



Confederation of  
family organisations  
in the  
European Union

# Newsletter

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*better families, better society*

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### ***EY 2010 must not be window dressing...***

*We all know that this is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. And it's already halfway through.*

*It's a constant topic for all social NGOs, who are all aware and alive to the challenges. Campaigns are being run, alliances formed and actions readied, while conferences, meetings, publications and articles display the EY 2010 brand.*

*But stamping out poverty has been a concern for years: the EAPN European Network has been going for 20 years, and ATD for much longer; the EU has run a number of anti-poverty programmes; the 9<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty has just taken place in Brussels, while the 9<sup>th</sup> Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion is set for October and will be followed by an informal meeting of EU Ministers responsible for combating poverty.*

*European programmes like Progress include a major social inclusion strand specifically targeted on tackling poverty and social exclusion.*

*The EU2020 Strategy adopted by the European Council includes the aim of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and exclusion – an ambitious goal coupled to new indicators like relative poverty, material deprivation, and workless households. A "Poverty platform" is in the making.*

*So, it might seem as though Europe, the cradle of human rights, is fully enlightened and that politicians are on course to finally free us of a scourge that brings shame on our prosperous societies.*

*But what do we find?*

*85 million (17%) of all Europeans, including 20% of children and young people and 19% of elderly people are still living in or vulnerable to poverty ... And not only are the figures not going down – they are actually going up.*

*So, what is to be done?*

*What not to do is be defeatist and give up the fight, because one change for the good is the awareness that ... it can't go on like this.*

*The last People Experiencing Poverty meeting walked the talk: you cannot exit the crisis without exiting poverty. Member states have to implement the recommendations adopted in late 2009: establish an adequate minimum income scheme, establish an inclusive labour market, create secure jobs, and ensure access to quality public services. These measures should enable social inclusion and a decent standard of living for the population as a whole.*

*So it is gratifying to see the Belgian Presidency of the EU which starts on 1 July inveighing against "worsening social inequalities" in the very 3<sup>rd</sup> line of its programme. It goes on to focus on social cohesion, plans to "launch a discussion on strengthening social protection" and will close EY 2010 with a proposal to Council to "adopt conclusions on child poverty, access to quality care for all, homelessness and preventing poverty."*

*And among the vital mainstays of preventing poverty, of course, are policies to support families.*

*Maybe we will at last progress beyond the rhetoric, and see effective measures like those spelled out in 2009 put in place. At least we can hope so. Otherwise EY2010 will have been no more than disappointing window dressing....*

William Lay  
Director



### *What's new in Europe?*

#### **European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty**

Brussels, 25-26 June. Since 2001, the *EU meetings of people experiencing poverty* organised by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) bring together delegates from all over Europe to exchange views on the impact that social and economic policies have on their daily life. As stated by Pervanche Beres, chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, the 9<sup>th</sup> European Meeting came at a very special moment, when the objective to reduce poverty has been officially enshrined in the EU 2020 commitments. The Conference represented hence a unique opportunity to test the reactions and expectations of people experiencing poverty in relation to the latest developments at EU level.

The meeting was opened by European Commission officials (Ms. Carparelli and Mr. Samuel, on behalf of Commissioner Andor), by representatives of the Spanish Presidency (Ms. Martines) and by Members of the European Parliament (Ms. Beres and Ms. Figueiredo). Ms. Martines announced the intention of Spain and Belgium to draft a common statement at the conclusion of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, while Mr. Samuel reminded that social inclusion policies can be effective only if people experiencing poverty are actively and directly involved. Ms. Carparelli underlined the need of a social rights-based approach, by making use *inter alia* of the innovations of the Lisbon treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The conference continued in eight separate workshops, where national delegations engaged in lively debates and touching testimonies on the challenges that persons experiencing poverty need to face in their everyday life. **COFACE** took part in the meeting as a guest observer, together with other civil society organisations engaged in the prevention of poverty and social exclusion.

Several participants lamented the absence of decision makers in the workshops, and expressed frustration for the gap existing between the requests elaborated in the meetings and the actual policy responses at national and EU levels. **Family policies** were often named among the most urgent measures to be taken for fighting against poverty and social exclusion, together with employment, housing and health. Poverty was specifically indicated as one of the main reasons for family break-ups: several delegates mentioned the “domino effect”, i.e. a chain of negative events that eventually leads to poverty and social exclusion. The enormous marginalisation of persons with disabilities and their families was also addressed on several occasions.

All delegations agreed on the multidimensional nature of poverty and called for a comprehensive and holistic approach. Mr. Ludo Horemans, President of EAPN, expressed the strong wish that people experiencing poverty are put at the very heart of the European

Poverty Platform Against Poverty, and that a genuinely participatory process is guaranteed both at national and European levels.

More: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=88&langId=en&eventsId=271&furtherEvents=yes>

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## **EY2010-EU Stakeholders Expert Group**

Key actors in the organisation of the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion gathered in the Albert Borschette Conference Centre in Brussels on 21 June for the fourth time, in a full day meeting organised by the European Commission.

Antonia Carparelli, Head of Unit E2 at DG EMPL gave the opening address and shared the results of the EY 2010 saying they were beyond the European Commission's expectations. She stressed the strong commitment from the Spanish Presidency and gave a brief overview on the EU 2020 strategy, highlighting that for the first time in social EU history, when the EU Council of 17 June agreed to lift some 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. She added that the EY 2010 was a success in awareness-raising of issues related to poverty and social exclusion. Nevertheless, Ms Carparelli reminded participants that the year was only in midterm and that there was still much to achieve and a lot more to improve.

Anne Degrand Guillaud, Coordinator of the EY2010 Task Force, briefed the meeting on the state of play of the year. She declared that the impact of the different projects varied throughout Europe but that the level of commitment was high across the 27 member states. She mentioned there was more than a thousand ongoing projects to-date and that partnership with the media to raise public awareness of issues pertaining to poverty and social exclusion had been unprecedented. She concluded her introduction by placing emphasis on the need for more synergy between operational and political dimensions of the EY2010 projects and she called for more stakeholders to get involved at all levels (regional, national, local but also European).

Elodie Fazi continued on the midterm campaign update and participants discussed the final declaration to be put forward to the December EU Council in view of activating political commitment to fight poverty and social exclusion. The EU Solidarity Day in crisis-stricken Latvia, the Arts Initiative, the Journalists Competition and the EY2010 Ambassadors were also debated.

The meeting provided input on the ongoing initiatives and projects by the EU institutions and bodies (EESC, Committee of Regions and the EP) and was followed by a round table during which the EY EU social NGOs present at the meeting (Eurocities, Eurochild, EDF, EAPN etc...) the social partners (BusinessEurope and ETUC) and the other EU Stakeholders' Group members exchanged the latest information on their respective campaigns and activities.

