

INTER-AGENCY WORKING EVIDENCE FROM EUROPE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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ISOTIS

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What will be covered

- Why inter-agency working is promoted
- Theories, political background, definitions and processes
- Facilitators and barriers
- Possible impact
- Country level variability in readiness for inter-agency working
- Policy implications

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What is inter-agency working

- **Inter-agency** collaboration is "the process of agencies and families joining together for the purpose of interdependent problem solving that focuses on improving services to children and families" (Hodges, Nesman, & Hernandez, 1999, p.17).
- It's aim is "providing a seamless response to individuals with multiple and complex needs." (SCIE, 2010).

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Aspects of inter-agency working

- It can range from low to high involvement between services, depending on the intensity of the partnership process, structure and purpose
- It can occur horizontally, between sectors, and vertically, comprising different levels of responsibility, namely local, regional, national, and sometimes transnational stakeholders.
- It can include partnerships between the state, the private sector, civil society, and the community.

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Terminology confusion

Some writers use these terms as synonyms for inter-agency working

- Multi-agency, Inter-agency, Inter-disciplinary, Multi-disciplinary, Joint working, Joined-up working

Others see these as distinct and representing different degrees of connection:

- Multi-agency, more than one agency with a client
- Inter-agency, more than one agency work in a planned and formal way at a strategic level
- Joined-up, deliberate and coordinated planning of policy and practice, multiple agencies
- Integrated, all agencies supporting children effectively with formalized collaboration and coordination

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Torres (2008) Portugal Distinguishes two domains

- Organization:
 - resources available in terms of human capital
 - internal organization such as leadership, strategic discussions and sharing of information, co-responsibility and recognition/appreciation of caseworkers.
- Delivery:
 - operationalization in terms of guidelines and systems for referrals, prioritization of cases and use of shared information;
 - coordination with external community entities such as schools and hospitals.

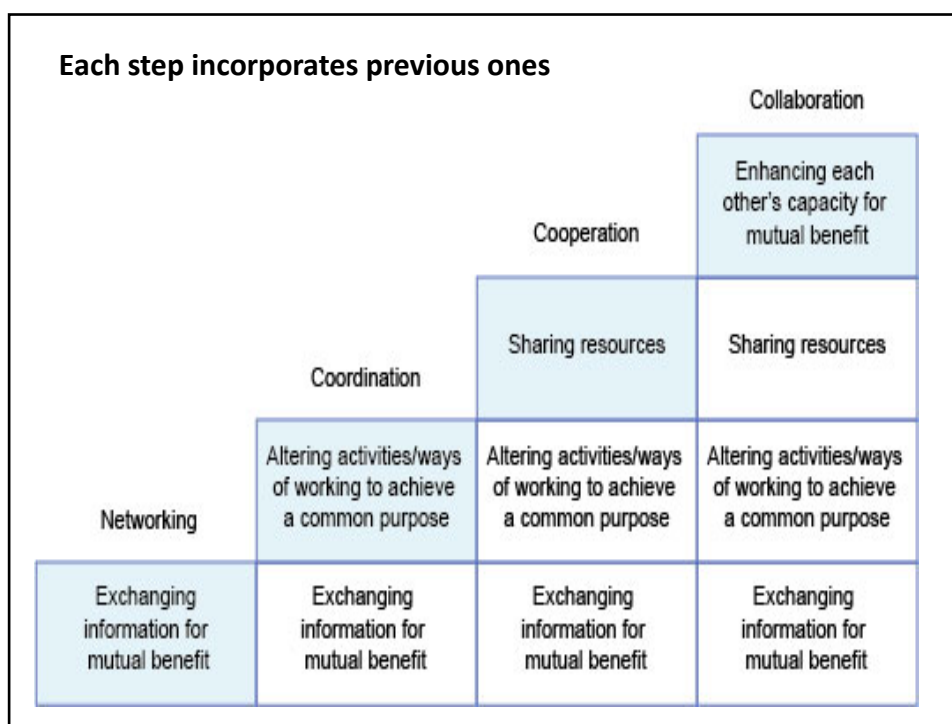
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Generally perceived as a continuum

