

# Summary

# Research Report

Prepared by UPIT 21/03/2014

Project Title: Parents Informal Networks for Early Childhood Learning

Project Acronym: PINECL

Project Number:543178-LLP-1-2013-IE-KA3-KA3MP



**PINECL**

Parents' Informal Network  
for Early Childhood Learning

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# I

## Context for the development of the Parents' Informal Network for Early Childhood Learning [PINECL] project

### Introduction

This report is based on the analysis of several studies and action research undertaken at European level in Ireland, Cyprus, Italy, Northern Ireland and Romania by the acting partners of the PINECL Project. The national reports were conducted in two phases; the first one represented a desk study of the State of the Art of national initiatives and policies regarding parenting supports and early childhood education in rural communities. The second phase consisted of focus group sessions in which training need analyses amongst parents, education and healthcare professionals was conducted in all the participating countries. Individual stakeholder maps were also created for each country to present the range of actors engaged in these sectors.

The report also includes a synthesis of best practice approaches to early childhood education; best practice approaches to ICT training for different target groups and best practice considerations in e-learning platform design. The best practice examples were provided by the supporting partners of the project from Ireland, Finland and Austria.

### European context

The project Parents' Informal Network for Early Childhood Learning [PINECL] has been framed in close connection with the new European policies to promote the importance of early education and the role of the family in ensuring a positive start for children in early life. The most important criterion for designing the project were: recent findings of scientific research and education policy guidelines formulated at the European level on how to facilitate rural children's access to a quality education which can ensure their natural development and evolution.

In a relatively recent study (2005), Professor Israel (University of Florida) underlined that low-capacity rural areas, where educational attainment, income levels, job skills, and community engagement are more limited, can create a milieu that does not place a high priority on education – *ibid.* Charles Dervarics [1]. He also added that social networks and parent involvement can increase student achievement at an early age.

Another study that was carried out by the American researchers in 2011 [2, p.10] emphasises the following cause-effect relation: increasing the availability of preschool education can be an effective strategy for reducing inequalities that exist prior to school entry and better prepare children for transitioning into kindergarten.

The same study stresses how important it is for healthcare and social services to become more involved in supporting parents in the process of educating their children: public and community health providers should review how they can be more involved in providing information that promotes the parent's role in young children's brain development and how they can become more aggressive in their information-sharing role [2, p.46].

One of the most important questions that politicians interested in early education ask themselves is: What kind of programmes would be more advantageous for parents? From this perspective, in a review of UK research, Desforges and Abouchaar [3] concluded that the most effective programmes aimed at supporting child academic development were those which focused not on improving parents' cognitive skills but on improving general parenting skills.

Some primary research has suggested, on the other hand, that home-based programmes can be more effective than those in other sites. For example, Lonigan and Whitehurst [4] suggest that home environments can be the most effective because parents can better tailor their approach to their own child in a home-based, one-to-one context.

There are research papers pointing out that the dialogue between parents is also important for them to share their beliefs and opinions. As Powell observes, “focused discussion among parents allows individuals to rework their existing beliefs in order to accommodate new ideas from peers or programme staff” [5].

Ideas like those mentioned above formed the basis for the research methodology developed in the project Parents’ Informal Network for Early Childhood Learning [PINECL].

The project’s research study also rests on some strategic documents issued by the European Commission which regulate a number of measures to be taken and actions to be launched in order to improve the quality of early education, by putting previous research findings into practice.

One of these documents clearly states that early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been, since the 1992 Council Recommendations on Child Care, a recurring topic on European policy agendas [6]. More than that, whereas initially the rationale for investing in early childhood education and care was mostly driven by socio-economic concerns about employment, competitiveness and gender equality, more recently EU policy documents point to children’s rights, questions of citizenship, equality of educational opportunity, and social cohesion (EC communication, 2011; Europe 2020, 2010a; Council Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Education and Training, 2010).

The European Commission has been preoccupied, among others, with the problem of equity when referring to basic education, based on the well-known fact that social inequities and economic disadvantages represent the first sources of discrimination that affect children in the development of their personalities. Therefore, a document issued as early as 2008, Communication on future cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020, refers explicitly to addressing educational disadvantages through pre-primary education. Following this, Member States agreed to develop co-operation at European level to promote quality and equity in this sector [7].

Recently, in February 2011, the Commission set out the key issues for future European co-operation in early childhood education and care with the aim to improve access and quality of services from birth to the start of compulsory schooling [8].

The document reveals that complementing the central role of the family, Early Childhood Education and Care lays the essential foundations for language acquisition, successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and employability. If solid foundations are laid during a child’s formative years, later learning becomes more effective and more likely to continue throughout life, increasing the equity of educational outcomes and lowering the costs for society in terms of lost talent and public spending on welfare, health and even justice.

All the above mentioned documents lay emphasis on the parents as primary educators who act as main providers of informal learning from pre-birth throughout adolescence of their children.

Civil society has also reacted in favour of enhancing the role of the parents as providers of informal learning and partners of the formal education system.

Thus, as early as 1985, was founded in Milan, Italy, EPA - the European Parents’ Association – aiming to promote the active participation of parents and the recognition of their central place as the primary responsible of the education of their children. Recently, EPA launched a proposal for the EU to declare 2014 the European Year of Family and Work Reconciliation.

Certainly, many European countries are now in the situation of assimilating, within their own systems, the guidelines formulated by the European Commission.

In order to find out how well prepared some of those countries are to take the next step in the development of Early Childhood Education and Care by stimulating parents to become more competently involved in this process, let us follow the brief radiographies carried out by the partners of the project Parents’ Informal Network for Early Childhood Learning [PINECL] in their countries.

## References

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- [8] - Early Childhood Education and Care - providing all our children with the best start for the world of tomorrow , Source: <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0066:FIN:EN:PDF>

## II

# National State of the Art Analysis

## II.1.CYPRUS - State of the Art Analysis

### Parenting and Early Childhood Learning

In Cyprus there is no legislative framework that establishes the programme of positive parenting. Parental role is defined within the Parent and Children Relations Law of 1990 (Law 216/1990) and at the base of the Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law, 2000 and 2004, which describe the parental responsibility generally, without specifying clearly the way parental role should be exercised.

