



Confederation of **Family** Organisations in the European Union

Memorandum

« Better families, better society »

Avril 2010

COFACE is a pluralistic organisation which promotes family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. It advocates policies of non-discrimination and equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aimed at increasing equality between women and men.

COFACE considers European family policy as the family dimension of policies and initiatives decided at EU level, (family mainstreaming).

The primary concern of family policy at any level (local, regional, national, European) is addressing families' essential needs in terms of financial resources, services and time.

All families must be able to take an active part in shaping Europe.



COFACE is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).

This programme is managed by the Directorate-General for Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities of the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment and social affairs area, as set out in the Social Agenda, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy goals in these fields.

The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

PROGRESS mission is to strengthen the EU contribution in support of Member States' commitment. PROGRESS will be instrumental in:

- *providing analysis and policy advice on PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *monitoring and reporting on the implementation of EU legislation and policies in PROGRESS policy areas;*
- *promoting policy transfer, learning and support among Member States on EU objectives and priorities; and*
- *relaying the views of the stakeholders and society at large*

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Families are being hit hard by the current economic crisis: rising unemployment, falling purchasing power, increasing debt, poverty and social exclusion. Families are also facing growing uncertainty for the future – an uncertainty fuelled by governments' attempts to reduce public deficits by dismantling social protection systems. This can lead many couples to put-off having children, with the all-too familiar demographic consequences.

The EU bears equal responsibility with Member States for preventing families from becoming marginalised: the European Commission is duty-bound to work to this end.

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Introduction

COFACE is a pluralistic organisation that promotes family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. It advocates policies of non-discrimination and equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aimed at increasing equality between women and men.

COFACE celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008 and gives a voice to millions of citizens through close to sixty organisations across 22 EU Member States.

COFACE is fully aware that family policy remains a Member State responsibility. However, it believes that the EU has a real influence on Europeans' family lives, and that the European Institutions must therefore give proper weight to the family dimension of EU policies and initiatives through a positive application of the subsidiarity principle. It also stresses that the content of family policy at any level must be primarily directed towards addressing families' essential needs in terms of financial resources, affordable quality services and adequate time arrangements.

Whatever type of family they come from, most Europeans have been, are or will be part of "a family", and opinion polls show that the family still comes at the top of the list of values. Also, the role of the family is increasingly crucial in shaping the identity and education of individuals, and in forging their social bonds in society.

COFACE calls on the European Commission to take family life into account when drafting European policies so that families feel that they are involved in shaping Europe, and therefore take an active part in its construction. This is a fundamental task for the European Commission.

I. Families are suffering in the crisis

The new European Commission takes office at the height of the worst economic and financial crisis since the 1930s. Families living in the European Union are bearing the full brunt of rising unemployment, falling purchasing power, increasing debt, poverty and social exclusion. The most recent figures available (2008) predate the current crisis, but even then, the EU already had 85 million people living in or on the brink of poverty, i.e. 17% of the population. 20% of them are children and 19% older persons (65+). Thirty-five percent of lone-parent families were vulnerable to poverty. How much worse will the figures be when this recession has done its work?

Moreover, in the context of the priority of reducing public debt, social protection systems are threatened by governments keen to reduce deficits. However, the crisis has demonstrated the effective role of such systems as a safety net for families: studies show that without social protection, there would be on average nearly 32% of the population further at risk of poverty.

This deeply worrying trend comes on top of challenges (e.g., migrant families' difficulties in integrating) and dangers (e.g., environmental risks) that existed before the crisis.

This has led to growing uncertainty and concern for the future settling in among large sections of the population, with all the damage this can do to family life. These worries and this insecurity also play into couples' decisions to put off having a first, second or third child, with the demographic consequences that we are now familiar with.

All these problems take a toll on society generally, producing a siege mentality, and a rising tide of hardening attitudes, intolerance and violence. This is unacceptable in an EU committed to its diversity and wealth of differences.

II. COFACE's demands

COFACE and its national member organisations have serious fears for the plight of families and have a list of very concrete demands to put to the European Commission. These are their priorities. They go beyond tackling poverty and social exclusion - although the fight against these scourges remains urgent : they should prevent families from becoming marginalised. Each area includes aspects within the European Union's remit.

