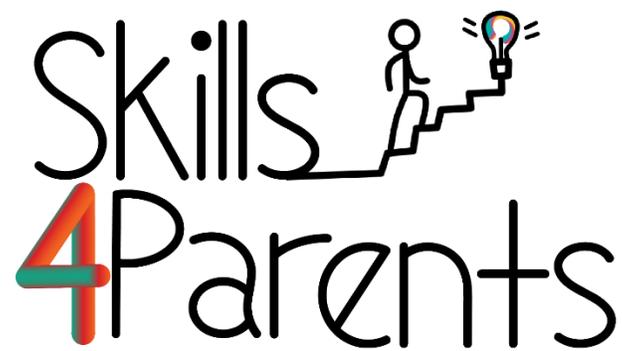




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## EUROPEAN COMPARATIVE REPORT



# SKILL VALIDATION AND TRANSMISSION NEEDS OF PARENTS AND ADULT EDUCATORS

May 2021

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## PROJECT INFORMATION

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## INTRODUCTION

THE EUROPEAN PROJECT “SKILLS FOR PARENTS” AIMS TO INFLUENCE THE LIVES OF ADULT EDUCATORS, PARENTS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES THROUGH ENRICHING THEIR LIVES AND GAINING VALUABLE SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND LIFE TOOLS.

With modern technologies developing fast, **MANY PARENTS NEED MORE SUPPORT**, guidance and mentoring in meeting the everyday challenges in raising their children. Throughout this project, we are defining these motivated parents in need of support as **LEARNING PARENTS**.

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*“No one is born as a parent. Therefore, in some critical or emergency situations, we as parents do not always have all the correct answers. That is why guidance is always helpful”.*

*(Parent, Cyprus)*

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With years of experience in supporting learning parents who need extra guidance, project partners agree on recognizing that parents often struggle with **COMMON ISSUES THAT ARE PRESENT IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF FAMILIES**, especially in those families already facing exclusion or with a higher risk of being socially marginalized and excluded. One of the solutions to this is the **UPSKILLING OF PARENTS**, which leads to their better understanding of children's needs and their mutual relationship. This ultimately results in **BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE OF FAMILIES** – of children, but also of parents themselves.



The **OVERALL GOAL OF THE “SKILLS FOR PARENTS” STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP** is to improve personal growth, communication and **PARENTING SKILLS OF PARENTS** as well as **PROFESSIONAL SKILLS OF ADULT EDUCATORS** working with parents.

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*"If you want to call yourself an educator you should be always willing to better yourself even in your fields of expertise."*

*(Adult Educator, Cyprus)*

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This will be achieved through setting the **FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES**:

- ✚ Supporting learning parents in acquiring and developing skills and key competences and provide them with mentoring and guidance.
- ✚ Enhancing the adult educators' professional skills and extending their competences to support and mentor parents through the use of digital technologies.
- ✚ Connecting adult trainers and parents through digital methods of learning and knowledge transfer.

Research shows that **ADULT EDUCATION CAN COMPENSATE A LACK OF EDUCATION IN EARLIER LIFE AND ENABLE SOCIAL MOBILITY – AND THUS PROMOTE SOCIAL COHESION, EQUITY AND EQUALITY**. This is why this project aims at supporting adult educators and their beneficiaries - parents - in acquiring and developing skills and key competences through an **INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT - ONLINE DIGITAL PLATFORM**.

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*"We lack a kind of Wikipedia (but then reliable), where the main parenting questions are being answered per topic and where we can find reliable, good resources for every parenting topic."*

*Parent, The Netherlands*

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**SKILLS4PARENTS** will therefore also contribute to **DECREASING OF THE DIGITAL INEQUALITIES** in learning, access and use by adult educators and parents, and to **REDUCING INEQUALITIES IN THE PROVISION OF ONLINE SUPPORT** services for parents and families. In this way project **SKILLS4PARENTS** will play an important role in **ENSURING EQUAL DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES AND BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE** whilst promoting social inclusion of target groups and ensuring setting up a sustainable long-term access to the upskilling pathway.

In order to develop a solid basis for the project, it was necessary to have a **EVIDENCE-BASED UNDERSTANDING AND A CLEAR INSIGHT** into the current situation of the participating regions. Therefore, we conducted **DESK RESEARCH AS WELL AS FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WITH OUR TARGET GROUPS** in order to directly involve them in **CO – CREATING THE CONTENTS FOR FUTURE SKILLS4PARENTS OUTPUTS**.

These findings were compiled in **NATIONAL REPORTS** in which partners examined the skills and skill gaps for adult educators and parents, and received feedback on key channels for skills transmission. As part of the national documents, partners also provided **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT STEPS** in creating the aforementioned online platform.

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*“There is never a limit to knowledge!*

*I always want to stay updated as a parent.”*

*Parent, Italy*

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All of this resulted in a precise and appropriate answer to the question of training/educational needs of adult educators and parents. In this way, the contents/tools in the upcoming **SKILLS4PARENTS** outputs (a guide with learning packages, and an online platform) will be delivered by using participatory method and user-focused approach through the involvement of the target group in the processes of design and development of educational materials and tools.



This comparative European report is based on the national reports, and examines the **NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT** (section I) in which it was made, the project's **CO-CREATION PROCESS** with the target groups (section II), **SKILLS VALIDATION** - the skills and skill gaps for both groups (section III), **SKILLS TRANSMISSION** - key channels for skills transmission (section IV), with **CONCLUSIONS** for the next steps in developing the **SKILLS4PARENTS LEARNING PACKAGES** (section V).



## SECTION I – NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### WHAT IS PARENTING SUPPORT AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT

Parental support can be defined as the **PROVISION OF SERVICES AIMED AT STRENGTHENING THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES OF PARENTS** so that they can adequately meet the physical, emotional and social needs of their children.

