



R.2.6 : Smart Parenting Vision & Success Report

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



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Information about the Smart Parenting Project.....	5
Introduction	7
1.Remarks from the desk-based analysis at EU and national level.....	8
1.1 International and EU legislation and policy frameworks for parenting support	8
1.2 Regulatory and policy frameworks across the smart-parenting consortium	9
1.3 Remarks extracted from the parenting support best practices.....	11
1.4 Remarks extracted from the literature review on gaps of national parenting programmes	16
2.Psychological Dimension key elements of Parenting programmes.....	17
2.1 Insights from the focus groups of experts.....	17
Country Analysis	21
France	21
Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations	21
Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective	22
Greece	23
Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations	23
Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective	23
Spain.....	24
Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations	24
Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective	24
Slovenia.....	25
Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations	25
Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective	25
Cyprus.....	25
Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations	25
Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective	26
2.2 Insights from the focus groups with parents.....	27
Country Analysis	29
France	29
Greece	30
Spain.....	31
Slovenia.....	32
Cyprus.....	32
3.Conclusion.....	33

SMART PARENTING

A partnership project between:

- Commune d' Oletta (France)
- Institut Corse De Formation Et Recherche En Travail Social (IFRTS): 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

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the wider Smart- Parenting partnership who contributed to data collection throughout this work package. This involved also parents with children aged 0-6 and 6-12, and professionals who work with families and who came together and shared their knowledge and experiences.

Country Reports

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

All compilation reports from national report activities can be found on the Smart Parenting website: <https://smartparenting-project.eu/>

Work compiled by: Regina Kalodiki, European Knowledge Spot (Greece)

Contributors:

- Commune d' Oletta (France)
- Institut Corse De Formation Et Recherche En Travail Social (IFRTS - France)
- GESEME (Spain)
- Zavod za izobraževanje odraslih in mladine Lendava (Slovenia)
- Association for the Prevention and Handling Violence in the Family (Cyprus)

Information about the Smart Parenting Project

Smart – Parenting Aim

The project's overall objective is to increase parents' competences by establishing a comprehensive online model of parent support grounded on the principles of informed decision-making and positive parenting thus contributing to the reduction in short- and long-term trauma-related symptoms of the child, and creating an inclusive environment that fosters equity and equality.

Specific Objectives:

-To foster prevention on potential adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) by offering concrete alternatives to abusive and ineffective methods of discipline and control

-To increase knowledge and skills of non-professionals (adult parents) and of adult trainers who will locally deliver high quality, evidence-based and online parental education and support in preventing and responding to ACEs. Most importantly parents will learn about the impact of trauma on their child development.

-To provide easy, practical strategies to help parents build strong and healthy relationships with their children, prevent problems in the family, school and community before they arise and create family environments that encourage children to realise their potential.

Rationale of the Smart – Parenting Programme

There is abundant evidence that children bear a heavy burden resulting from disrupted essential services, increased social isolation, and loss of family income. In times of crisis causing family disruption, parents and caregivers are more likely to feel overwhelmed with providing stimulation and care for their young children. In a report that should set off alarms across EU capitals, UNICEF warned that suicide is among the top five causes of death among young people in Europe. As COVID-19 continues to play havoc in lives, UNICEF's flagship publication "The State of the World's Children Report: On My Mind" – provides an analysis of trends affecting children and examines children and young people's mental health and well-being. The report states that around the world, mental disorders are a significant and often ignored cause of suffering that interfere with children's and young people's health and education and their ability to reach their full potential. It is estimated that more than 13 per cent of adolescents aged 10–19

live with a diagnosed mental disorder as defined by the World Health Organization. This represents 86 million adolescents aged 15–19 and 80 million adolescents aged 10–14.

While protective factors, such as loving caregivers, safe school environments, and positive peer relationships can help reduce the risk of mental disorders, the report warns that significant barriers, including stigma and lack of funding, are preventing too many children from experiencing positive mental health or accessing the support they need.

Parenting is foundational to children's mental health. Parents and caregivers, fulfilling this critical role requires support from parenting programmes, which can include information, guidance, and psychosocial support.

Thus, it is of paramount importance for the participating countries to develop and/or improve the parents' competences by establishing a comprehensive online model of parent support that would potentially foster children's well-being and contribute to the reduction in short- and long-term of trauma-related symptoms.

Aims of WP 2 - Analysis of evidence-based parenting programs at EU and national level

WP2 aims to analyse the evidence-based parenting programs and address gaps in the understanding of what promotes effective, sensitive and responsive child rearing and caring practices. To this end Partners explored current regulations, policies and reference parenting programmes, reflected on the gaps and needs in parenting training and supported and discussed the set of theories which explain mechanisms of behaviour change.

WP2 objectives:

- a. Review current regulations and policies on evidence-based parenting programmes and their techniques, to establish a usable project baseline and regulatory framework for the Smart Parenting model and its objectives.
- b. Explore the gaps and needs in parenting trainings and support programmes
- c. Analyse future insights for positive parenting characterised by a sustainable hue, even in times of crisis like COVID-19 pandemic.

These objectives are in total line with the Smart Parenting vision for a systemic change towards positive parenting because it establishes the background for Partners intervention, ensuring that the method of analysis evidence-based parenting programs is society-driven throughout the project and that the educational model that will be developed is aligned to the families' social needs and the Erasmus adult education 1st priority.