Elise Willame, member of the EY2010 Consultative Committee in Belgium, closed the morning session with a session addressing the Final Declaration and the Final Conference to be held under the Belgian Presidency next December.

In the afternoon, participants split into three groups and took part into interactive workshops detailing issues previously touched upon during the morning sessions.

For more information on the EY2010: <http://coface-eu.org/en/European-Year-2010/2010/>

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## Forum on Regional and local responses to poverty and social exclusion

Europe is considered to be affected by relative rather than extreme poverty, as there are still regions where people live with less than 60% of the average income of a household. Relative poverty affects vulnerable groups such as children, persons with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, elder or unemployed people. They hardly benefit from basic social services such as public healthcare services, childcare, education for adults and training courses, decent housing, dependency support services among others.

In the context of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Committee of the Regions organised, on 8 June, a forum with the aim of exchanging good practice and expertise in the fight against poverty and social exclusion between local and regional authorities, organisations and EU institutions.



The speakers were invited to present local and regional experiences. Projects were grouped under three aspects: 1) Making local social services more accessible to all, 2) Preparing people for integration into the labour market and 3) Inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas. The opening and closing sessions aimed at putting these projects into the wider context of the European debate about poverty reduction and social inclusion.

A great amount of interesting projects were presented at this occasion. One of them was an Italian project on ***“Economic support to family units at poverty risk with non self-sufficient persons”***. It consists in a special programme intervening on non self-sufficient people's behalf through: strengthening domestic social and health services, introducing measures of economic support, testing simplified administrative procedures, activating a web platform to manage economic support,... Some projects developed by the region tackle issues such as: family units with non self-sufficient people, recognition of the work of private care givers, financial help for newly formed families, economic support offered to overcome situations of extreme poverty. [More](#)

Another interesting project was ***“Under One Roof”*** from the Municipality of Montana, in Bulgaria. This project intends to strengthen the child welfare system and implement the right of the child to be raised in a family atmosphere as a socially effective alternative for placement in institutions, through implementing a specialised range of services in the Municipality of Montana. The project is targeted to the management of products and services; deinstitutionalization and crisis support of children and families at risk; promoting the development and services of the Social Services Complex... [More](#)

More: [www.cor.europa.eu/EY2010](http://www.cor.europa.eu/EY2010)

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## Focus Weeks 2010

Throughout this year of Fighting against Poverty and Social Exclusion, each European country will have a week when the spotlight will be put on it. Upcoming dates:



28 June-4 July: [Bulgaria](#)



5-11 July: [Romania](#)



29 August-5 Sept. [Norway](#)

- • • For more on the activities organised by COFACE for EY2010 go to: <http://coface-eu.org/en/European-Year-2010/2010/>

2010 BUILDING A  
EUROPE FOR ALL  
[www.endpoverty.eu](http://www.endpoverty.eu)



COFACE is a member of the [European Year 2010 NGO Coalition](#) coordinated by EAPN, the European Anti Poverty Network.

2010  
Année européenne  
de lutte contre  
la pauvreté  
et l'exclusion sociale

*What's new in COFACE?*

**European Family Conference: 14-15 October 2010. Save the dates!**



Living as a family in Europe has been everything but simple over the past few months. With the lingering and devastating economic recession that saw the income of millions of families shrink dramatically across Europe and put as many more millions at risk of poverty and social exclusion...

*What are we doing about it?*

Against this political, social and economic backdrop, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU (COFACE) calls on all families to take time to reflect and take action to ensure we learn the lessons from the past. EU Policy makers and institutional leaders are expected to help shape a more family friendly Europe.

This is why COFACE is organizing a major European Family Conference on 14 and 15 October 2010 in Brussels under the auspices and with the support of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union. The conference will look at the family dimension of EU policies and chart a roadmap towards a socially inclusive Europe.

Two main issues – the importance of an EU focus on the family, and the EU's role in combating family poverty and social exclusion - will be addressed through key note speeches, videoed testimonies, introductions by family policy specialists and interactive workshops.

More specifically, four key themes directly related to COFACE's policy working groups will be addressed at the conference:

- **Family and social policies in a changing Europe.**
- **The long road to inclusive Europe. Progress and prospects for people with disabilities and care needs.**
- **The importance of a specific family approach to consumer policy.**
- **Making Education together with Information and Communication Technologies work for social inclusion.**

*Why should you attend?*

This event is organised in the framework of the 2010 European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion with the financial support of the EU Progress Programme. COFACE is adamant that supporting families is a most effective way to prevent poverty and exclusion, especially that of children and young people.

The Conference, to be held at the Palais d'Egmont in Brussels in the presence of **Her Majesty Queen Paola** and co- presided by Belgium's Secretary of State for Family Affairs, **Melchior Wathelet**, follows a European ministerial seminar on family mediation. COFACE is hoping that all relevant EU actors will see this major event as an opportunity to renew their commitment to solidarity, social justice and greater inclusion of families. As many recession-beleaguered families look at the future with uncertainty, we feel it could hardly be better-timed.

We are therefore counting on your active participation to our conference. We believe it will provide a much needed platform for family organisations, academic experts, policy makers and all the other relevant stakeholders in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, to come together and engage into fruitful and enriching debate.

The draft programme is available here:

<http://coface-eu.org/en/European-Year-2010/for-COFACE/EU-Family-Conference/>



### *What's new among members?*

## **A study of a good family practice: Migration, education and integration in Finland**

As part of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, COFACE is arranging a major European Family Conference on 14 and 15 October 2010 in Brussels under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union (see previous news item).



COFACE plans to show a series of mini-documentaries at [the conference](#). These **short films** will deal with family issues that cut across COFACE's four policy working groups but with a focus on the theme it wants to imprint on the 2010 European Year.

The key themes of the documentaries in 2010 are: 1) work/life balance and poverty, 2) family carers and poverty, 3) access to credit and avoidance of debt, and 4) education and inclusion of migrants.