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*“This is the only job you can't get trained for,*

*and it is a job for life you can't quit.”*

*Parent, Belgium*

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The purpose of parenting support is to strengthen the parent's ability to provide the child with optimal conditions for the development and exercise of rights, meaning that **THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF PARENTING SUPPORT IS TO IMPROVE THE CHILD'S WELL-BEING**. Quality parenting support must result in improved educational, behavioural, social and health outcomes, and reduction in overall poverty and social exclusion in children.

However, it is important not to forget that an **ADDITIONAL EXPECTED OUTCOME MUST BE THE WELL-BEING OF THE FAMILY AS A WHOLE** while recognizing that *“good parenting benefits both the child and the parent and can only truly be defined as positive when it provides benefits for both”* ([UNICEF, 2013](#)).

### JURISDICTION OF PARENTAL SUPPORT MEASURES

Parental support measures are largely **IN THE JURISDICTION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**. Traditionally, they have been part of broader policies, including employment, social protection, family, housing, education and health policies. The role of the welfare state in relation to the family was mainly to protect groups "at risk" in a reactive manner. However, social welfare systems are currently in various stages of transition to the **IDEA OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT**, meaning investment in individuals through **EARLY INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION PROGRAMS**. In this way, various



groups are empowered to overcome risks independently - which is encouraged by all research, especially when we talk about the ratio of invested and obtained results through prevention programs in relation to the potential cost of corrective measures. In line with this transition, parenting support is slowly moving away from employment and health policies. It has been recognized that investing in family and parenting support is a strong pledge for the future and one of the ways to raise healthier, more successful and satisfied individuals.

In recent years, parenting support has been **INCORPORATED INTO NATIONAL STRATEGIES AND LEGISLATION IN MANY COUNTRIES**, since it has been noted how effective family support policies can strongly influence child outcomes, for example by reducing poverty and other risk factors that can trigger a lifelong and intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. As mentioned, research strongly suggests they can improve a child's educational achievement, health outcomes, and reduce the risk of future criminal behaviour ([OECD, 2021](#)).

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*"The problem is that parents are not aware of the tools and resources that can help them and the information is so vast that they do not know where to begin."*

*Adult Educator, Cyprus*

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Effective family support policies include:

- ✚ **EMPLOYMENT POLICIES** (work life balance, maternity, paternity and parental leave, financial support, support for inclusion in the labour market, especially for mothers),
- ✚ **SUPPORT FOR UNEMPLOYED PARENTS** (financial support, housing support, educational services, etc.),
- ✚ **FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO PARENTS IN COVERING THE COSTS OF RAISING CHILDREN** (family and child benefits, healthcare, etc.) and
- ✚ **SUPPORT IN PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH.**



It has also been found that **PROVIDING INCLUSIVE QUALITY EARLY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION AND CARE** is vital to a child's development and well-being ([Eurydice, 2019](#)). Research on preschool and early years of education shows that investing in early education can bring large socioeconomic returns, especially for disadvantaged children. More specifically, it seems that the same level of investment has the highest return the younger the user.

With this in mind, there is a trend among EU Member States to organize **PARENTAL SUPPORT THROUGH UNIVERSALLY AVAILABLE SERVICES, WHILE ADDITIONAL TARGETED SERVICES ARE OFFERED TO AT-RISK GROUPS** and/or by local organisations of various kinds ([Feasibility study for a Child Guarantee, 2020](#)).

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*“Parents with disabilities can also need guidance to overcome the lack of solutions offered by mainstream society, for example how to take a baby's temperature for someone with vision impairment.”*

*Parent, Belgium*

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Finally, the [2021 OECD study on strengthening family support services](#) indicates there is growing interest in family support services across different world regions, which increasingly focus on family functioning and parenting issues and are provided by a range of public and private agencies. There exists a wide range of supports to address the needs of families across OECD countries, including health care and mental health services, child protection, support resources for basic material needs such as food and housing, and specialized services for vulnerable families. When examining the national level, we must take into account how **COUNTRIES DIFFER IN THE TRADITION OF INVESTING IN SOCIAL ISSUES, THE WAY OF ORGANIZING SUPPORT, THE AMOUNT OF INVESTMENT AND A NUMBER OF OTHER PARAMETERS**. To illustrate this, we provide a brief overview of the national context of each partner country in the Skills4Parents project – further information is available in the five national reports prepared by the project partners.



## COMPARISON OF THE NATIONAL CONTEXT AT THE LEVEL OF MEMBER STATES PARTNERS IN THE SKILLS FOR PARENTS PROJECT

The project involves 6 organizations from 5 European countries - **THE NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM, ITALY, CROATIA AND CYPRUS**. Statistics from 2018 show that the island of **CYPRUS** has one of the highest proportion of households with children in the EU with a score of 36%, but according to various stakeholders, lacks public authorities/bodies that provide free support to parents. Activities and support for parents in Cyprus rely heavily on the activities of schools' Parents' Associations. The situation is similar in **CROATIA**, but with a robust legal framework for support to parents - starting with free health insurance for all citizens, free education, one-time financial assistance, additional financial support for families in need, long and subsidized maternal and parental leaves, identification of various social problems and adopted strategies and action plans for family support. On the other hand, the services themselves are mostly organized by non-governmental organizations that are very strong in Croatia in the field of providing psychosocial services.

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*"I am not stressed by my kid or parenting; I am stressed by the mental overload of being a primary caretaker – it is hard to take care of everything."*

*Parent, Croatia*

---

The legal frameworks for parents and carers are quite present in **ITALY** as well, providing a mix of family benefits, early childhood services, flexible working arrangements and prolonged paid leaves (maternity, paternity, carers) for parents with different types of work status including self-employed parents. But, just like in other countries there is no centralised support system, but a large amount of big, medium and small programs, projects, institutions and public/private organisations working with/for parents.

On the other hand, the system in **THE NETHERLANDS** is very hands-on with well-known support providers in each municipality. Maybe that is the reason why when parents are worried and have questions about parenting, 61% seek advice or help from people outside the family, family or circle of friends. The remaining parents usually do not find their questions problematic enough to



ask for professional help for this or have already solved it themselves. Only a small part of the parents (4%) do not know where they can get help and 2% finds it difficult to ask for help.