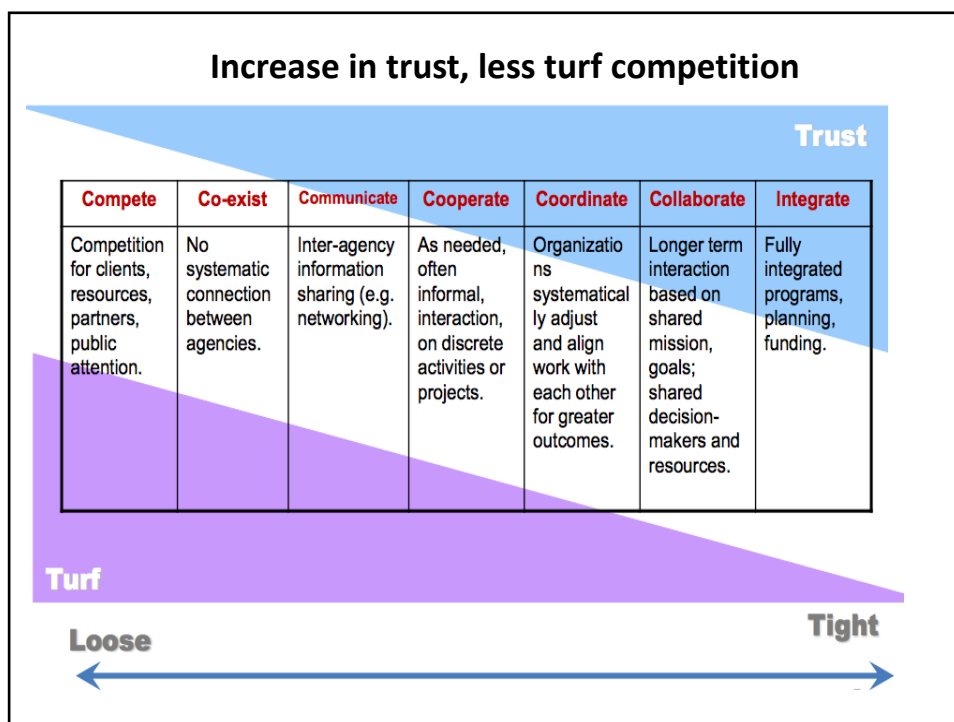
- Models differ in the number of stages of collaboration specified, which can range from three to seven (Frey et al., 2006), from co-existence, through cooperation and collaboration to coadunation – a complete union.
- This means that any evaluation, or monitoring of progress in interagency-working needs to plan and document actions with this variation in mind

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Each step incorporates previous ones



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Why inter-agency working can address Inequalities

- Collaboration between services is increasingly recognized as central to tackle social and educational inequalities (Vargas-Barón, 2016).
- It has been proposed that innovative practices involving inter-agency working to increase the efficiency of childhood services (including education systems) could play an important role in improving equity and addressing all the needs of the most disadvantaged (Einbinder et al., 2000) and these have received increasing attention (Maslin-Prothero & Bennion, 2010; Warmington et al., 2004).

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How will inter-agency working achieve this?

- Reducing the likelihood of ‘silo working’, particularly for health, education and social welfare services
- Preventing families from having fragmented experience, and ‘telling story’ many times
- A particular problem for the most disadvantaged, with multiple needs
- A particular problem for families with children below school age
- Enabling knowledge about all children between agencies especially prior to formal schooling. They are known at birth (health), and at school entry (education) but contact with services between those ages is not ‘joined -up’

