Authors: Synthesis Center for Research and Educaiton

Version: Final

Status: Completed

womenhomeworking

Desk Research

Summary

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The WHOW Project

The WHOW project focuses on young people, specifically young women who became mothers at a young age and had a pause in their education, training, or career path. This break has occasionally resulted in a knowledge and skills gap that requires completion or an update before returning to the job market.

The WHOW project addresses the following need: to play a facilitative role in these young mothers' transition period to ensure a return to training for a job in a home office. The need to work from home is a reality for many young mothers who want to return to work but need or want to stay with their young child or do not have access to childcare and would therefore prefer a job from home, in a transitory way until the child's schooling or until the child is old enough to attend an early childhood centre.

One coordinator and four partner organisations from five partner countries, GIP FIPAN (FR), Exeo Lab Srl (IT), DRAMBLYS (SP), and Right Challenge (PT) and, SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education (CY), will implement a methodological framework aiming to evaluate the situation of very young mothers, their link to training, how to avoid dropping out, and what activities are available to them to work at a distance.

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Background

For many women worldwide, motherhood is a significant aspect of life, and motherhood is considered crucial to women's identity in communities where motherhood is highly desired. Teenage motherhood, which occurs at a critical developmental stage in teenagers' lives, has been linked to adverse social and health outcomes.

Due to motherhood, young mothers experience increased responsibilities, social recognition, and a sense of purpose. Despite the benefits of motherhood, young mothers face challenges that impact their lives. Managing competing demands of schooling, work, and caring for a baby in a settlement site were frequently mentioned as challenges.

Globally in 2021, an estimated 14 per cent of adolescent girls and young women give birth before the age of 18. Early childbearing, or pregnancy and delivery during adolescence, can derail girls' otherwise healthy development into adulthood and negatively impact their education, livelihoods, and health. Pregnant girls are pressured or forced to drop out of school, affecting their educational and employment prospects and opportunities.

In 2009, the EU reported over 206 000 teenage live births, corresponding to an average adolescent birth rate of 15.0, ranging from 5.3/1000 in the Netherlands to 46.7/1000 in Bulgaria. Eastern Europe had the highest teenage birth rate on average, owing to high rates in Bulgaria and Romania, a moderate rate in Slovakia, and low rates in the remaining states. Teenage birth rates in Northern Europe were average in the United Kingdom, Latvia, and Estonia, low in Ireland and Lithuania, and very low in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden. According to research, teenage birth rates in Southern Europe were primarily low, while they were deficient in Western Europe. In Eastern Europe, the proportion of adolescent mothers was two to three times higher than in other regions.

Research shows that young mothers who receive adequate support with childcare are more likely to complete their education. Childcare options and other assistance forms should be available to support young mothers. This support could include subsidised childcare, flexible hours, or online courses to help young mothers balance parenting and educational advancement.

Purpose and Approach of the Desk Research

The desk research has an exploratory purpose for the WHOW project. The aim is not to provide a comparative data analysis in a strict sense, as this is neither needed nor within the resources, but to understand the situation and background of each partner country and the WHOW partner network.

The research focused on young mothers aged 14-25, exploring childcare responsibilities, education, employment opportunities, mental health, social support networks, and policy changes that may affect young moms. Through this review, we aimed to gain insight into young mothers' experiences and determine how best to support them in their parenting journey. In addition to the research, a questionnaire was created for young mothers to complete, so we could get their insights as well (see Annex 1). The research focused on answering seven questions that would provide great insight into each country's situation. These questions were:

1. Please give a very brief overview of the situation in your country: the number of women 14-25 who have children, the percentage of young mothers who dropped out of high school/college or quit their job
2. Please identify what are the challenges of motherhood at that young age.
3. Please mention (If any) organisations that provide mentorship and education about parenting, nutrition, and other topics to help teenage mothers become self-sufficient. Do those organisations offer support groups, therapy services, and workshops to foster a sense of community for young parents?
   Is there feedback on young mothers' needs from existing programs?
4. In terms of policy making, what are the gaps in education specifically for young mothers? Teenage mothers often have less access to education, with many dropping out of school altogether due to pregnancy or parenting responsibilities. Despite the increasing number of teenage pregnancies, few policies still address education for young mothers
5. Please give a short characterization of the policies of existing funding programs (from national, European, and international sources, etc.) for young mothers. Is it a topic in this area, and what are the aims and practices?
6. Do you have any policy recommendations from the stakeholders of your country regarding the reintegration of young mothers into education or the job market?
7. Please describe good practices that can point WHOW to innovative success stories of applying the training by young mothers. Please highlight the background of the female promoters of these practices and what

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competencies they have used (your observation or information about the course).

