Dear Ms Drieskens,

Thank you for your message on the European Union’s response to the COVID-19 virus and its devastating consequences for families and informal carers in particular. President von der Leyen asked me to respond on her behalf.

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused a health, social and economic emergency, which will require strong and decisive policy actions to get Europe back on track. As you highlight in your message, the current crisis is showing the value of care in our societies and the key roles of families, who have been called upon to fill the gaps in the public provision of the relevant services.

The Commission is acutely aware of the challenges and has mobilised all the available EU funding. Moreover, it has proposed a bold recovery strategy with an unprecedented financial volume.

The two packages of the Commission’s Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative have mobilised available cash reserves in the European Structural and Investments Funds to enable swift investments. This initiative will allow unprecedented flexibility to use up to EUR 54 billion of uncommitted cohesion policy funding to address the COVID-19 crisis. Member States can focus these resources – from the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund – to assist companies to preserve jobs, workers in finding new jobs and national health care systems in acquiring essential supplies. Support to families, in particular single parent families, and families in vulnerable socio-economic situations (exacerbated by Covid-19), through the delivery of socio-educational services, health and care services, or proximity services1, as well as support to people in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities2, are eligible under these instruments.

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1 Allowances/ short-time work schemes for parents who stay at home to care for children as schools are closed - Allowances to cover baby-sitting costs for parents who need to go to work and cannot stay at home to care for...
The Commission’s recent proposal for a Regulation establishing the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) provides for a total of EUR 55 billion in additional funding for the European Regional Development Fund, the ESF and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. REACT-EU will, through the delivery mechanisms of 2014-2020 cohesion policy, support crisis response and recovery measures. This includes support to SMEs, job maintenance, including through short-time work schemes and support to self-employed. In addition job creation measures, in particular for people in vulnerable situations and young people as well as skills development can be financed. Moreover, the funds can be used to enhance access to social services of general interest, including for children, to support health services and investments in infrastructure providing other basic service for citizens.

Additionally, the Commission put forward a revised proposal for the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). It proposes that Member States are obliged to dedicate at least 5% of their ESF+ allocation to the fight against child poverty and 15%, instead of originally 10%, to the fight against youth unemployment, in case this challenge is particularly present in the Member State.

The Commission has also proposed a reinforced EU4Health Programme (EUR 9.4 billion) for strengthening the resilience of health systems and promoting innovation in the health sector. Among other actions, it will support activities aimed at assisting healthcare professionals in their duties.

Finally, the Commission is funding a project on advancing Personal and Household Services (ad-PHS) since 2018, targeted at all national stakeholders involved in the field of PHS (care providers, organizations representing direct employers and trade unions) as well as relevant public authorities at national, regional or local level. The project offers an opportunity for PHS stakeholders to work together in a consortium to create a platform of PHS stakeholders at EU level to support, guide and provide advice to public authorities in the development of their PHS policies.

I thank you and all the organisations in Europe that you represent for the crucial and inexhaustible work performed to support families and informal carers during this major crisis.

Yours sincerely,

Nicolas Schmit