



# **Family Support Policy and Practice: a Multi-dimensional Conceptual and Developmental Approach to Promoting Equality**

Professor Angela Abela, University of Malta, Dr Harriet Churchill,  
University of Sheffield, and Dr Carmel Devaney, UNESCO Child and  
Family Research Centre, University of Galway

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**L-Università  
ta' Malta**



**University of  
Sheffield**

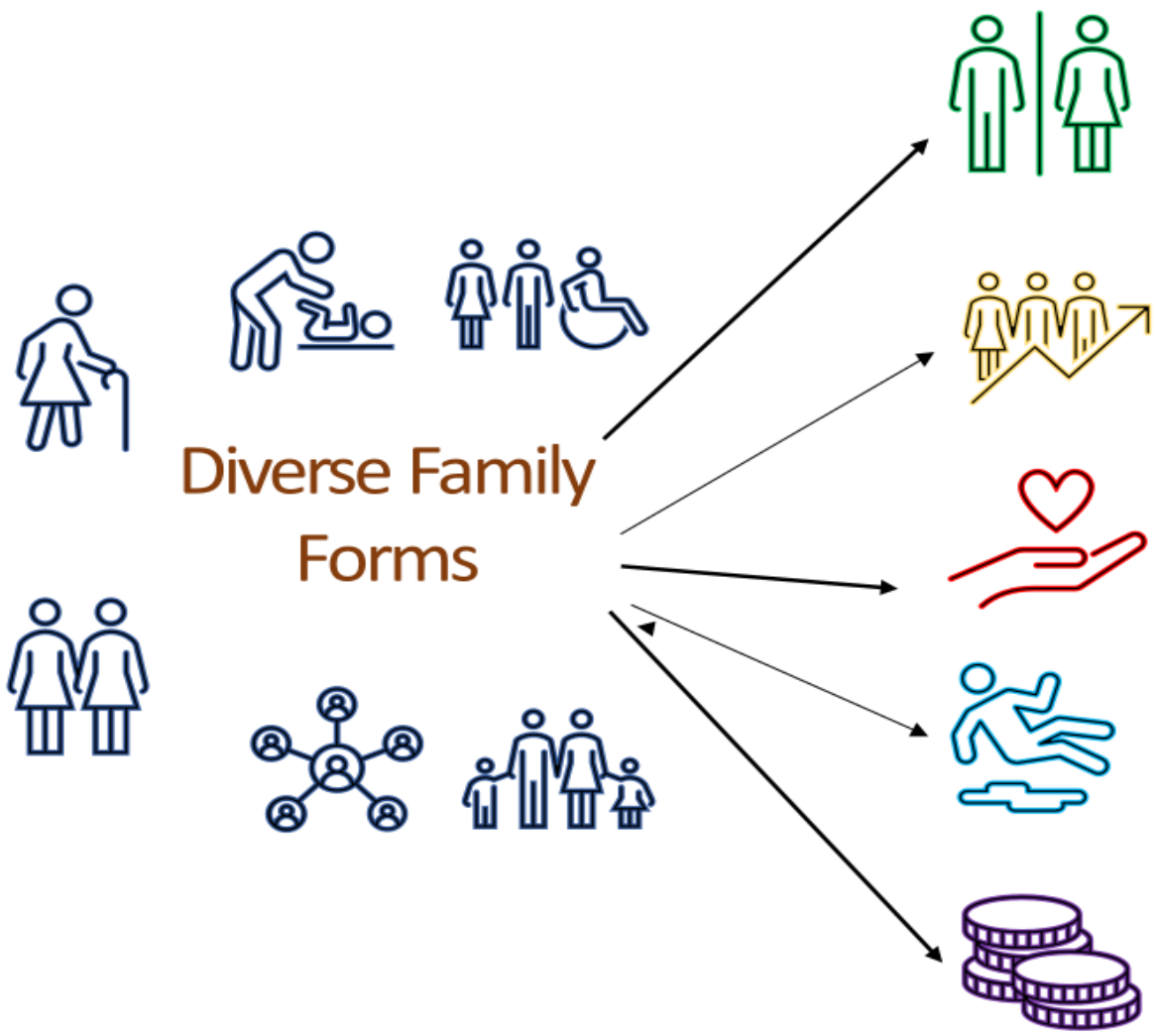


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UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



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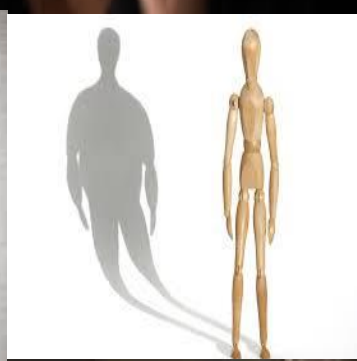
Gender Equality

Demographic Trends & New Family Forms

Cultural Norms of Care & Intergenerational Dynamics

Diversity of Need

Social & Economic Circumstances



# Family Support.. within and across systems and sectors ...

*Family support is the mobilisation and provision of resources & support for the purpose of sustaining & enhancing family roles & assets and promoting the well-being & capabilities of family members including children and parents.*

*It includes a range of resources and support provided by 'informal' networks, 'semi-formal' community groups & 'formal' services.*

*Formal services should seek to provide timely and enabling support for children, parents and families; be developed and delivered as much as possible based on an ethos of participation and promotes inclusive and supportive communities*

