



Survey on the role of parents and the support from the Governments in the EU

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ChildONEurope Secretariat

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This survey has been carried out by the ChildONEurope Secretariat in accordance with an agreement concluded with the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity of Portugal. The functions of the ChildONEurope Secretariat have been assigned by the ChildONEurope Assembly to the Italian National Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre, whose activities are managed by the Istituto degli Innocenti of Florence, under an Agreement with the Ministry of Social Solidarity of the Italian Republic.

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List of acronyms

ChildONEurope	= European Network of National Observatories on Childhood
CoE	= Council of Europe
COs	= Concluding Observations
Committee	= United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
CRC	= United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
EU	= European Union
GA	= United Nations General Assembly
L'Europe de l'Enfance	= Permanent Intergovernmental Group L'Europe de l'Enfance
SG	= United Nations Secretary General
UN	= United Nations

1. Introduction

1.1. Origin and aims of the survey

The Republic of Portugal decided to hold a meeting of *L'Europe de l'Enfance* on the 31st of October 2007 in Lisbon, on the occasion of its Semester of the EU Presidency (1st July to 31st December 2007). For this event, the **Portuguese Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity** has entrusted the ChildONEurope Secretariat¹ with the mandate of carrying out the survey “The role of parents and the support from the Governments in the EU”, considering its terms of reference and its relations with *L'Europe de l'Enfance*. ChildONEurope is an institutional Network of the National Observatories or institutions on childhood appointed by the national Ministries of the EU which form *L'Europe de l'Enfance*. ChildONEurope was set up in 2003 after two years of preparatory work in the context of *L'Europe de l'Enfance*, whose aim is, among others, to promote the mainstreaming of children's policies and of the rights of the child in all EU policies. The main objectives of ChildONEurope are the following: the exchange of knowledge and information on national legislations, policies, programmes, statistics, studies and best practices concerning childhood and adolescence, the realization of comparative surveys, the organization of seminars and conferences at a EU level with a multidisciplinary and comparative approach, the development and exchange of knowledge on methodology and indicators in order to obtain comparability of data and information. In June 2007, ChildONEurope comprised 24 partners². With regard to the contents of this survey carried out by the ChildONEurope Secretariat, the overall objective is to **mainstream children's rights in the policies implemented at the national level on State support to families within the 27 EU Countries** on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

More specifically the survey aims at identifying the different kinds of State support to the family provided in the EU Member States. It is necessary to specify that the survey focuses in particular on the **socio-pedagogical support given to parents through parental education programmes and counselling**. The survey does not take into consideration the other forms of parental support, such as economic support, child-care services, measures to reconcile family and working life. The latter are undoubtedly key elements in supporting parenting, but the aim of this survey is to look specifically at the different forms of parental education that have been developing across the EU in recent years as they represent a new tool to help parents in their child-rearing responsibilities, that needs to be further analysed and developed. As underlined by international bodies like the Council of Europe (CoE), the nature of parenting has deeply changed, also due to the modified gender roles inside the family and in society as well as to the new labour organization, and parenting therefore requires appropriate attention and response by the States. In this framework, the specific aim of the survey is to identify policies, programmes and interventions on parenting support currently carried out by the EU Member States at national level, to compare them and to share some of the most significant and innovative experiences in this field.

The **survey results** will be presented during the *L'Europe de l'Enfance* meeting held in **Lisbon on 31st October 2007**.

1.2. Methodology and content of the survey

In compliance with the mandate and the aims mentioned above, the survey was realised on the basis of the following steps:

¹ The ChildONEurope Secretariat has a role which enables it to make proposals and it has technical-scientific, logistic, documentary and communication support functions. The Secretariat's functions have been assigned to the Italian National Childhood and Adolescence Documentation and Analysis Centre whose activities are managed by the Istituto degli Innocenti of Florence.

² For more information, see the web site www.childoneurope.org.

- 1. identification, collection and analysis of the international documents.** It is important to start from the international instruments dealing with State support to families, adopted by the international organizations such as the UN and those working specifically at a European level: the EU and the CoE. Concerning the UN, the report analyses not only the CRC, in particular articles 5 and 18 of the CRC, but also the General Discussion of the CRC Committee dedicated to the role of the family in the promotion of the rights of the child, the Guidelines on reporting and the Report of the UN SG on preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004. In relation to the EU the report provides a brief overview of the activities carried out in this field and outlines the approach developed by the EU on family support, analysing the main document adopted, whereas for the CoE, a view of its main elaborations on family support is presented, analysing the evolution path followed by the CoE in developing its approach to positive parenting.
- 2. identification, collection and analysis of the Concluding Observations (COs) of the Committee** on the last national reports discussed by the 27 EU Member Countries on the specific issue of State support to families; the analysis of the COs, identifying the common, positive and critical points emerging most frequently from the CRC Committee COs on this specific issue. The aim of this analysis is to identify the achievements of the 27 EU Member States and the obstacles and challenges, which remain to be addressed in the process of full implementation of the CRC on this specific issue; the comparison of those common positive and critical points emerging most frequently from the CRC Committee COs.
- 3. request, collection and analysis of information to ChildONEurope partners on national policies on parenting programmes and services.** The purpose of this step was to collect information from the EU Member States on the policies, programmes and actions they are currently undertaking on the specific issue of support to families. The comparative analysis also takes into consideration the information collected for the Conference of European ministers responsible for family affairs, XXVIIIth session, 16 – 17 may 2006, Lisbon, Portugal “Changes in parenting: children today, parents tomorrow” as well as those present in the last EU country report to the CRC Committee.

The survey is divided into **5 chapters**: the first one is an introduction to explain the origin, aims, methodology and content of the survey, the second focuses on the international instruments, the third on the CRC, and in particular the Committee COs, the fourth on the national policies on parenting support and the fifth presents some conclusions.

The survey includes in **annex** the list of the relevant national and international web sites and a bibliography on State support to families.

2. International instruments

2.1. United Nations

Different UN documents take into consideration the subject of the family, and the CRC adopted by the GA on the 20th of November 1989 and ratified by all the EU member States, is the most relevant not only among them, but also among all the international instruments. It is important to underline that such documents address the specific issue of parental education and counselling in the **wider context of family support policies**, therefore this part of the survey will take into consideration the way in which this wider subject is treated in the UN documents.

Chapter 3 of the survey is specifically dedicated to the CRC, in particular to articles 5 and 18 concerning the matter of family support, and also to the documents adopted by the CRC Committee: a General Discussion dedicated to the role of the family in the promotion of the rights of the child, Guidelines on reporting and COs concerning the last reports presented by the 27 EU member States.

Among the others UN documents, it is important to focus attention on the **report of the SG on preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004**³. The report provides additional information and analysis of the situation of families worldwide, as well as approaches undertaken, primarily by governments at the national level, in family policy and in support of families. The report follows the process enforced by the GA with two resolutions: the first one⁴ which aims, *inter alia*, to:

- a. strengthen the capacity** of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families;
- b. stimulate efforts** to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families;
- c. undertake analytical reviews** at all levels and assessments of the situation and needs of families;
- d. strengthen the effectiveness of efforts** at all levels to execute specific programmes concerning families;
- e. improve collaboration** among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families.

The second resolution⁵ which aims to request to the SG to submit an interim report to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-second session and a substantive report to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session on the implementation of that resolution and on the preparations for and the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels.

The report summarizes the information received, indicating general priority issues and approaches for the consideration of the GA for the period following the tenth anniversary of the Year. After briefly considering the changing circumstances of families, the report focuses on **national level actions on behalf of families**. It considers approaches to family policy, suggests the need for regular national surveys of the situation of families, and proposes actions for national coordination of family policies and programmes, as well as other national actions (legal reforms, legislation and other measures, public awareness, research, service provision and support to non-governmental organizations).

The major focus for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is placed at the local, national and regional levels. In preparation for the observance of the tenth anniversary, many Governments have taken a number of measures that have long-term implications for family policies and programmes. The report also provides a **synthesis of the experiences of a number**

³ A/59/176 Report of the Secretary-General on Preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004.

⁴ R/54/124 of 17 December 1999, Resolution of the General Assembly reaffirming the importance of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

⁵ R/58/15 of 13 December 2003, Resolution of the General Assembly requesting the Secretary-General to submit an interim report to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-second session and a substantive report to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session on the implementation of that resolution and on the preparations for and the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels.

of Governments, as well as a consideration of approaches and good practices in family policies and programmes that may provide input into national deliberations and planning for the future.

The report states that besides **policies** designed specifically **to support families**, all countries have a range of social policies, many focused on the needs of individuals, that also have an impact on the families in which those individuals live. Most existing social policies and programmes focus on individuals with few adjustments made in design and implementation to account for the diversity of family structures, internal dynamics and local cultures. Programmes and measures in areas such as employment, housing, education, health and transport should be evaluated not only in terms of how they affect individuals, but also on the basis of their likely contribution to resolving family difficulties or whether they promote family stability, ensure a family's ability to adapt or respond effectively to its environment, or reduce disparities in the benefits provided to families in terms of insurance, taxation, services, education or training.

In addition, family concerns are cross-cutting and multisectoral: they often cannot be addressed adequately by a single sectoral Ministry. It is suggested that a **national coordinating body** be established, consisting of representatives of public and civil institutions concerned with family matters. The coordinating mechanism could be a consultative body that plans, develops and implements family policies and programmes with the aim of mainstreaming and integrating a family perspective in those Ministries that may require advice and assistance and it can provide them with expertise and appropriate technical support on family issues.

The report also underlines the importance of the international Conventions ratified by Governments that have to conform their legal codes with **international standards**. Significant progress has also been made in the sphere of **legislation at national and local level** to improve the living conditions and strengthen the social security and stability of families, particularly families with children. Many Countries have enacted or considered new laws that directly benefit families. The laws and bills show that there is special interest in strengthening parent-child relations, dealing with conjugal and family disputes, helping people balance work and family responsibilities, protecting mothers and promoting measures related to the health and well-being of family members.

One of the major objectives of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, has been to revitalize public attention directed towards the family and to renew support for family policies and programmes. This revitalized attention and renewed support should be maintained and extended through an ongoing **public awareness campaign** and efforts to turn awareness into action.

Social services generally include provision of **education and training**, medical care, reproductive health services, social welfare services and labour market services. Many services are designed to meet the specific needs of individual family members without giving due attention to the family context. Social services should treat the family as a fundamental partner in the provision of support for those family members who need care. When problems exist that a family cannot address by itself, the State and the social sectors must intervene, but they should focus their efforts on strengthening the family's own independence and minimizing its dependency on external services. Effective services would help families to retain and strengthen their caregiving functions and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to cope.

Many countries provide some kind of **financial support** to families, generally in the form of direct payments, entitlements to special services or tax benefits. These benefits acknowledge the expense involved in raising a family and the difficulties many families face in reconciling work and family responsibilities. Governments may consider increasing family allowances, taking into account family income and applying principles of fairness; awarding a child benefit to families; and including adopted children among the children who benefit from family allowances.

This report has provided a substantive review of issues concerning family policy and programmes, based on experiences gained during the preparation and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. This review may provide **guidance to Governments** as they further develop national policies, programmes and plans of action on the family. In considering further action

on the family in the follow-up to the tenth anniversary, the GA may wish to consider the following recommendations.

- To **integrate family issues in national development policies and programmes**, Governments may wish to establish three institutional pillars: first, a national commitment at the highest level of government, preferably in the form of a declaration or proclamation, by the head of State; second, an effective national coordinating mechanism; and third, appropriate family support legislation and social services that take into account the country's cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions;
- Governments should **maintain a partnership with concerned organizations of civil society** (including non-governmental organizations, academia, professional societies and institutions, trade unions, employers' federations, chambers of commerce and industry, the legal and medical professions, and other stakeholders), especially through their participation in national coordination mechanisms;
- As the **UN** has a **catalytic and supportive role** in strengthening and enhancing concern for the family at the national, regional and global levels, this role can best be exercised by assisting in integrating family perspectives in the development process and by supporting national action. The GA may wish to encourage the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to provide technical assistance to national coordination mechanisms; support diagnostic studies, research and data collection; exchange expertise and experiences on family issues; disseminate information; support networking at sub regional, regional and interregional levels; and encourage policy and programme coordination within the UN system, and with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The UN Programme on the Family should highlight advocacy, capacity-building and technical support to Governments, at their request, on the issue of the family.

2.2. Council of Europe

The CoE has a long list of activities in the area of parenting and **parenting support**. A first step in this direction was moved through the adoption in 1975 by the Parliamentary Assembly of Recommendation 751 (1975)⁶, in which the Parliamentary Assembly recommended that the Committee of Ministers invite member governments to adopt **policies** in the areas of **family law, social legislation, labour and education** etc., with the intention to promote and safeguard the **equality of men and women**, and a genuine partnership between them within the family and society. In this recommendation it is possible to perceive a particular concern for the changing conditions of families towards a model within which the married partners share their rights and duties more equally and both are also entitled to participate in the upbringing of children and in paid employment activities.

The main objective of this recommendation is to “enable parents to choose between remaining in the home and taking paid employment, without prejudice in either case to the upbringing of their small children or their own interest in terms of social security and other social benefits”.

With this intention the Recommendation also provided a list of **pro-active proposals** addressed to Member States and related to **social security and taxation**, to the **re-entry into employment**, the organisation of work and the increasing of **child care facilities** in particular for day care.

The Parliamentary assembly added⁷ other recommendations to this first attempt by, among these

⁶ Recommendation 751 (1975) on the position and responsibility of parents in the modern family and their support by society, text adopted by the Assembly on 24 January 1975.

