



INTERNATIONAL
STEP by STEP
ASSOCIATION

Family and Parenting Support in the first 1,000 days

State of Art and European Perspectives

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A professional association of close to **95 member organizations** working in the field of early childhood in **more than 40 countries**, primarily in Europe and Central Asia

ABOUT ISSA

We advocate for and support **competent early childhood systems** for all children, especially the most vulnerable.

We strive to increase awareness of the **importance of early childhood development** and of a **qualified workforce**.

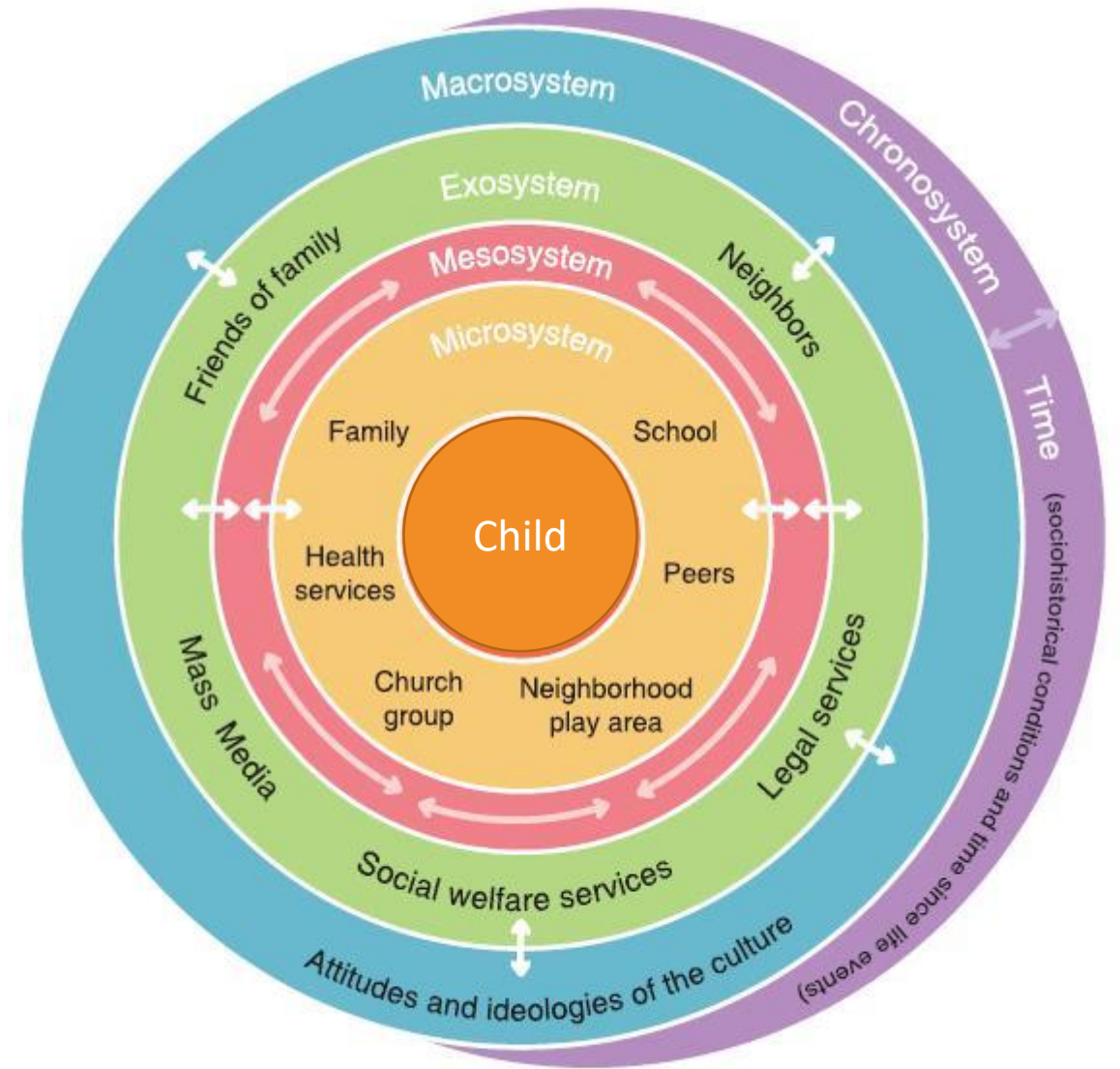
We promote **quality, equitable and integrated services** for children and families and practitioners.

www.issa.nl

The key concept:

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

A holistic perspective, at 360°



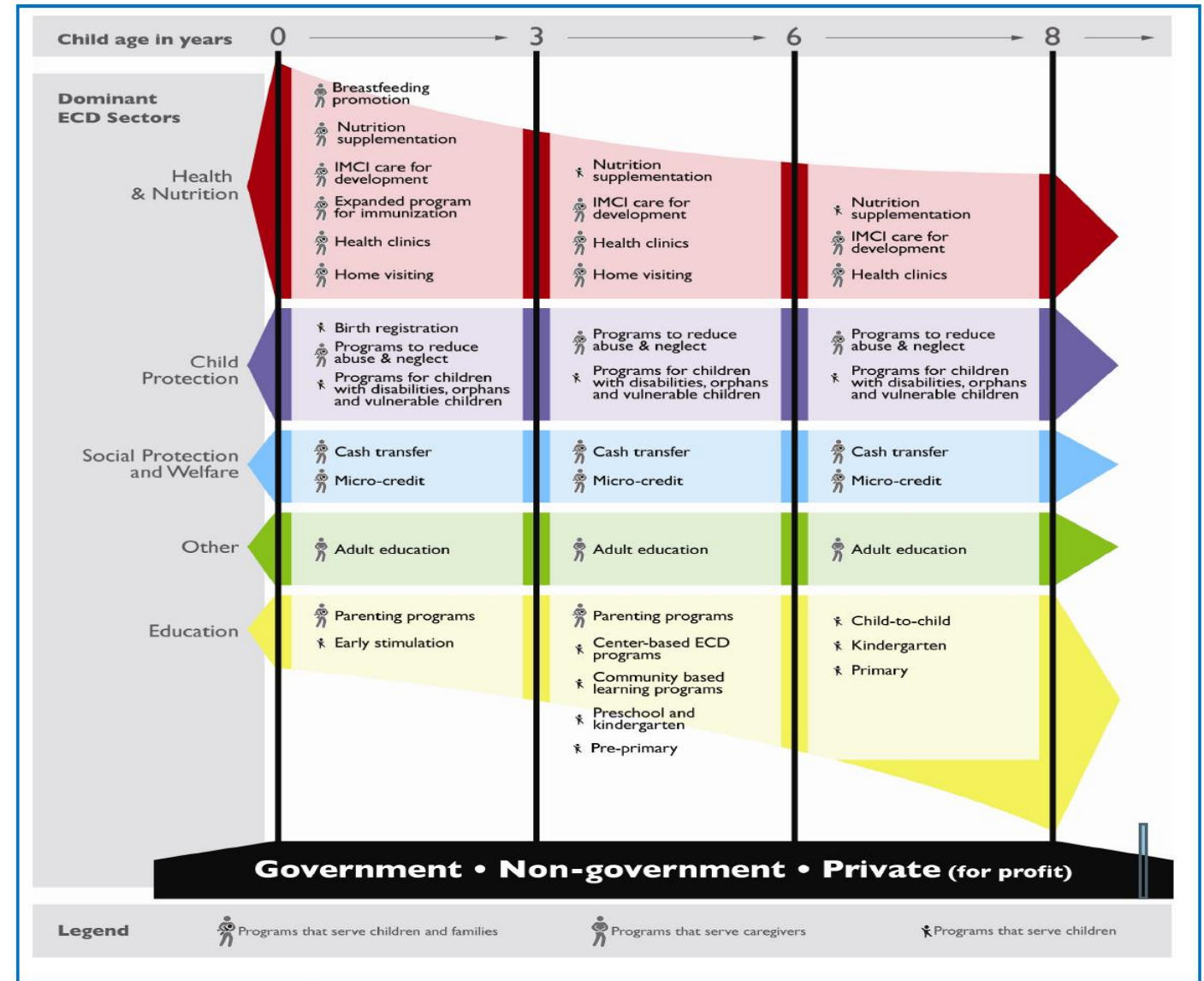
Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of personal development
(adapted from Santrock, 2007¹)

¹Santrock, J. W. (2007). Child Development (11 ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

ECD – A HOLISTIC AND COMPREHENSIVE PERSPECTIVE

Managing a complex (eco)system

- Common vision and values
- Coordinated policies and governance
- Coordinated funding
- Coherent competences
- Coordinated services
- Coherent practices



Source: Britto, P.B, Yoshikawa, H., Boller, K. (2011). *Quality of Early Childhood*

European policy Framework

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021)



European Pillar of Social Rights

Thematic areas of the Strategy



Child participation in political and democratic life



Socio-economic inclusion, health and education



Combating violence against children and ensuring child protection



Child-friendly justice



Digital and Information Society



The Global dimension



IMPORTANT STEPS: THE EUROPEAN CHILD GUARANTEE (2021)