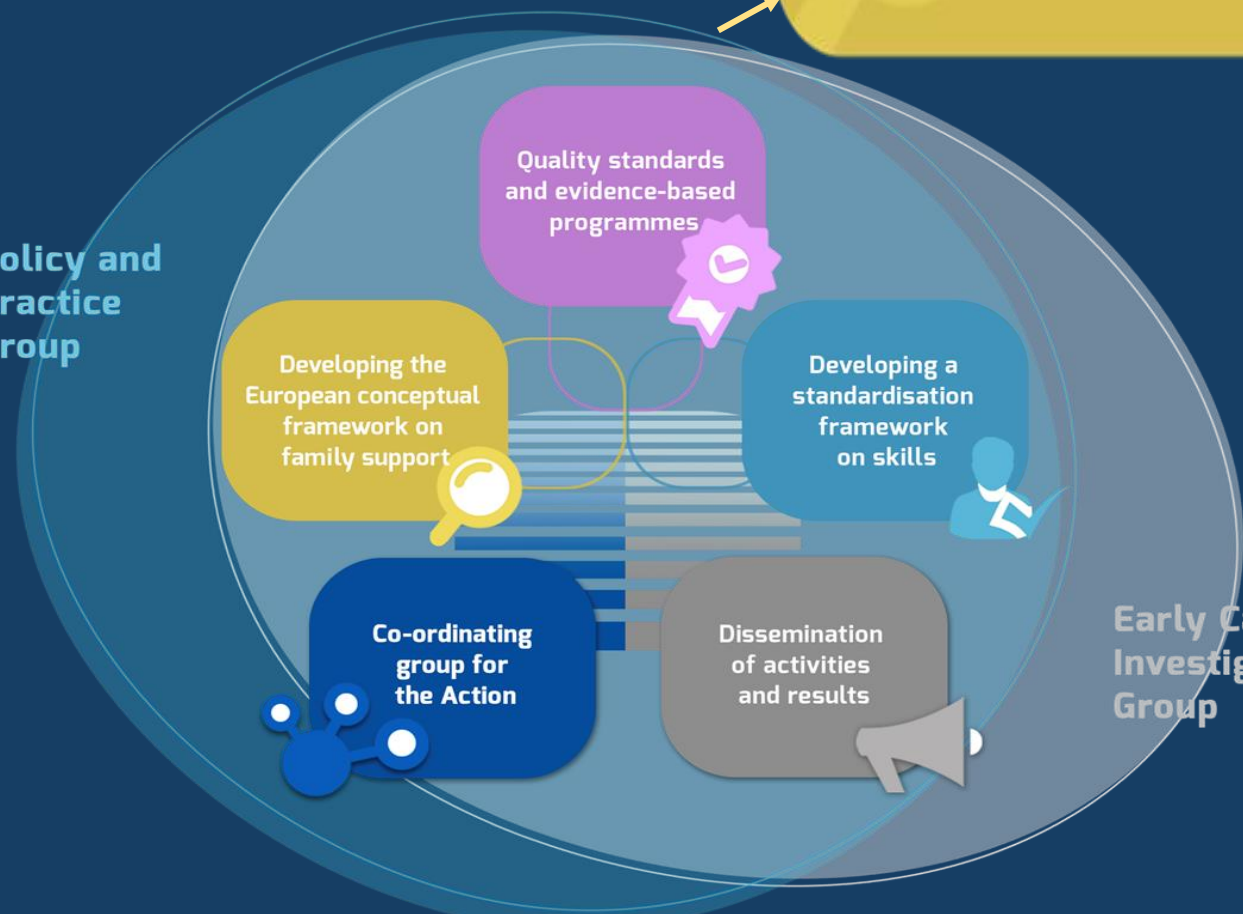
# Eurofam

**WP2**

Developing the European  
conceptual framework  
on family support



Policy and  
Practice  
Group



Early Career  
Investigators  
Group

• Literature Review

• Policy Analysis

• National Survey

• Conceptualisation, development and delivery of family and parenting support in European countries

• European & International policy frameworks  
• Considered how prominent treaties, directives & recommendations adopted by UN, CoE & EU conceptualised the key components of national state support and services

• National developments in family & parenting support among 27 European countries  
• Social trends, policy arrangements & reforms, key family support provisions, innovations and challenges

The conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe: A review of academic literature



The conceptualisation and delivery of family support in Europe: A review of academic literature

October 2021

A review of international and European frameworks and standards



The conceptualisation and delivery of family policy and support in Europe: A review of international and European frameworks and standards

September 2021

Child and family support policies across Europe: National reports from 27 countries

