



R.2.4 : Psychological Status Report

Smart Parenting Erasmus+ Project/ Grant Agreement: n°2022-1-FR01-KA220-ADU-000087853



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Country Reports

Each country involved in the project completed an individual report and these can be found on the Smart- Parenting common partnership Drive in the WP2 section.

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Introduction

This document compiles the focus group results produced in the framework of the ERASMUS+ programme, KA220-ADU Cooperation partnerships in adult education under the project entitled: Integrative on-line Parenting Courses: strategies for Raising Children Affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences (SMART PARENTING) and within WP2/A.2.2: Psychological Dimension key elements of the analysed Parenting programmes identification and Result. 2.4 Psychological Status Report

In the Framework of the elaboration of R.2.4 Psychological Status Report, partners anticipated to a) explore the gaps and needs in current parenting training and support programmes and the impact (positive and/or negative) on parents and b) investigate the 'ideal' parenting programme from a parent perspective.

A total of 5 focus groups with a total participation of 51 participants took place during May and June 2023.

In the next section of the report, the sampling and data collection methodology will be described followed by the presentation of an overview of the gaps and needs; perceived psychological impact and elements of an ideal parenting programme in each country. The analysis of focus groups discussion with parents are also described in each country section.

Partners and countries involved in the organisation of focus groups with parents:

- Commune d' Oletta (France)
- European Knowledge Spot (EKS): Greece
- GESEME (Spain)
- Zavod za izobraževanje odraslih in mladine Lendava (Slovenia)
- Association for the Prevention and Handling Violence in the Family (Cyprus)

Common themes and concerns across the five countries will provide a general description of the feeling that parents encountered while participating in a national parenting programme (perceived impact), the popular gaps and needs mentioned when talking of national parenting programmes and their expectations of an ideal parenting program, including knowledge and skills they would like to acquire from such program.

Sampling and data collection

Focus Groups

The aim of the focus groups was to reflect upon the gaps and needs in parenting support programmes in the five participating countries, analyse their impact (did they contribute to improvement of their parenting style or to strengthening the parent-child relationship?) and discuss what an ideal parenting programme could look like from a parent perspective.

The profile of participants included Parents/caregivers having children aged 0-6 and 6-12.

The focus groups ranged between 50 minutes -1 hour and 20 min, and were designed to be semi-structured, with a clear but open-ended topic guide. Three questions were distributed to Parents with a view to develop the focus – group conversation as follows:

Issues addressed to Parents included the following:

- Question 1: What do you see as the most valuable organizations, services, or programs in your community that support your efforts in raising your children? How often do you use these resources? How have they been helpful to you
- Question 2: Who can tell me about a time when they had a really good experience getting help from a program or service in the community in which you live? During that process, did you consider the programme had a positive impact on you? What was that? and what in your opinion was missing and needed improvement?

The first and second question aimed to extract from parents their general view on the national parenting support system including the gaps and needs and gauge the general sense of their feelings and the impact that these programmes had on their parenting behaviour (positive or negative).

- Question 3: For those parents that have not attended a parenting support programme what would you find most valuable/helpful in an ideal parenting support program? What are the knowledge and skills you would like to acquire?

The third question aimed to extract from parents their expectations and vision of what an ideal parenting programme would look like in order for the Consortium to be able to proceed with the development of an evidence – based parenting programme in the framework of the Smart-Parenting model.

Written and/or oral consent was obtained from all participants which were also informed that the data collected will be confidential and anonymous. They were also reminded of their right to withdraw from the focus groups at any time.

Some focus groups were held on virtual meeting platforms and other in person and were facilitated by one or two team members. They were recorded and transcribed, with detailed notes also taken in case of malfunctioning software. English translations were provided by all partners as part of the data analysis process.

A summary of all participants is at Table 1.

Table 1: Project Data Collection Summary

Country	Number of Focus group parents	Gender distribution ¹		Mode of elaboration
		Female	Male	
France	13	12	1	Face to Face
Greece	15	14	1	Online
Spain	10	Not Declared	Not Declared	Online
Slovenia	9	9	0	In person
Cyprus	4	3	1	In person
Total	51	38	3	

¹ In Spain Article. 43 of Law 4/2023, of February 28, regulates legitimation and establishes: People of Spanish nationality over 16 years of age may apply for themselves (for gender change). People under 16 years of age and over 14 years of age may submit the application themselves, assisted by their legal representatives.

France

Overview of the gaps and needs in parenting programmes - perceived psychological impact

The responses from the parents in the French focus group provided valuable insights into their diverse parenting experiences and needs. Overall the need for both emotional support and practical advice was evident, as parenting was mentioned to be both rewarding and challenging. Further, Parents highlighted the importance of personalized support, practical solutions, and emotional well-being in a parenting support program. They expressed a desire for tailored guidance that addresses their specific challenges and concerns, such as managing a large family or handling various parenting situations.

Some parents mentioned obstacles to their participation in such programs, including a lack of awareness, time constraints, or scepticism about their effectiveness.

Overall, these insights underscore the importance of designing parental education programs that offer a range of support, from practical advice to emotional assistance, and that take into account the unique needs and circumstances of different parents.

In addition, many parents expressed their concern especially after the birth of their first child whether they are 'good' parents and if they are doing things correctly. Balancing personal life, professional life, relationships, and the demands of parenting has been also recognised as a major challenge. Further, parents were concerned on the issue of the sleep deprivation and stress that could potentially lead to difficulties in managing their life.

Dealing with the health problems of their children as well as the struggle of managing daily stress while being unemployed and providing emotional support and attention to their children had been also mentioned as a major challenge that parents nowadays had to face. Several parents mentioned also the difficulty of teaching their children independence and coping with situations where their children experienced rejection from peers. Difficulties and needs also were addressed to issues that had to do with single parenting as well as with parents having more than one child and in particular teenagers.

Overview of an ideal parenting programme from the parents' perspective.

Parents value a comprehensive approach to parenting support programs that encompass emotional, psychological, and practical aspects of parenting. They find comfort in sharing experiences with others and in receiving guidance from professionals who understand the complexities of parenting. The need for both emotional support and practical advice is evident, as parenting can be both rewarding and challenging.

Analysis of the Focus Groups Findings in France

Context

The focus group with parents was held on the 28th of June in the Municipality of Oletta. The municipality of Oletta, invited parents both verbally and through a notice posted. The information was also conveyed through the teachers who were informed and subsequently passed on the message. The focus group lasted about 60 minutes and was attended by 13 parents.. Thirteen (13) parents participated in the focus group, all females except one male. All parents were employed and have children from 6 to 12 years old.

Content of the focus group

At the beginning of the discussion participants explored the most memorable or significant moments experienced by parents in their parenting journey. The responses reflected the diverse and multi-dimensional nature of the parenting experience. Memorable moments ranged from the joyous and celebratory, such as births and early milestones, to the challenges and personal growth that come with raising children. Each moment mentioned holds a unique significance for the parent, contributing to their evolving identity as caregivers and nurturers. These moments collectively shape the parent-child relationship and the family's journey through life.

Analysing the responses, several common themes and insights were identified:

- Birth and Early Milestones: Many parents mentioned the birth of their child as a profoundly memorable moment. This is often followed by a series of "firsts" in their child's life, such as the first word, first steps, and first smiles. These milestones mark important developmental stages and create lasting memories for parents.
- Parenting Challenges: Some responses highlight the significance of overcoming parenting challenges. One parent mention establishing a stable routine for their five children despite facing difficult circumstances. This accomplishment was seen as a

pivotal moment in their parenting journey, emphasizing the importance of resilience and adaptability.

- **School Milestones:** Several responses mention significant moments related to their child's education, such as the child's first day of school or achieving milestones in their academic journey. These moments often symbolize a transition from infancy to childhood and are significant for both parents and children.
- **Adolescence and Personal Growth:** Parenting isn't confined to the early years; it extends into adolescence and beyond. Some parents highlight the significance of seeing their children grow into unique personalities during their teenage years. This transition is a crucial part of the parenting journey and carries its own set of challenges and rewards.
- **Parenting Identity:** One response touches upon the moment of becoming a parent itself. It represents a profound shift in one's identity and perspective. This parent emphasizes the importance of understanding the child, which can be a transformative experience that sets them apart from societal norms.

