EMINC: Engaging Men in Nurture Care

Men's and Father's Engagement in Nurturing Care

Compendium of Good and Promising Practices 2024

25+ years for Early Childhood Development

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Disclaimer: The categorization of practices into good and promising practices were made based on the available data at the time of developing this compendium. We encourage readers who want to get more information on specific programs to contact the organisation. The indicators applied were extracted from the synthesis of the data and the analysis reflects ISSA's understanding about the elements of impactful programs.

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Introduction

This compendium is developed under the Engaging Men in Nurturing Care Initiative (EMiNC) and is intended to compile good and promising practices of fatherhood programs. These programs aim to change the way professionals work with parents and young children and to promote nurturing care and responsive caregiving that encourage men's and father's engagement.

Men's and fathers' engagement in responsive caregiving and the promotion of child development produces a variety of benefits for children, fathers themselves, and their partners. Contrary to the traditional belief that caregiving is primarily a woman's role, men are equally capable of nurturing and supporting a child's growth. Research shows that when fathers are actively involved—starting from the prenatal stage, through birth, and into the early years—there are significant, positive developmental outcomes for children. These include enhanced social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills. Additionally, children with engaged fathers tend to perform better academically, demonstrate advanced problem-solving abilities, and develop stronger interpersonal skills (UNICEF, 2017).

For fathers, active caregiving fosters greater life satisfaction, encourages healthier behaviors, and strengthens emotional bonds with their children. Engaged fathers report fewer health issues, such as reduced substance abuse and lower rates of illness (PLAN International, 2021). Involvement in caregiving also has societal benefits, particularly for gender equality. Fathers' active participation in caregiving supports their partners' careers, helping to close the gender pay gap and promoting more equitable distribution of labor. Furthermore,

boys raised by caring and involved fathers are less likely to perpetrate domestic violence and more likely to support gender equality (Barker et al., 2011).

Beyond the immediate social and emotional benefits, recent research reveals that fathers experience hormonal and neural shifts linked to their caregiving role. More engaged fathers show reductions in testosterone and increases in oxytocin and prolactin, which enhance emotional bonding and responsiveness to infant cues. These shifts are not automatic consequences of childbirth but are driven by fathers' involvement during the pre-, peri-, and postnatal periods. Fathers who are consistently engaged experience these hormonal changes more profoundly, improving their caregiving behaviors. In contrast, less engaged fathers do not undergo such shifts to the same degree, which may limit their emotional connection and responsiveness to their children (Mascaro, Hackett, & Rilling, 2013; Gettler, McDade, Feranil, & Kuzawa, 2011; Weisman, Zagoory-Sharon, & Feldman, 2014; Feldman, Gordon, Influs, Gutbir, & Ebstein, 2013). This insight emphasizes the importance of early and consistent fatherly involvement in caregiving, reinforcing the idea that fatherhood goes beyond biological ties to a child.

Early childhood services play a pivotal role in promoting men's and father's engagement. Health, education, and social service practitioners often provide families with their first professional interactions starting from pregnancy. Unfortunately, unless services are intentionally inclusive of fathers, they may default to a focus on mother-child interactions, reinforcing the notion of caregiving as primarily a maternal responsibility (Fletcher et al., 2014). For example, institutional behaviors, such as using the mother's name for newborn identification in maternity wards, can limit men's engagement. With proper training, practitioners can actively promote father involvement and challenge outdated gender norms, resulting in benefits for child development, family dynamics, and broader societal progress.

Why promote men's and father's engagement early in child's development and care?

The impact of engaged fathers in early childhood

Children's early years, especially from pregnancy to age three, are crucial for their development and future well-being. During this sensitive period, their brains are highly susceptible to environmental influences, presenting a vital window for measures that support their growth and resilience, potentially benefiting future generations. Engaging in nurturing care means optimizing each interaction with a child, ensuring they are not only healthy and well-fed but also feel safe, are learning, and are exploring. The quality of interaction often outweighs the quantity. Nurturing care encompasses attending to the comprehensive needs of children, including their health, nutrition, security, learning opportunities, and responsive caregiving, usually provided by parents, family members, and other caregivers. Fathers and male caregivers play a crucial role when they are emotionally available and actively contribute to nurturing, protecting, and promoting their children's development. Their engagement includes sharing caregiving responsibilities and household decisions and fostering positive, respectful, and non-violent family relationships. Men's participation in caregiving deepens family bonds and should be supported by appropriate policies and community services.

The engagement of fathers from pregnancy onwards has extensive and significant benefits for children. Engaged fatherhood is associated with better maternal health, with supportive fathers encouraging comprehensive maternal care that can reduce the likelihood of postpartum depression (Yargawa & Leonardi-Bee, 2015). Informed fathers contribute to better nutrition during pregnancy and infancy, leading to healthier outcomes for both mother and child (Martin et al., 2020). Persistent engagement of fathers is crucial and has been shown to foster children's social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development, with such children often performing better academically and demonstrating advanced social skills (Diniz, Brandão, Monteiro & Verissimo, 2021). Active fatherhood benefits the entire family, with fathers experiencing increased life satisfaction, healthier behaviors, and deeper emotional connections. Engaged fathers also tend to avoid negative habits such as excessive drinking or drug use (PLAN International, 2021). Moreover, parenting programs that include men improve family communication, promote fairness, and can reduce domestic violence (Digolo et al., 2019).

Overall, nurturing care provided by both parents is essential for a child's holistic development. Fathers play a pivotal role that is beneficial for the child, the mother, and the father himself. Hence, societal norms and policies must evolve to support and encourage active fatherhood right from the start.

Addressing barriers to strengthen men's and father's engagement

Despite clear evidence of its benefits, social and institutional barriers continue to hinder fathers' engagement in early childcare. Global research indicates that while both parents feel responsible for childcare, the burden still disproportionately falls on mothers due to persistent gender stereotypes and societal norms viewing men as less capable caregivers (Gaag et al., 2023). This is reflected in the largely predominant female early childhood education workforce and the stigma against men taking parental leave, often seen as a lack of commitment to their jobs (PLAN International, 2021). Current policies do not adequately support equal parental leave, further entrenching gender roles and preventing fathers from fully embracing caregiving (PLENT, 2017). The EU Work-life Balance (WLB) Directive, adopted in 2019, aims to ensure gender-equal work-life balance by addressing family leaves and flexible working arrangements. However, the diversity in parental leave policies across EU countries and the view of mothers as the main beneficiaries limit the directive's effectiveness. Additionally, men often face more severe wage penalties than women when taking leave, further discouraging paternal involvement (Eurofound, 2019; Evertsson, 2016; Morosow & Cooke, 2022).

Road to engaged fatherhood: Early intervention with well-trained professionals

Despite the scientific evidence supporting the benefits of men's and father's engagement during the early years for child development and cumulative positive effects on gender equity, certain obstacles remain for father and male engagement. Care work is generally viewed as a woman's responsibility, rooted in the belief that caregiving and household duties are natural female roles and that men are biologically unsuited for these roles (Bernacchi et al., 2022). Moreover, social protection policies and programs often reinforce these stereotypes by focusing solely on mothers and promoting traditional 'breadwinner' family structures (PLAN International, 2021). Professionals working with children and families in health, education, social, and cultural services tend to have a traditional perspective on caregiving, viewing the mother as primarily responsible for children and expecting primarily mothers to be involved in institutional practices. This often leads to professional gatekeeping, such as not allowing fathers in maternity wards and referring only to the mother when discussing the child's development (Frascarolo, 2016).

The actions of professionals and how they interact and communicate with families significantly impact families' and parents' experiences and their understanding of gender roles (Persson et al., 2012). It is crucial to foster equitable perspectives on family roles and responsibilities, supporting both partners in developing the understanding and skills for caregiving. Practitioners have the potential to transform harmful gender norms and biases and challenge traditional views of parenthood and

caregiving during the early years. Beginning early pays off; father engagement from pregnancy is linked to engagement in later years (Shannon, Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda & Lamb, 2009). Families and practitioners in health, education, and social sectors come into contact during pregnancy and the first years of a child's life. Conversations during these encounters provide the opportunity to discuss family dynamics, relationships, decision-making processes, and the emotional health of the family. Practitioners have the chance to identify and challenge common gender biases, helping to re-evaluate traditional views on the roles of men in families and society. They can address common perceptions of masculinity and femininity and discuss the negative impact these stereotypes have on both genders. It is also important for them to encourage a more balanced perspective on relationships, partnerships, and caregiving within families, urging both partners to develop the necessary skills and knowledge.

In general, health professionals are the first contact for families with children aged between zero and three. Research shows that training health professionals on engaged fatherhood helps reduce violence against women. For example, the European Project PARENT (Promotion, Awareness-raising, and Engagement of Men in Nurture Transformations, 2019–2021) provided training for social and health practitioners working with fathers during pregnancy, childbirth, and the first 1,000 days of life. Findings show that the training modified and improved knowledge, competencies, attitudes, and daily practices of staff. Practitioners were able to encourage fathers to be involved during labor and birth and promote direct physical contact between the father and the child. There were observed changes in behaviors over time in promoting an equal share of caregiving responsibilities between partners (Zambri et al., 2022). Similar to health services, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services play an important role in promoting parental engagement in children's development. Through establishing close partnerships with families, ECEC professionals can support parents in providing nurturing care for their children and promote father engagement in child's development and care.

Purpose of the compendium

The document aims to provide an overview of programs promoting men's and father's engagement in nurturing care during early years and shared parenting and child-rearing responsibilities.

The compendium is intended to compile evidence across various early childhood sectors to support and sustain advocacy efforts at the European level under the EMiNC initiative. EMiNC aspires to tackle social norms, home and workplace realities, and policies that have been proven to act as barriers to increased male engagement. EMiNC's advocacy strategy aims to raise awareness among policy- and decision-makers across sectors about the importance and benefits for children, families, and societies of men's and fathers' engagement in formal and informal nurturing care. It seeks to influence public discourse on gender equality to encourage more men to participate in both informal and formal nurturing care work.

By showcasing good and promising practices, the compendium stresses the importance of strengthening the capacity of programs and services to encourage and stimulate men's and fathers' participation in nurturing care. It also emphasizes the need to significantly increase access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, in line with the revised Barcelona targets for 2030, (Recommendations on early childhood education and care by the Council of European Union) as a policy measure contributing to equal employment opportunities for men and women.

Brief overview of the compendium

The data collection for the compendium was conducted in two manners. ISSA created a form to collect good practices and programs regarding men's and father's engagement. The form allowed organizations to submit information about their practice. The form was distributed across partners of the EMINC initiative and ISSA network. Simultaneously, desk research was conducted to expand the pool of practices. The practices that provided information on monitoring and evaluation were included in the compendium.

Eventually, nine of the practices submitted through the form were included in the compendium. These practices were implemented in European countries: Portugal, Italy, Austria, Lithuania, Spain, Croatia, Belgium, The Netherlands and Slovenia. The remaining four programs were included as a result of desk research conducted in Spain, Rwanda, Uganda and Türkiye.

Inclusion of practices

After the collection of practices, the available data were subjected to a synthesis process. As a result, several criteria and impact dimensions were extracted to build a framework for grouping the fatherhood programs included in the compendium. The criteria represented the conditions and qualities for evaluating the practices while the impact dimensions represented the outcomes and program effects that are prioritized.

The selected criteria are the following:

- **Sustainability:** Sustainability is crucial for the ongoing success and replication of the programs. Programs with lasting impact benefiting communities over time are beneficial in the long run.
- **Capacity Building:** Capacity building helps create lasting change by equipping individuals and organizations with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed and sustain the program's impact.
- **Comprehensive Evaluation:** Rigorous evaluations can provide evidence of effectiveness and areas for improvement, which in turn increases credibility.
- **Scalability and Adaptability:** Programs that can be scaled and adapted to different contexts have the potential to benefit a larger number of people, increasing overall impact.
- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Engagement of the community and stakeholders ensures that programs are relevant, supported, and sustainable.

The following impact dimensions were prioritized in the selection of programs:

- **Programs showing early positive results:** Programs with early successes can attract further support and funding to expand and deepen their impact.
- **Programs contributed to changes in attitudes:** Shifts in gender norms lead to a more equitable sharing of parenting and household responsibilities, benefiting all family members and creating a balanced and supportive family environment.
- **Programs contributing to changes in family dynamics:** Positive family dynamics are crucial for the well-being of all family members and for creating a supportive environment for children's growth.
- **Programs showing increased levels of men and father engagement:** Engaged fatherhood benefits holistic child development, breaks down traditional gender roles, and contributes to gender equity.

- **Programs showing reduction in violence and punishment:** Reducing violence towards partners helps develop healthier family environments. Reducing harsh child punishment improves parent-child relationships.

The practices are presented in two sections in the compendium based on how many criteria they meet and level of impact dimensions they demonstrate. The distinction between the two groups is related to their maturity and depth of evidence supporting the practices. Good practices are more established with substantial proof of effectiveness, while promising practices show potential and are accumulating comprehensive evidence to reach the same status.

