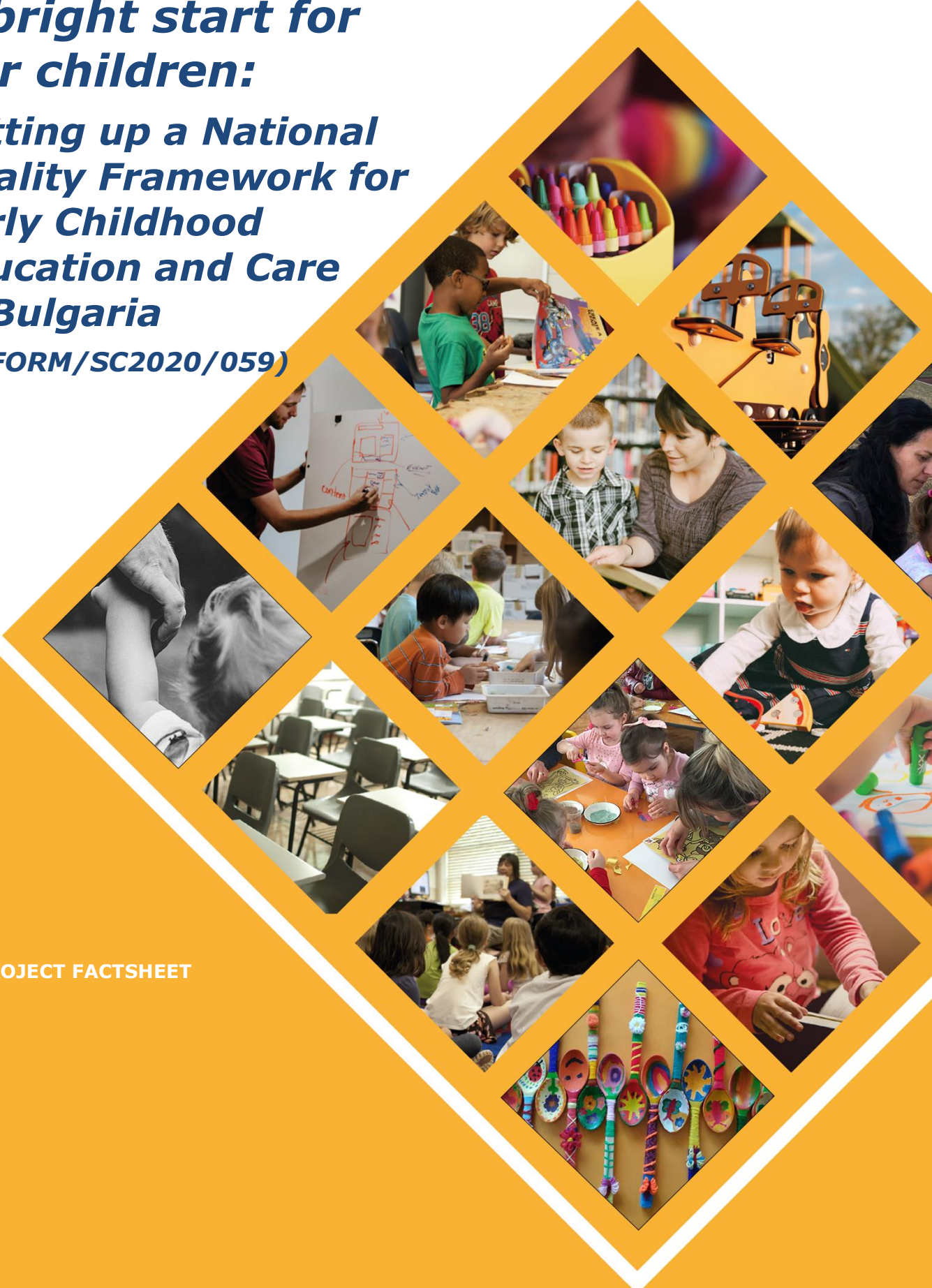


**A bright start for
our children:
Setting up a National
Quality Framework for
Early Childhood
Education and Care
in Bulgaria**
(REFORM/SC2020/059)



