The role of family-friendly policies for the prevention of child poverty and the realisation of child well-being

Data confirm that children are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion than other groups in the European Union, reporting a higher risk of poverty (20%) compared to the overall population (17%). The risk increases to 25% for children who live in large families, and exceeds 30% for the ones living with lone parents.

Poverty and social exclusion are largely known to be determined by socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions that are often transmitted from generation to generation, with the consequence of deepening the income divide and perpetuating societal inequalities. Well-being in childhood largely shapes the future adult, recalling the need to prioritize children’s development.

First and foremost, poverty is a violation of children’s rights. The concepts of child poverty and child wellbeing display a complex and multi-dimensional nature, going beyond low or insufficient income and comprising a variety of dimensions such as adequate housing, access to health, education and other essential services, but also non-material dimensions such as relationship and participation.

Anti-poverty strategies must be underpinned by a child well-being approach based on the rights and principles enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and recognise the fundamental roles that families play to this regard. States Parties must respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents and families to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention.

The persistent economic crisis and its dramatic consequences for millions of children and families across Europe urge Member States and the EU to take concrete actions for advancing in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and develop a global policy for children.

COFACE stands for a recognition of the fundamental role that various policies supporting families can play for the prevention of poverty, breaking its inter-generational transmission and attaining the highest levels of child well-being.
The current situation provides a political momentum: with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the protection of children’s rights became an explicit objective of the Union, while in the framework of the EU-2020 strategy Member States agreed on strong social pledges and high profile commitments to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020.

COFACE stands for a coherent EU approach to family policies and the child-rights agenda at EU level and calls for:

- the adoption of a Commission Recommendation on Child Poverty and Wellbeing by 2012;
- the development of more accurate indicators to monitor the different dimensions of child wellbeing;
- the promotion of family-friendly employment policies, based on the principle of non-discrimination;
- the effective implementation of the Flagship Initiative ‘A European Platform against Poverty’;
- the establishment of common EU criteria for quality early years’ services;
- the full involvement of civil society, and in particular organisations representing children and families in the elaboration, implementation and assessment of all EU initiatives affecting them.

What is COFACE? The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims to promote family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the legislation, programmes and initiatives of the European Union (“Family mainstreaming”).

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