

COFACE Families Europe
Annual report 2019

Safeguarding a social, inclusive and diverse Europe for all families

I. Summary

The context of the action

Our mission: COFACE - FAMILIES EUROPE is a network promoting the well-being, health and security of families and their members in a changing society and serves as a trusted entity for family mainstreaming and for the voice/needs of families in the EU and beyond.

We achieve this through coordination between the COFACE Member organisations to assess the needs of families at grass-roots levels, to gather evidence and project trends, and to link these needs to the appropriate policy mechanisms at EU level, such as the European Semester process, the Social Open Method of Coordination, the European Structural and Investment Funds, the European Pillar of Social Rights, as well as other key EU legislative and non-legislative initiatives beyond social and employment policy (gender equality, migration, education, consumer policy, financial services, safer internet and more). We do this by liaising directly with key EU policy makers in European Parliament, Commission and Council, as well as EU advisory bodies like the European Economic and Social Committee and the EU Committee of the Regions. It is also our role to drive innovation by facilitating transnational exchanges and foster mutual learning on effective policies and practices between COFACE member organisations, aiming to support national and subnational policies in the interest of families. COFACE achieves this through the organisation of seminars, ad-hoc expert groups, EU presidency and other conferences, advocacy and awareness raising campaigns, on-line and social communication and dissemination.

In a spirit of pluralism, working in the name of all types of families, COFACE Families Europe is rooted in a set of six core values:

Non-discrimination. COFACE-Families Europe recognises all family forms.

Equal opportunities. COFACE-Families Europe believes equality between women and men is a cornerstone for the reconciliation of family and professional life.

Respect of human rights. COFACE-Families Europe seeks to advance the rights of families and their members to a decent quality of life.

Empowerment. COFACE-Families Europe aims to give a voice to all family members as citizens, consumers and workers.

Social inclusion. COFACE-Families Europe advocates for the shaping of policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion of families and their members.

Solidarity. COFACE-Families Europe promotes intergenerational solidarity between family members.

Main policy areas

COFACE pays attention to the needs of all families in Europe. COFACE's focus is on the social and family policies including labour market policies that impact the lives of children and families, and we work on the mainstreaming of the family dimension into all policy areas. COFACE is working in particular in the fields of social protection and inclusion, safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities and support needs, preventing and fighting child poverty, reconciling family and work life, housing, inclusive education, health, care and other services to families, migration, information and communications technologies, consumer policies and other relevant policy areas. The bubbles on our website www.cofaceeu.org represent our key policy areas and sub-areas of work:

- Education: ECEC, informal education, inclusive education
- Migration: Family reunification, transnational families, inclusive societies
- Worklife Balance: Working arrangements, Services, Gender equality
- Europe: European Pillar of Social Rights, Sustainable Development Goals
- Disability: Desinstitutionalisation, Families of persons with disability, Family carers, UNCRPD implementation
- Digitalisation: online safety, digital future, data protection and privacy -Consumers: financial inclusion, health, children

For each policy area, we focus on a specific angle, pushing a progressive agenda for families in line with our core values and human rights. We monitor the impact of EU developments in these different areas, we promote knowledge transfer across countries, we build research partnerships on the different areas to build evidence-based policies, and we campaign and communicate about the impact of Europe on all policy areas.

Main objectives

Our vision: COFACE Families Europe works towards a family friendly environment, enabling all families and their members to 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 have 8 internal strategic objectives to achieve this vision:

1. Giving a voice to families in policy-making and implementation
2. Promoting fair access to Services of General Interest
3. Building family-friendly policies and workplaces
4. Achieving an EU status for family carers
5. Harnessing the transformative power of technologies for a sustainable world
6. Supporting the inclusion of vulnerable groups such as migrants, persons with disabilities, one-parent families, and other minority groups
7. Promoting equal opportunities for all families
8. Promote child rights and well-being

In 2019, we addressed all objectives.

Key activities

We undertake the following activities.

Represent: Representing COFACE member organisations towards the European and international institutions (UN, OECD, Council of Europe), and towards other organisations operating at European level (EU agencies and stakeholder groups, NGO alliances, forums, platforms).

Advocate: Carrying out advocacy campaigns for families and family organisations wherever the interests of families and their members are at stake.

Coordinate: Coordinating and facilitating projects, programmes, activities and initiatives of member organisations, bringing a European dimension to their local initiatives to drive change for families.

Monitor: Closely following EU and international initiatives, assessing the negative and positive impacts for families. Assess emerging family trends across Europe through studies in various fields, and making the link with EU/ international initiatives.

