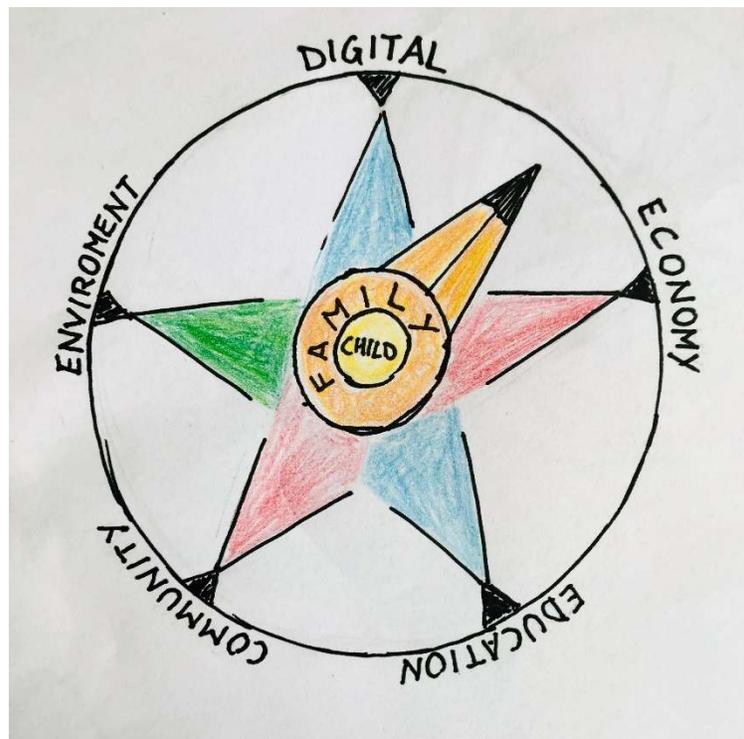


## **CHILD COMPASS 2030**

*For a Europe which invests in shaping  
a healthy society, environment and economy  
fit for children and families*



**COFACE position paper**

## Background

More than 30 years ago the International Community signed the UN Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC). Although in many ways children and families in Europe fare, on average, better than ever before, inequality has increased and some families have multiple problems.

Family policies are being reviewed across countries, to meet new challenges and needs. In some cases, they are being strengthened. In other cases, they are being weakened. There is an increasing tendency to focus on the child. At EU level, the European Commission has launched a public consultation on building a European Child Guarantee focusing on vulnerable children.

COFACE Families Europe has always pushed for a society and work-life that are kind to all children and families, without discrimination and based on values of gender equality, human rights, and social inclusion. The right to work-life balance is firmly highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and is a necessity for both families and children.

## Interrelated well-being of children and of their parents

COFACE Families Europe wants to shape a healthy and safe environment fit for children and families. We believe that all measures that affect society should be adapted to **children**, the most vulnerable and valuable elements of our societies. This child-centered approach has always been a priority for COFACE, but has gained new significance in these new COVID-19 times<sup>1</sup> where health and health systems are driving many policy debates today.

The first years of a child's life provide lifelong foundations for health, development and wellbeing. Healthy development requires that children grow and learn in supportive and nurturing families and environments. The first 1,000 days of life of a child are when a child's brain begins to grow and develop and when the foundations for their lifelong health are built, in a process which continues well into adolescence.

Children are no mini adults, their developing bodies and minds are more vulnerable to poor living conditions such as poverty, inadequate health care, nutrition, public water distribution, housing and environmental pollution. The effects of disease, malnutrition and poverty threaten the future of children and the future of the societies in which they live. Nonetheless, at present, safety and environment standards are too often based on healthy adults.

We must ensure children grow up in a healthy environment and receive healthy building blocks for their physical and emotional development. Based on the precautionary principle, we must also prevent damage to children's developing bodies and minds.

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<sup>1</sup>COVID-19 and children: A call from paediatric leaders across Europe (European Academy of Paediatricians, 2020)

Children depend on the care of adults in the environment of relationship they live. The quality of a child's home environment is most influential for later development. Parents and caregivers play a central guiding role in a child's life, they have the duty to care and provide for their children and this duty requires support from the State. Children will thrive only if their family thrives and if the whole of society cares enough to provide for them.

