DECISION

Subject: **Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of the COST Action "The European Family Support Network. A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach" (EuroFam-Net) CA18123**

The COST Member Countries and/or the COST Cooperating State will find attached the Memorandum of Understanding for the COST Action The European Family Support Network. A bottom-up, evidence-based and multidisciplinary approach approved by the Committee of Senior Officials through written procedure on 13 November 2018.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

For the implementation of a COST Action designated as

COST Action CA18123
THE EUROPEAN FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK. A BOTTOM-UP, EVIDENCE-BASED AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH (EuroFam-Net)

The COST Member Countries and/or the COST Cooperating State, accepting the present Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wish to undertake joint activities of mutual interest and declare their common intention to participate in the COST Action (the Action), referred to above and described in the Technical Annex of this MoU.

The Action will be carried out in accordance with the set of COST Implementation Rules approved by the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO), or any new document amending or replacing them:
  a. "Rules for Participation in and Implementation of COST Activities" (COST 132/14 REV2);
  b. "COST Action Proposal Submission, Evaluation, Selection and Approval" (COST 133/14 REV);
  c. "COST Action Management, Monitoring and Final Assessment" (COST 134/14 REV2);
  d. "COST International Cooperation and Specific Organisations Participation" (COST 135/14 REV).

The main aim and objective of the Action is to build collaborative pathways between researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, children, families, public and private agencies, and general society to create the necessary framework that allows to inform family policies and practices with the underlying goal of ensuring children's rights and families' well-being. This will be achieved through the specific objectives detailed in the Technical Annex.

The economic dimension of the activities carried out under the Action has been estimated, on the basis of information available during the planning of the Action, at EUR 112 million in 2018.

The MoU will enter into force once at least seven (7) COST Member Countries and/or COST Cooperating State have accepted it, and the corresponding Management Committee Members have been appointed, as described in the CSO Decision COST 134/14 REV2.

The COST Action will start from the date of the first Management Committee meeting and shall be implemented for a period of four (4) years, unless an extension is approved by the CSO following the procedure described in the CSO Decision COST 134/14 REV2.

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OVERVIEW

Summary

The best interest of children is placed at the forefront of social policies, giving the governments the responsibility to provide parent and family support. The recent crisis has placed parenting at a more difficult situation, accompanied by the existence of complex family realities that need new responses which require innovative approaches. Although recognised as central to a number of political priorities, at a European level the institutions have not yet addressed family support wholistically.

The Action proposes the creation of a **Pan-European family support network, under which family support and parenting policies are included, combining both common goals across countries and the recognition of the specificities of cultural and families' contexts**.

This **Action will build collaborative pathways between researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, children and families, public and private agencies, and general society to create the necessary framework that allows to inform family policies and practices with the underlying goal of ensuring children's rights and families' well-being**. EuroFam-Net will: (1) Use a pluralistic and dialogic structure to co-create responses with all involved stakeholders in the field in close collaboration with the national policies; (2) Create an evidence-based framework that improves family support services, science and technology-driven policy and practice; (3) Use a multidisciplinary approach by gathering all the relevant scientific disciplines working in this field; (4) Disseminate research and make use of advice mechanisms to the professional and political arena to innovate in family support services; (5) Avoid the duplication of services and promote inter-sectorial coordination, increasing the efficiency of available resources.

Areas of Expertise Relevant for the Action	Keywords
● Sociology: Family studies	● Family support
● Psychology: Developmental psychology	● Positive parenting
● Political Science: Social policies, welfare state	● Childs rights-based approach
● Health Sciences: Health services, health care research	● European social policy
● Political Science: Public administration, public policy	● Evidence-based programmes

Specific Objectives

To achieve the main objective described in this MoU, the following specific objectives shall be accomplished:

Research Coordination

● To unite under a new multidisciplinary Network the European family support researchers together with the involvement of policymakers, practitioners, children and families, public and private agencies, and civil society at large.
● To produce an innovative conceptual framework for family support research.
● To enable frontier-knowledge responses to parenting across the life-course and in particular to challenges faced by families affected by migration (including intra-European one), psychosocial risk, mental health issues, or that are multicultural or diverse in structure.
● To support the professionals and the policy making institutions in family support with high quality knowledge adapted to their needs from a trans-national collaboration framework.

Capacity Building

● To mobilise a critical mass of researchers across Europe for family support research, working through coordinated activities that are multidisciplinary (involvement of researchers and involvement of stakeholders, such as policy makers, professionals, family and civil society representatives and the private

sector) and inclusive.

● To contribute with high quality training of the future generations of European researchers in the field of family support from an evidence-based and pluralistic approach.

● To fully incorporate ICT approaches in family support (information and communications technologies), in the whole Action as well as through the involvement of ICT engineers in the Network. To make the use of new technologies visible in family online support research.

● To raise awareness among key European and international stakeholders in family support by involving them into the Action and disseminating internationally with interactive tools.

TECHNICAL ANNEX

1.   S&T EXCELLENCE

1.1.   CHALLENGE

1.1.1.   DESCRIPTION OF THE CHALLENGE (MAIN AIM)

Family support plays a key role in social, labour and economic development of European countries. Research has proven that family is the context for development and well-being of the new generation, and parenting is a resource that must be supported (Rodrigo, Almeida, & Rachel, 2016). Nowadays, children's rights are placed at the forefront of social policies and governments are encouraged to support caregivers in the exercise of their childrearing functions (Pecnick, 2007). Although family support is a recent discipline, research efforts have contributed not only to basic research, but also to improve policies and practices (see details in 1.3.1). Nevertheless, **Europe needs a pan-European effort that provides high-impact research based on a participatory model (counting with the voice of a wide range of stakeholders) that informs family policies and practices at a European level responding to the different realities existing at national level.**

Part of the current challenge is to build up a body of shared knowledge, as well as a workforce with clearly identified competencies. Family support field is placed at a frontier-knowledge domain, which means that it is a very rich area that embeds several traditional disciplines (such as social work, psychology, and social education). Consequently, diversity concerning conceptual assumptions and epistemological frameworks in the field remains from its beginnings. Therefore, family support it is being carried out from multiple approaches of different disciplines. There exists a diversification of services from different paradigms of intervention and from different sectors (Frost, Abbott, & Race, 2015). **There is need for a shared body of knowledge that can embed diversity and be responsive to the realities and needs derived from current existing family support schemes and family realities; there is a strong need to make this body of knowledge useful for the public policy and the standards of practice.**

Family support requires a common umbrella at a European level, under which family support and parenting policies can be included, **a framework committed to the common goals and values across European stakeholders and starting from specific cultural, social, legislative and economic realities across them**. Nowadays there exists diversity between countries regarding their epistemological and organizational aspects beyond the family support field, such as differences in EU members' structures, institutions and policy trends, as well as the diverse living conditions of the families across countries (Rodrigo et al., 2016). On the one hand, research has shown that different historical traditions in child welfare policy and practice are associated with differences across countries in approaches to support parents and families (Boddy, Smith, & Statham, 2011). Child welfare systems vary in problem definition, mode of intervention and the parents-state relationships, such as child protection view (e.g., USA, Canada, and UK) and family service orientations (e.g., Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany) (Gilbert, 2012). On the other hand, family policies are embedded in a broader philosophy of social policies, which in turn are strongly linked to the model of welfare state they have: the so called 'neo-liberal' systems (e.g., UK); the 'social democratic' welfare systems (e.g., Scandinavian countries), and lastly the 'conservative' systems (e.g., France, Italy and Germany) (Boddy et al., 2011). Furthermore, only a few countries have developed specific legislation in family support area (e.g., Austria, France, Germany, England, Scotland, Belgium, and Estonia).