Network: Establishing networking systems for the continuing exchange of information and actions with member organisations on matters arising within the European Union, as well as reaching out to individuals who support COFACE's mission.

Initiate: Developing new research, projects, conferences, seminars, trainings and study days, and putting in motion programmes of action at European level, in partnership with other organisations.

Target groups

We represent family organisations (an estimated 25 million families), which directly represent people and support services to people. We represent all types of families in a spirit of pluralism and non-discrimination. They are the prime target of our work. We in addition represent families in vulnerable situations: single-parent families, families of people with disabilities, large families, and also provide support services to migrant families through our member organisations.

The main target groups of our EASI activities and actions, on behalf of 25 million families, are the following:

-National member organisations: COFACE Member organisations, select stakeholders at national level (especially those involved in our conferences)

-EU institutions and public authorities: COFACE has disseminated all of its reports/output with the relevant EU institutions at EU level including EU Commission DGs (DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG JUST, DG FISMA, DG SANTE, DG REGIO, DG CNECT, SEC GEN), the European Parliament (via select Committees such as FEMM, EMPL), interest groups (such as the Interest Group on Carers), National Governments.

-NGOs and civil society: COFACE has disseminated all of its reports/ output with key NGO and/or civil society stakeholders at EU and National level. Among these, we find: EEG-DI, Eurochild, Women's, Lobby, ETUC, the Social Platform, BEUC, Finance Watch, EU Alliance for Investing in Children, European NGO Platform on Asylum and Migration, EDF, Right To Energy coalition...

-EU Agencies: The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND); European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE); Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA); European Banking Authority (EBA); European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO)

-EU stakeholder groups: European High-Level Group on Disability; European Platform for Diet, Physical activity and Health; Financial Services Users Group;

-International agencies: United Nations (special consultative status at the Economic and Social Council); Council of Europe; OECD.

-EESC via the EESC Liaison Group, and key EESC members.

-Corporate Networks: Toy industry, Advertising industry, sitting in multistakeholder groups with the digital industry, finance industry, food industry.

-Research projects/academics: Societal Advisory Board of the Joint Programming Initiative "More Years, Better Lives", CAPABLE (European Research Council project on worklife balance), Digital Citizenship Education (Council of Europe), DigiGen (researching the impact of digital transformations on children), and more.

Key deliverables in 2019

During this important European elections year, we especially focused on safeguarding a social, inclusive and diverse Europe.

We organised 4 internal expert meetings on communications, work-life balance, disability and digitalisation, and 1 big public affairs event under the Finnish presidency of the EU on shaping a healthy environment fit for children bringing together 100 participants from 20+ countries and a wide range of sectors creating new synergies and partnerships, as well as cross-country knowledge and innovation transfer. We developed 4 position papers, including our "Building inclusive societies" paper, the New Deal for Families of Today and our S.H.I.F.T. guide to boost a further shift towards full inclusion of persons with disabilities. We collected good practices throughout our different meetings, and carried out a coordinated mapping of actions/programmes to support families in the digital world resulting in a Digital Families Map. We launched a call to mobilisation to the COFACE network for the European elections, through our #Allfamiliespeakout campaign, encouraging people to vote for pluralism. We carried out the first Europe-wide survey about Toys and Diversity, collecting 2000+ responses from people in 30+ countries. We helped build 6 new successful European projects (under Erasmus+ and Horizon2020) which will help bridge research, policy and practice at EU and national level. We continued shaping the EU social policy agenda through a wide range of European events, actions, campaigns, statements linked to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. We successfully mobilised families to vote in the European elections for a pluralistic European Parliament. COFACE staff and

members travelled to different cities across Europe (Toulouse, Strasbourg, Vienna, Vilnius, Nice, Athens, Berlin, Warsaw, Madrid, Zagreb, Turku, Paris, Bucharest, Lodz, Malaga, Rome, Helsinki, Valetta, Larnaca, Geneva, The Hague, Antwerp, Prague, Dole, Dublin) to bring the perspective of civil society and families to different events organised by governments, research institutions, EU agencies, civil society, employers and trade unions. We organised numerous internal trainings to build capacity of civil society to have a strong voice in EU policy and law-making. We continued building key information into our website which acts as a centralised hub of for EU family affairs, and increased our outreach on social media communities boosted by different communication tools (graphic cards, videos, articles).

II. Results/Outputs

Actions and recommendations to feed EU policy-making

We consolidated the EU social agenda based on legislative and non-legislative actions, and support the wider recognition of social concerns in other policy fields which impact the well-being and fundamental rights of families. We built cooperation with EU-level networks for joint advocacy and reinforced implementation of social policy. We promoted evidence-based advocacy by monitoring and integrating available COFACE data and external data in EU discussions.

