was the capacity of local UISP committees: the majority of the local Uisp has a great experience of working with children and young people and some of them are managing similar projects like Icehearts in community projects. Local Uisp committees with a lower experience were also chosen to test the model as a new intervention, these committees will be supported by their neighbourhood communities.

**Vulnerabilities:** Children's mental health; domestic violence and abuse; academic/school pressure; emotional distress; cyberbullying; economic crisis; regional differences in access to education, healthcare, social services, economic opportunities; migration (often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse); obesity (especially in southern regions)

**Risk factors for social marginalisation:** Being a Single-parent family; low income; low education levels in parents; large families; migrant or asylum seeker status; children with disabilities; poverty in the South specifically

**Means of living:** Social assistance in form of economic benefits on national and regional level exist. Social allowance makes the largest contribution in terms of assistance. Italy has recently introduced a guaranteed minimum income. A guaranteed minimum pension exists. Additional contributions for people with disabilities or invalidity can be applied for. Various regional measures include care allowance and COVID support.

**Programmes and after school activities:** Schools themselves usually do not organise any after-school activities, only in cases where there are specific projects, but rent their spaces after schooltime to cultural and sport associations which organise different activities (such as sport courses, music or language courses, theatres, etc). These activities are open to all people. In most cases they are not free, but usually inexpensive.

**Sports activities:** The two largest "Sport for All" associations in Italy are from different backgrounds: one aligned to Catholic values (CSI) and the other laic and linked to politically left values (UISP). Both of them work a lot for offering young people an opportunity of sport and socialization throughout their network linked to the churches and their "oratori" (parish) or sport clubs and socialisation young centre. The Italian Sport for All Association (UISP) is an organisation of social and sports promotion which includes around 970.000 members. "Sport e Salute" in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Merit promotes the project Sport

at School (Sport a Scuola). This project includes innovative teaching models to support the skills of teachers. Among the specific projects, it is worth highlighting: Sport in the classroom (Sport in classe). The project is open to all primary schools and provides two hours of physical activity per week. It includes a Tutor graduated in Sport Science. Schools open to sport (Scuole aperte allo sport) is a project targeting high schools and is realized in collaboration with the National Sports Federations. It aims at fostering physical activities, discovering new sports, promoting the educational values of sport, and offering specific know-how and tools. In all cities many possibilities for children to attend organised sport courses or activities exist, these are managed by Olympic Federations or the private sport for all associations. Infrastructures managed by UISP affiliated sports clubs will be used for the implementation of IceHearts.

## PLANS FOR MENTORS

A significant **hurdle** is ensuring that potential mentors speak English, which would make it hard for them to follow mentor trainings offered by the IceHearts Europe consortium. Managing the workload and responsibilities of mentors across various activities within schools, sports organisations, and community associations could pose a challenge. It is hard to identify intrinsically motivated people, rather than financially motivated ones. Ideal **qualifications** include a Bachelor's degree or professional certification in relevant fields such as social work, healthcare, sports, physical education or related disciplines. Previous experience working with children or adolescents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or facing difficult circumstances, are advantageous. Demonstrated proficiency in effective communication, empathy, and interpersonal skills to engage and support children and their families are a plus. Further qualifications are strong organisational abilities, and a warm and approachable demeanour. A clean criminal record is required and candidates should have completed the UISP training course. UISP plans to engage mentors using the Co.Co.Co. (coordinated and continuous collaboration) contract, serving as a flexible arrangement that bridges the gap between conventional employment and self-employment. The professional agreement foresees self-employed work, VAT-registered, with a contract duration of 9 months. This arrangement allows mentors to preserve a certain degree of independence while maintaining an ongoing and coordinated connection with the organisation, a flexible working hour system would be advantageous. Legal obligations include obtaining the necessary authorizations and clearances, establishing robust safeguarding protocols, and delivering comprehensive training for mentors regarding their legal responsibilities when working with minors, maintaining open communication with legal advisors or experts well-versed in child welfare and protection. City-specific investigations into legal matters are going to be carried out.