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At an applied level, **family support services in Europe require a more advanced evidence-based and culturally informed approach that offers practitioners effective programmes and practices' toolkits relevant for specific family contexts** (see 1.3.2). Over the past 20 years different family-related services have evolved in different parts of the world, through: (1) economic support, especially cash payments; and (2) social, health and psychological services. Despite services' diversity, evidence-based programmes have acquired a fundamental role and are being implemented throughout Europe, particularly focusing on positive parenting (Daly et al., 2015). However, there exist strong differences in family support practices delivered by front-line staff, and much of this set of practices awaits codification and evaluation. Moreover, **innovative ways of coordination that are more effective and evidence-based need to be proposed** at inter-sectional, multi-territorial, planning-delivering and public-private level. Institutions at different levels are responsible for family interventions but lack overall coordination. Often central authorities are responsible for funding and planning (e.g. Ministries), while implementation is normally entrusted to local services and agencies (e.g., NGOs, foundations) (ChildOnEurope, 2007).

Besides these challenges, there are **other trends that need to be addressed by research**, including: the incorporation of information and communications technologies (ICT) to provide online support to parents and through family education programmes; the empowerment of men in their parental role; the incorporation of a multi-cultural approach to intervention; the diversification and specialization of family-related services for supporting targeted-needs families (e.g., families at psychosocial risk, families with children with mental health problems) and supporting new family realities (e.g., diverse family structures, migrant families); and the support from collaborative and dialogic frameworks that enable families' empowerment families instead of just the feeling of "acting on them". These challenges require a plural and networking framework for enhancing positive parenting.

The aforementioned challenges are of high interest at a European and global level, as at this point in time there are not global actions that may face them. EUROFAM-NET as a pan-European Network for family support can overcome these challenges by offering high-level applied-research solutions for Europe (see 1.3.2). For this purpose, **the Action will build collaborative pathways between researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, children and families, public and private agencies, and the general society to create the necessary framework that allows to inform family policies and practices with the objective to have a shared and responsive European framework to the national level realities** (see 1.2). The Action will build a Pan-European Network for family support research by: (1) Creating an evidence-based framework that improves family support services, science and technology-driven policy and practice; (2) Using a pluralistic and dialogic structure to co-create responses with all a wide range of stakeholders in the field that come from different cultural, social, structural, economic and legislative realities; (3) Using a multidisciplinary approach by gathering the different scientific disciplines working in this field; (4) Disseminating research and advice to the professional and political arena in order to improve family support services; (5) Contributing to remove duplication of services, and promoting inter-sectorial coordination working in a network, increasing the efficiency of available resources.

1.1.2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS

Respect for **children's rights constitutes a founding value of the European Union (EU)** (as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon) and is guaranteed through a significant commitment to children's protection (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union). In line with this commitment, countries have been encouraged to offer appropriate assistance to parents with the objective to fulfil their childcare responsibilities. Consequently, **European countries have developed family interventions aimed at guaranteeing children's rights**, particularly targeting children who are in psychosocial risk situations (see European Recommendation C(2013)780 on Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage; and Recommendation Rec(2011)12 on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families). **The Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting** recognizes that the family is a child's best source of protection because the family has primary responsibility for ensuring that a child's educational and developmental needs are met. Significantly, this Recommendation states that local governments are responsible for developing family education programmes aimed at promoting positive parenting, with a special focus on at-risk situations. In spite of the fact that the EU does not incorporate family support as one of its main policy areas, it does address it indirectly through areas such as children's rights, migratory movements, equal opportunities, working conditions and social protection (Janta, 2013). Implementation of the above recommendations is key. EUROFAM-NET will help facilitate these.

Despite the EU sensitivity towards family support, the severity and social crisis situation experienced at a global level has meant that promotion and prevention has been relegated to the background, and to a model of family support centred on the economic support, in which a paternalistic model is gaining relevance (Gilbert, 2012). Echoing this reality, the strategic lines of the EU are placed in child poverty and forced migration as the spearhead of the Horizon 2020 under Challenge 6 "Europe in a changing world - Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies". However, it is precisely **the current crisis that places parenting at a more difficult context regarding the families that need and demand support** (Molinuevo, 2013). In European countries, changes in the labour market have reduced the availability of adult neighbours during the day; families' social mobility can often lead to residence change and lack of easily accessible support systems; the disconnection with civic life and an increasingly marked tendency towards individualism, are consequences of the current situation that translate into family policies and that have direct implications for family and child welfare (Garbarino, Vorrasi, & Kostelny, 2002). Specifically, in East Europe recent changes in family policies constitute a challenge that has not been yet addressed. The difficulties rising from the current economic, social and political situation of the countries are accompanied by the **existence of complex and new family realities that require innovative approaches**. This Action will provide the necessary critical mass of Europe-wide knowledge needed to achieve the pan-European inclusive and integrated knowledge to this respect.

Although the European Union does not have a common and integrated family support policy, **there is an increasing interconnectedness of European countries at a governmental level through the adoption of common rules and recommendations**. There is a broad consensus that parenting should be included under the umbrella of public policies and that there is need for trans-national coordination (Rodrigo et al., 2016). Time has arrived for professionals, academics and politicians to go one step further and transfer this available knowledge into policy (Shonkoff & Balles, 2011). The academia has agreed that advances in prevention areas such as family support field need a global response: a global forum across the globe, **developing a pan-European Network as a starting point** (Romano & Israelashvili, 2017). On this regard, the European research agenda on families and family wellbeing has pointed out family education and empowerment as an urgent challenge to be addressed (see section 1.4.2).

In conclusion, the relevance of the Action and the creation of the Network is not only intrinsic to the scientific goal for developing a conceptual framework for family support research, but as well on including the contextual issues going on most of the European countries at the moment. Through **building this pan-European Network in 2019 EUROFAM-NET is timely for developing its coordination and research at the most appropriate time for European science**.

1.2. OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. RESEARCH COORDINATION OBJECTIVES

RCO1. To unite under a **new multidisciplinary Network the European family support researchers** together with the involvement of policymakers, practitioners, children and families, public and private agencies, and civil society at large.

RCO2. To produce **an innovative conceptual framework** for family support research.

RCO3. To enable **frontier-knowledge responses to parenting across the life-course and in particular to challenges faced by families** affected by migration (including intra-European one), psychosocial risk, mental health issues, or that are multicultural or diverse in structure.

RCO4. To support the **professionals and the policy making institutions** in family support with **high quality knowledge** adapted to their needs from a trans-national collaboration framework: (a) To **discuss and agree on diverse European perspectives about quality assurance in the child and family support services and in the standards for best practices** in matters of design, implementation and evaluation of family support programmes; (b) To produce **a catalogue of evidence-based European programmes** that are culturally relevant and responsive to different national needs available to the professional's community to be included into family support services; (c) To discuss and agree on the **skills qualification for family support workforce** necessary for a quality performance when attending families.

