



Parenting Support Policy Brief

The European Platform for Investing in Children was set up to provide information about policies that can help strengthen the capacities of children and their families to face the unprecedented challenges that exist in the current economic climate in Europe. Its purpose is to share the best of policymaking for children and families, and to foster cooperation and mutual learning in the field. This is achieved through information provided on the EPIC website, which enables policymakers from the Member States to search [evidence-based practices](#) from around the EU and to [share knowledge about practices](#) that are being developed, and also by bringing together government, civil society and European Union representatives for seminars and workshops to exchange ideas and to learn from each other.

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The document is designed to provide insights into issues of interest to policymakers. It has been reviewed by one of [EPIC's external experts](#) in family policy, and internally, following RAND's [quality assurance](#) processes.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.

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Core messages

- Parenting support can be defined as the provision of services aimed at enhancing parenting skills and practices in order to address children's physical, emotional and social needs.
- In Europe, parenting support is seen as a potential lever to improve educational outcomes and reduce the risk of criminal behaviour, and parenting skills are seen as drivers in the reduction of poverty and social exclusion.
- Parenting support has gained attention from policymakers in Europe since the 1990s. Policies related to parenting support lie within the responsibilities of individual Member States, but there are also some developments at the European level. In recent years, parenting support has been incorporated into national strategies and legislation in a number of EU countries.
- Parenting support services provided in European countries vary in scope, organisation, models of delivery and funding.
- There is a trend among EU Member States to organise parenting support in universally accessible services. Supplementary targeted services are offered to at-risk populations. Support to families is mainly delivered through provision of information, education, advice and counselling on parent-child relations and interactions.
- Parenting support is delivered through a wide range of services and actions at both the national and local level, meaning that there is not a single common model for delivery. Some European countries have centralised services organised at the national level, whereas in others services are highly fragmented and organised at the local level.
- There is a trend towards a more integrated approach for provision of support to families through collaborative multi-agency working of education, health and social services professionals.
- Outreach to families is typically delivered through children's centres and family information centres that offer a wide range of community health and social services. Most programmes are available for families with young children of pre-school age, as services targeting this age group have proved to be the most cost-effective and efficient.

Summary

From the 1990s onwards, we can observe a growing number of initiatives in the area of parenting support in Europe. This broad range of national, regional and local initiatives includes the development of legislation and national strategies, as well as policies and specific programmes and practices. The scope, organisation, delivery and funding of parenting support services varies considerably across and within Member States. Nevertheless, a common set of characteristic features of parenting support can be identified in the European context.

Parenting support is typically organised and delivered in an integrated approach that facilitates collaborative working between practitioners from different sectors such as health, education and social services. Services are mostly universally accessible and include counselling, provision of support and information, and training programmes. The overall aim of parenting support programmes is to enable people to become better parents, provide better support to their children and create a positive family environment.

Introduction

This policy brief aims to present current developments in parenting support in European Member States. We discuss measures that can be labelled as parenting support and offer examples of how these measures are implemented in different Member States. We also provide examples of potential good practice.

The purpose of this brief is to inform policy- and decisionmakers across the EU about policies, programmes and practices currently operating in Member States. Although we aim to provide a broad overview of the situation in European countries, our literature review was limited to English language sources only. To compensate for that, we also used information provided by national correspondents from relevant ministries and governmental bodies within each Member State included in the country profiles.¹ Nonetheless, this policy brief does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of developments and trends in the parenting support policy area in Europe and any conclusions should be carefully drawn and considered within the above limitations.

Understanding parenting support – historical perspective

In Europe, family policies traditionally were part of wider policies, including employment, social protection, housing, education and health policies. The role of a welfare state in relation to families was mostly to protect the social position of particular 'at risk' groups in a reactive manner. Since the 1990s,² researchers have suggested a transition in the relationship between the family and the state. Changing conceptions of support to improve children's life chances resulted, as suggested by researchers, from the changing welfare regimes. Giddens, for instance, observed that welfare systems were restructuring towards the social investment state. The idea underlying this concept was that states should build 'human capital' or 'social capital' by investing in individuals. In this way, the groups targeted by social policy would be enabled to overcome risks and their inferior social status by means of their own power.^{3,4} While it used to be viewed as a state responsibility to support groups at risks in a reactive manner, the new model gears towards preventive initiatives whilst also asking for individuals to take responsibility for their own social status and its progression. As Geens and Vandenbroeck have observed, this shift from state provision towards individual responsibility was accompanied by a shift from corrective measures towards preventive initiatives. Family policies and, in particular, aspects relating to parenting support were seen as risk prevention strategies.⁵

¹ Country profiles. As of January 2013: http://europa.eu/epic/countries/index_en.htm

² Roots of the active family policy and other social reforms may be seen in the 1934 book entitled *Crisis in the Question of Population* by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal.

³ Giddens, A. (1998), *The Third Way. The Renewal of Social Democracy*. Cambridge Polity Press.

⁴ It has to be noted that Giddens was personally involved in the reforms of the British welfare system under the New Labour government. Nevertheless, his general observations about the shift in the welfare provision are relevant for many European countries.

⁵ Geens, N. and Vandenbroeck, M. (2012), *Social support and social investment*, Presentation at the 'Think parents! Conference' in The Hague, the Netherlands on 10–12 October 2012.

A change in the orientation of family policy in European countries has also been observed by Hermanns.⁶ He argues that whereas traditionally family policies were focusing on creating conditions to combine parenthood and work-related obligations, since the 1990s European governments have become more interested in improving children's life chances and parenting skills. Hermanns explains that this shift from parenting support being part of a wider set of employment-related policies to becoming a policy area on its own is caused by several developments in modern societies.⁷ Firstly, he refers to a change in the objectives of welfare states, as discussed in the previous paragraph. He argues that this change facilitated a move from a compensating state to a civil society with citizens being activated and empowered to use their own resources. As a result, parenting competencies were seen as important for the development of individual citizens and societies, and parenting support became one of the frontline issues of new policies. Secondly, recognition and acceptance of children's rights, articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child signed in 1989, emphasised the core role of parents in children's upbringing and the vital role states play in providing appropriate assistance to parents. He argues that around the same time the emphasis in family policy shifted from corrective measures towards more preventive initiatives. There has been an increased recognition that prevention and early intervention programmes are more effective and more efficient approaches to combat societal problems than corrective measures. Finally, Hermanns concludes that modernisation of parenthood itself was an impetus to developments in parenting support. Because being a parent became an individual choice rather than a matter of custom, Hermanns argues, individuals deciding to have children want to be 'good parents'. This change in the motivation of parents is one of the important factors driving the development of parenting support services in Europe.

A range of policies is relevant for child development and well-being

Research shows that a broad range of policies is relevant for child development and well-being. Academic literature and OECD reports demonstrate that effective family policies can make a difference to child outcomes, for example by reducing child poverty and other risk factors that can trigger a lifelong cycle of disadvantage. Family policies can also improve a child's educational achievement and health outcomes, and reduce the risk of future criminal behaviour.^{8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14}

Typically, effective family policies include:

⁶ Hermanns, J. (2012), *Parenting support in Europe. What it brings and what it can take away*. Presentation at the 'Think parents! Conference' in The Hague, the Netherlands on 10–12 October 2012.

⁷ Hermanns (2012).