Nowadays, the role of parents is really important since they have the main role, in cooperation with school and other social institutions, in helping their children to develop healthy attitudes and values. However, the rapid and severe social changes impose increased demands on the family. Many of these requirements are new and parents need more information, support and skills in order to be able to understand the needs of their children.

### Early Childhood Learning in Cyprus

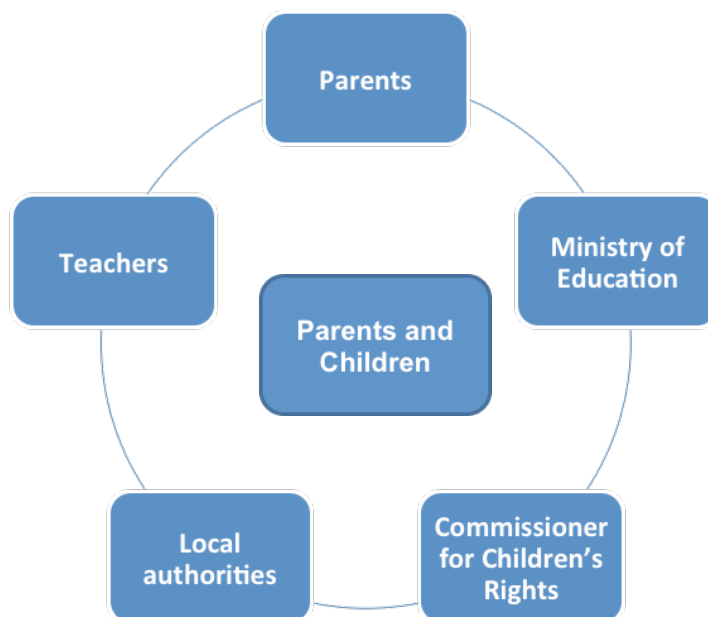
The educational programme of Pre-primary Schools' in Cyprus aims to promote learning through creative activities and child-centred approaches and to cultivate some basic skills and values, such as cooperation and teamwork, acceptance and respect (Annual Report of the Ministry of Education of Cyprus, 2012).

The Department of Pre-primary Education in Cyprus is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and specifically under the Department of the Primary Education. In general, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus is responsible for providing education to children from the age of 3 years old and over.

Pre-primary Education is responsible for providing fundamental knowledge to children aged over four years and eight months, in order to prepare them for their transition from nursery to primary school.

Furthermore, Pre-primary Education in Cyprus is considered as compulsory for all children that reach the age of four years and eight months. However, children have the opportunity to attend public, private and community pre-primary schools (Annual Report of the Ministry of Education of Cyprus, 2012).

### Cyprus - Stakeholders Map



## II.2. ITALY - State of the Art Analysis

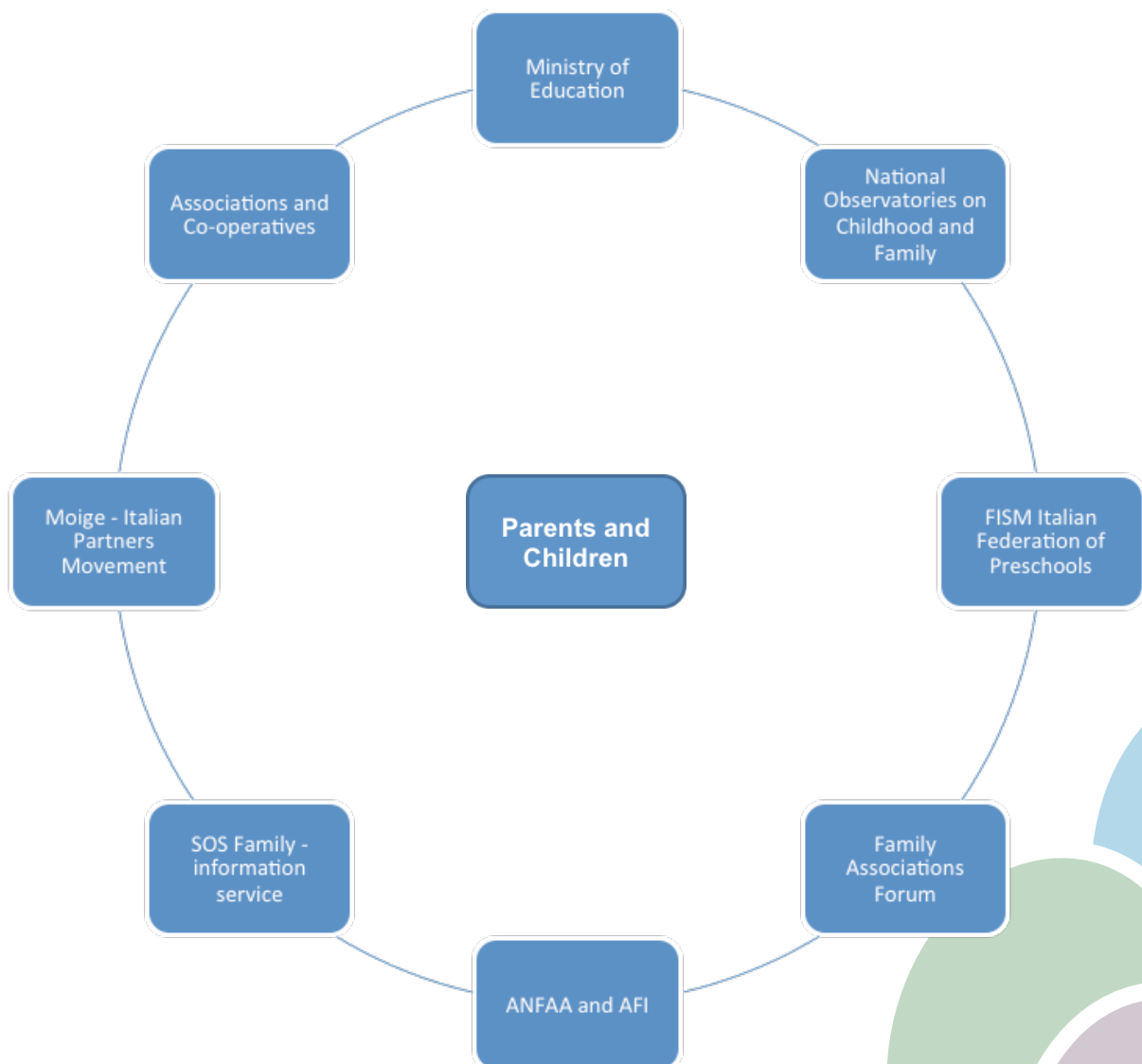
### Care and education of preschool children in Italy

In Italy, for a long time, preschool children's care and education remained merely a prerogative of families, especially of women, and of a few traditional childhood services.