A large majority of Dutch parents are satisfied with the current way of parenting with 75% having positive experiences. It turns out that non-Western parents, parents from single-parent families, parents with only children and parents living below the poverty line are more likely to be negatively disposed towards parenting, than other parents. Only a small minority of the Dutch learning parents seek help to receive information about certain parenting topics they have to deal with.

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*“Sometimes parenting doesn’t evolve the way you had envisioned, however, the child will always be connected to their parents. It means parents have to find their way in good parenting, taking decisions and accepting the vulnerability what comes with it.”*

*Adult Educator, The Netherlands*

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Parenting support for parents in **BELGIUM** is quite present in different forms and provided by different stakeholders. The national agency, Office National de l’Enfance (Kind en Gezin for the Flemish community), provides support to parents especially pre- and post-birth in the early childhood years. Different NGOs also provide support to parents for early childhood and beyond, namely the Ligue of Families (“Gezinsbond” for the Flemish speakers and “Ligue des Familles” for the Francophone speakers), providing different types of supports to families with children with online platforms like [www.goedgezind.be](http://www.goedgezind.be) and building different partnerships with schools. Additionally, there are different types of specialist organisations which support families of children with disabilities, different learning difficulties, digital parenting and more. The legal frameworks for parents and carers is quite strong, providing a mix of family benefits, quality and affordable early childhood services, flexible working arrangements and adequately paid leaves (maternity, paternity, carers) for parents with different types of work status including self-employed parents.



## HARMONIZED STANDARDS AT EUROPEAN UNION LEVEL

Still, even though most family support systems are shaped at national and sub-national level there are also **HARMONIZED STANDARDS AT THE EU LEVEL** linked to different pieces of legislation, as the EU has a **ROLE IN COORDINATING AND MONITORING THESE SOCIAL AND FAMILY POLICIES**.

The 2013 Recommendation [“Investing in Children: breaking the system of disadvantage”](#) adopted a whole family approach to child poverty. It triggered the creation of the **EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR INVESTING IN CHILDREN (EPIC)**, which has been monitoring family support policies and child policies in Member States since, through regular updates, country profiles and EU reports.

In their [2019 report](#), they noted that several Member States have taken significant steps to improve child-wellbeing through positive parenting, as well as improvement on access to Early Childhood Education and Care. The report also highlighted that apart from the direct cash transfers and fiscal support to families, European Member States also provided a wider range of financial and non-material initiatives to support families. Such as the provision of secure and adequate housing as one of the strategies to reduce child poverty and promote social inclusion. Other family policy priorities implemented by Member States focus on facilitating children’s participation in education by the provision of additional financial resources and the delivery of emotional and psychological support. The report also highlights that the increased attention to social rights for EU citizens has had a positive effect on family policies.

Since the proclamation of the [EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS IN 2017](#), the European Union has launched a number of initiatives in order to support and encourage Member States in strengthening social rights for European citizens, and in particular the well-being of children and families. The addition of the social scoreboard to the EU semester process allows the monitoring of policies at national level and their effects on families. The EU can then address possible shortages through specific country recommendations.

One interesting example is the [EU DIRECTIVE ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE](#) for parents and carers (adopted in 2019 and in transposition phase). The directive provides for minimum individual rights related to adequately paid paternity leave, parental leave and carers’ leave; flexible working



arrangements for workers who are parents or carers; and legal protection for those applying for or making use of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements.

Additionally, on the 24th of March 2021, the European Commission put forward the [RECOMMENDATION FOR A CHILD GUARANTEE](#), which aims at reducing child poverty in Europe (prior to the COVID-19 crisis there were approximately 18 million children living in poverty in Europe.) through support to children and families in vulnerable situations. The recommendation identifies five groups of children in vulnerable situations: **CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**, **CHILDREN LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS**, **CHILDREN WITH A MIGRANT OR REFUGEE BACKGROUND** (including Roma children) and **CHILDREN GROWING UP IN VULNERABLE FAMILIES** (e.g. single parent families, large families, families with history of substance abuse or mental health issues...). Member States are expected to endorse the Recommendation through the Council later this year. The adoption should kick off a 6-month period in which Member States will have to draft National Action Plan to implement the Child Guarantee. Hence, we are likely to see evolution in family support policies in line with the provisions of the recommendation, which may further support the objectives of this project.

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*“This is a very specific point in time, and it is hard to work on yourself when you are all at home all the time, in front of screens, with no real work – life balance. Parents should be proud of themselves just for managing to keep it all together.”*

*Parent, Croatia*

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## DETERMINANTS OF QUALITY PARENTAL SUPPORT

Numerous studies show that in addition to positive policies and services that reduce the daily stress of parenthood, it is **CRUCIAL TO TARGET AND HELP DEVELOP PARENTING SKILLS AND PARENTING STYLES** that have a strong and long-lasting impact on children. **INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING SEEM TO BE KEY IN THIS AREA**, and various modalities of service availability are encouraged to increase the likelihood that parents will use them.

There are four main determinants of the quality of parenting support:

### **SCOPE OF SERVICES**

The scope, accessibility, quality and affordability of services, as well as their position within public policies differs among the Member States of the European Union. Some countries, such as France and Sweden, have separate policies regarding parental support and only lean on other regulations in some areas, while in the Czech Republic, for example, parental support is read within many regulations.

### **SERVICE AVAILABILITY**

Universal, as early as possible availability of the service is encouraged, as opposed to reactive intervention. Additional support is provided to families at risk, but basic support is available to everyone. Such a model exists, for example, in Denmark and France.

### **PARENTAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATION**

There is no common model for providing parental support services, so some European countries have centralized services organized at the national level, while in others, such as France, Germany and Italy, services are very fragmented and organized at the local level. However, there is a trend towards a more integrated approach to providing family support through multidisciplinary intersectoral cooperation in the fields of education, health and social care.