⁸ Karoly, L.A., et al. (1998), *Investing in our children: What we know and don't know about the costs and benefits of early childhood interventions*, RAND Monograph MR-898-TCWF, Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation. As of 15 April 2013:

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/1998/MR898.pdf

⁹ OECD (2009), *Doing better for children*, Paris: OECD.

¹⁰ OECD (2007), *Babies and bosses: Reconciling work and family life: A synthesis of findings for OECD countries*, Paris: OECD.

¹¹ Kamerman, S., Neuman, M., Waldfogel, J. and Brook-Gunn, J. (2003), *Social Policies, family types, and child outcomes in selected OECD countries*, OECD Social, employment and migration working papers, no. 6, SBK, OECD 05/03.

¹² OECD (2001), *Starting strong: Early childhood education and care*, Paris: OECD.

¹³ Shonkoff, J., and Meisels, S. (eds.) (2000), *Handbook of early childhood intervention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴ Vleminckx, K., and Smeeding, T. (eds.) (2001), *Child well-being, child poverty, and child policy in modern nations: What do we know?*, Bristol: The Policy Press.

- Employment policies to help working parents reconcile work and family life. This category includes: parental leave entitlements for the birth and caring for young and sick children; help with childcare cost; policies that promote employment, such as measures facilitating labour market participation of parents and, in particular, mothers; and policies focusing on parental unemployment and underemployment.
- Support to parents who are not in paid employment. This usually includes: social assistance and housing benefits, family allowances, child raising allowances and care and education services.
- Financial assistance to families to cover the direct cost of children. This can include: family allowances, welfare benefits, tax breaks, and education and care services to cover some education or care expenses.
- Support for expecting parents during pregnancy and support for childbirth – for instance medical care, information and counselling services, or a lump sum paid on the birth of a child.^{15,16}

Provision of good quality education and care policies has also been found to be vital for child development and well-being. Research on pre-school and early years education shows that investment in education very early can produce large socio-economic returns, in particular for disadvantaged children.¹⁷ Participation in good-quality early years education programmes has positive impacts on children's cognitive, social, physical and emotional development, and is vital for skill formation. Learning starts before formal education begins and parents and other family members are children's first educators.^{18,19} Results from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study in the UK show that the active engagement of parents in activities with children at home promotes intellectual and social development in children.²⁰ Heckman observed that '*early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success just as early failure breeds later failure*'.²¹ A recent Eurydice report also highlights the importance of early childhood education. The report concludes that 'the most effective intervention programmes involve intensive, early starting, child-focused, centre-based education together with strong parent involvement, parent education programmes, educational home activities and measures of family support'.²²

Heckman's studies show that the same level of investment at each age level produces much higher returns in human capital when it is spent on the young. The reason is twofold: (1) due to the shorter time remaining to the old, they have a shorter time to recoup their investment; and (2) skills acquired early on beget easier later learning, thus facilitating additional skills development.²³ In his paper on policies fostering human capital, Heckman concludes: 'Learning is a dynamic process and is most effective when it begins at a young age and continues through adulthood'.²⁴ Recent

¹⁵ OECD (2011), 'The balance of family policy tools – benefit packages, spending by age and families with young children', in *Doing better for children*, Paris: OECD.

¹⁶ Kamerman, Neuman, Waldfogel and Brook-Gunn (2003).

¹⁷ Esping-Andersen, G. (2009), *Incomplete Revolution: Adapting Welfare States to Women's New Roles*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁸ Shonkoff and Meisels (2000).

¹⁹ Shonkoff, J., and Phillips, D. (2000), *From neurons to neighborhoods*, Washington, D.C., National Academy Press, cited in Kamerman, S., Neuman, M., Waldfogel, J. and Brook-Gunn, J. (2003).

²⁰ NAO (2004), *Early years. Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all*, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 268 Session 2003–2004: 27 February 2004.

²¹ Heckman, J. (1999), *Policies to foster human capital*, National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper Series, Working Paper 7288, p.2.

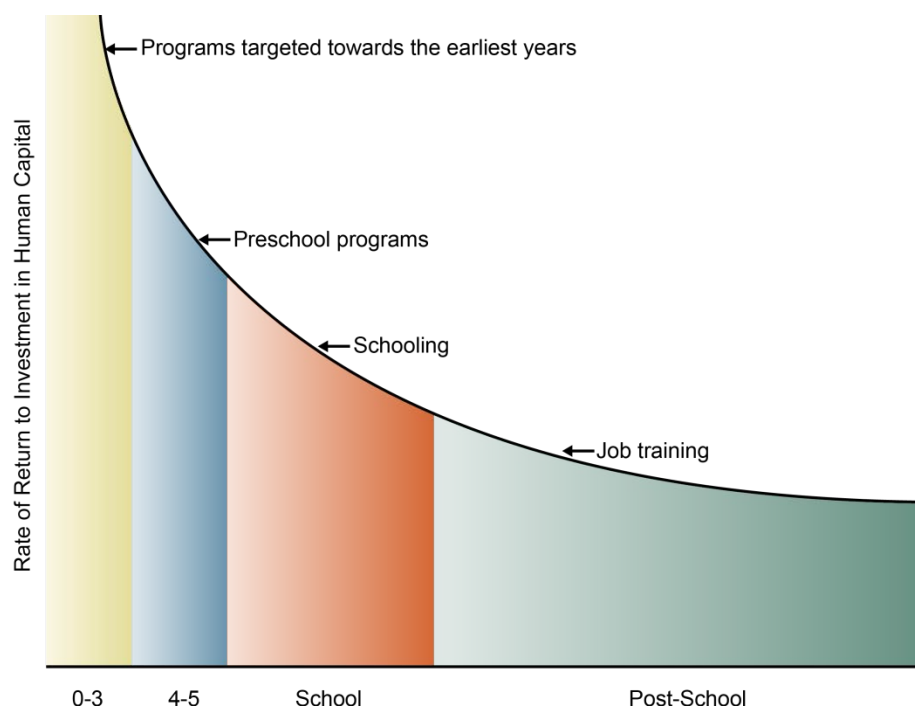
²² *Eurydice (2009), *Tackling social and cultural inequalities through early childhood education and care in Europe*, p.11. As of 30 March 2013: <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about/eurydice/documents/098EN.pdf>

²³ Heckman (1999), p.2.

²⁴ Heckman (1999), p.42.

Allen reports summarising evidence on early years interventions confirm the high returns on early intervention investments.^{25,26} A graphic representation of return to investment in human capital is presented in Figure 1.²⁷

Figure 1: Rate of return to investment in human capital



SOURCE: Reproduced from Heckman (2008).

Several studies confirm that investment in early education and early interventions can save on spending at an older age. For instance, results from the Perry School programme in the US show that early childhood investments produce remarkable success and have lasting effects. The reported cost–benefit ratios for the programme show substantial returns: the return on each dollar spent was \$5.70 at the age of 27, and estimated at \$8.70 for the remainder of the lives of programme participants.^{28,29} Other studies have also found that early intervention and prevention programmes contribute to savings in later age. For instance, the UK Westminster City Council's research suggests that for every £1 spent on Family Recovery Programmes, £2.10 in costs is avoided in year one. In addition, the programme also proved effective in preventing offending and anti-social behaviour, with an estimated cost saving of £3 for

²⁵ Allen, G. (2011a) Early Intervention: The Next Steps. An Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government, Cabinet Office, London. As of December 2012: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/g/graham%20allens%20review%20of%20early%20intervention.pdf>

²⁶ Allen, G. (2011b), 'Early Intervention: Smart Investment, Massive Savings', The Second Independent Report to Her Majesty's Government, London: Cabinet Office. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/earlyintervention-smartinvestment.pdf>

²⁷ Heckman, J. (2008), 'Schools, skills, and synapses', *Economic Inquiry* 46.3: pp.289–324.