The responses reflected the diverse and multi-dimensional nature of the parenting experience. Memorable moments ranged from the joyous and celebratory, such as births and early milestones, to the challenges and personal growth that come with raising children. Each moment mentioned holds a unique significance for the parent, contributing to their evolving identity as caregivers and nurturers. These moments collectively shaped the parent-child relationship and the family's journey through life.

Further, parents continued with discussing the greatest struggles and most challenging moments experienced in their parenting journey. The responses reflected the diverse and often demanding nature of the parenting experience. These challenges encompass physical, emotional, and practical aspects of raising children. While there are undoubtedly difficulties, many parents also expressed a sense of resilience and determination in navigating these challenges, driven by their love and commitment to their children.

Analysing the responses, several common themes and insights could be identified as follows:

- **Sleep Deprivation and Stress:** Many parents mention the exhaustion and frustration caused by sleep deprivation as a significant challenge. This can lead to stress and difficulties in managing daily life.

- Self-Doubt and New Parenthood: Some parents express self-doubt, especially after the birth of their first child. They question whether they are good parents and whether they are doing things correctly.
- Balancing Multiple Roles: Balancing personal life, professional life, relationships, and the demands of parenting is a recurring theme. Reorganizing daily routines to accommodate these different aspects of life can be challenging.
- Health Issues: Dealing with the health problems of their children is another significant challenge mentioned by parents. This includes both minor health issues and more serious medical conditions.
- Employment and Parenting: One parent highlights the struggle of managing daily stress while being unemployed and providing emotional support and attention to their children. Finding employment while being a caregiver can be emotionally taxing.
- Autonomy and Peer Rejection: Several parents mention the difficulty of teaching their children independence and coping with situations where their children experience rejection from peers.
- Safety and Security: Ensuring the safety and security of their children is a fundamental concern for parents. This includes issues related to sleep, child development, and dealing with potentially overbearing extended family members.

The last responses shed light on what parents find most valuable in a parenting support program. A summary of the key elements that parents believe would be the most useful in a parenting programme include the following elements :

- Tips for Simplifying Daily Tasks: Many parents appreciate practical advice that can simplify the challenges of day-to-day parenting, making life more manageable.
- Psychological Support, Especially After Birth: Psychological support, especially for mothers following childbirth, is considered vital. The emotional and psychological well-being of parents is a significant concern.
- Sharing Experiences and Feeling Understood: Parents find value in hearing from other parents, sharing experiences, and knowing that they are being heard and understood. Testimonials and peer support can foster a sense of community.

- Conflict and Crisis Management: Parents seek guidance on how to manage and navigate conflicts and crises within their families. This includes strategies for dealing with challenging behaviours and emotional outbursts.
- Emotional and Psychological Support: Emotional and psychological support is a recurring theme. Parents value resources to manage stress, find employment, and learn organizational strategies for handling large families.
- Listening and Counselling: Active listening and counselling services are seen as fundamental in helping parents address their emotional and psychological needs.
- Understanding Child Development: Parents express a desire for resources that help them understand child development, including key milestones and how to respond to them. This knowledge aids in effective parenting.
- Promoting Autonomy and Trust in Children: Encouraging children's autonomy and building trust with them is viewed as important for fostering healthy relationships within the family.
- Logistical Support: Some parents, especially those with twins or multiple children, seek more logistical assistance, particularly during the first year of parenthood.
- Access to Professional Advice: Access to professional advice from experts, especially regarding managing issues like anger and sleep, is considered valuable.
- Setting Boundaries and Cultivating Curiosity: Parents would benefit from learning how to set boundaries while also nurturing their children's curiosity.
- Involvement of Qualified and Compassionate Professionals: Many parents stress the importance of having qualified and compassionate professionals involved in the program, particularly those who understand the science behind child development and can provide warm and sustained support.
- Peer Support and Understanding from Others: Parents appreciate the opportunity to connect with other parents who may share similar doubts and challenges. Understanding from others regarding parenting struggles, delays, and organizational difficulties is valuable.

GREECE

Overview of the gaps and needs in parenting programmes – perceived psychological impact.

In Greece most parents mentioned that they had some experience of attending a parenting support programme, but this support proved not to be adequate as it was fragmented, not organised and offered on a voluntary basis. In addition parents pointed out that most parenting programmes are counselling programmes offered in the framework of the municipality, mental health services or provided by the school (school for parents' programme) but on an ad hoc basis (depending on the municipality) and if need arises. The church and some non – governmental organisations provide support and give valuable lessons and tips on how you can raise a child. They were all supportive but not adequate. Parents also indicated the need for the family and school to work closer, collaborate and exchange information in order to contribute to the long-term improvement of the child.

More than that parents shared the opinion that only parents that are really interested in developing a healthy relationship with their child attend education-related programmes. The parents that really need to attend these programmes do not participate. Therefore the parenting programmes shall become compulsory for every parent. In general, families are ignorant or may be burdened with numerous stressors, including resource limitations, which make participation difficult, undermine the use of positive parenting practices, or involvement with child welfare services in the first place.

Another need expressed was that parenting programmes should describe the difficulties of being a parent as before becoming a parent you are aware of the difficulties and no one is warning you for the challenges that you are going to face.

Overall most parents that attended a parenting programme felt that these were beneficial but were offered fragmented and focused on specific thematic. The general feeling was that even though support exists, it is not offered in a holistic way. Some parents also felt lack of empathy and sensitivity from the part of professionals and school teachers and even a sense of disregard and mentioned that in some cases they only point out the negative issues that a child has.

Overview of an ideal parenting programme from the parents' perspective

Overall, an ideal parenting programme should include information that is universal and not targeted only to specific cases (mainly children with difficulties) and contain case studies/ experiential learning. Parents from Greece also pointed out that empathy and trust are also really important points in the parenting programmes and sometimes are missing. In this direction, parents consider that experts should also be able to communicate clearly,

sensitively in ways which are engaging and motivating. In addition, connecting parents with the school will help to reassure families and build genuine partnerships.

Proposed modules included:

- Developmental stages and milestones
- How parents react according to each developmental stage (parental styles)
- Setting the boundaries/ Boundaries dynamics
- Tech- social media administration / break screen addiction challenge
- Interaction with other children at school
- Administration of stress for school achievements
- Sexuality education and parenting
- Couple administration: Helping couples avoid conflict and co-parent positively together.
- Bringing up confident children – building trust between parent and child
- How to manage children's emotions. (Soft skills development)
- How to raise multiple children and how to raise lonely children

Analysis of the Focus Groups Findings in Greece

Context

European Knowledge Spot held an online focus group with parents having children aged 0-12 on Friday 2 June 2023. In order to gather participants, an invitation has been created and published referring to the group discussion that would be held in the framework of the qualitative research of the Erasmus+ European Programme entitled: "Smart" Parenting : Developing Integrative on-line Parenting Courses: strategies for Raising Children Affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences Smart Parenting. The invitation mentioned that the content of the discussion would be about exploring parents' views and expectations around parenting support and empowerment programmes, as well as looking for the most appropriate and effective interventions aimed at improving the parent-child relationship. The invitation had also been made public through EKS Facebook page (see Annex 2). In total fifteen (15) parents participated in the focus group.

As regards the gender equality issue, from the fifteen (15) parents all were women except one (1) man. The focus group had been moderated by Ms. Olga Zouzoula psychologist and family therapist and facilitated by Ms. Regina Kalodiki, Project Manager of EKS. The duration was 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Content of the focus group

The focus group in Greece began by asking parents if they were supported in their parenting role by national organizations, services, or programs and if they found this support helpful for raising their children.