During the last forty years, the action of different types of childcare services aimed at caring and educating children before their inclusion in primary school joined the realm of traditional family care work. Thus, today's Italian families tend to be small, with weaker family bonds than before; they are composed of mothers and fathers with an unpredictable working life who often find themselves alone facing their challenging role as parents. In this general framework, there has been an increase and differentiation in the demand for assistance by families leading to some changes in childhood services provided for preschool children.

First of all, day care centres have remarkably changed. Currently, they are set up as non-domestic care and educational centres for children aged between 0 – 3 years, organised and led by professionally trained experts in close collaboration with families. At the beginning, day care centres were conceived as children care oriented services during mothers' working hours, as time passed they have become

### Italy - Stakeholders Map



educational services, often characterised by the presence of high quality staff and educational projects. Today in Italy, joint reflections are developed among operators, families and experts and spread into the day care centres' environment promoting the ethos that not only do children have care needs but they also have socialisation needs, which result from the strong interest they show when it comes to being involved in collective contexts.

Another element of novelty is represented by the emergence since the '80s of a greater attention to the presence of parents who are more and more in need of pedagogical and psychological support in carrying out their role.

In recent years, preschools too have undergone some significant changes, becoming a service that "helps, in the school system field, to promote the formation of the personality of children aged three to six (...) pursuing both the acquisition of communicative, expressive, logical and operational skills and competencies and a balanced maturation and organisation of the cognitive, affective, social and moral components of their personality" (Ministerial Decree of 3 June 1991). The increasing importance given by families to these services, in terms of caring and formative needs, has turned an initially welfare service into a completing part of the school system. Presently, public, state, municipal and private preschools, often religiously inspired and members of the Italian Federation of Preschools, are widely distributed throughout the country, covering most of the requests of parents with 3 to 6 year old children.

Only recently Italy, unlike other European countries, has adopted a Family Policies National Plan intended as a comprehensive and medium-term framework of policies specifically addressed to the family, which means having the family as a beneficiary and as a subject of interventions.

## II.3. IRELAND - State of the Art Analysis

### Early Childhood Development and Parenting Policies in Ireland

There has been rapid development of policy and provision in Ireland over the last 15 years in this area, but there is no national plan for early childhood care and education, in spite of recommendations from the OECD, the Oireachtas, the National Economic and Social Forum and Social Partners. The last decade in Ireland has seen the creation of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, the introduction of a free pre-school year, the extension of maternity leave entitlements, an increase in the number of places in services for young children, and the introduction of the Síolta Quality Framework, the Aistear Curriculum Framework and revised pre-school regulations.

At a policy level, the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA), which was established in 2005, is responsible for early care and education services. The OMCYA is part of the Department of Health and Children, but relevant units from other departments are 'co-located' within the OMCYA, including the Early Years Education Policy Unit, which is part of the Department of Education and Skills.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) is responsible for the inspection of early care and education services in relation to pre-school regulations, which were broadened in 2006 to include a focus on children's learning and development. In 2014, a new Child and Family Agency will be established in Ireland with responsibility for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. It represents the most comprehensive reform of child protection, early intervention and family support services ever undertaken in Ireland.

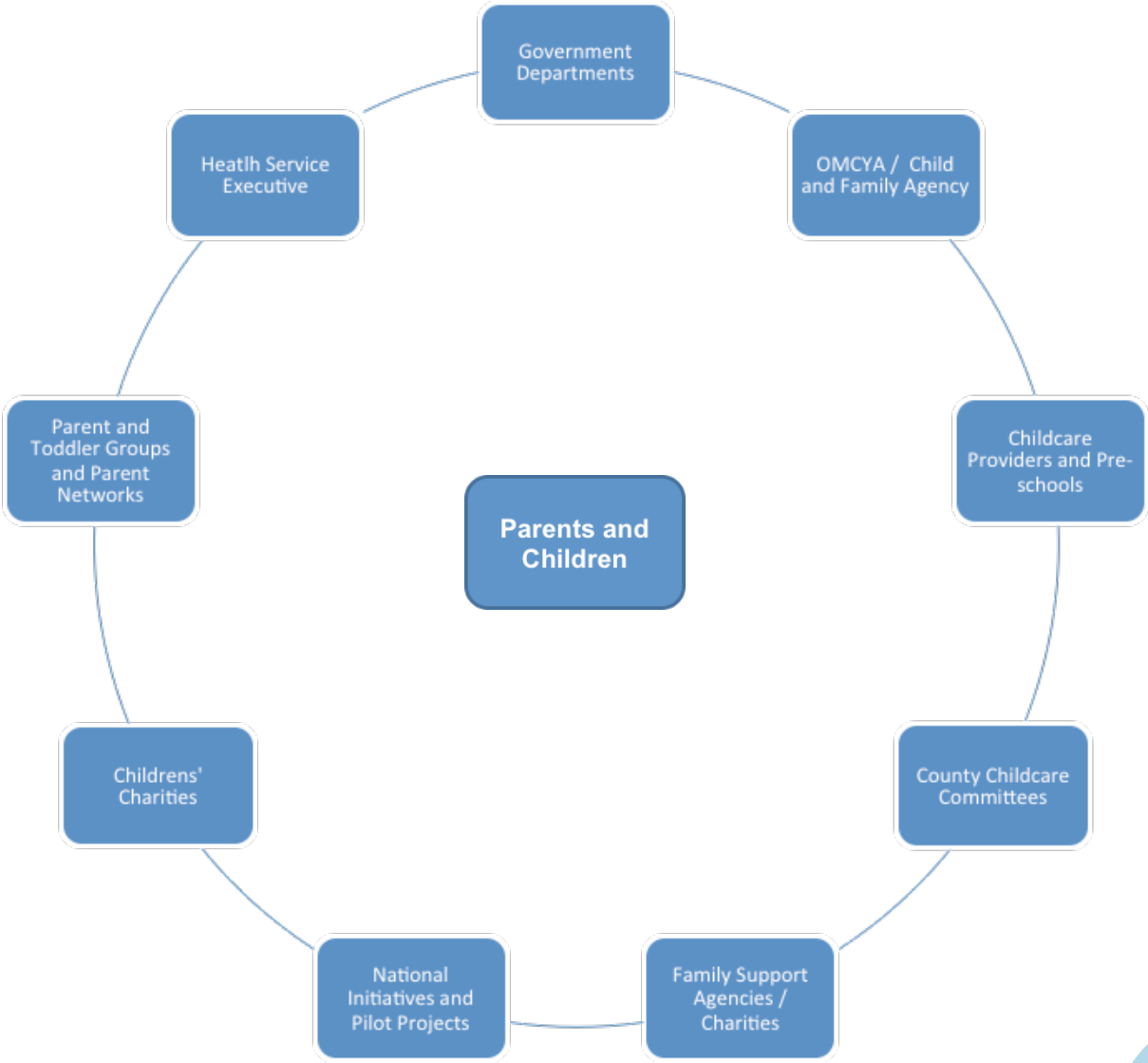
The majority of pre-school children are cared for during the working day by family members.