1.2.2. CAPACITY-BUILDING OBJECTIVES

CBO1. To mobilise a **critical mass of researchers across Europe for family support research**, working through coordinated activities that are multidisciplinary (involvement of researchers and involvement of stakeholders, such as policy makers, professionals, family and civil society representatives and the private sector) and inclusive (29 COST Countries , including 15 Inclusiveness Target Countries and 1 Near Neighbour Country (NNC), and with 45% involvement of Early Career Investigators).

CBO2. To contribute with high quality **training of the future generations of European researchers** in the field of family support from an evidence-based and pluralistic approach.

CBO3. To fully incorporate **ICT approaches** in family support (information and communications technologies), in the whole Action as well as through the involvement of ICT engineers in the Network. To make the use of new technologies visible in family online support research.

CBO4. To **raise awareness** among key European and international stakeholders in family support, by: (a) Developing an **Interactive Web Platform** that will not only ensure dissemination, but that will also include interactive tools for the use for researchers, professionals and benefit for the stakeholders such as the catalogue of practices or policy briefings, among others; (b) **Involving the stakeholders**, including family representatives, professionals, policy makers and the private sector, into the Action activities through a double-layered structure that will guarantee national and local aspects to be taken into account; and (c) **Involving and disseminating internationally** to the research base and family support research stakeholders.

1.3. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART AND INNOVATION POTENTIAL

1.3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

The state of the art in family support research, such as already mentioned under section 1, shows highly reputable advances that can be summarised as follows:

- **There is evidence about how family support services are organized and delivered in several European countries**, as: ChildOnEurope, 2007; Daly et al., 2015; Janta, 2013; Molinuevo, 2013; Ruggiero, 2014. These studies bring European and national based knowledge, but they have been developed from European agencies - not from the academia - and they lack the perspective from the wider Europe, especially the non-English countries.
- **Efforts on conceptualization of family support have been performed from the academia**, as: Canavan, Pinkerton, and Dolan, 2016; Frost et al., 2015; although lack a multidisciplinary approach. EUROFAM-NET will take into consideration contribution from these studies.
- **Several family support programmes based on evidence have been designed and tested**, as written in monographs like: Evidence-Based Programs for Children, Youth and Families (Psychosocial Intervention, 2010) and Evidence-based parent education programmes to promote positive parenting (European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 2012). However, this literature shows a strong focus on Western European and Northern American reality, and its research is done from the perspective of evidence-based programs as final products, whilst it has been proved that implementation in the real world shows that adaptations of programmes is inevitable in community-based practice (Gonzales, 2017).
- **Quality standards for family support programmes** have been published (Asmussen, 2011; Axford, Elliot, & Little, 2012; Gottfredson et al., 2015), offering common scientific criteria for the efficacy, the effectiveness and the dissemination of such programmes.
- **Blueprints or best practices guides for family support services**, like the example by Walsh, Rolls-Reutz, and Williams (2015) or those published by the UK National Institute HCE offer practitioners effective practices in family intervention as a result of rigorous research.
- Some progress has been shown in the **professional skills definition and qualifications**, especially for parenting support. This has been particularly developed by the USA Parenting Education Network, which is developing best practices for family support employees. Another example is the national occupational standards for "work with parents" in the UK (Long, 2016).
- Finally, a substantial number of peer-reviewed papers on **the effectiveness of family-support interventions** offer empirical evidence on interventions for diverse populations, in particular referring to North American programs with European adaptations, but there is a lack of empirical evidence about the effectiveness of programs designed in our context, especially from ITC.

1.3.2. PROGRESS BEYOND THE STATE-OF-THE-ART

Despite the state of the art and the progress described above, **there is a strong need, especially in the current years, for an integrated and inclusive step ahead in the area of family support research at European level**. This need comes not only because the state of the art does not address the diversity of European aspects related to the European family support, but as well because there is a need for policy advice that comes out of interdisciplinary research groups where stakeholders' participation is embedded in the research. EUROFAM-NET undertakes this endeavour by achieving:

- **Advances in family support conceptualization**, given that in spite of the progress made, most recent publications on the topic still wonder about what family support is and what role parental support plays (Canavan et al., 2016; Frost et al., 2015, Ponzetti, 2016). The conceptual framework this Action aims to develop will adopt on a common shared language **a broad vision of family support beyond structured parenting programmes** that only reflect discrete-targeted interventions for groups with identified needs (Boddy et al., 2011). The longer-term future may see the emergence of new common family support practice toolkits, derived from the many evidence-based programmes, which have wider applicability. The Action **will move forward explanatory models of the mechanisms of change in family support**, a problem that most of the existing research does not address.

- The most abundant and available evidence comes from English-speaking contexts and when non-English speaking countries have been examined, the focus has not been on ITC (Boddy et al., 2009). The Action builds **research on inclusive bases and most of the so-called low intensive research countries are incorporated**, bringing on board and sharing leadership with, for the first time, a truly pan-European Network in family support research.

- The Action will develop a **pan-European source of information for a global audience on evidence-based and culturally informed programmes** that cover a range of outcome areas (Axford et al., 2012), which without this Action would not exist, mainly because the best-known clearinghouses of evidence-based programmes are published in English and aimed primarily at American providers; and very few European programmes feature on them. The Action will identify the core components of evidence-based programmes, which will help to include key aspects in new programmes and to optimize the existing ones, reflecting common practices that are evidence-based. This challenge will be reached from **a culturally informed approach, through a flexible process of give and take between research evidence and the multiple stakeholders and potential end users at specific local and national contexts**. This approach for dissemination will lead to achieve large-scale integration of well-tested evidence-based programmes into practice in sustainable ways (Gonzales, 2017).

- EUROFAM-NET will focus on family characteristics that foster or hinder effectiveness, providing **further research-based knowledge for efficient diversification and specification of family-related services**. For this purpose, the family needs across the life span will be considered, and especially by putting a specific attention to targeted-need families (e.g., families at psychosocial risk, families with children with mental health problems), as well as new family realities (e.g., family diversity, multicultural and migrant families).

- The Action will incorporate the **use of technologies in family support services**, with a focus on going beyond available evidence in promoting effective use of research-based online parenting resources and ICT-based applications (Dworkin, Connell, & Doty, 2013), as well as enhancing practitioners training and awareness computer-based activities (Long, 2016).

- And as novelty and beyond the state of the art, the Action will develop a **shared framework on quality standards in services and training of professionals' best practices in the area of family support**, in an area where there is a multiplicity of initial and specific training (Frost et al., 2015). Recognition of policy, service, professional, and community's good practice is an important step in identifying quality standards for family support. A culturally responsive framework of quality standards has to be adopted in order to answer to the range of needs for diverse families in different European cultures and socio-economic realities.

1.3.3. INNOVATION IN TACKLING THE CHALLENGE

The Network will tackle the challenges already discussed above through the following innovations:

- **Creating a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach where the researchers are connected at local, regional, national and European level with the rest of the stakeholders such as policy makers, practitioners, public and private agencies, children and families**. The Action will use the existing structures for family support policy at national level and it will

build upon their knowledge to work at the new European framework. This will allow for knowledge to circulate from the national level structure to a supra framework that will be designed through the Action. The involvement of the decision makers as partners of the project will allow for the knowledge produced by the Action to overcome the barrier to be adapted to the economic, cultural and organizational contexts.

