

Key ingredients for the European Pillar of Social Rights to help families and the economy bounce back

RESPONSE TO EU PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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Key ingredients

1. Two-generation approach to policy-making;
2. Automatic social rights for families in vulnerable situations;
3. Use real-time evidence provided by civil society;
4. Monitoring, reporting and impact measurement;
5. Concrete and priority actions to trigger real change;
6. COVID-proofing and ensuring recovery policies fully respect social rights;
7. Upscale NGO-driven good practices through European networks;
8. Developing and consolidating EU legal frameworks with a social impact;
9. Education and awareness-raising for community building;
10. Think beyond social and employment policy.

Overarching messages

We have knowledge, now we need to use it and upscale it to ensure social rights are fully implemented equally across the EU.

Our [New Deal for Families of Today](#) (2019) and recommendations to address the [COVID-19 impact on families](#) (2020) contain the general direction needed to support families of today.

COFACE has developed a series of policy, service and campaign tools over the last years, and is in a position to boost implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) working closely with EU and national authorities.

1. Two-generation approach to policy-making

We call for use of the [COFACE 2030 Child Compass](#) to assess the 20 principles of the pillar based on an intergenerational approach, and namely taking into account the inter-related well-being of children and their families. The Compass can be the starting point to build effective European exchanges of knowledge on the family supports of today and tomorrow needed to build resilient societies. It can also be the basis for building the future Child Guarantee as a fundamental stream for the EPSR action plan.

What does implementation look like?

Use this Compass for design, implementation and monitoring of family and child policies and programmes to ensure that child and family well-being are both systematically taken into account and fully operationalised in policy and support terms. The Compass can help bring different policy departments (e.g. for an inter-ministerial taskforce) or different service sectors (e.g. for building a child-friendly city) together to build child- and family-friendly societies that put children, young people and families at the heart of their decisions and policies. Consideration of all dimensions (education, digital, community, economy, environment) of the Compass are essential to build more intersectional policy-making and ensure a favourable environment for empowerment and wellbeing of children. Such a systemic approach is intended to help governments to address child and family well-being in a more holistic manner, transcending administrative and professional boundaries.

2. Automatic social rights for families in vulnerable situations

We call for [21st century family policies](#) to ensure universal support for all families, with targeted measures for families in vulnerable situations. Those policies must guarantee parenting and family support, work-life balance, take-up of adequately paid maternity, paternity and parental leaves, carer's leave, support services, flexible work arrangements, and family-friendly workplaces. All these social rights are firmly highlighted in the European Pillar of Social Rights, and they benefit health and well-being of both children and their families.

What does implementation look like?

Since the term "implementation" implies a real focus on operationalization, this should be a priority in the future EPSR action plan, with very operational guidelines. This means especially developing guidelines on how to make social rights automatic, for instance through direct payments or income-related service fees, without expecting families to do further paperwork to take up their rights. Automatic implementation of social rights can be boosted further by other actions such as reducing bureaucracy for funding of service providers to help the flow of service delivery; setting up family and child centres in different neighbourhoods to maximize outreach to families; and working closely with civil society to reach out to the most vulnerable. Outreach must also be supported by accessible communications such as multilingualism and catering for different types of disabilities.

3. Use real-time evidence provided by civil society

We call for a strong EU research agenda to shape policies based on human rights and the needs of families, while also giving value to real-time qualitative and quantitative data coming from civil society. This is especially relevant for civil society analyses and research based on personal testimonies and consultations of people in vulnerable situations, such as the 2017 [Who Cares?](#) study on the needs and recommendations of family carers.

What does implementation look like?