A significant shift in thinking is needed if we are to fully take on board the significance of the links between young children's care and education. A split between 'childcare' for the youngest children (up to about 3 years old, viewed as a welfare support for working mothers) and 'early education' (focusing on school-readiness for children aged from about 3 to 5) has historically underpinned policy and practice not only in Ireland, but in many other countries. Policy documents in Ireland have increasingly referred to the links between young children's care and education, and the creation of the Office of the Minister for



Children and Youth Affairs – linking related units from three different Government Departments – was a significant move in the right direction.

But the split system – and the associated view of young children’s needs at different ages – has remained hard to overcome and is currently embodied at a policy level in the different rationales underpinning the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme and the Free Pre-School Year. The Community Childcare Subvention Scheme aims to provide financial assistance with childcare costs for families with low incomes, and recent reforms have focused the scheme more closely on supporting parents’ entry into the labour market.



*Ireland - Stakeholder Map*

## II.4. NORTHERN IRELAND - State of the Art Analysis

### National Policies regarding Parenting and Early Childhood Learning

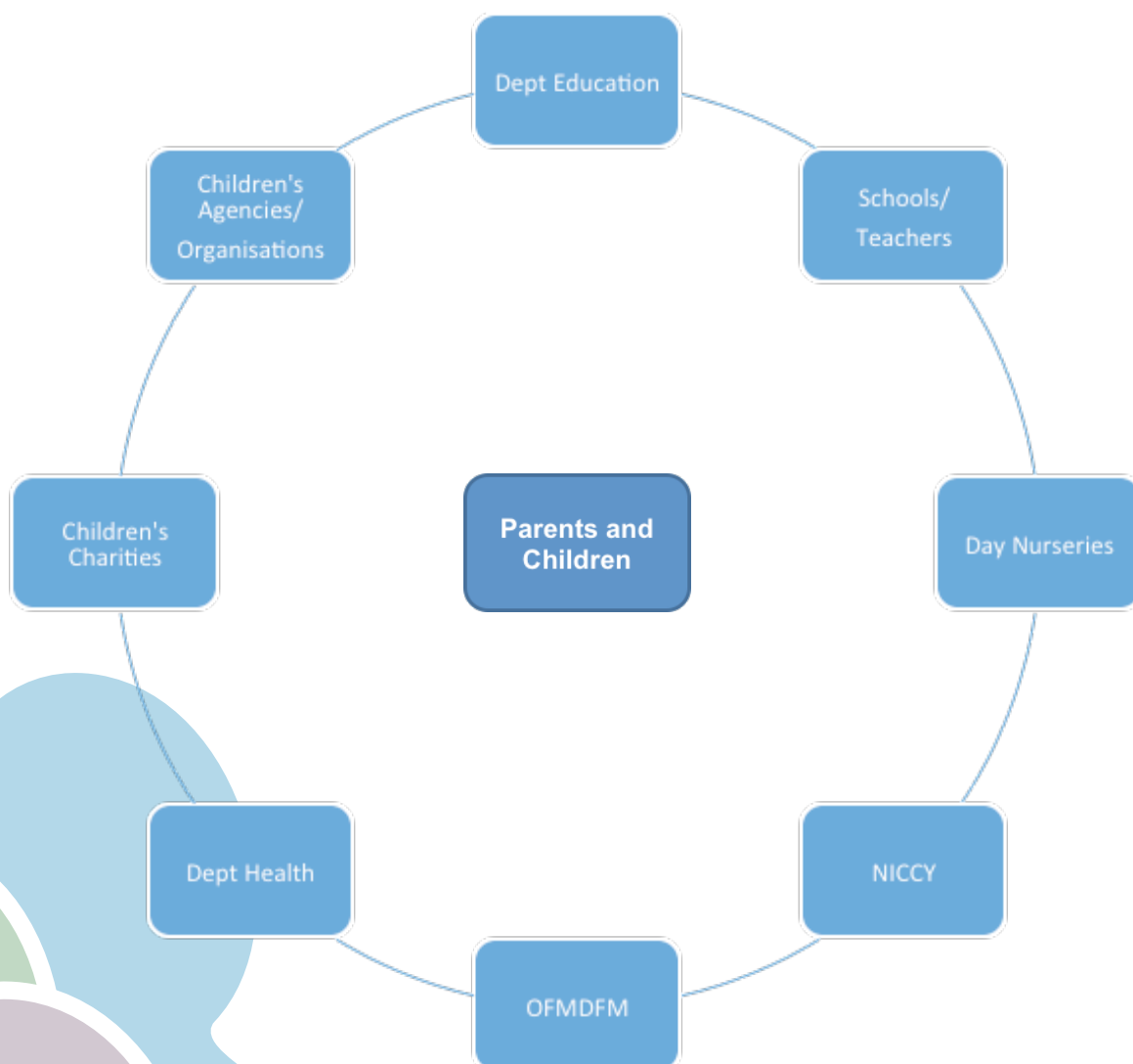
In the last five to ten years, a number of documents and policies have emerged in Northern Ireland relating to, or effecting early childhood learning. They have had different aims and objectives but one thing that almost all agreed on is that there needs to be a strategy in place that supports early years' education and learning.