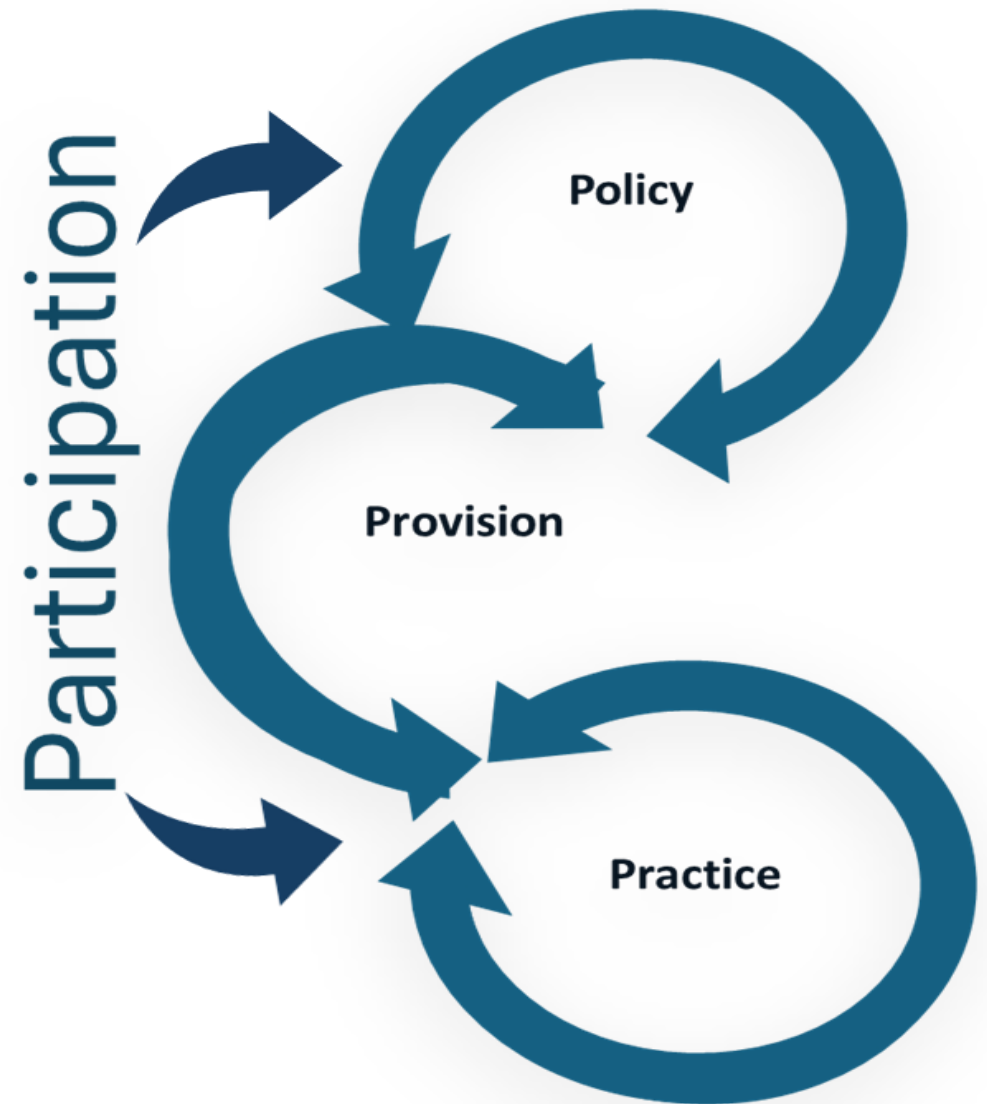
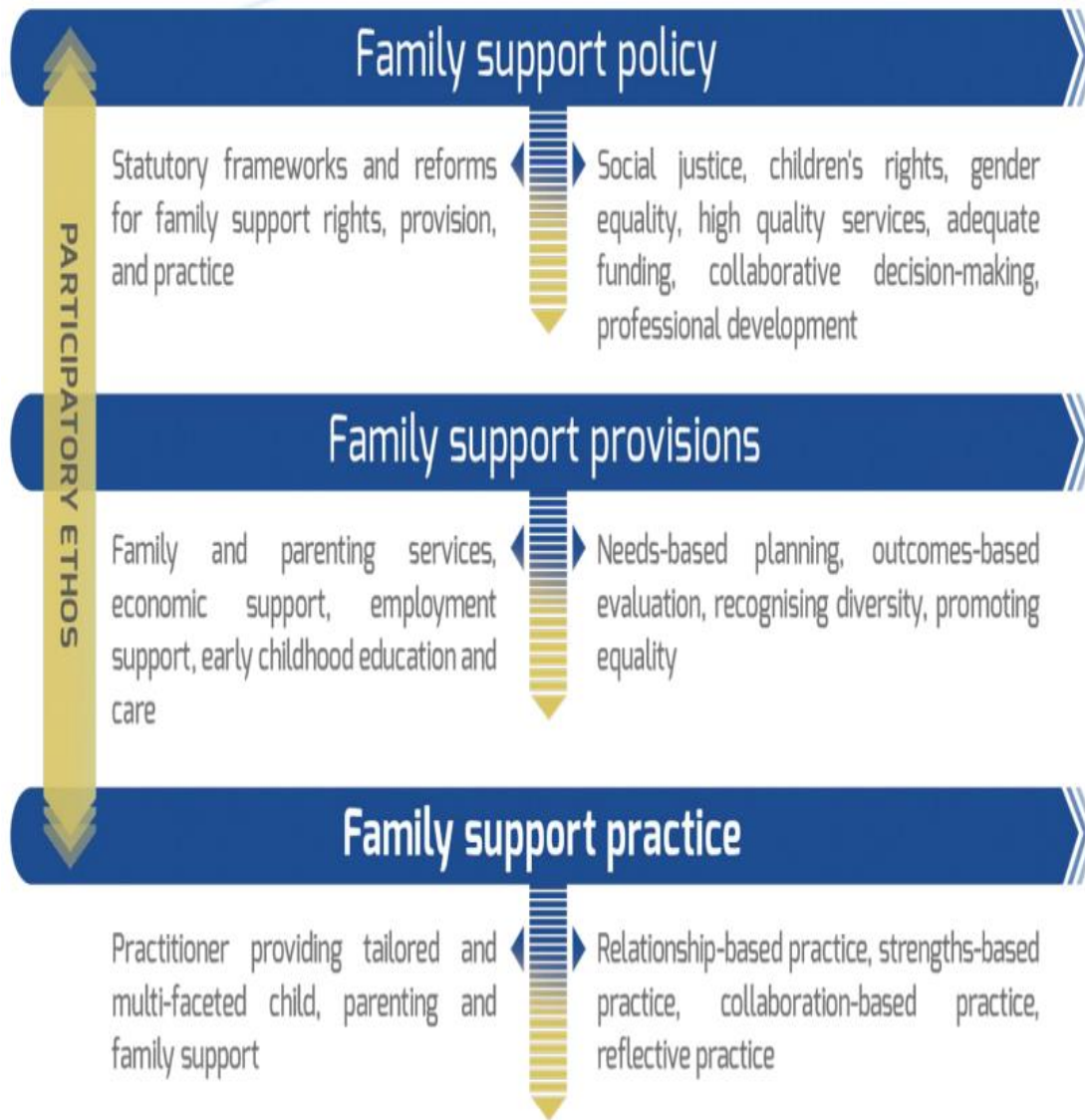