²⁸ Schweinhart, L.J., Barnes, H.V., and Weikart, D.P. (1993), *Significant Benefits: The High/Scope Preschool Study Through Age 27*, Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Press, Monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

²⁹ Heckman (1999), p.2.

every £1 spent.³⁰ Early intervention programmes were also found to be a cost-effective measure for families with multiple problems.^{31,32}

As described above, this broad range of policies has an impact on child development and well-being and influences parenting. A more detailed overview of the array of policies is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.³³ In the following sections, we focus on parenting programmes aiming to enhance parenting skills and competencies and discuss their impact on children's outcomes.

Defining and strengthening parenting support in the EU

While parenting support as a lever for improving educational and societal outcomes has gained prominence in Europe over the past decade, there have been debates about its scope and remit. Given the broad range of goals and expectations coming from practitioners and parents, there are various definitions of parenting support used in Europe. Nevertheless, there are some common features of parenting support that are universally acknowledged. It is often defined as the provision of care addressing children's physical, emotional and social needs. In this way, parenting refers to a socialisation and nurturing role. Parenting typically takes place in the context of family groups and in this way parents are the primary caregivers.³⁴

In a report providing an overview of parenting support practices in European countries, Daly³⁵ provides the following definition:

Parenting support refers to a range of information, support, education, training, counselling and other measures or services that focus on influencing how parents understand and carry out their parenting role. A common goal is to achieve better outcomes for children and young people (and in some instances families as a whole) by providing services that offer information, support and even retraining for parents.

There have been also discussions on what constitutes 'good' parenting programmes and what they should impart. For instance, it has been debated whether 'good' parenting programmes should focus on the provision of information, education, advice

³⁰ City of Westminster (2010), *Repairing broken families and rescuing fractured communities: Lessons from the frontline*, Local Government Leadership. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.westminster.gov.uk/workspace/assets/publications/Repairing-broken-families-Sept-20-1287139411.pdf>

³¹ Kendall, S., Rodger, J and Palmer, H. (2010), *Redesigning provision for families with multiple problems – an assessment of the early impact of different local approaches*, Department for Education, Research Report DFE-RR046. As of 30 March 2013: http://www.yorkconsulting.co.uk/uploads/redesigning_provision_Oct2010.pdf

³² It has to be noted, however, that these phenomenal returns to early childhood investments as demonstrated by Heckman are not very generalisable. Heckman's findings are based on programmes that are heavily targeted to extremely disadvantaged children (for instance the Perry School programme). Some later studies, for instance the UK Westminster City Council's research, suggest that the returns to investment for 'average' children are more modest.

³³ It is important to note that a wider range of policies has an important impact on parenting. For instance, the design and scope of early day care and pre-school centres in some countries (particularly the Nordic countries) has the most important role in promoting good parenting. Since this brief focuses on parenting programmes aiming to develop parenting skills and competencies, these important family-related and education policies are not discussed in detail.

³⁴ Moran, P., Ghate, D. and Van der Merwe, A. (2004), *What works in parenting support? A review of the international evidence*, Policy Research Bureau, Research report No 574, p.129.

³⁵ Daly, M. (ed.) (2007), *Parenting in contemporary Europe: a positive approach*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

and counselling or on a change of attitude and behaviour through structured interventions.³⁶

Hermanns points to potential dilemmas and conflicts of interests between various actors involved in providing and receiving parenting support.³⁷ These are summarised in Box 1 below.

Box 1: Dilemmas and conflicts of interest in parenting support

- Educating parents versus respecting intimate relationships between parents and children
- Child-directed interventions versus parental needs-oriented interventions
- Paternalism versus empowerment
- Encouraging mainstreaming versus encouraging diversity
- Evidence-based practice versus flexibility

SOURCE: Hermanns (2012).

Parenting support contributes to child development and well-being

Scholarly research has shown that parents are a crucial factor in determining their children's chances in life. The earlier things improve for children, the better. Research has shown that interventions during early childhood in areas such as healthcare and education are most effective in breaking the transmission of poverty between generations.³⁸ Promoting and providing additional support for families and schools can increase pupils' chances of school success and better learning outcomes.³⁹ Moreover, there is evidence suggesting that parenting skills are associated with a range of other children's outcomes, including obesity, physical exercise, anti-social behaviour and even risks of displaying criminal behaviour in later life.^{40,41,42} Earlier research has identified several parenting styles that influence children's development.^{43,44,45,46} Research also shows that parenting skills can be developed and strengthened. Brooks-Gunn et al.'s research highlights that 'neighbourhood effects' in terms of child

³⁶ Daly, M. (2011), *Building a coordinated strategy for parenting support. Synthesis report, Peer review on social protection and social inclusion*. As of August 2012:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7987&langId=en>

³⁷ Hermanns (2012).

³⁸ Karoly et al. (1998).

³⁹ European Commission (2011), *Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda*, Communication From The Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2011) 18 final. As of 30 March 2013: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlycom_en.pdf

⁴⁰ Patterson, G.R., DeBaryshe, B.D., and Ramsey, E. (1998), 'A developmental perspective on antisocial behaviour', *American Psychologist* 44.2: pp.329–335.

⁴¹ Golan, M. and Weizman, A. (2001), 'Familial approach to the treatment of childhood obesity: conceptual model', *Journal of Nutrition Education* 33.2: pp.102–107.

⁴² Campbell, K.J., and Hesketh, K.D. (2007), 'Strategies which aim to positively impact on weight, physical activity, diet and sedentary behaviours in children from zero to five years: A systematic review of the literature', *Obesity reviews* 8.4: pp.327–338.

⁴³ Examples of parenting styles include: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting, indulgent parenting and neglectful parenting.

⁴⁴ White, F., Hayes, B., and Livesey, D. (2005), *Developmental psychology: from infancy to adulthood*, NSW: Pearson Education Australia.

⁴⁵ Baumrind, D. (1967), 'Child care practices anteceding three patterns of preschool behaviour', *Genetic Psychology Monographs* 75.1: pp.43–88.

⁴⁶ Baumrind, D. (1978), 'Parental disciplinary patterns and social competence in children', *Youth and Society* 9: pp.238–276.

outcomes are quite marginal. This means that, to be effective, policies should focus on family effects rather than on community-based issues.^{47,48} There is also a growing debate on the impact of early return to work after maternity and paternal leave on child development.⁴⁹ Research suggests that early return to work has adverse effects on children in their first year of life. It has been suggested that filial attachment to parents developed during the first year of life is a significant precondition for later learning abilities. This finding has clear ramifications for parenting policy, in particular for post-birth parental leave.⁵⁰

Evidence for the importance of parenting skills as a factor contributing to child development and well-being has attracted the attention of policymakers. Support to enhance parenting skills has become part of governments' agendas to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and to improve educational outcomes for children and young people.