## CHILDREN'S RECRUITMENT PROCESS, CHALLENGES, AND FACILITY ACCESS

Piloting will be conducted by local UISP workers, who have experience in work with fragile minors. According to each vocation of the local UISP worker, **participants will be recruited in different ways** based on existing structures: children will be selected in the "Punto Luce", in the poor and disadvantaged area (with the help of the project of "Street education"), in youth centres,

and the sport clubs. In areas without existing set-ups they will try to establish contact with the schools and the social services. Cooperation partners also include municipalities, regional authorities, and civil society actors. The main **challenge** for the pilot is the short time of the project which can jeopardise the building of trust with the family. One idea is to establish an “Educational Pact” with the families, providing them all information about the project (with clarity about goals and activities), explaining how mentors will protect the minors (UISP Code of Conducts), and explaining their right to use social services, which they are often unaware of. Individualised mentoring is not expected. Children are likely already part of other programmes. Sport offers will be very different in the different towns involved.

## MAIN OBJECTIVES

**For parents:** make the families aware of their right and social services they can use; improving the relationship between families and social services; improving the number of positive relationship for the parenting support ; creating mutual-aid groups among the families;

**Schools:** improving the relationship schools/region;

**Local community:** Creation of a network of stakeholders; creation of a Community Education; make citizens aware of the importance of supporting the most fragile people to prevent critical situation in future;

**General:** involving more sport clubs in a project of social inclusion for disadvantaged minors, giving them possibility for practising sport; improving methodology of working with minors in condition of fragility using sport for all as a tool; improving health of the participant through physical activities.

## Implementation sites in numbers:

	POPULATION	%WOMEN	CHILD POPULATION (<18)
<b>LJUBLJANA</b>	293218	51.4%	40367
<b>EASTERN SLOVENIA COHESION REGION</b>	1009087	50.2%	147326
<b>WESTERN SLOVENIA COHESION REGION</b>	1107885	49.4%	170614

## CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL SYSTEM AT AGE 6

**Target Group:** Children with behavioural disorders; Children of divorced parents; Children of single parent families; Children from financially weak families; Children with a chronically ill family member (or ill long-term); Children from the Roma community; Children with fewer opportunities; Children who are not (sufficiently) physically active.

**Location description:** Ljubljana is Slovenia's capital and the country's cultural, educational, economic, political and administrative centre. Most of political, cultural, medical, educational and financial institutions are based in the city. Slovenia is characterised by the spatial dispersion of settlements. Slovenian cities are small to medium-sized. Out of a total of 6,035 Slovenian settlements, as many as 90 % of settlements have fewer than 500 inhabitants and only two settlements have more than 50,000 inhabitants. There is also a difference within cohesion regions: the Western Slovenia Cohesion Region has been classified as one of Europe's developed regions, while Eastern Slovenia remains one of the less developed regions.

### Vulnerabilities:

*Discrimination:* In Slovenia, some groups or minorities are victims of discrimination, in particular the Roma minority and non-Slovenians of the former Yugoslavia.

*Poverty:* According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Slovenia has a total child population of 376.390, 10.6% of which lived at risk of poverty in 2021.

*Domestic violence:* In the period from 2010 to 2019, 96 people lost their lives in Slovenia due to crimes committed within the family, 17 people suffered grievous bodily harm, 299 suffered aggravated bodily harm and 4,777 actual bodily harm.

*Children and young people most in need:* 21% of adolescents are obese; alcohol consumption above average; pandemic has worsened average mental health in teenagers.

**Risk factors for social marginalisation:** Negative attitudes, values or beliefs; Low self-esteem; Drug and alcohol abuse; Poverty; Early and repeated anti-social behaviour; Social exclusion; Lack of positive role models; Witnessing violence; Unequal access to ser-

vices (social, recreational, cultural, etc); Racism; Mental or physical illness; Low literacy; Domestic violence

**Means of Living:** Lunch is subsidised for children in school. Extraordinary cash social assistance is available, which is intended to cover extraordinary expenses related to living, which can't be covered by the family's income. Rent subsidies exist: the amount of the subsidy depends on income, the amount of child benefit, cash social assistance, property, and savings. Social assistance and income support are available, so are child benefits complementary to income (based on income class), as well as additional support available in special cases.

**Programmes and after school activities:** Schools are obliged to make an individualized education programme for every child with special needs. Primary school legislation offers immigrant students some forms of support, including: learning Slovenian as a second language, learning their mother tongue, adaptation of methods and forms of work, adaptation of examination, evaluation, an individual program in the extended stay section, interesting activities and morning care. Some schools use peer tutoring. All kindergartens are required to provide pedagogical, psychological, social counselling and career guidance, as well as non-compulsory extended educational programmes of supplementary classes, morning care (for pupils in Grade 1), after-school classes (for pupils in Grades 1-5), non-compulsory additional subjects, and other extracurricular activities. Students participate in the extended program on a voluntary basis.

