

CROATIA

NATIONAL POLICY BRIEF



The objective of this policy brief is to present the current situation and progress made in family support on behalf of the children's rights in Croatia towards achieving quality standards using the quality assurance protocol for family support services developed by the 19 countries participating in the COST Innovators Grant IG18123, QA[4]EuroFam. The aim is to provide key messages on current strengths as well as recommendations to key audiences, bringing relevant views and appraisals from the group of interdisciplinary experts, representatives of various sectors in the field at national level.

National Working Group

Consensual responses were provided by members of Croatian National Working Group made up of 15 researchers and coordinators of services and social entities at national, regional and local levels in social, education, health, and community sectors.

1. Contextualization and characterization of family support in Croatia



Q Definition and understanding of family support: The concept of 'family support' usually encompasses parenting leaves, child and family benefits as well as services, predominantly the services for early childhood education and care. In social and justice sectors, family support and parenting support are defined according to Daly (2015); strengthening of family relationships and parenting function are mostly linked to families/children at psychosocial risk. In health sector, concepts of parenting support and family support are predominantly referred to post-natal care and care for children with disability. In the education sector, 'parenting support' / 'collaboration with parents' and 'prevention programs' are more common concepts than 'family support'.

Q Family support services in context: Parenting leaves, child and family benefits, child protection and indicated parenting support/family support services are centralized from the national level. Provision of family support programmes, targeting parents' and children's psychosocial resources, are provided by more often within the social than in health, education and justice sectors, often as a result of a collaboration of the public social services and NGOs. However, with the exception of the family center, the provision is fragmented and sporadic.

Q Political perspective on family support: The approach is linked to children's rights and strongly shaped by the principles promoted in the CoE Recommendation (2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting, implemented in Croatia since 2008. There are systematic national policies in place regarding parenting leaves, child and family benefits, services for early childhood education and care and child protection services. The only explicit policy regarding family support is linked with the provision of the Family Center's national network of 21 county-level field offices which provide universal, selective and indicated family support services. The challenges are related to availability, integration and coordination of family support services.

2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



Families and Children

STRENGTHS

1. Reflecting the individual needs and capacities of children, young There are effective, strengths- and rights-based family support programmes, available in-person or on-line to parents and their (young) children in many communities. They can be accessed through kindergarten, family centre, rehabilitation centre or NGO as a routine practice. They comply with the quality standards for evidence-based programmes.
2. In addition to parenting support and family support programmes for all parents (of young children), targeted programmes tailored to the specific needs in addition to universal needs of families in diverse adverse circumstances are available in some communities. They focus on the child's as well as the parent's wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Timely, needs-based family support services should be made more available and accessible to families with children from early years to adolescence. In increasing accessibility of programmes and services and overcoming geographical disparities, the good practices of ICT use in family support within social sector should be replicated in all sectors.
2. Participants in family support programmes and services need to receive support with documented effectiveness, particularly in the field of child's disability. Participants need to have the opportunity to express their views in evaluation of outcomes and implementation of programmes and services and have those views considered by services' providers.



Professionals

STRENGTHS

1. There is recognition of the benefits of the strengths-based approach in family support and it is increasingly integrated in needs assessment and provision of services in the social sector. Adoption of this approach is facilitated through partnerships of public services and NGOs.
2. Practitioners in social services increasingly use available evidence-based parenting support and family support programmes as a regular practice, particularly in the family centre(s).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for transdisciplinary collaboration and promotion of strengths-based approach in family support in all sectors, and for training, supervision and leadership which facilitate exchange and scaling of best practices.
2. There is a need for increased use of evidence-based family support programs in education, health and justice sectors, as well as for an increased cross-sectoral collaboration in engagement of families and ensuring access to services responsive to families' needs, resources and culture.



Policymakers

STRENGTHS

1. There are examples of public services which successfully implement evidence-based family support programmes as a regular/standardized service, with practitioners receiving high-quality in-service training.
2. There are examples of successful collaboration of national-level public authorities and NGOs in increasing workforce capacities for provision of evidence-based family support services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need to invest in increasing availability of quality family support programmes, including funding provision and scaling of the existing programmes and development of new programmes responsive to children's developmental needs and family's capacities. Practices should be supported and scaled.
2. There is a need for: better integration and coordination within and across public sectors engaged with provision of family support and parenting support, public sectors' improved collaboration with NGOs active in them, and introducing systemic monitoring of quality standards in formal family support, including evaluation of interventions in all sectors.



Academics

STRENGTHS

1. There is recognition of the need to base parenting support and family support interventions on up-to-date basic and applied scientific research findings. An increasing number of academics is conducting research contributing to understanding family support interventions underlying theory, outcomes and implementation, in partnership with families, practitioners and/or policymakers.
2. There is commitment to increase interdisciplinary exchange regarding research on formal and informal family support initiatives and services and dissemination of best practices guidelines.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for proactive engagement of academics in translation of research findings in literature into family support practice and policymaking, and in promoting quality standards for family support services and enabling compliance with them.
2. There is a need for more engagement of academics from all relevant disciplines in generating evidence about family support and parenting support programmes and practices through research conducted in partnership with policymakers and practitioners, and in building their capacity for using the evidence to improve practice and policymaking.

3. Insights and lessons learned regarding the quality of family support

1 Although child-rights-based parenting support and family support are recognized as important provisions in policies (primarily within the social sector), there is a need for a framework that would facilitate inter-sectoral integration and coordination of family support provision.

2 There is a need for stronger promotion of the quality standards for family support programmes/services among all stakeholders (policymakers, practitioners, families, even academics) and the exchange of the best practices guidelines across disciplines. Evaluation is far from a systematic practice, and an evidence-based approach to policymaking is not present.

3 NGOs have an important role in driving innovation and best practices in parenting support and family support provision, but innovative programmes and practices face challenges of sustainability due to mostly project-based funding. Partnerships of public and civil sector in programmes development and roll-out contribute to their sustainability.

4 There is a lack of quality family support programmes and services in all sectors, provision is fragmented and sporadic, except in social services where targeted family support is a regular service. There is a need to invest in making formal family support more available to all families, and particularly families at psychosocial risk. In increasing availability and accessibility, good practices involving the ICT should be scaled up.

The authors of this document are Ninoslava Pećnik and Ivana Dobrotić.

This document is based upon work from COST Innovators Grant IG18123 A quality assurance protocol for family support services in Europe. An evidence-based and culturally informed model for professional practice, supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. COST Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation. www.cost.eu

Any citation of this document should use the following reference:

Pećnik, N & Dobrotić, I. (2024). *Croatian National Policy Brief*. EurofamNet.



European Family Support Network (EurofamNet) © 2024

ISBN 978-84-09-65737-7