CORE RECOMMENDATIONS



early
childhood
education
and care



education
and school-
based
activities



at least
one healthy
meal each
school day



healthcare



healthy
nutrition



adequate
housing

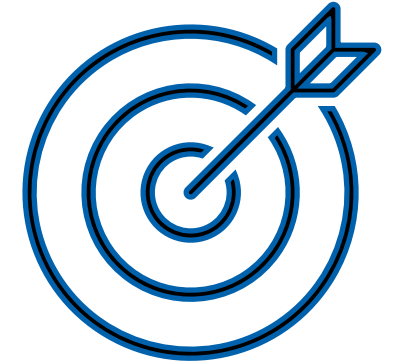
Strength

A comprehensive approach to childhood
A starting point/booster for **coordinated public policies and funding**
Strong focus on the most disadvantaged

Risk

Refers to children from birth to 18 years of age
Insufficient focus on family environment, capacity and support

IMPORTANT STEPS: THE BARCELONA TARGETS (2022)



Ensuring that by 2030 at least 45% of children below the age of three can participate in ECEC.

M.S. to increase ECEC participation in relation to their respective current participation rates:

- *by at least 90% for Member States whose participation rate is lower than 20%; or*
- *by at least 45%, or until at least reaching a participation rate of 45%, for Member States whose participation rate is between 20% and 33%.*

Strength

A more comprehensive approach to ECEC
Strong focus on quality and the most disadvantaged

Key aspects:

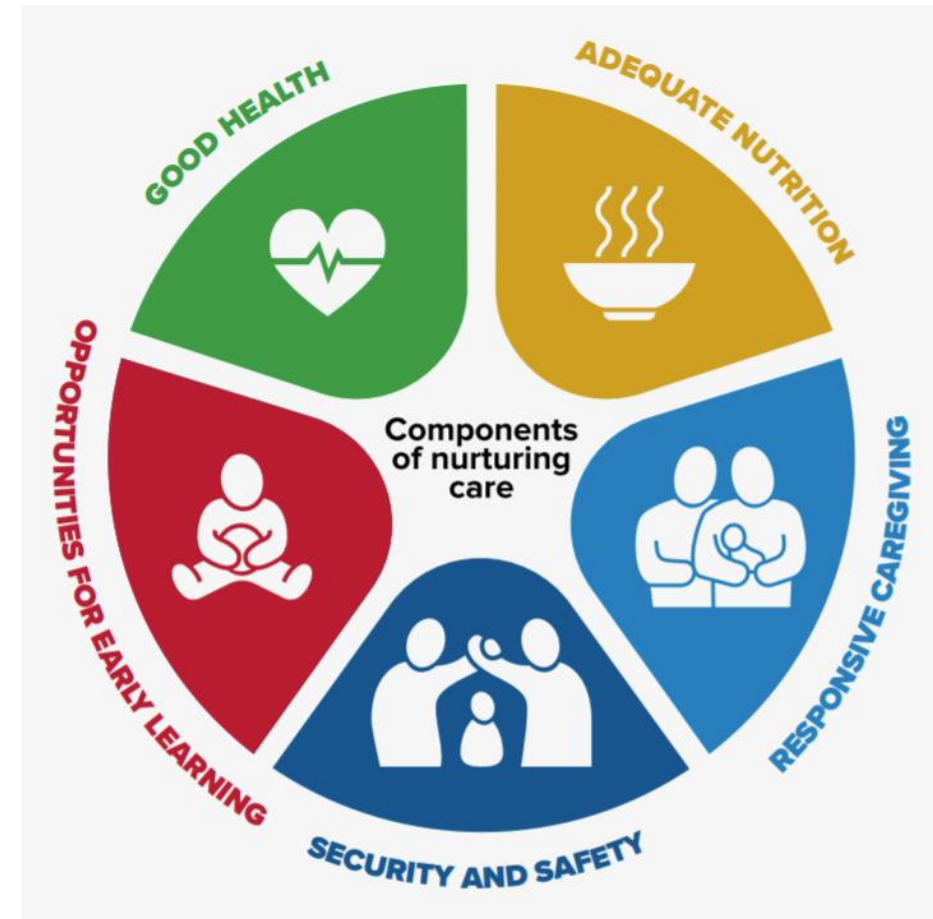
- Intensity of child participation
- Inclusion of vulnerable children
- Quality of services
- Territorial distribution
- Affordability
- Accessibility
- Complementary services and out of school care
- Staff working conditions
- Tackling the gender gap

Risk

Insufficient focus on parenting and family support, except in what regards the accessibility, affordability, flexibility of program, and gender equality (paternal leave and uptake).