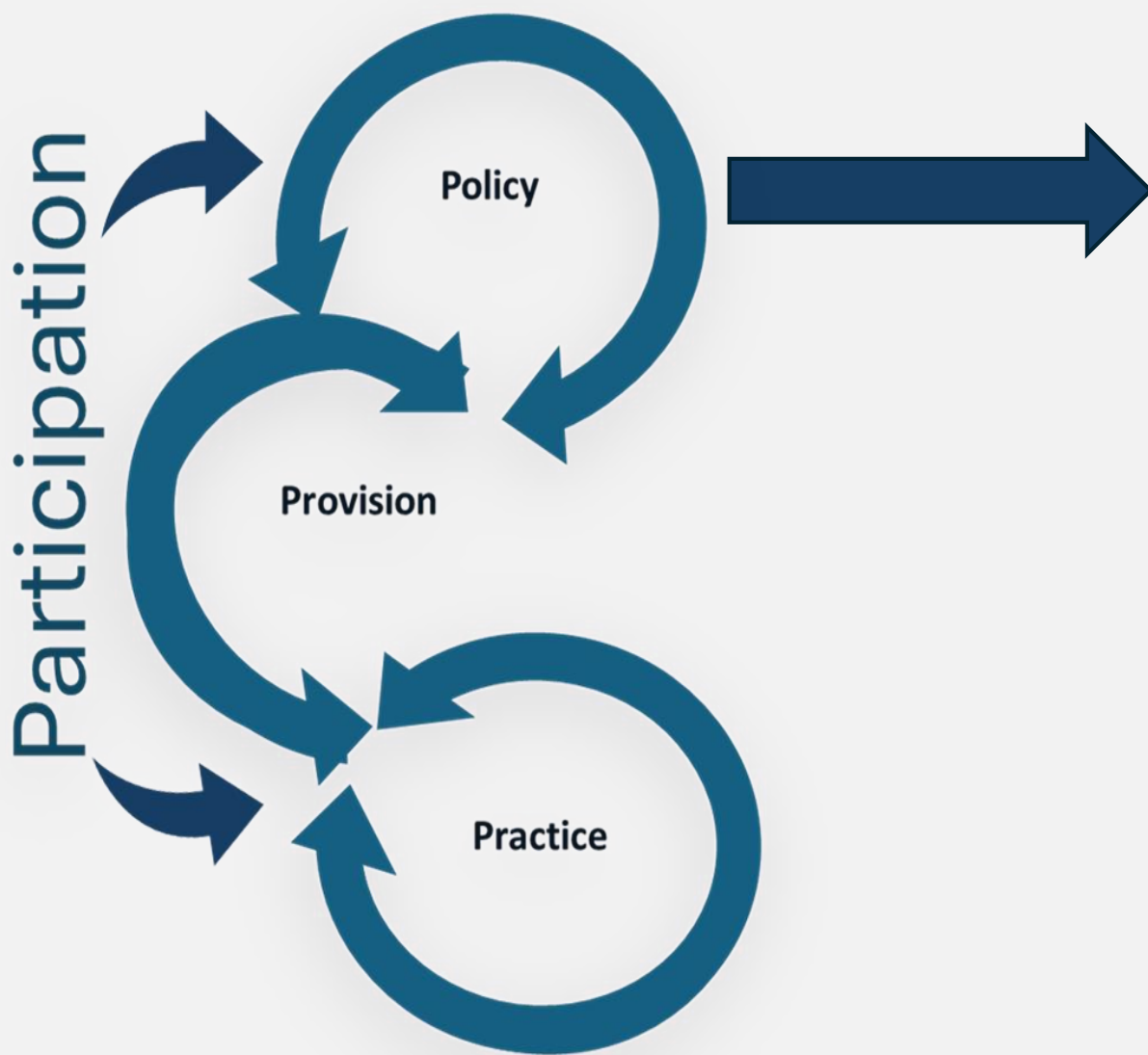
Child and family support policies across Europe: National reports from 27 countries

October 2021

Academic papers

Symposium & Webinars





*Family support as 'policy field/sub-field' = statutory, institutional and government remits & frameworks which structure family support rights, provision, funding, workforce, delivery & reform (Daly et al 2015)*

*Family support as 'policy paradigm/nested policy paradigm': normative & ideological orientations to childhood, 'family', parenthood & child-family-state relations which influence 'ends & means' of family & social policy (Saraceno 2023)*



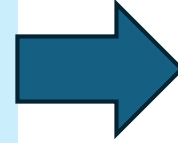
# CONVENTION

ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



*UNCRC = rights for all children (<18yrs) 'to grow up in a spirit of well-being, dignity, respect & equality' (UNICEF 2024)*

- *Rights to survival, development, health, welfare & education – 'to realise full potential'*
- *Rights to voice & participation as citizens with 'evolving capacities'*
- *Nation-states & Parents/Families = duties to ensure children's rights to protection, provision & participation*
- *Nation-states = duties to support parents, families & communities to ensure children's rights*
- *Additional protections & provisions for highly at-risk groups – disabled children, children in state institutions, asylum seekers & refugees*



## Recent UK reforms..

- Rights of Children & Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011
- UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill passed Dec 2023
- Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) national policy & services frameworks (Scotland)
- Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 & Delivery Plan 2022-26
- Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (2024)



***CoE (2006) Support for  
Positive Parenting***

***Followed by: CoE (2011a;  
2011b); CoE (2013); CoE  
(2019)***

- Ensure rights to network of local support and services delivered in partnership with parents & children
- Promote positive parenting – nurturing, non-violent, respect & recognition, gender equality
- National policies to ensure coordinated & cross-sectoral approach supported by investment, standards & collaboration

