

Inventory and Analysis of Promising and Evidence-based Parent- and Family- Focused Support Programs

EDITORS: Joana Cadima, Gil Nata, Maria Evangelou, & Yvonne Anders

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EDITORS:

Joana Cadima, Gil Nata, Maria Evangelou, & Yvonne Anders

AUTHORS:

2.1. The context for parenting & family support through an equity lens – Joana Cadima & Gil Nata

2.2. Overview of family and parenting services in each country – Country profiles:

- CZECH REPUBLIC: Lenka Slepíčková
- ENGLAND: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Maria Evangelou, Rebecca Tracz, Bethan Thomson
- GERMANY: Hande Erdem, Yvonne Anders
- THE NETHERLANDS: Rianne Francot, Martine Broekhuizen, Paul Leseman
- NORWAY: Frida Feyer, Henrik Daae Zachrisson
- POLAND: Olga Wysłowska, Małgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk
- PORTUGAL: Joana Cadima, Gil Nata

3. Characterizing parenting/family support services/programmes across the 7 European countries: key features and principles to tackle educational inequalities – Gil Nata, Joana Cadima, & Yvonne Anders

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS:

- CZECH REPUBLIC: Lenka Slepíčková
- ENGLAND: Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Maria Evangelou, Rebecca Tracz, Bethan Thomson, Marina García Carmona, Kaitlyn Newell, Aghogho Omonigho, Olivia Clarke
- GERMANY: Yvonne Anders, Franziska Cohen, Hande Erdem
- NORWAY: Frida Feyer, Henrik Daae Zachrisson
- The NETHERLANDS: Rianne Francot, Martine Broekhuizen, Paul Leseman
- POLAND: Ewelina Kownacka & Kamila Wichrowska
- PORTUGAL: Sofia Guichard

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PARTNERS INVOLVED

Number	Partner name	People involved
1	Universiteit Utrecht (NL)	Ryanne Francot, Martine Broekhuizen, Paul Leseman
2	University of Oxford (UK)	Katharina Ereky-Stevens, Maria Evangelou, Rebecca Tracz, Bethan Thomson, Marina García Carmona, Kaitlyn Newell, Aghogho Omonigho, Olivia Clarke
6	Freie Universität Berlin (DE)	Yvonne Anders, Hande Erdem, Franziska Cohen
9	University of Porto (PT)	Joana Cadima, Gil Nata, Sofia Guichard
12	Uniwersytet Warszawski (PL)	Olga Wysłowska, Małgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk, Ewelina Kownacka & Kamila Wichrowska
13	University of Oslo (NO)	Frida Feyer, Henrik Daae Zachrisson
17	Masarykova univerzita (CZ)	Lenka Slepíčková

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child development takes place in different contexts, such as the family and non-familial care arrangements. The characteristics of the environment in which child development takes place are important for child development. At the same time the child shapes his or her environment. The family is the first and most relevant microsystem for children in their early life. Many studies have provided evidence and discussed the impact of the family on child development (Adi-Japha & Klein 2009, Bornstein & Bradley, 2008, Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried 1998, Hart & Risley, 1995; Melhuish et al., 2008, NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2003a; 2003b; Sylva et al. 2004). Children growing up in poor families, in families with low socio-economic status or children from immigrant families show disadvantages in their cognitive, language and socio-emotional development as early as at the age of 3 years or even younger (George, Hansen, & Schoon, 2007). As a consequence, many countries have set up different approaches to support families and to promote the quality of the home learning environment. At the level of centre-based ECEC, efforts have been undertaken to (1) provide early access to preschool education and to rise attendance rates, especially for children of disadvantaged families, and (2) to strengthen preschool-parent partnership as an area of work and as an important quality dimension of preschool education and the following levels of the education system. Furthermore, various home- and community-based approaches have been developed. The effectiveness of many approaches still needs to be evaluated in different contexts, including its connections to other services. Existing program evaluations often tend to not consider minority parents' views and needs appropriately. Views and beliefs of different target groups as an important component of the quality of the home environment they provide is often not sufficiently considered in present program developments and research. The views and impact of further stakeholders seem to be often neglected. In addition, only a minority of approaches consider the home language of parents appropriately. A further important research question is associated with the potential of implementing and using ICT, particularly for immigrant parents and parents with low socioeconomic status.

The inventory and analysis of promising and evidence-based parent- and family focused support services/programmes provides social context indicators on family support and educational inequalities for the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Portugal. Country profiles of these countries describe child and family services, and how country policies deal with equality issues, monitoring, and language support. In addition, a selection of evidence-based and promising family support services/programmes is provided. This set of programmes is analysed with regard to existing challenges and their potential to overcome them.