Introduction

The present compilation report: Smart Parenting Vision and Success Guide (R.2.6) is 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 summarises the results of previous work activities conducted by the Consortium partner countries, as part of Work Package 2. Analysis of evidence-based parenting programs at EU and national level.

The Smart Parenting Vision & Success Guide, has been produced after a thorough discussion and reflection among partners on findings extracted from the WP2 Activities as follows:

Activity 2.1 : Desk-based analysis at EU and national level (literature review)

- EU Regulatory Framework of the evidence-based parenting programs and best practice report
- Reports including identification of gaps, inefficiencies and needs on current status of parenting programmes

Activity 2.2: Psychological Dimension key elements of Parenting programmes (data extracted from Focus Groups)

- Focus Group of Experts Identification Report
- Psychological Status Report

The present report establishes the base for reaching the Smart Parenting vision with a view to strengthen the supporting role of parents in guiding and advising their children and creating a caring environment as an essential element for the healthy development of children.

The target group of the report consists of:

1. Parents and caregivers

2. A wide range of professionals from different agencies who work with children and families (educators, trainers, teachers, family therapists, social workers, psychologists).

3. Relevant governmental agencies, educational, social and health providers

1. Remarks from the desk-based analysis at EU and national level

1.1 International and EU legislation and policy frameworks for parenting support

Parenting appears in a range of international and European policies and frameworks concerned with family policy orientated towards support and services for parents and children to enhance the care and well-being of children and young people. Reviews of family policy and family support often focus on national contexts and reforms. This reflects the primary significance of national governments in developing and delivering family policy and family support for citizens and residents. However, wider international and European policy actors, debates and developments are also vitally important. These spheres incorporate international and European 'inter-governmental organisations' (IGOs) including the United Nations (UN) and its associated bodies as well as the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) and their associated bodies.

The most important building blocks in place at international and EU level for a family policy based on children's rights include:

- The International Bill of Rights¹ and its emphasis on rights to economic support, employment support, healthcare and education, and social services for children, parents and families.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): Provides a comprehensive framework of children's rights to 'protection, provision and participation' which incorporates family and parental support.
- UN agencies and campaigns (including the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda) promote family-friendly policies (UNICEF, 2019).
- The CoE's 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the 1961/1996 European Social Charters (ESC/RESC), which incorporate significant emphasis on the provision of family support
- The CoE's 2006 (19) Recommendation on policy to support positive parenting, 2011 (12) Recommendation on children's rights and social services friendly to children and families and its Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

- The EU 2017 Social Pillar of Rights and the 2021 European Child Guarantee, explicitly promote improved rights to time-related, resource-related and service-related policies and provisions for children, parents and families as envisaged by COFACE (2019) and UNICEF (2019)
- The EU's 2013 Recommendation on investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage and 2017 European Pillar of Social Rights
- Nonetheless, traditionally the EU has provided limited direction to family policy as a matter primarily dealt with by member states.

1.2 Regulatory and policy frameworks across the smart-parenting consortium

The literature review consisted of an extensive analysis of the national regulatory frameworks and strategies in the area of parenting support in France, Greece, Spain, Slovenia and Cyprus. It presented a collection of national regulations referring to parental responsibilities, forms and modalities of parenting support and national policies towards investing in children.

The review demonstrated that in all Partner countries, when it comes to family law, there is a strong supportive legal system that recognizes the comprehensive nature of parental responsibilities and aims to safeguard the best interests of children. The parental regulatory frameworks mainly include care/medical treatment, protection, education, legal representation, determination of residence, and administration of property to safeguard the well-being and development of children.

It is also true that most common forms of parenting support schemes in the participating countries include:

- income transfers (e.g. family allowances, child benefits);
- social welfare schemes (e.g. housing support, measures to increase the employment of women);
- work-family reconciliation schemes (e.g. paid maternity, paternity and parental leave);
- open-access to family support services and social services (e.g. family counselling, therapy sessions, and mental health interventions, parent support groups, parenting education programmes) and
- professional services, specialist support and targeted provision

Strategies towards investing in children also revealed that national policies towards that direction are also an essential part of the social welfare system.

In France, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Childhood was launched by the French government with the aim to ensure the well-being and protection of children and adolescents across the country. The National Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Childhood focuses on several key areas, including child protection, early childhood development, education, health, and social inclusion. It sets out specific objectives and actions to address the challenges faced by children and adolescents in these areas. The plan aims to strengthen child protection measures and systems to prevent and respond to child abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It emphasises the importance of early intervention and support for families, with a focus on promoting positive parenting practices and providing assistance to vulnerable families. Parental education programs have also been developed in France to provide guidance and resources to parents, helping them acquire effective parenting skills and promoting positive parent-child relationships.

In Slovenia, the Resolution on family policy 2018–2028 "A society that is friendly to all families" defines key goals and measures that will further increase the level of quality of family life, ensure the protection and well-being of families, especially children and improve their socio-economic situation. The state has also developed family support programs and enacted the Children's Program 2020-2025 with the aim to increase the quality of life of children and to establish protective factors for children from socially and economically weak backgrounds.

