| *Building Social Capital for Families in Zeebrugge* | | |
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| **Organisation(s):** | Public Centre for Social Welfare of Bruges (OCMW Brugge), subdivision “Huis van het Kind” | |
| **Country:** | Belgium | |
| **Contact:** | policy@esn-eu.org | |
| **Theme:** | ☐ Ageing & Care<br>☐ Asylum & Migration<br>☐ Young People<br>☒ Support for Children & Families<br>☒ Community Care<br>☒ Integrated Care & Support<br>☐ Co-Production<br>☐ Disability<br>☐ Housing & Homelessness<br>☐ Artificial Intelligence<br>☐ Digitalisation<br>☐ Quality Care | ☐ Labour Market Inclusion<br>☐ Social Inclusion<br>☐ Technology<br>☐ Workforce and Leadership<br>☐ Social Benefits<br>☐ EU Funding<br>☐ Social Services’ Resilience<br>☐ Mental Health<br>☐ Person-Centred Care<br>☐ Research & Use of Evidence<br>☐ Management & Planning<br>☐ Other, please specify: |
| **Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights:** | ☐ 1. Education, training, life-long learning<br>☐ 2. Gender equality<br>☒ 3. Equal opportunities<br>☐ 4. Active support to employment<br>☐ 5. Secure and adaptable employment<br>☐ 6. Fair Wages<br>☐ 7. Transparent employment conditions<br>☐ 8. Social dialogue<br>☐ 9. Work-life balance<br>☐ 10. Healthy, safe work environment | ☒ 11. Childcare and child support<br>☐ 12. Social protection<br>☐ 13. Unemployment benefits<br>☐ 14. Minimum income<br>☐ 15. Old age income and pensions<br>☐ 16. Health care<br>☐ 17. Inclusion of people with disabilities<br>☐ 18. Long-term care<br>☐ 19. Housing and assistance to homeless<br>☒ 20. Access to essential services |
| **Current status of the practice:** | ☐ Concept and Design Phase<br>☐ Testing or pilot phase<br>☐ Temporary practice that has terminated<br>☐ Temporary practice that is ongoing and has a termination date<br>☒ Established and ongoing practice<br>☐ Scaling Up and Transformation Phase<br>☐ Other (please specify): | |
| **Summary:** | Building Social Capital for Families in Zeebrugge is a preventive community-based initiative that supports families by fostering social connections, mutual support, and trust within the neighbourhood. Through accessible group activities and personalised guidance, families expand their social networks and are more easily connected to appropriate services when needed. The project demonstrates how strengthening social capital can contribute to sustainable family wellbeing and early intervention. | |

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| **Context/social issues addressed:** | The practice addresses social isolation, weak informal support networks between families, and limited access to early assistance among families living in a socio-economically vulnerable neighbourhood. Many parents face complex challenges related to poverty, wellbeing, parenting, housing, and social participation, while lacking the trusted relationships and community connections that can help prevent these issues from escalating. By strengthening social capital, building trust between families, and creating pathways to both informal and professional support, the practice aims to improve family resilience and prevent the need for more intensive interventions at a later stage. |
| **Objectives:** | 1. Strengthen social capital and social networks among families by creating regular opportunities for parents and children to connect, build trust, and support one another.<br>2. Promote early prevention and resilience by identifying needs at an early stage and providing accessible support before problems escalate into more complex situations.<br>3. Improve access to support services by establishing trust-based relationships between families and social workers and facilitating warm referrals to appropriate formal and informal services. |
| **Activities:** | Building Social Capital for Families in Zeebrugge is built around regular, low-threshold activities that bring together parents, children, and community workers in a safe and welcoming environment. Weekly parent-child sessions provide opportunities for families to meet, participate in educational and recreational activities, and develop meaningful social connections with other families in the neighbourhood.<br><br>A dedicated social worker plays a central role in the project by building trust-based relationships with participating families. Through continuous presence and informal contact during activities, the social worker identifies needs at an early stage, offers guidance, and provides tailored support when necessary. This approach enables families to discuss concerns in an accessible and non-stigmatising setting.<br><br>The project actively promotes peer support and mutual assistance among participants. Parents are encouraged to share experiences, exchange practical information, and support one another in dealing with everyday challenges. By creating opportunities for interaction and cooperation, the project strengthens informal support networks and increases community cohesion.<br><br>In addition, Building Social Capital for Families in Zeebrugge acts as a bridge between families and existing services. When specific needs are identified, families receive personalised information and warm referrals to appropriate social, educational, health, housing, or welfare services. The established trust between families and the social worker facilitates engagement with these services and reduces barriers to access.<br><br>The project also collaborates with local partners and community organisations to broaden support opportunities and strengthen the local social infrastructure. Through this combination of community-building activities, individual support, peer networking, and service coordination, the project enhances social capital, improves family resilience, and contributes to the prevention of more severe social and welfare problems. |
| **Outcomes:** | Participant feedback and professional observations indicate positive effects on social connectedness, family resilience, and access to support services.<br><br>Participating families report stronger social connections, greater mutual support between parents, and an increased sense of belonging to the community. The trust established through regular contact has also improved access to social, educational, and welfare services for families who might otherwise be difficult to reach. |

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| | An important outcome is the early identification of emerging problems. Through ongoing interaction with families, social workers are able to detect concerns at an early stage and provide timely support or referrals, helping to prevent situations from escalating and reducing the need for more intensive interventions.<br><br>The project is evaluated primarily through qualitative methods, including continuous observation by social workers, case monitoring, participant feedback, and regular reflection with partner organisations. Families consistently report feeling more supported, better informed, and more confident in seeking help when needed. In addition, participation rates and the sustained engagement of families over time provide evidence of the project's relevance and effectiveness.<br><br>Although the preventive impact of strengthened social capital is difficult to measure through traditional quantitative indicators alone, the accumulated evidence from participant feedback, professional observations, and documented support trajectories demonstrates a positive contribution to family wellbeing, social inclusion, and early prevention. |
| **Funding source:** | EU Funds: ESF+ ☐ INTERREG ☐ ERDF ☐ ERASMUS☐ RRF ☐ other ☐<br>☐ National Government Funds<br>☒ Regional Government Funds<br>☒ Local Government Funds<br>☐ Private Sponsorship / Public-Private Partnership<br>☐ Financial contribution of People using Services<br>☐ Other, please define: |
| **Links to supporting documents:** | https://www.brugge.be/zorg-en-welzijn/algemene-hulp/opvoeden/huis-van-het-kind |
| **Comments and tips:** | Successful implementation requires a long-term commitment to relationship-building and trust. Families are more likely to participate and seek support when activities are accessible, informal, and focused on positive social interaction rather than problem-solving alone.<br><br>A dedicated professional who is consistently present and visible in the community is essential. Trust developed through regular contact enables early identification of needs and facilitates access to appropriate support services when required.<br><br>The practice works best when community-building activities are combined with strong local partnerships. Cooperation between social services, schools, health services, and community organisations creates a supportive network around families and increases the sustainability of the initiative. |