What works in parenting support – a generic overview of policy approaches

There is growing evidence on what works in parenting support. As observed by Moran et al., this creates 'opportunities for policy makers to support parents and to influence outcomes for children'.⁵¹ Based on their comprehensive review of international evidence, Moran et al. concluded that directly accessible support, such as counselling and provision of information, is a key element of parenting support. However, equally important are wider policies aimed at reducing everyday stress in the lives of families. Policies can and have developed programmes targeting poverty, unemployment, poor health, housing and education, and as such are also essential to support parents in caring for their children.⁵² Moran et al. also observe that both early and late childhood interventions can bring desirable outcomes. Early interventions usually report better and more durable outcomes for children, whereas late interventions can still influence some positive change in children and may help parents to deal with parenting under stress. The authors also stress that to be effective, interventions need to be continuous throughout childhood.

A review of evidence by Moran et al. also shows the effectiveness of both universal and targeted services. Universal services (aimed at primary prevention among whole communities) are mostly effective for less severe types of parenting problems, for instance communication issues. On the other hand, targeted interventions, aimed at specific populations, usually tackle more complex types of parental difficulties. Moran et al. also argue that interventions with measurable and concrete aims, based on a strong theory and model of change, usually work best. The study recommends developing multiple routes for families to access services, in order to facilitate inclusion and easy access to support. It also highlights the importance of appropriately

⁴⁷ Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G.J., Kato Klebanov, P. and Sealand, N. (1993), 'Do Neighborhoods Influence Child and Adolescent Development?', *American Journal of Sociology* 99.2: pp.353–395.

⁴⁸ Leventhal, T., and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000), 'The neighborhoods they live in: The effects of neighborhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes', *Psychological Bulletin* 126.2: pp.309–337.

⁴⁹ Early return to work is also part of debate in other policy areas. For instance, it has implications for employment-related policy. Issues are related to career progression, promotion opportunities, wage, number of working lives and its impact on future pension provision. See, for instance, Ruhm, C. (2004), 'Parental Employment and Child Cognitive Development', *The Journal of Human Resources* 39.1: pp.155–192.

⁵⁰ Esping-Andersen (2009).

⁵¹ Moran, Ghate and Van der Merwe (2004).

⁵² Moran, Ghate and Van der Merwe (2004).

trained and skilled staff, supported by good management and supervision mechanisms.⁵³

Moran et al. further observe that the efficiency of programmes and initiatives depends on the level of engagement with the parents, with interventions that manage to retain (or 'keep') parents obtaining the most positive results. Other researchers also reach similar conclusions.⁵⁴ In general, research shows that strengthening and enhancing the involvement of parents by closer collaboration and networking between parents and support providers enhances parenting skills and benefits children. Studies focusing on parent–school engagement show that close engagement is a factor in improving pupil motivation and in helping children to acquire good-quality education and training.^{55,56,57}

Parenting support has gained interest from policymakers at the European level

While family policy is a Member State competence, there are some initiatives at European level. For instance, aspects of support for parents were present in the Lisbon Strategy and were taken forward in its successor strategy, Europe 2020. The relevant parts of these strategies are focused on matters relating to reconciliation of family and work life, family-friendly policies supporting working parents, provision of children's early years services and gender equality. In addition, the Europe 2020 strategy called for support for young people and reduction of early school-leaving.

Some EU Presidencies, in particular the Portuguese (2000) and Belgian (2002), are also considered as an important turning point towards a shift from passive to active investment-oriented strategies for children and families in Europe. Influenced mostly by US-based scientific research, these strategies pointed to three important factors influencing social policy in the EU: (1) the rising skills requirements in the knowledge economy; (2) demographic challenges, namely population ageing and low fertility; and (3) little progress towards more equality of life chances and inter-generational mobility.⁵⁸

The Council of Europe's recommendations providing guidance on how governments can support positive parenting are also an important development for parenting support in Europe.^{59,60} In addition, the Council of Europe issues guidance and proposed an integrated strategy for the protection of children from violence.⁶¹

⁵³ Moran, Gbate and Van der Merwe (2004).

⁵⁴ Shonkoff and Meisels (2000).

⁵⁵ Council of the European Union (2011), *Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving*. As of 30 March 2013: http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlyrec_en.pdf

⁵⁶ Spera, C. (2005), 'A review of the relationship among parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement', *Educational Psychology Review* 17.2: pp.125–146.

⁵⁷ Clarke, K. (2006), 'Childhood, parenting and early intervention: A critical examination of the Sure Start national programme', *Critical Social Policy* 26.4: 699–721.

⁵⁸ Esping-Andersen (2009).

⁵⁹ Council of Europe (2006), Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting. As of 30 March 2013: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1073507&Site=CM>

⁶⁰ Voitzwinkler, F. (2009), 'Supporting parents in the best interest of the child', Council of Europe PowerPoint presentation. As of 30 March 2013:

http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/docs/events/childhoodscs/councilofeurope_pres.pdf

⁶¹ Council of Europe (n.d.), *Integrated strategy against violence. Council of Europe Policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence*. As of 30 March 2013:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/News/Guidelines/Recommendation%20CM%20A4%20protection%20of%20children%20_ENG_BD.pdf

Child and family policies are also discussed as part of the discourse on demographic challenges in Europe. A 2006 EU policy paper – promoting demographic renewal – called for Member States to address the barriers to parenthood through better conditions for families and improved reconciliation of working and family life.⁶²

A synthesis by Daly (2011) of the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion programme provided recommendations for further actions in the area of parenting support in Europe. It identified common challenges to parenting support and provided recommendations about key principles that should guide parenting support in Europe. The main recommendations included:

- Programmes should aim to empower parents
- Long-term support for programmes is needed
- Children's and parents' rights should be leading principles
- Early support is vital
- There is a need for evaluation/research.⁶³

Parenting support in a broad sense is covered by a number of policy areas at the EU level, such as employment, social inclusion, gender equality and social protection. The growing interest in family life and family-related policies has also been observed in the policy debates at the national government level of EU Member States. Parenting support is usually covered under policies addressing the rights and well-being of family members, in particular children.⁶⁴

As initiatives in parenting support take place at various government levels, one of the common challenges for policymakers is to stay up to date with all developments in order to coordinate programmes. It is important to meet this challenge since there are opportunities for learning and transferability of experience and approaches, given that many parenting support principles are commonly shared across European countries.⁶⁵ In the next section, we discuss how parenting support has been organised in several European countries.

Parenting support embedded in national legislation

Parenting support has been embedded in national legislation in several European countries.⁶⁶ In most cases, it is part of a wider range of initiatives focusing on children's well-being and family support.

In **England**, parenting support became a key policy area under the Labour government of the late 1990s. Child welfare initiatives spanned across the work of various departments, including the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health. Policies in England, previously described as a 'neo-liberal' approach to child welfare,⁶⁷ have moved towards 'a policy of progressive universalism': 'support for all, with more support for those who need it

⁶² Commission Communication (2006), *The demographic future of Europe – From challenge to opportunity*, COM/2006/0571. As of November 2012: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52006dc0571:EN:NOT>

⁶³ Daly (2011).

⁶⁴ Daly (2011).

⁶⁵ Daly (2011).

⁶⁶ In this section, we provide information on countries where data were available in English.

