Family Assistance Support Scheme		
Organisation(s):	Agenzija Sapport	
Country:	Malta	
Contact:	policy@esn-eu.org	
Theme:	☐ Ageing & Care ☐ Asylum & Migration ☐ Young People ☒ Support for Children & Families ☒ Community Care ☒ Integrated Care & Support ☐ Co-Production ☒ Disability ☐ Housing & Homelessness ☐ Artificial Intelligence ☐ Digitalisation ☐ Quality Care	☐ Labour Market Inclusion ☒ Social Inclusion ☐ Technology ☐ Workforce and Leadership ☐ Social Benefits ☐ EU Funding ☐ Social Services' Resilience ☐ Mental Health ☒ Person-Centred Care ☐ Research & Use of Evidence ☐ Management & Planning ☐ Other, please specify:
Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights:	☒ 1. Education, training, life-long learning ☐ 2. Gender equality ☒ 3. Equal opportunities ☐ 4. Active support to employment ☐ 5. Secure and adaptable employment ☐ 6. Fair Wages ☐ 7. Transparent employment conditions ☐ 8. Social dialogue ☐ 9. Work-life balance ☐ 10. Healthy, safe work environment	☐ 11. Childcare and child support ☒ 12. Social protection ☐ 13. Unemployment benefits ☐ 14. Minimum income ☐ 15. Old age income and pensions ☒ 16. Health care ☒ 17. Inclusion of people with disabilities ☐ 18. Long-term care ☐ 19. Housing and assistance to homeless ☒ 20. Access to essential services
Current status of the practice:	☐ Concept and Design Phase ☐ Testing or pilot phase ☐ Temporary practice that has terminated ☐ Temporary practice that is ongoing and has a termination date ☒ Established and ongoing practice ☐ Scaling Up and Transformation Phase ☐ Other (please specify):	
Summary:	The Family Assistance Support Scheme enables families of children with disabilities to employ a Family Assistant to support daily care, respite, and community participation. By strengthening families early, the scheme reduces caregiver stress and burnout while preventing unnecessary escalation into crisis or institutional care. This community-based approach promotes inclusion, resilience, and sustainable family life, in line with prevention principles and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.	
Context/social issues addressed:	Families of children with disabilities often experience sustained physical, emotional, and financial pressure due to the intensive care and supervision their child requires. In the absence of adequate and timely support, these pressures can lead to caregiver burnout, reduced employment opportunities, social isolation, and deteriorating family wellbeing. As	

	stress accumulates, families may struggle to cope, increasing the risk that children enter institutional or out-of-home care sometimes as a last resort rather than by choice. The Family Assistance Support Scheme within Agenzija Sapport in Malta addresses this gap by intervening at an early stage, when families are already facing significant disability-related challenges but before situations escalate into crisis. The scheme recognises that many institutional placements are preventable and are often linked not to parental neglect, but to lack of sustainable support within the community. By providing families with the resources to engage a Family Assistant, the practice directly responds to systemic shortcomings in informal caregiving, community inclusion, and flexible family support. It tackles social issues linked to exclusion, inequality of access to assistance, and over-reliance on institutional solutions, while promoting community living, family resilience, and the rights of children with disabilities to grow up within their family environment.
Objectives:	1. Strengthen families of children with disabilities by providing timely, flexible assistance that reduces caregiver stress and prevents burnout. 2. Prevent the escalation of family strain into crisis situations, including avoidable voluntary or involuntary institutionalisation of children. 3. Promote community living, social inclusion, and the rights of children with disabilities to grow up within their family environment.
Activities:	The Family Assistance Support Scheme is implemented through a set of structured, yet flexible, activities designed to respond to the individual needs of families of children with disabilities while preventing escalation into crisis situations. Where deemed necessary, professionals such as social workers and allied health professionals provide additional support to the family and the Family Assistant, contributing to the formulation and ongoing review of the child's individualised support plan to ensure coordinated, appropriate, and sustainable care. The process begins with an assessment carried out by professionals to identify the specific support needs of the child and the family. This assessment considers the child's functional needs, family caregiving capacity, existing supports, and the level of stress or strain experienced by caregivers. The focus is not only on the child's disability-related needs but also on the sustainability of family care within the home and community. Based on the identified needs, families are allocated a financial subsidy that enables them to engage a Family Assistant. Families are actively involved in selecting, directing, and scheduling the Family Assistant, ensuring that support is tailored, respectful, and responsive to their daily realities. This approach promotes empowerment and flexibility, allowing support to adapt over time as circumstances change. Family Assistants provide practical assistance within the family and community setting. Activities may include supporting personal care and daily routines, supervising the child for safety, assisting with leisure activities, accompanying the child to community or recreational spaces, and providing respite to parents or other caregivers. This support enables parents to meet their family responsibilities, thereby reducing exhaustion and stress. Ongoing support and monitoring are embedded within the scheme. Families receive guidance to ensure that the personal assistance arrangement remains appropriate, effective, and aligned with the child's best interests. Adjustments can be made as the child grows or as family circumstances evolve, maintaining the preventive nature of the intervention.