⁷ Recommendation 1074 (1988) on family policy; Recommendation 1121 (1990) on the rights of children; Recommendation 1443 (2000) on international adoption: respecting children's rights; Recommendation 1501 (2001) on parents' and teachers' responsibilities in children's education; Recommendation 1551 (2002) on building a 21st-century society with and for children: follow-up to the European strategy for children (Recommendation 1286 (1996)); Recommendation 1639 (2003) on family mediation and equality of sexes; Recommendation 1666 (2004) on a Europe-wide ban on corporal punishment of children; Recommendation 1698 (2005) on the rights of children in institutions: follow-up to Recommendation 1601 (2003) of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Recommendation 1074 (1988)⁸ is worth mentioning. In fact, through its comparison with the previous Rec751 (1975), it is possible to see the profound changes occurring in the family's structures and models, characterised not by a different relationship within the couple, but by greater life expectancy, a sharp drop in the birth-rate, a decrease in the number of marriages and remarriages, an increase in the divorce rate, a proliferation of single-parent families, an increase in other forms of communal life such as cohabitation, and the evolution of the role of women. In addition external factors such as alterations in working conditions, the persistence of pockets of structural poverty, the increase in unemployment, illicit drug use, violence and delinquency, and economic migration, have increased tensions within the family. All of this was already influencing the needs and the problems of the family in the social sphere demanding a different approach by the State with regard to family policy. In particular, the Recommendation demanded that the State give more attention to the **creation of circumstances necessary for the establishment of a "family unit in which the individual can develop in safety, solidarity and respect for fundamental rights"**.

This Recommendation, in line with the previous one, recommend that the Committee of Ministries invite the Member States to adopt **coherent family policies** ensuring the respect of **equality between the sexes** within the family and the **protection of children's rights**⁹. In particular in relation to children's conditions, even if this was adopted one year before the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, the recommendation requires the States to elaborate family policy taking into account the **needs of young families with limited means**, and to **enable children to develop in favourable housing conditions** and a **favourable environment**, adapting the infrastructure of towns to the needs of people and to recognise the value of housework and education carried out by persons who stay at home for the particular purpose of raising their children. It stresses the importance of recognising that the "prime responsibility for the upbringing of the child lies with his family". Moreover, reference is made to the development of policies based on a continuous and structured **dialogue between the public authority and the parents**, in particular recommending the adoption of national family policy including a permanent, constructive dialogue between parents and the education authorities, guaranteeing equality of opportunity for children, in particular for those in need, providing a system of "educational sponsoring", to assist single persons in difficulty to bring up their children and improving care structures for young children and adapting them to the needs of families, including particular categories who work at night.

Moreover, due to the changed working conditions, the Assembly underlines the importance of striking "a better **balance between professional activities and family life**", suggesting to plan and also legally guarantee greater **flexibility for working time** and ensure the consolidation of "**parental leave**" as a common reality in the national contexts.

This activity of the Assembly was integrated by the Committee of Ministries through the adoption of a wide series of recommendations to the Member States¹⁰, also in this case the first act dedicated to the family condition precedes the adoption of the CRC. In fact the first document dealing with the responsibility of parents in relation to the upbringing of their children was adopted in 1984. Recommendation (84)1984¹¹ draws up a list of 11 principles, concerning parental responsibility and

⁸ Recommendation 1074 (1988), on family policy, text adopted by the Assembly on 3 May 1988.

⁹ Recommendation 1074 (1988) was adopted one year before the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, but it already refers to the children's right within the family emphasising the necessity to speed up the elaboration process of the CRC itself.

¹⁰ Recommendation (84) 4 on parental responsibilities; Recommendation(85) 4 on violence in the family; Recommendation (87) 6 on foster families; Recommendation (94) 14 on coherent and integrated family policies; Recommendation (96) 5 on reconciling work and family life; Recommendation (97) 4 on securing and promoting the health of single parent families; Recommendation (98) 8 on children's participation in family and social life; Recommendation (2005)5 on the rights of children living in residential institutions and Recommendation (2006)5 on the Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006-2015.

¹¹ Recommendation R (84) 4 of the committee of ministers to member states on parental responsibilities, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 February 1984 at the 367th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

advises Governments to adopt legal provisions complying with them and guaranteeing legal equality between parents within the family.

In this recommendation the **parental responsibilities** are considered as the “**collection of duties and powers** which aim at ensuring the moral and material welfare of the child, in particular by taking care of the person of the child, by maintaining personal relationships with him and by providing for his education, his maintenance, his legal representation and the administration of his property”¹². The recommendation is strictly focused on legal aspect and mainly deals with the **right to exercise the parental responsibility** by parents in the different family situations (i.e. dissolution of the marriage, separation of the parents, child is born out of wedlock, legal filiation link established with one parent, etc.). However, even though not giving any kind of reference to intervention of socio-pedagogical support to parents through parental education programmes and/or counselling, in almost every single principle set down in the recommendation there is an explicit reference to the fact that the exercise of parental responsibility should be based primarily on the interests of the child (Principle 2), moreover when it is necessary to take a decision relating to the attribution or exercise of parental responsibilities and affecting the essential interests of the child, the latter should be consulted in order to have the opportunity to express his/her opinion (Principle 3).

Concerning the inclusion of **socio-pedagogical support** to parents among the classic forms of support dedicated to the family for a positive parenthood a move ahead in this direction is Recommendation (94)14¹³, in which for the first time the activities of counselling and guidance are mentioned among the services for the family within the preventive family policy. The recommendation suggests the **drafting and the adoption of a coherent and integrated family policy** in which the role of the **public authorities** is to **create the circumstances** conducive to the emergence of a family unit in which the individual can develop in safety, self-respect and solidarity, enjoying fundamental rights, in a legal, social, cultural and economic context, with actions based on the needs and various stages of family life cycles. It is recommended that Governments support the implementation of coherent and integrated family policies on the basis of the principles of consultation, co-ordination, efficiency and flexibility. These principles need to be applied in an equal manner at local, regional and national level, as appropriate in order to have a **coherent and integrated family policy function across administrative boundaries** as a factor co-ordinating all action taken affecting families.

Recommendation (94) 14 in practice suggests implementing a policy co-ordinating and reconciling the different sectors which affect the members of families and the family as a unit (i.e. social security, working life, education, environment, consumer interests, culture, housing, traffic, mass media, tourism, etc.). The family is recognised as having a central role in the promotion of solidarity between the generations and with the weakest members of the community and the upbringing of children according to the basic values of a democratic society. For these reasons education and mediation services are considered the most significant tools to resolve any family conflicts and the family also needs to be granted the possibility of forming or joining associations of parents which share opinions and express their views about family issues to the public authorities, suggesting measures which they consider to be in their interest.

However, a particularly important initiative of the CoE that added new elements of discussion to the current debate on this issue of **socio-pedagogical support** to parents through parental education programmes and/or counselling is without doubt the COE Recommendation (2006)19 on **positive parenting adopted** by the Committee of Ministers on 13th December 2006¹⁴.

¹² Principle 1 of the Recommendation (84)4.

¹³ Recommendation R (94) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on coherent and integrated family policies, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 November 1994.

¹⁴ Recommendation Rec(2006)19 on policy to support positive parenting, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 December 2006, <http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/youthfamily>.

Recommendation (2006)¹⁹ defines “**parenting**”, as “all the **roles falling to parents in order to care for and bring up children**”, there is an evident shift in the definition, more focused on the relationship between parents and their children and the difference with the approaches of the previous recommendations which concentrated more on the identification of the different actions included in the up-bringing of children instead of on the relationship between the parents and their children. This seems to suggest that parenting needs to be considered as the interaction between parents and children, promoting an approach that entails rights and duties for the child’s development and self-fulfilment. For the first time, Rec (2006)¹⁹ also provides the **definition of “positive parenting”** considered as **the parental behaviour ensuring the fulfilment of 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”.

This recommendation underlines the importance to children of growing up in a positive family environment and the **State’s responsibility to create the right conditions for positive parenting** is also emphasised, whereas the family is considered as the primary unit of society and parenting has an essential role for the future of the society. It encourages an integrated (united) approach, in the process of creating the necessary conditions for positive parenting in the best interest of the child, including cooperative action between the public authorities, the economic and social sectors and civil society. As a consequence of the Final Communiqué and Political Declaration of the European Ministers responsible for the family adopted at their 28th session in Lisbon (Portugal) in 2006, the Recommendation (2006)¹⁹ considers the “**creation of the right conditions**” as the: ensuring of **access to appropriate material, psychological, social and cultural resources**; taking steps to remove barriers to positive parenting, such as policies to promote a better reconciliation of family and working life; and importantly, **raising awareness of the value of positive parenting**, to parents, children and the state¹⁵.

The national programmes and policies suggested need to be adopted with the intention to achieve three main objectives:

- a) facilitate access to appropriate and variegated material, psychological, social and cultural resources** for all of those rearing children;
- b) remove all the existing obstacles** to positive parenting;
- c) promote positive parenting through awareness raising actions.**

In particular for the third objective, the public authorities are invited to promote initiatives aiming to make people aware of the value and importance of positive parenting and take a pro-active approach to promoting awareness of parenting issues and to normalising participation in parenting programmes. It recommends the adoption of an **empowerment approach** – based on **consultation and dialogue with parents** and on their voluntary involvement and participation in the spirit of a **working partnership**.

These should be geared towards providing support on three levels:

- a) informal:** creating and strengthening existing social bonds and encouraging new links; between parents and their family, neighbours and friends;
- b) semi-formal:** empowering parents’ and children’s associations and NGOs and activating a range of self-help and other community-based groups and services;
- c) formal:** facilitating access to public services.

Fulfilling the provisions and spirit of the CRC, the Recommendation promotes the development of **positive parent-child relationships**, based on the exercise of parental responsibility to optimise the child’s potential development, rather than the exercise of parental authority. It recognises both parents and children as holders of rights, confirming the **parents’ role as guardians of their children’s rights**, whereas the **State** is considered as a **final guarantor** with the responsibility of supporting the exercise

¹⁵ Key Messages, Seminar: Promoting Children’s Rights through Positive Parenting Policies, EUROCHILD/ Children in northern Ireland Members’ exchange, Belfast, 2007.

of the positive parenting exercise. Thus, the Recommendation invites States to adopt public policies on parenting support incorporating childhood related issues, acknowledging the needs and interests of all children depending on their age, capacity and level of maturity.

Moreover a combined activity of promoting education in children's rights and positive parenting need to be adopted in particular for parents, who need to become more aware of the nature of their role, children's rights, the responsibilities and obligations that derive from these and their own rights. Always in relation to the **education and counselling support for parents**, the recommendation calls for the adoption of **preventive programmes** regarding the different **forms of ill-treatment of children**, making parents aware of the serious problem and of its consequences on the child's development. Governments are also invited to adopt **comprehensive guidelines** and **specific programmes to assist parents in complicated life situations**, conflict resolution, anger management through non-violent approaches and mediation techniques. All this always needs to be achieved through intervention based on **education and counselling activities** that with Recommendation (2006) 19 become one of the **essential parts of the state support activity** in favour of positive parenting, which the Recommendation suggests implementing through an empowerment approach, based on consultation and dialogue with parents in the spirit of working in partnership.

2.3. European Union

Concern about children and their family is not limited to the Council of Europe. Also within the EU there is currently an increasing interest in child and family policies and a greater willingness to become involved in areas previously regarded as the exclusive domestic domain of Member States. The increasing interest in children and family policies seems to be due to different elements, on one side the realisation of the strict connection existing between social and economic issues and of the need for policy intervention in the areas affecting families and children and on the other side the demographic challenges¹⁶ and the increasing child poverty in one of the richest continents of the world¹⁷.

Moreover, it seems that the majority of Member States have now prioritised the development of strategies to combat child poverty and social exclusion, adopting a policy mix which has support services for families, promoting parents' entry into the labour market and reconciliation of work and family life as essential elements¹⁸. In addition the changing demographic composition of societies is also influencing the EU agenda of actions, that is stimulating a policy response of "**demographic renewal** to encourage families to have as many children as they want with State support to reconcile work time and family life". This kind of attention was manifested on the occasion of the summit held in Brussels on March 8-9, 2007 where the heads of States and Governments of the European Union agreed on the "**European Alliance for Families**" as proposed under the German EU presidency¹⁹. The Alliance, with the participation of the European Commission, is intended to become an arena of discussion and for **exchanging** opinions and information about **family-friendly initiatives** between the Member States of the EU. The intention is for the Commission to foster "extensive cooperation and partnership between all stakeholders in order to achieve a **better balancing of professional, family and private life**. Going beyond the initiatives taken by the social partners at European Union level and to

¹⁶ Eurostat Population and social conditions <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/int>. Green Paper Confronting demographic change published in March 2005, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_situation/green_paper_en.html. Communication of the demographic future of Europe — from challenge to opportunity, adopted by the Commission on 12 October 2006, COM(2006) 571.

¹⁷ Unicef Report Card No. 7, 2007 "An overview of child well-being in rich countries" www.unicef.org/irc and on the same issue Eurochild's review of the 2006-08 national reports on strategies for social protection and social inclusion, Jan. 2007 Ending Child Poverty within the EU? www.eurochild.org.

¹⁸ EC Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007 - http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/naps.

¹⁹ http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/Press_Releases/March/0309BMFSJAllianz.html.

develop partnerships with a view to facilitating the balancing of professional, family and private life, making use of new resources made available by the Structural Funds”²⁰.

To provide a clear picture of the current situation it needs to be underlined that, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, the EU has had **no formal competence to act in the area of family affairs, except with regard to migrant workers and their family members** under the EEC Treaty provisions regarding freedom of movement. However, even though political actors at European level continue to be reluctant to address issues concerned with family life directly, the **issues of family and welfare are present in a transversal manner in others EU policy areas**, such as **social ex/inclusion, employability, social cohesion, pensions, gender equality and migration**. In other words, although the family life and relationships are not explicitly targets of specific EU policies, various of the measures implemented in other contexts have an impact on family well-being²¹.

Moreover, there is a stronger focus by the EU on children’s rights and the condition of children, in particular expressed through their recognition as rights’holders in the EU through the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights (adopted in 2000 and not yet entered into force) and the introduction last year of the European Communication “Towards a European Strategy on the Rights of the Child”²². In particular, the incorporation of the Charter on Fundamental Rights in the EU Constitution (adopted in 2004 and not yet entered into force) represents a promise to provide a new status and forward motion to policies addressing family issues. In fact, even if the Charter recognises the importance of respecting national legalisation and leaves to the Member States the burden of developing policies to ensure the reconciliation of employment and family life, it goes further by requiring the Member States to guarantee legal economic and social protection to families. Introducing the concept of rights for family members in European law, the Charter invites **Member States to monitor not only the implementation of policies influencing family structure, but also the impact and effectiveness of these policies**.