We built bridges between COFACE and EU institutions to mainstream family issues through a strong presence in different European Commission-led EU stakeholder groups in various DGs (EMPL, SANTE, FISMA, CNECT, SECGEN), providing a strong voice for families, consumers, workers in EU discussions; by assessing the EU work-life balance directive and the New Deal for Consumers; by responding to 10+ consultations and by accepting invitations to speak in 10 EU Brussels-based conferences and workshops. We consolidated joint EU advocacy frameworks through signing 16 joint statements with European NGOs on a variety of topics (the EU budget, Worklife balance, Investing in Children, Desinstitutionalisation, migration, energy poverty, financial inclusion), as well as 3 joint reports (on the right to energy, implementation of the SDGs, and the right to vote in the EP elections), 6 joint European events on financial inclusion, energy poverty, deinstitutionalisation, and co-production of persons with disabilities in political participation. We built bridges between policy and research by supporting universities as advisory board member of 7 European projects, and supporting the development of 9 new European project proposals with successful funding for six of them. We also had researchers and academics present at each of our expert meetings and our public affairs events. We connected with researchers in Japan who visited COFACE to discuss work-life balance policies in Europe, and linked this to the 2019 EU-Japan partnership which focused on work-life balance in 2019, led by DG EMPL of the European Commission.

Bridge-building actions between EU level and national actors

We continued to mainstream the family dimension in EU policy and law-making, by feeding in new social developments and challenges highlighted by national family organisations. We supported the capacity of national organisations to monitor and implement EU policies, and their impact on citizens. We built bridges between European and local needs through various channels, including the take-up of the European Structural and Investment Funds

We strengthened evidence-based advocacy, highlighting new social developments and challenges by collecting information from COFACE members on their programmes/actions for

vulnerable families, work-life balance, disability, child well-being, support to families in the digital world. This resulted in different collections of good practice, including a series of powerpoint presentations and a Digital Families Map. By bringing EU and national expertise together in Luxembourg at our COFACE Disability meeting, we developed the S.H.I.F.T. guide to boost the shift towards full inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families. We consolidated the role of civil society organisations as experts in EU/family policy through countless invitations to take part in projects, conferences, expert meetings, trainings, lectures across European countries (Toulouse, Strasbourg, Vienna, Athens, Berlin, Warsaw, Madrid, Zagreb, Turku, Paris, Bucharest, Lodz, Malaga, Rome, Helsinki, Valetta, Vilnius, Nice, Larnaca, Geneva, The Hague, Antwerp, Prague, Dole, Dublin). In 2019, COFACE staff and members spoke at around 30 events at EU and national level, organised 11 training sessions, produced around 25 reports, and conducted various assessments of EU law. We ensured transfer of knowledge across countries resulting from engagement of COFACE member organisations and partners, with good mobilisation for our four expert group meetings (on average 12 COFACE delegates per expert meeting) and good turnout of external participants at our public affairs events, especially for our conference under the Finnish presidency of the EU which brought together 100+ representatives from 20+ countries, from local to international level, and across sectors, building multi-level bridges and creating positive synergies in celebration of the 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Awareness-raising and dissemination

We ensured an ongoing society watchdog function to raise awareness about new trends and emerging challenges for families at EU and national level. We aimed to foster transfer of knowledge across countries with a view to develop and disseminate innovative policy and practice. We built various online information and advocacy campaigns to disseminate COFACE/EU activities strategically to local communities in Europe and beyond.

The community of practice around COFACE is evident from our growing online communities and growing number of invitations to speak at events, which allows us to maximise the dissemination and impact of our work. We analysed our social media communities on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, and decided to start building a community on Instagram as well to reach to "future parents" since the average of Instagram users is lower than on the other communities. The monthly newsletters with EU and local updates are read by a wide-range of stakeholders in Europe and beyond (3000+ readers), so we put energy into reviewing and refreshing our newsletter look and content to make it more modern, communicative and engaging for the readership. In terms of network building, we also brought COFACE communications professionals together for the first time, to exchange good practices on their national campaigns, and to develop a collective campaign around the European elections: #Allfamiliespeakout aimed to mobilise families to vote for MEPs who defend democratic values of pluralism, gender equality, non-discrimination and human rights. In 2019 we also deepened our analyse of the support programmes and actions run by COFACE members at local level, and realised that there is a huge diversity of programmes worth highlighting and collecting into a digital platform which we will call the "Families of Today" Lab. Finally, we continued to experiment and innovate in the communication field which offers so many opportunities today to communicate about Europe. While we explored the possibility of organising a concert on Toys&Diversity, the idea was not retained for 2019. We instead focused our energy on other innovations: phasing in video into COFACE communications methods with a variety of videos from trainings on the GDPR, to videos for the #Allfamiliespeakout campaign (on the EU elections and on the WLB directive), to use of video for reporting about