Spain has also implemented several national strategies and policies aimed at investing in children and promoting their well-being. These initiatives focus on ensuring the holistic development, protection, and equal opportunities for all children in the country. The National Strategy for Childhood and Adolescence is a comprehensive framework that promotes the rights and well-being of children and adolescents and focuses on areas such as health, education, social protection, participation, and non-discrimination. The National Strategic Plan for The Reduction of Childhood Obesity (2022 – 2030), the Early Childhood Education and Care Centers (ECEC), measures to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, Inclusive Education, policies for Child Poverty Reduction are also some of the measures that Spain has enacted to provide support to families, and ensure the prompt intervention and care for children in need of protection.

In Greece, the main and central policy document to ensure that every child is protected is the National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child. This Plan is a policy instrument and strategic

tool that aims to ensure the inter-ministerial coordination and the contribution of all relevant agencies to the planning and implementation of relevant actions. It also defines the objectives and timetables for the promotion and protection of the Children's Rights in Greece. It aims to act as a protective shield, attempting to address a number of issues such as child poverty, social exclusion, the absence of child-friendly justice, the lack of care for children with special needs, but also to contribute to the information and education of professionals from various sectors (nursery school teachers, teachers, doctors, etc.) who come into contact with children's victims of abuse or neglect.

In Cyprus, there are several national strategies and policies concerning the well-being of children and families. These strategies include policies in the areas of Education (Prevention and Intervention); Health (Prevention and Intervention) and Protection of Children's Rights. In the area of Education, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Violence in Schools implemented in 2018 until 2022, and the Programme of non-school-related actions to support pupils which belong to vulnerable groups, operating since 2012 are some of the policy acts put in place to safeguard the well-being of children. In the area of Health, the Strategy regarding the Rights of the Child to health (2017-2025) aims to guide, promote and protect the health rights of children in Cyprus, the National Strategy on the Sexual and Reproductive Health of the Youth (2018-2025) targets young people from 15-29 years old, while the National Strategy Addressing Addictions 2021-2028 aims to raise awareness regarding prevention, treatment and social support services, addressing especially children and young people but also every citizens in Cyprus. With regard to the protection of Children's Rights, the Commissioner for Children's Rights represents children and their interests at all levels, raises public awareness and sensitization around their rights and identifies and promotes their views where themselves cannot be heard.

1.3 Remarks extracted from the parenting support best practices

When it comes to the best practice cases, it is worth mentioning that all ten (10) initiatives presented by the five participating countries – France, Slovenia, Spain, Greece, and Cyprus, can serve as a basis to promote positive parenting practices, support parental involvement and improve parental engagement. The cases identified included, national initiatives and tools supporting parenting and assisting with childcare, national training programs to improve parental skills and course of action with both children and adolescents as well as initiatives facilitating positive transitions to adulthood.

Further, most cases presented revealed that parents who are attending parental educational programmes can see improvements in parental knowledge in the areas of positive discipline strategies, social-emotional development and more positive parent-child interactions improved communication, reduced conflict, and enhanced parent-child relationship. Accordingly, national initiatives such as family, counselling centres and help lines services have also provided valuable support (material, psychological, medical support etc.) to parents while at the same time strengthened their parenting skills.

In the below table a summary of the best practice cases is presented

Table 1: Summary of the parenting Best Practice cases

Best Practice title	Best Practice short description	Best Practice Resource
Parental Education Program for Positive Discipline (France)	The objective is to provide parents with effective tools and techniques to foster positive behaviour and emotional well-being in their children.	https://montessoricettes.fr/discipline-positive-education-bienveillante/
The Strengthening Families Program (Slovenia)	is a family skills training program for high-risk and general-population families that is recognized both nationally and internationally. The program includes lectures, presentations, discussions, role-playing, audio-visual materials, homework, games, children's play, parent's play, supervised exercises.	https://strengtheningfamiliesprogram.org/
Positive Parenting Programme (Spain)	The program aims to promote positive parenting strategies, prevent and address behavior problems in children, and enhance parent-child relationships.	https://www.triplep.net/glo-es/home/

<p>The Incredible Years (Spain)</p>	<p>The program focuses on enhancing parenting skills, reducing behavior problems in children, and fostering social-emotional development.</p>	<p>https://www.incredibleyears.com/</p>
<p>The Smile of the Child (Greece)</p>	<p>The programme consists of 11 Support Centers in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Material support (food, necessities, school supplies, Christmas packages, Easter packages, clothing, footwear, household appliances, baby products, furniture, etc.) Things important for every child (books, games, etc.) Psychological support Medical support (medical coverage, medical examinations, surgeries etc.) Coverage of other needs for children (treatment, lessons, etc.) 	<p>https://www.hamogelo.gr/gr/en/poiioi-eimaste/</p>
<p>SOS 1056 for Children, Adolescents and Parents (Greece)</p>	<p>Through the SOS Line 1056, children, teenagers and parents can find people to listen and act immediately to provide the support they need in each individual case. The line operates 24 hours a day 365 days a year free of charge from landline, mobile and payphone.</p>	<p>https://www.hamogelo.gr/gr/en/ta-neamas/to-2022-me-tin-ekseidikeimenei-omada-464-epaggelmaton-epistimonon-ergazomenon-stiriksame-se-oli-tin-ellada-72501-paidia-kai-tis-oikogeneies-tous/</p>
<p>Neighbourhood nannies (Greece)</p>	<p>This project mainly concerns the care of infants aged between two months and 2.5 years and provides for financial support for working parents - mainly single parents, foster parents and in general for the care of their child or children, either within the family home or in the home of a childcare worker</p>	<p>https://ypergasias.gov.gr/isotita-ton-fylon/programma-ntantades-tis-geitonias/</p>

