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Eurofam

Methodology and position paper for a review study on the conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe

▶ **A review of academic literature on family support**

▶ An overview of European policies on family support.

▶ Compilation of national family support developments and contexts.

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CONTENT

Introduction

The European Family Support Network (EurofamNet https://eurofamnet.eu/home) is a pan-European network promoting collaboration between researchers, practitioners, policy agencies and service user organisations. Its aims to promote children's rights, family welfare and social equality through developments and innovations in family support research, policy and practice. EurofamNet is international, multi-disciplinary and inter-sectoral with over 100 members representing over 30 countries.

Launched in 2019, EurofamNet will undertake a four-year programme of activities funded by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) program (COST Action no.18123). The EurofamNet COST action will:

1. Develop an innovative conceptual framework for family support research, policy and practice.

2. Develop evidence-based resources for family support policy and practice.

3. Develop professional skills and training frameworks for family support services and practice.

4. Adopt a multidisciplinary approach underpinned by commitments to children's rights, social welfare and methodological diversity.

5. Promote wide involvement and dissemination across all stakeholders – including young people and families themselves - to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of family support.

This 'Methodology and Position Paper' has been produced in the first year of this programme of activities. It has been produced by Working Group 2 to inform its Year 1 (April 2019-April 2020) deliverable for EurofamNet which is to undertake 'a scoping study of the conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe'. Given the diversity and complexity of 'family support' in theory and in practice within and across European countries, Part 1 of the paper provides some starting points for the conceptualisation of family support in broad terms. It also highlights the centrality of children's rights and family welfare perspectives to the aims and objectives of EurofamNet. Part 2 sets out the aims, approach and design of the scoping study.

Part 1: Family support: Key concepts and principles

1.1 Introduction

The concept of family support is widely used by policy agencies, professionals, academics and communities across national and international contexts. However, the provision of family support by formal state agencies and the form this takes varies widely and therefore the concept of 'family support' can be an ambiguous one. This emerges from the diversity of provision associated with family support across countries and the need to respectfully balance private and public aspects of family life in order to be supportive without being intrusive. It also emerges from varied ways in which the term is used to refer to several phenomena ranging from aspects of informal social support within communities; forms of professionalised services; orientations to family policy and social policy; and fields of theory and research (Canavan et al 2016).

The production of this paper therefore has demanded deliberation about the concept of 'family support'. It seeks to provide some definitional and conceptual starting points for understanding and analysing approaches to, and aspects of, family support in European contexts.

1.2. Family

In order to understand and support families, we need to consider the diverse, complex and changing nature of contemporary family life. Attentive to these issues, scholars have developed broad definitions of 'family' such as in the case of the UNICEF report recently produced by Daly et al (2015) which defined family as 'a significant social group':

> [W]hich can be defined either by kinship, marriage, adoption or choice. Hence, family is recognised to vary in composition and the nature of the relational tie between members, and is not understood exclusively as the nuclear family or connection by kinship. (Daly 2015: 11).

Related to this point, it is widely recognised 'family' has a diversity of meanings within and across societies and states. To aid analysis of 'family meanings', Ribbens-McCarthy (2008: 7) usefully made a distinction between 'everyday/social' versus 'policy/legal/institutional/administrative' meanings of family:

> 'Family' forms a key construct through which people develop meanings in a whole variety of settings. //..Meanings [of family] may become more systematised because they are embedded in institutions and legal systems which also give these meanings more power in society, or meanings may be systematised in the sense they are

regularly exchanged and drawn upon between networks of people overtime, and thus become widely used and established.