- **The Network has a bottom-up, participatory, inclusive structure**. The voice of the family support professionals is incorporated considering their own practice as valid evidence, since they have very rich information about children and family situations (Law, Plunkett, Taylor, & Gunning, 2009). Moreover, they have a personal construction of intervention models that needs to be taken into account. In addition, the voice of the families is actively incorporated, which is consistent with the principle of turning parents and children into active agents of the intervention and promoting their autonomy and rights. This means adopting a dialogic style, giving an active role in the Action to the most relevant European associations representing practitioners and families, as well as organizations representative of civil society. These associations count on fluid communication channels with local and national partners, capturing the reality coming from different disciplines and realities. This dialogic structure will be also reached at inter-sectorial level by balancing dialogue between different actors, reducing the pronounced power asymmetry that exists between practitioners and family support services' users, and providing family-focused policy and practice.
- EUROFAM-NET **takes a pluralistic approach in relation to the quality standards of family support services as well as its research and evaluation**. Overcoming a classic experimentalist perspective, this project advocates a pluralistic approach that considers not only methodological adequacy, but also its usefulness, viability and ethic. Thus, the Action is committed to use robust evaluation strategies that allow results to be achieved with statistical validity. In addition, this approach is based on a rights' promotion perspective, which considers the voice of children and families. Finally, this plural approach establishes a two-way relationship with professional practice; on one hand it is nourished by professional experimental knowledge, and on the other hand it is committed to promote evaluative thinking in a day-to-day professional context. Advancing to a plural framework makes necessary a matrix of evaluation strategies instead of a hierarchy of evaluation (with control trials on the top), depending on evaluation objectives (Fives, Canavan, & Dolan, 2014).
- Finally, from the design stage of the research, the Network will **incorporate information and communications technologies (ICT) in family support practices**. The Action will tackle the challenge by the full incorporation of new technologies counting on specialists in this field from academia and private sector.

1.4. ADDED VALUE OF NETWORKING

1.4.1. IN RELATION TO THE CHALLENGE

Research on family support is not only scattered through a range of disciplines, it is woefully underdeveloped in non-English speaking countries and more specifically in Eastern European countries. Theoretical approaches to family support conceptualize maladaptive functioning in families as isolated issues (e.g., child abuse, spousal abuse, substance dependency, mental health, unemployment, nutrition). These approaches fail to conceptualize the family system as a whole, and as embedded in the social, economic, political systems, and the culture. These larger systems and the culture, however, not only act upon the support needs of the families, but also on the support mechanisms and modalities that may be most effective. **An effective and diverse network of researchers, policy makers, practitioners, family representatives and civil society representatives from different European countries including southern, eastern and ITC, is most appropriate means by which extant approaches can be augmented in order to incorporate a broad systems perspective**.

The challenges addressed by this Action can only be met if a diversified network of participants collaborates effectively. EUROFAM-NET guarantees the different members not only from different fields of science of family support, but as well from policy making bodies, practitioners and family associations, civil society and the private sector. **The effectiveness of the collaboration lays in its doubled-layered structure**. At national level there exist family support networks normally coordinated by the national policy bodies that enable the inclusion of stakeholders for policy design. The challenge exists to establish a supranational network that can make possible policy advice at the European level and valid at the national one. The implication of European stakeholders, but as well national ones that will not only provide the diverse knowledge, but they will as well participate in the Action is key for its success.

Only through networking can this challenge be faced, as it will enable the collaboration among different groups of interest in family support, each and every one working at their local and national level.

At the core of this shared framework is the full consideration of the role of cultural, social, economic, and political diversity. It is essential to EUROFAM-NET mission that the representatives of organizations that formulate family support policies, the representatives of family support practitioners and the representatives of families and children as well have **a strong platform at European level that coordinates with the national level ones to provide input to the theoretical and methodological challenge**. It is more specifically for this reason that members of these networks are five central/federal government departments that in their own countries design the policies related to families and children. Other seven ministries showed interest to participate, but their formalisation did not reach on time. The Action will be open to further collaboration once the Network is created.

1.4.2.   IN RELATION TO EXISTING EFFORTS AT EUROPEAN AND/OR INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

EUROFAM-NET which will strive for the creation of a Pan-European network that, by building up on the already existing knowledge of other European projects, will enable to include in a first-time framework the national structures on family support with the objective to reach a unique and comprehensive approach on producing research for policy advice and practice. To date there have only been two Framework Programme 7 Projects funded on family support research, and none has been funded under Horizon 2020 or COST. The two are FP7 projects are: (1) Family Platform (ID: 243864, 2010-2012) involved 12 organisations from leading research institutes and family associations working together to elaborate a European research agenda on the family; (2) Families and Societies (ID: 320116, 2013-2017) involved 15 EU countries and 3 transnational civil society actors focused on describing the diversity of family forms in Europe and on assessing the compatibility of existing policies with family changes. Both projects lacked a wider European perspective that EUROFAM-NET offers through involvement of 29 COST Countries including 15 ITC, and 1 NNC). Both projects described the current status of knowledge on families in Europe and identified important areas of future research. Family support has been recognised by the FP7 projects as an urgent area of research. EURFAM-NET counts with participants from one of these projects and expects to formalise the entry of partners from the other one during the first year of life of the Action. The Action will certainly use the FP7 projects research results especially the ones related to the analysis developed on the EU families' realities and legal frameworks from FamiliesAndSocieties project.

Other networks at European level already exists, although are focused on specific families' realities and practices and not on family support research. For example, some are focused on specific aspects related to family functioning (e.g., Eurofound, the European Network for psychosocial support of the Red Cross); on targeted-needs families (e.g., the NKH International Family Network, the UK and the European Birth Mother Network); on bringing together specific interest groups (e.g., the European Union Families Network, the Network of European LGBTIQ Families Associations, the European Network of Family Institutions REDIF); and on addressing the needs of specific professionals that serve family support (e.g., the International Association of Training and Research in Family Education and the European Family Therapy Association). There are networks of civil society organizations (e.g., the European Network on Family Group Conference, Make Mothers Matter, and the European Parents' Association), and few efforts focused only on research and research entities (as the European Society on Family Relations, the Sociology of Families and Intimate Lives, and the European Platform for Investing in Children - EPIC that is a platform where the associated countries have access to information related to policies and practices supporting families and children, but it does not provide a space for research interaction in the field). There exist, as well, policy bodies that are well connected with social structures at national, regional and local level (e.g., The European Social Network, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and the European Network of Social Authorities).

Given the above, **there exists a lack of a pan-European Network, which is both excellent in terms of research and inclusive in the field of expertise based for family support**.

EUROFAM-NET will develop a theoretically sound conceptual framework that will allow the systematic study and the comparison of the experiences of previous family support initiatives, adopting a systems perspective for the consideration of cultural, social, economic, and political context of providing and evaluating family support. The **Network aims to overpass the barriers it may encounter such as different cultural sets and work in different languages through the bi-folded structure it will operate, but engaging the national existing structures and cooperating with them systematically during the four years**. This solution is unique of its kind as for the first time a Pan-European network

in family support research will create a framework as supranational structure that can bring huge benefits for the research and policy in the field. As discussed in the implementation the Action will **produce knowledge and disseminate it in open access and in the languages of the Network**.