The Communication “Towards a European Strategy on the Rights of the Child” has the final aim of designing a **common strategy for children**, thus to reach this objective it aims to identify matters of urgent intervention, to mainstream children’s rights in all the EU activities, such as in drafting and implementing legislation and policies, to set up a European Forum for the rights of the child as a platform of discussion and exchange of information, to involve children in decision making, and to appoint a EU co-ordinator for the rights of the child in order to have a less fragmented action for children.

A first reference to the rights of family members of migrant workers to social protection, education and other forms of social support on the same terms as nationals in the host country is contained in the EEC Treaty (Treaty of Rome, article 3.2.2 on the removal of obstacles to freedom of movement between Member States for people) and in some European Council regulations²³, the social protection of families was not officially included in any kind of action within the EU until the 1980s, when the European Parliament suggested developing concerted action in this field.

The Commission took up the suggestion of the Parliament and adopted a Communication on family policies, published in August 1989²⁴. This document was the starting point for concrete measures (recommendations or directives) concerned with families, that started to be adopted in the 1990s. It

²⁰ Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions promoting solidarity between the generations, Brussels, 10 May 2007 COM(2007) 244 final.

²¹ Hantrais L., Family and Welfare Policy Review, for the European Commission, October 2003.

²² EC COM (2006) 367 final, 04 07 06 <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg>.

²³ Some examples: Regulation 1612/68 on freedom of movement for workers within the Community, adopted by the Council on 15 October 1968, Official Journal L 257 , 19 October 1968; Regulation 1408/71 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community, adopted by the Council on 14 June 1971, Official Journal L 149 , 05 July 1971; Regulation 574/72 fixing the procedure for implementing Regulation (EEC) No 1408/71 on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community, adopted by the Council on 21 March 1972, Official Journal L 074, 27 March 1972.

²⁴ COM (89) 363 final of 8.8.1989.

underlines the **importance of the family** and its **sensitivity to the economic and social changes** in society. It suggests the adoption of **common policies** affording special attention to child protection, **reconciling working and family life** by sharing responsibilities and focusing efforts on certain family categories (especially single-parent families, large families and families on low incomes). The European Commission also stressed the importance of **monitoring the impact of policies on families**, with particular emphasis on the protection of children. The contents of the Communication remained for a while the object of exchanges of information and joint consultations in 1989, ending in the creation of a European Observatory on National Family Policies, which was renamed in 1999 the “European Observatory on Family Matters”; its field of action was mainly to monitor trends and developments of family policies in Member State.

However, a first, modest, achievement was the 1992 Council Directive for the **protection of pregnant workers** and the **provision of maternity leave**²⁵ and the Directive on parental leave in 1996²⁶, which recognized not only the need for Community measures to **reconcile professional and family obligations**, but also the difficulties in meeting this demand. Three years later, in 1999, with the aim of implementing the Communication entitled “A concerted strategy for modernising social protection”²⁷ the European Commission set down that: “**Social protection** should contribute to **reconciling work and family life**: support for families and for the possibility to reconcile work and family life is not only a question of **equal opportunities for women and men**, but also an **economic necessity** in the light of demographic change”.

On the same lines, a Council Resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life²⁸ renovated the discussion about social and family policies, contributing to a change in the objectives to reach and to identify more ambitious goals and measures in the field of family law. An example of this shift is to be found in the Commission working document on the mutual recognition of decisions on parental responsibility (March 2001)²⁹ in which special attention is dedicated to the condition of children and the necessity to adopt family law at European level, with the aim of making more provisions for the new family situations arising within contemporary society³⁰.

Thus even if the Community legislation has long taken account of the requirements of family life and corresponding rights, its implementation concerning the freedom of movement for people and workers in Europe led to the coordination of statutory social security schemes³¹, including family benefits and the right to family reunification for workers in the European Union, including immigrants from third countries, with rights for family members³².

More recently, in the same direction, the **Lisbon Strategy** moved some steps further with the aim of strengthening actions in **balancing professional, family and private life** and **raising female employment levels**. The Open Method of Coordination in the fields of social protection and social inclusion developed under the Lisbon Strategy dedicates special **attention** to the condition of **poor children and their families** and **long-term care for dependent people**. As underlined in a recent Communication from the European Commission promoting solidarity between the generations, adopted in May 2007³³, **equal**

²⁵ Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, adopted by the Council on 19 October 1992, Official Journal L 348, 28 November 1992.

²⁶ Directive on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC, adopted by the Council on 3 June 1996, Official Journal L 145 of 19 June 1996.

²⁷ COM (99) 347 final of 14.7.99.

²⁸ Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, meeting on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life, Council of 29 June 2000, Official Journal C 218 of 31 July 2000.

²⁹ COM(2001) 166 final of 27 March 2001.

³⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs Unit E.2, Family Benefits and Family Policies in Europe, Social security and social integration, manuscript completed in June 2002.

³¹ Communication from the Commission — Free movement of workers: achieving the full benefits and potential - COM(2002) 694.

³² Council Directive 2003/86/EC on the right to family reunification. Council Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, Official Journal L 251, 03 October 2003.

³³ See note 15.

opportunities represent the **core of the Lisbon Strategy** in relation to the family context, as is also emphasised by several initiatives planned for the 2007 and 2008, such as:

- the launch by the Commission of a second phase of consultations with the social partners, asking for their opinions on the content of possible legislative and non-legislative proposals designed to help achieve a better balance;
- a series of measures to be implemented during 2007 in order to comply with the mandate from the European Council to place special emphasis on tackling child poverty;
- the adoption by the Commission of a series of measures to develop and modernise infrastructures and services providing quality of services for elderly dependent people;
- to intensify the discussion about the social framework of European societies³⁴ providing new information which can help in shaping the approach of the responses that the EU policies can provide in terms of equal opportunities and access to care services for all generations.

Even though the latter Communication recognises that **family policies are the exclusive responsibility of the Member States**, the **Lisbon Strategy** is considered as a **framework for the modernisation of family policies** through the promotion of **equal opportunities** and in particular through a better **reconciliation of work and private/family life** which contributes to female labour force participation. Thus in summary, even though the European Union has no common family policy, it nevertheless accords great importance to it, as highlighted by its legislative activities in a number of areas: migration and free movement, equal opportunities, labour law and working conditions, and social protection, but the main concern in all these actions is still to be focused on the balance between work and family life, without mentioning other forms of support dedicated in particular to the socio-educational dimension that remain the main focus of this paper.

³⁴ Social Reality Stocktaking - COM(2007) 63.

3. CRC and Committee's documents

This chapter is dedicated to the **CRC**, in particular to the articles related to family support, and to the documents adopted by the CRC Committee focused on this issue.

The CRC Preamble affirms that the **family** is "...the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children" and that "the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding".

In addition the protection of the family unit is one of the key principles of the CRC that dedicates various articles to the family as well as to the alternative care of children.

In particular **articles 5 and 18** provide a framework for the relationship between the child, his or her parents and the State, while art. 20 focuses on the rights of children deprived of their family environment and art. 21 on the regulation of the institute of adoption.

The Committee has also dedicated a **General Discussion to "The role of the family in the promotion of the rights of the child"** stating that "Traditionally, the child has been seen as a dependent, invisible and passive family member. Only recently has he or she become 'visible' and, furthermore, the movement is growing to give him or her the space to be heard and respected. Dialogue, negotiation, participation have come to the forefront of common action for children. The family becomes in turn the ideal framework for the first stage of the democratic experience for each and all of its individual members, including children"³⁵.

3.1. CRC on parental guidance and the child's evolving capacities³⁶

Art. 5

States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

Article 5 of the CRC provides a flexible definition of "family" and introduces two key concepts: **parental "responsibilities"** and the **"evolving capacities" of the child**. The article also clearly expresses a vision of the child as having active rights, emphasizing the exercise "by the child" of his or her rights.

The parents' primary responsibility in their children's upbringing is recognized also in other parts of the CRC that place strict limits on State intervention and any separation of children from their parents (articles 3(2), 7, 9, 10, 18) while one of the aims of education is the development of respect for the child's parents (article 29).

The first important aspect to note emerging from article 5 is that it provides a flexible understanding of the **concept of family** that reflects the wide variety of kinship and community arrangements within which children are brought up around the world. This concept has been better specified during the Committee General Discussion on "The role of the family in the promotion of the rights of the child" which stated that "When considering the family environment, the CRC reflects different family structures arising from various cultural patterns and emerging familial relationships. In this regard, the

³⁵ Report on the seventh session, September/October 1994, CRC/C/34, par. 183 et seq.

³⁶ From the "Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child", UNICEF, 2002, p. 85-92.

Convention refers to the extended family and the community and it applies to situations of nuclear family, separated parents, single-parent family, common-law family and adoptive family³⁷.

In this respect consideration should also be given to General Recommendation 21 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women calling for the “prohibition of bigamy and polygamy and the protection of the rights of children”³⁸.

Article 5 introduces the concept of “parental responsibilities” while art. 18 requires States parties to “use their best endeavours” to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. However the CRC does not provide a definition of “parental responsibilities”, although it appears clearly from the whole CRC that such responsibilities must be exercised to support the enjoyment by the child of the rights recognised in the CRC.

In addition the CRC Committee Guidelines for Periodic Reports ask for information on “the consideration given by law to parental responsibility, including the recognition of the common responsibilities of both parents in the upbringing and development of the child and that the best interests of the child will be their basic concern.” States are also required to “indicate how the principles of non-discrimination, respect for the views of the child and the development of the child to the maximum extent, as provided for by the Convention, are taken into account.”

The implication is that the concept of parental responsibilities should be reflected and defined in the law, using the framework of the CRC.

Article 5 further specifies that parental guidance must not be understood as being unlimited, rather it must be exercised “in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child” and must be “appropriate”. The concept of the “evolving capacities of the child” is a key concept in the CRC that aims to acknowledge that children’s development towards independent adulthood must be respected and promoted throughout childhood. The use of this concept has also avoided the need for the CRC to set arbitrary age limits or definitions of maturity tied to particular issues.

Article 5 must also be read in conjunction with article 19 providing that in no circumstances must parental guidance be exercised using physical or mental violence and the Committee has consistently upheld the view that corporal punishment is not consistent with the CRC.

3.2. CRC on parent’s joint responsibilities and assistance from the State³⁹

Art. 18

1. States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or, as the case may be, legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern.

2. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

³⁷ Report on the fifth session, January 1994, CRC/C/24, Annex V, p. 63

³⁸ General Recommendation 21, 1994, HRI/GEN/1/Rev.5, p. 230.

³⁹ From the “Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child”, UNICEF, 2002, p. 243-253.

3. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

Article 18 regulates the balance of **responsibilities** between the **child's parents** and the **State**, and particularly addresses support for parents in the performance of their responsibilities. The article must be read in conjunction with article 5 as well as articles 3(2) and 27 (the State's responsibility to assist parents in securing that children have adequate protection and care and an adequate standard of living).

These four articles of the CRC, taken together, make clear that **parents have primary responsibility** for securing the best interests of the child as their "basic concern", but that this responsibility is circumscribed by the child's rights under the CRC and may be shared with others such as members of the wider family. The **State** must take **appropriate steps to assist parents** in fulfilling their responsibilities. If parents cannot, the State must intervene to ensure that the child's rights and needs are met.

Protection of the family by the State had already been provided by the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** that in article 10 states "The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children".

Article 18 explicitly recognizes the common responsibilities of both parents for the upbringing and development of the child. This article clearly goes beyond financial responsibility, calling for both parents to play an active part in their child's upbringing.

The Committee has underlined the importance of this principle recognizing that most societies have only recently acknowledged that fathers, as well as mothers, can and should undertake the day-to-day care of their children, and that mothers, as well as fathers, have financial responsibilities and legal rights in relation to children.

This principle had already been recognised by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that in article 5 requires States to declare "...the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases".

For the Committee, the State shall use its best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child.

The principle of common responsibilities applies also in the case of fathers of children born out of wedlock. The Committee has often expressed its concern at the large number of single-parent families: a concern that does not relate to the state of marriage but to the need of children to have both parents actively involved in their upbringing and to the greater likelihood of poverty for children in one-parent families.

Again the principle of common responsibilities should also apply when parents separate, as explicitly recognised in article 9 of the CRC stating "...the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests". This implies that unless it is proved to the contrary, the continued involvement of both parents in the child's life is in his or her best interests.

Finally, the paragraph 2 of article 18 emphasizes the **State's responsibility to provide appropriate assistance to parents**. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the CRC, the Committee underlines that States shall: render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities; ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children; take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.

3.3. The Committee COs on articles 5 and 18

This paragraph of the survey regards the analysis of the CRC Committee COs. First of all the attention is focused on the most frequent positive achievements, than on the most frequent Committee's concerns and recommendations on the specific issue of family support – as named by the Committee – taken into consideration by the Committee and followed by an explanation of the Committee's approach to the issue addressed.

One of the key points of the survey remains the identification of the achievements reached by the 27 EU Member Countries and the obstacles and challenges, which remain to be addressed in the process of the implementation of the CRC in relation to the articles 5 and 18.

The Committee has devoted much attention to the subject of family support, in particular as regards the principle of parental guidance and the protection owed to families by the State (art. 5 and 18) on which has issued relevant COs for 12 EU member Countries⁴⁰.

The Committee has commented positively on a number of **initiatives** undertaken by the States in this field, first of all at a **legislative** level, such as laws and plans of action on family policy, on support to family with children and against poverty and social exclusion aiming at setting up a global policy on the family and/or at tackling the issue of child poverty⁴¹ or specific laws or legislative amendments on child benefits, parental leave and shared parental custody⁴². The Committee has further appreciated the creation of specific centres to support families by providing counselling and parental education⁴³. Notwithstanding these positive achievements, the Committee has expressed its concern about the following issues:

- insufficiency of support by the State to families in terms of **parental education and counselling**;
- insufficiency of support by the State to families as regards **economic support and furnishing of child-care services**;
- inadequate respect for the principle that the child should maintain **contact with both parents** also in case of separation or divorce.