Structure of the compendium

The compendium consists of two main parts: a synthesis and a list of good and promising practices.

The synthesis section describes the main target groups, details the implementation arrangements, and outlines the monitoring and evaluation methods. It also discusses the impact and key challenges faced by the programs. Finally, it provides recommendations based on the overall analysis of the programs included in the compendium.

The second part consists of a detailed list of good and promising practices structured as follows:

Elements	
Summary table	Countries, target groups, timeline of the program and the implementer organizations are listed.
Implementation arrangements	Provides information about program implementation cycle, topics addressed, further details on the capacity building program/trainings if available.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Gives information on monitoring and evaluation tools and methods, besides the implementation of M&E designs.
Key Reflections	Gives information about the main findings, challenges and the overall impact of the program.
Key Recommendations	Highlights the main lessons learned and provides recommendations if possible.
Resources	Links to the website (if applicable) and to resources (if available).

Overview of the selected practices

Main target groups

The target groups are diverse, encompassing various demographics and professional backgrounds. Programs aim to address traditional gender norms, promote positive parenting, and enhance men's and father's engagement across different sectors such as healthcare, education, and social sectors; and corporate settings, and community services. The interventions are designed to cater to the unique needs and challenges faced by each group, with a common goal of fostering gender equity and improving family dynamics:

- The programs primarily focus on engaging fathers in caregiving roles, promoting gender equity, and preventing violence. However, they also include fathers-to-be, mothers and fathers together, and extended families in some cases.
- The majority of the programs are designed with the objective of changing the practices of professionals working with young children and families, such as educators, healthcare professionals, social workers, volunteers, and professionals in the private sector.

Several programs target not only professionals in service but also pre-service professionals, mainly in the education and health sectors. The sectors involved are multifaceted, encompassing health, education, social

services, and parental leave policies, indicating a comprehensive approach to fostering father engagement across different societal dimensions.

The main target groups included in this compendium can be categorized as follows:

1. Fathers and fathers-to-be
2. Families (including mothers and children)
3. Healthcare Professionals
4. Education Professionals
5. Social Workers and Community Leaders
6. HR Managers and Companies

1. Fathers and Fathers-to-be

Fathers and fathers-to-be targeted by these programs typically range in age from 16 to 50 years old and have children ranging from newborns to those in early childhood. Their socioeconomic backgrounds vary widely, including both underprivileged and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. These men often exhibit initial uncertainties about their roles and have traditional views of masculinity. Many need support in nurturing and caregiving tasks to enhance their confidence and skills in these areas. Their parenting roles are heavily influenced by prevailing cultural norms and societal expectations about gender roles, which these programs aim to positively transform.

2. Families (including Mothers and Children)

Families involved in these programs generally include both parents and sometimes extended family members, with a particular focus on those with young children. These families often come from a mix of urban and rural settings, with some programs specifically targeting marginalized communities. Mothers usually have higher levels of engagement in parenting and domestic responsibilities, while fathers may initially play more supportive roles. There is a desire to balance work-life responsibilities more effectively, with mothers often encouraging fathers to participate in parenting programs. Traditional gender roles typically dictate the division of labor within the household, presenting an opportunity for programs to promote more equitable family dynamics.

3. Healthcare Professionals

Healthcare professionals targeted by these programs include nurses, midwives, doctors, and other practitioners involved in maternal and child health. While their familiarity with gender-transformative practices varies, there is a strong foundation to build on. Many professionals and pre-service students can benefit from additional training to enhance their capacity to engage fathers and create more inclusive, father-

friendly healthcare environments. These efforts reflect broader societal goals of prioritizing both maternal and paternal involvement in healthcare.

4. Education Professionals

Education professionals and pre-service students involved in these initiatives include preschool and elementary school teachers, administrators, and educational support staff. These individuals typically have specialized training in early childhood education and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. They are highly engaged in promoting child development and can benefit from specific training on ways for engaging fathers and addressing gender biases. Their work environment is more accustomed to interacting with mothers, so additional support in family-centered approaches can help them create inclusive environments for fathers. Programs aim to challenge and transform education systems to reflect more equitable gender norms.

5. Social Workers and Community Leaders

Social workers and community leaders involved in these programs include professionals and volunteers working within community organizations and social services. They often have specialized training in social work, community development, or related fields and come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. These individuals exhibit high levels of direct interaction with families and individuals from various backgrounds, focusing on supporting vulnerable and marginalized populations. Their work addresses multiple social issues, and programs aim to enhance their capacity to provide direct support to families, promote positive parenting practices, and address social determinants of health and well-being. The programs help build on their strong foundation of community engagement to achieve even greater impact.

6. HR Managers and Companies

HR managers and company representatives targeted by these programs generally come from well-educated backgrounds with professional experience in human resources. Their levels of awareness and implementation of work-life balance policies vary, but there is a strong interest in promoting gender equity. These individuals are in a pivotal position to create and enforce policies that support parental leave and flexible working conditions. Corporate culture significantly influences the extent to which these policies are prioritized, and programs provide valuable guidance to promote gender-equal work-life balance and inclusive corporate cultures.

Implementation Arrangements

The following section explores the implementation arrangements of programs included in this compendium. Programs implement a variety of strategies, such as using structured sessions, trained facilitators, collaborative

partnerships, and continuous evaluation, to help fathers develop the skills and confidence needed to play active, supportive roles in their children's lives.

Programs Structure

Most programs use a structured format involving multiple sessions spread over weeks or months, varying in duration and content delivery methods. Sessions typically range from 2 to 3 hours each and can include weekly meetings lasting from several weeks to a few months. These sessions are often designed to be interactive, incorporating activities like videos, role-plays, practical tasks, group discussions, and workshops. Some programs include specific sessions for both fathers and their partners, while others may focus solely on fathers or alternate between different types of activities. This variety ensures that the programs can address the diverse needs of participants and cover a wide range of topics, from positive parenting, masculinities and gender equity to stress management and non-violent conflict resolution.

Facilitators

Programs often rely on trained facilitators who may come from diverse backgrounds such as health professionals, social workers, community leaders, or volunteers. These facilitators typically undergo extensive training to understand gender dynamics and develop effective facilitation skills. Volunteers, including experienced fathers or community elders, are frequently involved in providing peer support and serve as relatable role models.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Programs generally apply a multi-sectoral approach that involves collaboration across various sectors, including health, education, and social services. Programs are often built as partnerships between healthcare professionals, educational institutions, and government bodies from the very beginning to ensure the integration of gender-sensitive practices. There is also cooperation with local NGOs and community organizations to expand the reach and impact. These partnerships help provide comprehensive support to fathers, leveraging expertise from multiple fields to address the diverse needs of participants in the programs. Collaborative efforts may include co-facilitated sessions with professionals such as nurses and police officers, involvement of community volunteers, and institutional support to create a network of resources and knowledge sharing.

Monitoring and Evaluation

This section synthesizes the monitoring and evaluation methodologies and practices of the programs included in this compendium. Programs typically employ a range of methods to assess effectiveness and impact, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Pre- and post-intervention assessments are commonly used to measure changes in attitudes and behaviors, often utilizing tools like surveys and specific scales. Continuous feedback is gathered from participants through regular evaluations, focus groups, and follow-up sessions to refine and adapt the programs. Independent evaluators may be involved to ensure objective monitoring, with some programs conducting longitudinal studies to track long-term outcomes. Data collection methods vary but

often include observation forms, interviews, and online or paper-based questionnaires, providing comprehensive insights into the program's effectiveness and areas for improvement. These initiatives use diverse tools and techniques to assess their effectiveness, ensure accountability, and inform continuous improvement, including training for evaluators, use of standardized tools, and thorough documentation and reporting.

Pre- and Post-Intervention Assessments

Many programs employ pre- and post-intervention assessments to measure changes in attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes among participants. For instance, health professionals and caregivers complete baseline and endline surveys to capture shifts in gender and masculinities' attitudes, caregiving practices, and engagement in childcare. These assessments provide critical data on the effectiveness of interventions, allowing for a clear comparison of participant's behavior before and after program implementation.

Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

Programs utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive data. Quantitative tools include structured surveys, scales, and inventories designed to measure specific outcomes such as gender norms, parenting behaviors, and instances of violence. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observational studies, provide nuanced insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and the contextual factors influencing their behaviors. This mixed-methods approach enriches the understanding of program impacts and highlights areas for improvement.

Training and Capacity Building for Evaluation

Effective monitoring and evaluation often involve training program staff and facilitators in data collection and analysis techniques. Training sessions cover topics such as research design, instrument creation, and data analysis. This capacity-building ensures that evaluation activities are conducted rigorously and consistently across different contexts. In some instances, country-specific adaptations are made to evaluation tools to better fit local cultural and social dynamics.

Use of Standardized Tools

Several programs adopt standardized tools for consistent and reliable measurement. For example, the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale is widely used to assess gender norms and attitudes among male participants. Originally developed for young men, this scale has been adapted for broader demographics and applied in

various countries. The use of such standardized tools facilitates cross-program comparisons and contributes to a robust evidence base on the effectiveness of fatherhood interventions.

Continuous Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms

Continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms are integral to the evaluation processes. Programs establish regular check-ins, supervision visits, and supportive coaching for facilitators. This ongoing monitoring allows for real-time adjustments and improvements in program delivery. Additionally, participant feedback is systematically collected through surveys and focus groups, ensuring that the programs remain responsive to the needs and experiences of fathers and their families.

Independent and Collaborative Evaluations

Some initiatives engage independent evaluators to ensure objectivity and credibility in their assessment processes. These evaluators review program activities, collect data, and provide unbiased reports on program outcomes. Collaborative evaluations, involving partnerships with academic institutions, NGOs, and government agencies, also enhance the rigor and comprehensiveness of the evaluation processes. Such collaborations facilitate the sharing of expertise and resources, contributing to more thorough and credible evaluations.

Documentation and Reporting

Detailed documentation and reporting are crucial components of the evaluation process. Programs maintain comprehensive records of activities, participants' data, and evaluation results. These records are compiled into reports that highlight key findings, impacts, and lessons learned. Reports are often disseminated to stakeholders, including funding bodies, partner organizations, and governmental agencies, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Impact and Challenges

Main Results

The compendium features fatherhood programs implemented across a diverse range of countries, including Portugal, Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Croatia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Uganda, Rwanda, and Turkey. These programs demonstrated broad geographical reach and collectively engaged a wide variety of participants, including fathers, healthcare professionals, educators, and communities. The scale of the initiatives was substantial, involving hundreds to thousands of participants in multiple regions, highlighting widespread engagement in fostering father involvement and advancing gender equity. The breadth of the programs extended beyond immediate family units to influence societal norms, policies, and institutional practices.

The practices presented in the compendium generated benefits for children by engaging men and fathers more actively in caregiving, along with benefits in other areas such as family well-being and the promotion of gender equity. Key outcomes include increased paternal engagement, promotion of gender equity, reduction in violence, improved family dynamics, strengthened policy and institutional support, positive community and social impacts, and sustained long-term effects.

The programs' impact is categorized into several key areas:

Enhanced Parental Engagement

A significant outcome of these initiatives was the increased engagement of fathers in childcare and domestic responsibilities. Health professionals in some countries reported significant improvements in providing antenatal and postnatal care information to fathers, and in encouraging paternal engagement. Men showed a greater intent to participate in childcare and household tasks, with the most considerable increases observed in traditionally female-dominated tasks such as washing clothes and preparing food. This enhanced engagement not only strengthened familial bonds but also created a more supportive environment for maternal and child health.

Reduction in Gender-Based Violence and Promotion of Safe Environments

Several programs effectively reduced instances of gender-based violence and promoted safer family environments. Training frontline professionals to engage fathers in caregiving and detect early signs of potential violence led to improved safeguarding for women and children. In some regions, programs showed significant long-lasting reductions in intimate partner violence and better health and relationship outcomes by promoting critical reflection on gender norms and encouraging supportive and non-violent conflict resolution techniques among fathers.

Cultural Shifts and Breaking Stereotypes

Many fatherhood programs successfully shifted harmful cultural norms and stereotypes regarding gender roles – in particular masculinities. Community mentoring demonstrated its potential to transform young fathers' attitudes and practices. Fathers were encouraged to adopt positive parenting practices, moving away from traditional authoritarian styles. This cultural shift led to better father-child interactions and more equitable gender roles within the family, fostering a supportive and nurturing home environment.

Educational Improvements and Capacity Building

Gender-sensitive training for educational professionals resulted in more inclusive and equitable educational environments. Providing educators with the tools to address gender differences effectively ensured that both boys and girls benefitted from a more supportive learning environment. Additionally, programs improved support systems for underprivileged fathers, enhancing their engagement in caregiving and promoting gender-equitable practices in early childhood education and care.