1) *Integration of family policies in social inclusion policies*

COFACE welcomes the European Commission's proposal to make the fight against poverty and social exclusion one of the seven flagship initiatives of its strategy "Europe 2020", with a goal of reducing poverty by 25%. The foreseen 'European Platform against poverty' must fully integrate family policies, which are essential tools to prevent and fight poverty (especially child poverty). Thus the active inclusion strategies currently promoted under the open method of coordination, and later under the European Platform against poverty, must become real instruments for the fight against poverty and social exclusion of families.

COFACE has made recommendations in this regard, including:

- establishment of a "minimum family income" ensuring sufficient **resources** for a dignified life, taking into account the specific needs of families (large families, single-parent families, families caring for a dependent relative,...), through family allowances, minimum income *stricto sensu* and other additional financial support;
- guarantee the adequacy, sustainability and continuity of resources for families;
- the basic needs of children must be fully covered by universal family allowances, designed as a right for all children;
- the minimum income *stricto sensu* must be a right for people outside the labour market, meeting both the needs of families and individuals;
- ensure the availability of child-care services, long-term care and other essential quality services for families that are available and affordable and which support the active availability of people at work;
- inclusive labour markets need to provide quality jobs, and in particular for people with family responsibilities;
- promote job retention through measures reconciling family and professional life;
- measures to support a return to the labour market for individuals who had a career break for family reasons.
- recognise the same value for both professional work and family work (e.g. for pension rights) by blending family time into the organisation of working time.

More broadly, the European Commission should encourage the strengthening of social protection systems and investment in social services as the most effective way to strengthen social cohesion and build a model of sustainable prosperity.

Beyond social protection and employment, the platform for cooperation, peer review and exchange of best practices proposed by the European Commission should also address other areas critical to the fight against poverty and social exclusion of families, such as:

- the fight against non-payment of alimonies, through measures of objective calculation of the amount of maintenance and development of simple and universal public systems, guaranteeing payment in case of default;
- taxation of personal income as a tool for taking account of family expenses, of non-discrimination, and as a tool to assist the most vulnerable families.

2) Reconciling family, private and professional life

Quality employment (i.e. decent pay, job security and/or 'flexicurity' fair to workers and working conditions respectful of family life) is a precondition to any measures of reconciliation. Active inclusion strategies must take into account the qualitative dimensions of work and ensure that reconciliation opportunities - whether in terms of time or services - exist.

On **time**, therefore, COFACE wants among other things for both men and women:

- leave that meets the variety of family needs (maternity, paternity, parental leave, and leave for other family reasons including caring for dependants,...), all issues that are being or have recently been discussed at EU level: a close watch must be kept on their implementation to avoid unfair differences between families in different Member States;
- an upgrading of the conditions attached to part-time work (pay, status, social/employment rights, etc.);
- flexible working time arrangements that allow for different family circumstances, with strict protection of employment and social security rights.

Where **services** are concerned, families must be offered access to a wide array of services that meet their needs, and in particular diversified childcare services and services for other dependant persons. If these services are to deliver their full potential in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, they must be:

- provided in sufficient quantity and quality, with ambitious objectives at a European level;
- be open to all without discrimination, particularly in regards to migrants, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities;
- tailored to meet the specific needs of the most disadvantaged groups;
- be affordable for all thanks to public and private financial support and adequate means-testing taking into account for each family the number of children in childcare;
- offer quality jobs to their staff;
- be effectively implemented.

The complexity of the issues and wide range of policies involved mean that reconciliation of family life, private life and professional life must be mainstreamed across all relevant policies and financing instruments (employment, social services, social security, education, etc.) at an EU and national level. The key aspects of reconciliation - leave, flexible working time arrangements and services – therefore need to be addressed through a framework directive at EU level.

Thus far, the approach taken to reconciliation has mainly been work-focused. It is time that more emphasis was put on the family and private life angle.

The new strategy of the European Union for equality between women and men should incorporate these different proposals and focus on, namely:

- quality employment for women (equal pay with quantified targets, equal employment status, equal employment conditions, desegregation of the labour market, etc.);
- improving the reconciliation of family and professional life both for women and for men who must provide support for a dependent relative in the context of an aging population (filial leave, targets for long term community and home-based care);
- improving the reconciliation of family and professional life both for women and for men with children (paternity leave and parental leave, encouraging men to assume their share of family responsibilities, replacing the Barcelona objectives with more ambitious targets and with out of school care for 6-12 years old).