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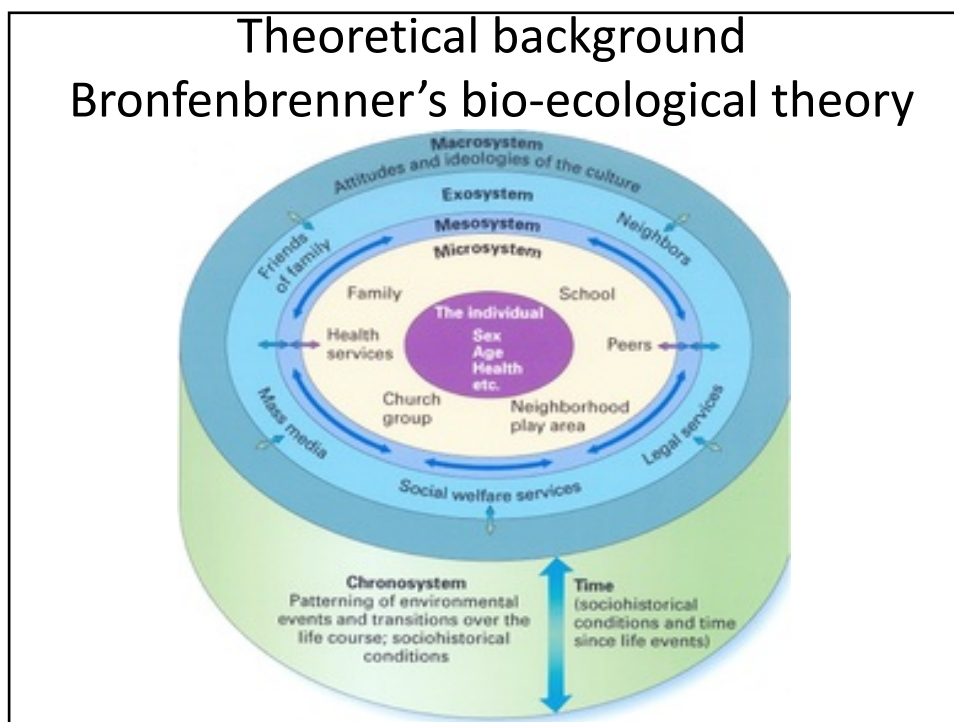
Assumptions

Said by some to be ‘The holy grail of policy and services’

- The expectation are that joint working and pooled budgets will:
 - Remove duplication of effort
 - Reduce stress for families
 - Be more economical with pooled budgets
 - Lead to services being more appropriate through shared assessment of local needs
 - Improve service take-up and quality
 - Enable more shared knowledge between professionals
 - Lead to better outcomes for children and parents

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Theoretical background Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory



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Theoretical basis for inter-agency working

- Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory: Development influenced by over-lapping and inter-connected levels of influence, from individual through the family and to the wider society
- The most disadvantaged children facing multiple risk have the poorest outcomes. Thus intervention and support also need to be at various levels (child, family, community) addressing multiple risks, in a coordinated manner
- This is likely to be easier to accomplish with inter-agency working, noting the value of various perspectives of education, health, social work and welfare

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Political background

- Inter-organizational collaboration between public and private/third sector organizations can expand social policy developments aimed to empower individuals and improve human capital.
- It is useful to examine different kinds of arrangements that may occur between public, non-state and private actors for policy implementation

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Shift in public policy in Europe

- There has been a shift from simple hierarchical top-down relationships, where the state government directs service delivery with an active state and a passive society, to a new governance model, with a negotiation system involving the cooperation between public actors from different levels and private actors in the production and execution of policies

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Some results of policy shift

- Service delivery has been increasingly contracted out to private agencies, with privatization accompanied by public management reform
- These reform processes have liberalized some top-down aspects of central administration in many countries, while creating new layers of regulation over public sector activities, frequently into new or remodeled freestanding agencies

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Top-down and bottom-up policy

- There has been a shift in emphasis away from a 'top-down' approach towards a 'bottom up' approach, along with a shift from a 'supply-orientation' to a 'demand orientation'. This marks a change in philosophy that acknowledges the importance of working with service users to identify needs and ways to meet them.
- Differs from previous approaches that focused on services for users and service delivery through separated specialised agencies

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Top-down

- In the top-down approach, the political process sometimes ignores the different levels of decision-making and the diversity of actors involved and makes authoritative (authoritarian) decisions on behalf of citizens.
- This expresses a linear hierarchical relationship, which starts with a decision made by the central government and the establishment of bureaucratic procedures to ensure that policies are executed.
- The top-down approach argues that an effective implementation process requires a "chain of command" with the ability to coordinate and control the policy implementation process

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Bottom-up approach

- Aims to give an accurate description of the interactions and problem-solving strategies of the actors involved in policy delivery.
- Puts issues like inclusive education onto, or back onto, the political agenda
- Values the influence of street level bureaucracy.
- Local partnerships can provide a mechanism for organizations to work together and adapt policies to respond effectively to local needs.
- The participation of service users in the design of initiatives that aim to support them is said to be crucial to ensure that their needs are best served and can contribute to their social empowerment.