Policy and Institutional Engagement	Engaging government and educational institutions were crucial for the sustainability and broader impact of these programs. Some initiatives showed early successes in raising awareness among companies to support fathers' roles in caregiving, leading to the adoption of policies promoting gender-equal work-life balance. Training manuals and best practices were recommended at the government level, demonstrating the importance of institutional support in embedding gender-equitable practices within policies and curricula.
Community and Social Impacts	Programs that focused on community engagement had significant impacts on social norms and family dynamics. Fathers were provided with opportunities to engage in creative and educational projects with their children, leading to enhanced skills and stronger father-child bonds. This community-based approach fostered a supportive network for fathers, promoting shared parenting responsibilities and reducing reliance on traditional gender roles. Emphasizing inclusive communication about fathers changed perceptions and supported fathers in their nurturing roles.
Sustainability and Long-Term Effects	Longitudinal studies of certain programs revealed sustained positive impacts. These initiatives demonstrated lasting reductions in family violence and improvements in health and relationship outcomes persisting several years after the intervention. Sustained impact highlights the potential for fatherhood programs to create long-term change, contributing to healthier and more equitable family dynamics. Empowering parents to design their childcare programs resulted in the equitable engagement of both fathers and mothers, fostering ownership and a balanced and inclusive environment for raising children.

Main Challenges

Despite successful outcomes and promising results, programs encounter several challenges. Addressing cultural norms, overcoming institutional and political resistance, mitigating socio-economic barriers, maintaining participants' engagement, ensuring sustainability, and tailoring programs to diverse populations are critical challenges in implementing fatherhood engagement initiatives. These challenges require multifaceted strategies, including education, advocacy, policy reform, and continuous evaluation, to create environments where fathers are encouraged and supported in their caregiving roles.

Below is a synthesis of **key challenges** extracted from the programs included in the Compendium:

Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes

A primary challenge in promoting men's and father's engagement is overcoming deeply ingrained cultural norms and gender stereotypes. In many societies, caregiving is traditionally seen as a woman's responsibility, creating significant barriers to encouraging men to take active roles in parenting and household duties. These stereotypes persist in both health and education sectors, making it difficult to implement gender-transformative practices. Changing these long-held beliefs requires sustained efforts, including education, community engagement, and policy support, to redefine gender roles and promote equity.

Institutional Resistance

Another notable challenge is resistance within institutions such as healthcare facilities and educational settings. Health professionals and educators often maintain practices that exclude men from active participation in prenatal and postnatal care, as well as in early childhood education. This institutional resistance can stem from a lack of awareness, insufficient training, or adherence to traditional practices. Overcoming this resistance involves intensive training, continuous advocacy, and developing supportive policies that mandate inclusive practices.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Socio-economic factors play a critical role in the success of men's and father's engagement initiatives. In areas with high levels of poverty and social inequality, families face multiple socio-economic challenges that affect their ability to participate in such programs. Economic instability, job insecurity, and lack of access to resources can prevent fathers from engaging fully in caregiving roles. Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive support systems, including financial assistance, flexible work arrangements, and accessible childcare services, to create an environment where fathers can participate actively without economic repercussions.

Engagement and Retention of Participants

Maintaining high levels of engagement and retention among participants is a common challenge. Competing demands on fathers' time, such as work commitments and societal expectations, often hinder consistent engagement. Effective engagement strategies, such as flexible scheduling, integrating enjoyable activities, and providing tangible incentives, are crucial to ensuring sustained participation.

Measuring Impact and Ensuring Sustainability	Measuring the long-term impact and ensuring the sustainability of men's and father's engagement programs are significant challenges. Monitoring and evaluation methods vary widely, and some initiatives lack robust evaluation frameworks. Ensuring accurate measurement of behavioral change, gender norm transformation, and overall program impact is essential for securing ongoing support and funding. Additionally, embedding these programs within existing institutional frameworks and securing long-term funding is vital for sustainability. Programs need to develop clear evaluation metrics, continuous feedback mechanisms, and strong partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations to sustain their efforts. Moreover, integrating an advocacy component into these programs is crucial. Advocacy for policy changes and measures that support engaged fatherhood can institutionalize these practices, shift societal norms towards more equitable caregiving roles, and provide a framework for the continuation and expansion of successful programs. This comprehensive approach helps ensure that changes are not just temporary but become part of standard practices within institutions, thereby fostering long-term sustainability and greater impact.
Addressing Specific Needs of Diverse Populations	Different populations have unique needs that must be addressed to ensure the success of men's and father's engagement programs. Specific cultural and socio-economic contexts, such as those of young fathers in rural areas or fathers in urban settings, require tailored interventions. Programs must be flexible and responsive to the diverse needs of their target groups, requiring comprehensive needs assessments and culturally sensitive adaptations of their interventions.

Key Recommendations for Enhancing Fatherhood and Early Childhood Programs

Based on the analysis of the fatherhood programs included in this compendium, several key recommendations have emerged to enhance the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives. The following consolidated suggestions aim to provide a more balanced and a well-organized approach.

Engage Men and Fathers Early and Sustain their Engagement

- **Early and Sustained Engagement**: Engage fathers early in the pregnancy and childbirth process to foster sustained participation and deeper emotional connections. Continuous support and follow-up are necessary to ensure the long-term success and impact of fatherhood programs.

- **Educational Sessions**: Educate fathers about pregnancy, childbirth, and infant care through tailored sessions. Providing practical information and skills training early on can boost their confidence and readiness to participate actively in caregiving.
- **Early Bonding Activities**: Highlight the importance of and provide opportunities for early father-child bonding activities, such as attending ultrasounds during pregnancy and skin-to-skin contact after birth. Emphasize the benefits of early bonding for both the child's development and the father's emotional well-being.
- **Continuous Support Mechanisms**: Establish mechanisms for continuous support, including follow-up meetings, support groups, and online forums. Ensure that support is readily available when needed, including access to facilitators for advice, resources, and emergency support.

Adopt a Whole Family Approach and Engage Both Parents

- **Inclusive Engagement**: Include fathers, along mothers, in prenatal visits, childbirth classes, and early parenting workshops. Early engagement helps fathers feel more connected and invested in the pregnancy and birth, setting a foundation for ongoing engagement.
- **Safe and Inclusive Spaces**: Facilitate safe and inclusive spaces for both parents to discuss their experiences and challenges, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation in caregiving.
- **Family-Centred Activities**: Design activities that encourage joint participation from all family members. Family-centred activities help break down traditional gender roles and promote teamwork in caregiving and household responsibilities.
- **Cooperative Parenting Sessions**: Encourage joint participation in parenting sessions and workshops to foster shared responsibility and model cooperative parenting.

Challenge and Redefine Gender Norms and Roles

- **Gender Dynamics Curriculum**: Include gender dynamics explicitly in the program and capacity-building curriculum. Topics should cover shared caregiving, shared responsibilities, equitable masculinities, emotional support, and conflict resolution within a gender-equal framework.
- **Community Discussions**: Promote ongoing discussions about gender norms and parenting roles within the community through workshops, discussion groups, and community events.
- **Culturally Relevant Methods**: Use culturally relevant methods and local role models to inspire change. Highlight relatable stories and individuals who exemplify positive fatherhood and gender-equitable behaviours.
- **Address Stereotypes in Materials**: Ensure program materials and activities address gender stereotypes and biases, helping participants recognize and challenge their own assumptions and behaviours.

Provide Quality Capacity Building and Continuous Support to Professionals

- **Comprehensive Training for Facilitators**: Invest in comprehensive training for facilitators, covering both theoretical and practical aspects of father engagement, including gender dynamics, positive parenting practices, effective communication, and conflict resolution.
- **Interactive and Experiential Training Methods**: Incorporate interactive training methods such as role-playing, group discussions, experiential learning, and case studies to enable facilitators to practice and internalize the skills needed to engage fathers effectively.
- **Ongoing Professional Development**: Provide ongoing training and resources for facilitators, including regular updates, advanced training sessions, and opportunities to attend relevant conferences and workshops.
- **Supportive Supervision and Mentoring**: Establish a robust system of supportive professional supervision and mentoring that also includes mental health support. Regular check-ins, feedback sessions, and peer support groups help facilitators stay motivated and continuously improve their practice.

Implement Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks

- **Long-Term Evaluations**: Conduct long-term evaluations to assess the program's impact over time, including the sustainability of behavior changes and the effectiveness of ongoing support mechanisms.
- **Continuous Feedback and Adaptation**: Use feedback from participants to adapt and improve the program continuously. Regular monitoring and data collection help in understanding participants' needs and making necessary adjustments.
- **Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection**: Collect both qualitative and quantitative data to understand the program's reception and its effect on cultural norms and behaviors, highlighting successes and identifying areas for improvement.
- **Training Impact**: Evaluate the impact of training on facilitator performance and program outcomes to refine training programs and ensure they are effectively contributing to the overall goals of the fatherhood initiatives.

Collaborate Across Multiple Sectors and Build Strong Partnerships

- **Engagement with Various Sectors**: Integrate efforts from health, education, social services, and community organizations to create a holistic approach addressing various aspects of fatherhood and family well-being.
- **Partnerships with Governments and NGOs**: Foster collaboration with local and national governments, community-based organizations, NGOs, trade unions, and employers to align fatherhood programs with policy frameworks, workplace policies, and broader community initiatives. This approach can help ensure long-term funding, sustainability, and increased support for fathers in both their professional and personal roles.**Private Sector Engagement**: Develop partnerships with private sector organizations and businesses to provide additional resources, funding, and support for program initiatives.

- **Cross-Sectoral Dialogue**: Promote cross-sectoral dialogue and knowledge sharing through regular meetings, workshops, and conferences to facilitate the exchange of best practices and innovative strategies.

Adapt and Tailor Programs to Local Contexts and Target Groups.

- **Cultural Assessments**: Conduct cultural assessments before implementing a program to design interventions that are relevant and respectful not only of local traditions and norms.but also of the diverse needs of minority populations, such as Roma and immigrant communities.
- **Localized Educational Materials**: Adapt educational materials to reflect local customs, languages, and values to ensure content resonates with participants and addresses their specific needs and concerns.
- **Local Leader and Community Organization Engagement**: Engage local leaders and community organizations to gain insights and support, facilitating smoother integration and acceptance of the program within the community.
- **Cultural Sensitivity Training for Facilitators**: Train facilitators in cultural sensitivity to more effectively engage participants and address their concerns.
- **Community Discussions on Gender Norms**: Promote ongoing discussions about gender norms and parenting roles within the community through workshops, discussion groups, and community events.
- **Leverage Community Strengths**: Identify and integrate existing community strengths and resources to support the program's objectives.

Create Support Networks and Inclusive Communities

- **Encouragement of Support Networks**: Encourage the formation of support networks among participants, such as peer support groups, to provide a platform for sharing experiences, challenges, and solutions, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.
- **Ongoing Communication with Stakeholders**: Maintain ongoing communication and collaboration with stakeholders through regular updates, meetings, and feedback sessions to align the program with community needs and expectations.
- **Inclusive Program Design and Community Involvement:** Ensure the program is co-designed with active participation from target groups and community leaders from the outset, addressing barriers such as language, accessibility, and cultural stigmas. This collaborative approach fosters inclusivity, empowers participants in decision-making, and enhances the program's credibility and acceptance within the community.

Good and promising practices of father and men engagement in early years

The programs included in this compendium were categorized into two groups based on their impact, evidence base, and innovation. High-impact, well-established programs reflect good practices, while innovative and emerging programs reflect promising practices.

Good practices: High impact well-established programs

Programs under this section have shown substantial impact and sustainability through comprehensive evaluations. They have demonstrated significant results in improving family dynamics, shared parenting, and reducing harsh child punishment and violence. Known for promoting gender equity, these programs are well-established, often featuring substantial capacity-building efforts and scalable frameworks, making them exemplary models of effective fatherhood engagement.

1. PARENT

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Portugal, Austria, Italy, Lithuania	Healthcare professionals	2018-2020 24 Months	Observatory on Masculinities at the Centre for Social Studies

Highlights: Sustainability, attitude changes, changes in family dynamics, increased father engagement, comprehensive evaluation, capacity building.

Engaged fatherhood allows men to champion gender equality and experience deeper emotional connections. Prioritizing their well-being leads to increased engagement in others' care, strengthening familial bonds and benefiting women, children, and the fathers themselves. The core aspiration of the PARENT initiative was to engage men in the nurturing sphere, enhancing relationships with children and others. By doing so, it aims to optimize maternal and child health, promote gender equality, and enrich the lives of men.

Based on years of groundwork by Equimundo (formerly Promundo), the health sector emerged as a primary entry point to foster this dialogue. The majority of prospective fathers, paired with expectant mothers, express a genuine desire to be actively involved. However, they often voice uncertainties about their role or feel alienated by a healthcare system seemingly unaccustomed to their presence. PARENT aimed to bridge this gap. It sought to draw men closer to the caregiving realm, urging the healthcare system to champion this cause as a collaborative partner. The underlying principle guiding these efforts is a positive reinforcement strategy: asserting that men are not only capable of caregiving but are also inherently inclined to. Emphasizing the critical phase of pregnancy, PARENT viewed this as an opportune time to bolster men's engagement in caregiving. The strategies adopted are rooted in time-tested methods from varied contexts that consistently validate this positive reinforcement approach.