Supportive global policy framework:

The Nurturing Care Framework (2018)



Strength

A comprehensive approach to childhood in the early years

A starting point/booster for **coordinated public policies, programs, and funding**

High profile of parental support as key in the early childhood program and policies

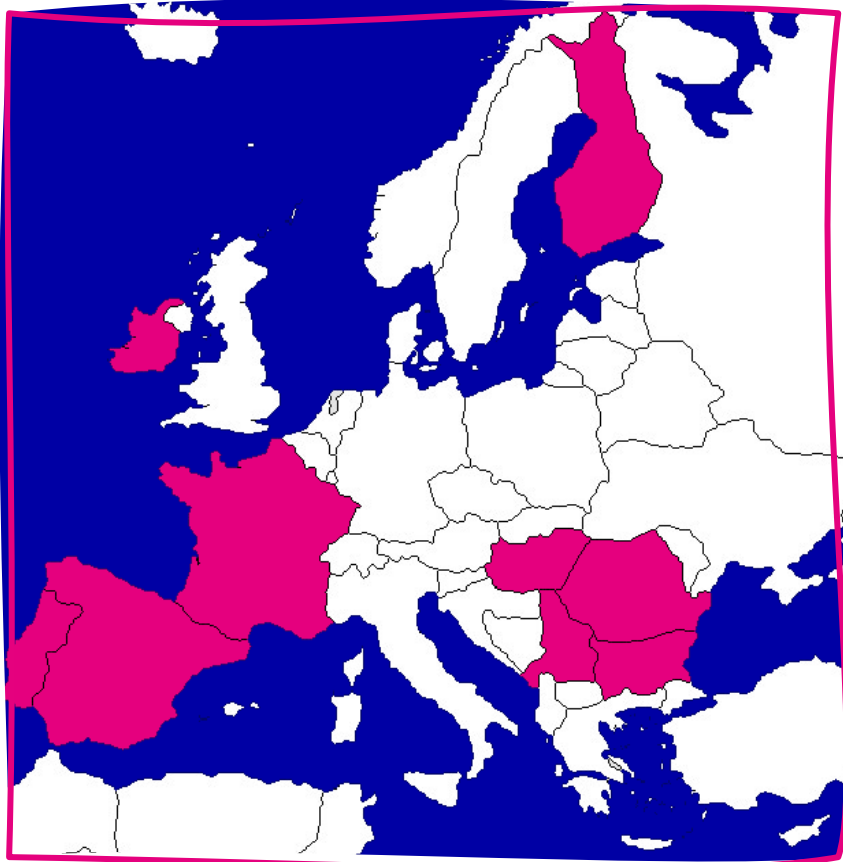
EARLY
CHILDHOOD
DEVELOPMENT

first years
first priority



- A comprehensive and holistic approach to ECD across early years – pre-birth up to primary school (6 years)
- A comprehensive approach to key areas of factors impacting ECD
- Strong focus on the most vulnerable children
- Strong focus on family environment, family capacity and support
- Strong focus on cross-sectoral coordination

first years
first priority



The *First Years First Priority Campaign* operates at the European level through its European partners (Eurochild, the International Step by Step Association, European Public Health Alliance, Roma Education Fund) and at country level through its National Coordinators and national coalitions in nine countries:

Countries involved:

1. **Bulgaria**
2. **Finland**
3. **France**
4. **Hungary**
5. **Ireland**
6. **Portugal**
7. **Romania**
8. **Serbia**
9. **Spain**

FirstYearsFirstPriority.eu

KEY FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES (2021)

1

The scarcity of data on almost all policy areas impacting ECD - especially children under three and the most vulnerable

2

Limited or non-existent disaggregated data on the lives of young children under six – especially those under three

3

Across countries there is a need to guarantee universal access to ECEC services for the entire age range (birth to 6)

4

There is a need for an integrated multi-sectoral approach to early childhood, with leadership and coordination that addresses children's and families' needs in a comprehensive way

Among the shared priorities in terms of data collection



Track data at EU and country level on **child and family poverty and social exclusion** for children under the age of six and especially for children under three, as well as for children and families from vulnerable groups



Track data at EU and country level on **maternal and child health indicators**, **disaggregated** by type of vulnerability