	Through these activities, the scheme strengthens informal support systems, reduces reliance on emergency or institutional responses, and ensures that children with disabilities are supported to remain within their family environment. The emphasis on early, community-based support plays a key role in preventing burnout, maintaining family stability, and promoting inclusion.
Outcomes:	The Family Assistance Support Scheme has led to positive outcomes for children with disabilities, their families, and the wider support system. One of the most significant results observed to date is a reduction in caregiver stress and burnout, with families reporting that they feel better supported in managing daily care responsibilities and can sustain caregiving roles over time without reaching a crisis point. This has contributed to improved family stability and overall wellbeing. Between January and December 2025, the scheme supported 226 families, a significant figure that demonstrates both the high level of demand for this type of support and the essential role the service plays in meeting the needs of families caring for children with disabilities. For children, the scheme has resulted in increased participation in everyday family and community life. With the support of a Family Assistant, children are better able to engage in educational, recreational, and social activities, reducing isolation and promoting inclusion. Many families report improved routines, safer supervision, and more consistent support, leading to an enhanced quality of life for both the child and the household. From a systems perspective, the scheme demonstrates strong preventive value. The availability of timely and flexible assistance has reduced the likelihood of families seeking emergency interventions or institutional placement for their children. In several cases, the service has acted as a critical factor in delaying or preventing voluntary or involuntary out-of-home care, highlighting its effectiveness as a secondary prevention measure. Service usage trends show sustained engagement with the scheme, indicating that families find the support both relevant and effective. Feedback gathered during ongoing reviews consistently highlights relief from caregiving pressure, improved coping capacity, and increased confidence in managing the child's needs within the community. Frontline practitioners also report improved family functioning and fewer escalations to more intensive services. Together, these outcomes provide strong practice-based evidence that the scheme successfully meets its objectives of preventing burnout, supporting community living, and reducing reliance on institutional solutions.
Funding source:	EU Funds: ESF+ ☐ INTERREG ☐ ERDF ☐ ERASMUS☐ RRF ☐ other ☐ ☐ National Government Funds ☐ Regional Government Funds ☒ Local Government Funds ☐ Private Sponsorship / Public-Private Partnership ☐ Financial contribution of People using Services ☐ Other, please define:
Links to supporting documents:	https://sapport.gov.mt/services/family-assistance-support-scheme/
Comments and tips:	Services wishing to implement this practice should adopt a preventive and family-centred approach, offering support early before caregiving pressures escalate into crisis. Flexibility is essential: families should be actively involved in selecting and organising the Family Assistant so that support fits their daily realities and changing needs. Assessments should consider both the child's needs and the sustainability of family care, rather than focusing solely on disability. Regular review and open communication help

	ensure the support remains effective over time, while positioning the scheme within a broader community-living and rights-based framework supports long-term impact and transferability.