<p>Hope For Children About Us (Cyprus)</p>	<p>The Counselling centre for children - provides services free of charge to children who are experiencing difficult life events, family difficulties or adjustment difficulties (e.g., parents' divorce, leaving from home, school bullying, and death of a loved one, behavioural problems). Accordingly, services are also provided to parents in order for the support of children to be done through a systemic approach, while at the same time strengthening the parenting skills of parents.</p>	<p>uncrcpc.org.cy</p>
<p>1466 HELPLINE for Children and families (Cyprus)</p>	<p>The Helpline 1466, offered by the "Hope for Children" and aims to provide psychological, social and legal support, counselling and guidance for matters related to child protection, offered to children and parents</p>	<p>uncrcpc.org.cy</p>
<p>Education and Child care support Program in APHVF's shelters (Cyprus)</p>	<p>The purpose of the program is to meet the social needs and improve the quality of life for women victims of domestic violence and their children during the time they stay in the Shelter.</p>	<p>https://domviolence.org.cy/en/xoroi_filoxenias/</p>

On another note, the best parental practices also revealed some challenges for the implementation of parenting programmes which can be summarised as follows:

Table 2: Challenges identified through literature review

Challenges in implementing parenting programmes

Lack of awareness and accessibility

Ensuring widespread awareness of the programs and its benefits can increase participation rates. Raising awareness about the program and making it accessible to diverse populations, including disadvantaged or marginalised communities, is also a significant challenge.

Sustainability

Maintaining long-term engagement and follow-up support for parents, ensuring long-term commitment and support from policymakers, securing ongoing funding, and integrating parental programmes into existing policies and services are essential for program sustainability and consist of real challenges.

Parental Resistance

Some parents may initially resist or be hesitant to adopt new discipline approaches, especially if they are accustomed to more traditional or punitive methods. Overcoming this resistance requires effective communication and ongoing support.

Lack of trained professionals

Implementing parental support programmes requires trained professionals who can effectively deliver the program to parents. Providing comprehensive training to practitioners and building their capacity to deliver the programs with fidelity and cultural competence can be a logistical challenge.

Stigma and Parental Engagement

Engaging parents in parenting programs can be challenging due to various factors, including the stigma associated with seeking help or participating in such programs. Overcoming barriers related to stigma promoting a positive perception of seeking parenting support, and encouraging parental engagement can be a significant hurdle.

1.4 Remarks extracted from the literature review on gaps of national parenting programmes

Partners explored diverse national parenting support programmes with a focus on educational parenting programmes and summarised each of the programme’s content, target group, assessment methodology, including gaps, limitations and inefficiencies.

Main deficiencies when it comes to parenting programmes identified through the desk-based research in the five participating countries – France, Slovenia, Spain Greece, Cyprus are summarised in the table below:

Table 3: Gaps detected through literature review

Gaps detected in parenting programmes	
Lack of awareness and accessibility	Insufficient post-program evaluation and support to sustain behaviour changes over the long term and assess effectiveness.
Inadequate and outdated content	The content is too generalised and not tailored to the actual needs of users. The emergence of new challenges, such as the influence of technology in young people is missing.
Lack of emotional support	Some programmes provide parents-to-be with knowledge about the course of pregnancy, preparation for childbirth and the basics of caring for a newborn, but it focuses mainly on the physical and medical aspects and not the psychological changes that a new family member brings to the family and its relations.
Inadequate dissemination and limited accessibility	Parents are unaware of the existence of parent support programmes or there is lack of information about them. This can lead to low

participation due to lack of dissemination and networking between relevant organisations

There is limited accessibility of parenting programmes in rural areas and disadvantaged communities including marginalised populations. Ensuring that these programs are accessible and available to all parents, regardless of their socio-economic status, cultural background, or geographical location, is crucial

Active involvement of fathers and co-parents in the parenting programs is crucial for promoting gender equality and shared responsibilities

2. Psychological Dimension key elements of Parenting programmes

2.1 Insights from the focus groups of experts

Experts' identification Report

It has been observed that the challenges and needs identified by experts in the parenting programmes settings are mostly common in France, Greece, Spain, Slovenia and Cyprus. The focus groups have been conducted by the following partner-organisations of the project:

- 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)

A total of 5 focus groups with a total participation of 42 experts took place during May and July 2023. The backgrounds of the participants included social work, educators, trainers, teachers, family therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists. All participants had experience with family therapy and/or parental counselling.