3) Support for family carers and siblings of people with dependency needs

COFACE supports the European Charter of family carers developed by COFACE-Handicap. It is addressed to political authorities at various levels of power as well as to the EU institutions, targeting those who are in a family carer relationship with a disabled and / or dependent person.

In 10 items, from the definition of family carer to the assessment of needs and services, through the choice of the carer, the necessary national and family solidarity, the place and status of the carer and recognition of his/her work and his/her needs in terms of quality of life, respite and training, the Charter has the ambition to become a European reference tool for the various actors working in the field of disability and dependency (organisations, institutions, national governments, European authorities, etc.). To see the full text: <http://coface-eu.org/en/Disability-Dependence/Help-the-carers/Charter-for-Family-Carers/>

Support for carers contributes to the quality of care and helps preserve the quality of life of families (ensuring the physical and mental health of carers, maintaining usual family ties between carers and the dependent person, preventing financial impoverishment and enabling the combining of family life and working life while maintaining the rights of its individual members).

The matter of siblings and dependency is another complex issue for the quality of life of dependents and their families, particularly during child development but also during adulthood. Measures to support the siblings are necessary during these periods (information awareness, dialogue and psychological support, assistance to carers, implementation of an inclusive society, support for the dependent person in his/her legal capacity, development of facilities and services tailored to the needs of older people, etc.).

Support for family carers and siblings must be built into all relevant policies and programmes by the European Commission, including:

- the new European strategy for people with disabilities 2010-2020;
- the EU strategy for health (including initiatives on healthy aging and in dignity, the mental health pact and the health personnel in Europe);
- Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion: the "European Platform against poverty";
- the new strategy of the European Union for equality between women and men;
- European Strategy for Employment;
- initiatives for social services (quality framework, de-institutionalisation, etc.).
- policies and programmes for education and long-life learning;
- the use of the structural funds.

4) Preventing over-indebtedness, personal finance education and action against banking and financial exclusion

Families are the primary force for all aspects of consumer education, particularly when it comes to developing a critical approach to advertising, borrowing, prices, etc. Also, faced with an expanding range of choice, families on increasingly tight budgets have to make decisions. It is not always easy to find a way through the maze, nor resist the many temptations on offer, especially that of easy credit with its attendant serious danger of building up unmanageable debt.

Life crises (unemployment, family break-up or illness, for example) may often put family finances under strain, but are more likely to reveal than actually cause over-indebtedness.

Some of these financial troubles could be prevented if families were given the necessary knowledge and information to objectively assess their position before committing themselves.

A study published by the European Commission in 2008¹ shows that millions of Europeans face an increased risk of social exclusion because they lack access to basic financial services. It reports that 1 in 10 adults in the EU-15 and about half (47%) of those in the EU-10 (new countries) have no bank account, and that an even greater proportion have no savings and cannot access credit. Financial services should count as a service of general interest.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_inclusion/2008/financial_exclusion_study_en.pdf

The family organisations linked together within COFACE are clear about the need to:

- do more to provide prospective borrowers with objective information;
- develop personal microcredit for people who have a life turnaround plan and can pay but cannot access traditional bank credit;
- promote personal finance education for very young children as an absolute necessity on the same basis as literacy and numeracy skills;
- promote a system of national credit registers ('positive file' or central credit history database) to be shared at EU level providing greater security in the use of credit in particular by:
 - enabling credit to play its part in household consumption as a means of investment that also contributes to family saving by asset formation;
 - preventing the stigmatisation of families and the destruction of their lives by building up too much debt and having continually to borrow more to repay. The credit register is a means of bringing all those involved face-to-face with their responsibilities.

5) Health and nutrition

The family is a key learning environment and early childhood is when habits are learned that are apt to become entrenched. It is essential to give children a sense of responsibility, which means discussing issues like taste, healthy lifestyles, nutrition, physical exercise, etc., with a view to promoting a positive attitude to their own health and welfare.

This education must be undertaken by all those in the child's immediate environment (youth movements, teachers, educators, etc.) in close collaboration with families, whose role is essential. It must also include information about the various structures available, so that each individual knows who to talk to, where to get information or find support. This should not be mistaken for some of the media propaganda which tends to be sensational rather than educational, and can actually encourage consumption.