D12a. PROJECT FACTSHEET

Objectives

Bulgaria's reform of early childhood education and care (ECEC) was supported by the European Union, between July 2020 and November 2022, through the Structural Reform Support Programme. As part of this programme the European Commission provided technical support for the development of a national quality framework for early childhood education and care (ECEC). This framework includes a set of indicators to monitor and evaluate the quality of ECEC services, and support ECEC institutions' self-evaluation. By the end of the project, the following outcomes were expected to be achieved:

1. The Bulgarian authorities have gained a better understanding of how they can improve quality in early childhood education and care by reviewing modes of governance and provision, developing effective tools and aligning relevant policies.
2. A National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care has been created, together with a set of related indicators and benchmarks. These tools are based on the European Quality Framework and have been tailored to the Bulgarian context through a broad consultative process.
3. The quality framework, indicators and benchmarks have been piloted in selected settings and promoted to a broad stakeholder audience. An Action plan for the implementation of the tools has been developed, including recommendations for a system of evaluation and monitoring of quality, as well as its alignment with reforms in related policy areas.

Methodology

This project was executed in **three distinct, but complementary phases**:

During **Phase 1**, the Bulgarian authorities gained a better understanding of how they can improve quality in early childhood education and care. A national analysis of ECEC provision was complemented by analytical comparisons at the European level. Peer learning activities with European stakeholders and policy experts allowed national authorities to review existing modes of governance and provision, as well as effective quality assurance tools in ECEC. This exercise also increased their understanding of how to align relevant policies to achieve the expected outcomes.

In **Phase 2**, a Draft National Quality Framework (NQF) for early childhood education and care was created. Based on the goals of the project, and the lessons learned from Phase 1, an initial version of the framework was drafted. This framework proposal was based on the European Quality Framework, and tailored to the specific Bulgarian context through a broad process of consultation and co-creation with stakeholders. The resulting framework contained a set of related indicators.

In **Phase 3**, the draft National Quality Framework was piloted in 10 ECEC settings, representing different geographic regions and different levels of education. Feedback from the pilot exercise helped refine the draft national quality framework, leading to a final proposal, which was presented and discussed at a Final Conference in Sofia.

Results

- ✓ A **national review** of the regulatory framework and practices in ECEC in Bulgaria (D2) and a comparative report and **peer learning event on international good practices** in the European context (D3) were completed, with the active participation of thematic experts, and relevant stakeholders in the Bulgarian system. These two reports, which were guided by the EU Quality Framework and its five quality dimensions, later informed the production of an initial draft of the National Quality Framework for ECEC in Bulgaria.
- ✓ A **draft National Quality Framework** for early childhood education and care in Bulgaria has been created, along with a proposal for related indicators. These tools are based on the European Quality Framework and have been tailored to the Bulgarian context through a broad consultative process.
- ✓ The **draft National Quality Framework has been piloted successfully** in a group of ECEC settings representing different regions and types of settings. The lessons learnt from this piloting exercise are summarised in the **Pilot Evaluation Report** (D8) and have informed the design of the quality framework.
- ✓ A **substantive discussion about the issue of quality assurance in ECEC** in Bulgaria has taken place among the most relevant stakeholders in the system. The Bulgarian Ministry for Education and Science has been closely involved in those discussions. Throughout the process, the Bulgarian authorities have gained a better understanding of how they can improve quality in early childhood education delivery.
- ✓ A **final conference to promote a revised version of the quality framework**, its indicators and targets among a broad stakeholder audience has taken place.
- ✓ A **Proposal for an Action Plan** with recommendations for the implementation of the framework has been developed, including guidelines on how to establish a monitoring and evaluation system for quality assurance in ECEC.

Recommendations

1. Develop and promote a **vision** for high quality ECEC which is based on the rights and needs of children and families, and the National Quality Framework
2. Develop a **single ECEC sector** to cover all contexts and all children from birth to the start of primary school
3. Strengthen the role and responsibilities of **parents** in all ECEC settings
4. Introduce a well-resourced **monitoring and evaluation** system based on indicators to measure the quality of ECEC provision at setting, municipal, regional and national level
5. Increase national **awareness** of the importance of high quality ECEC provision based on the National Quality Framework
6. Create **publicly available reports** which use everyday language to describe the quality of ECEC provision at the setting, municipal, regional and national level