conferences. We explored the potential of the graphic world to help us develop social media cards and infographics about the European election system, for use by COFACE members in reaching out to families in their respective countries, and tried to phase in accessibility and easy-to-read methods in our work. We innovated in our campaigning through the use of a survey tool to consult Europeans (2000+ responses from 30+ countries) about Toys&Diversity. This proved to be an educational and awareness-raising tool, a way to connect directly with citizens, and an important way to collect data.

Network organisation and management

We ensured a strong voice for families at EU level, by facilitating internal and open democratic governance, consensus-building and legitimate decision-making through strong COFACE statutory bodies. We maintained a highly performing staff and a strong, reliable and far-reaching network of excellence based on a sound membership, partnership and finance strategy. We continuously built synergies between the different types of expertise in the network (EU policy and family policy/practice) through mutual capacity building between COFACE staff and members.

We invested time in consensus-building on family issues across EU countries, adopting the seminar report on Economics at the service of society and carrying out capacity-building for members on economics, adopting a position paper on Building Inclusive Societies, developing a common strategy and manifesto for the European elections across different countries, assessing 10 years of campaigning on work-life balance culminating in the adoption of the EU worklife balance directive with minimum standards for EU citizens. The AC made key decisions in relation to developing the "Families of Today" Lab and mainstreaming the collection of good practice throughout our COFACE meetings. We adopted different key positions such as S.H.I.F.T. which brought closer together different groupings in the COFACE network, namely member organisation representing families of persons with disabilities and mainstream family organisations; and developed our New Deal for Families of Today, our 4-year priorities for the new European Commission. The consolidation of our Membership and Partnership system is always a key priority in statutory meetings, where we strategically connected with Irish organisations during our AC1 in Dublin, mapped out civil society organisations across Europe which provide support to families during our AC2 in Barcelona, and connected with potential member organisations during our AC3 and conference in Helsinki. As part of our long-term membership strategy, in 2019 we connected with civil society organisations supporting families in countries where COFACE is not present like Macedonia, Poland, Lithuania, Montenegro, and in countries where COFACE already has members (Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Ireland, Hungary, Greece, France, Belgium, Latvia, The Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom, Croatia, Germany and Italy). We strengthened the involvement of COFACE members in EU policy-making namely through various capacity-building sessions on Communications, Disability, Economics, Digitalisation, Work-life balance, to empower them to use EU funding programmes, participate in shaping the European Pillar of Social Rights implementation strategies, and more. We collected the information from the capacity-building and integrated it into our Experience Europe programme, adding new powerpoint modules.

III. Impact

Our views are being taken into account in different policy frameworks, namely the European Pillar of Social Rights, the development of two-generation Early Childhood Education and Care in the framework of developing the European Child Guarantee, the European Semester and the need for CSRs on inclusive education, LTC and ECEC. We are building links with the new European Parliament and new European Commission (namely with the Schmit, Dalli, Suica, von der Leyen and Vestager cabinets) and consolidating links with Council around the MFF negotiations to ensure the social dimension stays strong in the next 7-year budget, especially with the Croatian and German government in line with the 2020 EU presidencies. We continue to work jointly with different EU and international organisations through a wide range of NGO alliances, and COFACE has been elected one of the three co-chairs of the EEG-DI which will mean a heavy investment in promoting DI throughout 2020 and an opportunity to take our S.H.I.F.T. Guide to a wide audience, including to the new European Parliament. We will continue to advise and support different EU projects (research, education and more), using these to feed data into EU policy-making processes. While we have successfully joined two important Horizon2020 research consortia on the European Pillar of Social Rights (Euroship and EuSocialCit), a research on accessible transport (TRIPS), an Erasmus+ project upscaling a Belgian programme on safety online, our biggest focus in 2020 will be DigiGen, a European research project assessing the impact of digital transformations on children. This will be essential for protecting child rights online, and we have already informed key networks in Brussels (EU institutions, ICT industry, ICT users, human rights organisations) about the project, which will be further presented at our 2020 conference on digital citizenship in Zagreb under the Croatian Presidency of the EU.