***Recent UK  
reforms..***

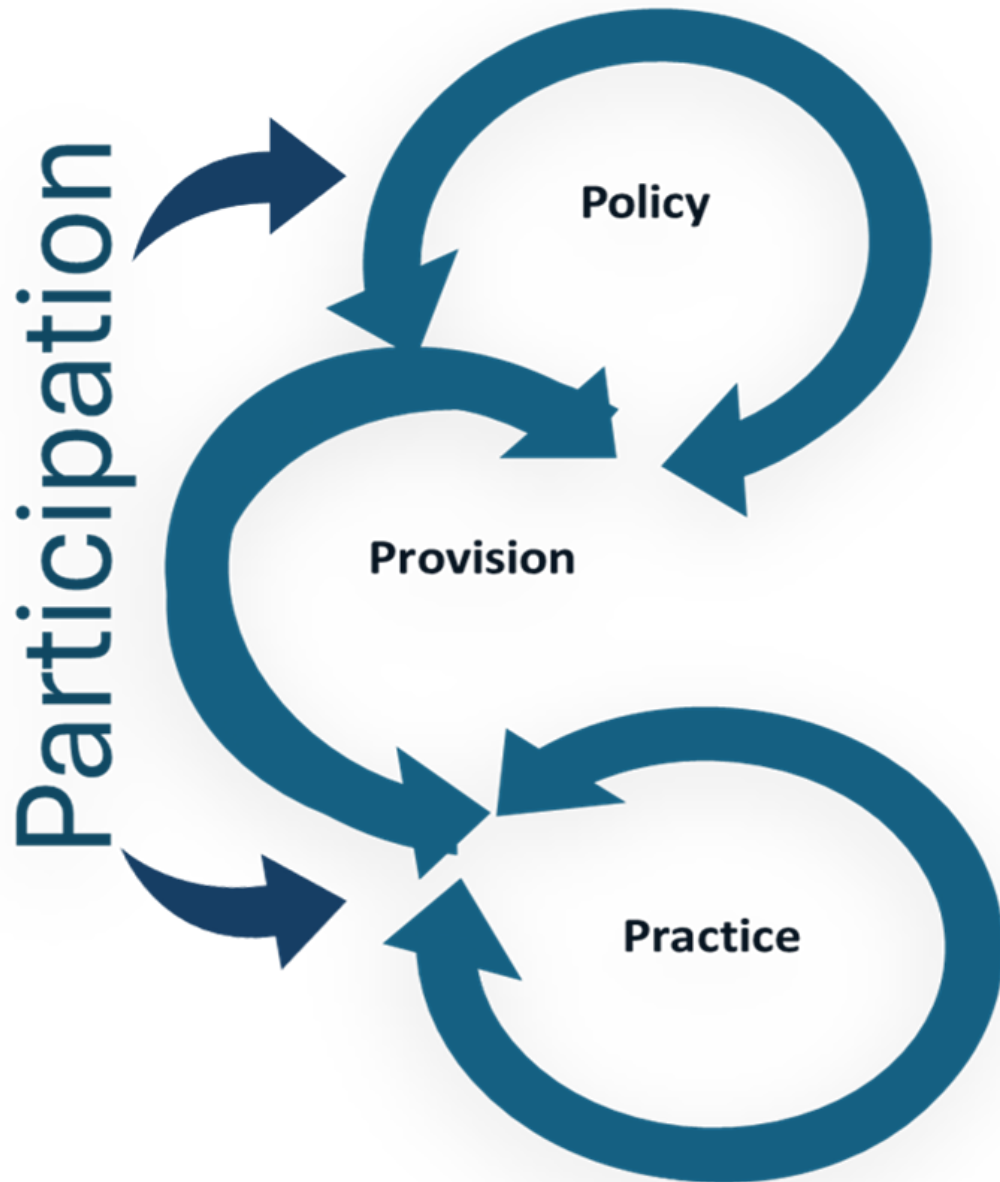
- National Parenting Support Strategies adopted previously but not renewed (Scotland; Wales; NI)
- Several Local Governments pursue ambitious 'Family & Parenting Support & Early Help Strategies' & reforms as envisaged by CoE
- Narrow framed & punitive 'parenting' policy discourses & agendas (Churchill 2024)

- **2013 Investing in Children Strategy**
  - Access to adequate resources
  - Access to affordable and quality services
  - Participation in decision-making
  - Coordination & collaboration (across Govt, sectors & civil society)
  - Evidence-informed approach
- **2019 Directive on Work-Life Balance**
  - Flexible working rights for parents & carers
  - >10 days paid paternity leave
  - Individual parental rights for >2 months parental leave
- **2021 Child Guarantee Action Plan**
  - Guarantee access to essential services including social welfare services, childcare, education support & housing

***We call for the UK Government to introduce... a comprehensive vision and plan for childhood accompanied by long-term sustainable funding is urgently needed... to make children's and young people's needs and rights a national priority*** (ADCS, 2024, p. 4-6)