COFACE has a six-point agenda on this:

- focus on disadvantaged groups,
- early childhood is key,
- encourage and facilitate breastfeeding,
- make labelling easier for consumers to understand,
- provide balanced foods at affordable prices,
- consider children in their family setting.

Each of these six points contains local, regional, national and European dimensions that play into one another and are an object lesson of how the subsidiarity principle can work to positive effect.

In the specific case of alcohol, COFACE has sent the European Institutions a list of 18 recommendations, calling their attention to the need for stronger policies to tackle alcohol abuse. The damage that alcohol does to the family system and each of its members demands a vigorous, coordinated multilateral approach.

Key recommendations include:

- right from an early age, children must be given a sense of responsibility about health and welfare, which includes alcohol consumption;
- it is important to ensure that schools and other institutions have received the training necessary to identify and support children from families with drinking problems;
- it is essential to support families through participation in therapies and other approaches to caring for the person or persons with alcohol abuse problems;
- all tax and administrative measures that are calculated to cut alcohol consumption, like lowering the cost of non-alcoholic drinks, increasing tax on alcoholic drinks, raising the age restriction to at least 18 at European level, etc.

6) Sustainable development from a family perspective

COFACE as a family and citizens organisation, is aware of the efforts that families must make to enable the sustainable development of society. COFACE upholds the definition and the implementation of policies by the European institutions which combine protection of the environment and economic development, in particular in disadvantaged areas, and take into account social challenges.

In particular, COFACE distinguishes between several positions which make up its first recommendations:

- As regards demography, consider that the population must ensure a development which will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and that it is not therefore in any sense an obstacle to sustainable development.
- As regards the economy, seek a different form of growth instead of diminishing growth that could result in shortages detrimental to vulnerable groups already suffering from job insecurity.
- As regards solidarity, ensure that populations in the poorest countries have a better future by retaining the aim of raising their living standards to a level which covers essential needs.
- As regards behaviour, get families to incorporate ecological and ethical attitudes in their daily lives.

7) A high level of consumer protection

The harmonisation of the application conditions of consumer rights is a prerequisite to the harmonisation of consumer rights in itself. Up until now, the Directives transposed into the different cultures and applied by different judicial systems have led to diverse interpretations, which in effect enables Member states to have a competitive advantage over other Member states. In such conditions, the clarity of rights is not enhanced. Besides, the confidence of the consumer is not acquired as long as it is impossible to obtain a redress or the application of the law outside his/her national boundaries.

The European Institutions must ensure that the rules they would like to impose on consumers fulfil the aspirations of consumers and citizens.

COFACE therefore recommends that:

- The minimum harmonisation directives already in application with regards to consumer rights and upon which the current maximum harmonisation directive inspires itself, are better enforced and lead to many more studies on the impact of interpretation discrepancy.
- The Commission sets up a harmonisation of the interpretation of rules and their application rather than solely on their content which would lead to situations where consumer rights would not be harmonised anyway, given the divergences in cultures and judicial systems².
- In the chapters where a maximum harmonisation would be suitable (namely chapters 1 and 3), a broad re-examination of the clauses and articles takes place with stakeholders involved, most notably national judicial authorities and consumer organisations in order to secure key consumer protection aspects such as the French concept of “vice caché” (latent defect) or the Belgian ban on “vente couplée” (coupled sales).

COFACE stresses in conclusion that:

This proposed measure must not gloss over other things that also affect consumers' confidence about buying online, like the lack of comparative critical online information on products and services:

- lack of (certified genuine) critical consumer opinions.
- lack of information about terms of delivery in the consumer's own country.
- lack of secure payment facilities.
- lack of information on the seller/service provider's commercial and financial ability to provide the product/service purchased.
- lack of information in the consumer's own national language.

² For instance, many French customers come to buy washing machines in Germany over the border. However, many, after signing a contract, decide not to buy the washing machine. German salesman are very dissatisfied with this attitude and some lawyers use this argument in order to push for EU consumer rights harmonisation. However, a closer look at the law shows that the French law does not permit to unilaterally break a contract but that French salesmen are much less strict on this provision. Thus the main barrier is **culture** and not law. Example provided by MEP Gebhardt.

COFACE would also point out that maximum harmonisation will assuredly not deliver clearer consumer rights, because firms will obviously carry on trying to outdo one another with contracts designed to play up their actual or alleged merits, so that a wide range of different consumer contracts will necessarily remain in existence.