Useful applications of these frameworks, for example, would be to examine the ways in which contemporary national and international family policies reformulate notions of 'family' in response to social change, social diversity and children's rights; or reinforce and support traditional family norms. Social meanings and practices related to 'family' are variously associated with social welfare/care functions, child-rearing activities, the private sphere/personal life and domestic living arrangements. International frameworks for human rights emphasise rights to a private family life as a civil right. However, it is important to consider the 'care and control' dynamics of personal and family relationships. In addition, there are often associations between 'family norms' and social inequalities that need consideration (e.g. in relation to aspects of generational, gender and economic inequalities). In the interests of human rights, social welfare and social reproduction - societies and states therefore negotiate complex imperatives to: safeguard family rights; regulate and support family functions/relations; recognise family diversity; and safeguard the health and welfare of family members, especially those in vulnerable positions. Overall, the scope of the role of the state in supporting and regulating families is often a contentious issue. This issue, in turn, informs the development of state-sponsored family support.

1.3 Childhood and parenthood

Family roles and family support encompass meanings and activities beyond those related to having, raising and supporting children. However, the aims and activities of EurofamNet are focally concerned with promoting children's rights and welfare via family support research, policy and practice. The concepts of 'childhood' and 'parenthood' therefore need consideration.

Theories of child development, child well-being, children's rights and social constructionism are useful in thinking about "children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas" (Cunningham 1995: 1 cited in Frost 2011: 5). Adopting an inter-disciplinary 'childhood studies' approach, James and James (2008: 14) state:

A child is a human being in the early stages of its life-course, biologically, physiologically and socially. It is a member of a generation referred to collectively by adults as children who together temporarily occupy the social space created for them by adults and referred to as childhood.

Informed by notions of human development as a lifelong process, child development studies and theories provide a wealth of specialist knowledge about aspects and processes of child and adolescent development and well-being. Moreover, social ecology theories are

highly influential. These emphasise child development is shaped by the dynamic relationships children and young people have with the entire social ecology they interact with. Scholars have widely applied and adapted Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of child development (Abela and Walker 2014; Churchill 2011; Devaney 2017). This model placed children at the centre of multiple interacting social systems. In this model, the 'microsystem' and 'mesosystem' encompass the most 'proximate' (immediate/everyday) relationships, contexts and influences which shape child development. These systems include the immediate contexts within which children are raised and cared for (e.g., parent-child relations; family systems; kinship systems; state care systems); peer relationships; education and childcare settings; and neighbourhood influences. These 'microsystems' and 'mesosystems' are then posited as located within and shaped by 'macrosystems' (e.g., social policies, cultural norms and changes, the welfare state, political/ideological influences, the labour market, technological advances, physical environments) and 'chronosystems' (e.g. the time period/generational circumstances).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) promotes a social ecology for children and young people based on children's rights to 'protection, provision and participation'. It includes all young people under 18 years old in its definition of a child:

> For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. (UNCRC 1989, Article 1)

The UNCRC establishes civil, social, economic and political rights for children as citizens. It affords children special status and protections because of their 'developmental immaturity and vulnerability' and 'marginal social status'; and because 'societies depend on adequate child development and well-being'. Further, it affords additional protections to vulnerable groups including children who are refugees and asylum seekers and children affected by disability, involved in the state care system and living in institutions. The rights for children specified in the UNCRC (and monitored by the UN) place duties on those responsible for the care and welfare of children (e.g., parents, families, communities and states) to safeguard and promote children's rights. However, although nearly all nation states are signatories to the UNCRC, countries vary in their interpretation, adoption and implementation of the UNCRC. At the European and international levels, European institutions and international agencies also seek to promote children's rights via several legislative and policy measures (e.g., Council of Europe 2006; 2011; European Commission 2013; Sandbæk 2017). This has particularly been the case for the Council of Europe as the leading European human rights body.

In addition, the notion of parenthood needs consideration. McCarthy and Edwards (2011: 141) usefully make the following distinctions, which have resonance for our scoping study foci:

> Parent refers to a particular status, or category of person, who is identified as standing in a special relationship with an individual child or related children. Parenthood refers to how this category or role is institutionalised as a social form. Parenting generally refers to a set of practices and activities and thus draws attention to what a person does as a parent in relation to their children.