The aim of the focus groups with experts was to engage with stakeholder and key informant professional participants to gauge their opinions on existing psychological theoretical methods for parenting behavioural change and explore the training needs of supporting families, parents and caregivers to learn positive parenting and avoid the production of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Table 4 summarises the numbers of participants from the focus groups across the five countries

Table 4: Project Data Collection Summary

Country	Number of Focus group participants	Gender distribution ²		Mode of elaboration
		Female	Male	
France	9	9	0	Online
Greece	6	5	1	Online
Spain	10	Not Declared	Not Declared	Online
Slovenia	9	9	0	Hybrid In person/Online
Cyprus	8	8	0	In person
Totals	42	31	1	

This selection allowed to understand the position of all parties on existing psychological theoretical methods for parenting behavioural change and explore the training needs of supporting families, parents and caregivers to learn positive parenting and avoid the production of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

The principal points from the focus groups with Experts are summarised in the below tables:

Table 5: Remarks on behavioural change methods

Remarks on methods leading to parenting behavioural change	
Encouraging positive discipline	Encouraging positive discipline techniques based on mutual respect, empathy, and consistency can help parents develop healthy and constructive relationships with their children
Parental self care and well-being should be promoted	Focus should be put on parental well being which equals to child well-being. Encouraging parents to take care of their physical and mental well-being

² 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.

is essential. When parents are emotionally and physically healthy, they are better equipped to provide effective parenting. Self-care activities may include engaging in hobbies, seeking social support, practising stress-reduction techniques, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Parental emotional intelligence shall be strengthened

Importance should be given to working on the notion of emotional intelligence with a view to enable parents to evolve their empathy and understand their actions. This approach can foster a secure attachment, emotional intelligence, and a deeper connection between parent and child.

Parental communication skills shall be enforced

Parenting Communication Skills, including active listening and accepting and spending quality time with children, has been indicated as a key to improvement of parent- child relationship.

Individualised Approaches

Recognizing that each child and family is unique, it's important to tailor interventions to their specific needs. Assessing the family's strengths and challenges, considering cultural factors, and adopting a flexible approach can help create personalised strategies for improvement.

Working on Parents as Partners shall be taken into consideration

Healthy relationships between partners, were also highlighted as issues that if regulated they could improve parental behaviour towards children

Strong need for Preventive Parenting Programmes

Many parents are not sufficiently prepared for their new roles or are confused by the overload of information. Thus there is a strong need to develop and largely promote preventive parenting programmes that can support parents to strengthen their relationships with their children and facilitate positive development

Collaboration between parents and schools shall be enforced

The role of schools in reinforcing the parent- child relationship is critical. A strong parent – school relationship and good cooperation between the two, can facilitate parents to learn more about the child's behaviour with positive outcomes for the child.

Networking and referrals shall be promoted and made accessible to all

Referring and connecting parents with various counselling organisations, educational, institutional and other resources like playgroups and cultural or sports activities is strongly recommended for an effective intervention and skill building in parental programmes

Table 6: Remarks on ACE parenting training programme

Remarks on parenting programmes dealing with Adverse Childhood Experiences	
Knowledge of what constitutes Adverse Childhood experiences (ACE:): Definitions, risk factors, effects, tools for remediation	Understand the concept of parental neglect, abuse and dysfunction in the family, recognise risk factors, the consequences of ACEs and learn strategies to prevent and address neglectful and abusive behaviours. Topics mentioned also included: parental responsibilities both social and legal. education without punishment and setting boundaries
Knowledge of family protective factors	Start the training programme by analysing a healthy family environment- the characteristics or strengths of families, that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development (family protective factors).
Knowledge of the Developmental Stages	Provide parents a glimpse into what they can expect at each stage of the child's development, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical development • Emotional development • Social development

- Cognitive development

Enhanced communication and connection	Enhancing communication skills to create open and honest dialogue with children. Promoting a safe and supportive environment for children to express their feelings and concerns.
Self- Care of Parents and Managing emotions	It is Important for parents to learn how to express and manage emotions, especially negative ones, and to acquire the necessary skills so that they can teach emotion regulation to their children

Country Analysis

This section summarises the focus group findings by country organised with the participation of experts in family therapy/counselling.

France

Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations

According to the French professionals, parental training is a multifaceted and dynamic field that plays a crucial role in promoting healthy family dynamics and the well-being of children. The responses from experts regarding methods that would improve parent-child relations pointed out the importance of early education and support for parents, as well as a focus on understanding child development and fostering positive, respectful relationships between parents and children. They also stressed the value of informing parents about available resources and interventions during the crucial early stages of parenthood. More, they highlighted the complexity of family-related challenges and the need for comprehensive training programs that address various issues. Experts also recognized that each family situation is unique. They advocated for tailored approaches that involve assessing individual needs and connecting parents with appropriate resources and professionals when necessary. This personalised approach is seen as crucial for effectively addressing complex family challenges. The involvement of professionals such as social workers, therapists, psychiatrists, and educators was also deemed essential in parental training programs. Further, many experts mentioned the importance of prevention as a primary goal in parental training. They stressed

the need to educate parents about potential challenges and equip them with the tools to avoid or mitigate these issues. Prevention is seen as a key strategy for promoting child well-being and family stability

Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective

When it comes to the learning objectives and content of a training programme dealing with adverse childhood experiences (ACE), French experts suggested a wide range of subjects such as: understanding child development, recognizing signs of neglect or maltreatment, gaining knowledge about legal and psychological aspects of divorce, understanding the consequences of mental illness and substance abuse on family life, and developing effective coping and communication skills. Effective communication between parents and children was also a recurring theme in the responses. Experts emphasised the importance of facilitating open and constructive communication within families as well as trust and mutual respect in parent-child relationships. Additionally, balancing family and work life, and building emotional bonds with children of all ages were also key aspects that a training programme should address. The goal is to provide comprehensive support that fosters a strong parent-child relationship and promotes the concept of positive parenting. Parents should be encouraged to seek support, recognize their difficulties, and know where to turn for assistance

Key takeaways from French experts include the importance of prevention, the value of involving professionals, the need for tailored approaches, and the emphasis on effective communication and support. These insights could inform the development of effective parental training programs that empower parents with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of parenting and family life.