The UNCRC, and in particular its Article 5 and Article 18, are key references for COFACE Families Europe. It offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development. By recognising child rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the whole child. It recognises the fundamental human dignity of all children and the urgency of ensuring their well-being and development. It makes clear the idea that a basic quality of life should be the right of all children, rather than a privilege enjoyed by a few.

Article 5 introduces the idea that children should be able to exercise their rights as they acquire the competence to do so. This article 5 and the Convention as a whole places parents centre stage in child development. Parental guidance must be geared towards supporting children to exercise their rights and State Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents. Together with article 18, which asserts parents' common responsibilities in raising their children it provides a basis for the relationship between the child, their parents and the State.

It is thus fundamental to ensure the well-being of both children and families through programmes assessing and addressing the needs of both generations. This provides a compelling justification for two-generation programmes, which help parents advance their own education and achieve economic stability while their children become more prepared for school and more socially competent.

Social and family policies should act towards the establishment of the conditions for a family to be autonomous, responsible, stable, active, able to independently perform its functions, and to ensure the well-being of generations. This is the basis for the development of healthy, vital and creative societies. To fulfil this task, policies must have a systemic two-generation approach based on the interrelated well-being of children and of their parents.

In October 2019, together with 100 key stakeholders from across Europe, COFACE-Families Europe triggered a discussion on the different dimensions which impact the health and well-being of children, collecting different types of feedback and data.<sup>2</sup> On this basis, and using the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, we have developed our Child Compass 2030 to guide policy making and service development not only in the social field but in multiple other fields which impact children and their families.

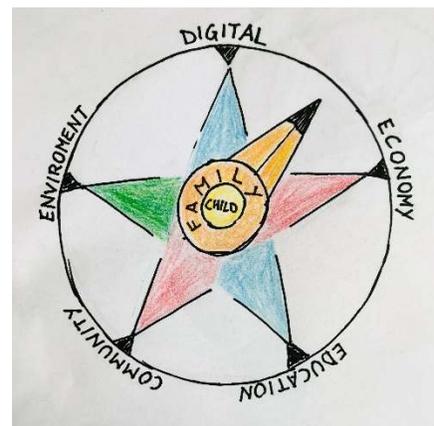
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<sup>2</sup> *Shaping a healthy environment fit for children*, 3-4 October 2019, Helsinki, Finland

## The Child Compass

The 2030 Child Compass uses a systemic two-generation approach, coming from the awareness that parents and caregivers are fundamental in the cognitive, emotional and physical development of the child. It is thus fundamental to ensure that both children and families receive adequate support.

This can be done through programmes addressing both the child and the parent/care provider, by fostering their learning and social competence, by actions supporting parents in their fundamental role filling gaps in education, training, social inclusion, parenting skills, psychological well-being, access to services, employment and income.<sup>3</sup>



The Compass provides a holistic conceptual framework of interlinked spheres of influence on individual child and family health and well-being, situating the **child** and their **family** at the core of a system with 5 dimensions which can be used as a checklist for developing positive impact measures to complement social policy measures:

1. Education
2. Community
3. Digital technology
4. Economy
5. Environment

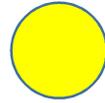
This can help bring different policy departments together (e.g. for an inter-ministerial taskforce) or different service sectors (e.g. for building a child-friendly city) to build child and family-friendly societies that put children, young people and families at the heart of their value-decisions and policies. Consideration of all dimensions of the compass are essential to build more intersectional policy-making and ensure a favourable environment for empowerment and well-being of the child. Such a systems approach is intended to help governments to address child and family well-being in a more holistic manner, transcending administrative and professional boundaries.

This 2030 Child Compass will guide our work in this decade to ensure child and family well-being are fully operationalised in policy and support terms. In turn, European and international frameworks like the European Pillar of Social Rights, the SDG Agenda 2030 as well as the future European Child Guarantee and EU child rights strategy, can and must play a fundamental role in boosting support for families and children at local level.

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<sup>3</sup>OECD (2020), *Delivering evidence based services for all families: A review of main policy issues*

## The Child



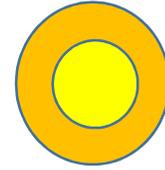
The child is an individual and a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to their age and stage of development and with the right to quality of life. The rights of the child recognised by the UNCRC can be subdivided in the commonly used three Ps: Protection, Provision, Participation.