The S.H.I.F.T. guide developed by COFACE Disability in Luxembourg has already been translated into 4 languages (FR, ES, IT, PT) and discussions have started at national level through the use of this tool by COFACE members. The Digital Families Map will serve as a model to further consolidate the mapping of good practice throughout the COFACE network, with further mappings planned in 2020 in the framework of building our Families of Today Lab. The exchanges in Barcelona around the EU work-life balance directive have connected COFACE members in preparation of transposition dynamics, and Spanish reforms on paternity leave have inspired cross-country transfers with COFACE members in Belgium pushing also now for increasing paternity leave beyond the minimum 10-day standard. The links built with civil society organisations across Europe will be harnessed as we invite them to connect further during our 2020 conferences with a view to integrate them in the COFACE network. The partnerships built in meetings across EU countries (with government, research, education, trade unions, and more) will be further integrated into our bridge-building strategy across sectors and to connect Europe to its citizens, and ensure intersectional dynamics between different policy areas (e.g. strengthening the links between disability and gender equality). We are already brainstorming with COFACE members to encourage them to engage with the future EU presidencies to host key COFACE conferences: Portugal, Slovenia, France. With the results of the Helsinki conference on child health and well-being, we will develop a 2030 Child Compass with the aim to publish it end 2020.

Our refreshed newsletter, Families Corner, has been successfully launched and the feedback is extremely positive. Families Corner is published more regularly and with fewer articles, along the following themes: You&theEU, CreativeHub, Discuss&Debate, Timeout. Following reflections on communications and accessibility in 2019, we are considering how to phase this better into COFACE communications and will host a meeting in 2020 on this topic. Our

decision to join Instagram in November 2019 has resulted in 50+ followers so far, mainly through the Toys&Diversity campaign. This was a useful test, which we will now further discuss with COFACE members active on Instagram in order to develop a coordinated strategy to boost following and using it differently to our three other active social media communities. The #Allfamiliespeakout campaign contributed to keeping a pluralistic European Parliament for 2019-2024 which respects European values of non-discrimination, diversity, inclusiveness. The videos and infographics produced for the European elections were translated into different languages, indicating a good take-up by COFACE members and good dissemination in certain countries. The #Allfamiliespeakout election manifesto was used to build our "New Deal for Families of Today", specific 2020-2024 recommendations which have been sent to various departments of the European Commission to insert in policy discussions. Following internal discussions on building a European Digital Family Lab collecting good practices, we are calling it the "Families of Today" Lab to firstly show that we are a pluralistic network respecting all family types, and secondly using the word "Lab" to evoke the innovation and idea exchanges that the Lab will provide to support civil society in finding solutions for the local communities they work with. Making these good practices visible are essential for the following reasons: giving visibility to the great work of civil society to support families, to inspire cross-country transfer of knowledge and innovation between civil society organisations, and bring concrete practices to EU level discussions to show the important work of civil society on the ground. This continues to be a work in progress throughout 2020 through different pilots and practice mappings. The results of the end of 2019 campaigns on #ToysandDiversity and #BeTheSHIFT are being felt already with interest from the Portuguese members of parliament in hosting an event on SHIFT under the 2021 Portuguese presidency of the EU, and with a new partnership with the Toy Industries of Europe to promote good practice in inclusive toy production.

The time invested in consensus-building on family issues resulted in strong and quality position papers (S.H.I.F.T. to boost further cross-country work on inclusion of persons with disabilities, bringing the disability family organisations and mainstream family organisations closer helping to mainstream disability in wider family policy), the #Allfamiliespeakout campaign which served as a compass to build our New Deal for Families of Today which was ready in time for the approval of the 2019-2024 European Commission, allowing us to feed our priorities and values into shaping the actions to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. The capacity-building on economics has helped COFACE members (social and family policy-makers) to better understand the economic system in which they are working and to bring this thinking into their advocacy. The timing is good since there is much economic rethinking around the EU Green Deal. The networking session organised with Irish civil society led to interest in membership of COFACE and involvement of some of our 2020 meetings, such as an Irish organisation of families of persons with disabilities which joined us for our Luxembourg meeting. We received new membership applications end of 2019 which will be examined at the next AC meeting in March 2020. We stepped up action around our networking strategy, trying to also partner or strengthen links with organisations which are not civil society but which have a huge impact on family policy, by inviting many professionals to our conference in Helsinki (eg health professionals, researchers, journalists, foundations), with a strategic reflection on "Friends of COFACE" planned in 2020. We are confident that the different capacity-building sessions on EU policy and legal frameworks are empowering COFACE civil society to have a stronger direct voice in EU policy-making, with better knowledge of Who is Who in Brussels, e.g. we set up a meeting between the German PermRep and our German AC member in view of preparing the German Presidency of the EU, and our COFACE offices now have a meeting room allowing member organisations to organise network and project meetings at the heart of Europe.