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Characteristics of bottom-up approach

- Has focus on local actors who devise and implement government programs, considering the relevance of contextual factors within the implementing environment
- Bottom-up approaches do not present prescriptive advice, but rather describe what factors have caused difficulty in reaching stated goals
- Promotes strategies that are flexible and adaptable to local difficulties and contextual factors, but assumes the availability of sufficient capacity to plan and enact policies with each locality

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Linked with decentralization

- **Decentralization** aims to reconstitute government, from a hierarchical, bureaucratic mechanism of top-down management, to a system of nested self-governments, characterized by participation, cooperation, transparency, and accountability to the governed actions as a binding constraint on public servants' behavior (Faguet, 2011).
- Can help cut complex bureaucratic procedures and increase government officials' sensitivity to local conditions and needs
- Can allow greater political representation for diverse political, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups in decision-making

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Principles behind decentralization

- Local governments are closer to the people than the central governments, and they have superior access to local information, what allows them to respond better to the needs of citizens.
- Local governments face stronger incentives to perform well on local matters than the central government, so that they are in a better position to derive the most from public resources at their disposal, and are more likely to seek innovative means of doing so

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Integrated governance

- Governance refers to the means to steer the process that influences decisions and actions within the private, public, and civic sectors
- The concept of **integrated governance** is used to mean integration within government (both inter and intra) and collaboration with other sectors
- Integration is about addressing issues and problems that can only be solved in partnership, involving acknowledgement of a multiplicity of stakeholders

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The 'third' sector

- A term used to describe the range of organisations that are neither public sector nor private sector. It includes voluntary and community organisations (both registered charities and other organisations such as associations, self-help groups and community groups), social enterprises, mutuals and co-operatives. (NAO, 2010)

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Central role of the 'third sector'

- The third sector in Europe is associated with the expansion of public intervention and has been the source of several action models that have generated public services
- Governments will sometimes leave the implementation, or some other aspect of policy-making, to non-governmental (often charity) organizations (NGOs), sometimes referred to as the 'third sector'.
- Integrated working for children's outcomes, with public services and NGOs working closely together in local communities, is frequently linked with bottom-up policies for service delivery.

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Potential of inter-agency working to reduce inequality

- The expectation that mainly bottom-up integrated services could be the panacea for supporting disadvantaged children and families may be too optimistic given the current level of knowledge.
- Nevertheless, inter-agency partnerships (e.g., health care, youth care, social work, education, welfare) have become increasingly recognized as important in supporting culturally, linguistically and/or economically disadvantaged children and families throughout Europe

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How widespread is interagency working?

- An international review found that 34 of 54 countries had made some efforts to coordinate policy, strategy and provision for children, young people and families
- Initiatives can be at the national policy level, at local government level, within a centre, or at all three levels.

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ISOTIS survey

- N = 132 respondents working in organizations supporting ISOTIS target groups: low income native-born, cultural minority with Turkish or Maghreb immigration background, and Roma families.
- Managers (leading a team or organisation, such as head teachers, principals, team leaders, managers, school coordinators); and
- Specialists (within the educational or caregiving setting, such as language teachers, remedial teachers, psychologists, pedagogues, specialized coordinators, and coaches).

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Type of work setting and country

	ECEC	School	Social work	After school care	Other
Czech Republic	0	9	0	0	0
England	6	3	2	0	0
Germany	6	0	0	2	0
Greece	7	17	0	0	0
France	3	0	1	1	0
Italy	4	2	0	0	1
Netherlands	14	5	6	0	0
Norway	23	5	0	5	0
Poland	2	2	0	1	0
Portugal	0	1	3	0	1
	65 (49.2%)	44 (33.3%)	12 (9.1%)	9 (6.8%)	2 (1.5%)

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Rated extent of their own collaboration with eight types of service

Used 6-point scale from the 'Levels of Collaboration Survey' scale (Frey et al., 2006):

- 0 - Not at all
- 1 - Little communication, loosely defined roles, all decisions made independently
- 2 - Exchange of information, somewhat defined roles, all decisions made independently
- 3 - Frequent communication, sharing of information and resources, defined roles, some shared decision making
- 4 - Frequent and prioritized communication, sharing of ideas and resources, joint decision making
- 5 - High level of commitment, frequent communication with mutual trust, consensus reached on all decisions

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Collaboration moderate at best (0-5)

(Other) Education services (e.g. primary schools)	2.9
(Other) Child care (e.g. day care, preschool)	2.7
(Other) Health services (e.g. infant and toddler health care, doctors)	2.6
(Other) Social services (e.g. after school programs by welfare organisations)	2.0
Public services (e.g. library)	1.9
Local law enforcement (e.g. police)	1.6
Volunteering organisations and charities	1.5
Local community-based programmes (e.g. elderly homes)	1.4