The first point has been addressed by the Committee in the COs of 5 EU member Countries⁴⁴.

The Committee has underlined the need to prepare parents for their responsibilities and in its Guidelines for Periodic Reports has asked for information on **parental education** programmes and on counselling for parents, and how knowledge about child development and the evolving capacities of the child are conveyed to parents and others responsible for children. The Guidelines also request information on any evaluation of the effectiveness of such educational measures.

The States have been invited to provide effective counselling and community-based programmes for families, to improve social assistance and support to families to help them with their child-rearing responsibilities, to support **parental education** programmes, to implement fully the programme of cooperation with UNICEF on enhancing family capacity, in particular for parents of disadvantaged children and also with a view to prevent abandonment and institutionalisation as well as to help families to provide appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the CRC in a manner consistent with his/her evolving capacities and by encouraging the perception of the child as an holder of rights⁴⁵. The Committee has also focused on the importance of **improving the efficiency and the quality of professional support and counselling** for families through the availability of qualified staff and resources⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia.

⁴¹ Czech Republic, Portugal and Romania.

⁴² Germany, Slovenia.

⁴³ Cyprus, Ireland, Slovenia.

⁴⁴ Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Netherlands and Romania.

⁴⁵ Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania.

⁴⁶ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia.

As regards the second point on the **economic support and furnishing of child-care services**, the Committee has addressed this issue in its COs for 5 EU member Countries⁴⁷.

The Committee has indicated that the **economic support from the State** referred to in art. 18 is obviously appropriate when parents are unable to undertake their child-rearing responsibilities, whether or not this is their fault. For instance it has requested States to adopt a family policy that includes social security for the child and the family, housing and social services; that every effort be made to the maximum extent of the available resources to support families in their child-rearing responsibilities, to reduce the number of persons living in poverty and to ensure access for all children and parents to financial assistance.

However the Committee has made clear that the protection referred to in article 18 should not be interpreted according to a narrow definition, rather it should be understood as including the State responsibility to assist all parents by “ensuring the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children”. In addition States are required to ensure “that **children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities** for which they are eligible”.

In relation to this last point the Committee has requested the provision of maternity and paternity leave as well as services for the conciliation of working and family life and child-care services⁴⁸.

Finally the Committee has recommended States to guarantee the principle that the **child should maintain contact with both parents including in case of separation or divorce**⁴⁹ and that disputes for the custody of children are resolved in appropriate time and in the best interest of the child⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ Czech Republic, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania.

⁴⁸ Czech republic, Netherlands, Portugal.

⁴⁹ Cyprus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Slovenia.

⁵⁰ Finland, Germany, Greece.

4. Comparative analysis of EU States policies and programmes on parenting support

4.1. What we mean by the concept of parenting support

As already specified, this survey focuses in particular on the socio-pedagogical support given to parents through parental education programmes and counselling. The survey does not take into consideration the other forms of parental support, such as economic support, child-care services, measures of conciliation of family and working life. The latter are undoubtedly key elements in supporting parenting, but the aim of this survey is to look specifically at the different forms of parental education and counselling that have been developing across the EU in recent years as they represent a new tool to help parents in their child-rearing responsibilities, that needs to be further analysed and developed.

As indicated in the introduction, this chapter is based on the information received from the ChildONEurope partners, as well as from the documents of the Council of Europe and the national reports to the UN CRC Committee.

As a consequence **the reference made in the text to specific projects carried out in the different EU countries does not claim to be exhaustive, but rather aims at presenting different kinds of experiences as a basis for reflection and knowledge-sharing on parenting programmes in the EU.**

More specifically the different forms of promotion of parenting competence that will be analysed include actions aimed at improving parents' knowledge of children's developmental needs and parents' educational strategies (family education), as well as actions aimed at helping parents to deal with ordinary as well as difficult situations in family life (family counselling).

From a theoretical point of view, parenting support must be included in the framework of education sciences and included among the objects of a discipline called "family education" (Pourtois, Desmet, 1989; Durning, 1995; Martinez-Gonzalez, 2001, 2007). Such a discipline deals with the study and the intervention on intrafamily (parent-child relationship) educational processes as well as extra-family interventions (services-to-parents relations).

In this framework parenting support programmes are primarily aimed at contributing to the preservation of family functions by strengthening family support services and the services do not substitute parents and their responsibilities.

Personal responsibility, justice and solidarity principles form the basis of family policy. The particular emphasis placed on gender equality is considered as one of the family policy principles and its consistent application is the prerequisite of identified priorities, especially in support of working and family life harmonization. The principle of balance and flexibility reflects the need for balanced assistance to families at every stage of the family cycle. Therefore assistance to families should consist of different types of support depending on the life situation of the family in question. Furthermore parenting programmes should support parents (fathers and mothers) irrespective of the legal form of the family, in order to prevent the preferential treatment of a certain form of a family to the detriment of another.

The main theoretical concepts⁵¹ that have emerged from research carried out on parenting programmes are the following:

- *Look for strengths and potential, not just problems*, namely look at the resources that even families in difficulties may have and build on those. Even if this process may be longer and difficult, research has demonstrated that the results are more long-lasting and it is important to map the resources of the community involved before starting a project (McKnight, Kretzmann, 1990).
- *Support neighbourhood parenting*, namely strengthen the social support in particular from the neighbourhood. The social work action is said to be based on the so-called five "C": *consulting*,

⁵¹ On this part see also the balance model in "Parenting support", Factsheet, NIZW International Centre, May 2002.

connecting, convening, constructing, coaching, that is to say working with a participative and shared programming logic and by promoting a “neighbourhood proximity” among families. The prevailing logic seems to be not so much and not only to work to reduce risk-factors, but above all to strengthen opportunity factors (Dunst, Trivette, 1997).

4.2. Legislative framework and bodies involved in the realization of parenting programmes

Regarding the **legislative framework**, few States have enacted specific legislation on the issue of parenting programmes. References to this can be found in more general legislations, such as on parental support (for instance the Austrian *Family Burden Equalization Act*, § 39c, 1 January 2000) or on children’s rights and protection (for instance the Portuguese Law 147/99 on the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk refers in article 41 to parental education programmes).

An interesting Act is the Belgian (French Community) Plan of Action on parental support adopted in June 2006, which covers the different sectors involved: social, education, health, culture and sports. This Plan has three main aims: promoting existing initiatives and informing on best practices; promoting the training of practitioners involved; developing services able to respond to families needs.

In Germany in its resolution of 22/23.5.2003, the Conference of Ministers for Youth emphasized the need to consider the legal, financial and expertise requirements in order to specify the parenting education services and to ensure their provision at regional and local levels. Also in the Netherlands the programme of the Ministry for children and families gives a high priority to parenting support.

In Italy a reference to parenting support can be found in Law No. 285 of 28 August 1997 that has represented one of the main instruments for implementing the rights of children and the adolescents. Law 285/97 states that the Fund may provide financing, among other programmes, for projects which pursue objectives such as providing preparatory and support services for parent-child relations to combat poverty and violence, and providing alternative measures to taking children into care in educational and help-oriented institutions, considering also foreign children.

The objectives which recur most frequently in the projects realised thanks to this law include the following: promoting and strengthening forms of self-help for families, providing support in parenting for families by disseminating a culture for sharing experiences, placing emphasis on mutual help and the skills of parents perceived as partners and not merely receivers-users of the intervention. There are very few interventions with objectives towards creating “parenting schools” based on the assumption that parents can be taught pre-packed knowledge divulging precepts instead of solving problems. In addition, the strategies indicated for achieving the objectives focus highly on local realities: they range from teaching mothers in depressed areas in the south of Italy to read and write, to trial projects within companies as a support to single mothers for gaining access to the labour market, and developing the practice of home-visiting in the immediate post partum period, to providing pedagogical support to the parents of children who do not attend day-nursery, establishing family-oriented structures and self-managed day-nurseries and building neighbourhood networks etc.

In other countries as well, the legislative framework concerning parenting support is represented not by a specific law or specific provision, but is entrusted to governmental authorities that give expression to their policies through regulamentary acts or circulars. What frequently happens is that those activities directed to promote support for parents are not compulsory, even if recommended.

As regards the **bodies** involved in the provision of service, it is possible to distinguish between three different levels of intervention: there are bodies responsible for planning, bodies that finance the activities, and bodies that are entrusted with the task of realizing the different parenting programmes. The first two levels of intervention are generally carried out both by central authorities (e.g. competent

Ministries) and by local governments, while the last one is normally entrusted to local agencies, local services and private organizations, such as NGOs, associations, foundations. Sometimes private agencies are also involved in the planning phase.

Therefore, generally the government itself does not run parenting programmes. Local authorities, schools and voluntary organisations run a wide range of parenting programmes, mostly using funding provided by the government.

A general trend that can be identified is therefore that of the **decentralization** of the provision of parenting services and programmes, while at the same time it seems that in this field, the issue of **public and private integration** has found specific and innovative ways of expression.

In the Netherlands for instance there is no national programme or standard because the municipalities are responsible for offering parenting support programmes and services. However, as a result of Operation Young, a 3 year programme on the reform of the chain of children's and young people's services, the recommendation has been made that in each municipality a Centre for Children and Families should be created and this process is currently in place.

Some countries have also created specific bodies, for instance the United Kingdom has set up the National Advisory Group to strengthen parenting education in schools, the National Family and Parenting Institute and the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, while France set up Networks for listening, support and counselling of parents (REAAP) (see the box). In Italy it is worth mentioning the setting up of the National Observatory on Family, in the framework of the activities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, that includes among its institutional aims the monitoring of the projects for parenting support. In recent years the Observatory drafted various surveys in the field of parenting support and conciliation of family and working life giving to professionals of the field an important occasion for training and in-depth study.

Belgium (French community)

The **Birth and Children Office (O.N.E.)** is a public interest body with a legal personality, whose tasks are defined in the Decree of 17 July 2002.

The tasks of the ONE are essentially twofold: to accompany the child in the relationship with his/her family and social environment and to provide quality care for children outside their family nuclei. Among the secondary tasks of the Office there is also the provision of parental support.

The following are some of the most important initiatives promoted by ONE.

Prenatal consultation centres can be incorporated into hospital complexes, but most of them are located in the town districts. Their purpose is to ensure that pregnancies progress satisfactorily, to screen pregnant women and to prevent the risks of giving birth to premature or underweight babies. Their objective is also to protect the health of the future mother and of the foetus, by fighting in particular against smoking and other addictions, in order to reduce infant and mother's mortality and to prepare the future mother for the birth and, for those who wish to, for breastfeeding. The physicians of the prenatal centre and the medical-social workers (TMS) collaborate in providing parental support and medical and social services to the future parents. The TMS can also make visits to the home of the future parents, if they so request.

During the first visit, the future mother is given a "**Carnet de la Mère**" (mother's book), which she will use primarily during her visits at the ONE's prenatal centre, with her GP or gynaecologist, during her stay in the maternity ward, or during the visit of the ONE's medical-social worker (TMS).

The Publication "Devenir parents" (Becoming parents)

The publication "Devenir Parents" answers some of the most common questions of (future) parents and stresses the importance of the role played by fathers. It contains information on the following topics: importance of prevention for the well-being of the child; health education; parental responsibilities and the rights of the child; the different approaches to birth.

The Publication "Le carnet de l'enfant" (Child's book)

This publication gives some information and suggestions concerning the child's development, his/her sleep, diet, as well as other topics related to his/her well-being.

Consultation points for children and family support at home

Their role is to promote the well-being of healthy children, not to treat ill children, and to follow their development up to 6 years of age. The objective of these preventive consultations is to ensure that the children have a harmonious upbringing and development. Besides carrying out preventive medical examinations, these structures also promote health education campaigns and provide parental support to the parents.

Finland

In the **FAMILY** project different local level actors are encouraged to build mutually co-ordinated networks in order to gain optimal benefit from the services needed by an individual family. The co-ordination between the bodies producing services helps to avoid the splitting of problems as well as overlaps in services. The project is being carried out in the territory of scores of municipalities basically in a similar form (reform of the service structure) but with varying applications (e.g. support for parenting, effective health education, or strengthening the father's role). The actors involved are the public social welfare and health care and school service, private social and health care, and non-governmental organisations.

France

The **REAAP (Networks for listening, support and counselling of parents)** were created in March 1999, with the aims to support parents in the upbringing of their children and to strengthen and promote new initiatives by creating a network of all the professionals dealing with families.

In April 2003, the Department of Health and Social Security (DDAS) delegated its role as coordinator of the REAAP to the Child Benefit Office (CAF) of the Yonne Department, given its knowledge in the field, existing agreements and its complementarity with the REAAP objectives.

One of the priorities of the Social Action of the Yonne CAF is family support, i.e. the provision of assistance and guidance to parents in the upbringing of their children.

In the development plan for the 2006-2009 period, the CAF has confirmed its willingness to continue to participate in the project.

4.3. Ways of providing parenting support programmes

The provision of services and programmes related to parenting support varies greatly across the EU, from those countries where specific and comprehensive parenting programmes addressed to all parents have been in place for several years, to those that have just started to set up programmes in this field that are mainly addressed to families at risk or to parents in difficulty.

However there is **general acknowledgement that the setting up or consolidation of parenting programmes is needed** in order to meet the new needs expressed by today's families. As underlined by international bodies, such as the Council of Europe, the nature of parenting has deeply changed, also due to the modified gender roles inside the family and in society as well as to the new labour organization, and it requires therefore an appropriate attention and response.

A common element that can be identified in the variety of programmes and services provided across the EU is the introduction of a **family support dimension in the provision of health services**, in particular those related to family planning, pregnancy and the rearing of new-born children. As also recognised by the Council of Europe study⁵², the health services play a major role in all member States. Courses about birth preparation are present in all countries and there is an increasing tendency to also involve fathers in these initiatives in order to promote fatherhood from its early stages.