FRANCE

In France, there is no specific data about young mothers between the ages of 14 and 25. However, the numbers suggest that teenage mothers have been reducing over the years. In 2018, only 1,5% of births were from mothers under 20. An interesting fact is that previously, most young mothers were married. However, according to the latest figures, 96% of young mothers under 20 are now unmarried when they give birth. Data also suggests that the first birth is planned more than an unexpected occurrence, and young mothers are now rare. This decline is attributed to the use of contraceptives, access to abortions, higher education of women, improvement of women's employment, and changes to the status of women in both family and society. Regarding young mothers and education or employment, there is no data on them dropping out or leaving work due to pregnancy.

Some of the challenges identified for young mothers are:

- Stigmatisation by society, especially if the child is born out of wedlock, which is 96% of the births from young mothers.
- Trouble continuing their education.
- Trouble reentering the workforce.
- Financial difficulties due to the high cost of living and the barriers they face to education and training reduce their earning potential. This challenge is especially true in the case of single mothers who often might also face poverty.
- Maintaining a balance between work and family life. Even beyond the first three years of the baby's life, the expensive childcare services remain a big issue for mothers in France who usually try to turn towards early childhood centres and institutions.

When it comes to the support of young mothers, there are associations and foundations, local or national, that assist pregnant women, minors or adults, and single mothers in difficult situations. The main financiers of these organisations are the municipalities, the government, and the Family Allowances Fund. In addition to this basic support, some also offer workshops or information, training, and education activities on topics related to parenthood. The French child welfare service intervenes in different areas, such as support for parenting, prevention, child protection, situations of danger and abuse, and adoption procedures. Lastly, the Mother and Child Protection Centers offer parent-child care, nutritional workshops, and Birth Preparation Centers.

Under French law, pregnancy does not justify exclusion from a public school. There is assistance from school personnel, such as accommodations or an exemption from attending school for medical reasons (and thus following her

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education by correspondence). This is important since 50-75% of adolescents drop out of school during pregnancy without school support, and only half return afterwards. Additionally, specific support exists at the local and regional levels, as some universities in France have opened crèches for students' children.

When it comes to aids, there is no specific state aid for teenage mothers. However, there are aids for all pregnant women under certain financial conditions. The National Family Allowances Fund has set three objectives: to accompany parents when their child arrives, to support them in their children's education, and to accompany and prevent family breakdowns. In France, expenditure on parenting support schemes increased by 74% between 2013 and 2020, reaching 122.3 million euros in 2020, indicating the great need for such financial support.

Policy recommendations made include:

- Reforming the CMG "childminders" to better support families, especially single-parent families.
- Promoting the professional integration of single parents.
- Better sex education in schools for both girls and boys.
- More flexibility in the workplace and education regarding hours or even remote access.
- Routine psychological care from the beginning of the pregnancy for all mothers, especially young ones.

Good practices suggested are:

- The association Pupilles de l'Enseignement Public (PEP) offers the SAMELY project, which supports pregnant high school students. The objective is to promote school continuity and to fight against the risks of dropping out and isolation of pregnant high school students or young mothers by offering them individual support, which can last up to 2 years.
- The Bon Voyage Maternal Center of the Association is a child protection facility offering a place for young women. The objective during this stay is to accompany young mothers in their efforts and encourage them to take charge of their lives, to train and, finally, to find a job.

A recommendation from doing the research is to consider the variety of profiles likely to integrate this support that WHOW will design. From a cultural and linguistic point of view, but also in terms of digital accessibility, level of education and mobility, the young people who will integrate the project will have similar needs but potentially (very) different professional and personal situations. Therefore, It will be

necessary to offer them tools that can be adapted to their needs and be accessible to the majority of them.