The first film was shot in Helsinki, in the offices of our member organisation [Väestöliitto](#) (Family Federation of Finland). Below, Hayet Zeghiche, our Project Officer in charge of making these short films for COFACE, gives a flavour of how it was for her:

*The floating laughter of Afghan women streams out of the room. As I get closer with Anna Mikkonen and Mina Zandkarimi, our two Väestöliitto delegate guides during our stay in Finland, I see a shimmering palette of fabric covering dark tresses. This weekly meeting of immigrant parents with integration specialists is one of the many innovative initiatives that our Finnish member has been running for many years.*

*We are in Espoo, a small town about half an hour's drive from Helsinki. Mina has driven us there, describing how the scheme works. She tells us that the focus today will be on the Finnish education system and issues about school of particular relevance to migrant children and their parents. The figures collected by Västöliitto in 2009 indicate that migrants make up less than 5% of the total population in Finland. Nearly 52,000 of them are Russian speakers, about 12,000 are English speakers, just over 11,700 come from Somalia, with 7000 Kurdish speakers in all (Afghans, Iraqis and Iranians combined).*

*These figures clearly show that the relative size of the migrant population in Scandinavia is well below that of its central and western European neighbours. The contrast with Belgium, the European Union's most multi-cultural member state, springs to mind. Already in 2001, the statistics put the population of immigrant origin at over 12% - double the rate of the other 25 member states at the time.*

*An Iranian Kurd by origin, Mina makes a strong impression. Composed and deceptively self-effacing but exuding self-assurance and inner strength. She coordinates the group of Afghan women that we are to meet this afternoon.*

*All eyes turn towards us. Shy, mischievous smiles, subtle glances and whispers punctuate Mina's explanations of why we are there. Fifteen or so women stare at us while Mina talks about the idea of our short film that will put them in the starring roles for the short space of an afternoon. Unspoken questions that I feel more than foresee are beamed at me. I feel very much at ease; these women remind me of the many others I have bonded with over the years... a very familiar world made up of religious prohibitions, palpable suffering, unflinching joyousness, and above all an indomitable courage in the face of adversity.*

*Mina says what COFACE is, what we do and gives a run-down on the October European Family Conference where the mini-documentaries we are making on the family issues at the heart of COFACE's agenda will be shown. I wonder if these women grasp that what we do at the European level (out of the secretariat in Brussels) and nationally (through Västöliitto) strikes chords in a daily life that would not be too unfamiliar to them. I also wonder if they truly understand the issues of European policy action in favour of all families, or whether to them we are just small occasional distractions in a hard, never-ending daily grind. And finally, I wonder what combating social exclusion means to they who are so powerless and so alone. Hopefully, this visit to Finland will give me the makings of an answer.*

*Gazes are riveted on the recording equipment that Alain is readying, and I ask Nazeem, the meeting's other coordinator, if one of the women would be willing to do a short interview with me before the meeting gets under way.*

*This is the crunch moment when the women swap glances, giggle, blush and mutter "you do it ... no, you!". One of those universal moments when curiosity and the lure of the unknown prove so powerful as to sweep aside origins and customs and break through the boundaries of cultural taboos and shyness. I can already see one of the women peeling off from the group. Slim, in her early forties, shrouded in a loose veil whose dark colour accentuates the paleness of her face, she rises at Nazeem's say-so and follows us into a small adjoining garden.*

*Her testimony is an impassioned argument for Västoliitto's good practice. Suhayla tells me that "the Tuesday meeting" has helped her on all levels. It has helped her to a better understanding of the host country she finds herself in, to understand the often obscure workings of "European" official agencies and how to access the social rights that are so important to coping. She says it has also given her an opportunity to break through her isolation, to meet women from similar backgrounds, forge ties with Finnish women ... adding that where she has felt most difference is with her children. Discussions and answers to her questions have given her a better understanding of how Finland's school system works. She knows she lacks the language and knowledge to support her children's education in the way she would like to, but she can at least follow what they are doing. Suhayla stresses the importance of being able to communicate with the school, and being able to check the children's report cards online even if you can't use a computer, she admits a touch naively; at least, you know where to look and how to get them. She again says that this initiative finally makes her feel supported in her role as a mother and educator. Between my halting Persian picked up on travels in Iran and her carefully articulated Dari, we get on pretty well, helped by a good few giggles.*

*Back to the big meeting room. The school buildings are plastered with falteringly written instructions, children's doodles and coloured balloons. Mina opens the meeting and briefly runs through the Finnish educational system. A simple chart in Dari and Finnish is handed out to each woman. They all chip in with something to say, a story to tell, remarks, criticisms ... the laughter swells, sometimes to crescendo levels, but always controlled and in a spirit of respect and active listening. The coordinators moderate the discussion, encouraging the most reticent to speak up and reining in the more outgoing. The hijab (an Islamic scarf that covers the hair but has nothing to do with the burqa – a full-length robe designed to conceal the entire body), crops up again and again ... Maryam gets carried away with all the fervour of her nineteen years when she tells the tale of her older sister who was refused a place at a hairdressing college for wearing the veil despite her obvious ability and her popularity with the other trainee hairdressers and clients.*

*Farzana says that she cannot get a nursing post because of wearing a veil. Suhayla tells how the school makes her 13-year-old daughter sit at the poolside while her classmates have their weekly swimming lesson, and the unsuccessful attempts to explain how attending a mixed-sex pool made it impossible for the teenager to go swimming. She says they tried to get her excused swimming lessons, but the school refused on the grounds that PE is part of the core curriculum.*

*The mental snapshot of this young Muslim girl, caught between the desire to fit in with the others and the century-old taboo of her religion ... clothed in her veil and long sleeves made even more uncomfortable by the humid heat of the swimming baths, sitting at the poolside while her classmates splash happily around seems to me the supreme example of cultural misunderstanding between these two peoples. And yet, the dialogue has not broken down. The coordinators explain the school's view and the benefits of sport as part of the curriculum. It is not about religion or customs versus Western rationality and practice. The meeting is first and foremost a place for listening, interacting and information. These women know full well that they will not change the dictates of Western schooling. They also know that their cultural priorities and identity will never completely reconcile with those of their host country.*

Basically, Västoliitto is offering them something akin to a family meeting where the generations talk to one another non-confrontationally, but also without abandoning the values held dear by each age, allegiance, culture etc.

The fact of COFACE having a front row seat as both spectator and facilitator of such an initiative seems more important still when so much uncertainty is in the air. The dialogue for and with families must go on through listening to and respecting one another ... and education must be an integral part of integration for migrants. We must continue to help parents help their children - whatever method we choose, regardless of the beliefs that inspire us, and regardless of the model that unites us under one roof ... And if Suhayla, Maryam and the others are to be believed, this very scenario for change and compromise that will be played out again next Tuesday. Except this time in private without the voyeuristic intrusion of the TV camera lens.

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## Symposium "Walking the tightrope of insecurity: women's issues and perspectives", Belgium

Steadily rising numbers of women are touched by poverty. Job insecurity, gender pay gaps, the sheer cost of maintaining a family, etc. are all factors that women have to grapple with often at the same time just to get by.

Women in Belgium – like the wider EU – are at greater risk of poverty than men. As part of the European Year for Combating Poverty, Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (FPS) are taking a close look at women's experiences of living on the bread-line. *What is poverty? Deprivation? Why are women walking a tightrope?*



To find out, the FPS research department has just done a study on women in poverty, women and lone parenthood. Entitled "Walking the tightrope" and based on existing data and findings, this study provides a detailed survey of poverty among women. [Download the study](#) (37 pp, in French).