Implementation Arrangements

Under PARENT, **Program P** was adapted to be implemented in the partner countries, namely Portugal, Austria, Italy, and Lithuania. Program P aims to foster gender equity in relationships by advocating for a fair distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities. It equips the healthcare sector with tools to engage both parents actively in maternal and child health. The program seeks to boost men's confidence in caregiving, endorse positive parenting practices, and renounce all forms of violence against children. It also emphasizes preventing violence against women and nurturing healthy relationships while instilling values of gender equality for future generations.

The foundation of Program P lies in extensive research, including findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). This research underscores the manifold benefits of men's active caregiving in transforming masculinities: it supports mothers, curtails violence against women and children, and elevates

overall family wellness. In collaboration with partners, Promundo has tailored the Program P framework to suit diverse cultures and regions.

Program P typically consists of 10 to 15 weekly group sessions, each lasting 2.5 hours, spread over 10 to 16 weeks. Facilitators undergo 6-10 days of training where they delve deep into gender and power dynamics, undergo self-reflection, and learn to guide open discussions rather than merely instruct. The emphasis is on fostering an environment conducive to open dialogue and critical thinking. These sessions incorporate interactive activities like watching videos, participating in group talks, role-playing, and assigning tasks to apply learned concepts. Facilitators can either be all-male or mixed-gender pairs. The program suggests sourcing facilitators from feminist and social justice backgrounds with experience in leading participatory talks and who have introspected on their own gender biases. Program P embraces diverse expressions of male caregiving and is open to both biological and non-biological fathers, underscoring the belief that the essence of fatherhood transcends biology and is rooted in the genuine caregiving bond shared with children.

Monitoring and Evaluation

During the PARENT pilot, partners employed non-experimental methods to assess their programs, primarily using pre- and post-test tools. Teams were trained in monitoring and evaluating, with a focus on assessing gender-transformative initiatives. While training provided guidelines on research design, instrument creation, and analysis, each country team was given the liberty to adapt these instruments to their context, leading to varied evaluation methods across countries. For evaluation tool development, the Portuguese team offered their tools as reference points, highlighting the Gender Equitable Men (GEM) Scale. Originally crafted by the Population Council/Horizons and Equimundo (formerly Promundo) in 2001 for assessing gender norms among Brazilian men aged 18-29, the GEM Scale has been effectively adapted for wider age ranges and other demographics across various nations. This scale evaluates attitudes towards gender roles and masculinities across categories like childcare, sexual relations, and violence.

Quantitative tools captured baseline and endline traits of health professionals in Italy, Lithuania, and Portugal. The teams administered pre-tests to professionals and caregivers online prior to any interventions. Post-tests were sometimes done immediately after workshops. Each partner managed their data analysis, creating unique databases and national reports.

Key Reflections

- **Italy**: Health professionals showed significant improvement in self-reported behaviors, particularly in providing information on antenatal/postnatal care, parental leave, encouraging continued paternal engagement, and child registration. Initially, equitable attitudes were observed, with the least equitable attitudes towards providing changing tables in men's rooms and the importance of the father/partner's presence during labor and delivery, both of which showed significant improvement post-test.
- **Austria**: Findings highlighted the need for implementers to be flexible, adopting adaptations to meet contextual demands and using monitoring data to inform changes.
- **Lithuania**: The team conducted extensive training, including 11 sessions for social workers, educational groups for fathers, and training of trainers, reaching 193 participants. They also ran a communications

campaign, distributing materials to 714 families and launching a national fatherhood campaign through various media, promoting active fatherhood and gender-equitable caregiving despite COVID-19 lockdown challenges.

- **Portugal**: Male participants generally exhibited equitable gender attitudes. Less desirable attitudes at the pre-test were mostly related to traditional views on masculinity. Significant improvements were observed in areas such as participation in prenatal services and intent to engage in childcare and domestic tasks post-training. There was also an increased intention among men to take parental leave of 15 days or more after the training.

Key Recommendations

- **Gender-Synchronized Programs**: Address the holistic significance of gender transformation rather than focusing solely on one gender. This comprehensive approach is essential, as maternal and child health services have historically targeted women, overlooking the vital role of men in caregiving from the very beginning.
- **Support Inclusive Practice Among Health Professionals**: Address practices that inadvertently exclude men, such as referring to newborns by the mother's name or engaging primarily with mothers in health discussions. Healthcare professionals should implement and adhere to gender-neutral protocols to actively involve fathers throughout all stages of a child's development.
- **Transformative Approach**: Emphasize the need to introspect and challenge deeply rooted gender norms, especially those linked to masculinity, that sustain unequal caregiving roles and broader gender disparities. This is crucial for future programs to evolve from being gender-sensitive to genuinely gender-transformative and synchronized.

These reflections and recommendations aim to advance the objectives of the PARENT initiative by promoting gender equity in caregiving and enhancing the engagement of fathers in maternal and child health.

Resources: Available at **PARENT website**

2. Bandebereho Couples' Intervention to Promote Male Engagement

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Rwanda	Parents with young children, fathers, fathers-to-be	Launched in 2015	Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC) and Prevention Collaborative

Highlights: Sustainability, attitude changes, changes in family dynamics, increased father engagement, comprehensive evaluation, reduction in violence.

The Bandebereho program engages men in maternal and newborn health, violence prevention, caregiving, and fostering healthier couple relationships. By focusing on fatherhood, the intervention encourages men and couples to actively and equitably participate in their children's lives in non-violent ways. Targeting expectant couples and parents with children aged 0 to 5, Bandebereho employs a gender-transformative approach. This involves participants critically examining and reflecting on gender norms—societal expectations for women and men—and understanding their impact on parental and partnership roles.

Adapted for the Rwandan context by the Rwanda Men's Resource Center (RWAMREC) in collaboration with Promundo, the intervention was developed through formative research, pilot programs, and feedback from the Rwanda Biomedical Center. Participants attend small group sessions that involve critical reflection, dialogue, and participatory activities designed to help men and their partners develop more equitable attitudes and behaviors. These sessions provide safe spaces where parents can access valuable information, challenge unfair gender norms, and acquire new skills related to pregnancy, parenting, couple communication, and non-violent conflict resolution. Through these activities, participants become aware of inequalities, contemplate the negative effects of rigid norms, and practice new skills in a supportive, non-judgmental peer environment, which can result in positive changes in health and relationship behaviors.

Implementation Arrangements

The program involved men and their partners in participatory small group sessions across three intervention cycles. These sessions aimed to promote critical reflection and dialogue on inequitable gender norms, attitudes, and behaviors within the home. Trained community volunteers facilitated the weekly meetings with the same group of 12 men or couples. During the intervention, men participated in 15 sessions (up to 45 hours), while their partners attended 8 sessions (up to 24 hours). Some sessions were co-facilitated by local nurses and police officers, focusing on topics such as pregnancy, family planning, and local laws. These meetings took place in local schools and offices. Participants received a transportation stipend of 2000 Rwandan francs (approximately $2.50) per session.

The curriculum for the Bandebereho program was developed by adapting Promundo's Program P. Promundo and RWAMREC spent eight months (from May 2013 to January 2014) adapting the curriculum before the

intervention. This adaptation process included participatory testing, evaluation, and modification of activities from earlier programs. Feedback was gathered from participants, facilitators, and external observers during a pilot workshop with couples. Additionally, the Ministry of Health/Rwanda Biomedical Center staff advisory group conducted a final review to ensure the health content and objectives aligned with national priorities.

Facilitators were local male community volunteers, recruited either from the pilot phase of the program or identified by RWAMREC or local authorities based on their interest and facilitation skills. They met the same eligibility criteria as participants and needed to be literate to use the manual effectively. These volunteers underwent a two-week training program and received material support and refresher training from RWAMREC staff, who also provided mentorship and monitored the implementation of the group sessions.

The program sessions focused on creating a supportive and confidential environment where participants discussed various aspects of parenting and gender equality. Men and women explored the differences between sex and gender and how these norms impact their relationships. Men reflected on the challenges and benefits of fatherhood, while expectant parents learned about pregnancy, birth, and how fathers can support their partners. The sessions also covered family planning, emphasizing the importance of couple communication, and baby care, highlighting the influence of gender stereotypes. Participants considered their own parents' impact, recognized different forms of violence, and learned non-violent conflict resolution methods. Discussions on substance abuse, raising children, and sharing household responsibilities promoted healthier family dynamics. Finally, participants reflected on their experiences and committed to being more involved and supportive parents.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A two-arm multi-site randomized controlled trial (RCT) was conducted across four Rwandan districts—Karongi, Musanze, Nyaruguru, and Rwamagana—where the Bandebereho intervention took place. The study involved structured interviews based on questionnaires, administered by trained same-sex interviewers who were not involved in the intervention. These interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda at central locations like schools. The study included expectant or current fathers and their partners, who were randomized into either the intervention group (575 couples) or the control group (624 couples). Recruitment was completed in two months, and participants were followed for 21 months. At the 21-month follow-up, 1123 men (94% of the sample) and 1162 women (97%) were surveyed. Men were interviewed at three points: baseline, nine months post-baseline, and 21 months post-baseline. Due to funding constraints, women were interviewed at only two points: nine months and 21 months post-baseline.

Additionally, RWAMREC employed a monitoring and evaluation approach, which included routine tracking of participant attendance, regular supervision visits and check-ins, and conducting interviews and focus groups with facilitators and both male and female participants.

Moreover, follow-up to a two-arm, multi-site randomised controlled trial was conducted in four districts of Rwanda six years later.

Key Reflections

The study revealed significant improvements in the intervention group compared to the control group:

- Women reported lower levels of physical and sexual violence by partners.
- There were higher levels of women's antenatal care attendance and use of modern contraceptives.
- More men accompanied women to antenatal care, used modern contraception, and supported their partners during pregnancy.
- There was a reduction in male dominance in household decision-making and a more equitable division of household labor.
- Lower levels of physical punishment of children were reported.

This longitudinal study demonstrates that a gender-transformative program with parents can lead to lasting reductions in family violence and improvements in various health and relationship outcomes, persisting six years later—far longer than any known trials. The findings highlight the importance of engaging both men and women to challenge inequitable norms, build skills, and enhance relationship quality for enduring change. Additionally, Bandebereho's focus on the transition to fatherhood and the benefits that change can bring for their children likely contributes to its positive and lasting effects, by working with couples during a period when they may be more open and motivated to change. Collectively, these findings, along with existing evidence, emphasize the potential for scaling up effective programs like Bandebereho and adapting and testing them in new contexts.

Key Recommendations

- Ensure the intervention is gender-transformative: The findings indicate that critical reflection and skill-building around gender, power, relationships, and parenthood are crucial for the success of such interventions.
- Allow time for participatory adaptation: This process not only enhanced the relevance of the content but also fostered buy-in and commitment from the government, staff, and facilitators.
- Focus on relationship skills in addition to gender attitudes: Emphasizing relationship skills was a key aspect of the intervention. The sessions offered partners opportunities to collaborate and communicate in new ways, strengthening their relationships.
- Positive focus on fatherhood: Highlighting fatherhood creates openness to change and reflection on family roles and goals, including topics like intimate partner violence (IPV).
- Support new attitudes and behaviors: Building strong group cohesion, as well as supportive service providers and policies, is essential to sustaining new attitudes and behaviors.
- Address persistently high rates of violence: Despite improvements, high rates of violence against women and children persist, and there was no change in women's time spent on caregiving post-intervention. Further adaptation is needed to address these issues effectively.

Resources: Programme Summary, Study Summary, Evaluation Results Article, Long-term Follow up Evaluation Results Article.

3. Responsible, Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Uganda	Young first-time fathers with children aged 1 to 5 years old.	Launched in 2015	Save the Children and Institute for Reproductive Health

Highlights: Sustainability, attitude changes, changes in family dynamics, increased father engagement, comprehensive evaluation, reduction in violence and punishment.

The Responsible Engaged and Loving (REAL) Fathers Initiative focuses on fostering positive partnerships and parenting practices among young fathers, aged 16-25. This community-based mentoring program leverages the significant transition period when young men become fathers to prevent intimate partner violence and harsh child discipline. In the REAL Fathers intervention, community elders mentor young fathers who are raising children aged 1 to 5. These mentors help the young fathers develop skills to enhance positive parenting and nonviolent discipline, improve communication with their partners, increase the voluntary use of family planning, and promote acceptance of gender-equitable roles within families.

In Uganda, Save the Children and the Institute for Reproductive Health developed and evaluated the REAL Fathers Initiative in Amuru District from 2013 to 2015, later expanding it to other areas in Gulu, Nwoya, and Nakapiripirit Districts from 2015 to 2017. Participants showed high enthusiasm for the program.

In Karamoja and Northern Uganda, REAL was assessed using surveys at baseline, endline, and one year post-intervention, along with qualitative research with a subset of men and their wives. Significant reductions in physical punishment of children and intimate partner violence were observed. Fathers also reported lasting improvements in partner communication, positive parenting, confidence in parenting skills, and father-child interaction. These results were significant at the end of the 7-month intervention and sustained one year later.

