

MONTENEGRO 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 Montenegro towards achieving quality standards using the quality assurance protocol for family support services implemented 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 Montenegrin National Working Group made up of 12 researchers and coordinators of services and social entities at national, regional and local levels in social, education, health, and justice sectors.

1. Contextualization and characterization of family support in Montenegro



Q Definition and understanding of family support: Family support is understood as all the services and provisions provided to families and children, but with the focus on the most needy. It implies developing and strengthening a system of social care which targets families and children but within a broader framework of services. Majority of these are provided by the state but also implies involvement of non-state actors which have experience and offer know-how and have practice and resources that can be useful. Child protection and development are seen as one of the major goals of family support and its strengthening is the basic requirement.

Q Family support services in context: Family as a unit has a long and important history and it is still by many seen in the traditional model and roles which are clearly defined. However, the approach is slowly changing, towards more open roles in which individual members of the family, especially children, are seen as the primary bearers of care and support. It implies that a system of social care aims at strengthening family and children by creating strong and all-encompassing institutions which are able to provide quality services for all. Understanding of the importance of this process is still in the process.

Q Political perspective on family support: Family support has had a strong tradition of support in Montenegro and it has always been one of priorities but the perspective has been changing. From the long support for a male breadwinner model there has been a shift towards capabilities development and institutional strengthening. In practice, it meant a shift towards developing institutions in childcare and preschool education as well as social care and health sectors. These have been on the top of the agenda and the recent decade also saw increased importance of the most disadvantaged families and children.

2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



Families and Children

STRENGTHS

1. Families and children are being recognised and family support is gaining importance and visibility in general. There is a higher willingness of families to participate in different programmes and services due to recognition of specific services and their development, which is a significant shift.
2. There have been improvements on implementation of the legal framework but there is a need to create detailed protocols of families and children participation. They need to be more included in the process, to participate according to their needs and have their voice heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Municipal funding only for evidenced based interventions.
2. The legal framework has been improved in accordance with the European practice to ensure quality services for families and children, in different areas including health, education and social care. It includes sub legal framework, so activities related to detailed studying, analysing and reporting on children and families can be improved and their well-being strengthened.



Professionals

STRENGTHS

1. There has been an improvement in development of materials for professionals and these include the necessary theoretical work but practice as well. It is a significant change and an improvement which is a basis for creating a quality work force able to deal with different challenges related to families and children.
2. There is a need to improve practice, especially with dealing with minorities and for possibilities of their inclusion. Formal education is not enough to secure a quality family support and recognition of individual needs and specific preferences in different circumstances. Individualistic approach needs to be strengthened in accordance with these principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a growing recognition of the non-state actors and their contribution. This includes international organisations but also NGOs. They play an increasingly important role by providing trainings for professionals and information and discussion groups opportunities for families and children. NGOs act as families' representatives when it is possible so their voice can be heard.
2. Professionals need to be recognised as an essential part of a quality services in family support. Despite improvements in the policy area, one of the greatest issues is a lack of funding and resources. It refers to professionals and their involvement. Quality depends on individual willingness and involvement and a change of this practice required further investing.



Policymakers

STRENGTHS

1. Family support services and measures have gained a significant place on the agenda in the recent decade. Political support is almost universal and families and children are an essential part of political programmes, but usually as a part of the broader programme on the improvement of the quality of life.
2. Some of the issues which are present in a number of areas are present in family support as well and regional inequalities are a serious obstacle in creating quality universal services for families and children. There is a need of improvement of services in the northern region of the country and policy makers need to understand negative consequences of these inequalities on the long run.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There have been significant improvements and changes of the legal and strategic framework which show a willingness to create a better environment for children and families. Implementation needs to be improved as well as a focus on services, especially education and health but European practice is being adopted as a corner stone of successful application.
2. The majority of the debate often goes of cash provision in social care but the part of the family support which needs further attention are services. There also needs to be a shift in debate towards a more individualistic approach, with family members having different notions and experiences so a universal approach does not guarantee an improvement in the quality of life of families and children.



Academics

STRENGTHS

1. Family support is only becoming a relevant issue in research and there are papers which deal with specific issues related to it. Until recently it was not present in research and apart from the curricula it was not accessible to any interested party. Additional research will increase its relevance and research projects related to it will contribute to visibility and relevance of family support in the academy.
2. Academics need to deal with relevant research, similar to a more European perspectives published in scientific journals. These refer to comparative analyses, longitudinal studies, inequality studies with the regional or focus on specific social groups. Research on minorities in this sense is missing as well and families and children from these groups are underrepresented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Academic discussions on family support are gaining importance, becoming visible and used due to increased transparency. Academics are also more present as experts through activities organized by NGOs and their approaches are utilised and at disposal through studies which are published by NGOs as a report or other type of publication.
2. Academics need to be included in the implementation and adaptations of specific services. It applies to development of legal framework and specific rule books but also education of professionals, their practice, reporting, evidencing and planning. Inclusiveness of interested parties, including academics has to improve so their knowledge is utilized as well.

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



1 Family support was often understood in shallow terms, referring to families and children in need. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to act preventively and to begin the process of families' and especially children's inclusion from the very beginning. And the number of services is on the rise.

2 European practice is being adopted through the legal and strategic framework but there is a need to improve implementation. Family support is gaining importance on the social and political agenda but there has to be more focused approach, especially towards service in education and health areas.

3 NGOs and international organisations have played an important role on increasing importance of family support. NGOs which are active in the area serve as a family voice when it is needed and parents use them to send messages about specific issues they or children face, so it gains attention of the relevant institution.

4 Success of family support often relies on an individual approach of professionals willing to contribute more. They are positive examples but they lack systemic support so such a practice becomes more than an exception. Their efforts are recognised socially but the state and local institutions need to ensure equally successful implementation of family support from the beginning of the process.

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