### **FINANCING MODELS FOR PARENTING SUPPORT PROGRAMS**

Typically, programs are funded from a variety of sources, including public funding, the voluntary sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), parent organizations, and private companies. Funding models are often the result of service organizations (national versus decentralized systems) and the dominant social welfare model. For example, funding in the



Nordic countries is mostly centralized and public, while in Portugal and Germany it relies heavily on voluntary services, and in France it is funded locally.

### PRACTICES AT EUROPEAN UNION LEVEL

When we talk about promising practices, the following models can be singled out at the European level:

- ✚ Family support networks, as they exist in Belgium, France and Finland
- ✚ Family information centres, which goes in the direction of a more integrated approach
- ✚ Children's educational programs, which aim to empower children in achieving their full potential and parents to be involved
- ✚ Services for young and future parents
- ✚ Positive parenting and conflict resolution support programs
- ✚ ICT services
- ✚ Train the trainer, in order for the service to be provided by capacity experts

The **SKILLS4PARENTS PROJECT WILL CONSIDER CLOSELY HOW TO INTEGRATE THESE GOOD PRACTICES IN THE NEXT STEPS.**

### PRACTICES AT THE LEVEL OF COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THE S4P PROJECT

In addition to the literature review and focus groups, the Skills4Parents partners also identified a wide range of practices identified at the level of each project partner country, which serve as further input for building the guide and online platform. These **PRACTICES CAN BE FOUND ATTACHED IN THE ANNEX OF THIS REPORT.**



## SECTION II – CO-CREATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

With the **AIM TO CO-CREATE LEARNING PACKAGES AND THE ONLINE PLATFORM** to support adult educators and learning parents (and indirectly children), the partner organizations organized **FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS** with the representatives of those target groups to gather valuable information for future actions and development of project outcomes. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in line with responsible behavior towards us and our participants, **MOST OF THE FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS WERE HELD ONLINE** through various communication platforms. Nevertheless, all facilitators of focus groups and interviews, in the beginning, established rules and provided a safe and supportive atmosphere to make it more comfortable for participants to share their experiences and opinions. Just as we defined in the Methodological Framework for the focus groups, apart from the rules at the very beginning, all participants gave their informed consent to participate and use the information and data obtained to prepare this report and other project activities.

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*"Parenting can be hard and there is no universal method, family management is not something that is taught in formal education."*

*Parent, Belgium*

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Each partner country had the task to **ORGANIZE AND CONDUCT 2 FOCUS GROUPS WITH A MINIMUM OF 5 PARENTS AND 5 EDUCATORS**, and to conduct additional interviews if necessary. All organizations from the consortium have completed their task and we can say that we have created a **CROSS-EUROPEAN FOCUS GROUP WITH DIFFERENT PROFILES OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS**.



The learning parents come from **VARIOUS BACKGROUNDS AND EACH OF THEM FACES DIFFERENT CHALLENGES IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIFE**. From divorced and single parents, migrating parents, parents with special needs to partners from big cities, suburban areas to rural. The group was gender-balanced and representing diverse family forms and geographical origins. The adult educator's group was also conducted with educators working on different types of family supports and representing not only the countries from the consortium (Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, The Netherlands) but even wider Europe (Bulgaria, France, Finland, Greece, Hungary).

When we put all this into quantitative indicators the focus groups and interviews brought together **25 ADULT EDUCATORS AND OVER 30 LEARNING PARENTS** who were balanced by gender, geographic territory, socioeconomic status, skill levels and educational (professional) backgrounds. Thus, we satisfied the representativeness of the sample and the set indicators from the project proposal. Below, we present you with an analysis of our findings from the focus groups.



## SECTION III – VALIDATION OF SKILLS

### INITIAL SURVEY

Prior to participating in the focus groups, participants completed **INITIAL SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRES** of key skills that were assessed as important in the phase of project development and that are planned to be developed further through the Skills4Parents project.

The parents were asked how they would assess their communication skills, digital skills, goal setting and problem-solving skills based on a scale from 1 (not good) to 5 (excellent). The results of their responses are shown in Figure 1.

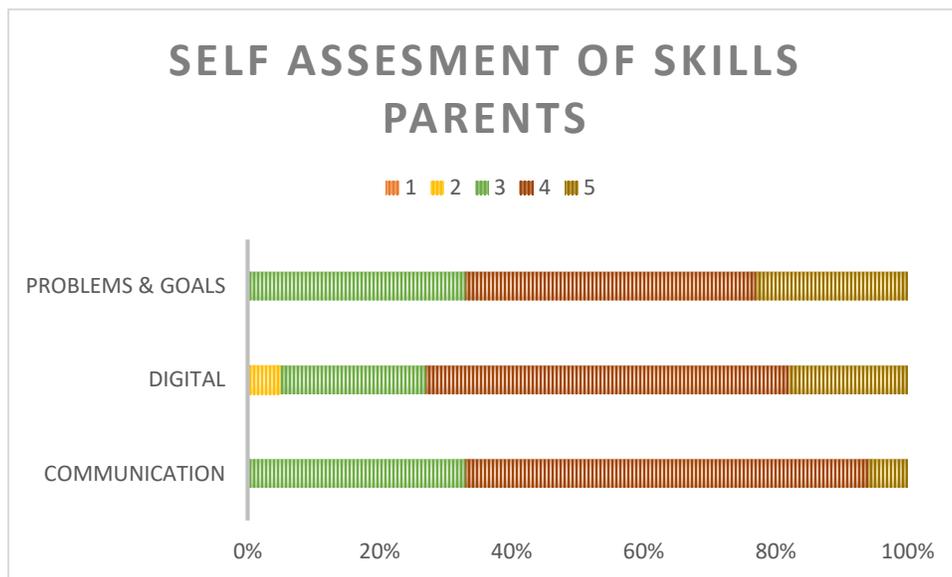


Figure 1. Self-assessment of key competences by parents

As can be seen, the parents rated their existing skills relatively high, but it is important to note that this is not entirely in line with the results obtained through the focus group, which will be discussed later.



Adult educators assessed their skills in the areas of communication, mediation, counselling, and goal setting and problem solving, on a scale from 1 (not good) to 5 (excellent). The results of the answers to the initial survey can be seen in Figure 2.