The conference was called to explore the causes of the burden of insecurity on women, but also to inform the debate to find solutions that are liveable with and effective long term.

More: [www.femmesprevoyantes.be](http://www.femmesprevoyantes.be)

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## What is new in Club of Large Families? – Slovakia

In the last 150 years, there have been many changes in society, especially in the status of women: they have acquired voting rights and the right to be elected, they have secured the right to education, they are increasingly active in highly qualified professions,... However, there is still no change in the work that women carry out at home. This is still an invisible (often second) job.

The Club of Large Families in Slovakia has looked at how to change this shameful situation. From its reflexion comes proposal concerning the adverse effects of demographic aging and children's poverty in families to include the work of a parent (mother or father) who takes care of a child/children in GDP measurement (open a discussion on adjustment of the relevant statistical methodology and prepare prerequisites for a political decision to adopt complementary factors) given in 2007 to Commissioner V. Špidla.

In Europe, many support the idea of celebrating the **Invisible Work Day**.

*What is invisible work?* Invisible work, unpaid, consists of all the work done within the family and voluntary work done in the community, whatever the status of the person.

*How to make invisible work visible?* The recognition of the value of invisible work will improve the status of those who do it, generally women as mothers and carers, without forgetting all forms of voluntary work in schools, hospitals, old people's homes.

The Club of Large Families (CLF), Slovakia, has prepared the celebration on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2010, as a part of the action during the European Year 2010 against Poverty and Social Exclusion. CLF has prepared a project for application through the National Implementation Body (NIB). The project was rejected and must be reduced. We have addressed the official media as TV, radio, newspapers and Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The CLF campaign on the Invisible Work Day was a success looking at reactions from the media.

Mothers are without sufficient security, the social insurance for their pensions is coupled with misjudgement, and result in feminisation of poverty. On these families relies a great part of investment in the future of the nation (human resources). This is made at their own cost. The result is family poverty, and child poverty. The choice for child is choice for poverty.

We should think also of other actors in this process; mainly of children and their rights. We must be very careful, we cannot permit the denied of rights of any participant. Especially we must protect the child's rights; they cannot defend themselves. The second large group which must be protected are caring persons, mostly mothers at home.

Rights and responsibilities are coupled. How can we move forward so that both rights and responsibilities of the parent caring at home are effectively recognised?

### Debate on the future of the European Social Fund

The European Commission organized a High level conference on the contribution of the European Social Fund (ESF) to the Europe 2020 strategy in Brussels on 23-24 June. The conference aimed at initiating a discussion on the future of the ESF, touching issues such as its future scope and priorities, main lesson learned, possible coordination with other instruments and design of effective delivery systems.

**László Andor**, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, participated in the conference and put emphasis on the fundamental role played by the ESF, a concrete tool of solidarity in times of crisis and increasing unemployment. Commissioner Andor insisted on the need to fully align the ESF with the EU 2020 strategy and broaden its scope in order to adapt it to specific needs and national peculiarities, while making use of a set of common indicators and result-based delivery systems.



Marien Delgado, COFACE's Vice-President, László Andor, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Michela Costa, COFACE's Policy Officer

According to **Aurelio Fernando Lopez**, chair of the Social Protection Committee, the ESF has been an essential instrument of social innovation and mutual learning for policy makers which should be improved and aligned with the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy, while maintaining its sources of added value. More coordination and closer contacts may be envisaged between the Social Protection Committee and the bodies managing the Fund. **Robert Verrue**, Director General Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, reminded that the fund is our main tool to invest at the community level into what economists call 'human capital', particularly in times of economic crises.

**Brian Burgoon**, Senior lecturer at the University of Amsterdam, highlighted an important political added value of the European Social Fund: in times of austerity plans and budgetary cuts, the ESF can enhance popular support towards the European Union and have strong implications for the European project as a whole. **Pascale Gruny**, President of the European Parliament working group on the European Social Fund, promised that the EP will be a proactive and innovative protagonist in shaping the future of the Fund.

**Stanislav Trnovec** from COFACE intervened in the general debate, highlighting the need of an inclusive approach addressing those who are most in need, such as families taking care of children and persons with disabilities. Other participants supported this point, insisting on the importance of family-friendly policies in the context of an ageing society. COFACE's Vice-President, **Marien Delgado**, recalled the issue of complementarities of funds and suggested a more transnational approach.

As stated by **Robert Verrue** in his conclusive remarks, the Commission will issue a proposal concerning the new European Social Fund by middle 2011, which will be preceded by a public consultation and a conference specifically focused on civil society.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=fr&catId=88&eventsId=256&furtherEvents=yes>

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## EU 2020 Strategy – European Council Conclusions

On 17 June the European Council has finalised the new *EU Strategy for jobs and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (Europe 2020)*, confirming the five headline targets:

1. raise to 75% the employment rate for women and men aged 20-64;
2. improving the conditions for research and development, in particular with the aim of raising combined public and private investment levels in this sector to 3% of GDP;
3. reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990 levels; increasing the share of renewables in final energy consumption to 20%; and moving towards a 20% increase in energy efficiency;
4. improving education levels, in particular by aiming to reduce school drop-out rates to less than 10% and by increasing the share of 30-34 years old having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40%;
5. promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion.

Member States are now expected to implement these policy priorities at their national level, *“taking account of their relative starting positions and national circumstances, and according to their national decision-making procedures”*. The first step will be the finalisation of national targets. In each Member State, the number of persons who are at risk-of-poverty and exclusion will be defined according to three indicators:

1. at-risk-of poverty
2. material deprivation
3. jobless households

Member States are left free to set their national targets *“on the basis of the most appropriate indicators, taking into account their national circumstances and priorities”*.

The European Commission should present a Communication on the flagship initiatives (including the European Platform Against Poverty) in October 2010. Member States will have to submit their Stability and Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes during the autumn.

European Council Conclusions: [here](#)

For more information: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/>

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## Maternity and pension benefits for self-employed workers

Self-employed workers and their partners will enjoy better social protection under new legislation endorsed by EU governments in early June. The Directive on self-employed workers and assisting spouses repeals and replaces an earlier law ([Directive 86/613/EEC](#)) and improves the social protection rights of millions of women in the labour market, boosting female entrepreneurship.

*"This new law makes real improvements to the rights of self-employed workers and their partners, in particular women,"* said Viviane Reding, EU Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship and Vice-President of the European Commission. *"It will help them to better balance work and family life".*

The directive, agreed with the European Parliament on 18 May and now endorsed by EU Member States, considerably improves the protection of female self-employed workers and assisting spouses in case of maternity or motherhood. It will provide equivalent access to **maternity leave** as for employees, but on a voluntary basis. At EU level, this is the first time a maternity allowance has been granted to self-employed workers.