Greece

Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations

According to the Greek professionals, psychoeducational programmes that emphasise parental needs and their well-being, in parallel with learning communication skills is key. Parental well being equals child wellbeing, reduces stress and can resolve conflicts and problems in the family. Strengthening the conjugal role together with the parental role is also of critical importance. Parenting communication skills, understanding what the child has to say, and giving full attention to children is also of great importance and a matter of building trust.

Experts also emphasised how a strong parent – school relationship and good cooperation between parents, schools, and the communities can facilitate parents to learn more about their child behaviour and can lead to strengthening the overall relationship between parent and child. When there is a strong and respectful relationship with the child’s school, parents will be in a good position to give them information to help the child get the most out of education. It is true that parents and educators can work together to support the child’s learning and well-being. Further, experts emphasised the importance of being aware of the parenting styles, so that parents ensure their parenting style is supporting healthy child’s growth and development

Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert’s perspective

When it comes to the learning objectives and content of a training programme dealing with adverse childhood experiences (ACE), Greek experts suggested that it would be really important to first analyse what a healthy family environment is and what is the Norm, discuss on how to manage family crisis (crisis management) and how to deal with emotions (create a healthy emotional environment). In this line experts highlighted the need to discuss the family protective factors i.e. the characteristics or strengths of families, that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development.

Further experts agreed that it is also important to understand the meaning of ACE and discuss trauma i.e. how a parent can produce trauma to his child, effects of trauma and how it can heal that trauma but within a supportive framework. In the context of the training the healing process shall be more emphasised. Overall they highlighted that professionals should give parents hope, positive feelings and discuss how to deal with various situations. Positivity and giving support to parents is the key. Mental health and the stigma surrounding it shall also be considered when developing the programme.

Spain

Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations

Concerning the first question on the most effective intervention and skill-building approach that can lead to improving parental style and behaviour, experts mentioned two theories that could lead parents to positive parenting, one being the Social cognitive theory and the other the Transtheoretical Model- TTM (Stages of Change). The Social Cognitive Theory emphasises the interplay between personal factors, environmental influences, and behaviour and stipulates

that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and modelling. The theory highlights the importance of self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations and tasks. The Transtheoretical Model- TTM proposes that individuals go through a series of stages when changing behaviour. These stages include precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. The model recognizes that behaviour change is a process, and individuals may progress back and forth through these stages before achieving lasting change.

Experts in Spain have also discussed and analysed eight (8) interventions that can lead to improving parental style. These interventions include: Parenting Programs (The Triple P program, the Parent-Child Interaction Therapy), Parenting Education and Support, Positive Discipline, Role Modelling, Parent-Child Relationship Building, Self-Care for Parents, Individualised Approaches, Emotion Coaching.

Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective

When it comes to the Identification of the needs for the creation of a course on Adverse Childhood experiences that incorporate the notions of neglect, abuse and household dysfunctions (divorce, mental illness, addiction) experts from Spain underlined that is important for parents to become acquaint with what is considered neglect, abusive behaviour, and dysfunction in the family. Facilitating parents to understand the concept of neglect, abuse and family dysfunction, what are the risk factors, consequences and the tools for remediation is a crucial part of the education process. The cultivation of empathy and understanding of children's needs and emotions, education without punishment, effective communication and supportive relationships, manage of screens, accessing support and resources were also some of the main subjects mentioned to be included in a parenting training programme dealing with ACEs.

Slovenia

Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations

In general, the biggest challenge for prevention programmes according to Slovenian experts is to raise parents' interest and motivate them to take part in them. It is always possible to work towards positive change with those parents who are willing to participate, and therefore it is really crucial to actively work on promotional and motivational activities for these programmes.

Experts also agreed that despite a large number of resources and prevention programs, some parents are lost in the abundance of information and remain poorly informed. They also mentioned that young parents are not prepared for the new role they find themselves in. Especially for the psychological burden that parenthood brings. In the same line they highlighted that with the first child, parents often panic more and rely too much on programs or professional resources for parenting. Experts also mentioned that many parents have a chaotic way of parenting, where they go from one extreme to another, for example, from passivity to complete control. More than that they pointed out that the lack of or a poorly organised multidisciplinary approach makes it even more difficult to work with families and that among users there is a growing distrust of experts and disrespect for the profession in general. Legislation in the field of parenting is lacking and there is still a stigma about attending preventive programs, especially after the birth of a child.

Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective

With regard to the topics of an ACE programme, experts pointed out that they would like to see more emphasis on psychosocial topics, especially family relationships and changing unhealthy family and parenting patterns, parent's responsibility for their own well-being in addition to childcare. They also recognised that this process is different for each parent-to-be or parent and that it takes a lot of work, effort and time to make a real difference.