## Family support provision?

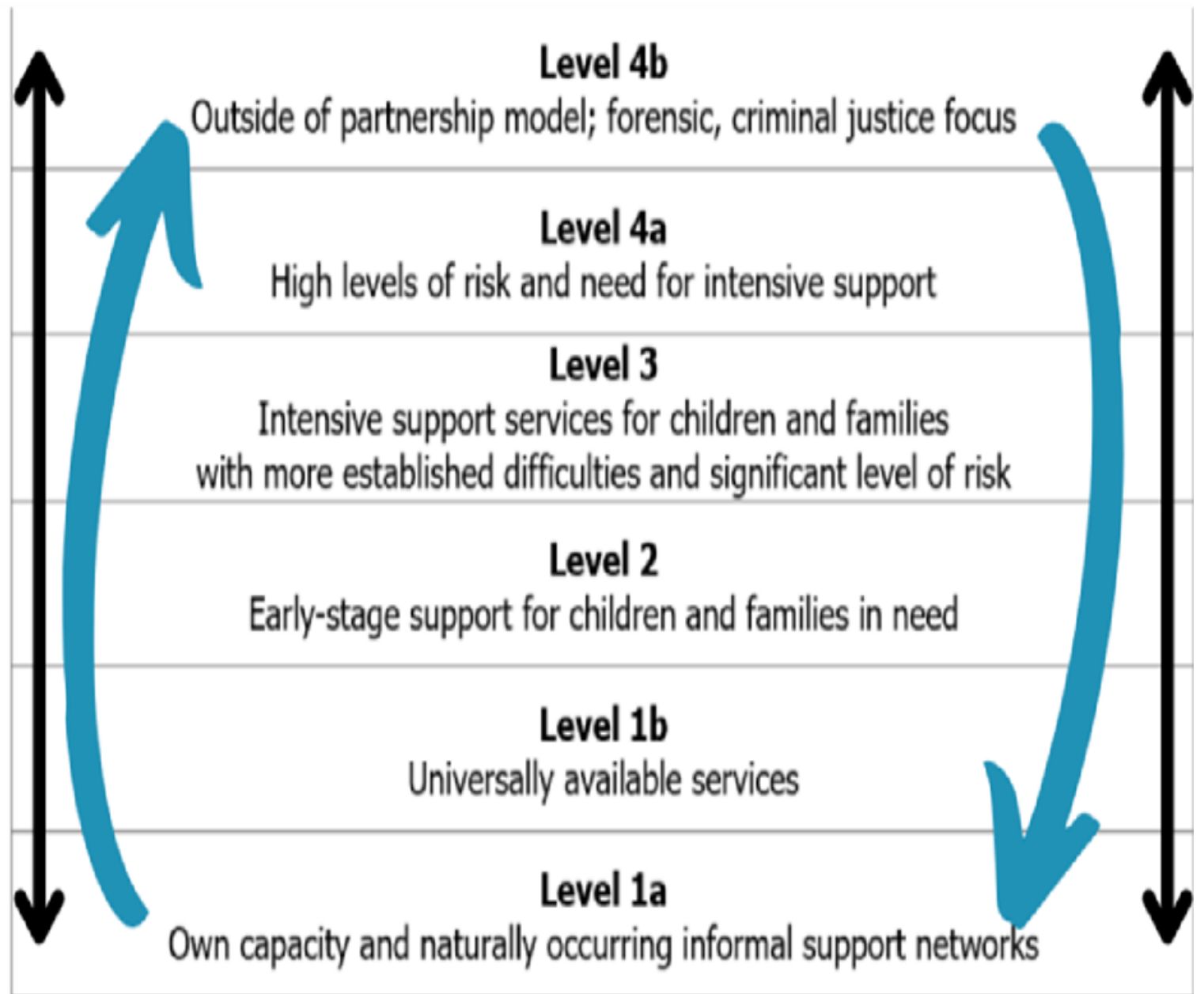
`Services incorporating support needs and service development based on population needs and risk assessments. Cross sector service audits and evaluation including the perspectives of stakeholders are also crucial in the planning of service



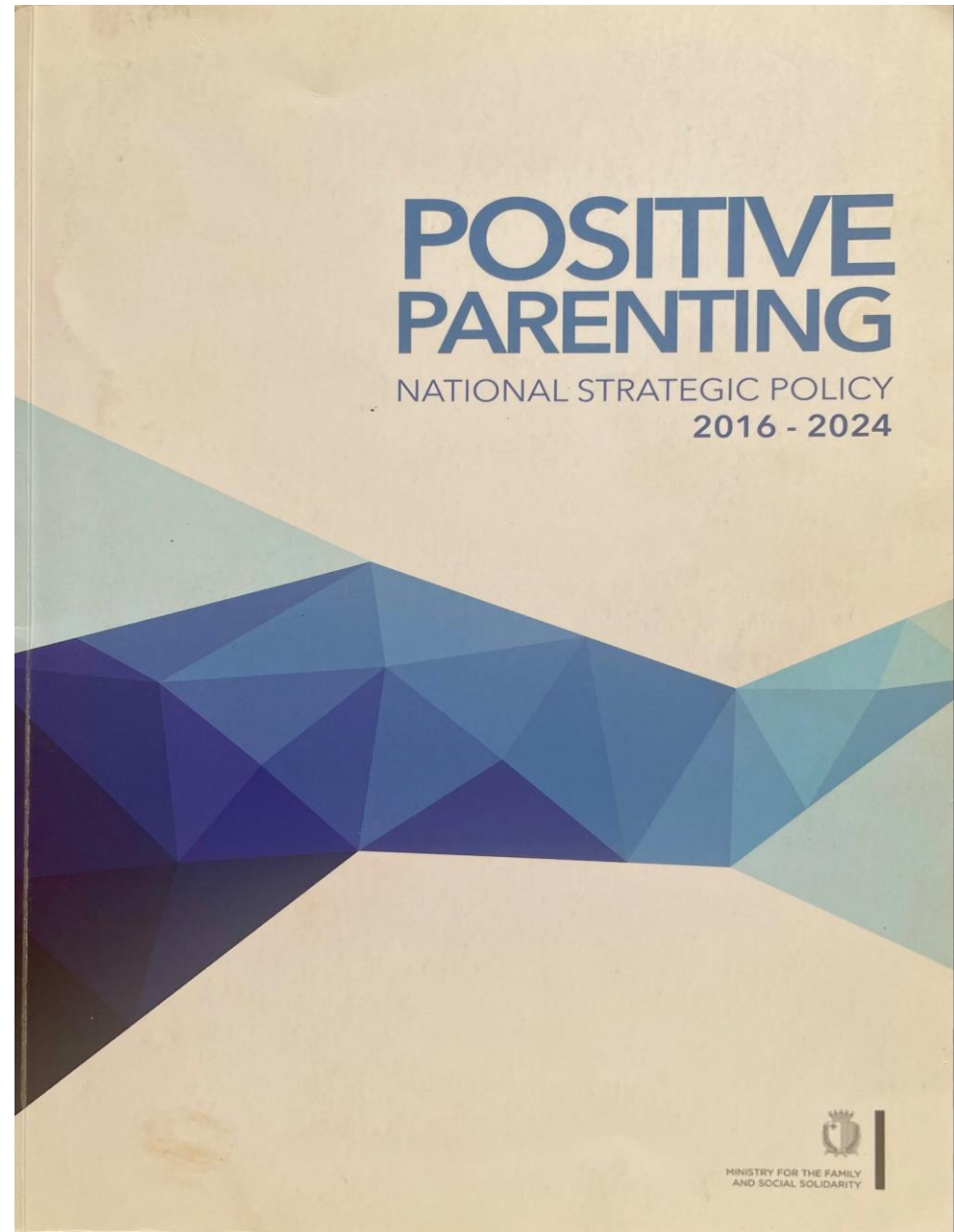
# *Protective Support - Supportive Protection*

The need to balance support and protection

*Protecting by Supporting*



# Coordinated and holistic implementat ion of



Practitioners are the front line of Family Support practice...

