

Initial implementation of the MIAF®

Pre-Service Training and Foster Family Applicant Assessment: Enablers and barriers

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Introduction

- Despite Foster Care (FC) has increased in Europe due to deinstitutionalization policies, Portugal has one of the lowest rates, with only 4.1% of 6,446 children in FC, while others remain in residential care (ISS, I.P., 2024);
- In response, the Integrated Model of Family Foster Care (MIAF®), a comprehensive and evidence-based model, supported by policy, best practices, and sensitive to Portuguese context, was developed to support professionals in training, assessing, and supporting foster families and children during the non-kinship FC placement;
- This pilot study sought to understand the enablers and barriers of the initial implementation of the MIAF® Pre-service Training and Foster Family Applicant Assessment, through a cyclical process of development, implementation, analysis, and optimization** (see Fig. 1).

Methods

Participants:

- 12 FC professionals** (♀ 92%) from one foster care agency, working in dyad teams, from varied backgrounds: Psychology (50%), Social Work (42%), Social Education (8%);
- Each dyad trained and assessed an average of 7.17 foster applicants (*SD* = 4.57; range: 1-14) applying MIAF®.

Instruments:

- Sociodemographic questionnaire;
- Semi-structured interview developed for this study.

Procedures:

- Interviews were conducted with each professionals dyads (~2 hours via an online platform), and was video and audio recorded with participants' informed consent;
- Thematic analysis** was performed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step framework.

Conclusions

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- The initial implementation of MIAF® showed potential to support professionals' roles in the FFC system.
 - MIAF® was considered **well-structured, flexible, and objective**, with resources that enabled **more transparent and consistent decision-making**.