The directive also provides the right to **social security coverage** (like pensions) on an equal basis with formal self-employed workers. This will help to provide a stronger social safety net and to stop women from falling into poverty.

The Council of Ministers is now expected to formally adopt the legislation on 24 June 2010. EU countries will then have two years to introduce it into national law. Where justified by particular difficulties, they may have an additional period of two years to implement the provisions concerning assisting spouses.

More information: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/699>

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## "Combating poverty and exclusion in the EU2020 Strategy"

In a closing address to the last COFACE General Assembly on 1 June 2010, Antonia Carparelli, Head of Unit, Inclusion, Social Policy Aspects of Migration, Streamlining of Social Policies, at the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, gave an excellent talk on European Year 2010 (EY2010). Specifically, she addressed the topic, "**Combating poverty and exclusion in the EU2020 Strategy and the legacy of EY2010**", whose context she described as quite energising.



Two aims are being pursued in EY2010: 1) raising awareness of the fight against exclusion and 2) creating a policy commitment.

1) *On raising awareness about the fight against exclusion*, there had been very good commitment at local and European level. Activities had been revamped and made more operational to raise the European Year's profile. The 2010 opening conference in Madrid had mobilised many top level politicians.

The crisis continues to exercise the minds of national governments, especially social affairs ministers. So when governments re-budget, this is an area of spending has to be looked at. The second half could be an opportunity for some countries to catch up.

2) *On the importance of creating a policy commitment around EY2010*, the European Commission has set growth targets linked to three main priorities: smart growth, sustainable long-term growth, and inclusive growth, with greater social cohesion.

**The EU2020 Strategy** aims to take over from the 2010 Lisbon Strategy whose aims were over-ambitious and were unfortunately not achieved. The new strategy will be looking at more concrete and realistic results.

Five headline targets have been identified:

1. *Research*: all Member States must step up their efforts on this;
2. *Employment*: getting the labour market going, with a desired employment rate of at least 75% of the workforce by 2020;
3. *Energy*: a long-term programme to tackle climate change must be implemented;
4. *Education*: reducing the number of early school leavers and increasing the number of university graduates;
5. *Reducing poverty*: reducing the number of people vulnerable to poverty by 25%. Negotiations with member states on this aim are very hard going.

The European Commission has proposed a series of "flagship initiatives" to be part of a **platform fight against poverty**, including:

- an action and results orientation;
- expanding the stakeholder base: currently there are the OMC and civil society organisations. Local stakeholders, trade unions and relevant institutions should be brought in;
- better policy integration; despite having the OMC, there is no overall management of the driving forces of social protection. The Platform would enable us to forge stronger ties, especially on non-discrimination, health, consumer policy, etc.
- a focus on innovation, social experimentation, including the construction of an operational tool. Such experimentation must be done on innovative initiatives tested on a small scale and then eventually replicated on a large scale. The idea is to identify key areas (disadvantaged young people, active inclusion, etc.), assess the arrangements put in place, and subsequently make them available to all Member States;
- work on the transparency of EU funds, with social inclusion aims.

The idea of the Platform is to create links between these different strands, to pull together everything that has been done on family policy, for example. The aim is to channel all promising initiatives and improve the use made of EU funds.

Antonia Carparelli concluded that there was a need to go beyond ideologies in all areas and focus on people's well-being. People know what is best for them. The cultural dimension of family policies must be taken into account. It will be a rich source of more effective social policies. There must be a more coherent system, respect for the family and the rights of the child as an individual.

## COFACE news

### **The role of Minimum Income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe**

None of Minimum Income schemes in Europe are adequate, sufficient for people to live in dignity. In 3 EU countries, they don't even exist. And that could get even worse... COFACE decided to join to the EAPN campaign on Minimum Income and to send, together with EAPN and other stakeholders, a support letter to the European Parliament in favour of Minimum Income schemes in Europe.

For years, COFACE has been asking that minimum income schemes be adopted in all Member States, because, providing levels are adequate, they are among the most efficient tools available to fight poverty and social exclusion of families and children. We therefore believe that the proposal and adoption of such a Framework Directive would be completely justified and a totally logical outcome of EY2010 against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

You can read COFACE's letter [here](#).

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### **Open letter to the Housing Ministers of the EU Member States**

At the 18<sup>th</sup> informal meeting on 21 June 2010 in Toledo, Spain, COFACE addressed an open letter to the Housing Ministers of the EU Member States.

Housing access and arrangements are at the very forefront of families' concerns. They need policies to be pursued in their countries that ensure an affordable, quality living environment. This means making appropriate provision where everyone - children, young people, adults and elderly people, people with disabilities or medical conditions – can be catered for and accommodated in human surroundings that not only preserve their dignity and autonomy, but also foster their personal development and their inclusion in society.

In the letter, COFACE emphasises that, to ensure social equity and promote social inclusion of low- and middle-income families, the EU Housing Ministers must take their cue from the EU2020 Strategy objectives and develop effective policies to:

- tackle poor housing and speculation in low-cost housing,
- implement accommodation solutions for elderly persons,
- ensure that the 2020 Strategy's environmental and energy implications do not produce an environmental social divide between more affluent communities living in low energy homes and low-income households living in the least energy-efficient housing.

• • • [Download COFACE's Open Letter](#) containing all the messages to the EU Housing Ministers.

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## **New COFACE position on sustainable development and families**

For children to be brought up in a family environment that cares about Sustainable Development and is also engaged with community life, will enable them to grow up as involved members of a liveable and fair world. We all bear responsibility for our future.

Families in particular, through the ways they live, move around and consume, can have a significant impact on the development of our society. They are mindful of that role, and clearly have a growing desire for and interest in more civic-minded and responsible consuming.

This being so, COFACE has set itself the objective of building awareness and guiding Europe's families towards "more sustainable consumption". But such controlled and responsible consumption cannot be achieved without a supply of sustainable goods by industries and businesses, as well as how they organise it, and this makes "sustainable production" vital to linking family and working life, such as through company clean travel plans, training in Sustainable Development, etc. Public authorities – both national and European – also have a major role to play by taking measures that enable a Sustainable Development policy to be framed for our societies and our families..

COFACE, as a family and consumer citizen organisation, is mindful of the efforts that families must make in order to change their behaviour in a way that enables society to develop in a sustainable manner. It will support the framing and implementation of long-term policies by the European institutions which combine environmental protection with economic performance and social equity. It is concerned that recognition be given to the interests of all the world's most vulnerable communities.

In particular, COFACE has identified several positions which make up its initial recommendations.

- • • [Download the COFACE position](#) on sustainable development and families.

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## 2009 Activity Report



COFACE took very many initiatives in 2009, and also joined its voice with those of other organisations active in its own areas of work so as to give real extra clout to the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Its annual report shows how **family policies** are the best way of **preventing** family poverty and exclusion at EU level.