With regard to the first question, most parents answered that they had some experience of attending a parenting support programme, but this support had proved inadequate as it is fragmented, not organised and not compulsory for every parent. In this respect one parent mentioned that: "Structures for parents are very scarce. There are mental health centers where sporadically a professional can see parents and cover some cases and there are also parenting schools from time to time. In all the movements of this kind I have been involved in, unfortunately we are the ones who are frustrated because - it may sound a bit harsh - it is us who want to work on some things to actually adapt to the environment that has been created which is not good .. We are trying to adapt our children to the new reality which is not good. Everyday life is not good. All I see is that I'm trying to adapt myself to all that is happening with the internet, with social media, with the way we interact, I think it's a bit frustrating". Another parent mentioned that: Before I became a mother, I searched to find if there was a structure to learn some things because I had a lot of worries about being a parent, and looking around I saw that there were some programs organised *in the framework of the municipalities addressed to parents especially counselling, but due to the crisis (Covid19) they were stopped and in the end I didn't find anything. In my opinion parental programmes are very useful especially in the beginning and before becoming a parent as at that time everything is unknown.* Another parent mentioned that: "*In kindergarten and primary school there is a counsellor who can support a parent but this is individual and the support is not provided on a regular basis. The regular support would be more helpful for us. At the nursery school where I asked for advice I saw a counsellor only two times in the whole year. To do a proper job, the support needs to be more frequent. on a more regular basis.*" Further, a parent expressed the need for parental programmes to be somehow compulsory for all parents: In particular the parent affirmed that: "The municipality organizes trainings for parents. Also the Municipality has a social service where there is counselling for parents. The issue with parenting schools is that parents who are interested go and not parents who need it. In addition, there needs to be a programme that applies to all parents... not just parents who have an issue with a child.... becoming a parent is a very important thing and crucial. There should be support and training for everyone because when you become a parent you don't expect all that's coming, you have no idea about all that's going to follow. Work, home, homework... it's all this huge volume... And so there should be something for all parents. Example when no boundaries are set, it gets out of hand... especially after the Covid19 many issues arose."

With regard to the need of making parenting programmes compulsory another parent mentioned: *It is important to make something mandatory, because even if the municipalities or schools do something, parents are not interested. There is indifference. If the parent is overwhelmed by their problems whether they are said to be social or financial they will not be involved.*

With regard to the parenting support from various institutions, a parent mentioned that: The church was very supportive and helped me where needed in parenting and in helping the child to fit in with the family environment. "When we went to school, I had cooperation with school psychologists. The parents' association did some training, but very targeted topics. When there is a very serious problem, non-profit organizations can help you, but you need a lot of documentation to subscribe in these programmes"

Concerning the school support a parent mentioned that: I feel that teachers only approach me when there is a problem. But I would like the information to be more general and more organised than just being told to be careful about this and that. There shouldn't be this 'random' i.e. The teacher saw a mum and remembered something I wanted to tell her. All these are just comments, which are usually stressful, don't give a complete picture and don't make me feel like I'm in a partnership with them (the school).

With regard to the second question and the impact the parenting programmes had on parents one parent mentioned that: *I received group counselling from a psychologist at the child's daycare center, once a month. Some questions were answered, some were not. What I felt was lacking was empathy from this particular psychologist, which did not make me trust her and did not help me. I was helped more by the mothers around me, who were trying to find solutions, than by this particular psychologist. She spoke a strict language. I felt like she didn't support me, like she was telling everyone the same thing. Another one pointed out that: I had a tragic collaboration with a psychologist at school. She was trying to convince me that I was raising a criminal. We both went as parents and what we encountered was a disregard towards us and no attempt at solving what they raised as a problem. Lastly, one parent affirmed that: The relationship with the psychologist is difficult you can't fit in with everyone and it would be good to have options, there should not be only one psychologist in each school. We should be able to go outside the school. Also what I see in primary school is that teachers e.g. gymnasts could see the concepts of teamwork and cooperation, of how the child manages such situations they make the lessons assertive. And when you ask them about these things you see that they don't engage. So I think that school psychologists should be the umbrella. And the parents yes we are there but we also want a total picture coming from the school.*

Parents had also several ideas and requests regarding their expectations of parenting programmes. In this direction one parent highlighted the need for a parenting programme to comprise practical exercises and regular feedback. Experiential learning would be really beneficial. The parent mentioned that: *In a parenting school it would be nice if we were given something like a project, a practical exercise. We are talking for example about boundaries. So in two weeks when we meet again tell us if you set boundaries, how you managed them. So there should be feedback. Because when you hear something afterwards you need time to process it. The way we learn should be experiential. Another parent noted that: The best is the experiential seminar. E.g. every two weeks to have feedback. The psychologist should show us a topic and say that we should apply it and in the next meeting we should analyse it and see what we do well and what we don't do well. In theory it's all good but in practice things are difficult.*

The parents also mentioned various topics that an ideal parenting programme should comprise. One parent mentioned: The topics may include how we manage boundaries , how we manage the mobile phone/tablets issue, children's relationship with their friends, anxiety about school performance. I think it is very useful to start with a more general framework to learn general principles of how children work. Basic Principles of Development. I have a gap in that. To better understand how a child works so that I can then understand and manage the whole thing better.

Sexual education was also a subject to be considered: “Children have a lot of information from the internet and do not know how to manage it. They also have information about sex from a very young age and we don't know how to manage it School doesn't touch the issue while it exists. But the internet doesn't show them the emotional aspect. Emotional education is very important. In how to tell children to express themselves

The issue of parents as partners was also mentioned: *“The topic of parent and partner study is very important. If there is no common line and common course in the couple it becomes a mess. If one is tough and the other is weak the children go to the weak one and then the issue in the couple starts... the children come only to you because you invalidate me”.* Another parent also mentioned that: *“The different approach of the parents is an issue that troubles me. When we don't agree, what happens? There has to be a common line but it is not possible to always agree. “When there is a dead end there is logically that there should be some advice that can be given”.* A parent also mentioned that : *I would like to add the issue of grandma and grandpa because mum works so the children spend a lot of time with the grandparents. So we need to learn how to handle the issue when the children stay with third parties.*

The issue of self-esteem, enhancement, self-confidence for the child was also a thematic mentioned: *“My son at primary school hangs out with the bad kids, so it influences him and he has adopted some bad behaviours too. A theme for socialization, or what a child looks for in his friends. I experience great anxiety and insecurity about what kind of child I have, what kind of child I am raising, I don't know where I am going wrong, how to talk to him. Should I tell him not to hang out with this kid? This is also affecting my relationship with the child; I don't know how to react”.*

SPAIN

Overview of the gaps and needs in parenting programmes – perceived psychological impact.

From the Spanish focus group the feeling that one can extract from the parents' answers is that overall parenting programmes had a positive influence on improving behavioural and psychological outcomes for parents and children including child behaviour, parent–child interaction and knowledge, and maternal self-esteem and stress. In particular one parent shared that during the participation in programme she felt supported and empowered and was able to find one that aligns with her values and meets her child's needs. The parent also received guidance on the enrolment process, financial assistance options, and the necessary documentation. her interaction with the program, the mother felt a sense of inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and genuine care for her and her child's well-being. The staff member followed up with her periodically, offering additional support and answering any further questions she may have. As a result the parent not only gained valuable information and practical assistance in raising her child but also felt a sense of belonging and connectedness within her new community. She became more confident in her parenting decisions, had access to support networks, and was equipped with the knowledge needed to navigate the Catalan system effectively.

Another parent pointed out that he learned effective strategies for communication, setting boundaries, and understanding the emotional needs of teenagers. He gained valuable insights and tools that helped him navigate the specific challenges he was facing with his daughter. The program also provided additional resources, such as recommended books, online materials, and contacts for professional support if needed. Overall the parent felt more equipped and confident in his parenting skills, the father witnessed positive changes in his relationship with his daughter. He noticed improved communication, better understanding, and a more harmonious atmosphere at home. A third participants had a really positive experience with a parenting program that focused on the importance of parental self-care.

Through this programme, the parent gained confidence in parenting abilities and feels more prepared to handle the challenges of early parenthood.

Overview of an ideal parenting programme from the parents' perspective

When discussing their wishes and expectations for parenting programmes, parents pointed out that they would need the provision of individualised support which they see as a crucial issue to address their diverse needs. They proposed that this can be done through one-on-one consultations with professionals who offer personalized guidance and advice tailored to the specific concerns and circumstances of each parent. They also mentioned that the program should ensure that resources and materials are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and available in multiple languages. A valuable program should also offer ongoing support beyond initial workshops or consultations. This can include periodic check-ins, follow-up sessions, or access to a helpline or online support platform. Peer support and networking, emotional and mental health support, Positive Discipline Techniques, Effective Communication, Child Development, Self-Care for Parents, Stress Management were also subjects that parent discussed as important to be included in an ideal parenting programme.

Analysis of the Focus Groups Findings in Spain

Context

Spain organised an online focus group with parents on 26th of May 2023. 10 participants took part in the focus group discussion .