**Sports activities:** At the national level, schools, sport clubs and associations or individuals can offer different sport programmes of sports education that take place in schools or local sport clubs. The "Zlati sonček" sports programme, which is intended for children aged five to eight years, is to enrich the child's free time with sports content in all seasons: goal is movement, not competition. The "Let's learn to swim" programme to increase the number of swimmers and improve the swimming skills of children and youth. After-school activities led by school teachers are free. But they rarely include physical activities other than random play. After-school activities in cooperation with sport clubs are not free of charge. In Ljubljana they used to be free of charge. Currently there is a monthly fee, but sport clubs are required to enroll socially-endangered children in their programmes free of charge; almost 70,000 registered across 1600 sport clubs in Slovenia. All school gyms are used for sport programmes in the afternoon and in the evening for various sport programmes: sport for beginners (children), competitive sport and sport recreation. Every municipality owns multiple-sport gym(s) and outdoors sport parks with sport courts, bigger town also have swimming pools, gymnastics gym(s), tennis courts, beach volley courts, athletics stadium(s) and/or ice hockey hall. Dance halls and fitness clubs are usually in private ownership. Slovenia has several kayak-kanu centers on the rivers, ski resorts and ski jumping infrastructure. Primary schools' gyms are owned and managed by municipality, while high schools' gyms are owned by the ministry of sport and managed by high schools (which rent them out after school curriculum). There are also some private sport facilities, owned by sport organisations or companies. It is unlikely that facilities could be used free of charge by IceHearts, it would be easier to get permission from surrounding and smaller municipalities.

## PLANS FOR MENTORS

The **biggest challenge** lies in finding the appropriate individuals competent for the role and willing to join the project. In addition, the budget for mentor's salary planned in the project is relatively low. The implementation team will try to find local and/or national stakeholders to join the implementation as partners and to cover part of the salary and adjust the mentor's responsibilities according to the available budget.

In terms of **qualifications**, a mentor should have:

- at least 3 years of experience working with children and youngsters as a teacher, trainer, coach, psychologist, social inclusion officer, or a social worker;
- knowledge of at least one team sport to be able to plan, organise and deliver sport and physical activity programmes for beginners;
- an understanding potential behavioural patterns of people from challenging backgrounds; knowledge of principles of behaviour change;
- knowledge of codes of conduct and ethics, as well as data protection rules (GDPR); understanding the benefits of sport activities for personal growth and health.

Ideally one of the formal education requirements should be met: social worker, psychologist, special educator, elementary school teacher or P.E. teacher or informal education: coach of team sport (football, basketball, volleyball, floorball etc.).

Personal skills include:

- organisational skills;
- leadership skills;
- interpersonal skills;
- pedagogical skills;
- social skills and building relationships;
- reliable, responsible and trustworthy;
- punctual;
- calm under pressure;
- able of critical thinking and conflict resolution;
- good at problem solving ;
- able to manage challenging behaviour;
- communicative;
- self-confident and resilient;
- determined and proactive;
- compassionate and empathetic;
- good at active listening;
- passionate about helping people in need ;
- committed; good motivator;
- attentive and patient;
- enthusiastic and motivated;
- positive;
- sensitive to target groups and contexts;
- sociological imagination to understand people's experiences;
- good at emotions control; people person;
- multitasker.

Two avenues are available when it comes to the **contract**: Mentors will be employed under Freelance contract or Subcontract for the pilot test period at 20 hrs/week. Mentors have to provide a clean criminal record.



## **CHILDREN'S RECRUITMENT PROCESS, CHALLENGES, AND FACILITY ACCESS**

Cooperation with relevant stakeholders will be established to facilitate the recruitment process, namely Association Of Friends Of Youth Ljubljana Moste-Polje and other local Associations of Friends, Local Youth Centers, Local Centers for social work, Society for the Development of Voluntary Work Novo mesto and similar institutes. Further, the implementation team will establish cooperation with local schools through their social worker and/or special educator.

### **MAIN CHALLENGES INCLUDE:**

Parents may not see the benefits of participating in the programme, fear of exposure of personal information, fear of too much obligations for participants, lack of motivation for behavioural change. It is crucial to present the benefits and positive impact on participants', their behaviour and personal development, and consequently the positive impact on the family.

Methods to motivate children to participate are: Including them in deciding which sport they want to play, adjust the activities to their capabilities and physical fitness level, setting (small) goals and celebrating when those goals are reached, praising effort and being supportive, fostering inclusion, cooperation and team building, and including individual approaches and individual work with participants.