Children need **protection** as they are dependent on adults and government for their survival and development, and while adults can access vote, legal redress and formal complaints procedures if their rights are not realised, children are generally excluded from these mechanisms. Children are thus powerless in the policy-making process and their interests can remain invisible to government if there is not a conscious and systematic effort to protect and promote them.

At the same time, children need **provision** such as goods and services to foster their learning and social competences, starting from inclusive early education and care, protection from neglect and abuse, counselling and psychological support. They are among the largest recipients of public services and vulnerable to government failures and omissions. Practically every area of government policy affects children to some degree and, due to their development stage, the negative effects of a policy or programme on children can result in long-term impacts on their potential as healthy, productive and peaceful adults. Short-sighted policymaking that fails to take children into account has a negative impact on the future of all members of society.

Decision-makers should systematically assess the impact of an initiative on children and their rights through child rights mainstreaming. Child rights mainstreaming should be part of the decision-making process by determining how actions will affect girls and boys differently, how negative effects can be minimized, how actions affect both early and later childhood, and what can be done to respect, protect and fulfil rights for all children.

Moreover, children have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, and in cultural, leisure and sport activities. **Participation** can take many forms and differing levels of children's involvement - from simple consultation on needs and problems, to influence over designs and plans, to active involvement with adults in governance structures, all the way to children conceiving of and driving their own development initiatives. To be most effective, meaningful children's participation requires widespread changes in political and institutional structures, as well as in attitudes, values and cultural practices, so that children are recognised as citizens and stakeholders. In any participatory process with children, adults are necessarily involved, and capacity building for adults to support children's participation is as important as capacity building for children to voice and make their claims. It is also important to foster parent's consultation and the structural involvement of child rights and family organisations in policy-making.



## The Family

The family environment is a key learning environment and parents and caregivers are fundamental in the cognitive physical and emotional development of the child. Healthy development requires that children grow and learn in supportive and nurturing families and environments. Parenting is a strong determinant of a child's future development. Parents' quality time with their children enables the transmission of abilities, skills, aspirations, attitudes, values, self-worth and emotional intelligence that affect how well they do in life.

Families can be considered as "natural" social protection systems. The quality of family functioning is fundamentally important and relates to the strength and quality of family relationships and the family's ability to nurture, care and provide for one another, societal health and resilience. A warm and supportive (grand)parent-child relationship is an essential element of children's wellbeing and resilience, and can limit harm caused by bullying, family poverty, partner violence.

All children must be treated equally regardless of their family setting. Modern family life is increasingly diverse and children are more likely to experience different family settings during childhood. The partnership status of parents should not affect entitlements to child-related support within tax/benefit systems, or access to quality health services (mental and physical health).

Every child who lacks parental support should be looked after by family members, in family settings, and when this is not possible, by person-centred services with staff respecting their religion, culture, language, individual choices and other aspects of their life.

The quality of a child's home environment is most influential for later development. Depending on their socio-economic background and on their children's needs, parents and caregivers might need early intervention family support, including universally-designed family support services such as family planning, parenting support, counselling, family mediation, sexuality and emotional education, respite services, peer support, financial, employment, and education support, psychological support, and more. This is relevant for early childhood, but also interventions in later childhood can have long-lasting positive effects on children's lives.

Factors of social risk are related with many elements including parents' unemployment and material deprivation, poor housing and unfavorable living conditions, absence of one or both parents, parents' chronic diseases, disorders of internal interpersonal relations in the family, parents' pedagogical failures, inadequate emotional bonding and poor communication and transmission of essential emotions such as love and trust between parents and children, and violence in the close environment. When experiencing these challenges, children face more social problems because their feeling of safety and confidence in oneself and confidence in their ability to face the external environment are not formed: difficulties in communication, anxiety, lack of self-control, tendency to engage in conflictual behaviour, and aggression might increase, while other forms of positive cognitive activity might decrease<sup>4</sup>.

21<sup>st</sup> century family policies are needed to ensure support for all families and especially for families in vulnerable situations. Those policies must guarantee work-life balance of families, parents and caregivers, enabling take-up of adequately paid maternity, paternity and parental leaves, carers leave, support services, flexible work arrangements, and building family-friendly workplaces.

