

Discussion paper:
Building a COFACE Family Lab

#FamiliesEuropeLab
#ConnectingPeople

Following positive reactions concerning our last discussion in the AC meeting in Dublin about the creation of a Digital Family Lab under the umbrella of COFACE Families Europe, we would like to share with you the following thoughts concerning starting a Pilot project to further develop this Family Lab idea. In this discussion paper you will find:

- a) The reasons for such an undertaking,
- b) The target groups of the Family Lab,
- c) The instruments,
- d) The material we think that should be gathered and shared, originally in a first stage
- e) Indicative topics of the Lab
- f) Outcomes and benefits of the Lab
- g) Roadmap and Action plan

a) The reasons: Why to do it?

The work of COFACE will continue today and in the future to be on three levels:

- National level**, driven by the Members.
- EU level**, driven by the secretariat in Brussels.
- Transnational level**, driven by the exchanges between Members.

We think that it is high time for COFACE to create such a **useful digital tool to reinforce the transnational dynamics in the network**, by connecting in a first phase COFACE member organisations and other professionals/organisations, and in a second phase the families that are represented through the member organizations. It would be useful to pool the resources and material available in the COFACE network, providing members with a resource centre as a source of inspiration to develop new services. We would use the full potential of technology to foster exchanges locally between families/providers and across countries between organizations (COFACE members) which are forward-looking and naturally integrate a European dimension in their work.

The great work of COFACE Families Europe in building “*A Better Society for All Families*” has to be upscaled. While COFACE members work on many topics, one topic that unites all members is **provision of support and services to families**. COFACE members can learn a lot by sharing knowledge, experiences and ideas. Professionals and experts working for the improvement of family-life, can offer valuable advice to both parents and children, while they can also educate and train families in a diverse range of important issues.

The objectives of the Family Lab would be the following:

- To deepen the transnational level exchanges** between family professionals and practitioners in the COFACE network, to drive innovation and mutual support.
- Connect** COFACE professionals and partners, and in a later phase connect families directly, therefore strengthening the transnational working of the COFACE network.
- Draw out the great** expertise in the COFACE membership, providing a wide range of support services to families of all types.
- Strengthen national civil society** and their capacity to innovate to find solutions for their local communities
- Better knowledge management**, highlighting the wide range of good practice and expertise available in Europe
- Harness the full potential of ICT to drive transnational** exchanges across borders, bringing communities together.
- Show the added EU value** of working together transnationally, helping to build European citizenship.

b) Target groups

The idea is to develop a digital platform in a safe and user-friendly environment that could be divided into two strands:

1. **A strand for family organisations and for families:** through an exchange programme for family organisations (local and transnational exchanges), support families across EU to share knowledge, experience and ideas over common family issues, and also to learn from other professionals and experts through lectures, seminars and trainings

The aim is to make this resource available to families or parents who need the support and educational material. This is especially relevant in countries without many civil society organisations or big family organisations.

2. **A strand for professionals:** through an exchange programme to support their professional and career development, through lectures, seminars, trainings and generally to promote innovation and knowledge transfer across countries. Professionals include teachers, policy-makers, researchers and more.

Operational staff and practitioners in COFACE member organisations who see emerging challenges in their communities must not feel alone. We want to help them build a European support and solidarity network that they can turn to for solutions, where challenges have been met in other countries. The Digital Family Lab is to be a meeting place for such practitioners.

c) The Instruments to bring the Lab to life from 2022

From 2022, the aim would be to have the following up and running:

1. **Human resources:** The manager of the Digital family lab would be a full-time person in the COFACE secretariat.
2. **Online platform** collecting different resources of COFACE members, and managing this information, dividing it into different streams of the Lab.
3. **Translation software and other digital tools** would be foreseen in order to facilitate dialogue and learning across countries.
4. **Series of webinars**, where a selection of resources would be drawn out every year in the form of trainings. 2-3 webinars/year led by COFACE members to give a 2-hour training on a topic of choice.

d) The material (outputs) that can be provided

Short term

- Short video lectures by professionals and experts
- Short videos just giving information about a series of issues that families need and are interested in learning more about (e.g Health, consumption, other services, etc.)
- Webinars
- Actions/ campaigns

Longer term

- Library with related educational material, to be built during the process
- Digital fora for discussion and experience sharing among a) family organisations and b) professionals
- Family packs for families on the move and newly arrived families from other countries. For example it would be of great value to help direct newly arriving families to existing resources of family organizations and other facilities in the host country.