REAL was one of the first integrated violence prevention programs to show significant and lasting impacts on preventing violence against women and children. As of 2024, the Ugandan government has endorsed the program and the program is integrated into the country's Early Childhood Development (ECD) system.

Implementation Arrangements

The program is grounded in social cognitive theory, which suggests that individuals' attitudes and behaviors are learned socially in response to expected gender roles and behaviors across various social experiences and contexts. The intervention adopts a life course perspective, specifically targeting young men before their relationship expectations, attitudes, and behaviors are established. It uses early fatherhood as an opportunity to transform harmful attitudes and practices. The program specifically targets fathers of young children, as

research indicates that caregiver violence often begins when children are young, frequently due to a lack of skills to manage young children's behavior and continues as they grow.

The REAL Fathers Initiative consists of two phases: the preparation phase (3 to 5 months) and the implementation phase (7 months). Although presented as steps, many of these activities may occur in tandem. The preparation phase involves understanding the behavioral and stakeholder landscape, deciding whether to operate independently or integrate with existing programs, and forming an advisory team. It includes adapting the core materials to fit the local context, establishing and training a mentor team, holding community meetings to select young fathers, nominating and verifying mentors, and finally training the chosen mentors. This phase ensures all foundational elements are in place before the implementation phase begins.

The implementation phase involves mentors conducting home visits and group meetings with young fathers, alongside providing supportive supervision and monitoring. The mentors' training curriculum consists of 12 sessions covering topics such as understanding gender values and norms, reflecting on desired fatherhood qualities, respectful parenting, effective communication with partners, addressing alcohol abuse, and managing stress and emotions. This phase focuses on active engagement and ongoing support for young fathers.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring during the implementation phase was done through three simple forms: the Mentor Home Visit form, which mentors filled out after each home visit with young fathers; the Mentor Group Meeting form, which mentors filled out after each group meeting with young fathers; and the Staff Observation form, which staff filled out while observing a sample of mentor interactions with young fathers (home visits and group meetings). The two types of mentor forms (Mentor Home Visit form and Mentor Group Meeting form) were collected monthly and entered into a monitoring database. Data from all forms, particularly the Staff Observation forms, identified where supportive supervision or coaching of mentors was needed. Staff observers provided immediate coaching after each interaction, while monitoring data revealed unobserved issues, common problems among mentors, and the need for additional structured support.
The impact evaluation of the REAL Fathers Initiative was conducted in Northern Uganda.

Key Reflections

Based on the evaluation study, two outcomes were measured: primary and secondary. Primary outcomes focused on intimate partner violence and the use of harsh physical punishment by fathers. Secondary outcomes focused on positive parenting by fathers, confidence in the use of non-violent discipline methods by fathers, father-child interactions, couple communication, and attitudes towards justifying intimate partner violence.

The findings showed that compared to the control group, the intervention group reported a significantly lower proportion of men perpetrating IPV at the endline and one year after the intervention. There were also significant reductions in physical child punishment by participating men at both the endline and during long-term follow-up. Additionally, the intervention had positive impacts on parent-child interactions, promoted

positive parenting practices, and fostered attitudes that reject intimate partner violence and violence against children, while enhancing men's confidence in using nonviolent discipline over time.

Key Recommendations

1. **Comprehensive Approach**: The REAL Fathers Initiative demonstrates that a successful violence prevention program can be designed and implemented through a single intervention. While the program has only been tested in Uganda so far, it is likely that it could be replicated and adapted to other contexts. The curriculum is easy to understand and could potentially be translated to other settings. It is important for program participants to have input in selecting their mentors and for the program's contents to be transparent to the communities. Guidelines for adapting and using the curriculum have been developed.
2. **Addressing Gender Norms**: The program showed limited effects on men's attitudes toward traditional gender roles at the endline, indicating the challenges of addressing gender norms and practices within the family context, especially in a short-term intervention.
3. **Engaging Family and Community**: While many behaviors were sustained one year post-intervention according to randomized control trial results, qualitative interviews with women revealed that behavior change was not always maintained, with some reporting that their partners reverted to violence, often linked to alcohol use. Future programs should engage wives and other key individuals in the family or community to explore how family and community support can foster more significant and sustained changes in attitudes and behavior.
4. **Young Fathers' Needs**: The program did not focus on the protection needs and services for young fathers, many of whom are still children (16–18 years). It would be useful to further explore with child protection practitioners what specific needs and support young fathers enrolled in the program may require, especially if they experienced childhood abuse at home.

The REAL Fathers Initiative provides a model for integrating violence prevention, positive parenting, and gender equity into a single, community-based intervention. The program's success in Uganda highlights its potential for broader application and underscores the importance of continued adaptation and evaluation to meet the needs of diverse populations.

Resources: **REAL Fathers Guidelines , REAL Fathers Mentor Training Curriculum, REAL Fathers Mentor Discussion Guide, REAL Fathers Mentor Resource Sheets, REAL Fathers Women's Group Sessions**

4. BADEP Fatherhood Program

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Türkiye	Fathers, mother and families	1996 to date	Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı AÇEV (Mother Child Education Foundation)

Highlights: Sustainability, changes in family dynamics, increased father engagement, comprehensive evaluation, capacity building.

The time fathers spend with their children and the relationships they build significantly impact children's mental and physical development as well as their social and emotional capacities. Therefore, AÇEV (Mother Child Education Foundation) advocates that the most important role in a man's life is fatherhood. Since 1996, AÇEV has been implementing programs and conducting campaigns to support fathers in their active parenting roles. In this context, they have continued to implement the Father Support Program (BADEP) since 1996, enabling thousands of fathers to support their children's development and establish mutual and close relationships with them. Moreover, graduates of the Father Support Program advocate for involved fatherhood in different cities of Turkey through local organizations and carry out activities to create a supportive environment for involved fatherhood. AÇEV works to highlight the father's role and importance in child development at home, in the workplace, in the neighborhood, and across the country.

The Father Support Program (BADEP) has been continuously updated in line with scientific developments and societal needs and aims to ensure that fathers take responsibility for their children's care and development and establish mutual and close relationships with their children.

The program aims to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of the father in child development.
- Equip fathers with knowledge about child development.
- Encourage fathers to have developmentally appropriate expectations for their children based on the knowledge they acquire.
- Prevent child abuse.
- Provide the necessary support for fathers to play a more effective role in child development.
- Promote gender balance by involving fathers in child-rearing.
- Educate fathers on democratic methods and encourage them to implement these methods at home with their spouses and children, thereby supporting a more democratic and happier family and societal structure.
- Encourage fathers to apply some of the skills learned in the program (communication skills, problem-solving strategies, etc.) in other relationships.

Implementation Arrangements

The program is implemented as two separate modules for fathers with children aged 3-6 and 7-11. It runs for thirteen weeks, with sessions held once a week in the evenings, each lasting an average of two and a half hours. Additionally, to ensure the support of mothers on the topics discussed, two mother sessions are conducted.

A father group consists of fifteen to twenty participants and is organized using adult education methods such as group discussions, small group activities, games, stories, and case studies.

The curriculum emphasizes children's needs and the skills a father needs to respond effectively. This includes 13 sessions, homework, and attention to group cohesion. Based on the needs, the program has included extra sessions on sexual and reproductive health.

The sessions in AÇEV's BADEP program are designed to support fathers in their parenting roles by fostering reflective discussions and practical skill-building. The program starts with an open meeting to set goals, discuss group dynamics, and address participation challenges and logistics. Fathers then reflect on their roles and expectations, understand different parenting styles, and learn communication techniques like active listening and using "I" language. The program introduces positive discipline methods, provides an overview of child development (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional), emphasizes the importance of play in development, and helps fathers apply the learned attitudes and skills to their adult relationships and reinforce positive feelings.
The program is led by a volunteer group leader trained in BADEP.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A research study was conducted for monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of the Father Support Program on fathers' experiences, relationships, and perspectives, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The overall impact of the program, implementation in the group, and how fathers benefited from the program are the main themes addressed.

a) Quantitative Evaluation through an Attitude Inventory

An attitude inventory was developed specifically for BADEP, due to the lack of suitable existing inventories targeting fathers (most inventories target mothers). The inventory, refined through several stages, ended up with 57 items and measured four key factors: unconventional roles, non-authoritarian attitudes, non-lenient attitudes, and communication openness. The inventory was found to be reliable and valid, targeting fathers specifically and capturing changes in their attitudes and behaviors effectively.

b) Qualitative Evaluation through Interviews

The individual interviews with fathers focused primarily on the changes they experienced, particularly in their relationships with significant people in their lives, such as their spouses, children, and friends. Another focus was on the fathers' perceptions, self-esteem, how they benefited from the program, and the changes they

underwent. The interviews also included questions on whether the program made a difference in the child's life and family environment, such as parenting techniques and the father-child relationship. Some questions assessed whether the service met the family's needs, such as helping with the children's growth, learning, and development. Lastly, fathers were asked to express their views about the group leader and the program, discussing both the content and implementation, and identifying the most and least beneficial elements.

Key Reflections

- **Program Satisfaction**: Fathers were generally satisfied with how the topics were addressed and conveyed, with most benefiting from the group experience. Some suggested adding more topics and extending the program duration.
- **Desire for Similar Programs for Mothers**: Nearly all fathers agreed on the need for a similar program for mothers, preferably coinciding with their attendance period.
- **Behavioral and Perceptual Changes**: Fathers reported becoming more tolerant, viewing their children as individuals, and being more careful to keep promises. They started explaining, talking to, and listening to their children more, showing increased affection, and using alternative discipline methods.
- **Impact on Relationships**: Improved communication and tolerance towards spouses were reported, enhancing couple relationships. Fathers felt more knowledgeable, flexible, and proud of their engagement in child development.
- **Changes Observed by Mothers**: Mothers noticed fathers' increased engagement and interest in child-related issues, leading to more time spent with children and reduced use of negative discipline methods. Improved father-child relationships and better communication within the couple were highlighted.
- **Impact on Children**: Fathers and mothers reported children expressing themselves better, taking more responsibility, and building better social relationships.

Key Recommendations

The program effectively created significant positive changes in fathers' attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors towards their children, spouses, and themselves. It fostered better father-child relationships, improved communication within the family, and promoted positive discipline methods. The program's inclusive approach, engaging both fathers and mothers, proved beneficial for the entire family, highlighting its importance and effectiveness in child development and family dynamics. Fathers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds experienced these positive impacts, demonstrating the program's broad applicability and success.

Resources: Research study on the programme, Case Study

5. Active Dads

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer

Slovenia	Early years educators; Fathers; Families; Fathers-to-be	2019 to date	Mala Ulica Public Institute (Centre for Children and Families)

Highlights: Changes in family dynamics, increased father engagement, community and stakeholder engagement, innovative approaches, capacity building.

Despite the increasingly important roles of fathers in parenting, women are still considered the principal parents. Even though today's generation of fathers are more involved with their children, they still play a more supportive role rather than the main one, meaning they carry less of the burden when it comes to raising children compared to mothers. Fathers are also more engaged in fun care activities such as spending free time and playing, whereas mothers have the primary role as caregivers and are more occupied with regular and routine family tasks. This trend is confirmed by the increasing number of fathers with children at the Mala Ulica family center. Parenting and parenting support groups are no longer solely a women's issue but are also becoming a men's issue. It has also been observed that fathers often do not know their child's needs and wishes, are not relaxed in their role as play partners, or do not know what to do with their child. That is why the Active Dads program was launched in 2019, with the aim of encouraging and empowering fathers in their educational and parental roles.

The aim of the program is for fathers to spend as much quality time with their children as possible and to be actively involved in the caring activities of the family. The program is implemented mainly by men, both employees and external collaborators. Since the start of the program in 2019, fathers have been able to spend time with their children mainly in the following activities:

- **Cooking days with Dad** (making a healthy lunch)
- **A trip to the forest with Dad** (active participation within the implementation of forest pedagogy)
- **Master Luke!** (Children bring things from home that need restoration, renovation, etc., and repair them under the guidance of Master Luke)
- **Gardening with Dads** in the garden at Rakova Jelša

In 2023, a new program activity for fathers, called the Chat Room for Dads, was launched as a therapeutic group for fathers. The group is aimed at fathers who want to have an in-depth conversation with other fathers about their experiences of life with children and their families. The group of fathers meets once a month and is professionally led by a family therapist and supervisor. In parallel, fathers have access to childcare as children can take part in a creative workshop at the Mala Ulica family center.

Implementation Arrangements

The Active Dads program is carried out either at the Mala Ulica family center or at the "Vrtišče" garden at Rakova Jelša in Ljubljana. The activity lasts 1 hour, or longer if conducted in the garden, up to two hours or more. The garden offers an excellent place where fathers can spend quality time with their children and,

according to the principle "from idea to implementation," undertake various tasks and activities together. So far, as part of the program, a vegetable and herb garden was set up, a bread oven was built, the grass was mowed, a tree house was built, and the basics of outdoor cooking were learned. Together with their fathers, children learn the basics of using various tools and machines and techniques of working with wood and other building materials. In the family center Mala Ulica, fathers and their children engage in activities, mainly making and repairing toys, thereby encouraging the recycling and re-use of otherwise old and discarded materials.