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ITALY

According to ISTAT - The National Institute of Statistics – more than 10,000 young mothers are registered annually in Italy. Most of these live in southern Italy, especially in Campania and Sicily. In recent years, however, the Lombardy region (in northern Italy) has recorded an increase in this trend. It is important to note that the number of young foreign mothers is significantly higher than young mothers of Italian origins. This means that the cultural factor greatly influences this phenomenon. Additionally, this figure is influenced by the fact that girls in Italy can voluntarily terminate their pregnancy while foreign girls do not and have to carry it out despite all the difficulties.

Statistics show that 90% of all young Italian mothers are themselves the daughters of young mothers. This suggests that these girls have consciously chosen to become mothers or that, on the other hand, they may have been influenced by the family context in which they live. An alarming statistic shows that 70% of fathers quit the family unit, leaving young mothers and children in dire financial conditions. The young mothers of Italy live in a country that, on the one hand, is industrialised and civilised but, on the other, is still full of stereotypes. A questionnaire looking into sexist behaviour revealed deeply rooted sexism from men, and surprisingly, women's views aligned with those sexist views. One statement upon which many in the questionnaire agreed was that women are better suited to raise children and should give up their careers. This data says a lot about the culture of Italian women, who are still locked in stereotypes that preclude their future.

The biggest problem is that Italy does not help enough young mothers who simultaneously decide to work or study and care for their children. Remote working is a good solution, but it needs to be implemented correctly. According to research, the wrong way leads to staying 'online' beyond regular working hours and decreases efficiency and productivity. The day for young mothers who work, or study, is also usually very stressful. This forces them to neglect themselves as they try to dedicate more time to work and their families. As a result, it negatively affects their physical and mental health. Another big concern is their financial independence. In the twenty-four months after maternity, a woman earns, on average, between 10% and 35% less than she would have earned if she had not had the child. Another problem is that there are few public nurseries in Italy where a young woman can leave her child without high costs, and private establishments are expensive.

Italy's economically disadvantaged single mothers do not fall into the Protected Category. They are recognised like all other mothers without any difference. They have the possibility of requesting financial aid from consultancies or social services. However, there are several structures for their psycho-physical and economic support where they can apply for help. Young mothers who do not have a home can apply for placement in a "Casa Famiglia" Family Home. In small

communities, this welfare facility hosts children awaiting fostering or adoption, single mothers, people with mental illness, and disabled children. It runs rehabilitation activities with the help of social workers and volunteers. There the mothers can live and be cared for during the period of pregnancy and in the postnatal period. As a result, while there, the new mothers will share spaces with other women living in the same condition and be supported in caring for the child. In the Family Home, single mothers are looked after by social workers and psychologists. In addition to Family Homes, there are also other types of establishments called CAVs – “Centri di Aiuto alla Vita” (Help for Life Centres) where they help new mothers in financial difficulty, assisting them in finding work, providing psychological assistance or even simply providing their children with a change of nappies, baby food and new clothes.

In the case of young mothers still receiving their education, a good “best practice” would be for institutions and organisations to offer a remote access option so young mothers can continue their studies or training. For mothers working, a remote work or hybrid system might better enable them to work and care for their children, as long as the above mentioned issue of spending too many hours because of remote work is avoided.

Two examples of such “best practices” that are put into place are:

- Danone Company's programme to support families. The company informs the mother-to-be about her rights. It allows her to rely on experts to learn more about the psychological aspects of pregnancy. In addition, a communication channel with the company remains open at all times, even during leave, to keep the new mother updated on news and new projects. The company supplements the period of optional maternity leave with a financial contribution, raising the new mother’s salary from 30% to 60%. The father is also guaranteed 20 days of paid paternity leave to enable him to share the first moments of his newborn baby’s life. They help the family by donating baby products from 6 months to 3 years of age and support parents through a contribution, including financial support, for the care and education of their children.
- MILANO IN-BLOOM, in agreement with SAGA - Service for Accompanying Parenthood in Adolescence of the San Carlo Hospital and San Paolo Hospital in Milan, a cooperative of educators, has designed a support service for young mothers. The commitment is to help the girls, followed by SAGA, to finish the compulsory school cycle, look for a job that will allow them to achieve economic independence, and solve the problems they often face without adequate family support.