Content of the focus group

With regard to the programmes/organisations/institutions that facilitated parents in the parenting role Spanish participants mentioned as most important the following

- Generalitat de Catalunya- the government of Catalonia region, Spain, offers various resources for parents. They provide information on education, health, child protection, and social services. Their website (<http://web.gencat.cat/en/inici/index.html>) is a valuable source of information for parents.
- Catalonia Family Support Program (Programa d'Atenció a les Famílies): This program aims to support families in various aspects of child development. It offers counselling, guidance, and resources for parents to promote healthy child-rearing practices. The

program focuses on early childhood and provides services such as parenting workshops, educational materials, and support groups.

- CatalunyaCaixa Social Foundation (Fundació CatalunyaCaixa): supports various initiatives for families in Catalonia. They offer programs focused on child welfare, education, and social inclusion. These programs include financial assistance for families in need, scholarships, and projects aimed at promoting social integration and equal opportunities for children.
- Early Childhood Education Centers (Escoles Bressol): Catalonia region from Spain has a well-developed network of Escoles Bressol, or early childhood education centers. These centers provide care and education for children from 0 to 3 years old. They often offer flexible schedules, age-appropriate activities, and trained professionals to support children's development and help parents in their childcare responsibilities.
- Parent Associations (Associacions de Mares i Pares d'Alumnes): Parent associations are present in many schools throughout the region addressed (Catalonia). These associations bring together parents and guardians to collaborate with the school community and support their children's education. They organize activities, workshops, and initiatives that foster parental involvement in schools and create a sense of community among parents.
- Childcare Vouchers (Xecs Serveis): The Catalan government provides childcare vouchers to eligible families, which can be used to access childcare services. These vouchers help parents cover the costs of childcare and support them in balancing work and family responsibilities.

Some participants mentioned they use the resources daily (the one with children in Early Childhood Education Centers -Escoles Bressol) and other mentioned that at least monthly (by workshops, activities, trainings, etc.)

Referring to the second question which was intended to extract the self-referred impressions that participants experienced from any service in their community parents mentioned the following cases.

Story 1:

One mother from the group (an immigrant) mentioned she has recently moved to Catalonia with her young child. The mother was unfamiliar with the local resources and is feeling overwhelmed with the challenges of adapting to a new environment while also providing the best care for her child. She decided to reach out to a local support program specifically designed for immigrant families.

The mother contacted the program and is greeted by a friendly and knowledgeable staff member who speaks her native language or provides translation assistance. The staff member took the time to understand the mother's concerns, needs, and cultural background, ensuring she feels heard and respected.

The program offered a range of services tailored to meet the unique needs of immigrant families, including language support, cultural integration assistance, and guidance on accessing social services. The staff member explained these services to the mother and helps her navigate the available resources.

The mother was particularly interested in enrolling her child in a suitable early childhood education center to support their development and social integration. The program staff member provided her with a list of recommended Escoles Bressol (early childhood education centers) in the area, explaining their features, quality standards, and availability. They also offered assistance in contacting the centers and arranging visits.

Feeling supported and empowered, the mother visited several Escoles Bressol and was able to find one that aligns with her values and meets her child's needs. She received guidance on the enrollment process, financial assistance options, and the necessary documentation.

Throughout her interaction with the program, the mother felt a sense of inclusion, cultural sensitivity, and genuine care for her and her child's well-being. The staff member followed up with her periodically, offering additional support and answering any further questions she may have.

As a result of this positive experience, the mother not only gained valuable information and practical assistance in raising her child but also felt a sense of belonging and connectedness within her new community. She became more confident in her parenting decisions, had access to support networks, and was equipped with the knowledge needed to navigate the Catalan system effectively.

This positive experience highlights the importance of tailored programs, culturally sensitive staff, and comprehensive support services in ensuring that parents, particularly those facing unique challenges, feel empowered and encouraged in their parenting journey.

Story 2:

Another example from the group participants was of a single father living in a small town in Catalonia (La Garriga), with his teenage daughter. The father was facing some difficulties in managing his daughter's behavioral challenges and is seeking guidance and support.

The father learned about a local parenting program that focuses on adolescent development and offers workshops and support groups for parents facing similar issues. Intrigued, he decided to attend one of their workshops.

At the workshop, the father was warmly welcomed by the program facilitator and other parents who share their experiences and challenges in raising teenagers. The facilitator created a safe and non-judgmental space where participants could freely express their concerns.

During the workshop, the father learned effective strategies for communication, setting boundaries, and understanding the emotional needs of teenagers. He gained valuable insights and tools that helped him navigate the specific challenges he was facing with his daughter.

The program also provided additional resources, such as recommended books, online materials, and contacts for professional support if needed. The father felt supported and encouraged, knowing that he has access to ongoing assistance beyond the workshop.

As the program progresses, the father attended support group sessions where he could share his progress, discuss challenges, and receive guidance from both the facilitator and fellow parents. These sessions offered a sense of community and mutual support among participants.

The father's positive experience extended beyond the workshop itself. The program staff continues to offer follow-up support, reaching out to participants individually to provide personalized advice or connect them with relevant community resources.

Feeling more equipped and confident in his parenting skills, the father witnessed positive changes in his relationship with his daughter. He noticed improved communication, better understanding, and a more harmonious atmosphere at home.

This experience highlights the importance of targeted programs that address specific parenting challenges, provide a supportive environment, and offer practical tools and resources. By engaging in such a program, parents can find solace, guidance, and renewed confidence, ultimately enhancing their relationships with their children and creating a positive family environment.

Story 3:

Another participant, , was a first-time mother living in Barcelona. She had a newborn baby and was navigating the challenges of early parenthood. Sofia seeks support from a local postnatal support program that focuses on the well-being of both parents and infants.

The parent reached out to the program and was warmly welcomed by a dedicated team of professionals. They understood the physical, emotional, and practical adjustments new parents face and provide a holistic approach to support.

As part of the program, the parent attended a series of workshops and classes designed to educate and empower parents during the postnatal period. These sessions covered various topics such as infant care, breastfeeding support, self-care for parents, and strategies for promoting infant development.

In the infant care workshop, the parent learns about newborn feeding, sleep patterns, diapering, and soothing techniques. The knowledgeable facilitator provided evidence-based information and practical demonstrations, addressing parents' concerns and answering her questions.

The breastfeeding support class offered a nurturing environment where she could seek guidance from lactation consultants. They provide personalized advice, troubleshoot any challenges she might be facing, and offer tips for successful breastfeeding.

Additionally, the program emphasized the importance of parental self-care. The parent attended a self-care workshop and learnt about the significance of prioritizing her own well-being, managing stress, and seeking support when needed. She connected with other parents in similar situations and forms a supportive network.

To further enhance the experience, the program offered additional resources such as online forums, a dedicated helpline, and a library of books and articles related to parenting and child development. Laura felt supported beyond the workshop sessions, knowing that assistance was just a phone call away.

As a result of her positive experience with the program, the parent gained confidence in her parenting abilities and feels more prepared to handle the challenges of early parenthood. She developed a strong bond with her baby and felt supported in her journey through the postnatal period.

Regarding the closing question of the focus group participants that have not attended a parenting support programme mentioned they find ideal to have in parenting programs the following elements:

- **Parent Education and Workshops:** The program should offer a range of educational workshops and classes that cover various aspects of parenting, child development, and family well-being.
- **Individualized Support:** Providing individualized support is crucial to address the diverse needs of parents. This can be done through one-on-one consultations with professionals who offer personalized guidance and advice tailored to the specific concerns and circumstances of each parent.
- **Peer Support and Networking:** Creating opportunities for parents to connect with and learn from each other is highly valuable. This can be achieved through support groups, parent networks, or online forums where parents can share experiences, exchange advice, and provide mutual support. Facilitated group sessions can also foster a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation.
- **Parent-Child Interaction Programs:** Incorporating programs that focus on parent-child interactions is important for strengthening the parent-child bond and promoting positive parent-child relationships. These programs can offer guidance on age-appropriate activities, play-based learning, and promoting healthy attachment.
- **Accessible and Culturally Sensitive Resources:** The program should ensure that resources and materials are easily accessible, culturally sensitive, and available in multiple languages. This ensures that all parents, regardless of their background or language proficiency, can benefit from the program's offerings.
- **Emotional and Mental Health Support:** Recognizing the emotional well-being of parents is crucial. The program should provide resources and referrals for mental health support, counseling services, and stress management techniques. This can help parents navigate the emotional challenges that come with parenting and ensure their overall well-being.
- **Collaboration with Community Partners:** Partnering with other organizations, such as healthcare providers, schools, and community centers, can enhance the program's effectiveness. Collaborations can allow for a coordinated approach to supporting parents, sharing resources, and expanding the reach of services.
- **Ongoing Support and Follow-Up:** A valuable program should offer ongoing support beyond initial workshops or consultations. This can include periodic check-ins, follow-up sessions, or access to a helpline or online support platform. Continuous engagement and availability of resources ensure that parents can seek help whenever needed.
- The participants mentioned the range of knowledge and skills that would be beneficial in their parenting journey should be in the areas of:

- **Child Development:** Learning about the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional milestones in different age groups helps parents set realistic expectations and provide appropriate support and stimulation for their children.
- **Positive Discipline Techniques:** This includes learning effective strategies for setting boundaries, promoting cooperation, and teaching problem-solving skills without resorting to punishment or harsh discipline.
- **Effective Communication:** To learn about how to actively listen, express themselves clearly, and engage in open and respectful conversations with their children, promoting understanding and mutual respect.
- **Parent-Child Bonding:** This may involve learning about attachment theory, promoting secure attachment, and engaging in activities that enhance bonding and connection with their children.
- **Self-Care for Parents:** Parents can learn strategies for managing stress, practicing self-care routines, and seeking support when needed. Prioritizing their own well-being allows parents to better meet their children's needs.
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Parents can learn how to identify and manage their own emotions, as well as support their children in understanding and expressing their emotions in healthy ways.
- **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:** This includes learning effective problem-solving strategies, critical thinking, and decision-making techniques to make informed choices for their children.
- **Health and Safety:** Parents can acquire knowledge about child health and safety practices, including basic first aid, childproofing, nutrition, sleep routines, and maintaining a safe environment.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognizing and respecting cultural diversity is important in a diverse society like Catalonia. Parents can gain awareness and understanding of different cultural backgrounds, enabling them to effectively support their children's cultural identity and foster inclusivity.
- **Stress Management:** Learning stress management techniques equips parents with the tools to handle the inevitable challenges of parenting. This includes relaxation techniques, time management skills, and seeking support from their social network or professional resources when needed.

Slovenia

Overview of the gaps and needs in parenting programmes – perceived psychological impact.

When talking about parenting in general, parents from Slovenia mostly drew on their personal experiences. In general, they said the following about parenting:

- They believe that the starting point for any parent's parenting is his or her primary family and personal experiences.
- They note that the intergenerational transmission of parenting patterns within the family is still very much present.
- More and more parents consider themselves experts in parenting and are not prepared to listen to the advice of others.
- Some have pointed out the negative consequences of permissive parenting and the consequences that are now being felt by society as a whole.
- They believe that the importance of parental or maternal instinct should be emphasised and given priority over theories.
- When it comes to parenting, they feel that they have learned the most from their experiences and by expanding their knowledge.
- They have benefited from advice from family and friends.

They also mentioned that parenthood main challenges are: feeling lonely, other people's patronising, too much information and advice, different information, feeling that they are bad parents.

As 6 mothers who work as teachers or workers in educational institutions coincidentally participated in the focus group, an additional topic was the debate on what they notice in their work in schools in relation to parenting. The first thing they mentioned was that they see the consequences of unhealthy educational patterns on a daily basis and that there are more and more cases of divorce, reorganised families and various forms of domestic violence

With regard to parenting programmes most of parents found the programmes useful but felt that there are too few or not enough of these programmes in their environment. Some also found the programmes too short and too general and others mentioned that there are programmes that only given strict parenting instructions (patronising programmes). They also feel they are not personal enough, as they are attended by a large number of people and there is rarely time for individual approach. In addition they pointed out that enrolment

requires time and consistency on the part of the parent and that the Interest in participating depends primarily on the individual.

Positive experiences with these programmes or other activities included:

- Simple explanations with humour.
- The calming effect of emphasising the positive qualities of pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood.
- Illustrative explanations and demonstrations, not just lectures.

The main negative experience was that too much information is provided to parents-to-be. Some are in a dilemma about attending the programmes, as they feel that a person can quickly become overwhelmed by the amount of information and advice. Some have also had the experience of receiving completely different information in different programmes, which has further confused them

Overview of an ideal parenting programme from the parents' perspective

Overall parents agreed that parenting programmes should start earlier, in the form of youth workshops.

When discussing their wishes and expectations for parenting programmes, they pointed out the following issues

- Intergenerational activities
- Exchange of experiences between parents
- Youth workshops
- Obligation to participate in at least basic parenting content
- Opportunity for parents to socialise
- Individual approach
- Youth Centres
- Objectivity of lecturers/programme leaders and professionalism
- More information about the birth itself and what happens after the birth
- More programmes for parents of a newborn
- Relief
- Educational and useful content
- Practical examples
- Lecturers with personal experience
- Diverse content

- Organised childcare during the programmes
- Participation should be voluntary as not all parents feel the need to participate in such programmes.

They also suggested specific topics they would like to learn more about or find useful for all parents-to-be and young parents:

- The basics of childcare
 - Hygiene
 - Handling the baby
 - Paying attention to your baby
 - Childhood illnesses
 - Breastfeeding
- Parenting
 - Teaching respect
 - Teaching good relationships
 - Comparing parenting then and now
- Development
 - Motor development
 - Emotional development
 - Social development
 - The importance of reading to your child
- Parental responsibilities and selfcare
 - Preparing for kindergarten
 - Sleepless nights
 - Submitting parenting-related applications
 - Importance of self-reflection for parents

Analysis of the Focus Groups Findings in Slovenia

Context

The focus group with parents was held on 20.6.2023 again in the premises of the Perec Family Centre, i.e. in person. Parents were invited via our organisation's social networks, as well as via email and personal contacts with parents with whom we had previously worked. To facilitate the collaboration, we also organised childcare during the focus group with the help of volunteers from the family centre. The focus group lasted about 80 minutes and was attended by 9 parents or parents-to-be. The focus group with parents was conducted by the same two workers as the focus group for experts. Again, the questions were projected on TV using a PPT presentation and the discussion was facilitated by one of the workers while the

other took notes of the answers. To facilitate analysis, the conversation was recorded by telephone with the consent of the parents. 9 parents participated in the focus group, all females. 5 of them have one child, 2 have 2 children, one has 3 children and one will become a mother for the first time this year. As a side note, out of the 9 mothers, 6 are employed in education and 2 are unemployed.

Content of the focus group

The conversation started about education in general. The mothers stressed that they rely most on their maternal instinct and on the advice of those closest to them, especially their family, for parenting. Some felt that it is the maternal instinct that is often overlooked and neglected, as they are overwhelmed by the advice of others and various theories when they should be listening to themselves. Those who have several children pointed out that all parenting skills are built on and improved with each child, and therefore they find experiential learning the best: "...I draw on the knowledge I got with my first child and from family members". They agreed that the primary family is of paramount importance in parenting and that there is still a strong intergenerational transmission of parenting patterns within the family in our society: "most people seem to be raising their children the way they were brought up" . They also found the exchange of experiences to be an excellent way of transferring knowledge between parents, as well as an opportunity to relieve pressure and socialise. At the same time, they agree that it is sometimes difficult to talk to other parents about parenting, as some consider themselves to be perfect parents and don't even want to hear a different opinion or advice: "I think that nowadays everyone is too smart, everyone knows best..."Some of them also pointed out the confusion in deciding on a parenting style, as there are so many theories at once, and for each of them, there are both negative and positive opinions, which only makes parenting decisions more difficult: "There's a lot of this permissive parenting stuff now, which has proved to be ineffective... I think it's such a time now that these young parents see that it's not the best, except for those who are already a product of permissive parenting, and there's such a division between that now... " Thus, the overall conclusion was that what was most needed in the parenting programmes was breadth, and then through individual sessions where parents could decide which style suited them best.