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But- good understanding of the expected goals of inter-agency working (1-5)

Goal	Mean
To detect pending or emerging problems at an early stage	4.3
To improve children's outcomes	4.2
To enhance continuity of children's experiences	4.2
To support the relationship between service/professionals and parents	4.2
To discuss the individual development or progress of children	4.2
To support multiple needs of families	4.1
To align work with children and families with other professionals' work	4.1
To learn from other professionals	4.0
To increase equity and access to services	3.9
To develop shared vision of provision towards common outcomes	3.9
To reduce discrimination or segregation	3.7
To have joint professional development, such as courses	3.6

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Facilitators, barriers and impact Recent evidence from Europe

- ISOTIS Successful case studies, in 8 countries
Belgium, England, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal
- ISOTIS Interviews with managers, service providers and policy makers, in 9 countries
Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal

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Successful case studies

Two or more of the following were required:

- Operational for at least two years;
- Nominated as good by 2-3 practitioners, policy makers or experts;
- Some evaluation indicating promising implementation and/or impact;
- Blogs report client satisfaction;
- Collaboration with a university for evaluation.

Research questions included:

- What processes, at the macro or micro level, facilitate inter-agency working and how can these be fostered?
- What are the barriers to successful inter-agency collaboration and how can they be overcome?

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Respondents to policy maker interviews

Czech Republic	9
England	7
Germany	6
Greece	7
Italy	10
Netherlands	6
Norway	4
Poland	6
Portugal	6
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Professional position:

Manager/director/principal (74%)
 City councillor (7%)
 Other (civil servant, special secretary, educational activities organizer (9%).

Type of organization:

Public services (31%),
 Social services (16%),
 Education (13%),
 Childcare (10%)
 Local authority (10%),
 Community centres (7%),
 Charity (3%),
 Government program (2%)
 Central government (2%).

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Open-ended questions

- **Perceptions of inter-agency working (e.g.)**
 - Taking into account your organization, what reasons would be made for having the inter-agency arrangements?
 - How important is that for families and children experiencing disadvantaged?
 - What problems do you think closer inter-agency collaboration is designed to solve for disadvantaged children, families and communities in your country?
- **Factors related to inter-agency working (e.g.)**
 - What would you expect to be the most important facilitators of developing and maintaining strong inter-agency partnerships?
 - What would you expect to be the most important barriers to prevent agencies from working more closely together?

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Reviews of facilitators

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities
- Securing commitment at all levels of agency hierarchies
- Securing funding
- Effective communication
- Good information sharing
- Developing a shared purpose with joint goals
- Effective planning and organization, with clearly defined structures and shared protocols.

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Evidence of how to facilitate success

Evidence from the National Evaluation of Sure Start N= 150 programmes (England)

At a strategic level :

- Effective and sustainable governance and leadership
- A welcoming, informal but professional ethos;
- Empowerment of parents, children and practitioners.

At an operational level:

- Auditing and responding to community priorities in universal services
- Early identification of children/parents needing specialist services
- Recruiting, training and deploying staff with appropriate qualifications
- Joint in-service professional development across agencies

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Top ISOTIS facilitators

Cases (C, N=8) and Policy Makers (PM, N=9)

	C	PM
Bottom-up (local) input and support	7	8
Strong, authoritative local leadership	6	
Shared values, commitment to inter-agency	6	7
Regular meetings, shared planning	5	7
Political, top down support	5	9
Joint training, secondment	4	5
Trust between partners	4	
Receptivity of professionals		8
Clear agency & professional goals		7

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Review - Types of Barrier

- (1) *Contextual* barriers/political climate, including political change, financial uncertainty, local needs at odds with national priorities and agency reorganisation;
- (2) *Organisational* challenges relating to different agency policies, remits procedures and systems, not collecting the same data, obstacles to information sharing;
- (3) *Cultural and professional* obstacles such as different professional beliefs, qualifications or experience leading to conflicting views or stereotyping; and
- (4) *Commitment* obstacles with differing levels of 'buy-in' with some agencies reluctant to engage, or where managers do not experience inter-agency working as part of the core work.