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As we can see, there is a lack of legislation tailor-made for young mothers in Italy who are recognised as simple mothers when they need much more help and support, both moral and economic. Awareness and sensitisation to this phenomenon will be the first step for both business and politics in Italy to achieve collective welfare without excluding anyone.

SPAIN

In Spain, the adolescent birth rate has decreased, but rates of change have been uneven across the country. It was estimated that the number of teenage pregnancies has significantly decreased, comparing the total number of 15.133 young mothers in 2008 with 7.839 registered cases in 2017. According to the National Institute of Statistics in Spain (NSI), in the first half of 2017, 1.778 teenage mothers carried on with their pregnancy and child-bearing, representing 1.95% of the total population of mothers. Thus, every second woman in a hundred was an adolescent mother. In contrast, in 2016, the number of young women who interrupted their pregnancies was 9.781, 10,5 % of the total voluntary interruptions. Overall, between 2010 and 2016, the number of young people who ended their pregnancy with abortion generally decreased. Whether the pregnancy is interrupted or not depends on the social context of a young woman, especially if there is any support from her partner or parents. Such factors as religion, ideology, and living conditions are crucial in making a final decision.

No family support, partner's disapproval or rejection, intergenerational violence, migration, low education attainment level, early pregnancy cases in the family and consequent repetition of "teen pregnancy" are some of the reasons and undesirable consequences of early pregnancy. In most cases, it is unintended motherhood, resulting from sexual violence, poor treatment and low self-esteem, information gap regarding sexual education and, worst of all, fear of loneliness and exclusion. If they decide to assume a parenting responsibility, they are more likely to become socially stigmatised, especially if there is no family or economic support. Thus, their lives are controlled by cultural and social determinism theory. Adolescent parenting becomes extremely delicate after a child's birth, occasionally leaving no other choice for young mothers but to leave their newborn child to another family.

There are some governmental and nongovernmental organisations that aim to help teenage mothers obtain self-sufficiency. Spain has launched assistance programs like the "Preinfant.org: Program of Support for pregnant adolescents" project in collaboration with the Healthcare and Development Association (HDA). The Association is financially supported by local, municipal and regional governments of Spain and a few private noncommercial organisations. It is an assistance program for mothers in vulnerable situations that helps from pregnancy to the first three years of a child's life.

Regarding policies, teenage mothers often have less access to education, with most dropping out or not completing high school and university altogether because of pregnancy or parenting responsibilities. Despite the increasing number of teenage pregnancies, few policies still address education for young mothers. School completion is the main educational issue that needs to be addressed for expectant and parenting young families. Only a few young mothers attain their high school

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diploma by 22, let alone that of the other higher education institutions. Hence, they may suffer from reduced earning potential, lack of development in employment skills, and a higher likelihood of living in poverty.

In contrast, the Entrepreneurship Support Program for Women (known as "PAEM" in Spanish) is a national program promoted by the Women's Institute and the Spanish Chamber of Commerce with co-financing from the European Social Fund. Its objective is to provide business advice for women with an innovative business idea or project or a plan to modernise and expand an existing business. The "PAEM" offers business guidance, a basic self-diagnosis to assess the viability of your business project, support for growing European and national networks, financing through a microcredit without guarantees of up to €25,000 (collaboration with MICROBANK) and last but not least, "W&W Women's Wisdom" project, which connects women with successful experiences (mentors) of entrepreneurs whose advice they can use. "Microcredits without guarantees¨ is an initiative within the framework of the "PAEM" programme, which offers the possibility of accessing microfinancing of up to 25,000 euros to women who are thinking of creating their own company or promoting an existing one. The program is developed thanks to a collaboration agreement signed between the Women's Institute and MICROBANK.

Some additional good practices identified are:

- Women Association "Bahía Gaspar García Laviana", Nicaragua. The initiative is to set up some workshops in rural areas with low economic opportunities to help young mothers provide for their basic needs. The project aims to offer financial resources and space for exchange, community and solidarity between young women from different backgrounds. It also improves the level of independence and self-sufficiency.

- "Generation Her" is a nonprofit organisation in Southern California dedicated to empowering teen mothers of 13 to 25 years old and their children, connecting them to a community of other teen mothers and adult mentors, and equipping them with desired life skills. The organisation encourages independence by teaching life skills such as budgeting, money management, job interviewing skills, parenting, resume building, cooking, self-defence, nutrition, stress and anger management, and relationship workshops.