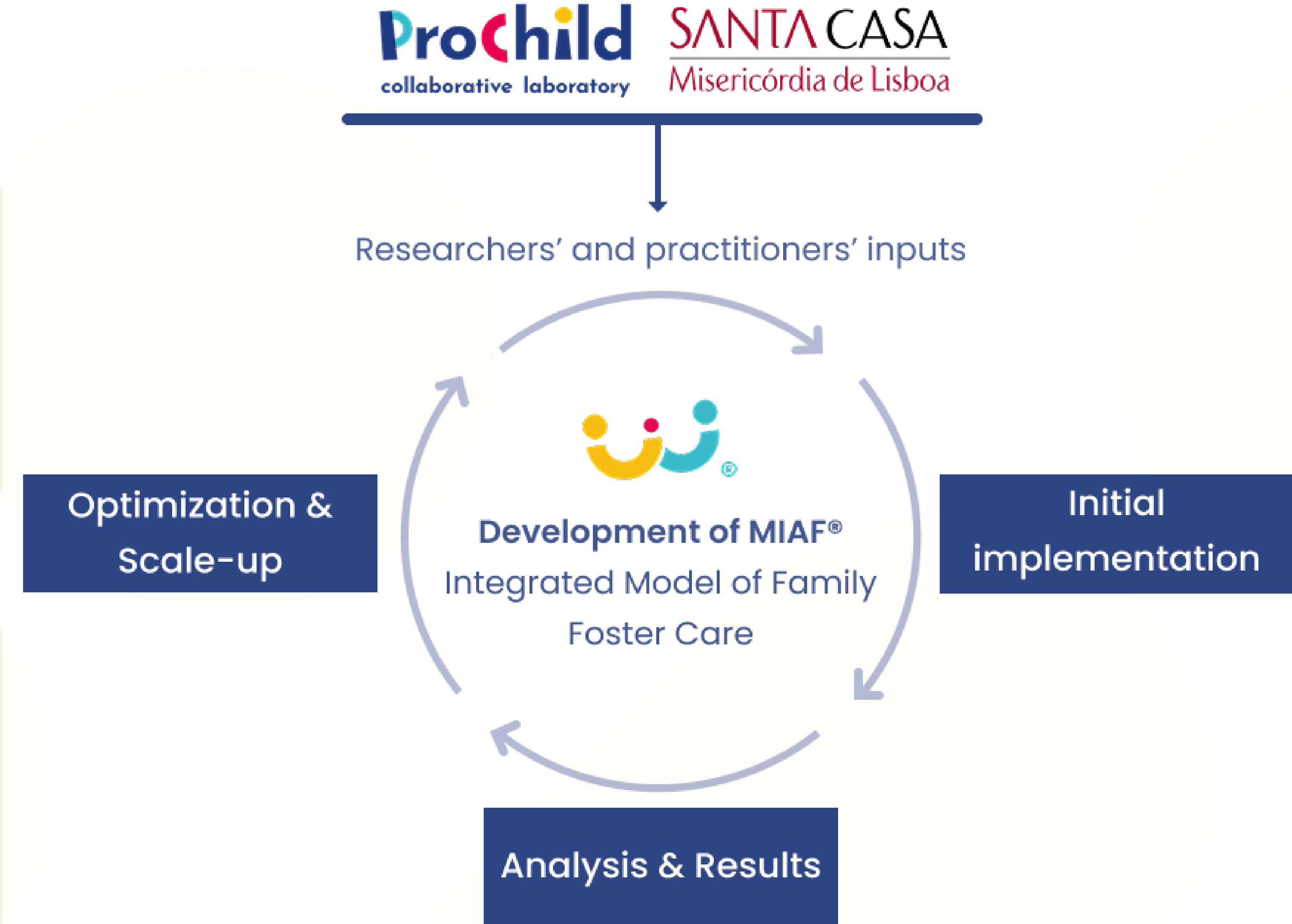


Figure 1. Design-based research process of the MIAF® (Adapted from Mulvey et al., 2020)

Results

Enablers	Barriers
Overall aspects	
- Close relationship with applicants for ongoing support (<i>Ref</i> = 36; <i>Teams</i> = 5) - Objectivity (<i>Ref</i> = 35; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Great model sequence (<i>Ref</i> = 19; <i>Teams</i> = 5) - Support for professionals' decision-making (<i>Ref</i> = 18; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Applicants' great knowledge about FFC and assessment process (<i>Ref</i> = 18; <i>Teams</i> = 6)	- Failure to meet time limit imposed by law (<i>Ref</i> = 38; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Need to anticipate assessment at applicants' home (<i>Ref</i> = 10; <i>Teams</i> = 2) - Assessment as an end-in-itself (<i>Ref</i> = 7; <i>Teams</i> = 2) - Difficulties in integrating assessment results across multidisciplinary teams (<i>Ref</i> = 6; <i>Teams</i> = 3)
Specific aspects	
- Preference for face-to-face interactions for engagement and in-depth information (<i>Ref</i> = 21; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - On-line format facilitates applicants' participation (<i>Ref</i> = 18; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Comprehensiveness of Psychological Assessment phase (<i>Ref</i> = 15; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Complementarity of supplementary assessment protocol (<i>Ref</i> = 8; <i>Teams</i> = 4) - Advantages of questionnaires before and after Pre-Service Training phase (<i>Ref</i> = 4; <i>Teams</i> = 2) - Adequate organization of assessment themes in Home Study phase (<i>Ref</i> = 3; <i>Teams</i> = 3) - Advantages of one-to-one interviews (<i>Ref</i> = 3; <i>Teams</i> = 2)	- Inconsistency and structural flaws of the assessment report form (<i>Ref</i> = 29; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Challenges related to questionnaires bias (<i>Ref</i> = 11; <i>Teams</i> = 4) - Specific difficulties in assessment instruments' use (<i>Ref</i> = 10; <i>Teams</i> = 4) - Different teams conducting each of the Pre-service Training sessions (<i>Ref</i> = 9; <i>Teams</i> = 6) - Need to increase and update foster families' testimonies in Pre-service Training phase (<i>Ref</i> = 6; <i>Teams</i> = 5) - Density of Pre-service Training contents (<i>Ref</i> = 6; <i>Teams</i> = 2)

Core recommendations:

- Strengthen **professional support** through **ongoing training** and **supervision**;
- Create and facilitate **digital tools** for the **assessment**;
- Ensure the model encompasses **strategies** to **overcome systemic barriers**.