⁶⁷ Esping-Andersen, G. (1990), *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

most'.⁶⁸ Some support services are embedded within universal services (such as education and healthcare), whereas others are universally accessible (such as Children's Centre provision) but access to them is determined by identifying need.⁶⁹ The overarching policy agendas of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) and the Children's Plan (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007) set the ground for some specific parenting-related initiatives.⁷⁰ The launch of the Sure Start programme (later converted into Children's Centres) in 1998 signalled a significant escalation in the UK government's commitment to supporting parents of pre-school children.

In **Scotland**, a new National Parenting Strategy was published in October 2012. It aims to strengthen the support on offer to parents and to make it easier to access that support. The strategy facilitates and enables professionals from various sectors providing family-related services to build better-coordinated support networks. It also sets out a range of commitments to support parents in their parenting responsibilities. More precisely, the strategy aims to: 1) ensure that all parents have access to clear and concise information on their parental concerns; 2) offer informed and coordinated support to enable parents to develop their parenting skills; 3) improve the availability of and access to early learning, childcare and out-of-school care; 4) provide targeted support to vulnerable families; and 5) address how wider issues can affect the ability of parents to provide care for their children.⁷¹

The 'Alle Kansen voor Alle Kinderen, 2007–2011' (Every Opportunity for Every Child) policy document in the **Netherlands** resonates with English policy developments. The target to develop youth and family centres in every Dutch municipality seems to have much in common with the establishment of Sure Start centres in England.⁷²

In Belgium (in the **Flanders** region), parenting support was formalised through a decree in 2007. This decree specifies parenting support as 'easily accessible, basic support to parents and persons with childcare responsibilities in the upbringing of children'.⁷³ It means that parenting support is offered to anyone who takes charge of children and young people. Services are universally available but some are specifically provided for vulnerable families. The decree shapes policy framework for parenting support in Flanders and specifies multiple levels of parenting support, such as local and regional level support, provision of services through parenting shops, organisation of Flemish parenting support coordinators, provincial parenting support centres and the Flemish expert centre for parenting support (EXPOO).⁷⁴

In **Estonia**, a new Children and Families Strategy 2012–2020 was approved by the government in 2011. The aim of the strategy is to initiate a series of national reforms and its strategic goal is to support families. The strategy has five main objectives

⁶⁸ Boddy, J., Statham, J., Smith, M., Ghate, D., Wigfall, V., Hauari, H., Canali, C., Danielsen, I., Flett, M., Garbers, S. and Milova, H. (2009), *International perspectives on parenting support. Non-English language sources*, Research Report DCSF-RR114, London: Department for Children, Schools and Families, p.5.

⁶⁹ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁷⁰ Since the Coalition Government came in power in 2010, there has been some movement away from the terminology of, and the funding for, Every Child Matters. However, it is still unclear how far the principles and structures of ECM will continue. See, for instance, *Every Child Matters and the Coalition Government*. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.everychildmattersbook.co.uk/every-child-matters-and-the-alliance-government>

⁷¹ Scottish Government (2012), *Helping make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up*. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0040/00403769.pdf>

⁷² Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁷³ EXPOO (n.d.), *Parenting support in Flanders*. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.expoo.be/parenting-support-in-flanders>

⁷⁴ EXPOO (n.d.).

covering issues of positive parenting, children's rights, child protection, family benefits, and reconciliation of work and family life.⁷⁵

Characterising parenting support in Europe

The policy instruments used to offer parenting support and their practical implementation vary considerably in the EU. They vary both within and across Member States in a number of ways, including differences in delivery and funding mechanisms and differences in organising services. These multiple approaches to what constitutes parenting support and how it is delivered result in a variety of parenting support models in European countries. In this section we discuss a broad range of parenting support models in European Member States, focusing on four key aspects: 1) the scope of services offered to families; 2) the extent to which services are universally accessible; 3) the organisation and delivery of parenting support; and 4) funding models of parenting support programmes.

The scope of services offered to families

Parenting support may be characterised by the range of services offered to families. It can take the form of comprehensive services to tackle the background to many parenting problems in the broad areas of poverty, education, housing and social care. Alternatively, parenting support can be understood as a psychological support to families, providing information and advice on parent–child interactions, child development, parents' role as caregivers, relationships between family members and other aspects of emotional and social support. Both approaches benefit from and are usually applied through multi-agency working, drawing from the areas of education, health and social care.

In some countries, such as France and Sweden, parenting support seems to be a policy area in its own right, closely linked to child welfare systems and a broad range of parenting support mechanisms. In others, such as the Czech Republic, parenting support is part of a wide spectrum of family policies. Differences in the scope of parenting support across European countries can be partly explained by historical developments in this policy area. For some countries, Estonia for instance, parenting support is a relatively new policy area. This country's need for parenting support was first mentioned in its 2012 programme of action calling for coordinated measures to support positive parenting. Other countries, such as Denmark, have a long tradition of delivering and developing specific parenting support services.⁷⁶

The extent to which services are universally accessible

A prominent feature of parenting support services is the extent to which they are universally accessible. Universal access refers to those services to which all families are eligible, based on the notion that all parents at some point of their parenting 'career' might need support and advice to carry out their caring responsibilities. In this respect, parenting support services serve predominantly as a way of helping people to become 'better parents'. Universalistic access to services does not mean that all services are offered to all parents. Levels of need are determined for each family and each parent, meaning that some services are provided only to specific groups (for

⁷⁵ Frazer, H. (2012), *The 2012 National Reform Programmes (NRP) and the National Social Reports (NSR) from a child poverty and well-being perspective*, Eurochild, July 2012.

⁷⁶ Daly (2011).

instance fathers, or parents from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds).^{77,78,79} Nevertheless, the universalistic nature of services means that in principle all families should be able to access them. The alternative approach focuses on services targeting populations at risk only, equipping those who are potentially struggling in their parenting roles to become 'good parents' (whatever the definition of an ideal 'good parent' is, in a given societal context).⁸⁰ These universalistic and targeted models can take preventive or corrective approaches, meaning that services can be oriented towards either prevention of undesirable outcomes or correction of harmful parental behaviour.

In countries with universally used services, such as **Denmark**, the most common model for delivery is to embed support within early-years settings. The principal guiding provision of family-related services in Denmark is that 'society has a duty to support parents and families'.⁸¹ The predominant model of parenting support is embedded within universal provision, and delivered through services such as early childhood care and education, schools and health services. Other family-related services are universally accessible (but not necessarily universally used), and include services provided in family centres, 'general preventive services' in local authorities, as well as advisory and support services from social workers.⁸²

Similarly, in **France**, parenting support is intended to reach all parents, regardless of their socio-economic status and background. This universalistic approach aims to avoid stigmatising malfunctioning families, and instead focuses on boosting parents' confidence in bringing up their children. Recent years have brought some reforms to the organisation and management of parenting support in France. Evaluation of parenting support schemes conducted in 2009 pointed out overlaps of activities and programmes, and insufficient coordination between various schemes.⁸³ In 2010, a National Parenting Support Committee was created in order to redefine and improve the organisation of existing parenting support programmes and schemes. Many developments are ongoing, including discussions around the definition and promotion of parenting support actions, broad applicability of parenting support schemes, monitoring good practices and improving the evaluation of schemes.⁸⁴

Organisation and delivery of parenting support

In many countries, including **France**, **Italy** and **Germany**, the system of parenting support is characterised by high fragmentation of services due to the involvement of many local and regional actors. In **France**, for example, parenting support emerged as a central element of family policy development and provision and therefore a wide

⁷⁷ There is some debate in the literature about the efficacy of the area-targeted approach. For instance, the Sure Start centres in the UK were initially located only in disadvantaged areas. However, as disadvantaged families do not always live in high-risk areas, it has been challenging to reach some families through Sure Start centres. In addition, evaluation of the Sure Start centres showed that services were predominantly used by upper- and middle-class families.