They connect the policy, legal, theoretical & welfare systems to children, young people, parents, and families

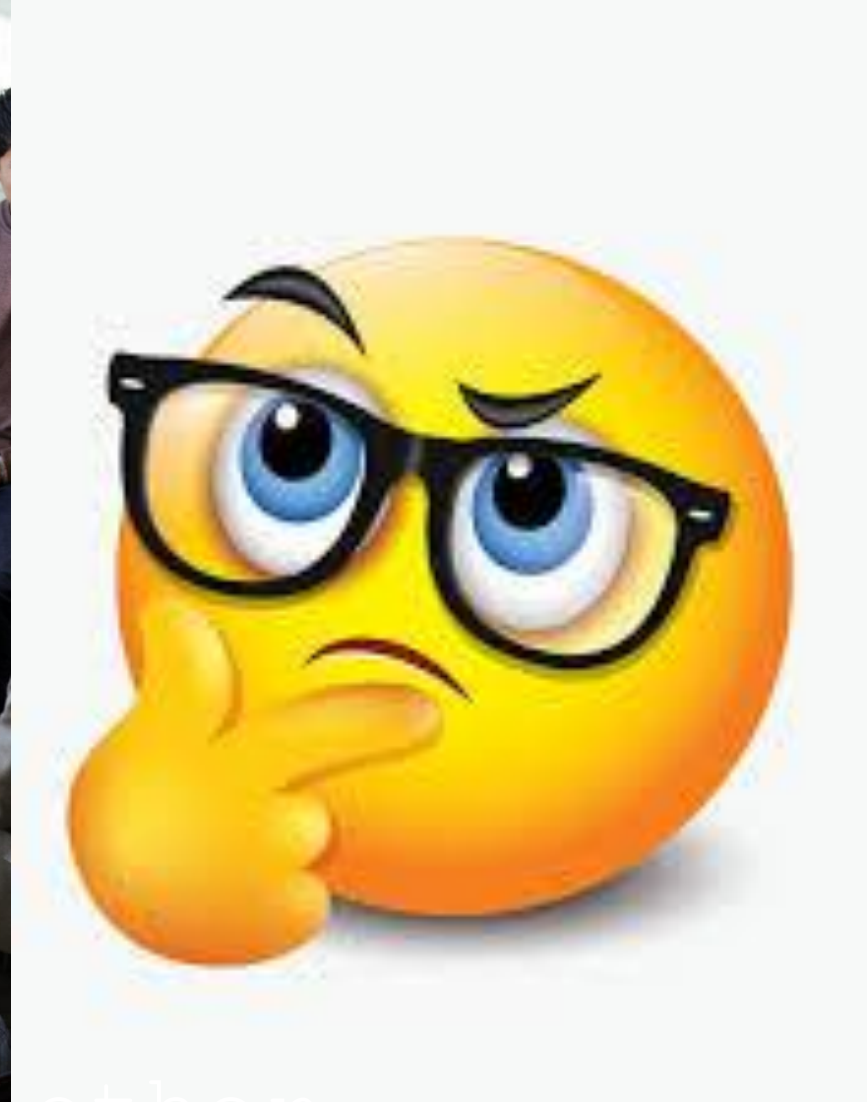
They interpret and present the relevant information, policies, services and systems...



Are we trying to 'fix' families when in fact their problems stem from structural inequalities?







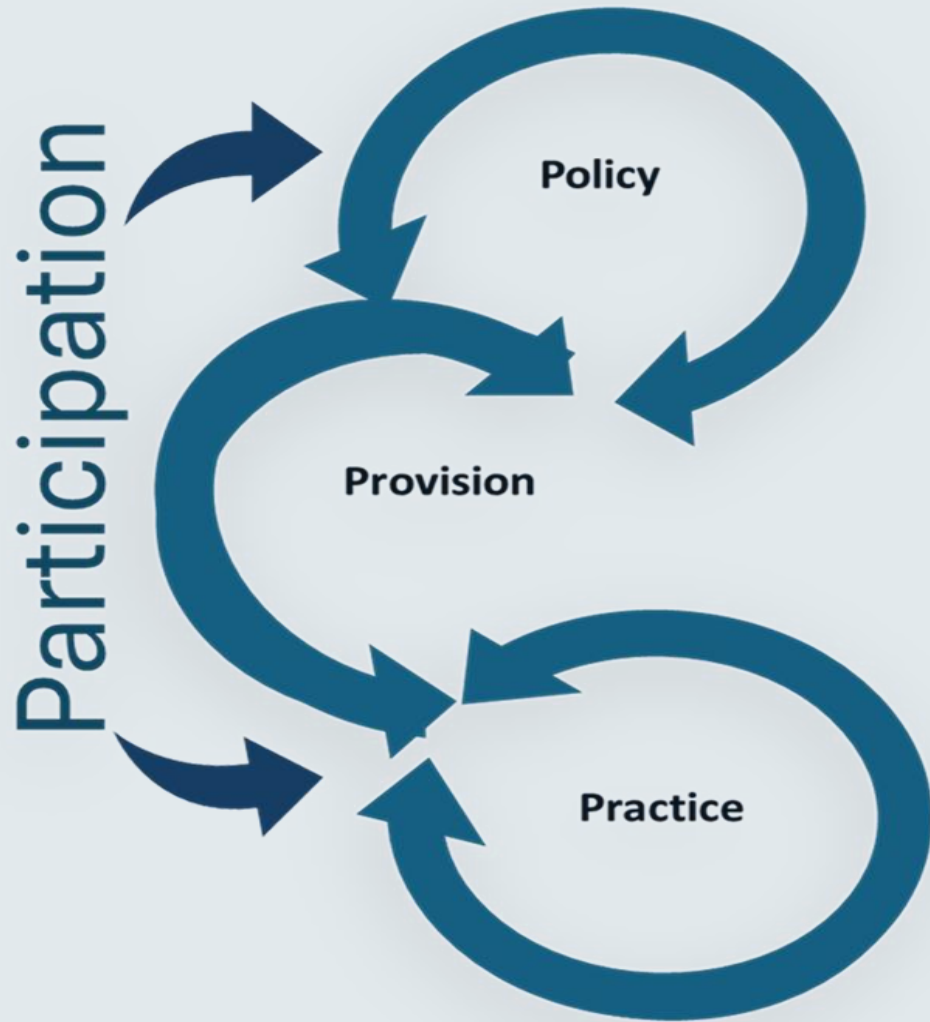
Gender class ethnicity and other inequalities facing families can be challenged through the use of reflective practice