It would be ideal to have some of the material above in English, however it may be possible for each organization to translate part of the material they are interested in, for the end users. (by using subtitles)

e) Indicative topics/streams in the Lab

- Migrant families
- The importance of healthy nutrition for children
- How to build good communicative skills between parents and children
- How to deal better with adolescence
- Toy safety and consumer education
- Bullying and Cyber bullying (What parents and teachers must know)
- Safer internet
- Financial inclusion
- LGBT matters
- Work life balance
- Disability
- Child wellbeing
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Every interested organization may introduce and bring new topics for the digital family lab, according to their expertise in the long run. The idea would be to build on existing energies, materials, needs in the COFACE network. Using a bottom-up approach.

f) Outcomes and benefits of the Lab
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A reliable source of information on support to families. The fact that this tool is going to be built by COFACE Families Europe, based on input of his members means:

- That it covers different fields of experiences
- Rich and evidence based material and inspiring practices that have worked
- Credibility and trust for the users of the Lab

European Community-building. It is going to offer one more vehicle through which every participating organization communicates and in a second step interacts with the families in each country.,

- It encourages cross-country knowledge exchanges of inspiring /good practices between civil society organizations providing support to parents and children, bring European communities closer together.
- Each participating organization will be able to gather very useful material they have which is a product of their work with families for a long time, and present it to the other family organisations and family experts. In the long run, the material could also be open to the wider public in the form of a very useful digital tool.
- The creation of a COFACE Family Lab, may strengthen even more the interaction between the participating organizations, since there is going to be a continuous overflow of material and new ideas.

Knowledge and education. An important resource for family support.

- In the longer-term it would respond to the needs of the users (the parents/families) who do not often have the time and the financial resources to pay experts for counselling and trainings. Short videos offering counseling and advice to parents and short parent trainings are often very useful tools for parents who are exhausted by their everyday duties.
- There are many organizations that already have short videos addressing to parents for a number of reasons, so possibly with a few, or no amendments at all, could use them in this occasion too.

Building bridges with different sectors. After consolidating this Lab internally in COFACE, this could be used to build bridges with teachers, policy-makers and more.

- The creation of this Lab, may possibly attract in the future other stakeholders that may work in the social sector and may want to join us. This in turn may bring various sources of interactions and other advantages. For example, the core partnership would consist of family organizations, but these organizations are also linked to governments and school institutions, so that the resulting resources of the project could also be used for policy purposes and as a teaching material in schools and Universities.

g) Roadmap /Action plan

2019: Brainstorm, map resources, build a pilot project for discussion on 20-21 November in Athens, hosted by KMOP and attached to the meeting on the Digital Families Compendium.

- Stocktaking of the interest and the needs of members at the AC2 2019 in Barcelona
- Build/develop a pilot-project with 4-5 member organizations: from May-October 2019.
- Mapping exercise of existing support/services and educational material available in the Member organisations that they want to share.
- Understand how to use some COFACE resources for the pilot (travel, internships, translation, media budgets)
- Develop a workplan for the pilot for 2020.
- Finalise the pilot Family lab at the meeting in Athens on 20-21st November (agree on topics for the pilot, key actions, and budgets allocated)

2020: Launch the 1-year pilot in 3+ organisations

- Categorise the resources available (videos, documents, graphics, etc)
- Translate the resources.
- Conduct interviews of potential needs in the three organisations (understand needs, aspirations, ambitions, limits, and more)
- Bring together key practitioners during one of the 2020 COFACE events to exchange, confront ideas, build the lab from the bottom up.
- Examine the results through the 2020 COFACE evaluation budget

2021: Analyse the Pilot results, and incorporate new organisations

- Consolidate family lab concept and agree on main topics for the Pilot project
- Develop the operational model (division of tasks) and financial model (budget projections), ensure the viability and funding of the Lab.
- Explore potential funding opportunities from ministries and/or foundations. 200.000 euros/year.
- Build the Lab into COFACE workplan
- Develop the instrument technically with IT support, secure digital roadmap with digital expert, using COFACE 2021 evaluation budget
- Agree on key Lab priorities, actions, resources for 2022 and beyond: webinars/lectures, material, papers, etc to insert in 2022-2025 COFACE framework.

2022: Launch of the Family Lab under the new 4-year framework of COFACE Families Europe