2. IMPACT

2.1. EXPECTED IMPACT

2.1.1. SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL, AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

As detailed under the objectives in section 1.2., the ultimate goal of the Action is to **have an impact on the quality of family support and its policy offered at pan-European level**, to improve the family wellbeing by optimizing the development and education contexts of the children who grow up in them. The Action will have an impact at different levels, as detailed below.

	At short term (next 4 years)	At mid- and long term (beyond 4 years)
Scientific	-Bringing together researchers, policy makers and civil society stakeholders: caring for gender, age and geographical balance (ITC) and the national aspects by including the national existing family support structures. → *To be done during the Action.* -Synthesis and integration of the regional and national research on family support from 30 countries at a wide European level under an innovative and plural conceptual framework. → *WG2.* -Production of a minimum of 50 proceedings papers and 130 national and international policy briefs in all the languages of the Network. → *The Action.* -Publishing in international scientific journals. → *The Action.* -Co-creation for the very first time at a pan-European level a common language on family support between researchers and stakeholders, such as policy makers, professionals, family and civil society representatives and the private sector. → *The Action.* -Training of the future generations of European researchers in the field from an evidence-based and pluralistic approach that will be sensible to the national differences. → *WG4 and WG5.* -Identifying needs of parenting across the life course and targeted family realities (refugee, mentally health affected and/or multicultural ones) that hinder the exercise of parenting. → *WG2.*	-Building a shared and plural conceptual framework on family support from an evidence-based approach will inform policy making support with guarantees of ecologic validity bearing in mind differences at national level. → *The Action.* -Building critical mass of researchers in family support research. → *The Action.* -High quality trained young promising researchers from research intensive and less research intensive countries. → *The Action.* -Respond to family needs, with specific attention to the new family realities under a European perspective and including the national economic and social aspects. → *The Action.* -Echo in the international arena of family support research. → *The Action.*
Technological	-Producing tangible socially oriented technological results through the Interactive Web Platform, in collaboration with European institutions. → *The Action.* -Production and dissemination of catalogues of programmes, quality standards, evaluation tools, etcetera. → *WG5.* -Identification of successful experiences incorporating ITC in family support services/evidence-based programmes. → *WG2 and WG3.*	-Incorporation of evidence-based practices in working with families under a coherent and plural family support conceptual framework. → *The Action.* -Introducing the use of new technologies in the family intervention process following the initiatives of e-parenting.→ *WG4.*
Socio-economic	-Identification of quality standards for the services as well as evidence-based programmes and practices on a common ground by including different national perspectives. → *WG3.* -Consensus on quality criteria and standardization of workforce skills.→ *WG4.* -Disseminating the standards of evidence with colleagues in relevant European organizations, including pan-European centers, clearinghouses and country-specific research institutes; and to the already existing national structures for family support. → *WG5.* -Encouraging the relevant European, national and local institutions in the adoption of standards, databases and economic models.→ *The Action.*	-Advances in quality standards will promote discussion about differences and similarities between different standards/databases (e.g. in terms of focus, function and audience) and ways of connecting different initiatives to achieve greater synergy.→ *The Action.* -The coordination of practitioners, politicians, NGOs and other stakeholders at different levels in a cross-sector environment will optimize the resources available, favoring the mid-to-long term viability and sustainability of family support resources.→ *The Action.* -Information collected during the Action will draw evidence on decision making about efficiency and effectiveness of family support actions at European, national and local level.→ *The Action.*

The impact will be seen not only in Europe (30 countries, this is 29 COST Countries including 15 ITC, and 1 NNC) but as well in the international arena, through the involvement of European and International organisations in the field.

2.2. MEASURES TO MAXIMISE IMPACT

2.2.1. PLAN FOR INVOLVING THE MOST RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The **profile of the researchers** that composes the Network is such that their research activity is connected to the advising role for policy makers in their local or national governments, they train family support practitioners and they collaborate with private stakeholders. Advisory roles with European institutions already exist from several Network members. The Action will go beyond by establishing a European structure. The stakeholders involved will be academics, policy makers, practitioners, family representatives and civil society representatives. More specifically, these stakeholders are:

From Academia	-The European and international highly reputed faculty that do not participate in the Network will be contacted directly with the Action results. These professors will be invited to take advisory roles in the Action outcomes. They will mostly be European, but not only. An international dimension will be taken into consideration. -The conferences and workshops will help to consolidate a wider database to reach academia. -The Network will hold and disseminate 6 Short-Term Scientific Missions in ITC, NNC and European and International Organisations. -The Network will hold and disseminate 2 Training Schools focused at ECI researchers. -The research papers, conference proceedings and the final Action book produced will be widely disseminated to the interested academia worldwide. -At least 500 researchers will fall in the scope of the Action.
Policy makers and European and international organisations	-Policy makers in representation of the local, regional, national and European institutions will be invited to participate in the Working Groups, in the workshops, and more specifically in one of the research studies in WG2 and WG3. -The Network will produce policy briefs from the research results the teams will have, which will be presented to the European and international organizations. At least one national policy briefing will be produced per each country participating in the Action and several European ones depending on the pace of the project results. -The policy makers will receive the newsletters and subscriptions at the Interactive Web Platform which will keep them updated. Two annual newsletters will be produced. -It is planned to reach all key European policy organizations, and at least 300 institutions at regional and national level.
Family support workforce/ Practitioners	A comprehensive identification of practitioners at different levels to be targeted for dissemination is planned. -The practitioners will be reached via the main European Associations working in family services, in the workshops, and likewise the policy makers they will be invited to participate in the Working Groups and more specifically in one of the research studies in WG2 and WG3. -They will be introduced to the Interactive Web Platform which will have special tools of their use, like for example evidence-based programmes, quality standards and evaluation tools. -The Network will elaborate and disseminate quality standards for family services and best practices for practitioners.
Families and representatives of the civil society	The representatives of families, family association representatives and the civil society will be reached via the main European Associations, and they will be invited to participate in the Working Groups and more specifically in one of the research studies in WG2 and WG3. The dissemination materials for raising awareness in families will be designed, included in the Interactive Web Platform.
Private sector stake-holders	The Network will reach the private sector stakeholders which are involved in family services in different European countries, and they will be invited to participate in the Working Groups and more specifically in one of the research studies in WG2 and WG3.

2.2.2. DISSEMINATION AND/OR EXPLOITATION PLAN

The Plan includes the main dissemination and exploitation channels considered, an outcome indicator, monitoring aspects and a contingency action.

Research dissemination at conferences: WG results will be disseminated to top international family support research conferences, including the European Society of Family Relations Conference, ISPCAN European Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, the European Conference on Developmental Psychology, and the European Social Services Conference. *Indicator*: 4 participations a year in each of the conferences by the Network members, including 2 by ECIs. *Monitoring*: This action will be supervised by WG1. *Contingency Action*: If participation is not guaranteed in all the above-mentioned conferences, these others will be reached: the EUSARF, the ESWRA, the European Congress of Psychology, and the Social Policy Annual Conference.