Research-informed  
practice and practice-  
informed research  
remain *patchy*

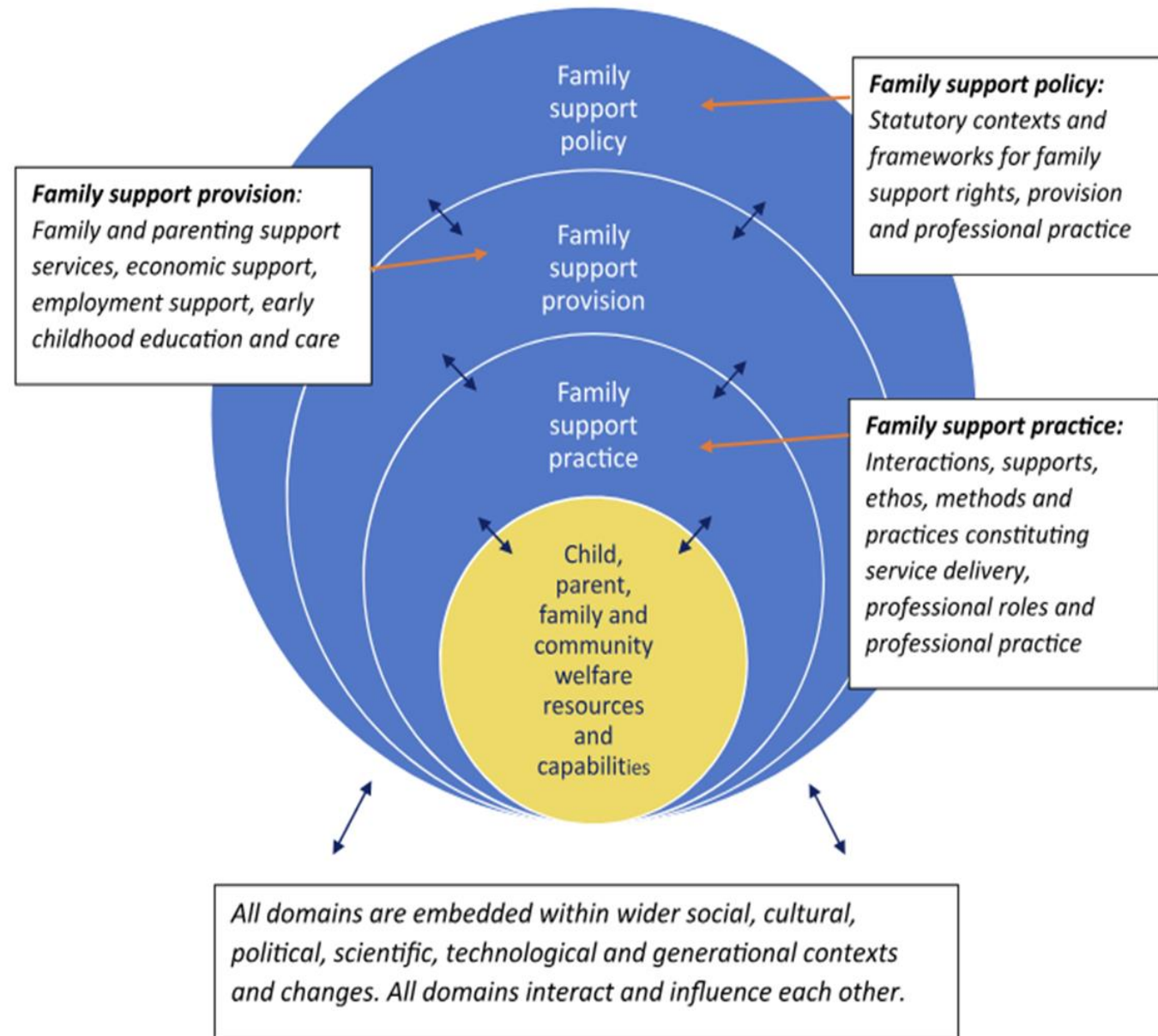
Only 11 country  
reports out of the 27  
we received,  
confirmed that  
interventions are  
informed by evidence



# High Quality Family Support



An evidence-based and culturally informed model



**Thank  
you**

## References & Resources

Churchill, H., Devaney, C. and Abela, A., (2024). Promoting child welfare and supporting families in Europe: Multi-dimensional conceptual and developmental frameworks for national family support systems. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol 161, p.107679  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2024.107679>.

Devaney, C., Churchill, H., Abela, A. and Jackson, R., 2022. A framework for child and family support in Europe: building comprehensive support systems.

[https://eurofamnet.eu/sites/default/files/toolbox/policy-briefs/A\\_framework\\_for%20child\\_and\\_family\\_support\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](https://eurofamnet.eu/sites/default/files/toolbox/policy-briefs/A_framework_for%20child_and_family_support_in_Europe.pdf)

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