

# SLOVENIA

## 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 Slovenia 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

In the first phase, the members of the National Working Group received information about the project and the quality assurance protocol. Leaders of the National Working Group asked them to review, complete and return it before the in-person meeting. The second phase was a group discussion at the full-day meeting, carried out at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Ljubljana. At the beginning of the meeting, the leaders of National Working Group presented part of the analysis of the responses collected from the members of the National Working Group. The full analysis was presented on a system-by-system basis according to the World Café principle at the different tables, where we had a thematic discussion of all topics and the group members tried to reach a consensus or clarify different views. This was followed by a debrief by the facilitators, who presented the answers to the protocol questions, best practices and areas for improvement. Based on this, the leaders of the National Working Group finalized the protocol and produced a report. In a third phase, the draft report was sent to all members of the National Working Group, on which they were asked to provide their comments and suggestions for changes.

Members of the Slovenian National Working Group provided consensual responses, comprising 33 researchers and coordinators of services and social entities at the national, regional and local levels in the social, education, health and community sectors.

# 1. Contextualization and characterization of family support in Slovenia



**Q Definition and understanding of family support:** In Slovenia, family support is conceived as a system of services and activities aimed at supporting and improving the life and functioning of families, with a focus on providing children with a safe childhood and development opportunities. This requires a functioning and effective social security system, an accessible and high-quality education and healthcare system, modern family policies and the strengthening of informal sources of family support.

**Q Family support services in context:** The family support system in Slovenia consists of services and programmes provided by public services (kindergartens, schools, social work centres, health centres) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The programmes are mostly long-term, free and widely accessible, and they are based on modern concepts of support and (self-)help. These programmes must be strengthened, with a focus on early support and help for families in multi-problem situations, as there is a lack of support for families and too many child protection measures in Slovenia. There should be a stronger focus on integration and cooperation across services that support families to develop offerings that consider the different thresholds of support (prevention, early help and support, child protection).

**Q Political perspective on family support:** The resolution on family policy (2018–2028), 'A family-friendly society for all', defines as a central starting point for the task of the state to recognise changes in the area of family life and to institute a family policy that responds to the emerging situation, as well as to draft strategic documents and legislation that comprehensively regulate this area, offer various forms of help and support, ensure equality and social inclusion and protect the most vulnerable groups. As the field of family policy is relatively broad, the state can fulfil this task well through close cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration with experts.

## 2. Key messages from the National Strengths and Recommendations Report



### Families and Children

#### STRENGTHS

1. There exist some good practices to support children in having their voices heard and considered and to prevent re-traumatisation in proceedings (e.g. advocating for the voice of the child, children's houses).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In a system focused on child protection, in terms of child-centred practices, family support must be further developed in the future, as it signals that a child's right may currently be being violated due to certain circumstances (e.g. lack of preventive work and early support for families, overload of professionals, etc.).



### Professionals

#### STRENGTHS

1. The rights and developmental needs of the child are the starting point in all areas of cooperation with the child. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a fundamental document for work in social welfare, education, health and justice, on which the decisions and actions of professionals must be based.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continual training is needed for professionals engaged in contemporary approaches to family support. Training must be organised such that it will allow reflection on one's own practices and additional supports for implementing contemporary concepts into daily practice.



## Policymakers

### STRENGTHS

1. A well-developed family support provision system with well-regulated family policies, rights and work-family balance, which supports the possibility of developing quality family support.
2. Councils of experts and working groups in the ministries that deal with child development or family support, involving stakeholders from different areas (policy makers, researchers and practitioners), to develop joint recommendations ensuring quality family support.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensuring appropriate institutional context conditions that support practitioners in implementing contemporary concepts of family support (reduced caseloads, fewer procedural tasks and more opportunities to work directly with families).
2. To establish an agency that promotes and ensures quality family support; collaboration with practitioners, researchers and families to develop standards and competencies for professionals working with families; and monitoring of their implementation in practice.



## Academics

### STRENGTHS

1. Based on research and with the involvement of professionals in the development of family support, we have identified certain concepts based on contemporary approaches to family support. These concepts are taught in the individual faculty programmes, opening opportunities to develop the practice of working with families further
2. Individual examples of good practices where academics work with practitioners to develop new knowledge based on needs expressed in practice (e.g. examples of action research).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Greater emphasis across faculty programmes on applying knowledge of the systematic evaluation of family support processes and the systematic collecting of feedback from family members to improve family support processes.
2. The curricula of programmes (especially in education, justice, health) that train students to work with families should place more emphasis on the importance and possibilities of building partnerships with families at all stages of the work process and of supporting the transfer of this knowledge into practice.

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



**1** The reflection on family support of the National Working Group in Slovenia showed the relevance of the topic in Slovenia and the possibility and necessity of networking among different family support actors.

**2** The systematic review of family support in Slovenia revealed a well-developed family support provision system and a poorly developed family support evidence system, highlighting it as a key area for future development.

**3** Despite having well-designed legislation in the field of family policy and having developed contemporary concepts to support families, it is difficult to achieve change in daily practice if the institutional context (workload, focus on procedural tasks) does not support in-depth work with families.

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