COFACE's 2009 activity report reviews the raft of activities carried out by COFACE in the last twelve months.

- • • Download the report.

## Members' news

### “Go for it dads!” campaign, FPS (Belgium)

Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (FPS) launched a major awareness and information campaign on parental leave in June entitled “Go for it dads!”.

By far most parental leave is still taken by women. For women to do almost all the family care work leaving men free to engage more with paid work is a division of labour that perpetuates a vast gender gap, including in the workplace.

One of FPS' objectives is to close the gender gap. FPS' aim with this campaign is to make fathers aware of the importance of taking their parental leave entitlement, which helps promote equality between women and men in the family and the labour market. By reaching out to all fathers (to be) FPS hopes to turn around the current allocation of family and child-raising tasks.

Policy measures that give fathers a bigger financial incentive would be a support second to none to what we are already doing. So the success of this campaign also depends on the policy decisions taken on the matter. The various actions that could be carried out can have a positive impact and help deliver the ultimate aim - greater gender equality.



The “Go for it dads!” campaign is built around a series of awareness-raising, distribution and other activities. Media tools like posters, leaflets, an information brochure, videos, etc. on different types of parental leave are available on the website [www.congesparentaux.be](http://www.congesparentaux.be).

Download the brochure [«Mode d’emploi des congés parentaux à l’usage de tous les papas»](#) (Guide to parental leave for all fathers, in French).

### Survey, “1000 women recount their childbirth experiences”, UNAF (France)

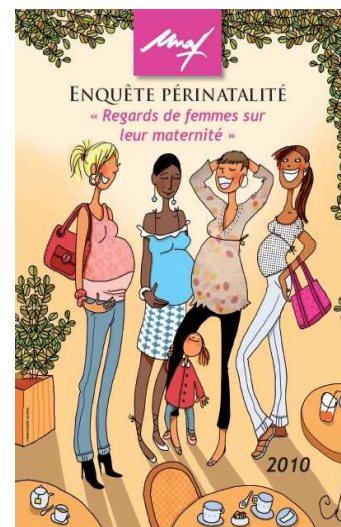
As the voice of families on the body set up to evaluate the Perinatal Plan 2005-2007, UNAF (the national union of family associations in France) has done a large-scale survey to canvass mothers’ views, quizzing women who gave birth between 2004 and 2009. UNAF drafted the questionnaire in conjunction with CIANE (an alliance of childbirth support associations), also a member of the Evaluation Committee.

The survey reflects 952 personal accounts gleaned in 77 departments across France.

The women were generally satisfied with the care they received up to and including childbirth. This probably reflects the coherent organisation of perinatal provision where professionals are now networked and where specialised provision and childbirth professionals work together.

However, the personal testimonies did reveal some criticisms and demands, such as:

- Breastfeeding is still a big issue beset by doubts and guilt.
- Women want a positive role in their delivery.
- Medical procedures are sometimes performed with no explanation.
- Expectations range from safety to personalised care.
- Some women felt very much on their own leaving the maternity clinic.



Confident that the wealth of what these women had to say will help improve after-care of women around childbirth, UNAF has sent the survey outcomes and its proposals to the 2005-2007 Perinatal Plan evaluation body.

More information: <http://www.unaf.fr/spip.php?article10920> (in French)

The survey: [http://www.unaf.fr/IMG/pdf/ENQUETE\\_PERINATALITE.pdf](http://www.unaf.fr/IMG/pdf/ENQUETE_PERINATALITE.pdf)

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## New COFACE member Latvia - Vienmēr lūdzu, ULLFA!

The Union of Latvian Large Family Associations (ULLFA) has just joined the COFACE family. Today, COFACE gathers general and single-issue national family organisations across 22 Member States ([see the list of COFACE members](#)), so it gives a voice to many millions of parents and children across Europe.

ULLFA is a network of non-governmental large families organisations, promoting the prestige of natural families in Latvia, based on marriage and the strengthening family values in Europe. ULLFA was founded in 1991 and gathers today 7 legally independent family organisations throughout Latvia whose members have raised at least 3 children, representing 420 families (members), which unite 2330 parents and children.

ULLFA participates in the discussion of family welfare programmes and seeks solutions together with the Demographic Committees of Cabinet of Ministers and Saeima (Parliament of Latvia). All work is accomplished with the mutual help of volunteers.

[More information](#)

## Stats of the month

### Enhanced cooperation in divorce

“International” couples (couples of different nationalities and couples living outside of EU countries or who live together in a country other than their country of origin) could choose which national law should govern their divorce under an **enhanced cooperation agreement** supported unanimously by the European Parliament’s Committee on Legal Affairs on 1 June 2010.

The parliamentary committee considers that for the first time in the history of European integration, the European Parliament must authorise the 12 EU member states that approve the idea (France, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Luxembourg , Germany, Belgium, and Latvia) to get closer cooperation going in the field of divorce law. Other Member States can join the proposal at any time.

This enhanced cooperation on divorce law and judicial separation procedures could benefit tens of thousands of "international couples". **Over 350,000 cross-border marriages and 170,000 divorces, or 20% of all divorces in the EU, take place each year in the European Union.** The Member States with the highest proportion of international divorces in 2007 were Germany (34,000), France (20,500) and the United Kingdom (19,500).

A Eurobarometer Flash study on family law showed that 60% of Europeans expect the EU to help make the laws governing divorce where one party comes from another Member State easier to apply.

This proposal would allow “international” couples to choose which law applies when they separate, provided it is the law of a country with which they have close links (such as long-term residence or nationality). For example, a Franco-German couple living in Belgium could agree that either French or German law would apply to their divorce.

[More](#)

## Measuring public perceptions of poverty

One European in six reports a constant struggle to pay household bills and three quarters believe that poverty has increased in their country over the past year. These are the key results from a new [Eurobarometer survey](#) on social impacts of the crisis, presented by the Commission on June 22.

The surveys are carried out in the context of the 2010 European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion. The initiative aims to raise public awareness of the issues surrounding poverty, promote collective responsibility for tackling it and give a voice to those suffering on a daily basis. More:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/10/268&type=HTML>

## Publications

### Final report “Breaking the cycle of deprivation” – European Social Network (ESN)



The ESN's Children and Families Working Group examined policy and practice trends in contemporary children's services in the context of the fight against child poverty across Europe.

The EU has positively contributed to framing child poverty from a multidimensional perspective and to maintaining the eradication of child poverty and exclusion as a priority in national policy agendas, however more needs to be done to recognise that local public social services play a vital role in supporting vulnerable children in their

families or and in their local communities and that this contribution needs to be properly resourced by all Member States.