For the first question, all mothers had experience with at least one parenting preparation programme. In general, the most visited programmes were those that are part of our health service and run by the local health centre. The Parents' School was the most popular. In general, they found it helpful and liked the fact that their partners could also attend. Among the topics covered by the Parent School, they pointed out that it had prepared them well for

pregnancy and childbirth and that they found the information useful, concrete and relevant. They also liked the fact that, in addition to pregnancy, the preparation for conception and the care of the baby after birth were also mentioned. However, they see some room for improvement in the Parents' School programme, especially in introducing a more individual approach and more interactive content, where parents would also have the opportunity to share, ask questions, etc. They also feel that the programme could be longer, as a week of preparation is not enough for some. All the mothers also had a very positive experience with regular check-ups during pregnancy with their personal gynaecologist: "I found the health centre or the regular gynaecologist very helpful. I went for regular check-ups during my pregnancy and used the service every month, even several times if necessary". They also felt that they received a lot of useful advice and information here, but most of all they liked the safe environment and the individual approach: "I have had a very good experience with the gynaecologist's advice, especially during pregnancy" When it came to caring for the baby after birth, they also mostly all had a good experience with the midwives, who visited them at home after the birth, and taught them the basics of hygiene and caring for the newborn. In addition, they also received a lot of useful information for taking care of their baby's health in the consultation room (i.e. paediatrician): "Good experience with the consultation room, especially with suggestions on how to care for the baby".

It is important to stress that all these activities are available to all parents-to-be and young parents within our health system. Other activities, resources and programmes were mainly self-initiated. In addition to the Parent School, most of them read some professional literature or attended webinars or lectures by various experts. Among the professional literature, they highlighted the book *What to expect when you are expecting*, and among the experts, mainly foreign and some national authors in the field of education, development and parenting; Panny néni, Dr Ranko Rajović, Jani Prgič and Mark Juhart. On the topics that were of particular interest to them, they highlighted in particular newborn care, hygiene and motor development. Most mothers also cited the internet as a source of additional information, where they read expert articles and participate in various social networking groups or parenting forums. They find the web to be an excellent source of quick and up-to-date information, especially when they encounter new and unpredictable situations (e.g. illness of a child) or want to know about certain products for the baby. One also pointed out that she had attended additional lectures on parenting topics online. However, they also acknowledged that additional education on these topics requires time and perseverance from parents: "The education of Mrs Kulcsár Mihályné or Panny Nényi, who is a movement therapist. She demonstrates and explains very clearly how to notice and correct a problem in a child. It is true, however, that these types of therapy require a lot of time and consistency from the parent."

Some mothers also highlighted the educational institutions their children attend as a positive experience. In particular, the school was mentioned in terms of the added content on parenting education offered by their programme, while in relation to the kindergarten, the good and professional attitude of the workers was particularly highlighted: "We have a good experience with the kindergarten because the teachers were very professional, always ready to talk" and another mum: "It is so nice for me when I bring my son to the kindergarten and they give him a hug every morning"

Other activities that helped them in their parenting were various sporting activities during pregnancy or after birth, where they had the opportunity to meet other mothers and exchange information and experiences in a spontaneous, informal way. They find such groups much more effective for the postnatal period in general, as knowledge is passed on in a relaxed and unpressured way, and they see such activities as a release of pressure and an opportunity to socialise. They like being able to attend such programmes together with their children. Parents' groups also seem to be a great way to overcome the feeling of loneliness that first-time parents face: "...I would like to see a programme where we meet together with the children and exchange experiences and opinions. Because sometimes we think we are alone in this, and we feel lonely".

Regarding the wide range of programmes for expectant and new parents, some mothers also pointed out that it is necessary to be careful and to choose only a few sources of information, otherwise, it can quickly lead to overload and mixed information: "Because this is also a problem, especially for those who have several children, in the hospital they give you one set of instructions and guidelines, and then a couple of years later they give you a completely different set of instructions. And then everybody's giving you a lot of advice, and when you have a baby, you have to find one way to filter all these comments very much, because after all, the mother always knows best".

However, mothers agreed that these programmes can be very useful, especially in the preparation for their first child, as this is when they felt the most anxiety and a sense of need for such programmes. However, they said that parents quickly resented the programmes if the approach of the lecturers was too patronising and commanding, as such 'wisecracks' only added to the difficulties they were already experiencing in parenting and making parenting decisions: "Because if you tell someone they have to bring up their child that way, then there can be resistance". In this regard, some mentioned that they sometimes feel that programmes do not focus enough on topics such as listening to the maternal instinct or learning from experience, which they consider to be much more useful for parenting than

theories and advice from others. Thus, they much prefer programmes based on humour, a positive approach and generally more experiential and interactive learning.

Mothers had several ideas and requests regarding their expectations of parenting programmes. The main ones were the wish to emphasise the exchange of experiences between parents and the possibility of an individual approach for counselling and discussions: "Probably the most practical are the workshops where parents can get together and exchange many different opinions because every child is different." It means a lot to them if there is childcare organised during the activity for parents or if the activity itself is organised in an intergenerational way: "Probably after the birth itself, some workshops where parents and children can get together and share their own experiences would be helpful." They also see the value in involving older people in such activities, as it would allow them to compare experiences of parenting over several generations. They would also like to see more emphasis on topics relating to childbirth in general, and also to the time after childbirth, because, according to the mothers, they learn a lot about pregnancy, but this time is also much shorter compared to the care that follows. Otherwise, they mainly want these programmes to be organised in a relaxed atmosphere, where parents can unwind and relax, rather than as strict lectures or giving direct advice. Some of them even thought that the local environment needs as many centres as possible, where parents and others (young people, children, etc.) can meet and exchange experiences not only on parenting but also on different topics in general. Some of them also agreed that family and relationship topics are also suitable for young people, as they, as well as professionals, consider prevention in this area to be very important. However, they also consider it very important that parents themselves are the providers of these programmes, as their personal experience can help to improve the quality of the content of the programme: 'It is desirable that the provider of the programme is also a parent, to be able to advise from experience' (P8-Q3f) (P8-Q3f) A few mothers also said that they do not attend such programmes because they do not feel the need to do so.

The focus group participants also listed some of the topics and skills they consider essential for young parents. The most relevant was newborn care, which includes handling, hygiene, breastfeeding, paying attention to the baby and childhood illnesses. They also consider it important to put much more emphasis on the upbringing itself and on the relationships within the family: "In the programmes, yes, parents should learn how to pay attention to the child, teach them respect and good relationships". About parenting, they also think it is important to learn more about child development itself and how they can strengthen and guide it as parents: "Young parents should be made aware of the importance of reading at an early age, the importance of exercise for children, free play because I believe that all of this

has a positive impact on child development. " Democratic parenting, which is now mentioned as a solution to the problems of permissive parenting, was also mentioned as a new thing, but they agreed that they did not know enough about it: " True, but now I have heard about a new thing, which is democratic parenting. I don't know what that means yet...I think it is more in the sense that you still bring up according to some principles, values, whatever, and you are just being fair" On development in general, they feel that it is necessary to be aware of the different areas and the role of parents in this: "I think it is essential that everyone knows basic baby handling and the appropriate stimulation for optimal motor, emotional and social development" . As a final topic, they also mentioned situations and challenges that they were not prepared for as parents and would have liked to talk about earlier, such as the stress of sleepless nights for the whole family, getting used to preschool and the different applications they have to make as parents (paternity, social transfers, pre-school applications, etc.): "It would be useful to be prepared for periods of kindergarten, sleepless nights and various illnesses" They also stressed the importance of parents taking care of their own well-being, as they see from their own experience that they pass on their stress and negative emotions to their child. Here they mentioned in particular working on themselves and their well-being and self-reflection.

Cyprus

Overview of the gaps and needs in parenting programmes – perceived psychological impact.

In Cyprus Parents mentioned how the majority of the provided parental training programmes derive from the private sector, thus free national, structured parental support is currently not widely available. However, they mentioned that seminars are organized in some schools, but it depends on the Parents' Association of each school. This suggest that a national guideline for schools in Cyprus is not available, and thus some areas are more affected than others.

Participants also mentioned that stakeholders, such as hospitals, offer training for women during their prenatal period, yet parents concluded that information regarding allowances for the same period is not available. The also argued that there is not widespread information for those rarely available training courses, and they suggested that free national support on parental training is needed.

Overall the feeling extracted from the focus group in Cyprus was that parents lack the needed support and the continuous provision of information , skill building and accessibility to parenting programmes from public social institutions and that there are only sporadically

organised workshops which mainly refer to targeted issues (sexual abuse, bullying, drug abuse).