⁵² Council of Europe, "Changes in parenting: children today, parents tomorrow". Parenting in contemporary Europe: a positive approach, Conference of European Ministers responsible for family affairs, XXVIIIth session, 16 - 17 May 2006, Lisbon, Portugal.

For instance in Sweden about 99 percent of all pregnant women are enrolled in the publicly funded maternal health services which offer parental groups an average of six meetings. Out of all mothers approximately 98 percent participate during their first pregnancy and approximately 60 percent during their second pregnancy. Future fathers participate to almost the same extent. Evidence based methods aiming at improving communication in the parental couple are pilot tested in the maternal health service. **Home visits** after the birth of a child are also becoming more common and they have both the purpose of making sure of the child's health and of helping the parents in their first child-rearing responsibilities.

For instance in Slovenia health visitors have traditionally played a key role in parental education and support. All families receive at least one visit from a health visitor within 10-14 days of the birth of the child. The role of health visitors is in health promotion, screening. They advise parents on matters such as breastfeeding, immunisation, child development, diet and general childcare.

Another form of parental support that is very common is **parental education and counselling** that can be provided through general courses, workshops or conferences addressed to all interested parents or through individual advice to parents upon request.

The aim of these initiatives is to help and empower parents by strengthening their parental skills as well as to provide parents with a forum for exchange and discussion on their experiences and difficulties. In some cases, such programmes also specifically address the issue of overcoming stereotypes regarding traditional family roles in the family and society as a whole.

For this aim an instrument which is increasingly used is that of **telephone help lines** (e.g. Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Romania, Sweden, UK) or also of website forums. For instance in Bulgaria in 2007 the State Agency for Child Protection started a new on-line service, "Parent's Club", addressed to all parents, including adoptive or foster parents giving them information on parental skills and child development.

In many countries **pre-marital counselling** for young couples is offered by church related services or associations.

Another way to offer parenting counselling is that of using the **child-care services or the school**, as there are services aimed primarily at children but that aim to involve parents as well.

An important role is also played by **parents' associations** that often provide networks that link families, community networks and **parents' self- help groups**.

In Luxembourg each primary and almost all primary schools (90 from 116 schools) have their own parents association or parents committee. A federation is regrouping all of them at the national level and is providing training and conferences on different issues for parents of school children who are members of local parents' associations.

In Spain parents' associations at schools and federations of these associations, together with private organizations and the church, run the so called "schools for parents".

In some cases the instrument of family **mediation** and mediation in school is also used to support parenting (e.g. France, Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg). The competence and objectives of family mediation can be determined on the basis of national laws. The most critical aspect is that the figure of the mediator can vary considerably from country to country and from culture to culture. Distinct definitions of the role, of the objectives of the role, of mediation and of the objectives of mediation can lead to differences based on the structures and services in each state. This lack of uniformity can lead each state to make an "operational" definition of the role, focused only on resolving disputes and reaching agreements, rather than on the life-building and life-management process between family members⁵³. Many countries have also implemented **awareness raising campaigns** through TV and radio programmes as well as brochures, booklets, publications and websites on parenting education.

⁵³ For more information: ChildONEurope Secretariat, *Family mediation in the European Union*, Istituto degli Innocenti, 2005 (www.childoneurope.org).

In **Austria**, for example an awareness-raising campaign was launched in 2001 with the aim of introducing the concept of parent education to all mothers and fathers and of raising their interest in the existing programmes and showing them how to use them. The campaign included direct mailings to families with children, schools, kindergartens and physicians, advertising in newspapers, radio programmes, a helpline and a website providing information on existing programmes. Following up the campaign, the website was re-launched and expanded in February 2003. Since then it has provided information about parental education and its effects on every day life as well as child-guidance and non-violent parenting. There is also the possibility for online-exchange with other parents and experts.

In **Estonia** various awareness-raising campaigns have been conducted, such as the one entitled “Growing up together” whose aim was to promote partnership and better understanding between parents and young children and a second edition entitled “Be normal! Growing up together” targeted mainly at teenagers and their parents, to promote better understanding and create positive relationships between teenagers and parents. In **Bulgaria** in 2007 the Government started a national “Responsible parenting” campaign with the aim of supporting responsible parenting and decreasing practices of children being used as an income source.

Alongside these initiatives addressed to parents in general, all States have enacted different kinds of parenting support initiatives for **families at risk** that are normally already under the charge of the social services. For instance in Poland every family suffering from difficulties or unable to bear and/or fulfill its duties is entitled to the psychological, legal or any other form of assistance according to its individual needs: the family therapy, the family counseling and general social assistance among them. The main task of crisis intervention centres is to restore the family’s psychological balance and the ability to deal with the problems on its own, thus counteracting the state of a chronic psycho-social deficiency of a family. Crisis intervention means giving instant psychological help, legal assistance or other type of specialized assistance, on some occasions also providing shelter for a period of up to 3 months.

In some cases programmes for **parents with specific difficulties** have been put in place, for instance for parents of children who have problems with various forms of addiction (drugs, alcoholism, gambling), for separated or divorced parents (normally through the instrument of family mediation) or for teenage parents. An interesting example of action in this last case is the Irish Teen Parents Support Programme set up to identify and develop models of good practice in service planning and service delivery for young parents, particularly those deemed to be at risk. (see the box).

Many States have also set up support and counselling programmes for the specific needs of **adoptive parents**. In the document “Guidelines on post-adoption services” recently published by ChildONEurope, those programmes and activities are analyzed in depth with the aim of defining some shared principles and common goals on this sensitive issue⁵⁴. The fundamental question related to services specializing in post-adoption support is linked with the legitimacy of such action. On the one hand it is stated that the need of support and accompaniment of the adoptive families can find a response in the general parental support services, thus non-specialized services. On the other hand it is acknowledged that adoptive families – even if they are families like all the others – express in this period specific requirements or problems that need, on the contrary, specific intervention.

Also specific initiatives for single mothers are usually present in all countries aimed at supporting mothers and overcoming their isolation.

All States have also enacted specific initiatives or services for victims of family violence, especially children and women but the analysis of this very important and difficult subject would go beyond the scope of this survey.

⁵⁴ The choice of addressing the specific issue of post adoption services came after the drafting of a first survey “Report on National and Intercountry Adoption” in which this issue emerged as one of the most important for the good realization of an adoption and often not sufficiently or adequately addressed by the states involved in the adoption process. The Guidelines on post adoption services are available on line on: http://www.childoneurope.org/activities/pdf/post-adoption_def2.pdf.

Austria

The Federal Ministry of Health, Family and Youth subsidises about 60 organisations which offer parents' education courses according to special quality standards; about 80,000 people attend these courses. As low threshold methods are required for spreading the idea of violence-free education, brochures and CD-ROMs are also developed and sent to all young parents. Another form of low threshold parents' education is a special website www.eltern-bildung.at which is consulted by about 325,000 visitors.

In addition to this, in the summer of 2007 the Ministry started a **pilot project for parents' education at the workplace**. Parents' educators can promote parenting education at the workplace either by simply advertising courses, lectures e.g. using company media (flyers, black boards, newsletters etc.) or by offering an introductory lecture at the workplace. The aim is for parents to get to know the value of parents' education in the first place and also information about places where they can find seminars and how to take part. The ministry also organises a seminar for parents' educators to discuss ways to promote parental education at a very low threshold. More information can be found at:

http://www.eltern-bildung.at/eb/service/adressen/Betriebliche_Elternbildung.php

Belgium (Flemish Community)

In the big cities of Flanders **"parenting shopping centres"** have been created to provide comprehensive, collaborative services of all kinds of parenting support, e.g. information desk, parenting help line, parenting support consultations, parenting classes etc.

These parenting shopping centres offer a range of parenting services to families with children from 0 to 18 years old in each city. They strive to create a friendly, non stigmatising atmosphere, inviting drop-ins and exchanges among staff and visitors. All families are offered a continuum of services, from occasional contacts to more intensive counselling in one or more easily accessible settings. Services may include home visiting as well as centre-based activities. This broad spectrum allows centre staff to adjust the intensity and mix of services to meet the changing needs of the family over time.

They may develop programmes in response to local needs and starting from existing services offered by the different actors that organise the parenting shopping centre. In Flanders by the end of 2007, 13 parenting shopping centres based on interagency collaboration, will have been created and subsidized by Child and Family.

Cyprus

Since 2006 the educational psychology service of the Ministry of education and culture has developed a programme for an **in-depth training for parents on matters of communication within the family**. It consists of a series of 13 workshop sessions based on experiences where specially trained people from the Ministry of education coordinate a group of about 20-parents in two hour weekly meetings. The Training of parents aims at promoting psychological health through the upgrading of the quality of communication within the family and furthermore between others and also aims at the reduction of domestic violence.

Greece

The national programme **Parental Counselling** was introduced by the General Secretariat for Adult Education and implemented by the Institute of Continuous Adult Education. The programme started in 2004. During the 2004-2005 school year, 51 Parent's Schools operated in the country with a total of 262 forty-hour duration schemes, 5,670 participants and a budget of 800,000 euros. For the year 2005-2006, the budget almost quadrupled, a fact that allowed the development of 1,440 new schemes. Non-violent upbringing of children is part of the programme. The positive element of this programme is the fact that all Counsellors are trained together and use the same material, in contrast to other parental education programmes run by municipalities or NGOs. Another positive aspect is that in the selection process priority is given to remote and needy areas.

Estonia

Family Centre You and I intends to implement the first educational system in Estonia for parents to improve their parenting skills. The goal of the activities is improving public awareness of parenting skills, implementing educational activities via PET (parent effectiveness)-training for parents and offering counselling for parents. The Family centre also offers courses for specialists e.g. local government social and children welfare workers, teachers etc. to be better informed about the needs of the parents and raising their motivation for arranging training courses for parents in the local governments.

Both family courses and training courses for specialists are organised all over Estonia. The Family Centre has more than 50 licensed trainers in Estonia.

The Family Centre cooperates closely with the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs in making the courses available for a wider range of people. The Centre is also offering the Internet-based counselling possibilities which has received very good feedback.

The long-term aim of the Family Centre You and I is to make the courses available to all parents and to advocate the idea of the need to improve parenting skills and that it is possible to learn them.

Germany

PEP – Prevention programme for externalizing problem behaviour

This programme was developed by J. Plück, E. Wiczorrek, T. Wolff Metternich & M. Döpfner (2006). It is based on THOP: Therapy program for children with hyperactive and oppositional problem behaviour.

The programme is provided and supported by the Klinik und Poliklinik für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie des Kindes- und Jugendalters (Köln University), child care centres, and youth welfare offices.

Its main objectives are to strengthen parent-child and teacher-child positive interactions and to improve parents' educational skills in order to reduce children's externalizing problem behaviour.

The addressees are parents and teachers of 3- to 6-year-old children with externalising problem behaviour. The period of implementation is 10 group sessions lasting 90 minutes.

PEP consists of parent training and teacher training. Both training programmes are based on these principles: a) to identify individual target problems and to develop individual interventions within the family and the school; b) to enhance positive parent-child and teacher-child interactions and c) to use effective requests, positive reinforcement and negative consequences for reducing children's problem behaviour. Training courses are offered for groups of 6 to 8 participants (parents or teachers).

There is a self help version of the programme (ELSPEP), in which parents receive a programme book that they progressively work out. In weekly telephone contacts with trainers, parents' progress is monitored and questions or difficulties with the implementation of the programme are clarified.

The programme is evaluated in several projects at the Köln University (Prof. Döpfner) in cooperation with the TU Braunschweig (Prof. Hahlweg) and with support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

<http://www.pep-programm.de>

Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme

This programme was first developed in Brisbane, Australia, by M. Sanders and colleagues of the University of Queensland.

The programme is provided by the PAG Institut für Psychologie AG (since 1999 as licence holder of the education programme in Germany) with the support of several regional Ministries and many national associations and international institutions.

The addressees are the parents of children from birth to 12 years and parents of adolescents.

Parents may access Triple P courses in counselling centres and family education centres supported by different associations in local public institutions and mental health service providers.

Its main objectives are to prevent behavioural, emotional and developmental disorders in children by enhancing the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents, i.e. by teaching parents how to build a positive relationship to their children, how to foster child development and how to cope effectively with difficult situations and problem behaviour.

The programme draws on social learning, cognitive-behavioural and developmental theory, and on research into risk and protective factors associated with the development of social and behavioural disorders in children.

The intervention model is based on 5 main principles: a) to offer a secure and interesting interaction and communication setting; b) to create a positive and stimulating learning atmosphere; c) to act consequently; d) not to expect too much from the children and from themselves; e) to consider their own needs.

The programme presents a multi-level framework in order to tailor information, advice and professional support to the needs of individual families: level 1, media-based parent information campaign on positive parenting; level 2, information and advice for a specific parenting concern (common child developmental issue or minor behaviour problem); level 3, narrow focus parenting skills training (brief programme combining advice with rehearsal and self-evaluation); level 4, broad focus parenting skills training (broad

programme for parents requiring intensive training in positive parenting); level 5, intensive family intervention (individually tailored programme for families with child behaviour problems and family dysfunction).

Multiple evaluation studies have been carried out in different countries in which Triple-P is implemented (most of all in Australia). In Germany evaluation projects have been developed at the TU Braunschweig (Prof. Hahlweg), supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Jacobs-Stiftung, in cooperation with Köln University (Prof. Döpfner).

<http://www.triplep.de>

Ireland

Springboard Initiative

The Springboard Family Support Projects were established by the Department of Health and Children in 1998. Springboard is a community based early intervention initiative to support families. All Springboard projects have a general strategy of being open and available to all families, parents and children in their communities as well as a more specific strategy of working intensively with those who are most vulnerable. Group work aims to impart parenting and personal development skills through a diverse range of activities. Family work involves counselling and therapy. There are currently 22 projects in operation nationally.

Italy

Service of support to parenthood for families with children at risk

The general aim of this project carried out in the district of Porretta Terme and funded by Law 285/97 is an integration of the various services so as to face in integrated way, problems that, for their complexity and the presence of various risk factors, demand the contribution of various professional figures.