ESN welcomes policy initiatives that encourage:

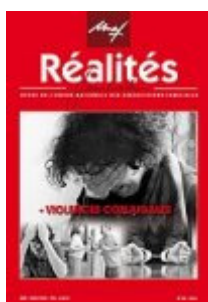
1. extra help for the most vulnerable families to access mainstream services and achieve a healthy work/life balance,
2. continuous assessment and monitoring of a child's needs,
3. partnership working with colleagues from education, health and justice,

4. the pursuit of excellence in social work practice based on locally based non institutionalised care and education.

In the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, investing in the local social work services that care and support vulnerable children, is key to breaking the cycle of deprivation.

This report is [available here](#)

#### «Réalités Familiales» Journal on domestic violence – UNAF (France)



One out of ten women is victim of domestic abuse. What is the nature of this phenomenon? What are its causes and its consequences? How can we detect violence? How can we help victims and witnesses? Whom should we direct them to?

To answer these questions, volunteers from the non-profit sector, sociologists, doctors, psychiatrist, jurists, psychologists, statisticians, press photographer... give their testimonies in the latest edition of “Réalités familiales”, a journal published by UNAF (l’Union Nationale des Associations Familiales de France)

More: <http://www.unaf.fr/spip.php?article11007> (in French)

## Exchange of information and experiences

### European Local Authorities Competition on Good Practices on the Support for Migrant Elders' Initiatives (ELAC)

Local authorities are key players when it comes to improving the quality of life of their citizens. In 2010/2011 a first European competition will award municipalities for their innovative initiatives in the mutual integration of migrant elders.

The competition was launched by the SEN@ER lead partner, the Ministry for Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration of the State of North-Rhine Westphalia and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), in partnership with the Committee of the Regions and is running under the patronage of the President of the European Parliament.

The prizes to be awarded will revolve around local authority initiatives for the mutual integration of migrant elders in all municipal fields of activity for the improvement of the quality of life of elderly people: housing, leisure and culture, social and intergenerational

activities, support of economic activities related to culturally sensitive products and services and support of volunteering by and for migrant elders.

The application package including this call for submissions, an application form and a validation form is available at: <http://www.aktioncourage.de/ELACinenglish>

The deadline for application is 31 October 2010.

## COFACE members' newsletters



<http://coface-eu.org/en/Info-Communication/Members-newsletters/>

## Call for tenders/Consultations/European Programmes

The "[Your Voice in Europe](#)" website is European Commission's single access point to a wide variety of consultations, discussions and other tools which enable you to play an active role in the European policy-making process.

### Consultations

#### Consultation on future strategy to combat violence against women

European Commission // DG Justice, Freedom and Security

→ Deadline: July 9

The European Commission is carrying out a consultation with relevant stakeholders on a proposed EU strategy to combat violence against women. The Commission has requested COFACE's input as it is currently coordinating a 24-month project under the European Daphne III programme "Helping victims of domestic violence to integrate into or stay in employment". The problems caused for families by violence and the resulting loss of income are big concerns for the family organisations members of COFACE. For more information, contact our secretariat.

#### Consultation on the Communication on the Rights of the Child (2011-2014)

European Commission // DG Justice, Freedom and Security

→ Deadline: August 20

This consultation is to give an opportunity to stakeholders to present their views to the Commission about which concrete actions they think should be developed at EU level that would bring real added value. The contributions will give the Commission an insight into concrete experiences of those working with children, particularly as regards the difficulties

they encounter when they promote and protect children's rights. The Commission is looking in particular for reliable data, factual information and concrete examples on the situation on the ground, both as regards problems and solutions.

More information [here](#)

## European Programmes

<http://coface-eu.org/fr/Actualites/Programmes-europeens/>

## Meetings of the month

### June

**1:** COFACE General Assembly. Brussels.

**2:** Best Practice Workshop "Supporting Lone Parents: How to Best Integrate Them Into the Labour Market?". European Commission. Brussels. Peggi Liebisch (KFO, AT), M. Costa.

**2-3-4:** Steering Committee for the CAFé Project coordinated by Familles Rurales (FR) in which COFACE is a partner. Ploiesti (Romania). W. Lay.

**8:** Social Platform Steering Committee. Brussels. W. Lay

**8:** Forum "Local and regional responses to poverty and social exclusion". Committee of the Regions. Brussels. A. Pérez.

**9:** Disability High Level Group. European Commission. Brussels. A.M. Comito (Co.Fa.As, IT), M. Costa.

**9:** Meeting "Europe 2020 Strategy: The place of the combat against poverty". Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Intergroup. European Parliament. A. Pérez.

**9-10-11:** Steering Committee for the "FamilyPlatform" Project coordinated by the Technische Universität in Dortmund (DE) in which COFACE is a partner. Witten (Germany). W. Lay, L. Farrer.

**10:** Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. Brussels. M. Costa.

**10:** Conference on Child Poverty, organised by the Secretary of State for Social Integration and the Fight against Poverty under the Belgian Presidency of the EU. Brussels. H Zeghiche.

**11:** Briefing on the Belgian EU Presidency priorities (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010). European Policy Centre. Brussels. A. Pérez.

**11:** Meeting with M. Nunes, assistant to E. Estrela MEP (S&D, PT) on the Maternity Leave Directive, organised by the Social Platform. Brussels. M. Costa.

**15:** General Assembly of the FLABEL Project (*Food Labelling to Advance Better Education for Life*), coordinated by EUFIC. Brussels. N. Molisse, W. Lay.

**15:** Workshop of support for families organised by The Brussels Office of the Autonomous Province of Trento (Italy) and the European Commission. Brussels. L. Farrer.

**17:** Preparatory business meeting for the COFACE European Family Conference of 14-15 October 2010 with the Office of Belgian Secretary of State M. Wathelet, Brussels. W. Lay, H. Zeghiche.

- 18:** Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care. Brussels. M. Costa.
- 21:** Meeting of the EU Stakeholders' Expert Group EY 2010. European Commission. Brussels. H. Zeghiche.
- 21-22:** Steering Committee of the "Daphne" Project coordinated by COFACE. Athens (Greece). A. Pérez.
- 21-22:** European Alcohol Policy Conference. Brussels. D. de Longeaux (CNAFC, FR).
- 21:** Bi-annual meeting between the Social Platform and the European Commission (with Commissioners V. Reding and L. Andor). Brussels. Y. Roland Gosselin (CNAFC (FR)), W. Lay.
- 21:** PEGI meeting at the European parliament. Brussels. W. Lay.
- 23:** Hearing EP Intergroup on Disability. Brussels. M. Costa.
- 23-24:** ESF Conference on Contribution of ESF to Europe 2020 Strategy. Brussels. M. Delgado (UNCEAR, ES), S. Tronvec (CLF, SK), M. Costa.
- 24:** MAC meeting. Social Platform. Brussels. W. Lay.
- 25:** Meeting of the COFACE's Belgian Committee. Brussels. W. Lay, H. Zeghiche.
- 25-26:** 9<sup>th</sup> EU Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. Brussels. W. Lay, M. Costa.
- 28:** Visit to the Palais d'Egmont in preparation for the COFACE European Family Conference of 14-15 October 2010. Brussels.
- 28:** Seminar "*Revolution digitale: aussi dans le secteur non-Marchand?!*" Brussels. F. Charron.
- 29:** Filming of a documentary as part of EY2010 for the European Family Conference (14-15 October 2010), at UNAF (Paris, France). H. Zeghiche.