- Maternando Social Project. Adolescent mothers often lack family support and economic and social resources. This project was launched to help such a disadvantaged target group transition to adulthood and has turned into a permanent one. The project has a social space, where five days a week from Monday to Friday between 9:00 and 15:00 hours, there are different activities related to the day-to-day living of teen mothers, which are carried out so that mothers can always bring their children. These group activities include training

courses about furthering school education, employability improvement, parenting, sexuality and sex, physical fitness and well-being, self-care and emancipation. Apart from group activities, some individual services are provided depending on the needs, whether health professionals consultations or psychological assistance. The project offers workshops about labour market entrance and employment opportunities for young women.

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PORTUGAL

According to the available data from Eurostat, in 2020, the birth rate among women aged 15-19 in Portugal was 5.5 per 1000 women. There is no specific data available for women aged 20-25. Regarding the percentage of young mothers who dropped out of high school or college or quit their job, there wasn't any recent data specifically for Portugal. However, according to 2019 reports from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, in the EU, early motherhood is associated with a higher risk of early school leaving and lower levels of educational attainment and a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. According to Eurostat, in 2020, the early school leaving rate for female students aged 18-24 in Portugal was 10.7%. This means that around 1 in 10 young women in this age group left education and training without completing upper secondary education. However, this data does not explicitly indicate how many of those who left school early did so due to becoming mothers.

Becoming a mother at a young age can bring many challenges, some of which may include:

- Educational challenge.
- Financial challenges.
- Social challenges.
- Health challenges.
- Lack of support.

Several organisations provide mentorship and education about parenting, nutrition, and other topics to help teenage mothers become self-sufficient. A sense of community is always promoted. However, overall, there is a need for comprehensive policies that address the unique challenges faced by teenage mothers in Portugal and provide support for their education and career development.

Several funding programs from national, European, and international sources aim to support young mothers in Portugal. The aims of these funding programs vary, but generally, they aim to help young mothers in areas such as education, health, and employment. Practices may include providing access to childcare services, counselling, education and job training programs, and financial assistance. However, it is important to note that there may be gaps and limitations in existing funding programs, and more comprehensive policies and funding may be needed to address the needs of young mothers in Portugal fully. Additionally, the impact of these funding programs may vary depending on factors such as accessibility, awareness, and effectiveness of implementation.

Some possible policy recommendations that could be beneficial for the reintegration of young mothers into education or the job market include the following:

- Comprehensive sex education

- Flexibility in education and employment
- Vocational training and job opportunities
- Support services: Providing support services, such as counselling and mentoring,
- to help young mothers manage the challenges of parenting while pursuing
- education or employment.
- Stigma reduction: Addressing stigma and discrimination towards young
- mothers through public education campaigns, community engagement, and
- policies that promote inclusion and respect for diversity.

A few good practices have been identified, such as:

- The Mães com Vida project provides training and support to young mothers to help them re-enter the job market. The project includes a 12-week training program covering communication skills, digital literacy, and financial management. Participants also receive mentorship and support in job search and employment placement. Female professionals with expertise in training, coaching, and social work lead the project. They use their competencies to provide personalised support to each participant based on their needs and goals.
- The Empowerment of Teenage Mothers project aims to provide vocational training and support to teenage mothers to help them achieve financial independence. The project includes a six-month training program covering computer skills, entrepreneurship, and career development. Participants also receive mentorship and support in job search and employment placement. Female professionals with expertise in vocational training, entrepreneurship, and social work lead the project. They use their competencies to provide tailored support to each participant based on their interests and skills.
- "Mãe Querida" (Beloved Mother) program provides teenage mothers with parenting education, counselling services, and support groups. The program also offers vocational training and job placement services. The program has been successful in helping teenage mothers improve their parenting skills, achieve financial stability, and build supportive relationships with other mothers. Female social workers and educators lead the program with competencies in counselling, parenting education, vocational training, and job placement.

Through the needs analysis, it became apparent that there is a need for further support for young mothers in terms of education and training to increase their self-sufficiency and employment prospects. The needs analysis also identified the importance of addressing systemic barriers and engaging young mothers as active participants in the project design and implementation.