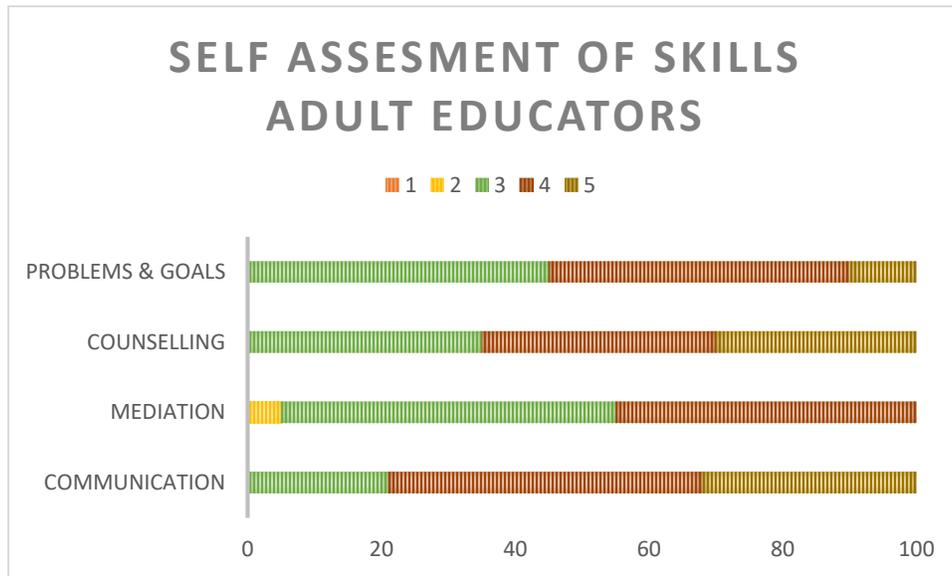


Figure 2. Self-assessment of key competences by adult educators

It is interesting to compare the assessments of parents and educators, especially on a scale of goal setting and problem solving where **PARENTS SELF-ASSESSED AS MORE COMPETENT THAN EDUCATORS**. This could be related to the higher level of self-awareness among educators who are often experts in precisely this area.

The actual development and the need to strengthen these skills were further investigated and verified through focus groups, the results of which are presented below.



## KEY SKILLS DEFINED BY PARENTS

Before we say more about the skills that parents have assessed as key to further development with the goal of increasing their parenting competencies, it is important to mention the **COMMON CHALLENGES** they face in everyday family life. In this way, we can view these needs in the context of the day-to-day challenges of parenthood, which have been **SOMEWHAT ALTERED BY THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.**

---

*“It is very frustrating when we are expected to be everything for our families and to adhere to impossible standards – 3 homecooked meals, no screen time, clean products, organic cotton, enough time outside, 8 hours of work from home, all while basically home-schooling – we need somebody to tell us it is OK to have a pizza night, put on a 20 min of cartoons, take that shower and be a good enough parent to our kids.”*

*Parent, Croatia*

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Parents thus cite difficulties with **COMMUNICATION, ACHIEVING COOPERATION WITHOUT RESISTANCE AND CONFLICT AS WELL AS DIFFICULTIES WITH SETTING BOUNDARIES. ADDITIONALLY, THEY EXPERIENCE CHALLENGES RELATED TO EXHAUSTION, POOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND DIFFICULTIES IN MANAGING TIME.** By managing time, they mean both actual time management, and also spending time in a more quality fashion. With additional challenges amplified by the pandemic, they see the need for more adequate **REGULATION OF SCREEN TIME AND THE INTRODUCTION OF A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE** for the whole family.

Regarding important **EXISTING SKILLS THAT HELP THEM IN EVERYDAY LIFE AS A PARENT,** they single out communication skills such as listening, reflection, discussing, explaining, asking open questions and showing interest, giving compliments, negotiation, conflict resolution, mediation, advising and comforting, setting boundaries, having clear rules, consistency, planning and organizing, personality traits like responsibility, patience, empathy, ability to guide, willingness to learn, positive parenting skills and digital skills.



On the other hand, we will now show what skills parents would like to further develop. In doing so, we will first show the skills pre-identified in the project planning phase and additional gaps identified through our research.

### **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

All parents agree that quality communication is the key to a good parent-child relationship. Features of good communication include **LISTENING SKILLS, ASKING OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, THE ABILITY TO LEAD POSITIVE COMMUNICATION THAT DOES NOT ESCALATE** into discussion. They believe that good communication can prevent, but also solve many difficulties and are interested in further developing their communication skills. On the other hand, parents are also interested in how to communicate with children about **SENSITIVE TOPICS IN AN APPROPRIATE WAY.**

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*"Communications skills are important. Through communication, parents can help children develop in ways that are complementary to their school education, by helping them to take their thinking further."*

*Parent, Belgium*

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### **PROBLEM SOLVING**

Many parents admit that they feel they are rarely successful in solving problems without conflict and that they would like to manage them better. **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT** is seen by parents as important because it is inevitable that when they make decisions as responsible adults, bearing in mind the long-term well-being of the children, that children will not always like it and sometimes disagreements will arise. In their opinion, this is where **MEDIATION SKILLS** would help as a way of fostering alliance and setting healthy boundaries in a way that shows respect for children. Mediation is a procedure in which the parties discuss their disputes and reach a common settlement. Parents believe that in relation to this process it is important to develop listening skills, positive communication, self-reflecting and empathy.



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*"Mediation skills can be useful also when setting rules to children. Challenging rules is a good way to foster active citizenship and reflection in children, empowering them to think critically."*

*Parent, living in Belgium*

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### **DIGITAL SKILLS**

Parents of older children express how difficult it is for them to monitor their children's behaviours in the online world. They need **RELEVANT SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON TRENDS IN THE ONLINE WORLD**, like what should be taken into account and especially monitored. All of this is particularly potentiated by the COVID-19 pandemic when children spend much of their day online and boundaries are often difficult to set rationally.