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<sup>4</sup>D.Alifanovienė, O.Šapelytė, N.Bėčiūtė, (2016), *Analysis of the opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk in communities*

## Education

Education should be holistic and include citizenship, human rights and age-appropriate sexuality and emotional education. Addressing stereotypes starting in early childhood and for all the education pathways plays an important role in the preparation of young people for a safe and fulfilling life free from (cyber-)bullying.

Inclusive early childhood education and care, including for children with disabilities, lays the foundation for further learning giving children a great start in life for reaching their full potential.

Schools, education institutions and family organisations play a fundamental role in supporting parents and children in their education and learning efforts. This includes informal education as well, supporting parents and carers by providing guidance to them as first educators of their children. This means developing interventions equipping them with a greater understanding of child development and developing parental confidence in their role as parents through knowledge on e.g. good nutrition, the impact of second-hand smoking on infants, health practices during pregnancy, use of digital technology, and more.

Parental educational level is an important predictor of children's educational and behavioural outcomes. Parent education and family interaction patterns during childhood also might be linked more directly to the child's developing academic success and achievement-oriented attitudes.

Furthermore, the routine of family life, the daily interactions between parents and children, the types of hobbies and recreational activities the family enjoys, all have a bearing on children's readiness for school learning. Children do better in school when their parents set high but realistic academic standards for them. Parents of good learners also place importance on verbal interaction, and provide consistent guidance and support for schooling.

Policies and practices must be oriented toward the individual growth and learning pathways for every child and parent. All parents and especially parents of disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds should benefit from parenting support and life-long opportunities of education and training.

Sometimes parents need to be reminded that children benefit from recreational and social activities, and that schoolwork need not replace these activities. Parents can help their children develop their own schedule, allowing them to set aside time for fun if they have first allocated adequate time for study.

## Community

Every child, regardless of their origin, family composition, disabilities and socio-economic status, has the right to grow up in an environment where they feel safe and secure, have access housing, basic services and clean air and water, can play, learn and grow and where their voice is heard and matters.

Inclusion of children and families in the community means also enabling the children's participation in decision-making processes, promoting family-based care, child-friendly spaces and cities, transport, access to play, recreational, social, cultural and sport activities and volunteering.

Suitable housing in a neighbourhood where children feel safe and confident to play and explore is important for their optimal development. Having access to neighborhood, spaces, participating in culture and leisure activities allows children to play and explore and allows parents to build their network and access essential services and resources for their children.

Less and less children play outside due to the lack of public spaces adapted to the needs of children, and the lack of room and time for play has been compounded COVID-19 confinement measures in some countries restricting outdoor access to children. Urban and city planning from a child's perspective could be further developed, as well as ensuring that family and child centres are positioned accessibly. Access to inclusive parks, community and sport centres for all families and children is urgent and associated with increased physical activity and decreased screen time and encourages children to positively interact with peers and adults in their community, thus preventing isolation and social exclusion.

Play is useful for child development on many levels (e.g. boosting learning, physical exercise, social contact, communication skills, entertainment), but also for adults (e.g. combating stress). Children and adults increasingly play through online communities, which are as relevant as offline/neighbourhood communities in shaping identities and well-being. Hence not only the toy industry but also the gaming industry and more generally social media platforms have a responsibility in facilitating and building more inclusive societies.

## Digital technology

Child rights have been developed over several decades, and mainly applied to the offline world. A recently published DigiGen review indicates that the ways families engage with digital technologies are complex, and so are their consequences. On the one hand, ICT offers unique opportunities for families and their diverse individual members. On the other hand, children – and also adults – face online risks and challenges.<sup>5</sup>

Digital technologies have already changed the world – and as more and more children go online around the world, it is increasingly changing childhood. From the moment children are born, they are steeped in a steady stream of digital communication and connection. Child rights need to be applied to the online world through inclusive and accessible digital environments which allow for the acquisition of media literacy and enable online democratic and civic participation, safety and respect.

Connectivity and digital skills can be a game changer for some of the most marginalised children, helping them fulfil their potential and break intergenerational cycles of poverty, as long as the access to IT devices and platforms and essential digital competencies are ensured to all. Digital technology can also make children more susceptible to harm both online and offline. Already-vulnerable children may be at greater risk of harm, including loss of privacy, vulnerability to aggressive advertising techniques and more. Adequate parental mediation and supporting parents in their digital competences can help mitigate these adverse effects.