The fathers' group within the program Chat Room for Dads currently meets once a month. Since the beginning of 2023, a regular group of visitors (from 4 to 6 fathers) has formed. The topics discussed at the meetings are suggested by the fathers themselves during or at the end of each meeting to encourage their future participation. The fathers speak about the following topics: self-esteem, feelings of inefficiency as a partner, how to develop individual fatherhood, caring masculinity, how to balance family and professional obligations, and taking care of oneself with a child. During their participation in the group, fathers take advantage of the childcare available at the family center (the child attending a creative workshop), and one father is present at the group together with his baby. This arrangement also provides their partners with some relief and personal time.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation is conducted based on staff observations and feedback received at the conclusion of each activity. For the fathers' group led by a psychotherapist, the facilitator is responsible for monitoring and evaluation. Recently, in-depth interviews were also conducted with the fathers' group.

Key Reflections

- **Program Satisfaction**: Fathers express great satisfaction in participating in these activities, as they have the opportunity to collaborate with their children and engage in creative projects such as gardening, building a bread oven, mowing the grass, and making new toys.
- **Chat Room for Dads**: It has been observed that many fathers are still registered for the activity by their female partners, indicating that mothers are often more proactive and involved, even in initiatives specifically designed for men. While attendance by men may be lower, those who do participate are highly motivated and demonstrate an above-average level of interest. For instance, one dedicated father travels from Koper to the family center in Ljubljana, a journey of at least one hour each way.

Key Recommendations

- **Promote Gender Equality in Childcare**: Although men are increasingly involved in childcare and other family responsibilities, the division of family duties and responsibilities is still gendered, with women doing the bulk of unpaid family work. Fathers' care practices are still too often seen as "helping" overburdened women and consist of doing light, routine household chores or playing with the children.

- **Address the Taboo of Therapeutic Conversations**: In the case of the Chat Room for Dads, therapeutic group conversations are still a taboo subject for men, but there is a need and demand from fathers who want to have them.
- **Continue Offering a Range of Activities**: To further promote active fatherhood at all levels of family life, continue to offer a range of activities for fathers and their children.
- **Increase Male Staff Participation**: Mala Ulica has worked to attract as many men as possible to the program, both as staff members and as external collaborators and students. Particularly among schoolchildren in holiday care, they witness a completely changed dynamic, more cooperation, and greater satisfaction among the children when male educators are present. Boys in particular want male educators, as the profession of educator and teacher is completely feminized, and they often do not encounter a single male educator throughout their education process.

The Active Dads program demonstrates the importance of engaging fathers in parenting roles and providing opportunities for them to bond with their children through various activities. By continuing to support and expand these initiatives, the program promotes gender equality and enhance the involvement of fathers in all aspects of family life.

Resources: Active Dads, Chat Room for Dads (In Slovenian), English Resources

6. KINDER

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Portugal, Spain and Croatia	Education professionals	2019-2021 24 Months	Observatory on Masculinities at the Centre for Social Studies

Highlights: Attitude changes, scalability and adaptability, recommended policy, community and stakeholder engagement, early positive results, capacity building.

The KINDER initiative seeks to address the pressing need for a novel and effective training curriculum for educators of children in preschool (ages 3 to 6) and the initial stages of mandatory education (ages 7 to 12). This project was rolled out in three European countries: Portugal, Spain, and Croatia, in partnership with the International Step by Step Association (ISSA). The consortium consisted of one academic institution (CES) and two NGOs (Cepaim and Status M).

The core aim was to equip teachers, educators, and other educational personnel with tools that are sensitive to gender differences and transformative, enabling them to cater to the distinct requirements of young girls and boys in their educational journey with a focus on gender equality. The approach involved endowing educational professionals with the knowledge, abilities, and mindset for gender-sensitive teaching methods. It also aimed to alter prevailing behaviors where gender stereotypes are perpetuated by these professionals, accomplished through in-depth research and targeted gender-transformative training. Concurrently, families were actively involved in fostering diversity both in and out of the school environment. Additionally, KINDER supported school administrations and national governmental bodies in emphasizing gender considerations from an early age.

Implementation Arrangements

The KINDER initiative was established based on the recognition that societal notions of gender roles often emerge during early childhood. Such notions are frequently reinforced within foundational institutions like families and schools. Through various mediums - from everyday interactions and expectations to the choice of clothes, toys, and literature - children are subtly guided into predefined "male" and "female" behaviors. From a young age, these cues shape their perceptions of the world and influence their interpersonal relationships. Remarkably, research indicates that by the age of three, children begin to exhibit behaviors aligned with these ingrained gender norms. This not only perpetuates a cycle of conformity to traditional gender roles but also discourages the exploration of activities beyond these boundaries. Such observations underscore the importance of early interventions in capacity-building programs to promote a more inclusive understanding of gender.

The training approach involves organizing workshops with selected schools to create guidelines, action plans, and strategies that counteract the spread of gender stereotypes within the school environment. This training targets educational staff such as kindergarten and elementary educators, assistants, and administrative personnel and engages families. The curriculum was developed drawing on the insights of KINDER affiliates and guided by ISSA's expertise. Every partner conducted in-person training sessions and also established an online resource center, known as the Playroom on the KINDER website. This online platform is set to continue even after the project's completion, with the backing of governmental bodies in charge of gender equality goals in the participating KINDER countries. Pre-service education professionals received 12 hours of training and education professionals received two sets of 25 hours of training.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used:

Survey and Interviews: Data collection was primarily done through online surveys using Google Forms, which included 15 detailed questions. The survey targeted the partners involved in the KINDER project and gathered their feedback on various aspects of the training and implementation processes.

Kirkpatrick's Four Levels Method: This evaluation framework was used by CES (Centre for Social Studies, Portugal) during a 50-hour certified training program. This method assesses participant reactions, learning, behavior, and results post-training. The evaluation involved brief assessments after each session to gauge participant satisfaction and how well the sessions met the training objectives.

Pre- and Post-Training Assessments: In some cases self-assessment pre-tests and post-tests were conducted to evaluate the immediate impact of the training on participants' understanding of gender equality issues.

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews: These were used as qualitative tools to gather in-depth insights from participants, especially when quantitative data collection was challenging due to low participation rates.

Piloting and Feedback: The training sessions were piloted across the three countries, and feedback from these pilots was used to refine and adjust the training content and methodology. The pilot phase included shorter sessions and workshops tailored to different participant groups, with continuous monitoring and feedback from participants.

Key Reflections

The training sessions were generally found to be effective. The report indicates that participants across the three countries (Portugal, Spain, and Croatia) showed a positive response to the training, particularly in terms of increasing awareness and understanding of gender equality and its importance in early childhood education. The sessions helped participants, particularly educational professionals, to become more aware of the role of gender stereotypes in education. Participants reported gaining new skills and knowledge that they could apply in their professional settings.

Overall, the training materials and methodologies developed were designed to be sustainable and replicable. The KINDER manual has been recommended at the government level (health and education sectors) as a good practice to be used.

Key Recommendations

- **Engage Government Institutions Early**: Engage government institutions from the beginning to ensure their accountability.
- **Partner with Universities and Higher Education Institutions**: Collaborate with academic institutions to enhance the project's credibility and reach.
- **Partner with Kindergartens and Pre-Schools**: Form partnerships with early education providers to implement and sustain the initiative.
- **Maintain Partnerships Post-Project**: Keep these partnerships active even after the projects conclude. Disseminate the project's findings and methodologies through seminars, webinars, and conferences.
- **Conduct Quality Campaigns**: Ensure the dissemination campaigns are of high quality to maximize impact.
- **Conduct Needs Assessment and Research**: Perform thorough needs assessments and research before developing methodologies.
- **Collaborate with Recognized Institutions**: Partner with internationally recognized institutions and campaigns (such as MenCare) to enhance the initiative's impact and credibility.

The KINDER initiative promotes gender-sensitive education and address the ingrained gender norms that children learn from an early age. By equipping early childhood educators and engaging families, the program seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for young children.

Resources: Available at KINDER website

Promising Practices: Innovative practices with emerging evidence

1. Early, Equal, Engaged, Empathetic Parent (4EPARENT)

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Italy	Fathers, families, fathers-to-be, and others: Human Resources (HR) managers and companies.	2023-2024 24 Months	Coordinated by ISS (Italian Institute of Health) plus other partners: Centro Per La Salute Del Bambino; Zadig; Cerchio degli Uomini; Deep Blue; Maschile Plurale;

Highlights: Scalability and adaptability, community and stakeholder engagement, early positive results, capacity building.

The 4E (Early, Equal, Engaged, Empathetic) PARENT project aims to promote engaged fatherhood and caring masculinities. One of the main objectives is to create an enabling policy framework and work environment for non-violent, gender-equal, early, and responsive engagement of fathers in care primarily in Italy and beyond across EU Member States. Enabling policies and practices that commit to increasing father engagement in the early years are necessary to change the prevailing culture that limits children from thriving to their full potential and achieving gender equity.

The project has three main components: 1) capacity building, 2) policy change, 3) communication.

- Capacity building has involved developing, through extensive consultations with professional and civil society groups and experts, three 10-hour distance learning courses on engaging men in the first thousand days. One course is for ECE professionals, another for health professionals, and a third for social workers, volunteers, and others working with parents and children from 0 to 6 years old. Over 5,000 professionals have participated. It has also run four in-person 2.5-day training courses for facilitators of fathers' circles.
- Advocacy work in Italy and at the EU level, particularly regarding paternity leave, has involved developing policy proposals and lobbying with parliamentarians and other decision-makers. As a basis for its advocacy efforts, a report on the situation of fathers in Italy was produced, and a survey was conducted on social media about leave for fathers, which received nearly 5,000 responses. A specific and original area of work has focused on influencing work-life balance policies and practices in the workplace. This has involved collaboration with six companies: three large companies, one medium-sized company, and one small company.
- Communication work has included ensuring continued media attention to the issues related to fatherhood addressed by the project. A website was created, which will continue to exist even after the project's closure. For this, original articles, infographics, videos, and podcasts have been produced.

Implementation Arrangements

In this compendium, we showcase the specific area of 4EPARENT's work that has been carried out with companies on work-life balance measures. The work is undertaken with six companies: three large, one medium, and one small. The aim is to understand, through consultations with HR managers, a survey, and focus groups with employees, the specific issues and needs related to work-life balance. Based on the analysis of the results, the goal is to engage with the HR department to identify measures to support work-life balance and responsive/collaborative parenting, including for same-sex parents. This includes promoting parental leave, flexible working hours, part-time work, 'smart' working, and permits to allow parents to attend meetings with teachers and health professionals. Specific attention is given to fathers/partners with temporary or precarious contracts. To enhance corporate policies and champion gender equity in work-life balance (GE-WLB) and gender-responsive parenting, several key actions are undertaken:

- **Agreements and Commitments**: Partnerships are formed to promote GE-WLB, encouraging companies to adopt best practices and become leaders in GE-WFB and responsive caregiving.

- **Interviews and Surveys**: HR managers were interviewed following a common outline, and a work-life balance (WLB) questionnaire was distributed among staff members of the six companies. Around 1000 responses to the questionnaire were received.
- **Focus Groups**: Following the questionnaire analysis, 30 focus groups we held with both male and female employees of all genders.
- **Reporting and Action Planning**: The findings from surveys and the focus groups were compiled into a report, which was then presented to company HR management. A collaborative process was then initiated with HR departments to identify key commitments and action to improve WLB in the company aimed to at ensuring gender equality in work-life balance and responsive caregiving.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project has an independent evaluator who requires a monitoring sheet on activities and outputs every three months.

Key Reflections

At the company level, there is an increasing awareness of the need to support the role of men as fathers. Some companies offer increased leave and other work-life provisions. However employees note that the pressure of work, long and inflexible hours often make it difficult to actually use these opportunities. While it is culturally more accepted that female employees who become mothers use leave, part-time and flextime (although they pay a price for this in terms of career advancement), expectations for men (either real or perceived by the male employee) are that for 'a good employee' work should take priority over family. Small companies tend to be less flexible and more traditional in terms of organization of work than large companies where attention to gender and diversity concerns are better established, and the cost of applying WLB measures has a lower impact in terms of cost and implications for the organization of work. There is a clear need to change organizational culture in ways that are more enabling for both mothers and fathers to use opportunities to balance family and work. While it is early to describe the impact, the consultation process has significantly raised interest and willingness in the companies concerned to engage in finding ways to improve work-life balance. The action-research and policy development model tested could be replicated in other companies. Findings from the surveys and focus groups is being used in advocacy work at the policy level.

Key Recommendations

Lessons learned and recommendations will be documented upon the completion of the activities at the end of 2024.

The 4E PARENT project demonstrates the importance of creating supportive policies and work environments that encourage father engagement and promote gender equity. By partnering with companies and involving HR departments, the initiative fosters a culture of responsive and collaborative parenting, ultimately benefiting both families and organizations.