⁷⁸ See Anning, A., Stuart, J., Nicholls, M., Goldthorpe, J., and Morley, A. (2007), *Understanding Variations in Effectiveness amongst Sure Start Local Programmes*, DfES Research Report: NESS/2007/FR/024.

⁷⁹ Boddy et al. (2009).

⁸⁰ It is worth noting that universal and targeted approaches are not necessarily static and some flexibility in services provision is feasible. For instance, during a time of economic recession, there can be more targeted support within a universalistic approach.

⁸¹ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁸² Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁸³ Paoletti, H. (2011), Building a coordinated strategy to help parent. Peer review: Building a coordinated strategy for parenting support, France. As of 15 April 2013:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7988&langId=en>

⁸⁴ Paoletti (2011).

range of stakeholders are engaged in a number of projects and initiatives. Parenting support is delivered through a variety of services and actions, both at the national and local level, and this means there is no one common model of parenting support service provision. Similarly, in **Germany**, parenting support is highly decentralised, with a range of provision models and programmes across the country. In contrast, in countries where parenting support is a recent policy area, for instance **Estonia** and the **Czech Republic**, there is a tendency to organise uniform services at the national level.

There are also differences in the extent to which European countries have implemented formal parenting programmes as a tool for delivering parenting support. In the **Netherlands**, for example, there is tendency to use standardised programmes (examples include the Prague Parent–Infant Programme, Triple P – Positive Parenting Program and Gordon Parent Effectiveness Training).⁸⁵

In **France** and **Italy**, however, formal parenting programmes are rarely used and service provision is delivered through schemes adapted to local contexts and needs. In **France**, particularly, diversity is a characteristic feature of parenting support. Parents often request a particular type of support in their educational role, and this, in turn, initiates the process of programme design. This bottom-up approach aims to address specific needs of parents, and means that ‘development of parenting support tools in France is a trajectory from local to national’.⁸⁶

Funding models of parenting support programmes

There are different models of funding parenting support programmes in European countries. Typically, programmes are funded from a variety of sources, including public funding, voluntary sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parental organisations and private companies. Funding models often result from the organisation of services (national versus decentralised systems) and the dominant welfare and social support models. In **Nordic** welfare state countries, programmes are typically publicly funded and both public and private providers are important in programme delivery. Public and private provision of services also characterises liberal welfare regimes.

In **Denmark**, for instance, most services are provided by the public sector at the local level. In contrast, in **Portugal** parenting support for early-years children is mostly provided on a voluntary basis by professionals specialising in education, psychology and sociology.⁸⁷ Similarly, in **Germany** large national voluntary agencies and ‘welfare associations’ are important providers of family-related services. One of the distinctive features of parenting support in Germany is that a significant percentage of services is provided by the voluntary sector. These parent-led ‘self-help’ initiatives, with a predominantly voluntary, part-time workforce, usually focus on day care provision, ‘mothers’ centres’ (Mütterzentren) and ‘multigenerational houses’ (Mehrgenerationenhaeuser).⁸⁸ Typical services provided in these centres include: childcare provision; support for parent-child interactions; support, counselling and advice on family matters; and support for business start-ups for women. A large diversity of programmes in **France**, often local initiatives, means that parenting support financing is decentralised and comes from a variety of sources. Highly

⁸⁵ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁸⁶ Daly (2011) .

⁸⁷ Molinuevo, D. (forthcoming), *Parenting support in Europe*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

⁸⁸ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

decentralised government administration also characterises **Italy**. As a result, parenting support services in Italy vary considerably across the country and are often provided by independent (voluntary) sector organisations contracted by local authorities, with a relatively low level of central state support and funding.⁸⁹

Example practices

In this section, we present examples of parenting support programmes in Europe. The broad range of services described below reflects varying levels of effectiveness and efficiency. Nevertheless, they are examples of programmes and practices in terms of service types, organisation and delivery. These examples are being reviewed by the European Alliance for Families (EAF). Where evaluations exist, practices are considered for inclusion in the Evidence-Based Family Practices section of the EAF platform and serve as examples of best, promising and emergent practices. Practices not evaluated to date are considered for inclusion in the interactive Family Practice User Registry.⁹⁰

Examples discussed in this section have been organised in seven main sub-sections, providing more detail on the key promising features of parenting support services, namely: 1) network working and coordination of services among professionals from various sectors; 2) family information centres; 3) children's education projects; 4) services for expecting parents and young parents; 5) programmes promoting positive parenting and conflict resolution; 6) ICT-enabled services; and 7) professional training for professionals.

Networks in parenting support

In some countries, initiatives supporting parents are organised and coordinated through networks. In **France**, for instance, Assistance and Support for Parents (REAAP), established in 1999, supports parents with a wide range of actions. It provides its services free of charge and aims its work at all parents, regardless of their status and social conditions.⁹¹

In Belgium (in the **Flanders** region), a network of Flemish Parenting Support Coordinators was established as a result of a 2007 decree. Their aim is to support local authorities in setting up and coordinating parenting support consultations across local authorities. They are also responsible for providing support to the cooperative associations that implement parenting shops initiatives as well as maintaining links with youth support networks.⁹²

In **Finland**, the reformed Child Welfare Act obliged municipalities to create a welfare plan covering children and young people's services. It created a new requirement for multi-agency working and better coordination of welfare services. In addition, the new Act transferred the focus of child welfare into prevention and early support.⁹³

⁸⁹ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

⁹⁰ More information on EAF Evidence-Based Family Practices is available on the EAF website. See *Review criteria and process*. As of January 2013:
http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/index_en.htm

⁹¹ Daly (2011).

⁹² EXPOO (n.d.).

⁹³ *Helsinki City Welfare Plan for Children and Youth 2009–2012*. Poster presentation at the 'Think parents! Conference' in The Hague, the Netherlands on 10–12 October 2012.

Family information centres as a one-stop-shop for comprehensive family services

There has been a trend towards a more integrated approach in Europe for organising provision of support to families. Today, a wide range of community health and social services is delivered through children's centres (also called family information centres, parenting shops, etc.). Usually, the core of a children's centre's activities is provision of group activities, such as structured parenting programmes, and individual one-to-one support to families, for instance counselling services.

Children's centres can be local centres for providing information to families, and can offer training courses on a broad range of professional and childcare topics. They often provide employment-related services, such as training on job search strategies, preparation for interviews, information on childcare options and childcare-related benefits, etc. Cross-agency collaboration and integrated working characterises children's centres in Europe. They tend to be universally accessible, but some services can be offered to targeted parent groups. This model of universal service provision corresponds well with the international evidence on what works in parenting support: based on a comprehensive review, Moran et al. concluded that universal access to parenting support services should be a universal right of parents. As many parents might need support at some point in their parenting career, universal access also avoids stigmatising service users.⁹⁴

The model of children's centres offering universal access to a wide range of family-related services is widely used in the following European countries: **England** (*Sure Start Local Programmes*, and more recently *Children's Centres*), **Finland** (*Perhekeskus*), **Sweden** (*Familjecentraler*), **Germany** (*Beratungsstellen*), **France** (*Point Info Famille*), the **Netherlands** (*Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin*), Belgium (*'parenting shops'* in the **Flanders** region), **Hungary** (*Biztos Kezdet* programme), and **Italy** (*Consultori Familiari* and *Centri per le famiglie*).