In October 2013, the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) released a document entitled 'Learning to Learn - A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning'. This document sets out an executive strategy for trying to achieve the vision of 'Every young person achieving to his or her full potential at each stage of his or her development'.

This policy is now seemingly the front runner in early years' education and learning at the executive level in Northern Ireland. It has taken influence from previous policies and strategies such as 'Early Years (0-6) Strategy' (2010), 'Ten Year Strategy for Children and Young People 2006-2016' and 'Delivering Social Change - Children and Young Persons Early Action Document' (Nov. 2012)

Learning to Learn seeks to draw from these and tie in with some of their objectives. There is particular emphasis on increased collaboration between ministerial departments in order to help "deliver improved

### Northern Ireland – Stakeholder Map



outcomes for children and families” and “improve the education and learning experiences of children in their early years,” (John O’Dowd, Education Minister, Learning to Learn, Ministerial Foreword, 2013). However, it remains to be seen if these objectives will be met and whether the collaboration, which is widely considered as necessary, will come to fruition.

The rapidly changing landscape in Northern Ireland has seen many agencies and educational bodies recognise the fact that parents are key to the educational process. Indeed, many are now putting forward that parents are the first educators. As such, most of the recently emerging initiatives, as well as the existing bodies surrounding early years’ education are seeking to involve parents and enlist their help in the educational process.

Agencies such as DENI, CYPSP, Early Years, SureStart and NICCY, among others have all stressed the importance of the parental role in the area of early childhood learning. There have been several recent initiatives from some of these agencies that set out ways in which to achieve greater parental involvement.

## II.5. ROMANIA - State of the Art Analysis

### Introduction

Romania has been affected in its past by a series of political decisions that had a negative impact on education. Among these effects we mention the deficit in most people’s minimal psychology knowledge, necessary for any person in life.

At present, early education, as well as the whole school education system, faces many other difficulties triggered by the extended economic crisis. Alarming statistics draw the attention upon the fact that a significant number of parents are leaving the country to work abroad in order to be able to provide material support for their families, leaving their children in the care of one parent (in the best-case scenario), of the helpless elders, of neighbours or of nobody.

### Children from rural areas

The problems of the children born, raised and developing in the rural areas are more complex and more serious than those of the children living in the urban areas. Generally, the opportunities for early development of the children in the rural areas are extremely reduced: on the one hand, there are situations when kindergartens and nurseries are located too far from families’ residences, and, on the other hand, healthcare services are deficient or entirely missing. Sometimes, even if there are medical cabinets in rural areas, they are very poorly equipped with medical equipment and medicines.

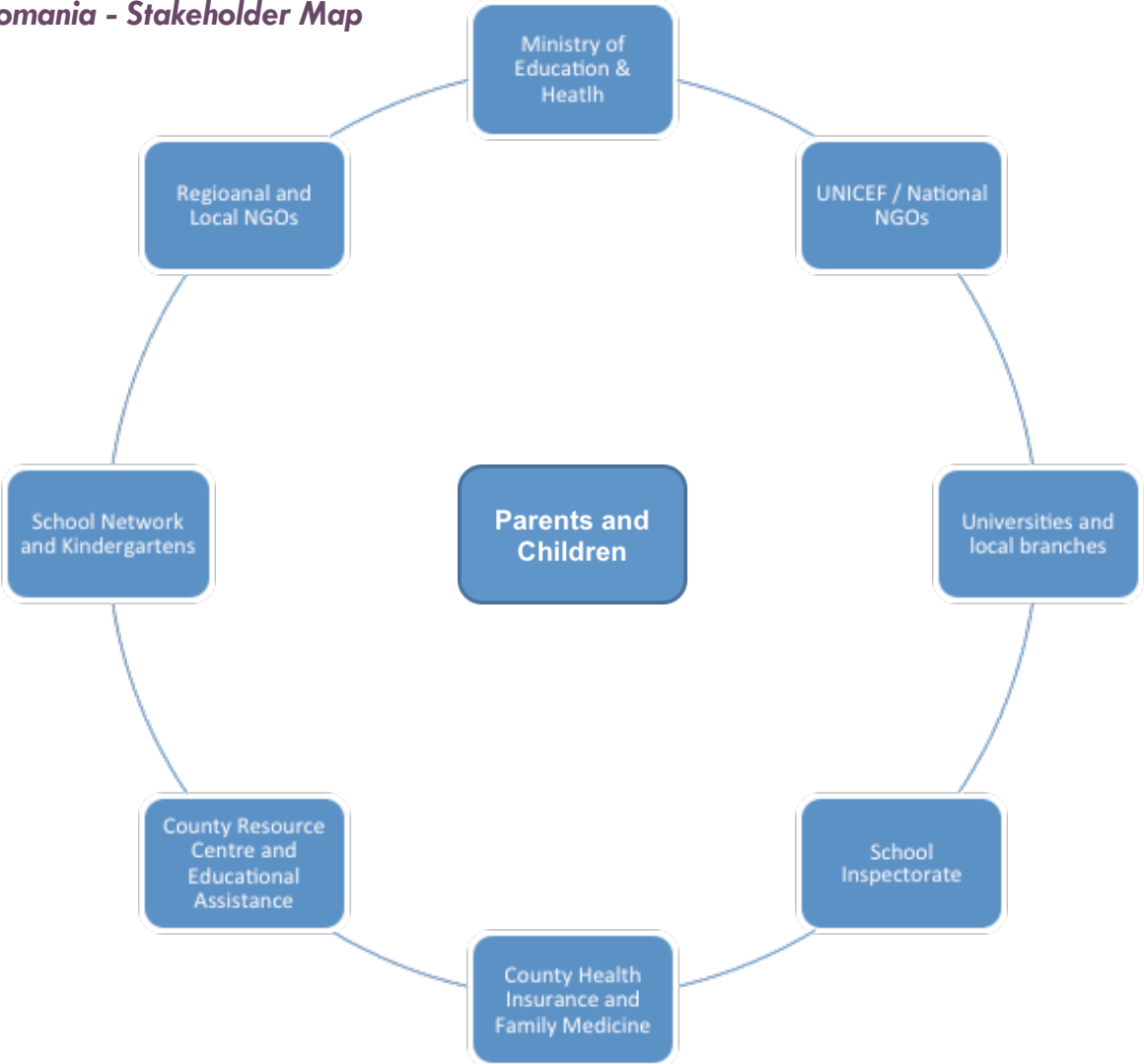
In a study carried out in 2012, World Vision Romania made a detailed analysis of the current state in 128 rural communities in 8 Romanian counties, based on the following indicators: nutrition, child healthcare, education and welfare of the child within the family.