## Focus

### Workshop on the support for families in Trento

15 June 2010, Brussels. The Brussels Office of the Autonomous Province of Trento and the European Commission jointly organised a workshop of support for families in Trento (Italy), within the framework of the European Alliance for Families ([Agenda](#) of the meeting).

The session kicked off with a presentation by Irena Kotowska (Warsaw School of Economics), who explained how family policy has moved from a focus on financial support for families to one concentrating on conciliation of work and life and an increased emphasis on children's perspectives. These policies "are key responses to long-term economic and demographic challenges". Concluding her presentation, she stated that countries that are doing best in terms of fertility rates are those that have adopted an equal opportunities and social investment approach, and have focussed on redistribution and adequate provision of social services.

Following this, we heard from speakers in Quebec, Trento, Valencia and Flanders who described vastly different approaches to family policy: from soup-kitchens and free food handouts to ski-lessons for families. Finally, in a session chaired by Ralf Jacob of the European Commission (Head of Unit – Social and Demographic Analysis, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities), there was a lively discussion about the different roles that family associations play across Europe in dialogue about and implementation of family policy.

In a handout, participants were alerted about a guide produced by the Commission titled [“Partnerships for more family-friendly living and working conditions: How to obtain support from the European structural funds”](#)

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## **Best Practice Workshop “Supporting Lone Parents: How to best integrate them into the labour market?”**

2 June 2010, Brussels. The workshop was organised by the European Commission in the framework of the European Alliance for Families and in connection to the activities of the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The aim was to present and discuss national programmes for supporting lone parents, involving representatives from Member States and Stakeholders. COFACE was invited to present the European perspective together with the European’s Women’s Lobby and Eurochild.

Three national experts illustrated the specific measures adopted to support lone parents households in the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and France. In all cases, the main focus of public intervention was the formulation of preventing policies against poverty and social exclusion, with particular attention to child poverty and parents’ activation measures. The data highlighted a substantially higher risk of poverty for lone parents families compared to others households, as well as a growing number and share of the phenomenon in all EU Member States. Since the broad majority of lone parents are women, the remarkable gender dimension of the issue was also repeatedly emphasised.

The solutions encountered at national level can vary broadly, and include ‘passive measures’ (such as fixed support for lone parents granting minimum income, assistance in recovering alimonies and access to social/low cost housing) but also ‘active measures’, including support to jobseekers, creation of flexible and part-time jobs, provision of financial support during the transition to work, tax relief and active family policies for work/family reconciliation.

The discussion highlighted the risk of a trade-off between employment of lone parents – generally considered as the best solution for poverty prevention – and home childcare, as a result of the lack of available and quality services. Several stakeholders insisted on reaffirming that employment is not a solution *per se*, and stated that essential aspects such as quality/sustainability of the jobs and reconciliation measures shall always be prioritised. Public authorities should also ensure that the benefits of employment for lone parents remain higher – in financial terms, but also in terms of quality of life – than social assistance.

**Ms Peggi Liebisch, intervening on behalf of COFACE**, insisted on the need of a holistic strategy to protect and enforce children’s rights and gender equality as the best approach to comprehensively address the needs of all family forms.

In her speech, she explained that COFACE believes that the focus of action must rather lie on the child’s well being than on getting the single parent in jobs, because this doesn’t guarantee the financial needs of the family. Special programmes and projects on single parents in the past didn’t make sense in terms of sustainability.

In the case of Germany, there is a lot of activity regarding single parents. The national labour ministry has set up a 3-year-program out of the ESF which is called “Good work for single parents”. The aim of the 30 projects all over the country is to integrate a greater number of single parent mothers. In constant unemployment are about 650.000 single parents (95 percent of them are mothers). In total there are about 1.6 Million Single Parent Families in Germany. Reasons for the unemployment are: missing child care facilities, structure of unemployment law (Mothers with children under the age of three must not be put into work from the agency), low wages and part-time jobs.

Statistically there can't be stated a progress in the integration of single parent families, simply because the labour market doesn't provide enough or/and sufficiently paid jobs. There is no minimum wage in Germany and the low wages sector has expanded. Women labour often is located in the service industry with extreme low wages. Single parents do not earn enough to finance their own and the living of their children. If their income isn't high enough for their living, they receive additional social benefits and count as dependants in the official statistics. If the children do not get their alimentary, they also depend on the social welfare system.

The Single Parent Organisations do not observe any sustainability in accomplishing the projects. There have been several programmes during the years to integrate a great number of single parents into the labour market, which have all failed. German legal systems (tax, social security) support the effect which the OECD has stated recently: In Germany, Single Parents pay much more income tax and social security first compared to married couples and children and second compared to other OECD-countries. Also, in Germany the gender Pay Gap is 23 Percent, which has strong effects on the Single Parent Families.

## **Forthcoming meetings**

**2-3 July:** COFACE's Working Group “Inclusive policies of disabled and other dependent persons and their families”.

**13 September:** COFACE's Bureau.

**16-17 September:** COFACE's Working Group “Family and social policies”.

**13 October:** COFACE's Administrative Council.

**14-15 October:** COFACE's European Family Conference.

**26 October:** COFACE's Working Group "Consumer protection, services and Public Health policies".

**10 November:** COFACE's Working Group “Education and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) policies”.

**19-20 November:** COFACE's Working Group “Inclusive policies of disabled and other dependent persons and their families”.

**13 December:** COFACE's Bureau and Administrative Council.

**27-29 May 2011:** ICCFR 58th International Conference “The family and social work: a successful ‘marriage’?” - The importance of developing a participatory attitude towards parents and children in Ghent, Belgium.

To view the Conference Flyer and Call for Presenters, please visit the ICCFR website:  
[www.iccfr.org](http://www.iccfr.org)



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**coface** is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims at promoting family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. **coface** advocates a policy of non-discrimination and of equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aiming at equality between women and men. **coface** links together general and single-issue national family organizations. It currently has more than 51 member organisations across 20 Member States of the European Union. As such, it gives a voice to many millions of parents and children.

*The views expressed by member organisations in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of COFACE.*



This newsletter is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013). The views expressed in it are those of the authors and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/progress/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/progress/index_en.html)