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Proactive International Network for Newborn and Young Children  
Report of 2nd Learning Exchange Visit



University of Coimbra, Portugal



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The Proactive International Network of Newborn and Young Children (PINN) aims to **share best practice in the areas of prevention and early intervention in disadvantaged populations, evidence informed practice, practitioner training in prevention and early intervention approaches,** and the importance of early childhood care and education (ECEC) as a preventative tool. The objective of this learning exchange is to allow partner organisations to develop and reinforce networks, increase their capacity to work at a transnational level, share and confront ideas, practices and methods in ECEC and prevention and early intervention.



The second Learning Exchange Visit of the PINN project was facilitated by the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, at the University of Coimbra (FPCEUC).

The 12 participants from Ireland, Norway, the Netherlands and Portugal took part in a 3-day programme of discussion, debate, lectures on research findings, visits to local educational and family support settings and sharing of practice and experiences from the field.

The focus of this visit was Prevention and Intervention in the Early Years. This is a report on the highlights on the visit and an overview of the follow up actions that were planned as a result of this visit.

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# Highlights

We very much appreciated the diversity of presentations and visits and the fact that special attention was given to making the connection between academic research, the practice and professional development of care givers. Portugal is turning a corner economically after many lean years following the global economic crisis. How this has impacted on families lives was highlighted by **Ana Seixas** (FPCEUC) – e.g., an increase of precarious work and negative migration balance. However, there are indications that things are now improving again.

There are many positive developments in the organization of services for young children. We were very impressed with the national **Early Childhood intervention System (SNIPI)**. **Ana Serrano (University of Minho school of Psychology)** explained that the system, which is implemented in all parts of the country is recognized by three Ministries (Health, Education and Social Affairs) and overseen by an inter-ministerial committee. Parents are no longer forced to shop for help themselves at a variety of organizations, but are supported by a **Local intervention team (ELI)** from the National Association of Early Intervention (ANIP) and a mediator who helps them identify their need(s). The mediator, who has access to and communicates with a multi-disciplinary network of professionals, determines the best way ahead in terms of support for the parents and their children.



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Teams of professionals working in the ELI are given regular training and supervision their work are overseen by regional sub committees. We had the opportunity to visited a **ELI in Coimbra** and hear first-hand about how they are supporting parents of young children.

Another highlight of the Exchange Visit was witnessing how children with additional needs have access to pre-school education. The very recent **Law about Special Inclusive Education**, which only came into effect as of July 2018, stipulates that all children, no matter what their needs are, have access to and participate in regular education.

We got to visit a very impressive inclusive pre-school project from ANIP, named “Florescer” (Blooming), where all children have access to enormous outdoor play area, which is actually part of a larger park. At this pre-school children develop and learn mostly by doing. This setting was a true paradise for children! In the **Dandelio APPACDM Centre** that includes children at risk or with developmental delay aged 0 to 6 years, we were impressed to hear about the high level of qualifications of the staff working with the children, including university level trained teachers and specialists such as speech therapists.



Team work comprising input from many specialists was also a feature of parent support programme, **Incredible Years** which we observed at the **Celas’ Community Health Care Unit**. Parents we spoke to there told us about how much they **valued being able to share their problems with other parents**. They also believe that they had become better parents by learning positive parenting strategies in the programme.

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We also heard about initiatives which have improved quality of care for both babies and mothers, such as the transformation of child minding from being a very informal baby-sitting arrangement to a **professional day care system for 0-3 year olds** through the implementation of **quality check system** (<http://www.fbb.pt/blog/fundacao-bissaya-barreto-com-novo-servico-de-creche-familiar/>). Another very useful resource is the **Be-a-Mom** web-based programme (<https://beamom.pt/>), which offers help to new parents. It was informed by a large research study about **postnatal depression**, which was conducted by Ana Fonseca.

On the last day at the mini conference organized as part of this learning exchange event, we had the opportunity to present good practice from our countries to a larger audience of psychologists, teachers, researchers, child protection experts.



The enthusiasm and commitment of everyone we encountered during the 3-day visit, University staff and students, preschool practitioners to improve prevention and early intervention opportunities was impressive. We were also convincingly persuaded of the **benefits of collaborations between research, practice and policy**. During the visit, there were lots of opportunities to exchange information about good practice examples in Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway.

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As a group we are adamant that the **voice of the child** needs to be more strongly heard and taken account of and that more effort needs to be made to **involve fathers in early intervention** and prevention programmes and to support them in their fathering role. Finally, what a wonderful hospitable country Portugal and its people are. In addition to the varied presentations and visits, we were treated to diverse cultural aspects including a Fado session on the final evening. Thanks to our wonderful hosts, University of Coimbra led by Maria João Seabra Santos and her team who coordinated this Exchange Visit.



## Next exchange visits

The Coimbra Exchange Visit was the second of a total of four.

	WHEN	WHERE
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### THIRD VISIT

OCTOBER 2019

THE NETHERLANDS

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### FOURTH VISIT

MAY 2020

IRELAND

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## PINN partner organisations

Ireland, Prevention and Early Intervention Network (*Project Coordinator*)

Portugal, University of Coimbra

Netherlands, International Child Development Initiatives - ICDI

Norway, University of Tromsø