Among the shared priorities in terms of policies



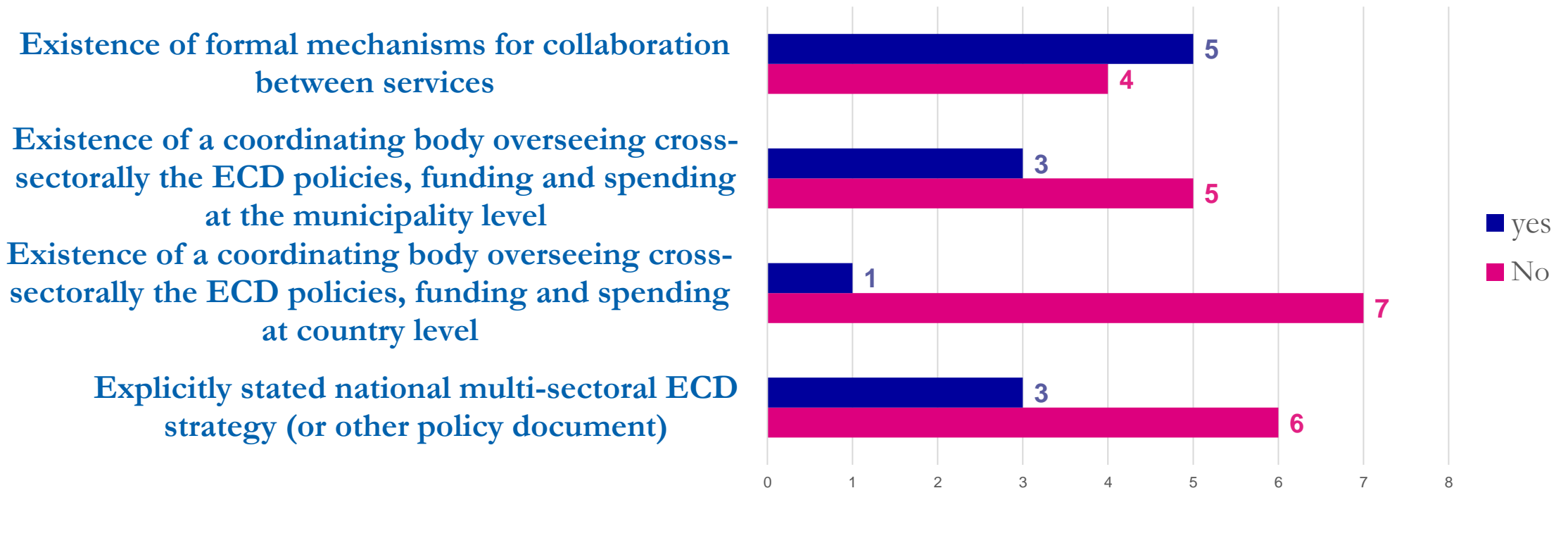
Take policy measures to ensure equal access to **pre- and postnatal care for all pregnant women, particularly for those living in precarious conditions and at risk of exclusion** (Roma and Travellers, migrants or refugees, single mothers, unemployed, undocumented).



Approach **parenting and family support policies and services** for parents with children under six years of age, and especially for those experiencing precarious life conditions, with multi-sectoral policy

POLICY AREA: CROSS-SECTORAL COORDINATION

Cross-sectoral coordination on ECD policy development and implementation (2021)



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT: A FEW REASONS



Acknowledges that **families should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance** so that they can fully assume their responsibilities



Families' engagement in their children's education is a fundamental **right and obligation** (OECD, 2006; UNICEF, 2008)