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The issue of cultural and linguistic diversity: Portugal is a diverse country, with different cultures and languages represented. A project to support young mothers should be inclusive and sensitive to these differences, ensuring that all young mothers have access to resources and support regardless of their cultural or linguistic background.

CYPRUS

According to information found by Cyprus Statistical Service (CYSTAT) [1], the average age of a mother at the birth of her first child was 29,6, which means most mothers in Cyprus do not fall within the 14 -25 category. The total number of births at the age of 15-19 fluctuates, and childbirths out of wedlock have increased. There were 165 total births in 2019, and only 58 were from married women; this means 107 births were from single mothers. Of course, this is a big assumption, as not being recognised as married by the country does not necessarily mean that the woman is single and that there is no father in the picture. It only means that there is no state record of the marriage. At the very least, we can conclude that those were the total births within the age range of 15 – 19 in 2019. Within the ages of 20 – 24, there were 894 births, out of which the country recognised 428 as single mothers. Both age groups together make up about 9% of the total births in the country in that year. It is also worth mentioning that Cyprus has one of the EU's highest asylum application-to-inhabitant ratios. This fact also begs the question if there are any young mothers among these asylum seekers. However, it was impossible to find any data on that.

When it comes to dropping out of school, no reliable data separates pregnancy as the reason for dropping out. However, these are the more generic data that state that the female dropout rate is about 10% or less. However, there is no additional information about these women or why they dropped out. In CYSTAT, there is data on women registered as unemployed. However, these are only the women registered with the government, which is only a partial picture of the situation in Cyprus. In 2022 there were 23 women under the age of 20 registered as unemployed and 314 women between the ages of 20 and 24.

Early childbearing, or pregnancy and delivery during adolescence, can derail girls' otherwise healthy development into adulthood and negatively impact their education, livelihoods and health. Pregnant girls are pressured or forced to drop out of school, affecting their educational and employment prospects and opportunities. Early pregnancy and childbearing can also have social consequences for girls, including reduced status in the home and community, stigmatisation, rejection and violence by family members, peers and partners, and early and forced marriage. In addition, pregnant adolescents often develop low self-esteem and face harmful traditional and cultural violence, such as forced marriages, which were not recognised as gender-based violence in the Cypriot context, making it nearly impossible for the researchers to measure them.

It is also worth noting that single mothers seem to suffer more, whether financially or due to the confounding reasons mentioned above, which limit their employment potential and do not allow them to become economically independent. Lastly, despite the many efforts of various organisations to tackle gender

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discrimination and imbalances in Cyprus, signs of sexism and exclusion are still taking place.

Teenage mothers are hardly ever mentioned unless the discussion is about avoiding teen pregnancies, teaching sex education, or talking about abortions and unwanted pregnancies. So, even though there seem to be many programs that can most likely benefit teenage or young mothers, these programs are often addressed to mothers or new families. Such organisations include:

- Caritas Cyprus is an organisation whose mission "is to work for a better world for those living in poverty, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. Inspired by Christian values, we work with all who are marginalised, regardless of race or religion.
- The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, an NGO actively working towards gender equality in Cyprus, and their team seems to be exclusively run by women.
- The Cyprus Family Planning Association (CFPA) is an organisation focused on Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Cyprus. Comprehensive Sexuality Education and advocacy are the main priorities of the organisation. CFPA plans, implements, and evaluates sexuality educational programs targeted to children and young people, professionals and parents.
- National Movement for Women's Rights, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice and its main objectives are:
  - the elimination of discrimination and the establishment of equality in all areas of law
  - increasing the participation of women in public and political life and, in general, in decision-making positions
  - enlightening women about their rights and raising awareness of society as a whole for equality.
  - preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, and empowering and strengthening Non-Governmental Organisations working in this field.

A few policies are in place that do not specifically mention young mothers. There is a policy that aims to help young people continue their school or job training and help them either remain in school or continue to improve their abilities for their work. However, there is no mention of teenage mothers. There is a government plan called "Thalia" that is running from 2021 to 2027, whose purpose is to increase the participation of adults in lifelong learning by improving the quality of adult education, establishing incentives for participation and eliminating barriers, improving outreach and awareness, and developing programmes for non-job-related learning. There is no mention of young mothers, but there is no reason this cannot be applied to them

as well. Young mothers in Cyprus rely heavily on informal settings, like grandparents or private institutions, especially for children under four. The plan mentioned above, “Thalia”, also aims to address this problem by providing affordable early childhood education and care, which is still under development.