Given the significance of family diversity discussed above, we also need to conceive of those afforded parental status and engaged in parental roles in broad terms. For example, Boddy et al (2009: 14) defined 'parents' in broad terms in their European comparative study of parenting support:

> Parents were taken to include all those who provide significant care for children in a home or family context, including biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, grandparents or other relatives. (Boddy et al 2009: 14)

Parenthood is often socially conceived and experienced in gendered terms related to motherhood and fatherhood. Informed by child development and children's rights perspectives, Daly and Abela et al (2007: 11-12) conceive of parenting in broad and recognise its gendered dimensions:

> For the purposes of this report, parenting is understood as the ongoing sets of relationships and activities that are involved for all of those who are parenting and raising children. Parenting is seen as a process involving a set of intellectual, emotional and material adjustments enabling adults to become parents, in other words, to meet children's needs in the physical, emotional, intellectual and social spheres.//..it is also recognised parenting is a gendered activity in that the experiences and approaches of mothers and fathers often differ.

Further, many recent social policy and family support initiatives promote positive parenting perspectives which in several ways seeks to integrate children's rights and nurturing parenting principles:

> Positive parenting refers to parental behaviour based on the best interests of the child that is nurturing, empowering, non-violent and provides recognition and guidance which involves setting of boundaries to enable the full development of the child. (Council of Europe, Rec 2006; also see Daly and Abela et al 2007).

1.4 Family support

As noted above several conceptual complexities arise in relation to family support from the varied applications of the term and the diversity of family support policy and practice (Canavan et al 2016). One general way of defining family support is as a form of social support which can include emotional, financial, practical, professional and childcare support provided to family members including children and parents. This broad definition potentially includes formal family support measures that are to some extent provided and/or funded and/or regulated by the state (e.g., cash support; professional services and work-family policies) which served formalised parental/family support needs as well as informal social support provided within families, social networks and communities which constitutes an essential form of social capital and supports parental and child well-being (Churchill 2011). The aims and activities of EurofamNet are particularly concerned with improving formal family support measures for children and families, including the ways in which these can bolster social capital and informal social support within and between families and communities.

The diversity of formal family support measures across countries means it is a challenge to neatly define this sphere of social policy and social provision. However, several scholars and organisations have developed broad and general definitions which provide useful conceptual starting points for international research. For example, in their international review, Daly et al (2015) developed the following useful broad generic definition of family support:

> Family support is a set of (service and other) activities oriented to improving family functioning and grounding child-rearing and other familial activities in a system of supportive relationships and resources (both formal and informal). (Daly 2015: 12)

For many, the term 'parenting support' has many similarities to the term 'family support'. Both terms can often be used interchangeably. Although not entirely aligned with the definition of family support provided above, Boddy et al (2009: 7), for example, defined parenting support in broad and general terms in the following way:

> Parenting support was defined to include any intervention for parents or carers aimed at reducing risks and/or promoting protective factors for their children, in relation to their social, physical and emotional well-being.

These broad definitions provide 'umbrella terms' which include a wide variety of policies and provision. This variety can be overwhelming but it is also possible to discern main forms (types) and modalities (genres) (Canavan et al 2016; Daly et al 2015; Devaney et al 2013). For example, Daly (2004: 136) conceived of 'welfare state for families with children' as having the following four categories of policy and provision:

Welfare state support for families with children includes policy and provision covering cash support for families; provisions for working parents; services for families with children, and benefits and services for higher need families.

Elaborating on the main features of 'services for families with children' in the Irish context, McKeown (2000: 2) provides another example of how types of provision can be categorised:

Family support is an umbrella term covering a wide range of interventions which vary along a number of dimensions according to their target group (such as mothers, fathers, toddlers, teenagers), professional background of service provider (e.g. family worker, social worker, childcare worker, youth and community worker, public health nurses, community mother, psychologist), orientation of service provider (e.g. therapeutic, child development, community development, youth work), problem addressed (e.g. parenting problems, family conflict, child neglect, educational underachievement), programme of activities (e.g. home visits, pre-school facility, youth club, parenting course) and service setting (e.g. home-based, clinic-based or community-based).