Acknowledges **parenting as a domain of public policy**

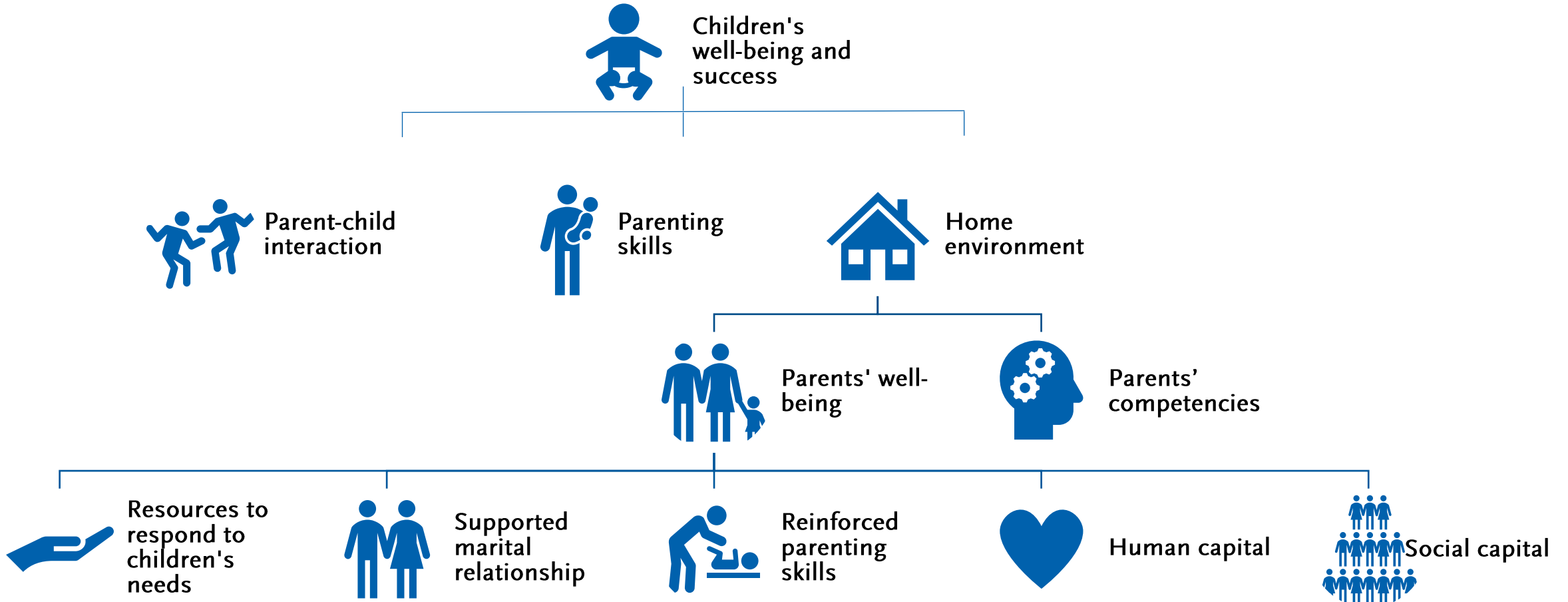


Prevention of **social exclusion and disadvantage** is most effectively achieved through support of parents at different levels



Research results highlighting the importance of family engagement and support for healthy child development and learning

WHAT IS AT STAKE WHEN TALKING ABOUT PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT?



SOME FACTS ABOUT FAMILIES AND PARENTING TODAY

Families **have changed** (family formation, household structure, work-life balance, etc.).

Families' roles are **complex**.

Today's families **DO NOT have the support they used to have** (by social networks, extended family, workplace environments, etc.).

Positive parenting is amongst the most **decisive factors** for healthy child development.

Parenting is **affected**, among other things (e.g., physical and mental health), by the **resources** they have in terms of availability (choices!) and in which they function. **the systems**

The best possible start for children is ensured through early **support of their key caregivers** (during and even before pregnancy).

Every family
would
welcome and
use some kind
of support

CURRENT STATUS OF PARENTING SUPPORT PROVISION IN THE EU COUNTRIES

- **Attention on parenting support is on the rise.**
- **Most countries lack a cohesive parenting support policy framework.**
- **In most countries, families do not have access to comprehensive parenting support but rather to uncoordinated and frequently overlapping services.**
- **In many cases, parenting support is provided via targeted and/or segregated policies/services which aim to meet narrow purposes (e.g., child abuse) or meet the needs of specific subgroups (e.g., disadvantaged families).**

CURRENT STATUS OF PARENTING SUPPORT PROVISION IN THE EU COUNTRIES

Focus on family financial support

Family policies across Europe often have a direct objective of providing financial support to children and families - cash transfers, such as child benefits, and of child and family tax credits, with many Member States increasing the value of existing benefits or introducing new forms of financial support.

Focus on parenting support programs - examples

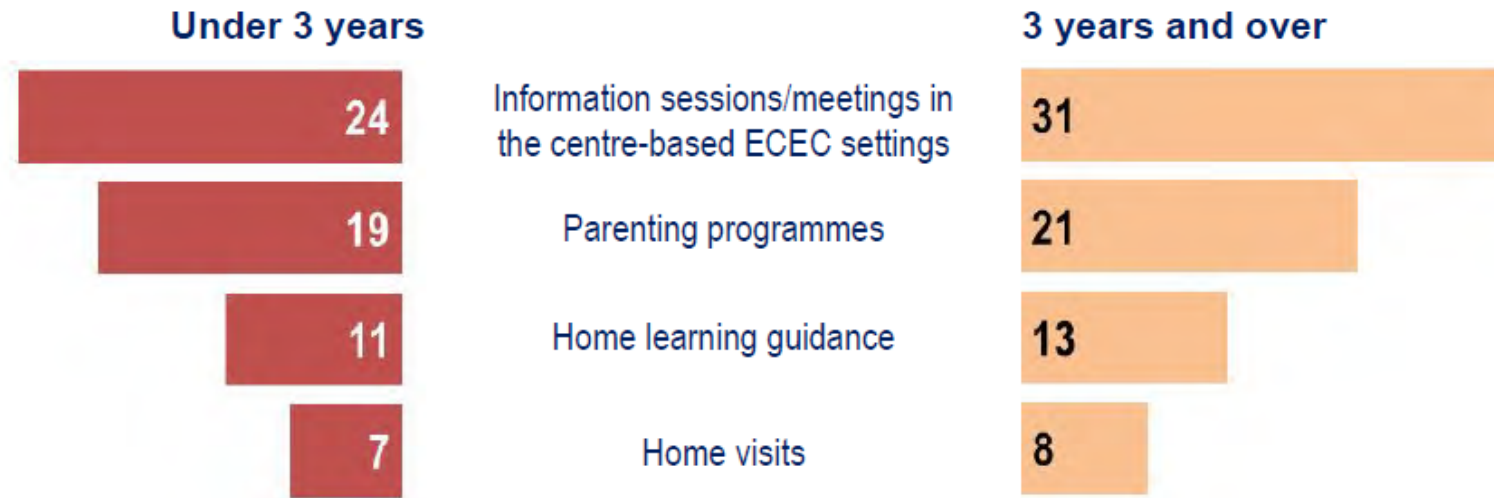
- In 2019, the **Swedish** government invested in a **national strategy** to help parents through maternity- and child-support groups, a parenting support programme, and an online knowledge-sharing platform.
- In **Germany**, the **Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention** was established in January 2018, with a dedicated funding to support families and child development and to protect children from violence.
- In **Malta**, apart from financial benefits, the government introduced the **National Strategic Policy for Positive Parenting** (2016-2024), which seeks to strengthen the family, support parents in their parenting roles and promote collaboration among ministries and agencies to ensure that services are available and accessible to those who need them most.

THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Nordic governments are encouraged to equally address to the following six areas:

1. Recognize the importance of the first 1,000 days of life for lifelong mental health and wellbeing.
2. *Provide comprehensive support for parents during children's first 1,000 days of life.*
3. Identify and respond systematically to risk factors early in life.
4. Improve equity and quality in services for young children and their families.
5. Strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration for the benefit of young children and their families.
6. Advance research, knowledge and understanding about the first 1,000 days of life.

SUPPORT MEASURES FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN ATTENDING ECEC

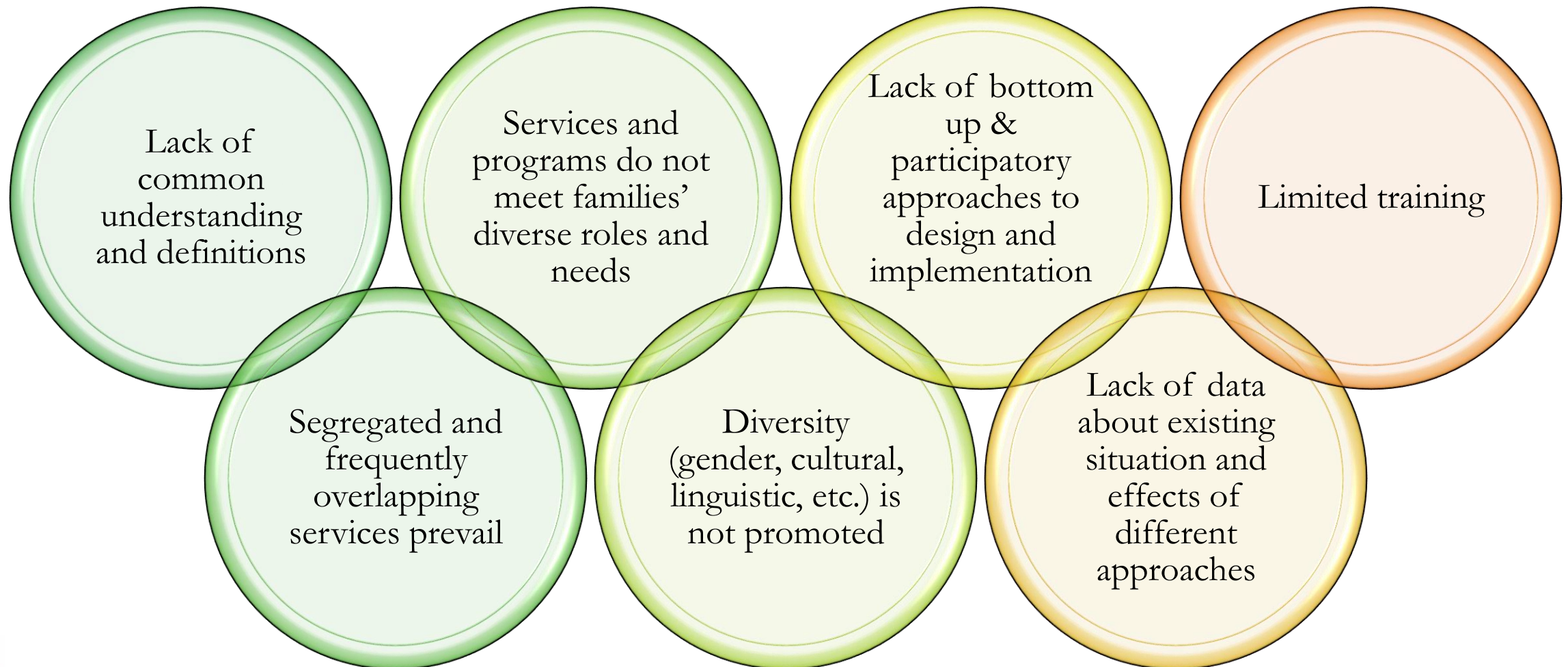


Source: Eurydice.