One mentor will be responsible for approximately 20 children and will not have a lot of time for individual work with each participant. Children will have versatile specific vulnerabilities.

A Mentor will have to have knowledge which institutions are responsible for certain social issues. Certain children will not be open and trust the mentor, so the Mentor will have to pay special focus to building relationships.

Specific employees have permission to be present in the classroom during school lessons. That is why a possibility for mentors to accompany children will vary from school to school.

Agreement is also needed for sport facilities, as many are run by the schools. If needed facilities may be rented from private owners, the latter of which are subject to availability and might already be booked at times. Almost all facilities are accessible by public transport. For school facilities, kids are expected to already have access to public transportation.

Football, basketball, volleyball, handball, floorball will be the main sports, for which not all children will be equally motivated, so the Mentor will have to motivate them through: letting kids pick which sport they want to play, adjusting the activities to their capabilities and physical fitness level, fostering inclusion, "Role playing" – assigning different roles to children (player, referee, coach).

Participants will need appropriate clothes and shoes. Project budget might be used to buy any other needed equipment.

## MAIN OBJECTIVES

**For children:** Enhanced social skills in children; improved physical fitness; positive mental health benefits and improved well-being; increased self-esteem and self-confidence; emotional self; wider social network for participants.

**For parents:** increase awareness of benefits if their child participates in organised sport activities, better family relations.

**For schools:** increase awareness of benefits of youth participation in organised sport activities, increase awareness of benefits of using sport as a tool for social inclusion, improved cooperation among key stakeholders for youth development in the local community.

**For local community:** improved cooperation among key stakeholders for youth development in the local community; less behavioural disorders among participants.

## Country Annex: Spain



### Implementation sites in numbers:

	POPULATION	%WOMEN	CHILD POPULATION (<19)
<b>SEVILLE</b>	681998	52.6%	131792
<b>MADRID</b>	3339931	53.3%	597992

### CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL SYSTEM AT AGE 6

**Seville** is the capital and most populated city of Andalusia and the only inland city with a port. The city has a well-developed road and rail transportation system and strong aeronautical and military industry presence. Despite a strong economy, it is home to some of the most underprivileged and poorest neighbourhoods in Spain and Europe, some with high crime rates.

These neighbourhoods are home to many undocumented migrants and it is estimated that there is a large shadow economy. These neighbourhoods also have absenteeism rates of up to 8 per cent. The city is also known for its strong soccer history. **Target groups** are students in 6th grade of Primary School from different Public Schools located in the mentioned neighbourhoods, as well as students in 1st and 2nd year of Secondary School (E.S.O.) from different public institutes located in the mentioned neighbourhoods.

**Madrid**, the Spanish capital, is an increasingly metropolitan city. In recent decades it has undergone a series of demographic, urban and economic transformations, experiences great wealth and has a flourishing centre. However, disparity between districts is evident. There are significant effects from economic crises

on unemployment, poverty, housing evictions and loss of social structures, half the population are from other areas of Spain or other countries. Refugees and migrants face many barriers and discrimination. 22% of the population are socially excluded, with high actual and perceived levels of inequalities.

**Target groups** are students from 1st to 6th grade of Primary School that attend the CEIP Felipe II.

### **VULNERABILITIES INCLUDE:**

- marginalisation;
- different needs such as gender differentiation, due to the low participation of girls and boys in sports and healthy activities in the area;
- the lack of structured healthy habits;
- little family involvement and domestic violence;
- impoverished working-class families;
- emerging mafia – esque structures and illicit drug trade;
- high rates of unemployment; homes with unregulated ownership;
- scarcity of young role models.

**Risk factors for social marginalisation** are the low economic status which is proportionally linked to low educational levels due to limited training and lack of information. A lack of professionalization often leads to increased engagement in marginal activities within families, which can confuse and negatively impact children, and even cause family separation due to financial reasons or incarceration. The causes of social marginalisation are complex and are result of a combination of social, economic and systemic factors, namely educational segregation, absence of adequate support systems, lack of safe and accessible spaces that cover their free time, early school drop-out and school absenteeism, Xenophobia and racism, domestic and gender-based violence.

**Means of living** are supported through a minimum Income Scheme; unemployment benefits; social assistance; housing assistance; child benefits; pension system; disability benefits; as well as emergency social assistance. By the end of 2021, 11% of households stated that at least one of their household members had gone to their municipal social services for help.