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*"Considering the speed with which new social media and apps are introduced in our life and in the life of our children, it is fundamental for us parents to keep us updated and informed."*

*Parent, Italy*

---

They also express the general need for education in the field of **SCREEN TIME** (especially parents of younger children), adequate limitation of the same and support in the development of healthy lifestyles.

### **ADDITIONAL GAPS IDENTIFIED**

In addition to the confirmed need to develop the skills envisaged through the project planning process, the research showed an additional space for parental growth. Below is a list of additional skills they want to work on.

 **NEGOTIATING**



A skill that is partly in the domain of communication skills and partly in the domain of conflict management. Parents believe that having this skill would help set reasonable boundaries while avoiding conflict even before it occurs.

#### **PLANNING**

Parents need support in planning time together, but also in planning quality time. This is partly related to the desire to reduce screen time and the introduction of healthy living habits for the family. It is also important to them that they can be supportive of the children in planning their time.

#### **POSITIVE PARENTING**

Parents feel that many need an example of positive parenting because we bring many behaviours from our childhood into our families without questioning them, and these are not always adequate patterns. Parents should be encouraged to reconsider, learn, and really try to change when some behaviours do not have the desired effects or are not beneficial to their relationship with the child.

#### **PRACTICAL SKILLS**

Parents point out that information in principle exists and is available, but to a greater extent for parents of young children. Also, it is not always easy to discern what a relevant source of information is. Parents of children older than 3 years have great difficulty finding such sources that would provide them with clear information about positive parenting styles and parenting methods.

#### **PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPACITIES**

Parents recognize multiple traits in this context and we can put them all under the same denominator. One of them is psychological resilience in response to fatigue, burn out and lack of time for oneself which many parents point out as a major problem they face. Then, parents mention the importance of empathy, especially when setting boundaries, and in the same context also flexibility, adaptability and patience. They also emphasize curiosity in relation to the child, self-awareness, self-respect, being patient and motivated to improve.



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*"Emotional skills should not be forgotten, they are as important as cognitive skills. Take for example the self-confidence of young kids. How on earth should we guide our kids in a world where you are watched and judged all the time? Own responsibility is a hot topic nowadays and kids want to be (and assumed to be) independent and act on their own at a very young age."*

*Parent, The Netherlands*

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### MENTORING

By mentoring parents mean knowledge and ability of skill transfer, specifically, training for independent living, fostering autonomy and responsibility in children, guiding them in developing self-confidence and similar.

### KEY SKILLS DEFINED BY EDUCATORS

When talking about adult educators it is important to mention at the outset which are the topics they work on the most with the learning parents. The answers could mainly be separated into 3 categories - **PERSONAL SKILLS, PARTNER RELATIONSHIP AND PARENTING SKILLS.**

Specifically, when talking about **PERSONAL SKILLS AND COMPETENCES**, we can single out:

-  Communication skills – with emphasis on listening
-  Negotiation skills
-  Conflict resolution (and this can go under other categories as well)
-  Empathy and emotion regulation (patience)
-  True motivation to learn and acquire new skills (can also go under other categories)
-  Practical life skills (e.g., finding a job)

Skills more connected to **PARTNER RELATIONS**:

-  Nurturing a quality relationship
-  Harmonizing parenting styles
-  Dealing with conflict, divorce, and similar



Skills connected to **PARENTING**:

- ✚ Basic knowledge of child development and skills to follow them
- ✚ Knowledge on psychological well-being of children
- ✚ Developmental needs of children and how to adequately attend them
- ✚ “There’s more to it than keeping them clean and fed.”
- ✚ Most of the topics mentioned above – communication skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, interest & empathy...

Educators point out that they would like to know more about each of these topics, so they would like to acquire **KNOWLEDGE SPECIFIC TO THE AREA OF THEIR WORK, BUT ALSO SKILLS** such as counselling, therapeutic, etc.

When we talk about other skills that they partly possess, but also want to further develop, we can mention:

### **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Educators consider this essential when working with beneficiaries, but also for **MODELLING A DESIRABLE PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION STYLE**. They also believe that it is important to recognize, but also to teach non-verbal communication, recognizing it in children. They place special emphasis on **LISTENING** skills.

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*"Three key words to describe our approach to working with families: Listen - Ask - Respect. This is even more important when working with families from different cultures".*

*Adult Educator, Finland*

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This is meant not only **BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND PARENTS**, which is of course undoubtedly a key to success, but also **BETWEEN EDUCATORS** in order to create and maintain an appropriate and effective teamwork.

### **PROBLEM SOLVING**

The way in which educators approach this topic in relation to parents is interesting. Namely, educators place emphasis on listening and guiding through the process, with an emphasis on building confidence in their ability to solve their own problems. They see themselves as people who empower parents in solving their problems, not as people who offer solutions or solve problems.

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*„The aim is not to convince parents to do something but to trust their ability to solve their problems – they know their life, children and capacities the best.”*

*Adult Educator, The Netherlands*

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### **MEDIATION**

One of the most popular skills amongst educators is mediation. This skill is used by educators for a good alliance with parents, a good relationship between parents themselves and also in the relationship between parents and children.

If we know the definition of mediation from the previous section, it is not surprising that educators stress:

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*„It is important to see kids and their parents as experts in the field of parenting. Take their participation and input seriously and consider their answers and solution as crucial to succeed in the end. “*

*Adult Educator, The Netherlands*

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### COUNSELLING

Depending on the profession of the educator and the field of work, the educators emphasize the importance of specialized skills. Thus, many educators who work on sensitive topics and with vulnerable groups and groups at risk single out counselling skills as very important, and also even more specific skills such as **PSYCHOTHERAPY**.

### DIGITAL SKILLS

Digital skills are mostly mentioned by educators in the context of the changed demands of online work in COVID 19 times with which they are not happy in principle.

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*„Digital skills are essential for educators to keep up with changing societies and digital transformations in order not to be left behind, but working offline will remain a key method especially for more vulnerable families who are not so connected or for whom digital tools are not accessible enough.”*

*Adult Educator, Greece*

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Most of the participants agreed on saying that the digitalisation of their work can happen, but should be an **INTEGRATION OF THE NORMAL ACTIVITIES**.