Explanatory note

The Figure includes any support specified by top-level authorities in their educational guidelines, other regulations or recommendations, or national programmes. For each age range, the number on the bar indicates the number of European education systems (43 in total) offering each support measure. Information by country is available in the Annex.

EXISTING CHALLENGES IN PARENTING AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES AT COUNTRY LEVEL



FAMILY POLICIES AND PROGRAMS - CONNECTING SOME DOTS...

CONTEXT impacting young children and families

Increasing poverty
Increasing inequalities
Increasing family insecurity and uncertainty
Intersectional vulnerabilities

....

EUROPEAN POLICY - RESPONSE (so far)

Increased attention to children
Increased measures for combating (child) poverty
Increased access to quality ECEC – focus on the vulnerable groups
Increased attention to gender equality and parenting

EUROPEAN POLICY - GAPS

Moving beyond family financial support and gender equality policies
Prioritizing policies for parenting and family support services and programs, especially for the most vulnerable
An integrated policy approach to ECD (intersectoral), and implicitly, to parenting and family support

WHAT TO PRIORITIZE?



Evidence-based, data-informed policies centered on young children's and families' needs (especially the most vulnerable).



Employing a **comprehensive 'constellation' approach** to policy measures and services around young children and families addressing their complex needs:

- Whole-government approach (coordination across sectors at policy / governance level)
- Whole-community approach (coordination across services and stakeholders)
- Establish functional networks of services at the local level – use existing services as entry points, strengthen capacity and collaboration.



Competent implementation of policies that allows **local contextualization and local participation**.

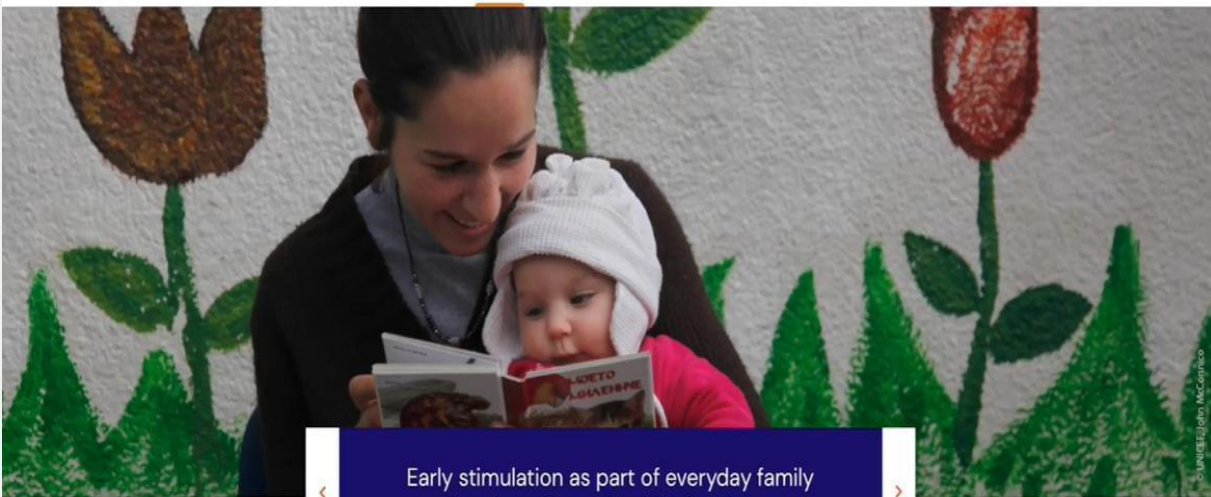
*Quality, effective services for families and children depend on **quality policies** and **quality implementation of policies**.*

Health systems for Early Child Development website: <https://healthforecd.com/>



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Early stimulation as part of everyday family routines benefits early child development.

The new perspective on the role of health care in **child development**



Health systems for Early Child Development

Health care systems can do a lot to support caregivers through family centered services to strengthen family resources and skills to provide nurturing care to young children.

[View >](#)



Facility-based health care

Facility-based health care services in Europe and Central Asia have a unique opportunity to support holistic child de

[View >](#)



Home visiting

Home visiting during pregnancy and early childhood is an effective health promotion strategy for improving...

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Developmental Monitoring

Developmental monitoring is partnering with families to follow and support children's development.

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Supporting children with complex needs

Health care providers often meet children with complex needs such as chronic or complex medical conditions, disability

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Thank you!

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