**Programmes and after school activities:** Special education programmes are available to support students with disabilities or special needs, ensuring inclusive education. Some schools offer bilingual education. Schools often have school nurses or health professionals who provide basic medical care, conduct health screenings, and promote healthy habits. Vaccination programmes ensure children are up-to-date with required vaccinations. Schools sometimes have social workers who provide counselling. Social services often collaborate with schools to provide programs that address issues like bullying, substance abuse prevention, and family support. Some schools offer tutoring programs to help students who are struggling academically. Schools often provide extracurricular activities such as sports, arts, and clubs to enhance students' skills and interests. Many schools have counselors who provide mental health support, guidance, and counseling to students. Psychologists might be available to offer specialized support for students with mental health concerns. Some schools provide subsidized or free nutritious meals. Schools offer physical education classes to promote fitness and active lifestyles. Spain offers various sports clubs and activities that students can participate in outside of school hours. Students

sometimes have opportunities to participate in cultural events, exhibitions, and artistic performances. Some schools offer art and music classes to encourage creativity and artistic expression. Extracurricular activities on languages, technology, reading, writing and more, both free and paid, are available.

**Sports activities:** Often, sports facilities of schools are open after school time for students.

- **Seville:** Some sport activities are available at schools, but few for free, and also only short sessions. Activities in sports centres which are subsidised by municipality exist, however, not all families are aware. IceHearts activities may take place there, but this requires talks with local authorities.
- **Madrid:** The local council provides the district with two libraries, three cultural centres, a youth centre and three sports centres. According to a municipal survey, 48% of the population uses the sports facilities and 38% uses the cultural centres; there is a clear wish for more sports facilities in the municipality; IceHearts activities may take place there, but this requires talks with local authorities.

## PLANS FOR MENTORS

The **main concern** is that the project budget alone is too small to hire enough and sufficiently skilled mentors. Options to mitigate this risk is finding partners that can contribute with some human resources to the project or finding partners such as universities that can bring internship students to participate as mentors. As mentors will not be developing a full-time job, they might have some additional job. A fixed schedule will be developed to find people who definitely have the time.

With regards to qualifications, the implementation team is looking for candidates with social studies degrees and with previous experience working or volunteering with children; regarding child protection policies, no criminal background, and some sport experience (even at a non professional level). Skills and personal qualities include empathy, communication skills, adaptability, teamwork, passion for sports, and enthusiasm.

Mentors will be hired on a part-time **contract** for 10 to 25 hours per week during implementation of the pilot (18 months). Mentors will be hired with the title “social technicians”. Futbol Mas are experienced in conducting background checks according to Spanish law.

## CHILDREN’S RECRUITMENT PROCESS, CHALLENGES, AND FACILITY ACCESS

Recruitment will be carried on in collaboration with schools. The implementation team will be working with educators to evaluate which children could benefit more from participating in the programme, this approach has previously been used by Futbol Mas successfully. Co-operation with stakeholders is fundamental for the recruitment process: Schools, social services, and sport clubs can provide information on the children situation and characteristics due to their previous work with them. The **Key challenge** will be to convince families to be involved (as opposed to children merely participating): a calendar will be created to help in the organisation of activities and to notify them in advance of the

date of events. Children are often eager to participate in sports, which is likely sufficient as main motivation. In addition, activities such as field trips or camps will be organised. Individual vulnerabilities will be screened and addressed with individual support foreseen. It is likely that some of the children participating in the programme are also part of other programmes or services that need to be approached. Individual support during the school day might be difficult as it is unlikely that schools will grant access to their classes. In FM's experience, schools are open to offer their space for activities to take place during the afternoons. School facilities are generally accessible to families participating in the programme at reasonable distance from home. Football will be the main sport (others may be added as side activities); sessions will include some other games and sport-based activities for children to learn through sport using the Sport for Development methodology. Socio-sport sessions with different games and activities for children who are not motivated will be organised. There is no need for special equipment from children: standard sport clothes can be used.

## MAIN GOALS

**For children:** Safe space to practice sport-like activities free of charge; having a mentor to act as a role model for them; inclusive environment where children can feel part of a group; aiming to prevent social exclusion and to promote social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

**For Parents:** support them in their conciliation of work and family duties, offer them a space where they can be involved in their children's activities by having a mentor whom they can trust and communicate with to centralize the information on the children's development regarding different social and public services (school, health services, social services, etc.).