Cyprus

Methods and theories to improve parent-child relations

Experts in Cyprus mentioned that the most effective intervention and skill-building approach that can lead to an improved parental style and behaviour, and strengthening the relationship between parent and child would be the participation in experiential workshops, conducted on a continuous mode, with specific structure, interactive and divided in learning phases. Respondents also highlighted that feedback through the workshops is crucial to create a positive change. Moreover, it was suggested that, at the beginning of the workshops, participants should complete a questionnaire that gives insights on what topics parents want to look into, and thus material can be added or modified.

Proposals for a parenting programme dealing with ACE from the expert's perspective

Experts from Cyprus recognized that the content of an ACE programme should include clear definitions of what constitutes neglect, abuse and dysfunction in the family and also include a chapter on parental obligations, legal and social. Participants also emphasised on emotional intelligence and empathy. They supported its importance based on the dual role of understanding the consequences of their actions upon their children, and recognizing and understanding their own emotions, and using this ability to manage their behaviour. It was therefore considered very important for parents to understand the consequences of their actions on their children's emotional and psychological health. Therefore, developing those skills will enhance the emotional connection between parents and their kids.

A section regarding parents' duties, responsibilities and obligations should also be included. All parents should be informed about parental responsibilities, not only regarding the social aspect but also the legal one. Legal consequences were also highlighted as an important knowledge because, unfortunately, not all people are motivated in the same way.

Another chapter that has been proposed was about the development of healthy communication skills and the provision of healthy boundaries and rules, as a means towards reducing conflict and establishing effective communication between family members.

Another chapter might include small daily parental tasks, in this way the information provided will embrace every parent and not only for those experiencing severe family dysfunctions, such as violence.

In terms of the overall structure, participants considered that it is important to organise them in a series of training courses, and that they implement an interactive approach which offers instant feedback. The purpose of this suggestion is that it can offer higher levels of engagement. It was also important for the participants that parents' opinion on the subjects should somehow be taken into consideration, so that the learning objectives can be adapted to their needs. Another interesting suggestion was regarding the type of the training material and more specifically the use of short video as a better tool to engage participants. Through the use of video experts suggest that the learning objective will be comprehended easier and faster.

2.2 Insights from the focus groups with parents

Psychological

The aim of the focus groups with parents was to reflect upon the gaps and needs in parenting support systems 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 support programme would look like from a parent perspective

The focus groups with parents and caregivers have been conducted by the following partner-organisations of the project:

- 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)

A total of 5 focus groups with a total participation of 51 parents took place during May and July 2023. The profile of participants included Parents/caregivers having children aged 0-6 and 6-12.

Table 7 summarises the numbers of participants for the focus groups across the five countries

Table 7: Project Data Collection Summary

Country	Number of Focus group parents	Gender distribution ³		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	

The focus groups allowed Partners 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). It also allowed to extract parents' 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.

³ 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.

Overall, most parents found parenting programmes useful but inadequate as they are offered on a hoc basis, occasionally, and are targeted to specific subjects (bullying, drug abuse etc).

The principal points from the focus groups with parents are summarised below:

Table 8: Project Data Collection Summary

Parenting challenges and needs	
Parenting challenges	Balancing multiple roles and managing daily stress while being unemployed, sleep deprivation and stress, health issues and autonomy and peer rejection were also challenges identified that needed to be addressed. Single parenting and parents having more than one child was also expressed as a parenting challenge.
Parenting needs	Expressed need for both emotional support and practical advice
Obstacles to attend parenting programmes	Obstacles to participation in such programs include time constraints, or scepticism about their effectiveness.
Lack of individualised support	The lack of individualised support was also mentioned as being crucial to address the diverse needs of parents. This could be achieved through one-on-one consultations with professionals who offer personalised guidance and advice tailored to the specific concerns and circumstances of each parent
Lack of sensitised experts	Experts should show more sensitivity and empathy when counselling parents
Proposed topics for an ideal parenting programme	Birth and Early Milestones; Developmental stages; Parenting Challenges such as setting boundaries/health issues/screens/emotional issues, difficult behaviours (violent behavioural patterns); positive discipline techniques, self-care for parents, school milestones, networking.

Country Analysis

This section summarises the focus group findings by country organised with the participation of parents with children aged 0-6 and 6-12.

France

Parenting needs

French 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 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 also mentioned 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.

Proposals for a 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. Tips for simplifying daily tasks, psychological support, especially after birth, sharing experiences and feeling understood, conflict and crisis management, understanding child development, promoting autonomy and trust in children, setting boundaries and cultivating curiosity. Parents appreciate the opportunity to connect with other parents who may share similar doubts and challenges. Understanding from others regarding parenting struggles, delays, and organisational difficulties was also considered valuable.

Greece

Parenting needs

Greek parents pointed out that most parenting programmes offered are counselling programmes provided in the framework of the municipality, mental health services or by the school (school for parents' programme) but on an ad hoc basis (depending on each 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. All programmes offered were mentioned to be supportive but not adequate.

Further 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, they mentioned that 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

Parents also expressed their negative experiences with professionals who were not compassionate and mentioned several ideas and requests regarding their expectations of parenting programmes. In this direction they highlighted the need for empathetic experts and parenting programmes to comprise practical exercises and regular feedback.

