ProChild CoLAB Against Poverty and Social Exclusion – Association

Expression of interest: Horizon-CL2-2025-01-TRANSFO-06 Evaluation and use of evidence in education policy and practice

Website: https://prochildcolab.pt/

Contact: Sara Magalhães (sara.magalhaes@prochildcolab.pt)

ProChild CoLAB is a collaborative laboratory formally recognised by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) since 2018. Its mission is to combat child poverty and social exclusion through a holistic and transdisciplinary approach, integrating social intervention with technological innovation and linking the public and private sectors. ProChild CoLAB is a non-profit organisation with 19 associated member entities, including universities, private companies, foundations, and municipalities. This network of partners ensures a strong and effective connection between academia, communities, and key stakeholders in the social, health, and child protection systems.

The main objectives of ProChild CoLAB are to implement, evaluate and validate evidence-based programmes and intervention models aimed at breaking the cycle of child poverty, promoting children´s development, well-being, and rights, and contributing to the formulation of science-based guidelines and recommendations for both local and national policy-making. To accomplish these objectives, the institution is structured into two strategic and interconnected R&D+I Units: (1) Social Intervention, including four axis: Health and Well-being; Development and Education; Social Participation, Citizenship and Gender Equality; Protection against Violence, Exploitation, Abuse and Neglect; and (2) Technological Development and Biology, including two axis: Biology and development, and digital Technologies. The ProChild CoLAB also includes two scientific knowledge transfer Units: the ProChild Academy and the ProChild Data Observatory.

The **Development and Education Unit** can play a pivotal role in a proposal aligned with this call. Its main objective is to develop and implement action-research projects focused on the improvement of educational offer for children through models of professional development, with a special emphasis on child education and care in the first years of life.

This objective is pursued through the following key activities:

- Designing, implementing and scientifically validating evidence-based professional development models aiming to support Workforce Development and Implementation Systems;
- Developing frameworks for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) quality analysis such as observational tools do guide and support high quality practices in childcare and education contexts;
- Developing digital and technological tools to support programs implementation, sustainability, scalability and accessibility;
- Providing training and supervision for professionals across health, education, and social sectors;
- Fostering multisectoral collaboration, strengthening links between professionals, families and other community stakeholders;
- Exploring hypothesis-generating data to inform the kind of program adjustments and/or new interventions that are needed;
- Translating scientific evidence science into policies and practice.

Over the past years, this unit has implemented several research and intervention projects. Among these, we highlight the following ongoing initiatives:

Development and Education in Childcare (DEC)

This is an action-research project that aims to enhance childcare professionals' high-quality pedagogical practices, through an evidence based multilevel professional development model, the Development and Education in Childcare (DEC), developed and tested by our team. Improving Quality and Impact Through

DEC components include collaborative consultation, discussion groups, specialized training and leadership support. To this purpose, 130 ECEC professionals and 693 infants and toddlers from 31 classrooms distributed by eight centers in four Portuguese regions participated in this study, during three school years. Using a longitudinal design, the study explored the extent that participation in the DEC professional development model components increase: 1) the quality of teacher-child interactions; 2) classroom characteristics in terms of space, equipment and materials; 3) the quality of the pedagogical leadership and the team's workforce. Additionally, the project aims to assess the program impact on child engagement levels and child developmental skills.

DEC-Up: Sustainability and Scalling-up

This project aims to strengthen the system infrastructure and attributes that are necessary to sustain the DEC model, assuring the conditions for the DEC model to achieve an effective social impact, supporting its scaling up with fidelity and adaptations. Specifically, well-grounded on implementation science, it aims to:

1) Develop specialized training and resources in order to enhance child care professionals knowledge and skills, though a multilevel approach;
2) Develop specialized training and resources in order to enhance DEC model implementers/facilitators knowledge and skills;
3) Build an infrastructure for implementing the DEC model
4) Assess financial mechanisms for scaling up;
5) Develop resources for families and the broader society to support the investment in the first years of life.

Crescer Seguro - municipal-wide training offer to childcare centers professionals

This action-research project comprises a municipality-focused, multilevel training program involving professionals, pedagogical leaders and administrations offered to all childcare centers (43) in the municipality of Guimarães, Portugal. The initiative aims to promote an integrated knowledge foundation based on child development for high-quality practices to support children combining the best available research with fieldwork expertise.

ORIGOS: A collaborative, intersectoral, and multilevel community intervention model for Early Childhood in Guimarães (Portugal)

ORIGOS is a community-based initiative aimed at promoting early childhood development, health, and positive parenting through an integrated and multilevel approach. Targeting pregnant women and children aged 0 to 3 in the Municipality of Guimarães, the project focuses on early psychosocial risk assessment and coordinated community support. The main objectives are: (i) Psychosocial risk assessment of pregnant women and young children, supported by a digital platform designed for use by Hospital Senhora da Oliveira – Guimarães and primary healthcare services; (ii) Creation of a community network for the prevention of psychosocial risk and the promotion of child development and family well-being, through the mapping and articulation of local stakeholders and services; (iii) Training for frontline professionals, including early childhood educators and health professionals; and (iv) Family

support initiatives, such as home visits and group-based interventions delivered in partnership with community entities.

In addition, ProChild CoLAB has extensive experience in developing evidence-based recommendations and communication materials tailored to a wide range of audiences — from healthcare and early childhood professionals to caregivers and families. This dual scientific and practical orientation ensures that our interventions are both scientifically grounded and socially impactful in real-world contexts.

Our participation would also bring added value to the implementation of the proposal, by building on our well-established partnerships across sectors and regions. The multidisciplinary and highly specialized scientific team, supported by the technological, legal, and administrative infrastructure of ProChild CoLAB, offers a unique and innovative environment for collaborative research and intervention.

This structure guarantees operational efficiency, scientific excellence, and effective stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle. Nonetheless, our projects are scientifically supported by experts from academic institutions of reference in Portugal, associated with different research units. Our partnership with the Department of Social and Organizational Psychology of Iscte - University Institute of Lisbon is worth noting. Cecilia Aguiar with her background in developmental and educational psychology, conducted and participated in research on ECEC quality and teacher practices in ECEC, focusing on children's social outcomes (i.e., peer social interactions, networks, and relationships) and, especially, on the social participation of children with disabilities. Among many research projects with this focus, we highlight the coordination of the dissemination workpackage in the FP7 CARE Project and the workpackage on curriculum, pedagogy, and social climate in the H2020 ISOTIS Project. As part of our network, this team will be also available to join future projects under this call.

Overall, we are available and would be pleased to explore how our expertise and resources can complement the consortium's priorities and contribute to a successful proposal.