Resources: Full documentation on activities is available at **4EPARENT website.**

2. i-mens De SLOEP

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Belgium	Health practitioners, early years educators, fathers, families, social sector, fathers-to-be, and pre-service providers.	2021-2023 24 Months	De SLOEP

Highlights: Innovative approaches, community and stakeholder engagement, capacity building.

Established in 1996, De SLOEP is a small non-profit organization located in Ghent, Belgium. The organization's basic principles involve working integrally and closely with the local neighborhood. This approach, combined with continuous support and warm referrals, contributes to its success. Annually, De SLOEP reaches over 1,000 families with young children. A concerning issue in the district is that 1 in 2 children grow up in poverty, with many of these families having a migration background and living in disadvantaged conditions. These families face needs in various life domains, such as precarious housing, unstable work, and financial problems, leading to insecurities about parenting that often remain unaddressed.

To overcome these issues, De SLOEP organizes accessible and informal groups where parents can recognize and acknowledge their role as parents. De SLOEP does not lead the conversation but facilitate a safe, open, and warm climate where parents meet and connect with each other.

De SLOEP's father-focused approach centers fathers in the organization, supporting them in their nurturing role and incorporating this perspective into mother groups. This includes involving fathers, whether in person or remotely, in communication and advice. De SLOEP believes that inclusive communication about fathers can change perceptions, emphasizing opportunities rather than limitations, obstacles, and prejudices.

Since 2019, De SLOEP has been running a Learning Network Fathers, gathering and organizing initiatives throughout Flanders and Brussels to share expertise and combine efforts. In 2021, the organization received government funding to expand and professionalize this network, growing it to include more than 100 organizations.

Implementation Arrangements

Since 2009, fathers have been actively involved in the organization, benefiting not only the fathers themselves but also their families.

Monthly "father group" sessions are organized, alternating between activities with their children and informative sessions among fathers.

Between 2021 and 2023, funding was received for the following initiatives:

- Pioneering a learning network.
- Providing free workshops to organizations interested in working with fathers or addressing concerns about working with fathers.
- Conducting a social media campaign to raise awareness about the importance of equivalent parenting and combatting stereotypes.
- Organizing a daylong conference focusing on various topics related to fatherhood, including LGBTQ issues, migration, mental health, current events, and pregnancy.
- Participating as experts in several nationwide concerns.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To monitor and evaluate results, a comparison was made between the situation in 2021 and 2023.

- The "Learning Network Fathers" expanded from 15 involved organizations to over 100 partners from various sectors addressing several issues.
- Initially, many organizations were interested in working with fathers but found it difficult to start or lost confidence due to the lack of immediate results. By combining strengths and enhancing knowledge, organizations supported each other.
- De SLOEP gained recognition as expert, becoming the contact point for all questions about fathers and compiling an overview of all initiatives concerning and/or involving fathers.
- Participation in numerous advisory boards and learning circle networks, such as a task force on "men in childcare".
- Following the workshops, many new initiatives started, including support for fathers during unplanned pregnancies and a "stop smoking" campaign for partners of pregnant women.

Key Reflections and Recommendations

- **Challenges in the Child Care and Social Sector**: The child care and social sector is very feminine, causing fathers to not find role models or a connection with the group or subject. Often, in preventive childhood facilities, there is an explicit focus on mothers.
- **Media Campaigns and Stereotyping**: Media campaigns often resign to stereotyping. Fathers are not seen as equivalent in parenting. However, there is growing awareness, motivation, and willingness to involve fathers.
- **Promoting Father Engagement**: To further promote father engagement, it is crucial to continue offering inclusive and supportive environments for fathers and to challenge existing stereotypes through education and media representation.

De SLOEP's initiatives demonstrate the importance of involving fathers in parenting and creating supportive networks for families. By addressing stereotypes and providing practical support, De SLOEP promotes more equitable and engaged parenting roles for fathers.

Resources: Materials

3. Fathers in Focus & Fathers in Sight

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Belgium	Health practitioners, early years educators, pre-service and in-service providers.	2016-2019	Arteveldehogeschool

Highlights: Attitude changes, community and stakeholder engagement, capacity building.

The Father Friendly Initiative is a program developed from two research initiatives: “Fathers in Sight" and "Fathers in Focus." "Fathers in Sight" (2017-2018) was a research initiative that explored the expectations and needs of underprivileged fathers in the perinatal period, which includes the time before, during, and after childbirth. The study focused on understanding the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum, as well as the perspectives of fathers toward their future role as parents and their expectations regarding family and support networks. Additionally, "Fathers in Focus" involved studying factors that facilitate fathers' engagement in various childcare facilities, from maternity hospitals to nurseries. The results of the study included a literature review, inspirational practices, and focus groups to gather information. The indicators found in the study supporting the expectations and needs of fathers-to-be during the prenatal period and first-time fathers during the postnatal period resulted in the creation of the 'Father Friendly Initiative.' This initiative serves as a tool to identify and recognize facilities that position themselves as "father-friendly facilities."

Implementation Arrangements

The research projects were conducted in Flanders from 2016 to 2019. After 2019, a series of group sessions, lectures, and training programs were organized. However, the development of the Dutch tool ceased following the conclusion of research funding. The themes addressed included the expectations and needs of fathers during the perinatal period, parental engagement in health and early childcare initiatives, and inspirational practices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

For the study, general scientific principles were honored: advice groups, triangulation, validation, and reliability were taken into account. There were regular inquiries with participants after group sessions on the study or session.

Key Reflections

- **Improved Support for Underprivileged Fathers**: The research identified specific needs and challenges faced by underprivileged fathers during the perinatal period. This information can be used to develop

targeted support programs and interventions to address these needs, potentially leading to improved outcomes for fathers and their families.

- **Enhanced Father Engagement**: By understanding the expectations and experiences of fathers-to-be and first-time fathers, research can contribute to the development of strategies and policies that encourage and support active father engagement in parenting. This can have positive effects on child development, family dynamics, and overall well-being.
- **Informed Healthcare and Social Policies**: Courses and training sessions informed the development of more inclusive healthcare and social policies that take into account the unique needs of underprivileged fathers. This could result in improvements in perinatal care, family support services, and community resources.
- **Recognition of Father-Friendly Facilities**: The creation of an indicator list and the designation of "father-friendly facilities" encouraged healthcare and childcare facilities to adopt practices that are supportive of fathers. However, it is important to note that, as of now, this label is not certified or recognized by governmental institutions.

Key Recommendations

- **Involving Fathers in Early Education**: Research consistently highlights the positive impact of paternal engagement on child development. It is crucial to involve fathers in early education for several reasons, including promoting better outcomes for children.
- **Stimulating Organizational Change**: Encouraging organizations in health and early childcare to reflect on the 'Why?' of paternal engagement is key to making innovative changes.
- **Recognizing Different Engagement Perspectives**: Fathers tend to see engagement in different ways than some early child care and health initiatives. It is important to acknowledge and incorporate these diverse perspectives.
- **Promoting Male Role Models**: The importance of male role models and images is often overlooked in efforts to involve fathers. Promoting positive male role models can enhance father engagement and support.

The Father Friendly Initiative promotes the involvement of fathers in the perinatal period and early childhood by addressing their unique needs and challenges. By recognizing and supporting father-friendly facilities, the initiative seeks to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for fathers and their families.

Resources: Father Involvement Review

4. PLURAL

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Spain	Fathers-to-be	2018 to date	Centre de Masculinitats de Barcelona, Direcció de serveis de Feminismes i LGTBI (Barcelona City Council, Office for Feminism and LGBTI Affairs),

Highlights: Attitude changes, early positive results, innovative approaches.

In 2009, the "Plural" Masculinity Center of the Barcelona City Council, in collaboration with the Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Assistance (ASSIR) program in Barcelona, established a working group comprising staff from both services to identify the needs of male users of ASSIR. This initiative led to the development of an intervention project where ASSIR's professional teams provide comprehensive support to couples, with a particular focus on expectant fathers with the aim to:

- **Enhance Men's Engagement**: Promote significant engagement of men in raising and caring for their children from the onset of their partner's pregnancy by improving their parental and emotional skills.
- **Encourage Participation in Domestic Life**: Foster men's active participation in domestic chores, family responsibilities, and their children's education.
- **Address Birth-Related Concerns**: Provide support to address any doubts and difficulties related to childbirth.

This project resulted in the creation of the "Guide for driving groups of men for a paternity responsible, active and conscious' which is being implemented by ASSIR professionals and staff from the "Canviem-ho" project in prenatal groups for men, with ten groups conducted annually.

Implementation Arrangements

The Men's Group for Responsible, Active, and Conscious Fatherhood is a pre-birth intervention designed to create a safe space for men to explore fatherhood with professional support. It aims to raise awareness about their roles, build identities, and address issues during pregnancy, postpartum, and child-rearing.

Participants work on various topics, including their identity and role as fathers, partner support during pregnancy and postpartum, bonding with the baby, managing emotions, communication within the couple, sexuality, time management, and family relationships. The group promotes active, responsible fatherhood, addressing potential issues like gender violence, anxiety, and addictions.

The general objective is to increase men's engagement in childcare from pregnancy, promoting active, present, conscious, affectionate, and responsible fatherhood. Specific objectives include developing parenting and

affective skills, establishing healthy bonds between fathers and babies, fostering positive couple relationships, encouraging emotional awareness and expression, preventing violence, substance abuse, and neglect, and promoting diverse, healthy masculinities.

Targeted at fathers-to-be and new fathers, particularly those with partners between 15-20 weeks of gestation in ASSIR programs, the project can be adapted for later stages of pregnancy or already fathers. The group is facilitated by two professionals—a midwife and a psychologist—with a recommended size of 8 to 14 participants. Involving midwives was important because of the overlap between sexual and reproductive health needs and the Canviem-ho project for men. Midwives needed training on how to engage men and lead interviews and group discussions with them. This intervention aims to transform societal norms around fatherhood, empowering men to take active and responsible roles in parenting while supporting their personal growth and well-being.

The program employs a group methodology emphasizing participatory and experiential dynamics to support personal development and social transformation. Sessions include a welcome, activation dynamics, main work, integration, and closing. The sessions cover topics such as masculinity and fatherhood, defining men's roles during pregnancy and postpartum, focusing on emotions and their expression, addressing sexuality during pregnancy and postpartum, managing time and responsibilities, and reflecting on learned concepts and practical information for post-birth.

Monitoring and Evaluation

It is important that the process of evaluating group interventions is incorporated to understand more carefully what is done, why it is done, and how it can be done better. Formal evaluation seeks to obtain results on behavioral, attitudinal, and skill changes, justifying the resources used to bring about change.

Types of Evaluation:

- Initial (Diagnostic) Evaluation: Conducted between the first and second session to identify the beliefs, knowledge, and current situation of the participating men, especially in relation to their partners.
- Formative (Continuous, Procedural) Evaluation: Carried out during the group activity to report on the evolution and learning progress of the participating men, enhancing the regulation of their learning.
- Final (Summative) Evaluation: Conducted at the end of the group to test the changes produced in the men who participated in the group activity compared to the results obtained in the initial evaluation.

Key Reflections

The project started with a program of three groups per year, which increased to between ten and eleven groups annually. Every year, 150 to 200 men who were going to be fathers participated. There was a waiting list, and the drop-out or absenteeism of the participants was very low. This project was replicated in other Catalan cities. As by 2024 September, the total number of fathers reached more than 1000.

Key Recommendations

- **Common Interests**: One of the most important lessons observed in projects aimed at transforming men's relational patterns to be more equitable is the importance of working on common interests. In order to involve men in certain projects and encourage their participation, it is necessary that the subject matter challenges them or generates interest in them.
- **Fatherhood as an Entry Point**: The fact of being fathers and the doubts it generates is an opportunity to start introducing topics and reflections related to gender and their role as fathers. If these topics are raised in isolation, they hardly challenge them. To work on masculinities, it is important to work from a perspective of shared frameworks of interests.

The "Plural" Masculinity Center project in collaboration with ASSIR demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted interventions to engage fathers in responsible, active, and conscious parenting roles. By addressing their unique needs and providing professional support, the project fosters healthier family dynamics and promotes gender equity.

Resources: **Guide to Male Behaviour for Active, Responsible, and Conscious Fatherhood (Cat), Leaflet (Cat)**

5. Fathers Rock

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Spain, Italy, Austria	Fathers, fathers-to-be, frontline professionals	2022-2024 24 Months	CONEXUS

Highlights: Innovative approaches, reduction in violence, capacity building.

Fathers' engagement in perinatal care and active participation in parenting significantly enhances children's well-being, fosters healthy relationship development, and is associated with a reduced likelihood of violence. However, research indicates that the transition to fatherhood can also present risks, as men may struggle with new roles and circumstances, potentially leading to increased instances of violence against their partners.