Critical issues for our scoping review, therefore, are to develop concepts and categories of family support in light of the diverse and changing nature of family support policies and provision in European countries.

In addition to understanding and developing the range of family support measures in place for families with children, understanding family support entails consideration of overarching 'social policy paradigms' and 'family policy paradigms'. These are conceived in terms of dominant and varied principles related to social citizenship, family policy, citizen-state relations and children's rights. As paradigms, orientations to these issues shape many features of family support policy and provision. Our scoping study will, in particular, consider the significance of policy paradigms related to social rights, family policy, gender equality and children's rights (Esping-Andersen 1999; Gilbert et al 2011; Hardiker 1991). The aims and activities of the EurofamNet are orientated towards children's rights, egalitarian and comprehensive conceptions of family support (Devaney et al., 2013; Canavan et al 2016). This lens can be employed to critically review policy and provision utilising methods such as 'critical frame analysis' (Dombos et al 2012) which examines the political, institutional and professional framings of family support issues and family policy measures, and the implications of these for social policies, relations and welfare.

Part 2: The aims and design of the Scoping Study

2.1 Introduction

Part 2 details the aims and approach to the 'scoping study of the conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe'. It is organised around three main sections. The first section explains how our approach to the scoping study combines two traditions - literature/research reviews and policy scoping studies (Anderson et al 2008; Arskey and O'Malley 2005). The second section establishes the main research aims and questions guiding the scoping study. The final section sets out the design of the scoping study that combines three main elements:

- A literature review to examine the ways in which family support in general, and family support services in particular, have been conceptualised, delivered and developed in European countries;

- A review of national reports produced by the national leaders involved in the EurofamNet COST action to examine changes, contexts and challenges pertinent to understanding and developing family support provision within and across European countries;

- A review of relevant and significant European and international policies and literature, specifically in relation to European Union policies, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and associated European / international bodies and policies (e.g. Council of Europe; UNICEF social protection framework) relevant in understanding and developing family and parenting support policy and provision across European countries.

2.2 Scoping study approach

Scoping studies are popular literature review strategies and social policy tools. However, they incorporate varied approaches and terminology including: 'rapid research reviews', 'rapid evidence reviews', 'knowledge synthesis', 'conceptual reviews' and 'policy scoping reviews' (Anderson et al 2008; Arksey and O'Malley 2005; Levac et al 2010). Our approach combines two approaches: (1) literature/research review studies; and (2) policy scoping studies. Each of these approaches are briefly explained below.

Literature and research scoping reviews

In general terms, scoping studies are often defined as 'techniques used to map and review relevant literature and research in a field of interest' (Arksey and O'Malley 2005: 20). In

addition, they are orientated towards producing general reviews completed in relatively short timescales (e.g. 3-6 months). Literature reviews can define 'literature' broadly to include academic, policy and practice literature while 'research reviews' can be more focused on providing reviews of specific empirical research literature. The latter is common across health, education, psychology, social work and criminal justice studies in the form of 'rapid research reviews' which:

> Aim to map *rapidly* the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of research evidence available. (Mays et al 2001: 194) [Emphasis in the original]

Overall literature reviews and research scoping reviews can aim to:

- Examine the extent, range and nature of research activity in a specified area;

- Provide an indicative, general critical review of the scope, strengths and limitations of a broad area of literature and research;

- Examine how key concepts are defined and used within and across specific literatures;

- Develop theoretical propositions informed by research reviews;

- Summarise and disseminate research findings to policy makers and practitioners;

- Identify research gaps in the existing literature and research in an area. (Anderson et al 2008; Arksey and O'Malley 2005)

A widely used framework for literature/research reviews was developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). These researchers proposed five key stages which should be recorded and explained alongside the study findings:

1. 'Identifying the research question': The formulation of clear, focused and feasible research questions; and clarification of key concepts and terms;

2. 'Identifying relevant literature and studies': Utilising literature sources, literature search methods and initial inclusion/exclusion criteria to identify relevant research and literature;

3. 'Literature and study selection': Refining the selection of relevant research and literature by refining study aims, questions and inclusion/exclusion criteria;

4. 'Charting the data': The development and adoption of a systematic approach to 'charting the key information' to be obtained from the research review utilising for example, a descriptive framework (e.g. to describe the number and types of studies in

an area) and/or thematic analysis (e.g. examining key themes and issues in the literature);

5. 'Collating, summarising and reporting the results': The development and adoption of a systematic approach to 'summarising, synthesising and reporting the results' such as in terms of tables that summarise the studies under review; and/or consideration of cross-cutting themes within the literature; and/or formulation of theoretical propositions based on the findings of the review; and/or development of typologies based on the findings of the review.

In addition, Arksey and O'Malley (2005: 29) as well as other researchers strongly state that social policy related reviews should incorporate 'stakeholder consultation activities' (also see Anderson et al 2008; Levac et al 2008). Arksey and O'Malley (2005: 29) stated stakeholder consultation was essential "to generate additional references about potential studies to include in the review as well as valuable insights about issues relating to the scoping study and area".

The EurofamNet scoping study of family support in Europe aims to review significant and relevant academic, policy and practice literature in the field; and therefore places much emphasis on literature/research review approaches. To adopt a systematic approach, the literature review element of our scoping study will adopt Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework.

Policy reviews

Social policy studies incorporate 'policy scoping studies' or 'policy reviews' - and these approaches also inform our scoping review. Similar to above, 'policy reviews' do not entail empirical research and seek to produce timely, general and indicative reviews. Likewise, they can be completed as standalone studies; as precursors to more in-depth policy analysis and as precursors to empirical research and policy/programme evaluations. However, policy reviews have some differences to literature/research reviews. Anderson et al (2008: 8) defined policy reviews as 'scoping studies that aim to identify and review the main policy frameworks and arrangements that have a bearing on the nature of practice in an area'. In this sense, policy reviews examine social policies and their associated political and institutional frameworks via the collation and analysis of: policy/official strategies and reports; statutory guidance and legislation; practice guidance and official documents; government, policy and organisational websites; official/government data and statistics; publicly available data and national representative/key informant reports (Anderson et al 2008).

Policy scoping reviews can have national or cross-national foci - examining policy frameworks, arrangements, debates and contexts within or across nation states. They can

also review policy frameworks and debates in relation to European and/or international agencies and frameworks such as those related to the European Union or the United Nations (UN) (Sandbæk 2017). A relevant example is Boddy et al's (2009: 7) 'scoping review of parenting support approaches and developments in five European countries'. This comparative review examined the following key features of parenting support policies and provisions: the ways in which parenting support is conceptualised, the use of related terminology and the alignment between key concepts and key theoretical/political influences; the mode and levels of access to provision; the make-up of the workforce and professional roles; the degree to which services operated in coherent and integrated ways; the approach to service development and evaluation; and the broader political and institutional context. The methods employed combined a literature review, policy documents analysis, organisational webpage analysis and national representative reports.

Commissioned by UNICEF and completed by Daly et al (2015), the report 'family and parenting support policy and provision: a global perspective' developed a highly useful analytical framework for policy scoping studies in these areas. Their analytical framework incorporated four domains or 'clusters of factors' (Daly 2015: 9) that are significant in understanding and developing family support across national contexts:

1. The broader social, political, economic and institutional contexts which encompass "the setting, discourses and background conditions" in which actors and actions related to family support policy and provision are embedded (Daly 2015: 30);

2. The policy actors, paradigms, rationales and 'evidence' which constitute the 'driving influences' in relation to the direction and nature of family support measures and reforms; and are described as "the most important factor either precipitating action or determining the form that a particular intervention will take" (Daly 2015: 9);

3. The 'forms and modalities of policy and provision' in terms of the main 'characteristics of' and developments in, 'policy and provision' (Daly 2015: 15);

4. And the 'impacts and outcomes' of family and parenting support policies and measures for children, youth, parents, families, communities and society more broadly (Daly 2015: 15).