In **England**, the *Sure Start* programme was initially offered to families living in disadvantaged areas. The programme was subsequently extended to all communities in England through the *Children's Centre* programme. The centres provide a wide range of health, education and counselling services, including integrated early education and childcare, provision of advice and support for parents through structured courses and drop-in sessions, access to health practitioners (such as community nurses, health visitors and breastfeeding consultants), parenting and family support, and links to training and employment opportunities.⁹⁵ Although the *Children's Centres* initiative is a national government scheme, local authorities have strategic responsibility for the location and development of particular centres in their area, responding to needs of parents and local communities. There are over 3,000 centres in the national network, providing support to almost 2.4 million young children and their families.⁹⁶

In **Finland**, a service model called 'family centre' has been developed since the early 2000s. The centre, supported by several government programmes, offers universal integrated multi-agency services including municipal maternity and child health clinics, early childhood education and care services, as well as family support services. The

⁹⁴ Moran, Ghate and Van der Merwe (2004).

⁹⁵ Barlow, J., Kickpatrick, S., Wood, D., Ball, M. and Stewart-Brown, S. (2007), *Family and parenting support in Sure Start Local Programmes, National evaluation report*, National Evaluation of Sure Start: NESS/2007/FR/023.

⁹⁶ European Union (n.d.), *Sure Start Centres*. As of 30 March 2013: http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/practices/sure-start-centres_en.htm

aim of the family centre is to promote the well-being and health of children and their families. Each centre's activities focus on preventive services, helping parents in their role as carers. It also facilitates development of family social networks and offers peer support and expertise.⁹⁷

In **Sweden**, a national network, the Association for the Promotion of Family Centres (Föreningen för Familjecentraler), formally established the creation of family centres in 2000. These provide universal, voluntary and free of charge services under one roof covering maternity and child healthcare, pre-school education and social welfare services. They involve multi-agency professional staff, including midwives, paediatric nurses, paediatricians, pre-school teachers, social workers and psychologists. One of the main features of Swedish family centres is their accessibility and the availability of services aimed at reducing inequalities. A 2009 evaluation of family centres described them as 'a low-risk investment' providing benefits for visitors and staff.⁹⁸

In **Germany**, there are almost 12,000 family education centres (Beratungsstellen). These are universally accessible and based within local communities. They offer a wide range of mainstream counselling and support services, as well as targeted programmes and interventions.⁹⁹

In **France**, information for families is organised through dedicated centres (Point Info Famille). The aim of these centres is to help families access information and to promote support tools. Family centres are part of the REAAP network.¹⁰⁰

In the **Netherlands**, support for parents and children is organised in Youth and Family Centres (Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin). These are easily accessible for parents and children and provide preventive youth policy services, youth healthcare and parenting support.¹⁰¹

The 2007 decree in Belgium (in the **Flanders** region) provided legislation to set up a parenting shop in every central Flemish town, as well as in Brussels. As a result, 14 parenting shops have been created over the past few years. Their work focuses on provision of family-related information, support and advice on specific parenting issues. Parenting shops also offer training and provide opportunities for social networking.¹⁰²

In **Hungary**, a comprehensive children's centre programme, Biztos Kezdet (BK), similar to Sure Start in England, was initiated in 2008. This programme was founded to provide early childhood services for the economically disadvantaged eastern and southern border areas of Hungary. The authorities were concerned that in these areas the lagging cognitive abilities among children from disadvantaged backgrounds would put a strain on the school system. The programme is open to all families in the regions where it operates and focuses on children aged 0–3. It aims to provide a quality environment supporting the development and learning of disadvantaged children and to support parents, as well as to strengthen communities and inter-agency cooperation across services. The BK programme also offers training and development

⁹⁷ Finland's Country Profile. As of 15 April 2013: http://europa.eu/epic/countries/finland/index_en.htm

⁹⁸ Abrahamsson, A., Bing, V. and M. Löfström (2009) *Summary of the report. An evaluation of family centres in region Västra Götaland, Sweden*, Kristianstad University College and the University of Borås. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.vgregion.se/upload/Folkh%C3%A4lsa/rapporter/Family%20centre.pdf>

⁹⁹ Data for 2008.

¹⁰⁰ Eurofound (2009), *Developing support to parents through early childhood services. Workshop report*. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2010/34/en/1/EF1034EN.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Nederlands Jeugd Instituut (n.d.), *Youth and Family Centres in The Netherlands*. As of 30 March 2013: http://www.nji.nl/publicaties/Youth_and_Family_Centres_in_The_Netherlands.pdf

¹⁰² EXPOO (n.d.).

opportunities to parents to facilitate their entry into the labour market. The service covered 36 centres by 2011.¹⁰³

In **Italy**, there are two types of family centres that offer parenting support services. The first, 'consultori familiari' (family counselling centres), has been operating since 1975. These centres offer primary care services related to sexual health and family planning, as well as information and advice on maternal and child health issues. Psychological and social assistance is also offered to parents and families. The second, 'centri per le famiglie' (family centre), was founded more recently and focuses on provision of information, parenting support and community development activities. Family centres offer universal services, but there is no standard service offer within the centres.¹⁰⁴

Children's education projects

There are various children's education projects in European countries. Typically, their aim is to engage parents in their children's education, help children reach their potential and strengthen relationships between parents and schools.

In **France**, for example, there is a wide range of education projects supporting children and parents. The Academic Support Local Contract programme (Contrat Local d'Accompagnement à la Scolarité) provides support with mentoring services outside of school, usually at home, enabling parents to participate in it. The level of support and resources for each child are agreed with the school to help children succeed and reach their academic potential. The programme also helps develop assistance to parents so they can effectively monitor their children's progress in school and with school work. One such programme is 'La Mallette des parents' (the parents' briefcase), which has the aim of increasing parental involvement in their children's education and helping parents to understand more about how their child is taught at school. This, in turn, allows parents to contribute more actively to their child's success at school and improve relations between parents and teachers. Parents are provided with a school information pack and offered workshops organised three times per year. Evaluation of this project revealed that participating pupils had lower levels of absenteeism and were more likely to receive higher grades compared with their peers.¹⁰⁵

Another example of a children's education project is the 'Kvartti' (quarter) parents evening model run in a few municipalities in Finland since 2009. The aim of the programme is to support parents and children in the transition from lower to upper comprehensive school. The programme is delivered in four sessions during parents' evening meetings. It encourages closer school–parent relations, strengthens cooperation between parents and schools, supports parenting, encourages parents to talk about parenting concerns with other parents and discusses potential solutions to specific problems.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Eurofound (2009).

¹⁰⁴ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

¹⁰⁵ European Union (n.d.), *Involving Parents in the Education of their Children*. As of 30 March 2013: http://europa.eu/epic/practices-that-work/practice-user-registry/practices/involving-parents-children-education_en.htm

¹⁰⁶ 'Kvartti' Parents Evening Model. Poster presentation at the 'Think parents! Conference' in The Hague, the Netherlands on 10–12 October 2012.

