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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: strategies for the eradication of poverty to
achieve sustainable development for all**

Statement submitted by Confédération des organisations familiales de l'Union européenne, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all:
A European reality-check from COFACE Families Europe

I. Introduction

COFACE Families Europe is a network of 59 organizations in 23 European countries, representing about 25 million families. We work across Europe, advocating for families, including families in vulnerable situations and at risk of poverty. We promote a family-friendly society, where families and their members benefit from sufficient financial resources, available quality services and adequate time arrangements in order to live and enjoy their family life in dignity and harmony.

We would like to provide a European perspective to the debate, highlighting poverty trends in Europe, looking at the role of civil society organizations in developing policies and services to prevent poverty, and finally the way forward.

II. Poverty trends in Europe

Poverty is a reality in Europe. Poverty reduction is a key policy component of the Europe 2020 strategy, with the target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 20 million by 2020. The number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU has increased rather than decreased since 2010.

Some key figures from Eurostat:

- Almost every fourth person in the EU was still at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2014.
- More than 30 % of young people aged 18 to 24 and 27.8% of children aged less than 18 were at risk in 2014. At 17.8%, this rate was considerably lower among the elderly aged 65 or over.
- Almost 50% of all single parents were at risk in 2014. This was double the average and higher than for any other household type analysed.
- Monetary poverty was the most widespread form of poverty with 17.2% of EU citizens affected in 2014. Next were severe material deprivation and very low work intensity, affecting 9% and 11.2% of EU citizens respectively.

III. The role of civil society organizations supporting families in vulnerable situations

Our experience in Europe is that family professionals have a role to play to develop policies and services to address and prevent poverty. COFACE Families Europe are currently engaged in the five general traditional stages of the policy cycle (both at national and European level):

- Problem definition: This entails assessment of the real needs of families, around which evidence-based policies can be built, and in order to create a baseline against which policy progress is measured. While researchers generally are called upon to scientifically define the policy challenge(s), civil society organizations can also fill any research gaps (either through data collected on the users of their services or through qualitative surveys linked to

the families they represent or work with). COFACE Families Europe and its members highlight trends and challenges in reconciling work and family life, the needs of single parent households, the challenges of family carers, and families in vulnerable situations.

- **Agenda-setting:** This phase is important in terms of defining the policy priorities and approaches. National social protection policies across Europe tend to prioritize areas such as financial support in the form of benefits and allowances, appropriate leave policies, and appropriate services to support family members (childcare, elder-care, disability care). We call for a life-course perspective in policy making allowing for a holistic approach to family needs which concern not only parents with young children, but also adults with ageing parents. We call also for a systematic two generational approach to preventing and tackling poverty and social exclusion of families, developing programmes which target explicitly both parents and children in order to maximize results.
- **Policy development:** The policy development process and the policy objectives will depend on the welfare structures in place in different countries, on the presence of a political vision or not for families, on the needs of families, on the exact target group of the policy (children, parents, youth, grandparents, carers). The policy objectives will depend on the approach taken to reach out to families (family or individual units, parent/child well-being, relationships to siblings), and the approach will determine the soft or hard outcome indicators used to measure policy progress. In many cases, civil society organizations are considered genuine partners in policy development.
- **Policy implementation:** Family organizations might wish to function outside of the policy arena, or they might wish to function within a clear policy framework. In some contexts, they are seen as part of family policy (as service providers to families e.g. parental support, babysitting), or as a way to complement existing family policies by helping to build family support networks, provide psychological support and training, respite to family carers, provide a voice for different groups of family members (e.g. grandparents associations, families of people with disabilities, one-parent families). Civil society organizations with a firm foot in local communities will be perceived as a resource to harness in order to contribute to successful policy implementation.
- **Policy evaluation:** Indicators are theoretically defined from the outset of a policy (see policy development) and therefore serve as the basic evaluation framework of a given family policy, as well as scientific evaluations and cost-effectiveness evaluations. But there are also other ways of complementing such indicators, namely through qualitative surveys and focus groups sessions with families which civil society organizations can contribute to or indeed lead on. Key evaluation questions to be considered are: does the policy support the social and economic integration of families? Does the policy successfully manage family support needs? Civil society organizations can intervene ex-ante, mid-term or indeed at the end of a policy cycle in order to help define new problems to be addressed in a next policy phase.

IV. The way forward: a mix between national and European policies

COFACE Families Europe works on three main levels which represent the multi-level governance of the European Union. Firstly, the national members of COFACE (a diverse range of family organizations) provide a voice and services in their respective countries and push for quality family-friendly national and regional policies. Secondly, COFACE Families Europe represents the interests of its members in the EU political arena, aiming to build European family-friendly policies, working in partnership with the European Commission, European Parliament and other key institutions in Brussels. Thirdly, we reconcile both EU and national levels by promoting transnational exchanges and innovation across EU countries through various activities (seminars, training, common projects, awareness-raising campaigns and more).

We would like to reinforce the fourth dimension to our work: making the links between European dynamics and global dynamics to reduce or eradicate poverty. There are some upcoming initiatives worth mentioning in this respect which we are monitoring closely.

Currently the European Union provides funding to countries under its Cohesion Policy to support employment and inclusion pathways through its European Social Fund, the building of community-based social and health services through its European Regional Development Fund, and providing emergency assistance to families in vulnerable situations through its Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived.

In March 2016, the European Commission launched a consultation on European Pillar of Social Rights, and will publish a proposal next year. We are convinced this Pillar can provide a 2030 vision with long-term goals linked to the Sustainable Development Goals in order to guide policy and law-making in ensuring all European citizens have access to their fundamental rights.

The European Commission is also preparing a package of non-legislative and legislative measures to be published early next year to promote reconciliation work and family for women and men. The package is likely to include proposals on leaves such as carers leave, paternity leave and on building quality services. The ultimate goal of this package is helping families to reconcile their private and professional lives, which we consider fundamental to preventing poverty and social exclusion.

COFACE Families Europe is working closely with EU institutions to shape and implement these policies with a view to supporting families in their daily needs (i.e. poverty prevention) and especially helping families in a vulnerable situation transition out of poverty and social exclusion. To this end, we are doing our best to ensure these policies include our core values of non-discrimination (recognising all family forms), equal opportunities (equality between women and men being a cornerstone for the reconciliation of family and professional life), respect of human rights (advancing the rights of families and their members to a decent quality of life), empowerment (giving a voice to all family members as citizens, consumers and workers), social inclusion (advocating for the shaping of policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion of families and their members), and finally solidarity (promoting intergenerational solidarity between family members). We truly hope Europe can provide some inspiration to other world regions in the global fight against poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.