### ADDITIONAL GAPS IDENTIFIED

In addition to the confirmed need to develop the skills envisaged through the project planning process, the research showed an additional space for parental growth. Below is a list of additional skills they want to work on.

#### **CONNECTING AND RESPECTING VULNERABILITY**

Educators believe that it is extremely important in working with beneficiaries to try to achieve a quality relationship, show **RESPECT FOR THE PERSON'S EXPERIENCE** and willingness to work on themselves, and focus on the adoption of more adaptive patterns.



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*„No parent has envisioned to become angry at their kids beforehand. No parent wants to punish kids. This is a result of powerlessness and not knowing how to respond on certain situations. Respect parents' vulnerability and show them their concerns/opinions/input does matter.”*

*Adult Educator, The Netherlands*

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#### **EMPATHY**

Related to the previous point, educators believe that it is important to build their ability to empathize for quality work with parents. In this context, it is important for parents to be able to provide a safe space in which they are accepted with all their differences and ultimately inadequate procedures, and to provide them with support in working within themselves.

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*“Standing aside” the parent is more effective than “standing above” the parent – it creates trust and an open conversation. ”*

*Adult Educator, The Netherlands*

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#### **FACILITATION**

Facilitation is important with the aim of creating interactivity and peer learning in group work, but on the other hand to facilitate a relationship of trust in individual work.

#### **STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Many educators mention the professional stress that accompanies them in working with parents, but also other difficulties that accompany this form of work. For example, some emphasize the need to strengthen the ability to maintain professionalism in situations that trigger them personally. For this reason, they see a great need to work on themselves and their professional competencies, but also for peer or professional support in the form of supervision.



## SECTION IV – TRANSMISSION OF SKILLS

What theorists know on the area of teaching and learning is that **LEARNING NEW KNOWLEDGE OR A SKILL IS AFFECTED BY DIFFERENT COGNITIVE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND EMOTIONAL INFLUENCES**. Therefore, to obtain a skill there has to be motivation, ability to learn and time for practice. In parenting, it is not so easy to always find the time for learning and practicing new skills. It was therefore, important to find out how educators and parents see the channels of skills transmission, what works for them and what will make it easier for them to acquire information and new skills.

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*"I lack time to reach out for help and mentoring - services that support parents should be more automatic."*

*Parent, Belgium*

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We have asked adult educators and parents to define how they prefer to acquire new skills, what kind of materials they deem useful and if they would consider digital methods of learning.

Adult educators and parents across Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Netherlands and Italy mostly agree on similar ways of skill transmission.

Accessibility of the information and tools for transmission (both offline and online) was also considered important.



## OVERVIEW OF SUGGESTIONS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRIES

Most of the participants agree on using **PODCASTS OR SHORT VIDEOS** (Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands) as a good form of knowledge and skill transfer, some suggest developing **PLATFORMS** (Belgium, Croatia, Italy, Netherlands) and to incorporate examples of good upbringing, success stories, best practices (Netherlands, Italy) and webinars (Belgium, Croatia, Italy) in them. One feature of the platform stood out by participants from Belgium, Croatia and Netherlands and that is the possibility of **CHAT** on the platform where parents would have a safe space to ask questions to an educator without judgement and get a professional advice.

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*“I would like to receive more information and advice regarding managing children, or maybe online lectures from psychologists. Time is gold for me, so having this information online and not having to waste time, is a big deal.”*

*Parent, Cyprus*

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One important characteristic of acquiring new skills but also representing a difficulty for parents is lack of time. Because of this the **INFORMATION THEY GAIN HAS TO BE ON POINT AND ILLUSTRATIVE** (Belgium, Croatia, Netherlands), **SHORT** (Croatia, Cyprus) and with an element of **PEER SUPPORT** (Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, Netherlands).

In Belgium and Croatia there has been a creative idea to uplift the features of the future online platform in a way to include a **SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL**, for parents to check their skills and if they lead to positive outcomes. On the topics of **FORUM** there is a slight difference in thinking: educators in Italy reject this method while parents in Croatia, Italy and Netherlands welcome it. Below you can find all the tools that were mentioned during focus groups throughout the countries.



## OVERVIEW OF PREFERRED METHODS OF SKILL TRANSMISSION

### *PODCASTS*

A podcast is a digital audio file made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically.

Some adult educators pointed out that a podcast is a modern version of a book (an e-book), but the goal of that instrument is always to **GIVE KNOWLEDGE, NOT TO INTERACT** and create a debate and new competences. Adult educators think podcasts can be useful to **ALLOW SELF-LEARNING** of adult educators and/or parents while multi-tasking for example cooking up dinner; and also useful for parents who cannot read. Parents mostly agree on using podcasts, they also consider audio books. It is important for parents to have a possibility to **DOWNLOAD PACKAGES** that they can watch and listen to in their own time and at their own pace.

### *SHORT VIDEOS*

Short informative videos are considered both from the adult educator and from the parent point of view a very practical and welcome tool for skills learning. Online video sharing platforms like YouTube are most often mentioned as a media through which short videos can be transmitted.

**NON-INTERACTIVE, SHORT, INFORMATIONAL AND CONCISE VIDEOS (OR VIDEO LESSONS) WITH PICTURES, KEY MESSAGES AND LINKS** about specific arguments are a good way for transmitting skills for most participants and easy to consume.

### *NEWSLETTERS*

Newsletters were mentioned by the parents as a way of attracting their attention because the news and **INFORMATION COME TO THEM WITHOUT THEM HAVING TO LOSE TOO MUCH TIME ON SEARCHING A TOPIC.**

Parents highlighted their preference for automatic updates such as newsletters or organizations reaching out to them through schools. It helps to have this type of regular support that is effortless on their side, and provided automatically.



## ONLINE MODULES

Online modules are most often referred to as online lessons or units and they contain activities organized to create a clear learning path for students.