Services for expecting parents and young parents

Special services for expecting parents are available in many European countries. These programmes are often directed at both pregnant women and their partners, but usually individuals may attend as well. The aim of these programmes is to prepare expecting parents for the pressures of parenthood and provide them with useful information on pregnancy, labour and early childhood development. In some countries, such as **Denmark** (with its 'Klar til barn' or ready for baby programme), special provision is offered to parents from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and others who may be socially isolated or vulnerable because of disadvantaging childhood experiences.¹⁰⁷

Programmes promoting positive parenting and conflict resolution

In many countries there are programmes that promote building a positive relationship between parents and children and non-punitive upbringing.

Family mediation services are offered to parents in **France** to help them in conflict management. These are mostly used by couples experiencing separation or divorce, and are aimed at helping parents and children to move forward without losing touch with either side of the family. Some initiatives are intended to support family mediation providers to develop their portfolio of services – these include support through the Ministry for Families, Ministry for Justice, and the Family branch of the Ministry for Social Security, as well as creation of a state diploma in family mediation.¹⁰⁸ Also in France, a so-called solidarity network programme aims to contribute to building a positive relationship between children and parents. The programme is delivered through mentors (volunteers) and aims to help develop solidarity networks around the child and between families. Parents and children must all agree to participate in this programme.¹⁰⁹

Another example is the 'Starke Eltern – Starke Kinder' (Strong parents – strong children) programme in **Germany**. It is a popular preventive scheme aimed at strengthening children's rights, promoting parents' self-confidence and preventing physical and psychological violence in the family by promoting alternative understandings of parenting.¹¹⁰

A 'Growing Child Programme' offered in **Northern Ireland** is an early intervention and prevention home visitation programme. The aim is to support parents to create and maintain a nurturing home learning environment and improve parenting practice, as well as to identify and address potential problems and concerns. The programme is delivered by a family visitor in the client's homes over the first three or five years after a child's birth. The overarching objective of the programme is to achieve better child development outcomes by educating parents on how young children develop and learn in the early years.¹¹¹

In **Poland**, the 'Dobry rodzic – dobry start' (Good parent – good start) programme has been offered to parents in Warsaw since 2007. It is run by a national NGO with help from health, social care, police and early-years education services. Partnered

¹⁰⁷ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

¹⁰⁸ Paoletti (2011).

¹⁰⁹ Paoletti (2011).

¹¹⁰ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

¹¹¹ *Lifstart's Growing Child Programme*. Poster presentation at the 'Think parents! Conference' in The Hague, the Netherlands on 10–12 October 2012.

institutions screen individual family needs and assess whether particular families might benefit from additional support. Families identified through this initial screening process are encouraged to participate in the programme. The programme consists of parent skills workshops to provide parents with positive examples of disciplining children to bring them up without violence and protect them from abuse. As part of the programme, new parents are also provided with leaflets and other publications about various aspects of parenting. These publications are offered to parents free of charge when they leave the maternity ward in hospitals.¹¹²

ICT-enabled and Internet-based services

Information and communication technologies (ICT) offer new possibilities for searching and receiving information, communication and support. While location-based services and mobile technologies (e.g., mobile applications) offer myriad possibilities, thus far the majority of examples identified in this category relate to websites dedicated to parenting.

One example is Netmums (<http://www.netmums.com/>) in the **United Kingdom**. Founded in 2000, Netmums is an online parenting organisation offering information, advice and support to parents. Netmums works as a family of local websites covering the whole of the country. Each local website is edited and managed by a local mum with support from Netmums' central team. Websites are built around a local community and provide opportunities for interaction between users. Membership is free and once the members have registered, they receive regular email bulletins containing information on local resources, childcare options and activities for families, as well as parenting articles provided by the Netmums' central office. The core element of Netmums is an interactive online discussion forum, the Coffee House, where parents can chat and get support and advice on a range of family-related topics, including parenting, relationships, healthy eating and activities for children (to name just a few). Apart from friendly advice and discussion with other website users, Netmums also provides a Parent Support Team offering expert support to parents. Netmums has around 700,000 members and up to 1,000 mothers are online at any one time. The Netmums team has published eight books on a range of parenting topics, meaning it is also available offline. Netmums received financial support through the 'Parent Know How programme' provided by the UK government's Department for Children, Schools and Families.¹¹³

Another example of a widely used website and online community is Familjeliv (Family Life)¹¹⁴ in **Sweden**. It is the largest Swedish website for parents and expecting parents, offering information, support and assistance on all aspects of parenthood and family life. Founded in 2003, the website has over 600,000 unique visitors a week that generate over 6 million page views. Familjeliv is listed as being one of Sweden's 100 most popular websites.¹¹⁵

¹¹² European Union (n.d.), *Good Parent Good Start*. As of 30 March 2013: http://europa.eu/epic/good-practice/help-children-young-adults/good-parent-good-start-programme-poland_en.htm

¹¹³ Netmums (n.d.), *Home page – about us*. As of 30 March 2013:

<http://www.netmums.com/home/about-us>

¹¹⁴ <http://www.familjeliv.se>

¹¹⁵ Familjeliv (n.d.), *Start Sidan*. As of 30 March 2013: <http://www.familjeliv.se/Information/om.php>

‘Train the trainers’ programmes

Effective, efficient and economical programme delivery requires dedicated, experienced and knowledgeable professionals. Evidence from European countries shows that there are substantial differences in the organisation, professional qualifications and skills of parenting support staff. In many European countries, family-related services are provided by professionally trained staff, including social pedagogues and psychologists. For instance, in **Germany** and **Italy**, services in family centres are delivered by professional teams. A wide use of professionalised child and family workforces also characterises **Denmark** and the **Netherlands**, including nurses, pedagogues, social workers and teachers.

In **England**, some research reports note, the family centres workforce would benefit from professional training and additional professional qualifications.¹¹⁶ In order to address this issue, a National Academy for Parenting Practitioners was established in England in 2007, with an aim ‘to transform the quality and size of the parenting workforce across England’.¹¹⁷ Other initiatives to facilitate professionalisation of the workforce in England include the expansion of school-based Parent Support Advisors (through the Extended Schools programme, Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007), and the Parenting Early Intervention Programme, aiming to improve parenting skills through programmes for parents of older children (8–13 years old). As noted by Moran et al., investment in training and development programmes to improve personnel delivering parenting support seems important for building capacity and skills in the social care workforce and related professions. They explain that this is because ‘supporting families without compromising their autonomy is a demanding and delicate job, and highly skilled and appropriately trained staff will get better results’.¹¹⁸

Moran et al. also looked at coordinated working. They concluded that coordination of efforts of professionals representing various services (education, social care and health) is crucial. Close collaboration between professionals, according to Moran et al., ensures that the efforts of various bodies working within this area are not contradictory and that policy initiatives and programmes bringing positive outcomes in one aspect do not bring harm in other areas.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

¹¹⁷ NAPP (2008), *National Academy for Parenting Practitioners Strategic Plan 2008–2010*, London: NAPP. Cited in Boddy et al. (2009), p.5.

¹¹⁸ Moran, Gbate, and Van der Merwe (2004).

¹¹⁹ Moran, Gbate and Van der Merwe (2004).

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