Overview of an ideal parenting programme from the parents' perspective

A major concern that participants raised, was the need for trainings and “parental education” focused on their “know how”, aiming to give parents the necessary knowledge to be better parents. Some of the topics that participants mentioned as gaps in their knowledge was regarding their behaviour towards their kids, how to interact and have patience, how to set boundaries, how to get familiarised with important developmental milestones, and the impact and consequences from the absence of a parent. Participants also mentioned they need training on the safe use of internet, in order to protect their children. It was also emphasized that parents should get informed about all form of violence, while the majority only knows and identifies physical violence. Finally, an important point that parents mentioned, was the need to connect and interact with the other parents of the community and the schools that their children attended, in order to exchange experiences, feelings, opinions.

Overall articipants summed up the conversation with some statements such us “We need money”, “We need knowledge, support, time” , “We need time to spent with our children”. So, it seems that the needs of the parents, are pretty basic, in order to strengthen their parental role.

Analysis of the Focus Groups Findings in Cyprus

Context

The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family held the focus group with parents on June 7th, 2023 at the Associations' Headquarters, in Nicosia. The participant's group consisted of 4 parents and it was conducted face-to-face. However, it is important to note that the professional background of the participants was relevant while the three out of four of them had a degree in psychology. The focus group consisted of three female and a male participant and three out of four were single parents. The focus group lasted approximately 60 minutes. For the purpose of the analysis, it was agreed that the conversation would be recorded with the participant's permission. Two facilitators participated in the focus group, one was the leader who facilitated the discussion and the other was the researcher who made notes during the discussion.

Content of the focus group

Responding to the first question, participants discussed whether parental support services exist in their community, in what frequency they are used and to which extent they proved to be helpful. The participants firstly suggested that public institutions, providing relevant help are not widely available.

As the conversation went on, P1 mentioned the role of the afternoon childcare services for kindergarten and elementary grade children, which operates during working hours and thus relieves parents while they are still at work. Moreover, the provision of lunch at schools resolves the issue of the time-consuming obligation of cooking. Additional benefits arise from this service, for the child of P1 who is a single-parent. As she mentioned, her son has the opportunity to study his homework during this timeframe and the amount of time required for the parent to check the accomplishment of this task is minimized. Another positive aspect of this supporting program is that it is particularly inexpensive compared to equivalent services of the private sector. In particular, P3, also a single-parent, suggested that “the difference in the cost compared to private services is immense” and P1 provided a more specific information, stating that it costs her 3 times less on a monthly basis when choosing the public service.

Other positive remark was the increase of the income criteria to be eligible for nursery school financial allowance, as well as the lowering of the minimum age for one’s inclusion in the national system’s nursery school, now starting from the age of 3 with the prerequisite that the children do not wear diapers. As P2 suggested, the latter update is very helpful financially as the equivalent of private initiative, applying in her case for her 3-year-old son, is very costly, being a compromising factor for her “to have a second baby”. Nevertheless, participants discussed that there are inconsistencies between communities regarding the admission policy. For example, the diaper rule does not apply, but diaper change while at the nursery school is subject to additional charge of 50 euro in other regions. As per P1 mentions, this relies on the decision-making of each region Welfare Council and not a national phenomenon. Another participant, P4, also single-parent, father to a 8-year-old boy underlined that “in some district the operation of those public institutions are inadequate, due to the limited number of positions available” and remembers that “the costs were exceptionally high for a working individual having children at the age of 3” as the only solution was to attend private pre-school, whereas P3 also a single-parent noted that the costs for her two children were even “higher than the monthly rent itself”. The above mentioned examples point towards services that helps parents in terms of money and time, through the provision of low cost services.

Services provided regarding the perinatal period were also mentioned from participants. One of those services mentioned from P1, is the inclusion of midwives in the National Healthcare System for pregnant women for up to 6 visits within the pregnancy period. Additional financial provisions include the monthly single-parent allowance, which adequacy is commented as “non-negligible” and “an income, although never enough, that is preferably granted, than not at all, and it covers certain expenses for my children”, as well as the annually given parental leave allowance and the child support grant, that someone is “very glad to receive, even once a year, in case one has outstanding debts e.g. afterschool creative childcare fees” especially for a single parent. Other social welfare provisions include child dowry, childbirth and maternity absence leave. However, as P1 said, some of those were not received as she was told that the insurance rank was not sufficient for her to qualify for these provisions during her first pregnancy.

Another publicly-launched activity mentioned is the municipal swimming pool, which enables children to take swimming sessions as a leisure activity, or other dancing or recreational activities taking place at a municipal level for a minimal yearly cost.

Regarding the parental role, a nationally-established workshop program was eventually brought up to the discussion by on parent. This program was powered by the Makario Children Hospital, aimed to reinforce the parental skills and targeted teams of young mothers. As she further elaborated, this is a systemic initiative, which is free of charge and includes communication skills for parents, instrumental teaching for children e.g., tutorials for how to use the toilet and other developmental milestones. Adding to this reference, P1 said that this program also prepares pregnant women for the delivery, as well as, the perinatal care and provides essential information to parents about the vaccination scheme, breastfeeding, etc., which both considered as “really important”. Additionally, a parent declared that such educational demonstrations motivates them “to try to adopt roles as parents and as practise”.

However, it was mutually agreed that the majority of the provided programs regarding the empowerment of parental role derive from the private sector. One participant, mentioned a related program offered by the Fairy-tale Museum in association with the National Drug Enforcement Agency which is accessible free of charge. It aims mainly to educate stakeholders in terms of the parental role, but she supposes that the program also inclines towards the prevention of drug abuse. However, these actions are not widely advertised for the general public to gain awareness, and she mentioned that she encountered this information “by accident”. One Participant also referred to individual initiatives by other professionals such as psychologists, that perform workshops or give informative speeches about children sexual abuse, hosted by the nursery school of her son, that she attended to, but due to her profession (psychologist), the content of the projected information did not

add to her competence as a parent, suggesting however that this might not be the case for the majority of parents. On the contrary, another parent mentioned that at the school of her children, several seminars regarding bullying and drug abuse take place regularly. However, she mentioned that this is more or less affected by the level of organization of the parent association of each school unit, and to which extent it is characterized by a spirit of dissemination of good practice actions. To advance the previous statement, P1 who is also a psychologist, drew from a personal experience, when she was invited by a private nursery school to speak in front of a parent auditorium as part of a seminar, while she mentioned that similar invitations to contribute to seminars have been received by the NGO she works at. These examples hint back at the tendency for such social actions to be constituted mainly as individual, privately-funded initiatives.

On the negative end, a meeting of minds manifested among participants with regard to the lack of targeted information, especially for specific social groups. As one parent characteristically said “there is nobody to inform you, in general about these grants. For example, when you get pregnant, which rights apply, and when you give birth, there is this, that and the other grant that you are entitled to”. “These are posted at the webpage of the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Labour” she continues, but very often it is out of the average citizen’s perceptual scope to be aware of the available provisions. Alternatively, another parent refers to the role of the gynaecologists, the hospitals and medical centres to provide essential orientation to service seekers through informative leaflets or in association with representatives of the corresponding ministry as usually “these sites are the only contact point between woman and the public services”. In addition, another parent added that for foreign citizens the challenges to have access to the same objectives are even more increased as they “have no clue about their rights as citizens and how to act”. In this direction, one participant suggested that continuous provision of information, and accessibility to all parents from public social institutions, such as school units, would be very essential for the education of all involved parties towards healthier parental figures. Whereas another participant, pointed out that conventional means of communication such as letters may be obsolete and “paper can be lost”, and thus updates forms have to be employed such e-mails, social media or SMS updates.

Going on to the second question which was intended to extract the self-referred positive impressions that participants experienced from any service in their community, related to the upbringing of their children, P3 drew from an incident that occurred in the class of her son. In particular, the authority of the school decided to coordinate an intervention plan, named “Friendship cycle”, incorporating a psychologist to conduct sessions with a classmate that featured aggressive behaviour, by acting violently against teachers and other classmates e.g., throwing objects, swearing, moving inside the class during lesson and was

generally unable to control himself. In this case, the son of one participant could help by escorting him to the sessions and give advice to help him acknowledge the misbehaviour and act properly. As she said, the other parents were able to have access to updates about the progress of the whole procedure from the specialist, while she felt proud about her child and the fact that “he reached out to help his friend, made him perceive the seriousness of the situation, that resulted from the issue that took place in the classroom” and strengthened the ability for empathy. However, the process delayed significantly between the time the issue was detected to when the intervention plan was executed and this can divert the responsibility from the surrounding involved parties, the society and the school director/teacher to the child and reinforce the stigma.