The EurofamNet scoping study aims to provide a critical review of national and European policies and provisions related to family support. It therefore incorporates policy scoping approaches. It also draws on the insights of recent reports and studies, such as by Boddy et al (2009) and Daly et al (2015), to develop the research questions and strategies guiding our policy reviews.

2.3 Scoping study aims and questions

Utilising literature/research review and policy review approaches, our scoping study will examine 'the conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe' with a central focus concerned with developments and debates in relation to 'family support services'. Where relevant and appropriate it will adopt a critical perspective to inform subsequent work undertaken by the activities in the EurofamNet COST action project. As a starting point, family support services are defined in broad terms as:

> Services and programmes targeted at children and/or young people and their parents and/or their families which aim to support families, promote children rights and improve family functioning.

The scoping study responds to the need for more European research about family support services in order to better understand and evaluate the variety of national approaches and developments (Daly et al 2015; Sandbeak 2017); and to better advance the ways in which family support policies and provisions can promote children's rights, social welfare and social equality (Canavan et al 2016).

The scoping study aims to:

- Develop innovative and comprehensive conceptualisations of 'family support' and typologies of 'family support services' that can usefully inform research, policy and practice;

- Provide a general yet critical review of developments and challenges in family support policy and provision particularly in relation to family support services;

- Identify critical issues and gaps related to research, policy and practice in the area to inform three follow-up activities to be undertaken in the COST action – research/policy/practice knowledge exchange actions; policy/practice stakeholder consultations; and the development of empirical research projects/funding bids.

To achieve these aims, the scoping study will examine five main overall research questions. These are listed below with an accompanying list of indicative sub-questions. The degree to which the scoping study will address these areas of interest will be refined during the process of the review. Several questions listed below – such as those related to providing a more in-depth evaluations and developing new conceptual frameworks - will be examined further in the subsequent work undertaken by Working Group 2 in Year 2-3 of the COST action project.

1. What are the main conceptualisations of, and approaches to, family support policy and provision across Europe?

2. What are the main forms (types) and modalities (genres) of family support services delivered in European countries?

3. What are the key features of the national approach to, and package of, support and services for children, parents and families more broadly?

4. What are the roles and implications of the major European and international policies and bodies (e.g. EU, Council of Europe, UN) in relation to family support policy and provision?

5. From an egalitarian evidence-informed standpoint, what are some of the prominent innovations and challenges related to current national and European reforms in the area of family support services?

2.4 Scoping study design

Guided by the aims and questions above, the scoping study will combine three main components. It will:

1. Undertake a review of academic and policy/practice literature published since 2010 to examine contemporary studies, theories and perspectives about the ways in which family support in general, and family support services in particular, have been conceptualised, delivered and developed across European countries;

2. Compile and analyse national reports about family support developments and contexts produced by the national representatives involved in the COST action;

3. Undertake a policy review of relevant and significant European Union and international policies and frameworks related to family support.

Three sub-groups led by each of the three WG2 leaders will be formed including all members of WG2 to oversee and undertake the three components of the scoping review.

Literature review about 'the conceptualisation and delivery of family support'

Adopting Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework above, the literature review aims to provide a general, indicative review of significant academic and policy/practice literature concerned with 'the conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe'. It will aim to identify and examine similarities and differences in the meanings and applications of 'family support' as a key concept within and across European countries. It will aim to identify and examine similarities and differences in national approaches to, and packages of, support and services

for children, parents and families across European countries; and the ways in which the literature in the area has conceptualised, evaluated and theorised these. Further aims of the literature review are to identify knowledge gaps in the area.

