

Comprehensive review of the literature on inter-agency working with young children, incorporating findings from case studies of good practice in inter-agency working with young children and their families within Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of reducing inequality and discrimination in educational attainment in Europe is challenging. Disadvantaged families living in poverty, especially those living in deprived neighbourhoods where risks tend to accumulate, have diverse needs for support. It has been proposed that innovative practices, possibly involving inter-agency working, to increase the efficiency of childhood services (including education systems) could play an important role in improving equity and addressing all the needs of the most disadvantaged (Einbinder et al., 2000) and these have received increasing attention (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Warmington et al., 2004). Throughout Europe different models of service-coordination and integration exist, but a systematic overview of experiences and evidence on effectiveness is not available.

The overall aim of the review is to explore different models of inter-agency work, the impacts and possible facilitators and challenges to inter-agency working, as well as the implications this has for good practice, using several search methods and expert consultation. The aims of this review are described in Task 6.2. Drawing on both the existing literature and eight case studies of successful inter-agency working (presented in Part 2), the review:

- Highlights reasons why inter-agency working has been suggested as a way to improve services for young children and their families;
- Describes different ways to conceptualise inter-agency working;
- Identifies ways that the success of inter-agency working can be evaluated;
- Summarises well established facilitators of, and barriers to success;
- Identifies likely impacts for service providers, for families and for children;
- Integrates information from the case studies, makes recommendations about how to achieve success.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is in two parts. Part 1 presents a review of existing literature with reference, where relevant, to case studies conducted in eight different European locations selected to represent successful inter-agency working. Part 2 presents each case study (CS1 to CS8). The methods used for the case studies were based on recommendations in Yin (2002; 2009) and Stake (1995). The goal of the case studies was to investigate examples of successful inter-agency working with a range of disadvantaged groups, e.g., poor families, immigrant families, Romani families in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and the UK in order to identify what is common and what is particular about the cases. The overarching research questions for the case studies were:

- What does “successful inter-agency working” look like in relation to services for young children and families?
- What contributes to the best implementation of inter-agency working, and does this differ between contexts?

Subsidiary questions were:

- How and why do organizations collaborate with one another to provide joint services?
- How do practitioners perceive inter-agency working?
- How does inter-agency working impact on services for children and families, in particular those experiencing disadvantage?
- What processes, at the macro or micro level, facilitate inter-agency working and how can these be fostered?
- What are the barriers to successful inter-agency collaboration and how can they be overcome?

The criteria for selection of case studies were:

- It represents ongoing work/service provision;
- At least three agencies or types of support should be involved (e.g., education, social work, childcare);
- While some focus on the younger age range some cover support for families of children older than eight years of age.

Sources of information to determine that a case is 'successful' (at least 2 required) were:

- It has been operational for at least two years;
- It was nominated as good by 2-3 practitioners, policy makers or experts;
- There has been some kind of evaluation indicating promising implementation and/or impacts;
- There are blogs reporting on client satisfaction;
- There is collaboration with a university for evaluation.

A common protocol was developed, based on the initial literature review (Barnes et al., 2017; Deliverable 6.1) so that each case study would have a similar style of data collection and would cover similar themes, but with sufficient flexibility to capture the uniqueness of each case. All case studies included examination of relevant documents and interviews or focus groups with key stakeholders. Some also included observations.