Social context indicators on family support & educational inequalities

The percentage of people born in a country other than the country of residence varies considerably across participating countries, ranging from 1.65% in Poland to 14.85% in Norway. But regarding the proportion of children under the age of 5, the countries do not differ markedly from one another. Income inequality varies considerably across the countries. Norway, Czech Republic, and Netherlands have the lowest inequality levels of disposable income while inequality is particularly high in Portugal. Along with variation in income inequalities, the countries differ in rates of child poverty or social exclusion. Of the seven countries, the UK has the highest rate of young children who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion (31.6%).

Portugal, and to a less extent, Poland, also have relatively high child poverty rates of 24.8% and 22.8%, respectively. Family friendly social policies also include leave policies that enable parents to take care of their very young children at home (Adema et al., 2015). The participating countries vary considerably in terms of priorities and approaches to parental leave (Eurydice & Eurostat, 2014). ECEC provision seems an important means to reduce social inequalities (Eurydice, 2014). Participation rates for children aged between 3 and 5 are relatively high in all countries. Rates for children under 3 tend to be lower, and differ considerably more across countries. In Norway, Portugal and Netherlands around one-in-two children under 3 participate in ECEC, while in the Czech Republic and Poland, less than one-in-twenty children under 3 participate in ECEC.

Parenting and family support services across seven countries

Although in all countries family support encompasses a broad range of services that cross several sectors, there are important variations across countries. The main cross-country differences are related to both the main approach taken to the support of parenting and the extent to which parenting support is integrated in a clear policy framework. In England, Germany, Netherlands, and Norway, parenting support has been incorporated into national comprehensive early intervention strategies. In these countries, parenting support is part of a clear strategic framework that integrates a broad range of early intervention and prevention services for families. These countries also share a trend towards more integrated approaches to child and family services at the local level, through local networks, local structures and coordinated support centres. At the same time, in these countries, there has been a trend towards more holistic approaches to young people and their parents (Boddy et al., 2009), with an emphasis on early preventive intervention and greater state engagement with parents (Daly, 2013). Following a strong preventive orientation, services appear to favour a continuum of care, incorporating parenting support in a range of services and actions that provide parents with resources and support mechanism. In most countries, other sectors (than social/welfare, which are mainly in contact with vulnerable families) have been involved (health and education), highlighting the preventive focus of support.

Analysis yielded a great variety of underlying theoretical frameworks for selected evidence-based and promising practices of services and programmes for parenting and family support and education. In addition to services/programmes that do not have a defined theoretical framework or are anchored in “broadly defined” parenting theories, one can find a wide array of informing theories, with contrasting levels of specificity. One interesting pattern to highlight is the international coverage of some programmes and their inclusion either in the general country services/programmes, or at a local level. In effect, there are several examples of parental support programmes that have its origin in one country and that are adapted and implemented in another country. This is most evident in the Netherlands, Germany, and, to a lesser extent, Norway and England. The transnational use of several programmes is a good indicator that countries are communicating and learning from each other’s experiences. Nevertheless, it is important to stress a word of caution, related to the need to study the efficacy of a programme in every particular new context, even if there is good empirical evidence of that same programme’s efficacy in another context. Consideration of pre-existent services, in addition to local needs and specificities, along with careful implementation plans and continuous monitoring are needed to ensure quality implementation. All approaches and programmes have

shown positive effects or include elements that have shown to be effective in other contexts. Although there are a number of existing services or programmes aiming at diminishing children's educational gaps through parental/family support and education, which have been evaluated through high standard quality studies, little is known about the differential effectiveness of these same services or programmes between disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups (notably the ISOTIS target groups) and the overall population.

Several programmes aim at increasing outreach and use active recruitment strategies to increase outreach. Several strategies were identified: guaranteed translation for services, inclusion among the staff of members of the minority that the service or programme is trying to reach, universal money incentives, and dedicated teams to small but very highly disenfranchised groups. Possible tensions were identified between strategies to improve outreach that resort to members of minority groups (namely as staff) and the maintenance of the quality of the delivered service or programme. This structural challenge may be overcome by tailoring the planning and resources of interventions, and perspectives may be seen in using second-generation well-educated migrants as staff. In addition, further means to guarantee the implementation quality such as regular monitoring and professional development throughout the process may be incorporated.

The vast majority of the included programmes – although considered evidence-based or promising practice – related to the ISOTIS target groups, do not deliberately target multicultural goals. Multicultural goals, however, according to current evidence reviewed in this report, would be essential in order to downplay intercultural conflict and stereotype threat. Research evidence has been provided that proficiency in the first language is not only relevant for the development of language and communication skills of the children, but also and even more important for developing a multicultural identity without losing the link to their cultural origin. Prior research has shown that many immigrant parents in different countries and contexts articulate the wish for more respect for their home languages and better implementation of different languages within the educational systems.

The analysis of the system contexts and the overview of evidence-based and promising practices has led to recommendations for potentially effective interventions. These relate to different characteristics of the programme design, programme implementation and research.

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**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY**



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