8) Accessible, affordable and quality services of general interest

The need for well-functioning SGIs for the quality of family life is obvious. Health and care services, public transport, education, energy, water, electricity, financial services, housing, etc. All are essential to ensure cohesion, inclusion and social solidarity. However, dogmatic policies which plan to solve all problems via perfect competition, within the European Union, notably through the entry into force of the Services Directive, represent a danger for the access to some more specific services. These must now seek special exemptions from their government to sustain the financial support they receive or to assert their right to be free from the implementation of the Services Directive.

Services to families are particularly vulnerable: nurseries, family centres, centres of learning for families, social organisations, and local neighbourhood associations. These are all services not responding to competition standards, but above all need criteria such as accessibility, reasonable cost, quality, proximity; it is unthinkable that nurseries only exist in neighbourhoods where they are "profitable".

Thus, in the light of the Lisbon Treaty and the new powers of the European Parliament in the field of SGIs (Article 14 Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Protocol on SGI - Article 26) COFACE highlights the need to define the general tasks of SGIs and ensure that services meet specific criteria in particular regard to accessibility, both physically and in terms of cost and quality standards. COFACE will follow with interest the work of the "Public Services" Intergroup in the European Parliament.

9) Support for migrant parents in the education of their children

Greater efforts should be made to help migrant parents to support their children in education to tackle the greater difficulties these children face at school. This involves taking measures on adult education, information on school systems, teacher training, school-home dialogue and support for parenting. This requires the European Union to:

- develop a European integration policy and promote the targeted use of the European funds in the field of integration;
- strengthen the open method of coordination on education and training;
- use the European Life-Long Learning Programme to provide targeted funding to support migrant children and their parents;
- mainstream intercultural dialogue across all EU policies.

10) A Safer internet, accessible to all

The development of the internet, which is safe and respectful of fundamental rights, must rely on the involvement of parents who have been empowered to fully understand the digital world and how it works. This involvement must build primarily on strong educative principles and dialogue between the parent and child. All stakeholders must be involved: public authorities, services and content providers, researchers, and also users, family and child protection organisations. COFACE considers it essential to:

- raise parents' awareness of the dangers of the internet;
- train parents by supporting exchanges of good educational practices;
- provide parents with supporting technological tools;
- promote positive content;
- involve family organisations in the framing and implementation of regulatory measures;
- undertake research in the field of parental education and supervision;
- provide support services to deal with self-exclusion of young users.

Apart from supporting the EU's e-inclusion policy under the i2010 Strategy, COFACE calls for an integrated policy ranging from information society policies to social and education policies. In particular there should be a clear link and smooth articulation between e-Inclusion policy and the Open Method of Coordination in the field of social inclusion. But in addition, more emphasis should be put on the family dimension of the e-inclusion policy. Families are primarily concerned by the digital divide. For most Europeans, the home is where they acquire their internet skills in daily life.

COFACE is particularly concerned about:

- Inclusion of families through the use of ICTs - Information and Communication Technologies.
- Bridging the digital divide between families by supporting households' connection to the internet and developing public Internet access points.
- Promoting e-accessibility for elderly/disabled people and/or immigrants.
- Tackling lack of interest in internet use by promoting family and social uses of the internet.
- Tackling the lack of digital literacy by promoting training in public access points and at home, and targeting training at the most vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, it can be said that e-inclusion is an inseparable element of a more comprehensive strategy to prevent families from becoming marginalised, and that a modern European Union has a real moral duty towards its citizens here.

11) Families in their community

Every family should be able to live where they want to, in the best conditions for building their lives, be it in the town or countryside. But wherever they live, all families have the same needs: childcare provision, support to help elderly people stay living at home, health, transport, accessible public services, information, cultural activities, information technology ... European land use and management policies therefore have to put into play the means necessary to enable urban and rural areas alike to fulfil these wants and deliver improved living conditions for all.

COFACE welcomes the opportunity given to all areas to work on their development through the various EU programmes, but the balance between town and country remains uneasy. COFACE therefore affirms the key principles it stands for on the issue of families in their community:

- Equal opportunities for all children wherever they grow up: appropriate school transport, out-of-school childcare provision, cultural and artistic discovery activities, means of transport for young people, etc.
- The area-wide availability of accessible quality services, including the new digital services, to make Europe a tangible, close-to-home reality for all
- The development of economic activity area-wide, not just in and around large and small towns, or particular areas.
- Recognition for what voluntary organisations are doing to deliver local responses to rural communities in partnership with local government.