**For Schools:** opportunity to offer activities to children in need during after-school hours, involve schools as much as possible so that the work done with teachers at school can be continued through mentors, creating synergies with work in communities.

**For the Community:** create synergies between different public services where children and families can participate, preventing social exclusion within communities.

# ***Situation Analysis and Needs Assessment (SANA) model for Icehearts Europe***

## **Content:**

- Background
- The purpose of Situation Analysis Needs Analysis (SANA)
- Focus of the SANA
- How to complete the SANA?
- Where will the SANA data be stored?
- How will the SANA data be analysed?
- Important SANA Deadlines
- Questionnaire SITUATION ANALYSIS (SA)
- Questionnaire NEEDS ANALYSIS (NA)
- Questions about the SANA process?

## Background

The mental health burden and crisis in society, especially among youth, has been extensively researched. It is clear that there is a critical need for mental health intervention programmes for children and youth, as highlighted in the EU4Health work programme.



The Icehearts Europe project will address several health-related problems currently facing children and youth, including:

- The fact that 20-25% of youth are suffering from mental health problems in the aftermath of COVID-19<sup>1</sup>
- The long-lasting trend of insufficient physical activity for 80% of adolescents which puts the health and well-being of the children and youth at serious risk<sup>2</sup>

The Icehearts Europe Project is uniquely positioned to address the intersections of physical activity, mental health<sup>3</sup> and physical health and to deliver benefits in all of these interconnected fields.

Icehearts has already been identified as an evidence-based and highly successful best practice in Finland<sup>4</sup>.

Icehearts Finland uses team sports as a tool for engaging children with social work. The model provides consistent long-term support for vulnerable children. Each team is led by a mentor who supports the selected children at school, after school and at home for 12 years. Children who require special support and who have been identified as being at risk of social exclusion are chosen to join the sports team. Children are chosen in co-operation with pre-school, school and social service professionals. It is the child's caregivers who ultimately decide if the child will participate in the team activities and accept the support offered.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/22-11-2019-new-who-led-study-says-majority-of-adolescents-worldwide-are-not-sufficiently-physically-active-putting-their-current-and-future-health-at-risk>

<sup>3</sup> [https://sportfordevelopmentcoalition.org/sites/default/files/file/23817%20Sport%20for%20Development%20Coalition%20Mental%20Health%20&%20Well-being%20Report\\_Accessible\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sportfordevelopmentcoalition.org/sites/default/files/file/23817%20Sport%20for%20Development%20Coalition%20Mental%20Health%20&%20Well-being%20Report_Accessible_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.icehearts.fi/brief-in-english/>



Icehearts Europe lays the foundations for the Icehearts methodology to be further iterated through: (i) international knowledge exchange, (ii) adapted to new countries and their cultural contexts, and (iii) pilot tested in 5 countries across Europe.

In Icehearts Europe we fulfil specific objectives, tasks, deliverables, and indicators of the project in order to improve mental health and well-being of disadvantaged youth in Europe through a pan-European initiative based on the Finnish Icehearts model. To build the foundation of this work, we will conduct a Situation Analysis and Needs Assessment (SANA) in the aforementioned 5 pilot countries: Italy, Slovenia, Spain, Estonia and Denmark.

## **The purpose of Situation Analysis Needs Analysis (SANA)**

In order to plan the implementation of IceHearts Europe in five pilot countries, the project consortium has prepared a Situation Analysis and Needs Assessment (SANA). Within each of these countries, the aim is to understand the local needs, the factors that put youth at risk, as well as what resources are available, and finally, what interventions are currently being implemented.

The SANA will be used to identify what the gap is between the current status in these countries and the desired outcomes. This will assist in planning the implementation of the Icehearts Europe Project.

## **Focus of the SANA**

The SANA questions will target the following in each pilot country and the chosen implementation site in each:

For Situation Analysis (SA)

- Identification of population characteristics
- Identification of environment of the implementation site
- Identification of possible target groups
- Identification of service and school system in the local community
- Identification of sport and after school activities in the community

For Needs Assessment:

- Mentor recruitment
- Recruitment of programme participants (children)
- Individual support based in selected children's needs
- Access to facilities and resources
- Team sport and after school activities
- Main goals of the programme

## How to complete the SANA?

In order for us to understand the situation and needs in your country, please answer every question in the template. Both quantitative and qualitative (discursive) responses are welcomed. You can provide more information, for instance, about factors supporting or hindering the implementation of the Icehearts Europe programme in the General Comments section.