(Statham, 2011)

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Top ISOTIS barriers Cases (C, N=8) and Policy Makers (PM, N=9)

	C	PM
Funding uncertainty or reduction	6	8
Different policies, values between agencies	5	6
Different regulations between agencies & professionals	4	
Restrictions on data/information sharing	4	
Political climate change	3	5
Problems recruiting staff/staff turnover	3	7
Insufficient/poor communication	3	5
Cultural/language obstacles	3	
Limited staff time for training and meetings		6
Lack of interest & trust from agencies		5

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Is there evidence of impact?

- Despite a legislative focus on integration of services in a number of countries, a systematic review of the literature concluded that there is a lack of good evidence that outcomes for children are enhanced by the strategy (Siraj-Blatchford & Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).
- There are only limited attempts to rigorously investigate the longer-term outcomes for children of system level change.
- Much of the research evidence has focussed on the necessary facilitators, and organisational barriers encountered when this type of strategy is introduced

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Evidence about service delivery

- Reviews of literature conclude that more inter-agency working can be linked to:
 - Greater involvement of service users
 - Increased access to services and better reach
 - Better identification of need with less duplication of services offered
 - Less time between identifying a problem and getting support
 - More prevention and early intervention
 - Better targeting of resources so more cost-effective
 - Better quality services

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Top ISOTIS perceived service impacts, Cases (C, N=8) and Policy Makers(PM, N=9)

	C	PM
Coordination of services and more effective referrals for complex family problems	5	9
Efficiency, avoiding duplication of services	2	9
Better and more specialized services	2	9
Able to react flexibly and with innovation to gaps in service	4	6
Professional development, expanding roles	2	6
Improved outreach and communication with families		5
More culturally appropriate/sensitive	3	2
Continuity between ECEC and school	3	

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Possible impact, families and children

- Minimal evidence regarding outcomes such as parenting, mental health, child development
- Reviews conclude:
 - Increased access to services
 - Speedier response
 - Better information from professionals
 - More consultation over case planning
 - Less stigma, especially when social services involved
 - Children less likely to be taken into care

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Top ISOTIS perceived impact for families & children:
Cases (C, N=8) and Policy Makers (PM, N=9)

	C	PM
Families contact fewer agencies, less stress, more accessible	3	8
More responsive support for families with multiple problems, families more satisfied	5	6
Welcoming for culturally diverse families	4	2
Reduced inequalities, more inclusion	3	3
Reduced family social isolation	2	3
Smoother transition from ECEC to school	2	1
Access to services independent of legal status	2	
Children - better health and well-being, continuity of monitoring	2	
Children –improved language development	2	

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Country Score – Inter-agency readiness

Based on Policy Maker interviews

Scores per country reflecting potential for and openness to inter-agency working. Each of four dimensions scored -1, 0 or +1

- **Degree of decentralization** in terms of legal authority, responsibility and budget, principle of subsidiarity (social and political issues should be dealt with at the most immediate (or local) level that is consistent with their resolution);
- **Degree of inter-sectoral integration vs. segregation** (e.g., different funding streams, different salaries and working conditions, different ministries);
- **Degree to which the system involves the third sector** – i.e., non-governmental charities and active organizations with a social-emancipatory mission vs. public institutions;
- **Degree of coordination of (bottom-up) power** at the local level (power of municipalities or of a dominant sector to stimulate or enforce inter-agency collaboration).

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Parent interviews, service use and life satisfaction

Four groups: Turkish group of immigrant origin; North African (Maghreb) group of immigrant origin; Romani group; low-income native-born group. N=3,942

- Asked about use of professional services, both home visits and centre visits in last 6 months

5-point scale: 1 – once or twice; 2 – more than twice; 3 – once per month; 4 - 2-3 times per month; 5 – every week

- Asked about how satisfied they were, with life in general, with life specifically in the country

5-point scale from 1-disagree to 5-agree

- Significant differences between countries in home and centre visits
- Significant differences in general satisfaction with life and satisfaction with life in the country