To address these challenges, Fathers Rock (Fathers' engagement in the Role of Care Keeping mothers and children safe) focuses on preventing gender-based violence among men who are becoming fathers. This initiative collaborates with key services such as perinatal services, birth pathways, daycares, health services, hospitals, and nurseries.

The primary aims of Fathers Rock are:

- **Enhancing Social and Emotional Capacity**: Improve the social and emotional capacity of men who are becoming fathers, enhancing their parenting skills and ability to navigate their new roles.
- **Increasing Engagement of Public Institutions**: Promote the caring role of men within key public institutions, thereby fostering gender equality, child well-being, and safeguarding, and preventing domestic violence.
- **Strengthening Skills of Service Providers**: Equip service providers with the skills to involve and support men in parenting, minimizing the risk of violence and increasing accountability.
- **Improving Capacity of Frontline Professionals**: Enhance the capacity of frontline professionals to prevent domestic violence by identifying risk indicators and early signs of potential violence.
- **Equipping Professionals with Knowledge and Resources**: Provide professionals with the necessary knowledge and resources to refer cases of domestic violence and motivate men towards greater accountability.

Implementation Arrangements

The Fathers Rock project establishes training and education groups targeting frontline professionals working in perinatal and early childhood services (such as pregnancy, birth, nursing, daycare, and parenting) to equip them with the necessary skills and abilities to involve fathers early in their children's lives, ultimately

preventing and combating violence in emotional relationships. The project also created a program for parents that trained professionals could use, and pilot groups were held.

The intervention model of Fathers Rock builds on previous EU-funded projects:

- **ENGAGE Roadmap**: Focused on the detection and exploration of domestic violence and the referral to programs for men who perpetrate violence in emotional relationships. Implemented in Italy, Spain, and France.
- **PARENT Project**: Aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women and children by involving fathers in shared parenthood and childcare. Focused on fatherhood challenges and carried out in Portugal, Italy, Lithuania, and Austria.
- **Project MiC (Men in Care)**: Carried out in Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain. Aimed at fostering the engagement of men in care roles and changing behaviors and social attitudes around gender roles to establish a better balance between work and family life and promoting caring masculinity.

The training has a duration of approximately 8 hours, divided into 4 training modules, and can be conducted both online and in person. It also includes a 2-4 hour follow-up session after six months to assess any issues that might have arisen, the usage of training learnings, encounters with perpetrators among fathers, and successful referrals to perpetrator programs. The four modules contain background information, methods, and supporting literature, each focusing on different aspects of involving men, fathers, and fathers-to-be in violence prevention. The modules follow a structured format, starting with objectives and expected learning outcomes, followed by an overview with useful sections, and ending with references to additional resources. The four modules are *Challenging Stereotypes*, which addresses traditional gender roles; *Needs and Motivations*, focusing on understanding men's unique circumstances; *Detecting Violence*, which teaches participants how to recognize signs of violence; and *4 Steps to Detect Violence and Refer Men to Perpetrator Programs*, offering a practical guide for intervention.Monitoring and Evaluation

Both training courses for professionals and parents were assessed. Each workshop series includes a pre-evaluation and post-evaluation, ideally conducted in the first and last sessions for the best response rate. For single-session workshops lasting 90 minutes, participants should fill out evaluation forms either before or after the session to save time. Evaluations can be done online (e.g., Google Forms, LimeSurvey) or on paper. After all fathers' groups have completed their workshops, the completed and cleaned data matrices are collected from partners for evaluation and transnational analysis.

Key Reflections

Austria: Based on the needs analysis, professionals in parent education required support in dealing with the topic of violence. The training was adapted to focus more in-depth on removing taboos around violence. The disclosure processes were adapted in the training, including an overview of services for victim protection and work with perpetrators in two areas in Austria. The training on gender stereotypes in babies, strongly requested by professionals, incentivized attendance.

Italy: Topics related to fatherhood and masculinity such as father role, expectations towards fathers, traditional male models and violence were explored in the training. The Engage Roadmap helped professionals refer users to specialized services for perpetrators. High demand from early childhood education and care professionals indicated a need for support to effectively involve fathers and overcome social and cultural resistance.

Spain: Feedback from various professional groups was gathered to enhance training implementation. The manual was modified to offer both two-session and three-session formats, particularly for services aimed at parents in crisis and child protection situations. The manual now emphasizes intervention principles and strategies with fathers and potential aggressors, rather than providing a general explanation of violence, as most professionals already possess basic or advanced knowledge in this area.

The feminist and gender perspective underlying this work can sometimes pose challenges in adapting to a male perspective. There may be resistance and fear of working comprehensively and supportively with men, even with the goal of helping them address their issues with violence. During training, it may be beneficial to stress that the primary beneficiaries of interventions against violence are women and children.

Key Recommendations

- **Expert-Led Training**: Training should be led by experts in preventing gender-related violence who have personally developed and become aware of their own behaviors and gender models. These experts should also have experience working with male perpetrators of violence in intimate relationships.
- **Deep Understanding of Gender Dynamics**: Facilitators need to understand gender dynamics and the shift from traditional masculinity to a nurturing model. They should also comprehend the evolution of fatherhood and how to encourage fathers to be more involved in child-rearing and education.
- **Involving Public Entities**: To ensure long-term sustainability and diverse professional engagement, include public entities as partners and participants in the training, allowing them to organize their own programs for fathers and fathers-to-be.
- **Prioritizing Victim Safety and Perpetrator Accountability**: All gender-related violence prevention initiatives must prioritize the safety of victims (both women and children) and hold perpetrators accountable. Creating a network involving various professionals (e.g., perinatal services, victim protection experts, and those working with perpetrators) is crucial.

Fathers Rock aims to create a safer and more supportive environment for families, ensuring that fathers play a positive and proactive role in caregiving and preventing gender-based violence. By training and equipping frontline professionals, the initiative seeks to transform societal norms and promote responsible, active fatherhood.

Resources: **Manual for Fathers' Groups**, **Training Manual for perinatal and early childhood professionals**, **Multiagency Cooperation Model**, **Leaflets for men who need help**.

6. Kinderopvang door Ouders

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
The Netherlands	Families	Over 40 years	De Bombardon

Highlights: Innovative approaches, community and stakeholder management.

In the 1980s, several parents initiated unique parent-led early childhood educational centers: Kinderopvang door Ouders. In 2024, seven such centers operate in the Netherlands, with five located in Utrecht and two in Amsterdam. These centers are distinguished by their parent-led approach, where parents themselves serve as Early Childhood Education (ECE) teachers. Notably, almost half of these parent-teachers are fathers, reflecting significant engagement of both genders in the educational process.

Families have the autonomy to decide which parent will take on the role of a teacher, allowing for flexibility and active participation from either mothers or fathers. This model fosters a collaborative and inclusive environment, emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in early childhood education.

These centers comply with Dutch laws and regulations, operating under a specific legal provision that supports their parent-led model. This ensures they meet required standards while maintaining their unique approach, emphasizing parental involvement in early childhood education.

Implementation Arrangements

This citizen-led intervention has been in existence for over 40 years. These centers offer their own training for new parents, conducted by experienced parent members. New fathers and mothers undergo a comprehensive induction process, starting with a three-week enrollment training where they serve as additional staff. Following this period, there is a three-month probation phase during which they continue to receive mentorship from current members.

Every six weeks, general member meetings are held to discuss specific themes and topics related to staff education. Annually, several educational sessions are organized, inviting external experts to provide training for all parents, including those who teach and those who do not. This structured approach ensures continuous development and support for all participants involved in the centers.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Within the center, monitoring and evaluation of staff are done regularly. All parents are involved, and every teacher team (three teachers/parents per day) discusses their functioning twice a year.

Key Reflections

Empowering parents to design their own childcare programs, as demonstrated by these centers, results in the equitable engagement of both fathers and mothers. This approach not only fosters balanced participation but also encourages fathers to take an active role in early childhood education and care, thereby promoting a more inclusive and collaborative environment for raising children.

Key Recommendations

- **Engage in Open Dialogues with Parents**: Regular, open dialogues with parents are essential for understanding their needs and fostering their active participation.
- **Facilitate Parent Participation at the Policy Level**: At the policy level, facilitation of parent participation in childcare programs should be improved to support this inclusive model of early childhood education.

These parent-led centers in the Netherlands showcase a successful model of parental involvement in early childhood education, highlighting the benefits of collaborative and inclusive practices for both children and parents.

Resources: Parent experience cases (Dutch)

7. The Preparation for Childbirth, Birth and Parenthood Program

Country	Target Groups	Timeline	Implementer
Portugal	Families, fathers-to-be	2014 to date	Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso, Portugal

Highlights: Increased father engagement, change in family dynamics, attitude changes.

The Preparation for Childbirth, Birth, and Parenthood Program aims to empower couples and families by recognizing their skills and competencies. This program enables them to be the primary resource capable of responding to the demands, adaptations, and changes required during the transition to a new phase of life, in conjunction with community services, fitting into a concept of anticipatory care.

It is a synergistic activity where the whole exceeds the sum of its parts, as informing is more than just telling, sharing is more than simply giving, living is more than merely knowing, involving is more than being present together, preventing is more than remedying, and "experiencing" is more than simply imagining. The final aim is for fathers-to-be to understand that their role is not just “to help” the mothers in taking care of their child but to actively participate in the nurturing care process. The preparation for welcoming a new family member aims to create the conditions for secure attachment, which is addressed to both parents.

This program began in 2014 in Lisbon to address an unmet need detected among couples monitoring their pregnancy in health services. It was delivered by a nurse specializing in Maternal Health and Obstetrics, with training in Psychology, Family Therapy, and Breastfeeding Counseling. The program also benefited from the collaboration of a nurse from the Foundation’s women's health program.

Implementation Arrangements

The program ideally begins at the 28th week of pregnancy and consists of seven sessions (theoretical, theoretical/practical, and practical), each lasting 2 hours on a weekly basis, and a workshop with an eighth session held at the Foundation's premises during after-work hours. The workshops are free of charge and are aimed at couples attending the program. They are also open to the community.

As a preamble to the first session, an individual interview is conducted to register the couple, characterize the pregnancy, and identify specifics, as well as understand the couple's expectations. Some pregnant couples are accompanied by family members or others who will take on the role of caregivers for the newborns in the absence of the parents. Each program participant receives a briefcase with materials on paper (some also available online, only in Portuguese).

The program is based on the concept of anticipatory health care and covers topics such as:

- Warning signs and alarms
- When to go and what to take to the maternity hospital
- Labor and birth planning
- Labor and analgesia
- Newborn characteristics and care
- Breastfeeding benefits, techniques, and difficulties
- Breathing and relaxation techniques for pregnancy, labor, and childbirth
- Affective relationships throughout the birth process in a family
- Puerperium

In addition to the sessions, the nurse responsible for the course remains fully available to support participants during and after the program, especially post-childbirth, to provide real-time responses and prevent complications.

Post-course support has mainly focused on maternal health, family dynamics (particularly between the couple and their families of origin), breastfeeding, newborn care, and child health. This support is often requested by fathers, who reach out to the nurse with questions and needs.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The course is accompanied by an informal evaluation based on research/action, which has been very positive. Equally positive is the formal evaluation of participants and professionals, regardless of where pregnancy monitoring takes place.

This methodology has proved fundamental in the pursuit of constant improvement in the care provided, striving for excellence in service.

Key Reflections

Program evaluation by users has been highly positive, with participants reporting that the program met their expectations and provided an appropriate number of sessions with well-timed intervals. Theoretical topics addressed their needs, and the practical sessions were considered sufficient. The program's timetable was convenient, facilities were adequate, and the support materials were well-suited for each session. All users expressed that they would recommend the program to friends and family.

Fathers are increasingly making efforts to be present, verbalize emotions and difficulties, and benefit from their greater engagement in the parenthood project. This involvement reduces anxiety and recognizes parents as the primary resource in their daily work with the baby.

Key Recommendations

The informal research/action process has been crucial for continuously evaluating and adapting the themes and content to the realities and experiences of the participants.

The dynamics of interactivity, sharing, and listening, even when not in person, have allowed for assessing sensitivity and receptiveness, as well as considering the specificities of each couple. This approach makes it possible to adapt the flow of content to group dynamics and individual needs.

The main recommendation is for such programs to adapt their duration and content to the participants' needs, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.

Resources: The first 1000 days of life - information leaflet for parents and carers (PT)

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The Engaging Men in Nurturing Care Initiative

The Engaging Men in Nurturing Care (EMiNC) initiative led by the International Step by Step Association (ISSA), in collaboration with the Observatory of Masculinities (CES) in Portugal, Centro per la Salute del Bambino (CSB) in Italy, and CONEXUS with the Barcelona City Council in Spain, supported by the OAK Foundation, was launched in February 2023. This three-year initiative aims to catalyze policy discourse at the EU level and create changes in practices at the city level to promote positive masculinities, fatherhood, and gender equity in caregiving. EMiNC advocates for equal respect for men and women as parents, fostering a balanced environment for child development. It collaborates at local, national, and European levels to enact changes in households, early childhood services, and communities, ultimately influencing national and EU policies for gender-balanced caregiving.

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