Research publications and journals: The research papers as WG2 results will be submitted to the Journal of Family Theory & Review. Results from WG3 will be submitted to: (1) the Journal of Family Issues, and (2) the Journal of Social Policy. Results from WG4 will be submitted to the Child and Family Social Work Journal. The Network will publish on Open Access. *Indicator*: The Network will submit 5

publications. *Monitoring*: This action will be supervised by WG2, 3 & 4 Leaders and the WG1. *Contingency Action*: If submission is not reached in all the above, other journals will be reached: Journal of Child and Family Studies, Future of Children, The European Journal of Social Work, Family Relations, Child and Youth Services Review, Journal of Family Psychology, International Journal of Social Welfare.

Research advice to policy makers and European and international organizations: WG2-4 results, wherever deemed necessary will produce policy papers to reach the institutions at different levels through the members of the Network, making 29 COST Countries including 15 ITC, and 1 NNC). *Indicator*: 5 policy briefs for the European policy making bodies and its translation for the national bodies. *Monitoring*: This action will be supervised by WG1-4 Leaders and the WG1, and WG5 will translate and disseminate. *Contingency Action*: In case policy advice conclusions are not reached for all the countries, the focus will be in a variable geometry of representation that includes specifically Eastern and Southern European countries.

Research exploitation with professionals: The Action will produce a Catalogue of evidence-based European programmes, a Catalogue of sound evaluation tools, a list of international agencies and a Catalogue of skills standards of usage for the practitioners representatives at European and National level. Those stakeholders who are not directly involved will be reached via emailing and social media. Each country participant has already identified networks of professionals for dissemination. *Indicator*: The network will produce 4 Catalogues where the results of the project will be given, and annexes on specificities per country will be included. *Monitoring*: This action will be supervised by WG3 & 4 Leaders and the WG1, and WG5 will disseminate. *Contingency Action*: In case the annexes with best practices and guidelines are not available for all the participant countries, the focus will be in Eastern and Southern European countries on which research has been lacking.

Dissemination to families' representatives: Families' representatives participate as members of the Action. More representatives will be reached via direct contact, through the Web and via leaflets to be sent to the associations at national and regional level. *Indicator*: 10'000 leaflets will be spread on a selected number of countries in their language (this will be agreed in year 2 when the Network would be finally established). *Monitoring*: Supervised by WG1 & 5 Leaders. *Contingency Action*: If the leaflets fail to be printed and distributed the Network will operate through the Web Platform and the social media.

The Private sector participation: The private sector contribution will not only support the conceptual framework, but as well encourage the dissemination of the Action. The private sector will be reached via meetings, conferences, direct contact and Website and social media. *Indicator*: 25 European private sector stakeholders (service providers, foundations, etc.) will be contacted. *Monitoring*: As a responsibility of WG1 & 5 Leaders. *Contingency Action*: The Network will encourage members to foster contact at national level with the private sector stakeholders.

Dissemination at society at large: Society will be reached the Interactive Web Platform and its participatory tools, including social media and through approaching the local, regional and national traditional media. *Indicator*: 10'000 followers in the social media, 2 news in the traditional media. *Monitoring*: WG5 Leaders and WG1. *Contingency Action*: Understand the dynamics and foster those channels that create more participation.

2.3. POTENTIAL FOR INNOVATION VERSUS RISK LEVEL

2.3.1. POTENTIAL FOR SCIENTIFIC, TECHNOLOGICAL AND/OR SOCIOECONOMIC INNOVATION BREAKTHROUGHS

Europe lacks a comprehensive multidisciplinary approach to family support. Never before the European researchers have gathered to tackle family support challenges from an integral perspective with the participation of policy makers, involvement of families and public and private entities. The Action will introduce not only a scientific and innovative breakthrough, but as well a socioeconomic one. This is related to the involvement of the policy making bodies, as well as practitioners and families' representatives in the Network. These are members of the existing national structures for family support; thus, the analysis of socioeconomic situations from different countries will shape the results of the Action. The national structures will not only feed with information the Action, but as well they will participate in them and they will facilitate that the Action results reach the national arenas.

EURFAM-NET is an innovative vision that gathers expertise from 29 COST Countries including 15 ITC, and 1 NNC) and 75 participants (34 ECI) and that unites a multidisciplinary group. The inclusion of many

different stakeholders under the same Network for the very first time is a risk by itself, not only because of differences in terms of disciplines, but as well in terms of culture and language use. The solution to this reality will be the choice of working in the double layered structure where the Working Groups will be in close touch with a selected number of countries, the introduction of the Web Platform in multiple languages as in innovative tool, and the effort to work in different languages.

3. IMPLEMENTATION

3.1. DESCRIPTION OF THE WORK PLAN

3.1.1. DESCRIPTION OF WORKING GROUPS

The Action is organised in five Working Groups (WG). WGs will be either led or co-led by a researcher from an ITC; a half of the leaders will be ECI and gender balance will be considered. WGs will make sure coordination with the national family support structures represented by members of the Network and they will establish collaboration channels whenever deemed necessary.

WG1: Management and coordination: WG1 responds to the RCO1 and the CBO1. WG1 will handle all the necessary coordination and management tasks under the responsibility of the Management Committee. WG1 will be led by the coordinator of the project (also an ECI) and co-led by a senior researcher from a European research centre. Its responsibilities are: 1.1) Identify the key stakeholders in family support at European level and mapping them. 1.2) Coordinate the internal work, monitor and evaluate the progress, maintain fluid communication with all Action members. 1.3) Ensure mutual training in perspectives, disciplines and methods. 1.4) Organise the first meeting and the final Conference (See Gantt Chart below for details). With the feedback from WG2, WG3 and WG4, the WG1 will manage under the Management Committee decisions: 1) The participation of young researchers in top international conferences. In total four conference travel and accommodation grants will be given per year. 2) The payment of the conference proceedings will be funded.