The study underlines the fact that parents leave the country to go abroad for work brings not only negative effects, but also positive which is: the parents’ attitude towards nutrition and education improves when the family’s revenues increase, and therefore, the higher revenues enhance the chances of a family to buy a computer.

The most important conclusion of the study mentioned above is that of underlining the demand for prompt public policies and interventions of the authorities (municipalities, schools, and health services) or of the non-governmental organisations in order to alleviate the difficulties resulted from either both parents or one parent going abroad.

We find it important to highlight the fact that, following the communist policies of banning counselling and psychological services, people continue to manifest a certain distrust in and reluctance to psychological assistance which they often confuse with the psychiatric assistance. However, people are more open to the advice offered through mass media – TV, radio, written press – or posted on social networks, which are quite often accessed by more and more people, including those from rural areas.

**Romania - Stakeholder Map**



### III

## Practice approaches to early childhood education, IT training and e-learning platform design

This section of the research report is provided as a supplement to the research conducted by acting project partners. It is a brief synopsis of the three individual research reports produced by FIPL, ENTER and Innoventum which are available on the project website [www.pinecl.eu](http://www.pinecl.eu). In this section, the summary highlights of the best practice approaches to early childhood education; the best practice approaches to IT training for different target groups and best practice considerations in e-learning platform design are presented.

### Early Childhood Education

Parents as Early Education Partners (PEEP) is an early intervention programme to support parents and caregivers as the first and most important childhood educators. PEEP's main focus is promoting early communication, literacy and numeracy as well as supporting children's personal, social and emotional development. The PEEP programme has been very successful in helping parents and caregivers to become more aware of the importance of early education and has also helped children to become confident communicators and active listeners by capitalising on everyday learning opportunities, and incorporating more listening, playing, singing and talking into a child's daily routine. This programme was chosen because it has actively engaged in educating parents and caregivers about Early Childhood Learning. PEEP builds on the activities that parents already undertake with their children, while helping them to understand why particular activities help their children's development. PEEP also brings parents together in local networks to allow them to share their ideas with other parents and with practitioners.

**The Lifestart Programme** is offered as a free, voluntary service to parents and caregivers of children aged from birth to five years providing a structured month-by-month curriculum of information, knowledge and practical learning activity. The programme recognises that a child's primary learning environment is their own home. It is delivered by family visitors, who on a monthly-basis visit the family home bringing age-appropriate learning materials. The Lifestart programme is a good example of a positive intervention programme which allows parents and caregivers to become actively involved in their child's early education. Lifestart was selected as a best practice example because it focuses on the skills that parents and caregivers already possess, and seeks to up-skill them to allow them to become more active in their child's early education and development.

**Happy Talk** is an innovative project designed to improve the language development of children aged from birth to six years through parent and caregiver programmes and working with teachers and childcare providers. Happy Talk has developed a series of learning resources to support and develop parent's and caregiver's capacity to support children's language development. Happy Talk also works with a team of childcare and education staff and speech and language therapists in order to create a community of specialists all working to improve children's language development. The Happy Talk project was selected because of the age appropriate educational resources it has developed and because of the project's innovation in bringing childcare professionals, speech and language therapists and parents and caregivers together to learn from each other and together to improve the language development of children.

**Start Right** is a project that seeks to develop better learning, health and well-being outcomes for children aged from birth to six years. By working with families, early years practitioners, local services and service providers, Start Right seeks to enhance the capacity of parents and caregivers, families and services to

work collaboratively supporting parents and caregivers to increase their participation in their child's early care, play and education in the home. This programme was chosen because it centres on creating a community of support and collaboration between parents, caregivers and the early years' sector. It actively involves parents in their child's education and provides a good example of how consultation with parents and caregivers should be implemented with local parent networks as part of the PINECL project.

**Under5s** is the website created for use by professionals working in pre-school education and childcare including speech and language therapists, parents and caregivers. The website provides a full suite of interactive resources for children from birth to five years. This website has been created by Sarah and John Hampson to provide free and easy-to-use resources which enhance children's pre-school learning and development. The site is based on the belief that pre-school is the most important stage for learning and positive experiences provided at this time having a lifelong influence. Under5s was chosen as it provides free and easy to use educational resources for one of the primary target groups of the PINECL project. It is also a vital resource for anyone working with children as it encourages parents and caregivers to engage in their child's learning development through play, singing, rhyming as well as arts and crafts.

**Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD)** provides comprehensive information for parents, caregivers and childcare professionals on the development of young children aiming to raise awareness of the importance of the period from birth to five years in a child's learning and development. CEECD actively disseminates scientific reports and findings regarding the development of young children with an emphasis, but not exclusively, on the social and emotional development and on the services and policies that influence this development. CEECD was selected because it is a very useful and accessible education resource for parents, caregivers, service providers, policymakers and childcare professionals. As an information portal, it is a comprehensive resource for all target groups, and provides up-to-date information for parents and caregivers who wish to learn about their child's development. It also provides guidance and a chance to informally acquire new knowledge on a range of topics pertaining to childhood development for those already working in the field.

## Digital Skills

Bridging the Digital Gap for Elders addresses several objectives and priorities that are linked to an older population, the development of ICT skills and lifelong education. The aim of the project was to encourage older people to use ICT in their daily life and to take advantage of the opportunities of the information society. Innovative educational materials and tools adapted to the needs and requirements of the target group were developed and training for trainers was provided to emphasise the needs and requirements of elderly learners. The detailed needs of the target groups were defined and the training resources were developed based on Volere methodology, which puts the needs of the users first. Two courses were developed; first the training for trainers and second the pilot course for seniors, where all materials and approaches were tested and verified. All project outcomes and materials on the website [www.seniors-bridge.eu](http://www.seniors-bridge.eu)