The task of the professional educator (inserted in a multidisciplinary working group) engaged in the project is to support the family and being, together with it, the spokesperson for the family needs in relation to the process of autonomization and growth of the family.

The specific objectives are the following: to observe the relational and educational dynamics with the aim of modifying the relationship parent-sons/daughters and the couple relationship; to stimulate the family, through specific educational activity, to take care itself in an adequate way of the child and of his/her material and psychological needs; to favour the integration of the familiar nucleus in the social context helping it to relate in an appropriated way to the various institutions of reference.

The target group is composed of families with children temporarily inserted in institutes or in foster care and who need interventions of support and verification of the family of origin to the aim of a later reinsertion in the family, children who have just been reinserted in the family of origin, after a judicial or consensual removal from the family.

The indicated aims and activities can be regarded as relevant and coherent, in particular the project is centred on the aid to the family in order to realize a recovery of an adequate educational relation between parents and sons/daughters, through a support concerning the intra-family aspect (several activities of support to parenthood) and the extra-family aspect (several activities of support by the formal and informal net of community services).

Netherlands

Opstap Programme

The objective of the Opstap ('Step-up') programme is to enable parents to stimulate their children's development, where there would otherwise be a risk of educational deficit. Parents help their children to prepare for primary school with a number of exercises and activities that they undertake together with the children. These activities help to: enhance the quality of mother-child interaction, promote interest in learning and develop cognitive and language skills.

Opstap involves group meetings and visits to the homes of families with young children. The programme has been run with success in numerous Dutch local authority areas for almost twenty years.

Graduate professionals are responsible for the form and implementation of the programme. They train and coach the "paraprofessionals" who share the language and culture of the parents. These paraprofessionals are informally known as the "neighbourhood mothers". They assist at the group meetings and visit parents (usually mothers) at home.

The recent postgraduate research project undertaken by Cathy van Tuijl reveals that the Opstap Opnieuw programme ('Step-up revised': the name used from 1997 to 2003) reached many families in the Turkish and Moroccan communities in the Netherlands. In general, social assistance programmes have difficulty in accessing these families, for a number of reasons.

Each year, many thousands of families take part in the Opstap programme, which provides parenting support and strives to promote child development. In many cases, the parents speak little or no Dutch. Most have only a basic standard of education, and half are unemployed (some due to illness or incapacity). Without the programme, many children would start primary school with below average cognitive and language skills.

Video Home Training

Video Home Training (VHT) is a counseling method whereby the interactions between parents and their child(ren) are recorded and analysed. This analysis is made between the counselor and the parent(s) together and the recording is a starting point for the improvement of the interaction between the parents and the children. VHT is a training programme for families with children between 0-18 where there are problems of communication and parenting. VHT is not problem oriented, but directed at improving basic communication and parenting skills. Viewing positive interactions on the recording is an encouragement for enhanced positive parenting. In the Netherlands VHT is carried out in various forms, both short- and long-term. In many places the method is used by the local health nurses as an instrument for parenting support.

Poland

Workshop for Parents and Their Children **We learn from each other**

These workshops organized in the primary school of Bytom are for parents of grade 1-3 pupils (ages 7-9), who want to know their children's needs, expectations, some mechanisms and reactions to difficult situations. They are also for those who wish to improve their relationship with their children or more actively take part in their development. The series covers 9 meetings run at 2 week intervals after lessons, for both parents and children at the same time in the form of a workshop.

The general aim of the workshop is to introduce examples for activities developing educational skills, while the more specific aims include: showing parents and pupils ways of good communication; introducing the good and bad sides of the media influence on children; presenting parents with the value of educational games; showing parents patterns of activities to compensate for the children's feeling of inferiority; making parents aware of the things their children find very important; presenting parents with the types of exercises which aim at strengthening the child's already existing "WAK" channels (kinesthetic, auditory and aural).

The methods used include mini-lectures, talks, games, audiovisual instruments. In order to prepare the programme evaluation, special questionnaires for children and parents have been prepared.

Portugal

Centres for Family Support and Parental Guidance

Centres for family support and parental guidance are aimed at the study and prevention of situations of social risk as well as at supporting children and young people at risk and their families. Such support is provided within the community through multi-disciplinary teams. There are currently 17 Centres for Family Support and Parental Guidance.

An example of the CAFAP, is the centre run by the NGO ASAS based in Santo Tirso, in the North of Portugal that among the different services developed as an answer to the community needs, includes also one Centre for Family Support and Parental Guidance. Such a centre is aimed at studying and preventing situations of social risk and giving help to children and young people in difficult situations and to their families thanks to multidisciplinary teams.

The Centre organises two lines of activities: i) promotion of parental education aimed at helping parents to modify their behaviour towards their children and ii) parenting training focused on the prevention of behaviours that are a social risk.

In the period from 2005 to 2006, 61 families and their children (about 131) were supported.

As far as methodology is concerned, a programme of action is organised, taking into consideration the specific needs of each family, also through home visits and the "Parents School", a programme of parental education aimed at strengthening parental competences. In the period from 2005-2006, 825 parents attended the school.

Romania

The “Educăm așa” (We Educate Like This) parent education programme

The programme is developed on the basis of a unitary method, accessible to the parents, elaborated and experimented by the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare.

The aim of the programme is the education of parents regarding the prevention and/or reduction of neglect, abuse and violence towards the child.

The objectives of the programme foresee:

- the improvement of parental abilities for parents with children aged between 3 and 12;
- the training of trainers in the field of parent education and instructors for the parents;
- the growth of the school’s role in the community and of the community’s involvement in the life of the school.

The method was taken over by the “Our Children” Foundation in Romania and experimented, up to the present, with very good results, in Bucharest and in twenty-two counties within some projects financed by the Netherlands Embassy in Bucharest (the 1998-2003 period) and UNICEF (the 2000-2003 period).

Up until today, 679 national trainers have been trained and 4857 parent instructors, usually educators, and 29,661 parents from 2167 kindergartens and 236 schools have participated in the classes.

Starting with the 2004-2005 school year, the extension and development of the project at a national level has been done under a “tutorship” system, i.e. a new county entering the project is trained and monitored by a county that has previously entered the project.

Starting with the school year 2006-2007, the Ministry of Education and Research has finalized a partnership convention with the Partnership Center for Equality, within which the parent instructors in the “We Educate Like This” programme will be trained to approach this type of education in the parent meetings.

Slovenia

The Slovenian government facilitates educational programmes which are carried out by different nongovernmental organizations: pre-marriage counselling for couples, baby-counselling for couples expecting baby, family crisis counselling, etc.

Among those the “**Malāki Palāki**” (**Baby Dwarfs**) project which was implemented by the NGO SEZAM in 1999 was first and foremost intended for parents, but also their children. It consisted of five parts: help telephone – a telephone information line open to parents for questions about babies, toddlers and pre-school children, active on Fridays all day long; counselling service organised on the premises of the Sezam association; the “**āajanka**” (Tea Party) – parent meetings with the purpose of spending time together, exchanging information and knowledge (on family planning and pregnancy, giving birth, having a baby, toddler, pre-school child, older child, adolescent, the protection of children, a modern family, etc.); advocacy of children’s rights in the relations between institutions-children-parents; get-togethers of parents, children, nannies, expectant parents in order to informally bring together families and foster family life.

Spain

Among the most innovative **parenting programmes** are those designed by Bartau & Maganto (1999), García Bacete (2007), Máiquez et al. (2000), Martínez-González (1999), Radio Ecça (Canarias), Preescolar na Casa (Galicia). These programmes aim to reach a diversity of objectives such as: promoting parental competences for educating small children, children from 6-12 years old and adolescents, promoting literacy at home, promoting family-school-community partnership, promoting co-responsibility in the family, etc. Most of these programmes follow an experiential, cooperative and active methodology to allow parents interaction and active participation. They look forward, promoting parents’ cognitive changes which allow them to be more aware of what it is going on family interactions and more ready to change current habits producing ineffective interactions.

The objectives defined for these programmes must be coherent with the educational needs Spanish parents and families have. For this reason the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has recently supported and published a report on **Parental Strategies to Prevent and Cope with Family Conflicts (parents and children)** (see the paragraph on the role of training and research).

Sweden

“De otroliga åren” (The Incredible Years), Community Parent Education Program (COPE) and KOMET (COMET)

“De otroliga åren” (The Incredible Years), Community Parent Education Program (COPE) and KOMET (COMET) are examples of interactive programmes aimed at developing affection and emotional attachment in a parent-child relationship.

They are used in Sweden for parents of children aged 2-9 years.

These programmes help and encourage parents to give their children positive attention, to be clear in the way they communicate with their children and to find well thought-out ways of confronting the children when conflicts arise. The interaction programmes are usually carried out in groups consisting of ten to fifteen parents who meet for two or three hours once a week for a ten to fifteen-week period. The group discussions are normally based on everyday parent child situations shown in a short video. The parents discuss different ways of resolving the situation. Then the parents practise the solutions with each other in roleplays.

Home assignments are included in the programmes. Parents are asked to note down when they needed a particular skill and whether this was effective. They are also asked to make notes on the child. This can help parents to become more aware of how they themselves react to different situations involving the child. It can also help them to see more clearly how the child develops.

The interaction programmes do not question the ability of the parents but instead try to utilise and develop the collected experience of all the parents in the group. It is often the parents themselves who suggest and discuss different alternative approaches. The programmes do not generally include ready solutions that are presented as a “lecture”.

Access to most of the parenting programmes and services is free of charge as they are supported by public funds; some require a low participation fee from the participants. Private institutions that are not funded by the government ask for a higher participation fee.

As regards the **age of children**, it seems that the majority of the initiatives taken by the different countries is addressed to families with young children, mostly from 0-6 years. However there are also examples of specific initiatives for parents of adolescents and of children starting school in order to deal with the specific characteristics of these phases of life.

Germany

Starke Eltern – Starke Kinder (Strong parents – Strong children)

The programme is provided by the Deutscher Kinderschutzbund, in cooperation with other family education supporting organizations, and supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).

The addressees are: parents of preschool, school children or adolescents, besides it is possible to adapt the programme to specific target groups (single parents, adoptive families, socially disadvantaged families, etc.). The period of implementation runs from 8 to 12 sessions (lasting 2 to 3 hours) with 12 to 15 participants.

The main objectives are to prevent and reduce the use of physical and mental violence within families by promoting parenting competence and by strengthening children’s rights and needs (e.g. by allowing children to participate in family decisions).

The programme is based on the principle of “guiding education” (parents are conscious of their educational responsibility and guide their children in their developmental process), and is structured in 5 steps:

- Reflecting upon the family’s values and beliefs about education
- Consolidating parents’ identity as educators
- Strengthening parents’ self-confidence in their ability to support child development
- Defining clear communication rules within the family
- Enabling families to recognize and solve problems.

Several evaluation studies have been carried out in München (Katholische Stiftungs-Fachhochschule, Prof. Schatz), Remscheid, Aachen, and Köln (Fachhochschule Köln).
<http://www.starkeeltern-starkekinder.de>

Ireland

Teen Parents Support Programme (TPSP)

The Department of Health and Children implemented a pilot initiative in the health sector on Teen Parents Support in 1999 and 2000 as part of the National Child Care Investment Strategy. The TPSP was set up to identify and develop models of good practice in service planning and service delivery for young parents, particularly those deemed to be at risk. Along with providing practical support, young parents are encouraged in their new role, given skills to enhance their confidence to enjoy parenthood and to understand child development. Research has found that the majority of Teen Parents interviewed believed that the Initiative had helped them in their role of parenting. There are now a total of five TPSP projects in operation nationally.

4.4. Aims and contents of parenting services and programmes

Notwithstanding the great variety of parenting programmes introduced throughout the EU, it is possible to affirm that in many countries the parenting support programmes that we have analysed concern the area of primary prevention, namely of promotion. Usually projects focus on the empowerment of parents and families in the context of families-services partnerships and aiming at strengthening social networks as well.

Prevention activities vary also on the basis of the specific goals to be reached, various States for instance put emphasis on the prevention of child abandonment (e.g. Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Slovakia). In the Netherlands great attention is being paid to earlier recognition of problems in families in order to prevent unnecessary suffering for the child, difficulties for the parents and escalation of problems. For this aim an electronic child file has been created in order to make information available more quickly and on a larger scale. As of 1st January 2007 all newborn children in the Netherlands receive their own electronic files from the young persons' health services. In addition to the electronic files there will be a **referral index / risk box** where various sectors involved with young people can report risks and incidents. Together, the electronic child file and the referral index must ensure that risks for children can be better monitored and problems can be more easily prevented.

In the United Kingdom there has been particular interest in the contribution of parenting programmes to help families and children who may be drifting into antisocial behaviour. The youth justice system, locally administered, is increasingly investing in such programmes; it expects to spend more than £4 million on them in 2006-07. The government's "**Respect**" **Action plan**, published in January 2006, makes a general commitment to improve parenting provision nationally, ensuring that all parents, but particularly parents/carers of children at risk of negative outcomes, receive early, relevant multi-agency support.

Concerning the contents of parenting education and counselling, a special mention should be made of the issue of **corporal punishment** as such programmes normally include a part on alternative educational methods. In the EU, 11 countries also declare the **prohibition of corporal punishment by law**: Austria (1989), Bulgaria (2000), Cyprus (1994), Denmark (1997), Finland (1983), Germany (2000), Hungary (2004), Latvia (1998), Portugal (2007), Romania (2004), Sweden (1979).

In addition Italy's Supreme Court has declared that all corporal punishment, including that in the home, is unlawful, while in Greece a Network for the Prevention and Combat of Corporal Punishment, consisting of governmental and non-governmental agencies, is in the process of being formed.

In Spain there has been a special emphasis for promoting a legal reform of the article 154 and 238 of Spanish Civil Code which is waiting for the final approval of the Parliament before the end of 2007. The final objective of this legal reform proposal is to eliminate any misunderstanding about the legal ban of physical and psychological punishment to children in any setting in Spain.