WG 2: Developing the European conceptual framework on family support: WG2 responds to the RCO2 and the RCO3 as the Action incorporates target-needs families and the so-called new realities under the scope of study and works in close collaboration with the national family support structures. WG2 will be led by an internationally reputed senior scientist and it will be co-led by an ECI from an ITC. Its tasks are: 2.1) Perform a full-scoped review of studies and European reports on conceptualization and delivering of family support in Europe. 2.2) Conduct a cross-national study of perceptions on family support delivering from different group. 2.3) Conduct an expert-targeted panel in order to identify new realities and targeted-needs that require specific supports. 2.4) Conduct a cross-national study about perceived support needs and strengths and characterisation of the national family support structures. 2.5) Develop an innovative conceptual framework in family support research. WG2 methodology will consist of: i) documents review on the state of the art, ii) exchange of information and meetings with the national family support structures; iii) elaboration of the studies with participation of policy making bodies and practitioners and families' representations members of the Network. WG2 will deliver: a) Research papers and policy reports on family support conceptualization. b) Research papers and policy reports on support needs and strengths of new and targeted family realities. c) Policy reports on family support delivering. The Action plans two Short-Term Scientific Missions in this WG that will encourage the mobility of senior researchers in ITC and the other countries and the European/international organizations.
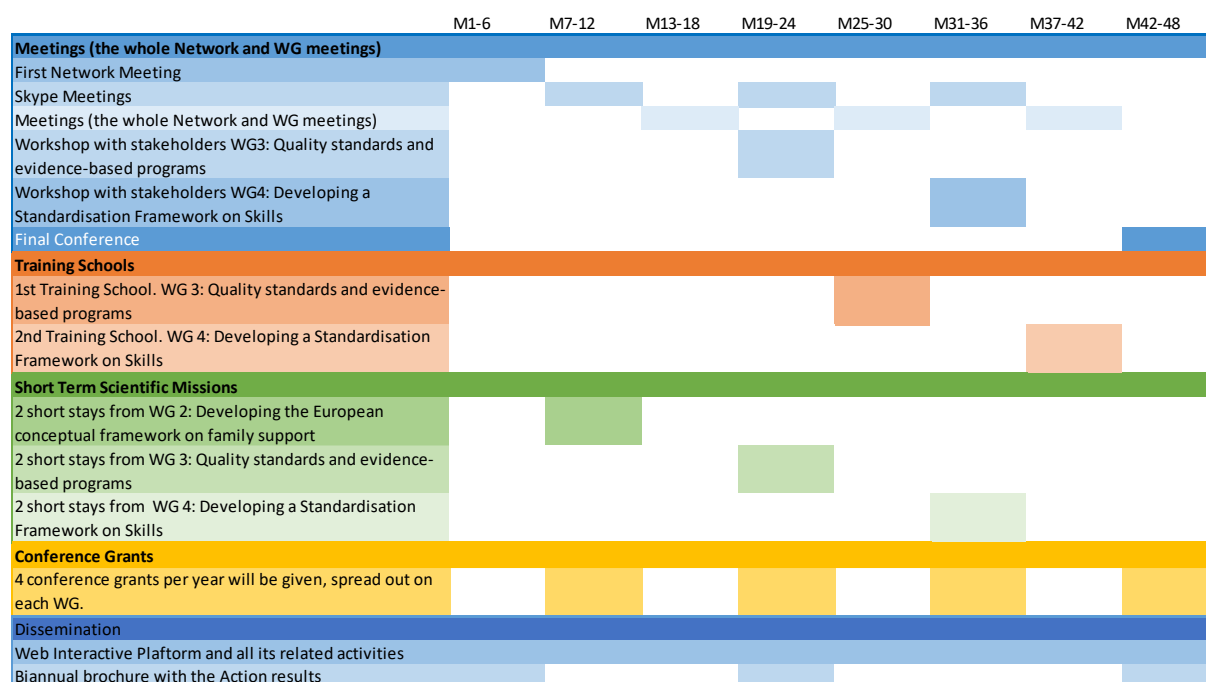
WG 3: Quality standards and evidence-based programmes: WG3 responds to the RCO4. This will mean: a) To discuss and agree on diverse European and national perspectives about quality standards. b) To produce a catalogue of evidence-based European programmes to be included into family support services at European, national and local level. WG3 addresses CBO2 and CBO3 too. WG3 will be led by a senior researcher from an ITC and an ECI from a COST Country. The tasks identified for WG3 are: 3.1.) Identify the international agencies on programme evaluation and study to integrate their quality standards. 3.2.) Develop a shared position on family support programme evaluation. 3.3.) Compile existing evidence-based programmes in different European countries, including Eastern European ones. 3.4.) Identify successful experiences incorporating ICT in family support services/evidence-based programmes. 3.5.) Identify and compile sound evaluation tools in family support area from databases and other sources in different European countries. WG3 methodology will consist of: i) Documents

review on studies already existing on quality standards; ii) workshops with civil society stakeholders, policy bodies and professionals to discuss the feasibility of global quality standards at their realities set in different cultures and legal frameworks; and iii) Compilation and analysis. WG3 will deliver: a) List of international agencies. b) Research papers on quality standards. c) Research papers on family support programme evaluation. d) Catalogue of evidence-based European programmes. e) Policy reports on quality standards and evidence-based programmes. f) Catalogue of evaluation tools. g) Training School on quality standards and evidence-based programs. h) Workshop with stakeholders on quality standards and evidence-based programs. Two Short-Term Scientific Missions are planned under WG3.

WG 4: Developing a Standardisation Framework on Skills: WG4 responds to the RCO4c and the CBO2. WG4 will be led by a senior researcher from an ITC, and co-led by a ECI researcher from a participating COST Country with high expertise in the topic. WG4 will: 4.1.) Identify the international agencies on skills qualification and integrate their results. 4.2.) Perform a full-scoped review of existing studies on skills standards for workforce in family support. 4.3.) Conduct a cross-national study on skills standards from practitioners' point of view. 4.4.) Agree on the set of skills qualification for workforce in family support required for a quality performance. WG4 methodology will consist of documents review, meetings and co-creation of the research. In the lifetime of the Action, WG4 will deliver: a) Research papers, a catalogue and policy reports on skills standards. b) A Training School on developing a standardisation framework on skills. c) Workshop with stakeholders on developing a standardisation framework on skills. Two Short-Term Scientific Missions are planned under WG4.
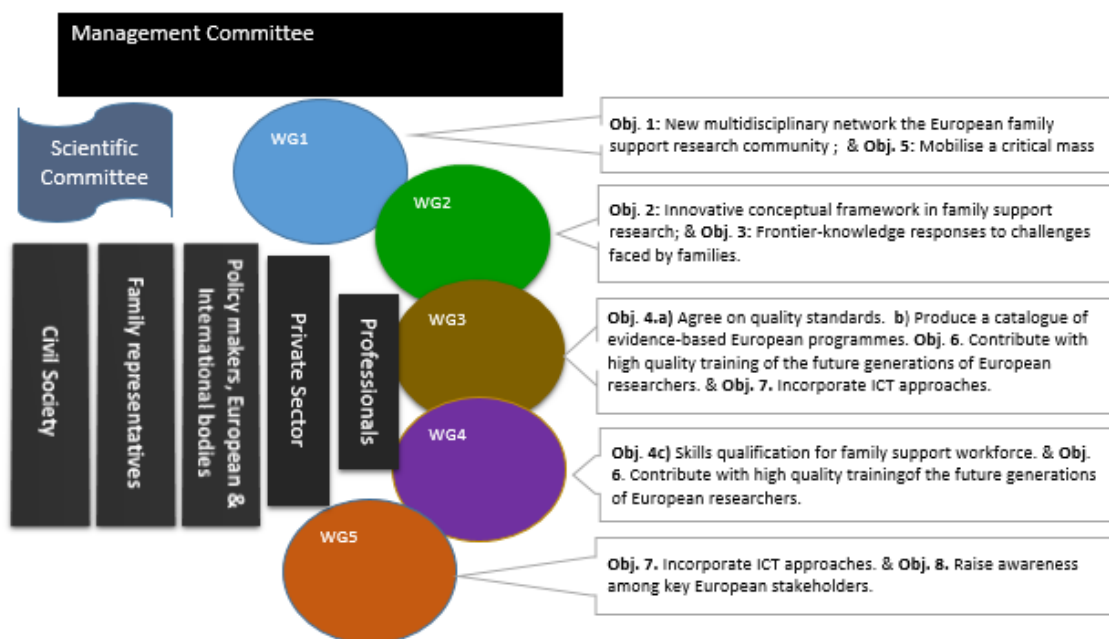
WG 5: Dissemination and exploitation of activities and results: WG5 responds to the CBO3 and CBO4 and it will implement the Research and Exploitation Plan. WG5 will be led by a senior researcher from a European research centre with expertise on dissemination and it will be co-led by an ECI from a participating COST Country. WG5 activities will be: 5.1.) Design, build, feed and maintain the Action's Interactive Platform. 5.2.) Organise the first meeting workshop and the final conference. 5.3.) Stimulate and coordinate the dissemination of the main results of the Network at international conferences. 5.4.) Coordinate the language translations. 5.5.) Update national and international stakeholders about the Action. 5.6.) Disseminate the main results to the public trough social media, favouring public awareness of family support policies. WG5 will deliver the Interactive Web Platform during the first year and the rest of the activities related to outreach, including management of social media channels.