Proposals for a parenting programme from the parents' perspective

Greek parents mentioned various topics that an ideal parenting programme should comprise. 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 parenting as a couple, 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 one child.

Spain

Parenting needs

Parents in Spain highlighted the positive influence that parenting programmes had on improving their behavioural and psychological outcomes including, parent–child interaction and knowledge, and maternal self-esteem. In particular, they felt supported and empowered and were able to find programmes that aligned with their values and met children’s needs. Parents also pointed out that they received guidance on the enrolment process, financial assistance options, and the necessary documentation. They also gained valuable information and practical assistance in raising their children but also felt a sense of belonging and connectedness within the community. They became more confident in their parenting decisions, and overall felt more equipped and confident in their parenting skills, including improved communication, better understanding, and a more harmonious atmosphere at home.

Proposals for a 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 could be done through one-on-one consultations with professionals who offer personalised 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.

Slovenia

Parenting needs

When talking about parenting in general, Slovenian parents mostly drew on their personal experiences. and mentioned that the starting point for any parent's parenting is his or her primary family and personal experiences. They also noted that the intergenerational transmission of parenting patterns within the family is still very much present and that 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 also believe that the importance of parental or maternal instinct should be emphasised and given priority over theories. When it comes to parenting programmes they mentioned that they find them useful, the interest in participating depends primarily on the individual and there are too few or not enough of these programmes in their environment. Some found the programmes too short and too general and patronised offering strict parenting instructions.

Proposals for a parenting programme from the parents' perspective

When discussing their wishes and expectations for parenting programmes parents from Slovenia, pointed out: the exchange of experiences between parents, the obligation to participate in at least basic parenting content, the opportunity for parents to socialise, the importance of the Individual approach, objectivity of lecturers/programme leaders and professionalism, more information about the birth itself and what happens after the birth, the need for more programmes for parents of a newborn, relief, educational and useful content, practical examples, diverse content, organised childcare during the programmes.

They also suggested specific topics they would like to learn more about: The basics of childcare; parenting (teaching respect, teaching good relationships), development (emotional development, social development, the importance of reading to your child), parental responsibilities and selfcare.

Cyprus

Parenting needs

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 organised in some schools, but it depends on the Parents' Association of each school. This suggests 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. They 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).

Proposals for a parenting programme from the parents' perspective

A major concern that parents raised was the need for training and “parental education”, aiming to give parents the necessary knowledge to be better parents. Some of the topics that participants mentioned as gaps in their knowledge were 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 emphasised that parents should get informed about all forms 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, and opinions. Overall participants summed up the conversation with some statements such as “We need money”, “We need knowledge, support, time”, “We need time to spend with our children”. So, it seems that the needs of the parents are pretty basic, in order to strengthen their parental role.

3. Conclusion

As can be seen from the gaps and needs identified in relation to parenting support programmes across the partner countries, there are key thematic areas which impact on their access and provision. These, extracted from the literature review, are broadly related to lack of awareness and accessibility, stigma associated with seeking help or participating in such programs, time constraints, lack of trained professionals and of professionals with empathy. More, many parental programmes mainly focus on the physical and medical aspects and not the psychological changes that a new family member brings to the family, their content is too generalised and not tailored to the actual needs of users, and there is insufficient post-program evaluation to assess their effectiveness. Parents also found that parental training and support play a crucial role in empowering them to navigate the complexities of parenthood, ensuring

the well-being and healthy development of their children but they expressed the need for more emotional and psychological support, more personalised and tailored support that addresses their specific needs, increased awareness, improved accessibility, practical advice, peer support and networking and access to qualified professionals. Overall, they found parenting programmes really useful but not adequate as they are offered on an ad hoc basis and with content not tailored to the current challenges they face. With regard to the content of an ideal parenting programme, parents mentioned the following: birth and early milestones; developmental stages; parenting challenges such as setting boundaries/health issues/screens/emotional issues/difficult behaviours (violent behavioural patterns); positive discipline techniques, self-care for parents, school milestones, networking.

Experts also brought a wealth of knowledge and experience to the field work, emphasising evidence-based approaches, the importance of early intervention, and the need for a comprehensive understanding of child development. They highlighted the potential impact of parental support on a child's long-term well-being, they supported a multidisciplinary approach to working with families as well as the need to strengthen the school-parent relationship. Strong emphasis should also be put on empowering parents. This includes addressing their emotional well-being, particularly after childbirth and the discussion of the family protective factors i.e characteristics or strengths of families, that act to mitigate risks and promote positive well-being and healthy development.

When it comes to a programme that deals with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) they pointed out that this should focus on prevention, begin with the understating of a healthy family environment – the norm- , define neglect, abuse and dysfunction in the family, recognise the signs, understand the consequences and explore tools for remediation. They also found it really important to discuss issues such as developmental stages, self-Care for parents/ emotional coaching, communication and active listening, as well as referrals and peer support.

Both groups have also highlighted the importance of experiential learning which was also considered to be more successful than just passively receiving information. Provision of short videos with examples from the real world, practical advice and solutions, sharing of experiences, follow-up, interaction with other parents- experts should also be considered.