Policies and practices must ensure the general interest, the rule of law and due legal process are always respected, to avoid arbitrary concentration of power in the hands of the executive branch of government or private companies providing online services.

Children must be respected and appropriately protected from predatory or ill-suited business models which may have an effect on their overall online experience. Children rights, especially that of younger children, should be respected by all media and advertisers, and children should be especially protected as consumers.

Our 13 COFACE-Families Europe digitalisation principles taken together, paint a picture of an Internet and a web managed and maintained by reconciling and balancing the roles and responsibilities on the end user and private/public actors, creating a better Internet and web for children and their families.

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<sup>5</sup> T.Lorenz & O. Kapella (2020), *Children's ICT use and its impact on family life*

## Economy

The economic status of families has a huge impact on child health and well-being.

Growing up in a family environment at risk of poverty or in poverty can have disastrous consequences on the economic, social, and psychological development of children. A healthy economic environment which benefits society supports the family's ability to nurture, care and provide for one another. In turn, quality of family functioning is fundamentally important to economic health and resilience.

Economic conditions that determine the quality of family functioning include: secure parental employment, financial security, adequate housing, access to decent and affordable health care, access to social services and support. Families facing adversities in these areas are likely to experience levels of dysfunction that will have health, behavioural and social repercussions for young family members, and poorer outcomes for them later in life, very often leading to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Reduction of child and family poverty, via a mix of universal and targeted measures, is needed to ensure material resources, financial inclusion, quality employment, addressing in-work poverty and energy poverty. This also means a shift in economic thinking, away from the endless GDP growth and building a child and family friendly economic and financial environment which cares better for the wellbeing of families and children. This means providing child-friendly allowances, VAT and other tax-related policies, investing in work life balance measures and especially in adequately paid family leaves that lead to better outcomes for women, men and children.

All over the world families are the primary caregivers and they carry out the bulk of care work. Within the families, women bear a disproportionate burden of this care. This hidden engine of the world economy keeps families, societies and markets going and represents an invisible contribution to the world economy. It is time to make this invisible work visible and foster gender equality in families and societies.

A family-friendly economic environment is related to family-friendliness in the workplace but also to ensuring that financial service providers such as banks serve the real economy as opposed to speculating on stock markets. Most jobs in Europe are provided by SME's and these need a steady and reliable source of financing to sustain their economic activity. Policy-makers should be providing more support to SME's including small family businesses and families where more parents are self-employed.

## Environment

To make the living environment and the quality of life better for children and the generations to come we need to adapt our living environment according to their needs and wellbeing and not to those of adults. Looking at a policy from the perspective and needs of a child, environmental standards should be based on the physical and mental health of children because of the damage of pollutants to their developing bodies. Environmental policies must take children as a starting point to reduce children's exposure to environmental hazards.

Environmental hazards exist outside the home (e.g. pesticides, air pollution in cities), but these can also be found inside a child's home or school which can be a threat to a child's health: bad indoor air quality, mold, asbestos, flame retardants in furniture and building materials, endocrine disruptors in products like plastics/cosmetics/toys/clothing, noise pollution, inability to keep a house adequately warm or cool, and more. While broad governmental measures and safety standards are essential to avoid negative impacts on the health and well-being of children, it is important also to raise awareness of parents on how to reduce risks and promote prevention and healthy behaviours.

Action in public service provision must also be taken into account. For instance, drinking water from a community water system is a major concern if it is contaminated. Bacteria and other harmful chemicals can be a threat to anyone's health, but especially to young children. When children are exposed to a toxic environment before and after birth, this impacts their ability to attain decent standards of health, development and physical integrity. Moreover, children are the least responsible for climate change, yet they will bear the greatest burden of its impact.

Children and young people around the world have many lessons to share with us, lessons about what they need, confronting us with the results of our failure to invest in the environment. They address a powerful and clear message, and demand common action for addressing climate change and promoting sustainable lifestyles, but especially call for broader systemic change addressing the most polluted industries and the growth-oriented economy. Taking in account their demands and the participation of young people is a necessity if the interests of future generations are to be safeguarded.

EU/ international frameworks like the EU Green Deal, the future EU Child Rights Strategy, and especially the UNCRC, should consider how to firmly anchor green rights of children at their heart.