

INTERVIEW STUDY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COORDINATORS ON INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN NINE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present study aimed to describe the state, facilitating factors, barriers, and impacts of inter-agency coordination of services for culturally and linguistically diverse children and families, including with a migrant, ethnic minority and/or low-income background, at selected sites in European countries. The goal was to provide recommendations for future policy and practice in the field of inter-agency coordination to reduce social and educational inequalities and exclusion in Europe.

Heads of services, coordinators, and local government representatives were identified as key-informants in the local services system. Considering all the participating countries, 61 key-informants were interviewed. The participating countries were: the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews.

Findings indicated commonalities between countries. The national legislation includes references to decentralized responsibilities. The government has a key role, coordinating, monitoring, and/or providing funding. Public, private, and non-profit entities are playing an increasingly important role in the implementation of measures to promote inclusiveness. The entities involved in inter-agency working, forms of organization between them, and the scope of action are being broaden. Governments increasingly share the collective-action stage with private actors, both for-profit and not-for-profit. Differences between countries are also found. Some countries are more decentralized than others (Germany and Portugal are contrasting examples) differing in terms of administrative status, competences and funding.

Considering all the participating countries, the most frequent facilitating factors of inter-agency coordination mentioned by the key-informants included: a bottom-up approach; political top-down support; shared values, planning and goals; commitment to inter-agency; receptivity of professionals; and clear roles of professionals and agencies. The most frequent barriers acknowledged across countries included: funding uncertainty or reduction and problems with recruiting staff/staff turnover. These factors and barriers were also identified in the previous case studies of good practice in inter-agency working with young children and their families within Europe (Barnes et al., 2018).

The most frequently mentioned impacts on services included: coordination of services and more effective referrals for complex family problems; efficiency; better and/or more specialized services; and improved communication between services/professionals. The most frequently mentioned impact on families was contact with fewer agencies to access the necessary services. The findings reinforced what has been found in the literature: there is a lack of measured outcome data, since evaluations of impacts and the monitoring of inter-agency working are scarce and difficult to measure. The evaluation of children's outcomes was found to be given more priority.

Identifying facilitating factors, barriers, and impacts regarding inter-agency working can contribute to ensure adequate social responses and services to support the needs of children, young people and their families, as well as to the wider community. However, the development of policies and practices need to be adapted to the context in which inter-agency working occurs. Clarifying country models is important to understand how (de)centralization processes are managed, which frame or motivate inter-agency working.