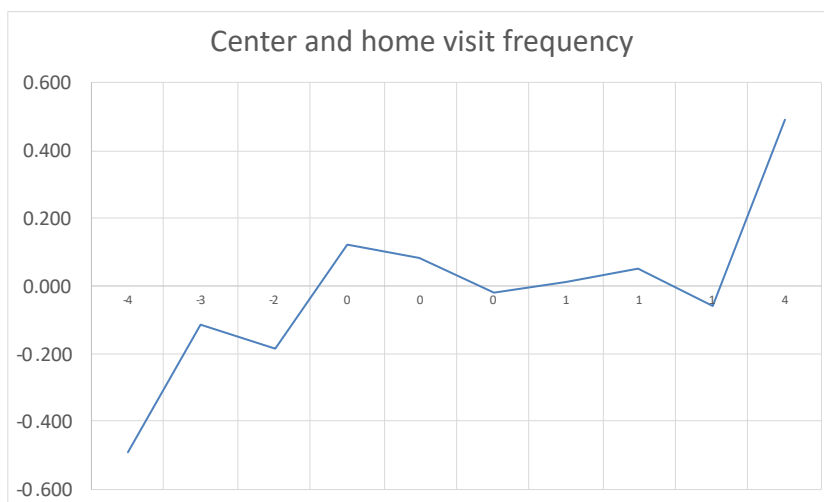
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Parent responses and associations with country score (N=10)

Frequency home and centre visits	.90
Frequency centre visits	.83
Frequency home visits	.53
Home visits useful	.45
Centre advice useful	.38
General life satisfaction	-.55
Satisfaction in country	-.08

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Parent reported use of services and country score



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Associations between country score and managers' reports of collaboration with different agencies (survey)

Primary Education	Child care	Health	Welfare	Public	Law	Charity	Community
.14	-.05	-.33	.34	.59	.45	.40	-.37

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**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT
TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY**

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Policy recommendations

Macrosystem level - Government

- National government agencies need to provide top-down support, both political and organizational, ensuring sustained funding and continuity of human resources, and appropriate time and task allocation.
- Bottom-up solutions are only feasible when national states permit decentralized initiative, experimentation and local arrangements matching territorial resources and people's needs
- Decentralization can lead to fragmentation of the welfare state, which could lead to inequalities between localities, especially in rural areas. So good monitoring of service provision and quality is required.

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Policy recommendations


Macrosystem level – Government

- Support discourse about prevention rather than reparation of risk, reinforced by talking about social policies as a social investment for a society.
- Develop a cohesive national salary and training structures and comparable working conditions that allow professionals to move between agencies and to develop skills.
- Include concepts around inter-agency working in training for new professionals working in education, ECEC, social work, health visiting and family support.

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Policy recommendations


Exosystem level - Organizations and professionals

- Develop an organizational culture to promote partnerships and networking.
- Develop integrated multi-agency teams that combine the skills necessary to address multifaceted customer profiles.
- Invest in horizontal governance with coordinating entities to reduce bureaucracy, enabling faster and tailored solutions for the individual needs
- Promote inter-sectoral communication (e.g., digital platforms, email, ITCs) that will enable better communication and effective sharing of information about clients

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Policy recommendations


Exosystem level - Organizations and professionals

- Promote a more value drive social mission, often accomplished by inter-agency work that includes NGOs, who may have limited capacity but are likely to be aware of the needs of the local community
- Promote closer working between law enforcement and agencies working with children and families such as ECEC, education and social work since immigrant families frequently have some involvement with law enforcement in relation to their status.
- Time is needed for innovation. Investment should be made to allow professionals to meet and plan effectively.

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Policy recommendations


Microsystem level – parents and families

- Engage parents and families through **active outreach** to participate in the identification of needs, finding joint solutions and to take part in discussing evaluation findings.
- Involve families more in giving feedback about the utility of the available services so that they can be made more relevant and appropriate. Mechanisms are required so that they can be heard.

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Final points

- Traditional centralized implementation of social policy is not always working. Social policy needs to be re-interpreted at local and state level as an investment, with a discourse on prevention.
- There is limited evidence about the impact of high quality inter-agency working. This should be developed – and funded
- Caveat 1: Inter-agency working will not provide all the answers for all children or families to reduce inequality. It is one of a range of policies
- Caveat 2: The ideas presented are based on the ISOTIS localities, parent groups and countries and may not be representative of, or suitable for, other European countries

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Review & successful case studies available at:
<http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/D6.2.-Review-on-inter-agency-working-and-good-practice.pdf>

Summary of views of service providers,
coordinators and policy makers available at:
http://www.isotis.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ISOTIS_D6.3-INTERVIEW-STUDY-OF-SERVICE-PROVIDERS-ON-INTER-AGENCY-COORDINATION_ESummary_.pdf

Integrated report available at:

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