The introduction of these provisions was not so much aimed at providing for sanctions or punishment but was rather aimed at serving the development of parental capabilities and providing for a clear support framework. These measures are intended to encourage parents to seek assistance if they encounter difficulties in bringing up their children as well as to encourage them to acquire alternative methods of disciplining their children. At the same time these provisions strive to reduce the use of corporal punishment in disciplining children, and to alter the public notion of corporal punishment in society and to make everyone more sensitive to issues concerning the human dignity of the child.

It is interesting to look at the effects which such legislation produced in particular in those countries that introduced it a long time ago. For instance in Sweden research shows that the provision has had a great impact on the population. A study from 2000 where parents were asked about their experience of and attitudes towards corporal punishment showed that forceful corporal punishment of children, which potentially could cause severe injuries, has decreased substantially as well as parental attitudes to the use of corporal punishment as a means to raise their children. A study of children's experience from the same year shows that the absolute number of children subjected to corporal punishment has decreased and the children who are exposed to punishments experience this much less often than before.

Alongside the introduction of laws prohibiting corporal punishment, **awareness raising campaigns** have been organized in various States, e.g. Estonia held the campaigns: "Don't hit the child" and "The child is not a doll". Romania as well organized a campaign entitled "Violence breeds violence" by Save the Children Romania (see the box). The Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and Save the Children Spain in collaboration with more than eighty other NGOs and institutions have been working since 1999 for promoting positive parenting and ending physical and humiliating treatment to children in the families. Two main campaigns have been developed: "Educate, do not punish" from 1999 to 2001 and "To teach is not to hit" from 2005 until now. The objectives of the campaigns have been: to raise awareness among parents and society about the negative consequences of physical punishment, to promote positive and non violent parenting skills and to encourage children to know and defend their rights.

Latvia

The parenting education programme "**Emotional Rearing of the Child**" realized by the NGO "Centrs Dardedze" in the framework of the State Programme for the Improvement of the State of the Child and Family for the Year 2005 is aimed at educating parents about the methods and principles of the rearing of the child.

In the framework of the project it was possible for 216 parents from different regions of Latvia (among them also parents from social risk groups) to take part in 18 support groups for parents. Additionally specialists were educated about the implementation of the programme.

The programme's aim is to diminish violence against children in families as well as to diminish physical punishment of children. The programme is for parents whose children are not older than 7 but especially for those parents who have difficulties to control the child's behaviour. Yet this programme is suitable for all who wish to learn positive parenting principles and promote the development of their children.

Romania

Violence breeds violence

Objectives:

- Promote positive education and training of parents and professionals working with other people's children to stop using corporal punishment and humiliating treatment against children and reduce the incidence of corporal punishment in schools and families.

- Create a group of personalities from different professional areas to advocate a change of mentality regarding education.
- Encourage professionals working with parents to advise and support the latter so that they no longer use any form of corporal punishment and humiliating treatment against their children.

Activities:

- a) Develop a regularly updated website for parents www.educatiefaraviolenta.ro.
- b) Develop information materials for parents: flyers, booklets, posters, TV and radio spots.
- c) Distribute information materials via the general Secretariat and branches with the help of: Info Sănătate network; police stations; schools; other institutions.
- d) Broadcasting of TV and radio spots: on 5 national TVchannels, 2 radio stations, at 11 cinema theatres, conferences, events.
- e) Promote the campaign in the printed press: articles in specialised magazines, in daily journals, ads in mags; interviews and participation in TV shows on national and local stations.
- f) Develop a Handbook for parents and specialists, the booklet “My child’s behavior. Guide of methods for parents”, the booklet “Be there for your child! Advice for parents with children of 2-7”, the Legal Guide and a Guide for good practices to prevent abuse against children.
- g) Translate handbooks and training packs from international resources.

4.5. The role of training and research

Most countries show a strong interest in investing in training and research, in order to guarantee adequate and effective support to parents.

For this purpose, in the **United Kingdom** the government commissioned the establishment of the **National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP)**. The academy, to be launched in Autumn 2007, will serve to improve the quality of services for parents by raising the standard and consistency of practice and disseminating the evidence from research. Above all the academy will train practitioners working with parents in schools, health services, children’s services and beyond and support innovation and knowledge sharing.

In **Austria**, a working group established by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs has elaborated a **training scheme** which is intended to serve as a basis for enhancing professionalism and for quality assurance in the field of parent education. This scheme aims at creating comparable standards for expert staff for the whole of Austria, in order to improve the quality of the available parent education programmes.

In **Spain** the National Observatory on Childhood Ministry realised a study entitled “Strategies to prevent and deal with conflicts in the family relations (parents-children)” aimed at identifying the specific educational needs of parents concerning their relationship with their children (see the box). In a regional perspective, an interesting current experience being developed in Asturias-Spain is the **Observatory on Family-School-Social Agents Partnerships**, which constitutes a longitudinal programme to promote training for social development and quality in education (see box).

In **Portugal** a cooperation protocol has been signed among different public institutions and universities in order to make an analysis of the needs and prepare models and action on parental education. In **Sweden** the Government has commissioned the Swedish National Institute for Public Health to suggest methods and programmes for parental support and education. The Institute will follow the development in this field in municipalities and county councils all over Sweden.

Spain

Research “Strategies to prevent and deal with conflicts in family relationships (parents-children)”⁵⁵

One of the most recent research reports carried out in Spain, among an extensive corpus of research reports and papers on family and parental education is the report “**Strategies to prevent and deal with conflicts in family relations (parents-children)**” that has been supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2007).

The study focuses on analysing the information parents have on the evolving characteristics of their children at different ages, their self-control skills, their self-esteem and assertiveness with their parental role, their emotions and abilities to communicate, their strategies for negotiating with their children and conflict resolution, their strategies to set limits and regulations in the behaviour of their children. Some of the results point out that nearly fifty percent of the parents in the sample admit they do not properly understand their children’s behaviour – especially when they are teenagers – and more than fifty percent are worried about what others may think about their parenting style. These and other results in this research underline the need to support parents in their education responsibilities towards their children, addressing issues such as parents’ assertiveness and self-esteem, communication skills, negotiation strategies and conflict resolution. The report states that it is appropriate to promote Family Education and family programmes as preventive community means to support positive family dynamics. The researchers also remark that Family Education should be considered as a specific professional field for which training and specialization at university level are needed (Martínez-González, Pérez-Herrero y Álvarez-Blanco, 2007).

Observatory on Family-School-Social Agents Partnerships

This Observatory is an initiative of the research team on “Evaluation and Socio-Educative Intervention on Families, Schools and Communities” at Oviedo University, coordinated by Dr. Raquel-Amaya Martínez-González. It has been running for ten years so far, from the 1997-98 academic year to the present. Its main aim is to identify socio-educational needs and to promote intervention programmes which might contribute to increase social development and quality of education for children through empowering families and schools.

More specifically, the actions undertaken so far by the observatory are related to:

- providing its members with strategies and resources which allow parents, teachers and other education community agents to facilitate communication and participation in schools and community processes and to develop positive attitudes towards collaboration;
- providing the parents, the schools, the teachers, and other educational community agents with strategies which contribute to parenting efficiency, children’s misbehaviour prevention and teachers’ training;
- supporting educational community agents in looking for the best alternatives to answer every day challenges in the family and at school;
- contributing to promote and spread knowledge on major school-family-community partnerships areas, no matter whether at a local, regional, national and international level, through conferences, courses and seminars for parents, teachers, and other education professionals, programme evaluation, and designing e-learning materials.

Among the issues addressed so far in the observatory the following can be mentioned:

- strategies for sharing and living together in the family, the school, and the community,
- understanding interpersonal conflicts and the implications for human development, parenting, the family, the school and parents-teachers partnerships,
- understanding how emotional intelligence works and its effects on effective parenting, teaching and parents-teachers meetings,
- promoting reading and family literacy,
- promoting parents’ literacy concerning information and communication technologies (ICTs),
- learning about the different areas in which family-school-social agents partnerships can be promoted.

⁵⁵ “Estrategias para prevenir y afrontar conflictos en las relaciones familiares (padres e hijos)”, Colección Observatorio de la Infancia n. 3, Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales.

UK

Toolkit for Commissioners of parenting programme

This is database of replicable parenting programmes, commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to Parenting UK⁵⁶, to enable Commissioners of Parenting Support across England to locate support programmes that can be replicated for use in their local areas.

Parenting programmes are defined broadly as any formal interventions designed to support the parent/child relationship. This includes practitioner training. The programmes listed in the Toolkit have been selected where the authors/providers have produced evidence that the programmes have been assessed as being of good quality and have a proven and effective evidence-base.

In reviewing evaluations of parenting programmes the commissioners will want to consider: whether the evaluation is independent and objective; whether it has been undertaken by an organisation or an individual with the appropriate skills and knowledge in undertaking evaluations; details of outcomes and effectiveness. For some of the programmes a **Peer assessment**, written by an experienced practitioner in response to standard questions, is available from Parenting UK.

www.toolkit.parentinguk.org/guidance.php

The publication - What Works in Parenting Support

This government supported review evidence of effective components of parenting support including a list of evidence based parenting programmes. This can be accessed at <http://www.prb.org.uk/wwiparenting/> programmes with a nationwide scope of implementation and programmes developed at regional or local levels.

4.6. Critical points in the provision of parenting programmes and services

A critical point in the provision of parenting programmes and services that has been indicated by several countries is their **limited availability** in terms of geographical distribution or the impossibility of reaching all interested families also due to the limitation of the parenting support programmes budget. Another general trend that can be identified is the provision of these programmes only or **mainly for families at risk** and not also as a general instrument to support all parents in their child-rearing responsibilities⁵⁷.

A further critical point is represented by the inclusion in these programmes of **migrant families**, for instance Denmark specifically pointed out this issue, but also Hungary by recognizing that the integrating role of social welfare services is to be strengthened by facilitating the access by the Roma population to social welfare services and Ireland that indicated the importance of family support for travellers.

In Denmark attention to migrant families' needs has been greatly developed as well. In January 2003, the Government introduced a bill on education in Danish for adult immigrants that took effect from January 2004 meaning considerably improved education in cultural and social conditions in Denmark in the Danish language programmes.

The difficulty in **networking** among the different bodies involved due to the privacy requirement was also underlined.

Finally the specific needs of lone parents and families of people with disabilities should be better met⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Parenting UK was formed in 1995 and is a membership organisation for those who offer parenting services, promoting quality provision in the field. It informs, advises and regulates the sector. It supports the development of good practice at all levels by offering a range of services. It maintains a network of agencies and practitioners throughout the UK and it acts as a voice for service providers.

⁵⁷ e.g. Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Slovakia.

⁵⁸ e.g. Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia.

4.7. Guidelines for Work with Parents

International organisations as well as national agencies responsible for carrying out parenting programmes have developed documents containing principles and values that should be followed in providing support and counselling to parents and families. These documents testify the awareness of the importance of common and shared guidelines in this area.

In particular, they underline that parents, whether they are biological or adoptive, must be considered by the professional as partners in the area of child protection. Support parenting programmes must therefore be considered as a way of empowering parents' competences/skills and never as a way to replace them.

The Council of Europe in its **Recommendation Rec(2006)19 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policy to support positive parenting** indicated some Fundamental principles of policies and measures in this area that are indicated below:

“Policies and measures in the field of support for parenting should:

- i.** adopt a rights-based approach: this means treating children and parents as holders of rights and obligations;
- ii.** be based on a voluntary choice by the individuals concerned, except when public authorities have to intervene to protect the child;
- iii.** acknowledge that parents have the prime responsibility for their child, subject to the child's best interests;
- iv.** consider parents and children as partners sharing, as appropriate, the setting up and implementation of the measures relating to them;
- v.** be based on the equal involvement of parents and respect for their complementarity;
- vi.** guarantee equal opportunities for children irrespective of their gender, status, abilities or family situation;
- vii.** take into account the importance of a sufficient standard of living to engage in positive parenting;
- viii.** be based on a clearly expressed concept of positive parenting;
- ix.** address parents and key players having childcare, health and educational and social responsibilities towards the child and who should also respect the principles of positive parenting;
- x.** recognise the diverse types of parenting and parental situations through adopting a pluralistic approach;
- xi.** adopt a positive approach to parents' potential, particularly through placing priority on incentives;
- xii.** be long-term in order to guarantee stability and continuity of policy;
- xiii.** ensure that the number of common rules of principle at national or federal level are kept to a minimum to promote equal standards at local level and that there is a local network of services providing parenting support measures;
- xiv.** ensure inter-ministerial co-operation, encouraging and co-ordinating the action(s) in this field of the different ministries, departments and agencies concerned in order to implement policy that is coherent and comprehensive;
- xv.** be co-ordinated at international level, through facilitating exchanges of knowledge, experience and good practice in the application of the guidelines on positive parenting.”

The same Recommendation also a list of qualitative **guidelines for professionals**:

- i.** the principle of equity and accessibility, which should underlie all action taken;
- ii.** the principle of becoming partners with and empowering parents. Partnership presupposes recognition of parents' own experience and their knowledge of their own children;

- iii. application of the concept of partnership to co-operation and interdisciplinary co-ordination between agencies, specifying the particular areas of activity of each department, providing for a sharing of facilities and working in a cross-curricular network;
- iv. ensuring that the application of comprehensive services is conceived in terms of support and assistance, encouraging family initiative without creating excessive dependency. Accordingly, strengths and resources of families should be supported. This also means that professionals should act as support for parents, in ways that are non-judgmental and non-stigmatising;
- v. building up parents' self-confidence, enhancing their competencies and potential and motivating parents to be informed and trained;
- vi. enabling children to communicate their feelings and needs, in particular very young children and children with communication impairments;
- vii. the importance of service provision and professional practices by ensuring that the emphasis is placed on:
 - thorough training of the professionals concerned;
 - ongoing evaluation, both external and internal (self-evaluation);
 - continuity of action;
 - responses based on the understanding of the child and families in their context;
- viii. devising methods to identify risk factors regarding failure to provide parental care to be disseminated among social services, health-care professionals, those dealing with young people, teachers and childcare staff to train them in identifying families with problems in this respect and offer support. A better co-ordination among the services working to support a family should constantly be sought;
- ix. co-ordinating the implementation of measures to separate children from their parents, when this is necessary, with work with the family of origin (particularly in partnership with the parents) in order to enable them to prepare or better prepare for and accept this step as a means of ensuring the best interests of the child. The aim of any such measure should be the return, if possible, of the child in the family environment".