Important notes for the pilot countries:

- Pilot countries can decide / choose by themselves whether they want to fill out a separate template for each site or collect all information into the same questionnaire.
- Pilot countries can focus on collecting data from pilot sites as well as from larger area/region/city.
- Pilot countries are encouraged to contact local and/or regional stakeholders, partners and experts, to gather as many detailed insights as possible.

## Where will the SANA data be stored?

All answers will be collected in a Microsoft Word file. The collected data will be saved in the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) Dropbox in the separate folders for each pilot country. These files will be password protected.

## How will the SANA data be analysed?

The data gathered from the pilots will be analysed in 4 steps:

1. reviewing and organising the data related to the context in which the programme will be implemented,
2. identifying the needs for programme implementation
3. identifying the existing gaps between the current situation and what is needed to implement the programme
4. providing feedback, recommendations and solutions to help pilot sites to overcome any gaps/issues.

The tool for analysing the data will be selected after collecting, reading and familiarizing with the data.

# Questionnaire

# **SITUATION**

# **ANALYSIS**

General information :

Country:

Pilot organisation:

Contact person:

Email address of the contact person:

Stakeholders that assisted in the SANA  
Analysis (and their role):

**1.****IDENTIFICATION OF POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS****1.1. Population characteristics of the region/city of implementation site.**

1.1.1. What is the total population in the region/city of the implementation site?

1. Total
2. Women
3. Men

1.1.2. What is the total number of child population (< 18 years) in the region/city of your implementation site?

1.1.3. Can you provide information on what kind of families with children live in the region/city? Are there data available on the numbers of such families?

- I. Nuclear family (mother, father, children)
- II. Single parent families
- III. Divorced parents with joint custody
- IV. Others

GENERAL COMMENTS:

**2.****IDENTIFICATION OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION SITE****2.1. Location of the implementation site**

2.1.1. Can you describe the region/city/location where you aim to implement the programme?

2.1.2. Why do you think this would be the best location to implement the programme?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

### 3. IDENTIFICATION OF POSSIBLE TARGET GROUPS

#### 3.1. Main vulnerabilities

3.1.1 What are the main vulnerabilities of the children that need to be addressed in the region/city of the implementation site?

#### 3.2. Target group

3.2.1. Which are the possible /planned target groups of the programme in your implementation site?

3.2.2. What are the risk factors for social marginalisation in these target groups?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

### 4. IDENTIFICATION OF SERVICE AND SCHOOL SYSTEM IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

#### 4.1. Means of living

In case families are struggling with means of living, which social allowances or benefits are in place to secure the minimum level of subsistence?

#### 4.2. School system and services for school-aged children

4.2.1 At what age do children enter primary / comprehensive school in your local site?

4.2.2 What kind of services /programmes (health, social, educational, mental health) are available for all children at school/during school years?

4.2.3 Do local schools have preventive programmes or interventions (social, health, and mental health) for vulnerable children who need extra support?

4.2.4 Are any of these programmes or services sport-based?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

**5.  
IDENTIFICATION OF SPORT AND AFTER SCHOOL  
ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMUNITY**

**5.1. After-school activities**

5.1.1 Do children have the possibility to participate in after-school activities organised by local schools?

5.1.2 If yes, are they free of charge?

5.1.3 What is the level of uptake of these activities?

**5.2. Sport activities**

What kind of sport facilities and possibilities for leisure-time physical activities are available in the local community for the children?

Would Icehearts have the possibility and permission to use sport facilities provided by the local community? If yes, how and what kind of sport facilities? If not, is there a way to get this permission?

**5.3. Organized sport**

Do children have the possibility to participate in organised sport in your local area?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

# Questionnaire

## NEEDS

## ASSESSMENT

General information:

Country:

Pilot organisation:

Contact person:

Email address of the contact person:

Stakeholders that assisted in the SANA  
Analysis (and their role):

In this part of the questionnaire, we are addressing:

If it is possible to implement the Icehearts programme according to the basic principles and concept of the intervention? What challenges and possibilities do you foresee in relation to the following key elements of the programme?