3.1.2. GANTT DIAGRAM

	M1-6	M7-12	M13-18	M19-24	M25-30	M31-36	M37-42	M42-48
Meetings (the whole Network and WG meetings)								
First Network Meeting								
Skype Meetings		▓		▓		▓		
Meetings (the whole Network and WG meetings)			▓	▓	▓	▓	▓	
Workshop with stakeholders WG3: Quality standards and evidence-based programs				▓				
Workshop with stakeholders WG4: Developing a Standardisation Framework on Skills						▓		
Final Conference								▓
Training Schools								
1st Training School. WG 3: Quality standards and evidence-based programs					▓			
2nd Training School. WG 4: Developing a Standardisation Framework on Skills							▓	
Short Term Scientific Missions								
2 short stays from WG 2: Developing the European conceptual framework on family support		▓						
2 short stays from WG 3: Quality standards and evidence-based programs				▓				
2 short stays from WG 4: Developing a Standardisation Framework on Skills						▓		
Conference Grants								
4 conference grants per year will be given, spread out on each WG.		▓		▓		▓		▓
Dissemination								
Web Interactive Platform and all its related activities								
Biannual brochure with the Action results			▓		▓		▓	

3.1.3. PERT CHART (OPTIONAL)

3.1.4. RISK AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

The Network is aware of **several risks the Action may suffer due to internal and external causes. For that reason, a Contingency Plan is put into place with two main pillars**: a) A reinforced monitoring of the Action milestones through its life, and 2) The Management Committee will assess the scientific outcome of the coordinated work, and in case of doubt assess research quality and decision making with external advising from top worldwide recognised researchers, under the responsibility of the Network. The main risks and the contingency actions are as shown in the table.

Risks	Contingency Actions
1. Difficulty managing a multidisciplinary team with a broad geolocation.	Design Working Groups with researchers from multidisciplinary background from the start of the project and regularly monitor the activity from the Management Committee and WG1.
2. Participating countries stop attending meetings or decide to leave.	The Network from its design has included a surplus of number of countries, with a special attention on ITC. Alternative country representatives can be sought and a further round of invitations can be send out from WG2, 3, & 4 Leaders.
3. Lack of consensus on key topics related to scientific quality.	In case consensus is missing when scientific products, papers, guidelines, etc. are out external researchers to the Action will be consulted for their independent opinion.
4. Problems in publication of results.	Seek publication in another journal, such as planned for the WGs above. See alternatives in 2.2.2. WG2, 3 & 4 Leaders and Co-Leaders are to reach consensus on this regard.
5. Cost or time overrun.	Readapt planning with the Management Committee and all the WG Leaders and Co-Leaders and notify the whole Network.
6. Possible disengagement of stakeholders may occur due to size and diversity	The double-layered structure of the project with members participating in the already existing national structures and as well participating in the Action this raises the resilience of the Network for a more effective collaboration.

3.2. MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES

The Action will **follow the guidelines described in the COST Implementation Rules**. The coordination and management has carefully assigned ITC in leading or co-leading roles, with half of the researchers being ECIs and a gender-balance distribution.

The **Management Committee** (MC) consists of national representatives from participating COST Countries in the Action. It will be convened twice a year to discuss the annual scientific plans on the basis of the inputs of each WG, to plan the Grant Period activities. MC will also be responsible to assess the quality of the deliverables of the Action and to guarantee the ethical standards for research; for this purpose, MC will consult key stakeholders and researchers external to the Action when necessary. Action Chair and Vice-chair will be elected from the MC members at the first Management Committee Meeting.The MC will include the NNC participating in the Action as MC observer.

Work Group Leaders and Co-Leaders will be elected from the MC Members at the first MC Meeting. They will be responsible for organizing and chairing the WG meetings, preparing the meeting agenda, providing inputs to the MC, and ensuring WG deliverables. They will be in charge of maintaining contact with national structures and of ensuring the participation of representatives from policy and professional bodies, as well as from civil society and private sector organizations in WG activities.

At the first Meeting of the WG5, the architecture of the **Action's Interactive Platform** will be designed, as well as a calendar for its implementation. Decision will be taken as to procedures for providing the webmaster regularly with new and relevant information. At the MC Meetings and Action conferences, attendance statistics will be presented to identify topics of maximum interest.

The **administrative management** will be developed by WG1, supervised by the MC.

3.3. NETWORK AS A WHOLE

The Network is made up of 75 participants from 49 institutions from— 29 COST Countries including 15 ITC, and 1 NNC. The emphasis on ITC and NNC is a core part of the Action since, as stated, its main objective is to integrate the full picture of the family support research conceptual framework from the pan-European perspective, especially the one from Southern and Eastern Europe. EUROFAM-NET has a 57.14% of its members from ITC. The balanced representation is achieved through the participation of countries from Eastern Europe and from the Western Balkans, as well from Western and Central Europe. The Network is composed of a team of researchers from different fields of science making the research team multidisciplinary. (Psychology 33.3%, Social Sciences 28.0%, Sociology 10.7%, Educational Sciences 8.0%, and Political Science 6.7%). EUROFAM-NET includes as full members families' and professional representatives and civil society organisations (17% of the entities); governmental and intergovernmental organisations (6.7 % of the total) and the private sector. Institutions participating in the Network operate at national or European level. Their activities will be coordinated in the WGs following the topics of discussion and direct contact will be established with the national structures, beyond the 5 ministries participating in the Action. The high-quality profile of all the participants, as well as inter-connections at research-policy-practice-family level, guarantees effectiveness for the achievement of the objectives, as well as its sustainability both at short and long term. This Action will pursuit the academic excellence to promote equal opportunities under The Equality Act 2010. The team will have an appropriate balance in terms of gender for the discipline. 32% of the participants are male. The family support field is recognised as a mainly female based scientific field, where 70% are women, such as seen in the report "Women in academic science: A changing landscape" (Ceci, Ginther, Kahn, & Williams, 2014). This Network has done its utmost by including relevant researchers from all Europe and it has achieved one of the best balances in top networks worldwide including in coordination. In relation to the generational balance there are 34 ECI, which is 45% of the whole network that includes not only researchers, but policy makers, families' representatives, civil society stakeholders, etc. The importance of ECI is key for the Action. All WGs will be directed or codirected by ECIs with the objective to foster their training and career development, allowing them to interact with senior researchers and improve their skills and knowledge. More than 50% of the ECI research in ITC. Several key agencies and institutions in family support at regional, national, European and international level have already confirmed their interest to be involved in the Action. The Network is open to receive expression of interest and it has a strong interest of broadening its participation, by raising the relevance of the Action and its objectives on creating a comprehensive conceptual framework on family support in Europe. The Network will work for its sustainability of its activities by seeking future support in the Framework Programme, with special focus on widening the participation in social sciences.

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