Adult educators state that online modules can include different types of tools like **VIDEO TESTIMONIES** from parents and children, online **QUIZZES, SELF-LEARNING MATERIAL** but they emphasize that they **NEED TO BE TRAINED** to use such online modules. Interactive online modules can come with a **HANDBOOK** with visuals and short sections what will be easier to read. For each module or learning package that would be developed it would be helpful to include a summary with key points, tips (in bullet form) and success stories.

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*"Parents cannot be expected to stay ahead of the curve on digital innovations,  
they lack reliable information sources about digital trends"*

*Parent, Belgium*

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## WEBINARS

Parents and educators are in line regarding the attitude towards webinar. Most of them already use them for learning a new skill or to transmit skills. Webinars are mentioned as a tool that could be **PART OF THE PLATFORM** and to be **CARRIED OUT BY PROFESSIONALS**.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a popular way of transmission of information for a specific group, in this case parents. Educators think that **QUOTES AND FACTS** on the Facebook page of the Skills4Parents project is a good way to engage parents.



Most parents state that they use some types of **GROUPS** on social media to connect with other parents and **EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION** (Facebook or Whatsapp groups). For some parents, social media represents **THE MOST USED METHOD FOR GATHERING NEW SKILLS**. Parents mainly use WhatsApp for **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS** (most valuable for all) and social media (Facebook groups and Instagram).

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*“We have a family group on Facebook. My teenage son locks himself in his room. So sometimes to communicate with him I have to send him messages through the family group chat even though we are in the same house!”.*

*Parent, Cyprus*

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Instagram is mentioned as a media through which **SHORT TIPS OR SHORT INFORMATIVE VIDEOS** could be useful for parents. Since there is a vast number of parenting books and online communities on Facebook or Yahoo, parents often feel overwhelmed by this diverse offer and they lack time to find the right one for their needs.

### **ONLINE (LEARNING AND VIDEO CONFERENCE) PLATFORMS**

An online learning platform is an integrated set of interactive online services that provide trainers, learners and other involved in education with information, tools and resources to support and enhance education delivery and management (litmos.com).

Parents’ suggestions on how the platform could be more **USER FRIENDLY AND PROVIDE MORE ENGAGEMENT** of parents is by including (some of) these features on the platform:

- ✚ examples of good parenting, success stories, best practices
- ✚ tips from parent to parent (as a form of peer mentoring)
- ✚ online articles



- ✚ frequently asked questions and
- ✚ interactive features like: chat, forum, tests or self-assessment material, polls, quizzes games

Some educators suggest **VIDEO CONFERENCE PLATFORMS** (like Zoom and Whatsapp) as these are quite accessible and user-friendly but it can be difficult for adult educators to engage confidently with all the different platforms used so additional professional skills upgrading are needed.

### *INTERACTIVE TOOLS INTEGRATED IN A PLATFORM OR AN APP*

#### ✚ **CHAT**

This is a feature that was appealing to mostly parents meaning that there is a chat option for **PARENTS TO TALK WITH EXPERTS** in the field on a voluntary basis without being judged. Chat function where parents can ask professionals for help would maybe be easier to integrate on a mobile app instead on an online platform.

#### ✚ **FORUM**

A forum is also an online tool through which **EDUCATORS AND PROFESSIONALS COULD BE MORE ACCESSIBLE ON DEMAND AS WELL AS THROUGH CHAT**. Although some educators reject forums as a way of transmitting new skills, some parents are very fond of this kind of tool and training method.

#### ✚ **SELF-ASSESSMENT MATERIAL/TOOL**

Another good example of interactive tool that parents mentioned where they can assess their own skills, are **SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS FOR SKILLS EVALUATION** which can be integrated in platforms. Other than assessing their own skills, test and tools that could be more engaging to parents could be tracking and monitoring their child's progression on some level.



## GAMES

Some adult educators mention using games to target **CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS**, but can also be useful in working and transmitting skills to parents as well and they can include polls or quizzes for example.

Participants agree that **ONLINE TOOLS AND FORMS OF LEARNING ARE PROVIDING POSSIBILITIES TO ENGAGE MORE FAMILIES IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS BUT ALSO TO FAMILIES WHO ARE IN MORE RURAL AREAS**. They also agree that workshops in person and maintaining the options for offline ways of learning is important to them as well as to gain a professional point of view with reliable sources. Lack of time would be the most emphasized issue for parents and therefore **THERE SHOULD BE VARIOUS MEANS AND TOOLS OF SKILLS TRANSMISSION WITH A DIVERSE APPROACH, BUT ALWAYS AS SHORT, ILLUSTRATIVE AND INFORMATIVE AS POSSIBLE**.



## SECTION V – CONCLUSIONS

Based on the feedback of the focus group participants across several European countries, the five national reports and this European report drawing out the main trends and recommendations, the Skills4Parents partnership now has **KEY NEEDS ANALYSIS AND BUILDING BLOCKS TO BUILD THE SKILLS4PARENTS GUIDE AND THE ONLINE PLATFORM WITH LEARNING PACKAGES** for adult educators and parents. Key dimensions to consider in the next steps for the development of the guide, and the digital version of the guide in the online platform:

The **VALUES** which underpin the guide: supporting all types of families without discrimination, social inclusion, gender equality, intergenerational solidarity, empowerment of parents, and human rights (based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

The **CHOICE OF SKILLS SETS** to put focus on in the guide based on the validation of the focus groups, and also the acknowledgement of other skills highlighted by the focus groups and their integration (or not).

The **FORMAT OF THE GUIDE**, creating learning packages for use directly by parents, and also by adult educators to boost their work with parents and children. These packages should be specific enough, but also open enough to apply to different parenting cultures and styles.

The **LEARNING OUTCOMES** of the guide, such as 1. boosting capacity of parents to engage better with children and people in the community working with their children. 2. help adult educators acquire knowledge on parenting challenges and needs.

The **METHOD AND APPROACH**, based on a learning or training model.

The **CONTENT OF THE LEARNING PACKAGES** (e.g. articles, tips, infographics, quotes, videos).