Another fortunate outcome derived from her interaction with the local sectors was brought by another participant. As per her narration, the municipal nursery school, that her daughter was attending, established a cooperation with an external speech therapist to provide assessments to children, help treat her child's speech issues and have 30-min personalized sessions within the nursery school normal schedules, twice a week. This combination was a convenient solution and “her daughter was helped a lot. The communication gradually improved between her and the child and the child was able to communicate with its surroundings, as well”. The participant further proposed that speech competence and occupational screening and if needed, specialized interventions would be pivotal for the development of children of this age and should be incorporated in the educational plan of nursery school. In addition, more “simple” lessons, directed by speech therapists should be also included in the curriculum of primary schools, once a week to enhance the identification of potential corresponding deviations. Finally, a downside occurrence was mentioned by P1 which reflected the enormous delay that stakeholders encounter when seeking parental support and other public services, even though these services exist. In particular, following an application for provision of services, an official response accompanied by a rejection was given 2 years later. In the meantime, the participant sought private service to cover her needs.

Lastly, one parent elaborated about his positive appreciation for the contribution of the parent association in his community, as owing to their activity and the organization of several social and entertainment events he observes that his son “feels well about them” and as a consequence, (P4) a parent is glad too. Through these gatherings his child has the ability to “play with other peers and everybody has a good time”, while “it is preferable that the child is also in contact with its nature, instead of being sedentary all day long or be entertained solely by video gaming”.

Regarding the closing question of the focus group, it was focused especially on the parents who have not attended a parenting programme yet. The main purpose of this question was

to explore what the participants would find most helpful in an ideal parenting support program, and what knowledge and skills they would like to acquire from such programs. What all of the participants mentioned as their primary need as parents, was the financial support from the government. While this was a shared opinion, some of the participants associated their need for financial support with their role as single parents, focusing the discussion on the increased needs that single parents have, and the difficulties that they face because of that. Moreover, regarding the financial support, it was suggested that the government needs to take into account the financial status of a family, in order to help them accordingly when it comes to financial support (R4).

Moreover, the main focus of the discussion was the need for “parental education” as the participant R4 mentioned in a general statement. More specifically one of the needs that the participant (R4) wanted to cover through educational program for parents, was the need to learn how to protect a child from the dangers that the internet poses, for instance how to hide inappropriate content from a child. Another participant (R3), mentioned that, from an educational program based on the parental role would like to receive a deeper knowledge on how to behave towards their child, and more specifically how to be understanding and patient when interacting with them. In a similar manner, participant R4 mentioned that a significant knowledge for a parent to have, is the understanding of the non-physical ways a parent can harm and abuse its child, without noticing. This point as the participants said, is based on Cypriots cultural background, and specifically, the fact that Cypriot parents have difficulty recognizing as abusive a non-physical behaviour.

In terms of the “parental education” content, another participant (P1) stated the necessity for trainings focused on the “know how” of the parents. Those “know how” trainings, as the participants mentioned would focus on a variety of topics, that the parents need to educate themselves for, such as, know what gaps may occur from the absence of a parent, and how to fix them, know how to help my child with the school homework. Also, another topic that most of the participants showed interest in, was to know how to set boundaries towards the other important adults in their children’s life, like the grandparents, which especially in Cyprus have a significant role in children’s life. Also, concerning the “know how” seminars, a participant mentioned that it would be helpful if new parents went through those seminars, during the period of pregnancy, so they would be prepared when the child is born.

In addition, one participant stressed the importance of creating free of charge Workshops that would train the parents for the different milestones that a child goes through, such as the beginning of verbal communication, the potty training, and many other important milestones. The same participant added to that idea, that it would be helpful if those Workshops offered a childcare service, for the parents that don’t have someone to take care

of their child. Moreover, another participant mentioned that it would be helpful for their role as parents, if schools created programs and actions led by Professionals, in order to help parents with many important topics, such as “empathy” and “bullying”.

In a similar manner, one participant mentioned that it would be really useful, if every community, created events where parents of the community would meet on a weekly basis, in order to know each other, to exchange experiences, and in general to support each other, because as a participant indicated the most important for a parent is “the sharing with the other mothers of our community”. As they said, getting to know the other parents of the community it would create a feeling of security for the parents, because they would know the background of the kids their children socialize with. In addition to that statement, another participant mentioned that it would be helpful as well, if similar group meetings were organized by the schools so that the parents could get to know each other. In addition, with that, parents also mentioned a significant limitation of our educational system. Specifically, all the participants, seemed to agree that the school needs to focus less on the grades and more on the learning of social skills and major life lessons.

Common themes and concerns across the five countries

Parents' responses across the five countries, reflected the real-world challenges and joys of parenting which were mostly drawn on their personal experiences. In France in particular parental challenges were mentioned to encompass , physical, emotional, and practical aspects of raising children with the most commonly mentioned feature of struggle being that of the balancing of multiple roles and of managing daily stress while being unemployed. Sleep Deprivation and Stress, Health Issues and Autonomy and Peer Rejection were also challenges identified. In Slovenia and France they also pointed out their concern especially after the birth of their first child whether they are ‘good’ parents and if they are doing things correctly.

When it comes to parenting programmes/services that exist in their community most countries reported programmes and support offered by the municipalities, schools, non-profit organisations, the church and the private sector. These mainly include training and education on specific subjects, psychological, health and financial related support as well as guidance for pregnant women. The Slovenian parents specifically mentioned the Parents' School programme that had prepared them well for pregnancy and childbirth and that they found the information useful, concrete and relevant. They also felt that they received a lot of useful advice and information from these programmes but most of all they liked the safe environment and the individual approach. The Spanish parents also mentioned a variety of existing programmes that aim to support families in various aspects of child development,

financial support, social integration, (Catalonia Family Support Program, Catalunya Caixa Social Foundation, Early Childhood Education Centers, Parent Associations,)

Overall, most parents found the programmes attended useful. The Slovenian parents mentioned that positive experiences with these programmes included :Simple explanations with humour; the calming effect of emphasising the positive qualities of pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood, the illustrative explanations and demonstrations, not just lectures. More than that the Spanish parents mentioned that attending a parenting programme made them feel supported and empowered, liked the safe and non-judgmental space where participants could freely express their concerns, learned effective strategies for communication, setting boundaries, and understanding the emotional needs of their children, felt supported and encouraged, knowing that they have access to ongoing assistance beyond the workshop. The offer of additional resources such as online forums, a dedicated helpline, and a library of books and articles related to parenting and child development have also contributed to a positive experience with the program. In that sense parent expressed the feeling that they gained confidence in their parenting abilities and felt more prepared to handle the challenges of early parenthood

However in France, Greece and Cyprus parents mentioned that there is lack of information and advertisement regarding availability of parenting programmes and even if some of the programmes are supportive this support is not adequate as most of these programmes are occasional, and targeted to specific subjects (bullying, drug abuse etc). In the same direction Slovenian parents felt that there are too few or not enough of these programmes in their environment and interest in participating depends primarily on the individual. Some also found the programmes too short and too general and others mentioned that there are programmes that only given strict parenting instructions (patronising programmes) and include too much information. Parents from France also mentioned obstacles to their participation in such programs, due to time constraints, or scepticism about their effectiveness. In Greece some parents had really negative experience from the family experts and pointed out that it is really important for the experts to show more sensitivity and empathy.

The lack of individualized support was also mentioned as a need in the French, Slovenian and Spanish reports as personalised guidance would be crucial to address the diverse needs of parents. This could be achieved through one-on-one consultations with professionals who offer personalized guidance and advice tailored to the specific concerns and circumstances of each parent

When discussing their wishes and expectations for a parenting programme it is evident that all countries had many common topics that they would like to see be included in a parenting programme. The most popular subjects comprise: Communication and active listening; Developmental Stages of a child; Emotional support and Mental Health; anger/stress management, setting the boundaries; positive discipline; peer support and networking.