However, the scoping study will not extensively review specific policy/service evaluation literatures or significantly address questions of policy/service impacts and outcomes. Where evaluation literature is more extensive (e.g. related to specific types of evidence-based programmes such as parenting programmes), the findings of significant research reviews will be included in our review and tentative evaluation conclusions may be reached about 'promising approaches' and more rigorously evaluated services. This approach is mindful that WG3 and WG4 in the COST action are more focused on these issues undertaking research and actions related to evidence-based programmes, best practice guidelines and service standards/professional development frameworks.

Potential limitations to the literature review will be the dominance of literature published in English; and reporting the key findings in English. Two strategies employed to address these limitations to some extent include: the contributions made by WG2 members that are bilingual in their language of origin and English; and a request for national representatives to provide literature search terms and key literature recommendations. Therefore, in terms of literature search terms – a range of terms will be utilised in order to capture English and European terminology/concepts. The literature sources accessed will include academic databases relevant to key academic disciplines (e.g. social policy, sociology, psychology, health and social work). Significant policy/practice literature will also be identified and reviewed by: undertaking google searches, searching organisational websites and following recommendations from COST action members. Literature inclusion and exclusion criteria will be fully developed during the process of the review. Initial key criteria will be: literature related to the COST action countries; literature related to EU and international agencies and frameworks; literature published in and since 2000; and literature with a significant focus on 'the conceptualisation and delivery of family support' including prominent research/systematic reviews in relation to prominent areas of evaluation literature but not the full range of evaluation literature related to specific services and programmes.

National reports of family support policy and provision

Given the gaps in current literature related to family support and given the significance of understanding 'provision in context' - a key component of our scoping study will be the submission and analysis of national policy/provision reviews provided by the national representatives involved in our COST action programme. This aspect of the scoping study draws on the policy review approaches discussed above. The national reports will primarily address research questions 1-3 above although will potentially also address aspects of

research questions 4 and 5. It is requested that one national report be produced per country involved in the COST action programme. This data collection is to be coordinated with the other WGs which also require national data collection organised by national leaders. The WG2 leader and sub-group responsible for this element of the scoping review will therefore contact national leaders and coordinate this data collection with WG3 and WG4.

Informed by a template provided, national representatives will be asked to complete a national survey/report form. The national survey/report will provide an overview of the main types of, and developments in, family support services at the national level. National reports will also provide an overview of the broader institutional, political and socio-economic context important to understanding the main features of, and changes in, family support services in the country. Further, in these reports national representatives are encouraged to highlight what they consider to be the main strengths and limitations, advances and challenges pertinent to developing, evidence-informed approaches within their country.

Review of European and international policies and frameworks

Addressing RQ4 and associated sub-questions listed above, the third element of the scoping study will examine approaches to, and developments in, family support policy and provision related to influential and significant EU and international policies and agencies. For feasibility reasons, the main focus of this aspect of the study will be to review relevant and significant developments related to family support emerging from key European and international agencies such as the EU, the UN and the Council of Europe. Drawing on literature review and policy review approaches, this aspect of the scoping study will consider questions such as: What is the evolving scope of EU policy competences in relation to state support and services for families with children among EU member states? What are the recent significant EU policies and initiatives in the area? What are key policy aims, principles and measures these encompass? In these respects, the Council of Europe's Recommendations (2006; 2011; 2013) on Positive Parenting policies and European Union strategies for children's rights and 'investing in children' (EPIC 2017) are highly relevant and significant.

This aspect of the scoping study will also examine key questions such as: What are the impacts and implications of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in the area of family support? The ways in which, and degree to which, these European and international policies and agencies recognise the diversity and complexity of contemporary families and childhoods as well as the range of vulnerable groups and social support needs will also be examined.

This review will include policy analysis methods such as documentary analysis of key legal instruments (e.g. CoE recommendations; EU treaties); and key policy strategies (e.g. children's rights strategies; family and parenting support strategies).

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