**DigiSkills:** Network for the enhancement of digital competence skills aims to serve as an accelerator of the sharing, adoption and usage of existing eLearning resources. It demonstrates ways to involve all levels of education providers in innovative teaching and learning practices through the effective use of eLearning resources. It promotes community building between numerous educational institutions of Europe and empowers them to use, share and exploit unique resources from a wealth of educational repositories, within meaningful educational activities. It also demonstrates the potential of eLearning resources to meet the educational and quality needs of the widest community of educators and learners. The DigiSkills Inventory is a social platform where teachers, students, parents and other community members can discover, acquire, discuss and adapt eLearning resources on their topics of interest and also use e-assessment tools. [www.digiskills-project.ea.gr](http://www.digiskills-project.ea.gr)

**Digital Literacy 2.0** follows an ICT based train-the-trainer and qualify-the-users approach. It sets out to develop and implement training programmes for staff in non-formal and informal learning settings such as public libraries, community centres and care centres building essential skills for the use of Web 2.0 and the provision of ICT based non-formal learning offers to marginalised groups and those distant

from education. DLit2.0 analyses best practices strategies and success criteria from different European countries into one comprehensive and innovative strategy with special emphasis on innovative non-formal learning approaches and collaboration models. The project creates value by basing growth on knowledge, empowering people in inclusive societies and ensuring that citizens can access lifelong learning and up-skilling throughout their lives. <http://www.digital-literacy2020.eu>

**Web 2.0ERC** aims to enable the significant cohort of educators who find ICT confusing and frightening to have a simple and secure environment to use ICT within their class. Today the ability of educators to use technology; create media-rich interactive content; and communicate on the Web is limited by the complexity and sophistication of the training offers available. There are many tools available but teachers do not have the time or the expertise to identify the best solution for their needs. Meanwhile students use and communicate easily and openly using Web2.0 tools and the technology gap between educators and students grows. The project aimed to achieve a significant increase in the number of educators who can use Web2.0 tools in a pedagogically sound way, leading to an increase in the digital competency of both educators and students. The project also aimed to pilot the Web2.0ERC platform with 30 institutions and involve 750 students across the different educational sectors. 93% of users believed that the platform was useful to support the learning process, 85% of users stated that the platform supported dialogue and networking and 89% of users rated the look and feel of the platform as appealing. <http://www.web20erc.eu>

**CONNECT** aimed at developing and testing a web-based learning model for e-skills and skills for life enhancement, to improve social and economic participation of adults, unemployed women, aging people, and migrants with cultural integration difficulties. This project mainly addressed training operators who are still not confident with web technologies and new learning approaches and community managers interested to know more about web-based, social learning. All the products realized by the project partners are available on the website: [www.connect-project.eu](http://www.connect-project.eu)

## E-Learning Design

In the context of education as we know it, e-learning is still a relatively new concept. The considerable developments in technology over the past two decades, especially the increased interactivity brought about by the whole Web 2.0 explosion, provides the foundations on which new learning platforms and educational relationships are being built. Whether it is tapping the vast stores of digital information now available or using new technology tools to learn; teachers and students alike have the opportunity to move the learning experience forward in new ways.

The ubiquity of e-learning in this user centred technological environment is there for all to see. However there are a number of salient points to consider before concluding that e-learning provides the answers to the problems faced by education:

- remote access to educational materials does not guarantee that learning outcomes are being achieved
- the fact that an individual might have the ability to create learning content does not necessarily guarantee that the content created is of any value

Blended learning can provide a win: win scenario for students and tutors alike by leveraging the best aspects of both face-to-face and online instruction for the students' benefit. The advantage of using a blended approach is that instead of using classroom time for presentation of material you can use that time to engage students, clarifying their questions and helping them apply what they have viewed or listened to online and supporting them to work with each other in team problem-solving scenarios. An additional advantage is that online activities and assessments can usually be completed at any time of day; anywhere the student has internet access.

Best practice would suggest that the use of Audio-visual lectures with synchronised PowerPoint presentations provides the most flexible and robust learning instruction model with each audio-visual lecture limited to a maximum time of 15 minutes. From these resources a wide range of presentation options will be possible to ensure that all learners' preferences can be accommodated.

# IV

## Needs Assessment: Compared Focus Group Analysis

The aim of PINECL is “to design a bespoke curriculum that supports the accreditation of parents as lay family learning advisors and a bespoke social network to bring parents in rural communities and service providers together in support of early childhood development and education”.

### IV.1. Methodology – Data Collection

For the purpose of the project’s research phase, needs assessment was carried out with members of three focus groups in each country organised and facilitated by CARDET (Cyprus), UPIT (Romania), Meath Partnership (Ireland), Oxfam Italia Intercultura (Italy) and Elklan (UK). The focus groups consisted of

	<b>CARDET - Cyprus</b>	<b>UPIT - Romania</b>	<b>Meath Partnership - Ireland</b>	<b>Oxfam Italia Intercultura - Italy</b>	<b>ELKLAN UK – Northern Ireland</b>
Number of parents of children 0-5 years old (from rural areas)	6	11	6	7	7
Number of social and healthcare workers who work with parents of children 0-5 years old	6	11	18	4	4
Number of educators - pre-school teachers	6	12	14	5	6

Each focus group lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes and commenced with a presentation of the PINECL Project and followed by a semi-structured facilitated discussion. This section of the report documents the key findings of these focus groups.

### IV.2. Summary of the major parents’ needs

On the next page we present a list of the major needs that have been mentioned by the parents during the focus group discussion in all participating countries:



<b>CARDET – Cyprus</b>	<b>University of Pitesti - Romania</b>	<b>Meath Partnership - Ireland</b>	<b>Oxfam Italia Intercultura - Italy</b>	<b>Elklan – Northern Ireland</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and skills in order to be able to understand the needs of their children</li> <li>• Parenting advice</li> <li>• Information about child development</li> <li>• To know how to be a more effective parent at all ages</li> <li>• Skills for teaching their children to be social</li> <li>• Information about breastfeeding</li> <li>• Help with daily responsibilities</li> <li>• To learn more about early childhood learning</li> <li>• To learn more about early childhood language learning</li> <li>• To learn parenting skills</li> <li>• Technology skills and access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy courses;</li> <li>• Information and training in ICT skills;</li> <li>• Information about parent-child communication skills;</li> <li>• Information about psychological child development according to child age and environment;</li> <li>• Psychological counselling;</li> <li>• Information and counselling about family abandonment due to parents' emigration in Europe;</li> <li>• Information about children, parents and family rights;</li> <li>• Information about financial education;</li> <li>• Education to avoid violence in families, school or community;</li> <li>• Information about religious education;</li> <li>• Information about nutrition education;</li> <li>• Education regarding motivational strategies used in communication;</li> <li>• Training in family psychology;</li> <li>• Education and training regarding short and long term consequences of family violence on their children;</li> <li>• Education regarding the emotional needs of their children;</li> <li>• Education and training regarding gender education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating with your child</li> <li>• Parenting skills</li> <li>• Managing challenging behaviour</li> <li>• Early language learning</li> <li>• Speech development</li> <li>• Children and play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting skills</li> <li>• Information on recreational activities or services directed to children or parents or information on related topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information for young parents, migrant workers, older parents</li> <li>• Parenting children with SEN</li> <li>• Behaviour management</li> <li>• Responding to pressure from children and outside influences</li> <li>• Important to stress that one size does not fit all and what works for some may not be effective for others</li> <li>• Responsible and appropriate use of technology</li> </ul>