In conclusion, sustainable and harmonious spatial development is certainly crucial to balance society as a whole. Urban concentration and rural deserts are two pitfalls to be avoided in achieving a land planning and management policy for all areas, and local economic development.

III. The institutions must give more weight to the family dimension

Family life is a fundamental part and fact of Europeans' daily lives, so the European Institutions have already given something of a family flavour to their policies and initiatives. The EU may have no formal remit for it, but more can still be done if the desire is to bring Europe closer to its citizens and, as stated earlier, in compliance with the subsidiarity principle. Some areas in which the EU should step up its action are:

1) Lisbon Treaty

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009 now calls for its implementation. It contains essential provisions for the family dimension of the EU, not least promoting solidarity between the generations and the protection of children's rights. The Treaty also refers to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which includes a number of provisions relating to families.

2) European Alliance for Families

The European Alliance for Families, adopted unanimously by the Heads of State and Government at the June 2007 European Summit, is a big step forward in the organised exchange of information and good practice on family policies between Member States.

The Alliance includes a web portal holding the different family policy provisions of each Member State, regular meetings of a high level group of government experts on demography, and the setting-up of a European observatory on family policies hosted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound, Dublin). This latter – cardinally important - decision could not be implemented because no budget was set.

COFACE is calling on the European Commission to write support for the setting-up of such an observatory into the next EU budget whether it be located at Eurofound or elsewhere. Any other structure or partnership set up to compensate for the lack of this observatory could usefully be incorporated into the mechanisms for collecting information and monitoring national developments and the thematic studies done on family policies and families.

The European Commission should also pay heed to seeing that each Presidency of the EU includes follow-up of the European Alliance for Families' activities on its programme,. The Alliance should feed in the open method of coordination on social protection and social inclusion.

3) Meetings of Family Ministers

In the same vein as the further development of the European Alliance for Families, the European Commission must ensure that each Presidency of the Union organises at least one meeting of Ministers for the family. The idea will be to hold a regular review of developments in family-friendly policies in the countless spheres that affect families. These do not overlap with the formal Council of Ministers' meetings but enable the policy-makers concerned to look at issues from the specifically family angle.

4) European Parliament's Family, Protection of Childhood and Solidarity between the Generations Intergroup

The existence of this European Parliament Intergroup is important to COFACE and its member organisations. It was set up in the late 1980s as a forum for different political persuasions to come together in discussion on issues relating to the lives of families and children in Europe. COFACE invites the Commission to work closely with the Intergroup.

5) Implementation of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010)

The European Commission is responsible for the Year. Its importance is doubled due to the effects of the current crisis on the entire population living in the EU. COFACE and its member organisations are actively participating in the Year. With the Coalition of NGOs around the European Year, we are asking for:

- an awareness campaign on the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion of families;
- better dialogue with families in poverty and with NGOs;
- a strong political legacy for 2010;
- funding to support the European commitments in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

6) Designation of 2012 as European Year of active aging and solidarity between generations

The European Commission is set to designate 2012 as the European Year of Active Aging and Solidarity Between Generations. The current context of rapid population ageing and the economic crisis make the adoption of such a policy approach urgent. Family policies are indeed at the heart of this approach: as the traditional expression of solidarity between generations, families need to be supported in this task by public authorities, particularly regarding the care of relatives with dependency needs.

At European level, the Year 2012 should be used to identify the resources needed to integrate active aging and solidarity between the generations in all processes, policies and instruments of the European Union. Nationally and regionally, the Year should be an opportunity to raise the awareness of decision makers to this new political approach and create opportunities with all stakeholders to develop innovative solutions and opportunities to learn what the EU can offer to meet the demographic challenge in a way that is sustainable and equitable for all.

7) Definition of an ambitious EU strategy on the Rights of the Child

Under the Stockholm programme adopted by the Council in December 2009, the European Commission has set an ambitious EU strategy on the Rights of the Child.

The rights of the child as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child must be integrated into all EU policies to ensure an integrated approach.

The issues of the fight against poverty and social exclusion of children, inclusion of disabled children and their brothers and sisters, integration of migrant children belonging to ethnic minorities, de-institutionalisation, support for parenting, access to quality education from an early age and fight against school failure must be at the heart of this strategy.

* * *

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