

NETHERLANDS 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 the Netherlands 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 the Dutch National Working Group made up of 15 researchers, coordinators, and professionals 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 Netherlands



Q Definition and understanding of family support: Family support is a set of support services and other activities to improve how parents approach and execute their role as parents, while increasing their child-rearing resources (including information, knowledge, skills, and social support) and competencies (Knijn & Hopman, 2015). Parents' rights are juxtaposed to those of their children. The family is not seen as an institution but an 'assemblage' of individuals, allowing for more diverse perspectives on what it means to be a family.

Q Family support services in context: Most family support services in the Netherlands are non-profit organisations, supported by local governments.

Q Political perspective on family support: Most family support services in the Netherlands are non-profit organisations, supported by local governments.

Family support in the Netherlands is described from an empowerment perspective. In this jurisdiction family-centred programmes aim to achieve positive changes by strengthening the capacity of parents, families and their social networks; establishing a working relationship with the parents and involving parents in shared decision-making; and recognising parents as experts and active participants in meeting their children's needs (Damen et al., 2020). A solution-oriented approach and involvement of parents' networks are considered key elements to establish parental empowerment (Reekers et al., 2018).

2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



Families and Children

STRENGTHS

1. Many evidenced based family support interventions (e.g., VoorZorg and Triple P) are available for many families via health and youth care.
2. Availability of family support at different levels of prevention: universal, selective and indicative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Municipal funding only for evidenced based interventions.
2. Shift in funding to more universal and selective prevention using evidence-based approaches.



Professionals

STRENGTHS

1. Professionals invest in strong alliances to promote a collaborative relationship with families
2. Professionals increasingly use hybrid and online forms of support to reach more diverse groups of families, and larger numbers of families within the available resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provision of training on culturally diverse, sensitive and community-based ways of working with families.
2. Funding and support of online interventions with a proven ability to prevent parenting difficulties and enhance parent and child well-being.



Policymakers

STRENGTHS

1. Families are supported through all levels and types of need..
2. Policymakers support coordinating bodies to ensure quality assessment and communication of results to services and society in general (e.g., national guidelines and databases).

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Currently, there are 100.000 families on waiting lists for mental health care. We highly recommend investments to reduce waiting lists and ensure all families receive support in a timely manner. This can be done by investing in more staff and in the development and evaluation of better scalable services.
2. Families in the Netherlands experience many challenges in balancing work and family life. Childcare is expensive and frequent changes in costs (due to changes in tax-return policies), make it difficult for families to organize this care. High quality and free of charge day care is needed to overcome this challenge.



Academics

STRENGTHS

1. Academics contribute knowledge, interventions, and evidence on effective family support. As a result, national guidelines are based on scientific evidence and there is a growing body of available evidence-based interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Invest in improving evidenced based practices in fulfilling their potential in real life situations and sustainable implementation of evidence-based family support.

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



1 There has been a shift in focus on specialized youth care to focus on prevention efforts, by funding evidenced based preventive interventions.

2 Challenges regarding providing families with effective support in a timely fashion could potentially be overcome by increased use of online services.

3 Many professionals struggle with how to best reach out to families most in need. More training in working with families in culturally diverse and sensitive ways is needed.

4 More family support is needed to help families balance family and work life.

5 The Dutch family support system benefits from the integration of high quality academic research and expert knowledge, translated into professional standards and guidelines for family support.

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