At national level, Parenting UK in partnership with employers and practitioners across the UK in 2005 developed "**The Principles and Values of the Work with Parents sector**" that are set out below:

- "Parenting education and support should reflect the rights of the child set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Practitioners work in partnership with parents at all times
- Mothers, fathers and those in a parenting role are acknowledged as having unique knowledge and information about their children
- Children are the responsibility of the wider society as well as their families
- Work with Parents should be non-judgemental and anti-discriminatory and should seek to empower by building on and valuing parents' existing strengths, knowledge and experience
- Parenting education and support should be available to, and practitioners should engage with, all those in a parenting role
- Gender, cultural diversity and different needs must be respected; entitlement, quality and inclusiveness are of fundamental importance to those who work with parents
- Anyone who works with parents should have specific training for that purpose
- Good practice requires reflection and a continuing search for improvement".

Also the **French Networks for listening, support and counselling of parents (REAAP)** also drafted a national charter updated in 2006 in which the professional commit themselves to:

1. Enhance the role and competence of parents: responsibility and authority, self-confidence, transmission of family history, creation of points of reference, child protection and development, etc.

2. Make sure to take into account the diversity of family nuclei and of parental approaches and to acknowledge the role of each parent in the education of their children.
3. Favour the relationship between the two parents and, to this purpose, promote all forms of support in which both parents are present and collaborate.
4. Encourage the persons in charge of the centres and structures attended by the parents to welcome and to promote new initiatives. They guarantee that such centres are open to all parents, inviting people from different backgrounds, generations and social, professional and cultural groups.
5. Respect, in the elaboration and implementation of actions developed in the framework of the REAAP Parental Support Network, the principle of political, philosophical and denominational neutrality.
6. Build and become part of the largest possible partnership without replacing, but rather by integrating, the other partners and common legal instruments providing support to parents.
7. Rely on the available and competent network of parents, volunteers and professionals who share their commitment to help families, being respectful of people and of their independence, and who have already developed knowledge and expertise in the field.
8. Participate in the life of the department and in the construction of a common system which would make it possible to spread information, to evaluate initiatives, to build on the existing know-how, to contribute to the transparent, rigorous development of this movement and to give it visibility”.

5. Conclusions

The present survey highlights that the issue of **family support** by the States was given a **specific and increasing attention** in the recent years both at international and at national level.

Through the analysis of the international instruments it is evident that the issues of family support by the EU Member States represents an area of increasing attention and concern for several reasons, moving from the realisation of the strict connection existing between social and economic issues and the need for policy intervention in the areas affecting families and children, to the demographic challenges, the increasing child poverty and the changing of the family structure and of the gender roles.

The **United Nations** provide, through variegated instruments, a series of recommendations aimed at leading the States interventions, underlining their essential role as guarantors, enablers and promoters of all those actions directed at removing the obstacles that prevent parents from achieving the positive and complete exercise of their parental role. However, such documents only address the specific issue of parental education and counseling in the wider context of family support policies, based on the respect of the fundamental principles for children's rights as stated by the CRC. Whereas, the **European Union** even though has no common family policy as family policies remain the exclusive responsibility of the Member States, it gives great importance to it, as highlighted by its legislative activities in a number of areas: migration and free movement, equal opportunities, labour law and working conditions, and social protection. However the main concern in all these acts is still the issue of the conciliation between work and family life, without mentioning other forms of support dedicated in particular to the socio-educational dimension. As underlined in the recent Communication from the European Commission promoting solidarity between the generations (May 2007), the Lisbon Strategy is considered as a framework for the modernisation of family policies through the promotion of equal opportunities and in particular for a better reconciliation of work and private/family life which contributes to female labour force participation.

We can notice that there is no specific reference to socio-educational forms of support from State to family life in the activities of the EU and UN, thus at the international level it is possible to say that the work of the **COE** contributed to add new elements of discussion to the importance of socio-educational supplies for positive parenting by the States. The **Recommendation (2006)19** underlines the importance for children of growing up in a positive family environment and the State's responsibility to create the right conditions for **positive parenting** and to provide parents with the knowledge for appropriate guidance and direction (in a non-violent manner) of their children, to have the opportunity to provide materially for the child and to enable the child to be heard. Moreover, it invites the public authorities to promote initiatives aiming to make people aware of the value and importance of positive parenting and take a pro-active approach to promoting awareness on parenting issues and to normalising participation in parenting programmes. It also recommends the adoption of an empowerment approach based on consultation and dialogue with parents and on their voluntary involvement and participation in the spirit of a working partnership.

It is important to remind also that the **Committee** in its **COs on the EU member States reports** on the implementation of the CRC, devoted much attention to the subject of family support, in particular as regards the principle of parental guidance and the protection owed to families by the State (art. 5 and 18). The Committee has commented positively on a number of initiatives undertaken by the States in this field, first of all at a legislative level, such as laws and plans of action on family policy, on support to family with children and against poverty and social exclusion aiming at setting up a global policy on the family and/or at tackling the issue of child poverty or specific laws or legislative amendments on child benefits, parental leave and shared parental custody. The Committee has further appreciated the creation of specific centres to support families by providing counselling and parental education. Notwithstanding these positive achievements, the Committee has expressed its concern about the following issues: insufficiency of support by the State to families in terms of parental education and counselling; insufficiency of support by the State to families as regards economic support and furnishing of child-care services; inadequate respect for the principle that the child should maintain contact with both parents also in case of separation or divorce.

Concerning the national level, from the analysis undertaken of EU Member States policies, it clearly emerges that **EU Member States** are devoting an increasing attention to parenting support policies and programmes focusing specifically on a socio-educational dimension. There is a general acknowledgement of the importance of such programmes based on the recognition of the fact that the nature of parenting has deeply changed, due among others to the modified gender roles inside the family and in the society as well as to the new labour organization.

Certainly the extension and availability, as well as the characteristics, of such programmes vary greatly across the EU from those Countries that have since several years developed specific and comprehensive parenting programmes addressed to all parents, to those that have just started to set up programmes in this field that are mainly addressed to families at risk or to parents in difficulty. However there is general acknowledgement that the setting up or consolidation of parenting policies and programmes is needed in order to meet the new needs and exigencies expressed by the today-families.

Concerning the ways to provide parental support, first of all it must be recognised that all EU Member States introduced a **family support dimension in the provision of health services**. Secondly among the most common forms of parental support we can find also **parental education and counselling** that can be provided through general courses, workshops or conferences addressed to all interested parents or through individual advice to parents upon request. The use of telephone help-lines, web-site as well as awareness-raising campaigns is also increasingly used.

Other forms of parenting support provided in various EU Member States are: pre-marital counselling for young couples, often offered by church related services or associations, involvement of parents in relation with child-care services or the school, family mediation, specific programmes for families at risk or for families with children with special needs. An important role is also played by parents associations that often provide networks that link families, community networks and parents self helping groups. Parenting programmes are mostly provided by local bodies in accordance with the administrative **decentralization** taking place in EU Member States, while the central level usually maintains the function of planning the general policies and providing funds for the services.

Regarding the legislative framework, few States have enacted specific legislation on the issue of parenting programmes as references to this can be found in more general legislations, such as on parental support or on children's rights and protection. Another common element in the provision of parenting support programmes is the **public-private integration** that in this field has proved to work rather well.

Access to most of the parenting programmes and services is free of charge as they are supported by public funds; some require a low participation fee from the participants. Private institutions that are not funded by the government ask for a higher participation fee.

As regards the aims of parenting support services and programmes, usually projects focus on the **empowerment of parents and families** in the context of families-services partnerships and aiming at strengthening social networks as well. This aspect is very important because parental support should not be understood as a form of control of parental behaviour or as way to replace the parents, but as a way of empowering parents' competences and skills.

It appears therefore necessary to realise programmes directed at supporting parents making emerge their personal resources as well as those of the family and social context. To this aim it appears fundamental not only to use empowerment techniques but also to know in depth the territory in which to intervene.

Concerning the contents of parenting support programmes, many of them also promote alternative discipline methods to **corporal punishment** that in 11 EU Members States is forbidden by law.

From the survey it also emerges that States are increasingly paying attention to the issue of training and research as well as at the importance to identify replicable best practices. Some EU Member States, as well as international organizations like the Council of Europe, also developed **guidelines for work with parents** that point out a number of principles that should orient the work of professionals,

among others the principle of becoming partners with and empowering parents, as well as the principle of equity and accessibility, which should underlie all action taken.

Finally the survey points out some **critical aspects** in the provision of parenting support services, namely the limited availability of such services having as a consequence the impossibility to reach all interested families, the provision of these programmes only or mainly for families at risk and not also as a general instrument to support all parents, the difficulty in including migrant families and the difficulty in networking among the different bodies.

According to studies of international organizations, such as the Council of Europe the limited availability of parenting programmes appears to be, even if with different degrees in the various EU Member States, one of the most serious shortcomings in this fields that leads the organization to affirm that “the process of ascertaining the needs of parents has just started and requires more political attention and priority”⁵⁹.

The wish is that this survey may be helpful to provide more information on this subject, both by making a review of the most important international instruments on this issue and by identifying policies, programmes and interventions carried out by the EU Member States at national level as well as by sharing some of the most significant and innovative experiences in this field.

⁵⁹ Council of Europe, “Changes in parenting: children today, parents tomorrow”. Parenting in contemporary Europe: a positive approach, Conference of European Ministers responsible for family affairs, XXVIIIth session, 16 - 17 May 2006, Lisbon, Portugal, p. 59.

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International networks and programmes

- European Research Network About Parents in Education: <http://www.ernape.net/>
- NORNAPE (Nordic Network of Researchers About Parents in Education): <https://www.ltu.se/web/nornape>
- Association Internationale de Formation et de Recherche en Education Familiale (AIFREF): <http://www.aifref.be>
- Parents in Education; Home and School Together. A joint venture of the Parents in Education Research Network (PERN) and the U.K. National Home School Development Group (NHSDG): <http://www.dundee.ac.uk>
- CRESPAR Johns Hopkins University & Howard University Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/a>
- Europarent.org: <http://www.europarent.org/evaluation.asp>
- Gordon Training International: <http://www.gordontraining.com/family.html>

National references

Austria

- Website for parents and parents' educators: www.eltern-bildung.at
- Information for families: www.bmgfj.gv.at

Belgium

- Office de la naissance et de l'enfance (ONE): <http://www.one.be/>
- Parents, enfants, prenons le temps de vivre ensemble: www.yakapa.be
- Ecole des Parents et des Educateurs (EPE): <http://www.ecoledesparents.be/>
- www.parentalite.be (under construction)

France

- REAAP 89. Les Réseaux d'Ecoute, d'Appui et d'Accompagnement des parents: <http://www.caf.fr/web/Web891.nsf/VueLien/REAAP-CHARTE?opendocument>
- Point info famille: www.point-infofamille.fr

Estonia

- Campaign "Be normal! Growing up together": www.noorusonhukas.ee

Germany

- Pecip e. V.: <http://www.pekip.de>
- Hippy Deutschland e.V.: <http://www.hippy-deutschland.de/home.php>
- Deutsches Jugendinstitut. Forschung über Kinder, Jugendliche und Familien an der Schnittstelle zwischen Wissenschaft, Politik und Praxis: <http://www.opstapje.de>; <http://www.dji.de/opstapje>
- Starke Eltern Starke kinder: <http://www.starkeeltern-starkekinder.de>
- Triple P Das positive Erziehungsprogramm: <http://www.triplep.de>
- Effekt Entwicklungsförderung in familien: eltern- und kinder-training: <http://www.effekt-training.de>
- Pep. Präventionsprogramms für expansives problemverhalten: <http://www.pep-programm.de>

Ireland

- Barnardo's: <http://www.barnardos.ie/home.htm>
- Parents Plus: <http://www.parentsplus.ie>
- Holy Family: <http://www.holyfamily.com>

- The Art of Balancing Your Life: <http://www.theartofbalancinglife.com>
- Lifestart Foundation .Educating parents, developing children: <http://www.lifestartfoundation.org/sligo.html>
- The Family Centre: <http://www.thefamilycentre.com/>
- Parent Line: <http://www.parentline.ie/>
- Education Resource Site: <http://www.gerlohan.com>
- Nurture Institute of Further Education for Parents: <http://www.nurture.ie>

Italy

- National Observatory on Family: <http://www.osservatorionazionalefamiglie.it>

Luxembourg

- Parent's helpline: <http://www.12345kjt.lu/>
- Parent's national association: <http://www.fapel.lu/>
- Parent's courses and trainings: <http://www.kannerschlass.lu/> - <http://www.familjencentercpf.lu/> - <http://www.info-video-center.lu>

Netherlands

- Home-start: www.home-start.org.uk
- Nederlands Jeugd Instituut: www.jeugdinterventies.nl/
- Triple P Programme: <http://www.triplep-nederland.nl/>

Poland

- www.mpips.gov.pl

Romania

- Violence breeds violence: <http://www.educatiefaraviolenta.ro/>

Spain

- National Child Observatory:
www.mtas.es/SGAS/FamilialInfanc/infancia/observatorio/ObsInfancia.htm#es

Sweden

- Swedish National Institute for Public Health: <http://www.fhi.se>
- Programme COPE: <http://www.ltvastmanland.se/COPE>
- Programme The incredible years: <http://www.incredibleyears.com/>

UK

- National Academy for Parenting Practitioners: <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/napp/>
- Parenting UK: <http://www.parentinguk.org/>
- Polity Research Bureau: <http://www.prb.org.uk/wwiparenting/>
- The Family and Parenting Institute: <http://www.familyandparenting.org/>
- What Works in Parenting Support: Online Database: <http://www.prb.org.uk/wwiparenting/>