

Camilo, C., Baptista, J., Grangeia, H., Negrão, M., Pastor, I., Gaspar, A., Soares, I., & Alves, S. (2024). *The integrated model of family foster care (MIAF®): a study on the process evaluation of recruitment, assessment, and training of foster families in Portugal*. 1-1. Abstract from ISPCAN SWEDEN 2024, Uppsala, Sweden.

Compared to other European countries, family foster care (FFC) in Portugal is under-resourced and under-implemented (3.6% of children in foster care, compared to 96.4% in residential care; CASA Report, 2022). A shift to alternative care in a family environment is urgent and requires a combination of public policies and resources to promote high-quality practices that guarantee sustainable change. With the regulation of FFC in 2019 (DL no. 139/2019), which reinforces this alternative care as the preferred one for children up to the age of 6, institutions have begun to make efforts to effectively implement this measure. However, establishing a system of FFC is challenging. Among other reasons, it entails the need for specialized child welfare services to address the recruitment, training, and supervision of foster families, to provide adequate support to carers and children, and to ensure good matching decisions (Harlow, 2021). Indeed, failures in child welfare reforms are explained, at least in part, by accelerated changes relying on unprepared staff and evidence-practice gaps (Anghel et al., 2013). Therefore, this project focuses on the initial implementation phase of the Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF), recently developed by the ProChild Collaborative Laboratory (ProChild CoLAB) and the oldest charity in Portugal with a large experience in Child Protection and Welfare (i.e., Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa). Its development responds to the national priority in terms of child protection policies, to promote high-quality practices and help foster families and children to achieve outcomes of safety, stability, and well-being. Implementation science frameworks (Albers et al., 2017) share a stage-based approach, ascertaining that process and outcome evaluations, rooted in a theory of change, should precede effectiveness testing and full implementation. This specific study focuses on process evaluation and aims to analyze the fidelity, feasibility, and acceptability of MIAF's first three key-processes (Awareness raising and foster families' recruitment; Pre-service training, and Assessment and selection of foster families), through a multi-informant approach. The project will include as participants the caseworkers and team leaders involved in the implementation of the MIAF from four child welfare agencies (40 professionals estimated) in the North and Center regions of Portugal, and the respective foster families' applicants receiving the MIAF. Model providers will be invited to complete fidelity and feasibility forms after each key-process of MIAF, as described above. The Conceptual Framework for Implementation Outcomes (Proctor et al., 2009) will guide the data analysis, and the results will be organized into specific implementation outcomes (Proctor et al., 2011). These results will inform the continuous quality improvement of the MIAF, which is crucial for the successful implementation of evidence-based interventions in an emerging FFC system in Portugal.