The funding found is all from the government towards mothers, and the list includes:

- A maternity benefit is available to all mothers, as long as she, or her husband, are registered as working in Cyprus and at a job for longer than six months.
- There is a special maternity benefit for single mothers.
- There is also a child benefit and a single-parent benefit.
- And the ‘Baby’s Dowry’ project has supported more than a thousand families at risk of poverty in Cyprus since February 2018. Unfortunately, this funding will end by December 2023. Baby’s Dowry aims to reduce material deprivation and to tackle the risk of social exclusion by providing essential consumer goods free of charge (baby-care items, bedding, diapers) and baby equipment (a pram, a cot, a baby chair). Families can also benefit from a small monthly allowance and are offered mentoring and networking sessions with social services. Again, the wording is families at risk of poverty. However, there is no reason this project would exclude single mothers who face the same difficulties.

Most policies do not focus on the reintegration of young mothers. Most seem more concerned with the benefits received during pregnancy, how long mothers can stay on maternity leave, and what facilities they can provide to young mothers while working. No policy has been found that explicitly focuses on reintegrating mothers into the workforce; instead, they focus on not being removed from their job when pregnant.

A surprisingly interesting project uncovered during this search is the Baby Buddy app which was also part of an Erasmus+ project. The Baby Buddy Cyprus web app is a high-quality online learning environment based on guidelines, research evidence and best practice, covering the journey from early pregnancy to birth and the first six months of the child’s life.

The stigma of being a young mother exists. However, it is a rare phenomenon in Cyprus today, and the most significant issue, socially speaking, is if the mother has a child out of wedlock. There is no interest in focusing on single mothers, helping women be mothers while maintaining their careers, or enabling them to return to work after giving birth. The socially accepted norm is for the mother to put family first and become a housewife. There is a need for better communication of services and aids towards mothers in general and enabling women of all ages to continue their careers or education, if they so desire, even during or after their pregnancy. It might also be a

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good idea to look into normalising the view of a woman working while caring for her child. A famous proverb says, “It takes a village to raise a child,” and providing the space where such a community can come together is essential.

Commonalities and Conclusion

From reading the desk research of each country and trying to gather it all together, some commonalities quickly stand out and offer perhaps directions that are worth either exploring further, or keeping in mind as the project proceeds with its development.

These commonalities include:

The need to consider the variety of profiles likely to integrate this support that WHOW will design. Not only from an organisational, or cultural and linguistic point of view, but also in terms of digital accessibility, level of education and mobility of young mothers who will integrate the project and who will have potentially (very) different professional and personal situations. Therefore, It will be necessary to offer them tools that can be adapted to their needs and be accessible to the majority of them.

The importance of fostering a sense of community. Social isolation and stigma can be significant challenges for young mothers. A project to support the training and employment of young mothers should aim to foster a sense of community and belonging. This can be done through support groups, peer mentoring, and networking opportunities. Building a sense of community can help young mothers feel empowered, connected, and motivated to achieve their goals.

The necessity of engaging young mothers as active participants. To develop an effective project, it is important to engage young mothers as active participants in the design and implementation of the project. This can be done through participatory approaches that involve young mothers in decision-making, co-creation of activities, and evaluation of outcomes. Engaging young mothers as active participants can also help ensure that the project is responsive to their needs and goals. Specificity is what seems to be missing from many of other forms of support that exist for young mothers, and that should be addressed.

The imperative of addressing systemic barriers. While there are several programs and initiatives in place to support young mothers all over Europe, there are still systemic barriers that prevent them from accessing education and employment opportunities. These barriers may include discrimination, lack of affordable childcare, and inadequate support systems. A comprehensive project to support young mothers should address these systemic barriers and advocate for policy changes to promote inclusion in education and the workplace.

In conclusion, despite the many nuances and differences that can be spotted from country to country, the main issues seem to remain unaltered and repeat again and again. A project that helps young mothers deal with these issues common in all countries will offer them a strong starting point to take control of their lives and give them the freedom to provide for their families and themselves, all while also allowing

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them to receive support from their community and enabling them to look after themselves too, building a better future for everyone.