<b>6. MENTOR RECRUITMENT</b>
<b>6.1. Challenges in hiring of mentors</b>
6.1.1 Do you foresee challenges in hiring mentors for your local site?
6.1.2 If yes, what kind of challenges? How could you tackle these challenges?
<b>6.2. Qualifications of mentors</b>
6.2.1 What do you think are the main requirements, skills, work experience, education and personal qualities a candidate needs to qualify for the role of Icehearts mentor?
<b>6.3. Employment contract</b>
6.3.1. How will the pilot organisations employ the mentors (for example the type and length of the contract)?
6.3.2. What would be the best solution for your local site regarding mentors' working hours and employment contract (how many working hours and what kind of employment contract)?
6.3.3. Do you expect any legal challenges in the recruitment process (such as criminal records, working with minors etc.)?
GENERAL COMMENTS:



**7.****RECRUITMENT OF PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS****7.1. Recruitment process for the programme**

7.1.1. How do you plan to recruit children for the programme?

7.1.2 Do you plan to co-operate with other stakeholders (schools, social services, sport clubs etc.) to reach out your target group?

**7.2. Convincing parents and children**

7.2.1 Do you think that you are able to convince the parents about the programme, its goals and activities? What do you think are the main challenges that may be faced?

7.2.2. Do you think that the children will agree with the programme goals and activities? If not, what could be the best methods to motivate them to participate in the programme?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

**8.****INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT ACCORDING TO CHILDREN'S NEEDS****8.1. Providing individual support according to children's needs**

Do you foresee challenges in providing individualised mentoring to specific sub-groups and/or to children with certain specific vulnerabilities? If yes, what kind of challenges and how would you try to tackle them?

**8.2. Family-related issues**

Would some of the children likely be already part of other programmes or services (health, social, educational, mental health)? If so, will it be possible to establish a coordination and cooperation between Icehearts and other service providers?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

## 9. ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

### 9.1 School as working environment for the Icehearts mentor

9.1.1 Will the mentors have the access to childrens' school(s) in order to provide individual support during the school day?

9.1.2 If no, what is the reason for that? Are there any possibilities to co-operate with the school so that mentor is able to provide individual support in the school?

9.1.3 Will the mentors be able to provide sport and other activities in schools?

9.1.4 If not, who would you need to interact with in order to get this permission?

### 9.2. Facilities of local community and sport clubs

9.2.1 Will the mentors be able to use facilities of local communities and sport clubs when operating as Icehearts-mentor?

9.2.2 Do you foresee challenges in cooperating with local communities and sport clubs?

### 9.3 Accessibility of facilities for the children and parents

9.3.1 How accessible are the local facilities for the children / parents participating in the programme (e.g., distance from home or school, public transport)?

9.3.2 Do you foresee need to support children and families with means to reach the facilities when participating the programme (public transport tickets, local buses, etc.)?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

## 10. TEAM SPORT AND AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

### 10.1 Type of activities

10.1.1. Which are the types of team-sport you could offer the children within the Icehearts programme?

10.1.2. What kind of other sport /after-school activities would you plan to offer the children?

10.1.3. Do you foresee challenges in motivating children to participate in team sport? How are you going to motivate all selected children to participate in team sport?

### 10.2 Resources and equipment

10.2.1. What kind of resources and equipment are needed to start the chosen sport activities?

10.2.2. How do you plan to ensure that all children have the necessary equipment (for example sport-shoes) to be able to participate in team sport and other after school activities?

GENERAL COMMENTS:

## 11.

### MAIN GOALS OF THE PROGRAMME

#### 11.1 Outcomes of the programme

11.1.1 What outcomes are you aiming to achieve regarding to children participating in the programme?

11.1.2 What outcomes are you aiming to achieve regarding to parents of participating children?

11.1.3 What outcomes are you aiming to achieve regarding those schools involved in the programme?

11.1.4 What outcomes are you aiming to achieve regarding impact on the local community?

GENERAL COMMENTS:



## **Questions about the SANA process**

1. How much time did you need to gather the information and to fill in the template?
2. Did you face any challenges in filling in the template? If yes, what kind of challenges?
3. Did the SANA questionnaire give you an opportunity to address all necessary information. If not, what do you think was missing from the questionnaire?
4. Please, feel free to give more feedback about the SANA process.



**THANK YOU FOR GIVING YOUR  
TIME TO COMPLETE THE SANA  
QUESTIONNAIRE**

*The Icehearts Europe Team*



## ICEHEARTS EUROPE PROJECT

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## WP3 LEADING ORGANISATIONS AND AUTHORS:

*EuroHealthNet, Belgium:*

- Samuele Tonello*
- Hannes Jarke*

*Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland:*

- Marjatta Kekkonen*
- Kaija Appelqvist-Schmidlechner*

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