### IV.3. Summary of Continuous Professional Development training needs and support requirements for professionals working with parents (educators and healthcare workers)

CARDET – Cyprus	University of Pitesti - Romania	Meath Partnership - Ireland	Oxfam Italia Intercultura - Italy	Elklan – Northern Ireland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and skills in order to be able to understand the needs of the parents</li> <li>• In service training to acquire knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Seminars which will help them to improve their skills</li> <li>• Training courses about their role in providing parents with parenting skills</li> <li>• Training courses about early childhood development, early childhood language learning, bullying and professional development skills for the Lay Family Learning Advisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in adult education;</li> <li>• Training in remedial education;</li> <li>• Information about children, parents and family rights;</li> <li>• Information about financial education;</li> <li>• Education to prevent violence in families, school or community;</li> <li>• Training in sex education;</li> <li>• Information about nutrition education;</li> <li>• Education regarding motivational strategies used in communication;</li> <li>• Training in family psychology;</li> <li>• Training in adult-to-adult communication skills;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using family-based therapies</li> <li>• Use of educational resources for parents and children</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• How to manage grieving parents</li> <li>• How to manage challenging parents</li> <li>• Effective communication</li> <li>• Facilitation skills</li> <li>• How to access vulnerable and isolated parent groups</li> <li>• Cross-sectoral networking and effective referring</li> <li>• Improved networking</li> <li>• Presentation skills</li> <li>• Managing and negotiating parental expectations</li> <li>• Up-skilling for Sfolta, supplemented by mentoring and support visits</li> <li>• Behaviour management</li> <li>• Foreign language learning</li> <li>• Cultural awareness</li> <li>• Managing families from other cultures</li> <li>• Language enrichment</li> <li>• Children with special needs</li> <li>• Social and emotional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality services,</li> <li>• A more emotional and less performance - oriented relationship,</li> <li>• To share information and create empathy,</li> <li>• The role and the related tasks of the school,</li> <li>• Early Childhood development: Cognitive development, Social and emotional development,</li> <li>• Early Childhood language learning: Play and language development, Promotion of effective communication</li> <li>• Parenting skills: Principles of active parenting, Understanding your child, Managing behavioural patterns, Skills demonstration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of educational resources for parents and children</li> <li>• How to manage challenging parents</li> <li>• Effective communication skills</li> <li>• How to access vulnerable and isolated parent groups</li> <li>• Cross-sectoral networking and effective referring</li> <li>• Improved networking</li> <li>• Managing and negotiating parental expectations</li> <li>• Behaviour management</li> <li>• Cultural awareness</li> <li>• Managing families from other cultures</li> <li>• Language enrichment</li> <li>• Children with special needs</li> <li>• Social and emotional development</li> </ul>

## V

### Parents needs and the PINECL Project aims

Analysing the above training needs of parents in all participating countries, similarities regarding the identified parental needs were identified, as well as some important differences.

In **Ireland** and **Northern Ireland**, the specific needs of parents can be grouped in the following areas: the use of family-based therapies; access for vulnerable and isolated parent groups; cross-sectoral networking and effective referring; cultural awareness; managing families from other cultures; and engaging with children with special needs.

In **Cyprus**, the following priorities can be found: in service training to acquire knowledge and skills; the know how to be a more effective parent at all ages; skills for teaching their children to be social; information about breastfeeding; and technology skills and access.

**Italy** focuses more on: information on recreational activities or services directed to children or parents or information on related topics; access to quality services; a more emotional and less performance - oriented relationship; and the role and the related tasks of the school.

In **Romania** the specific parents' needs are to be found in these areas: literacy courses; psychological counselling; family abandonment due to parents' emigration in Europe; children, parents and family rights; financial education; education to avoid violence in families, in school or in community; religious education; and training in adult and remedial education.

Depending on the specific culture and experiences in providing parents with help and specialised services regarding children's education in rural communities, below we have identified the most common training needs that can be addressed by the PINECL Lay Family Learning Advisor curriculum:

- Counselling skills
- Early childhood development
- Early childhood language learning
- Parent-child communication skills
- Parenting skills
- Social and emotional development

From the focus group discussions, as was expected, parents spoke about their diverse training needs. Some parents' shared very detailed aspects of their needs particularly parents in Romania, Cyprus and Northern Ireland with the others from Italy and Ireland providing more general comments. On one hand, in some countries, the practices referring to parents needs are more frequent and, on the other hand, in other countries, they are less frequent.

The most common parent needs in all countries referred to parenting skills, childhood and language development and they can be correlated with the Lay Family Learning Advisor curriculum modules of the PINECL Project: (1) Early childhood development (2) Early childhood language learning (3) Parenting skills (4) Professional development skills. In order for the project to meet the diverse training needs in all partner countries, the modules should integrate country specific training activities. By linking the PINECL project's aim of designing a bespoke curriculum that supports the accreditation of parents as lay family learning advisors in support of early childhood development and education, it can be seen that its aims will be met if the research basis for the project is adhered to.

To conclude, this research executive summary report provides an evidence base for all future development actions and ensures that the project partners implement a best practice approach to curriculum development, induction training, digital competence development and social networking design. It is essential that all future development work undertaken by partners produce resources that add value to target group members by addressing the identified gaps in education provision and their specific learning needs.



This project has been funded  
with support from the European Commission.

This publication reflects the views only of the  
author, and the Commission cannot be held  
responsible for any use which may be made of  
the information contained therein.