Scientific research in the field of social science and humanities must be valued in EU and national research agendas, as well as the work of key agencies like the OECD, Eurofound and EIGE. Ongoing cross-country research projects like [DigiGen](#), [Euroship](#) and [CAPABLE](#) are already yielding much data relevant to the EPSR. However, policy-makers must also be able to take swift action responding to emerging needs based on real-time evidence and trends highlighted by NGOs. Groups of the population suffering from poverty and exclusion, invisible to society, are often given a voice by NGOs at national and European level. Such NGOs must be seen as co-shapers of policy and legislation. COFACE represents different families in vulnerable situations, but one group which consistently remains invisible is family carers of children and adults with disabilities. The social recognition of family carers is urgently needed, via clear definitions, clear criteria, and a clear set of rights to support this group of people (mostly women) who are under huge pressure. In most EU countries, family carers still do not benefit from any national solidarity mechanisms providing them with professional respite services, training, financial benefits, or adequately paid leaves from work.

4. Monitoring, reporting and impact measurement

We call for EU monitoring and impact measurement of the European Pillar of Social Rights based on ambitious 2030 targets. Monitoring and evaluation are key to assessing the reach and implementation of the EPSR, and should build on a mix of strong tools like the EU social scoreboard and complementary evaluations by the Commission but also by the European Parliament and the Council. Indicators should also be developed in cooperation with civil society specialized in different policy areas. Our [New Deal for Early Childhood Education and Care](#) (2018) makes recommendations for painting a clearer picture of access to ECEC across the EU via a mix of indicators.

What does implementation look like?

Regularly reviewing the indicators used to measure progress in social rights, and consolidating the EU social scoreboard to ensure all principles of the EPSR are covered. In relation to ECEC, this means diversifying the indicators used, shifting away from using only indicators of enrolment in childcare to also measuring the number of hours that children spend in childcare. In relation to Work-life balance, this means adding complementary (sub)indicators to the social scoreboard based on comprehensive data provided by the [European Parliament](#), the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#), and [Eurofound](#). Moreover, when talking of implementation this involves measuring the impact of EPSR actions through a variety of tools looking at impact from a multi-level perspective: impact on people (well-being, poverty reduction), impact on policy (improvements, reviews), impact on society (inclusion, health, well-being), impact on the economy (labour market participation, employers and businesses), and finally impact on Europe (transnational dynamics, consolidation of EU social acquis).

5. Concrete and priority actions to trigger real change

We call for a list of concrete actions to drive real and lasting change in the lives of families and children, using the [S.H.I.F.T.](#) guide developed by the COFACE Families Europe Disability Platform highlighting 5 objectives, 15 tools and 45 actions in the areas of Support, Human rights, Independence, Families and society Transition (S.H.I.F.T.).

What does implementation look like?

The EPSR contains 20 principles which all require a series of concrete actions to reach the goals highlighted. One way of asking Member States to report on implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights can be to highlight national priorities and objectives to be reached by 2030 (in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed by just under 200 countries in 2015). On the basis of these objectives, Member States should be invited to set out their priority actions for policy, service, and funding going to the essential and not trying to cover all areas simultaneously. Where possible these actions should be linked to existing EU strategies on disability, gender equality and existing legislative frameworks. Where the Member State objectives are aligned with the objectives of our S.H.I.F.T. guide to ensure meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families, synergies can be created as we kick-start the implementation of S.H.I.F.T. in different national contexts. This means taking the broad and holistic conceptual approach of S.H.I.F.T. to trigger change, but identifying a select number of actions to start from nationally/locally in order to build sustainable family support systems.

6. COVID-proofing and ensuring recovery policies fully respect social rights

We call for COVID-proofing of all EPSR principles, to ensure the action plan is futureproof taking into account the needs and challenges which have emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has magnified the [vulnerabilities of families](#), while highlighting the importance of [social and family policies](#) as central. This unprecedented health and social crisis should prompt the European Union to rearrange its priorities to ensure that all its policies respect social rights.

What does implementation look like?

The European Union, its institutions and Member States need to look at both today and tomorrow, responding to short-term emergencies while starting long-term reflection and planning for post-pandemic life. We must avoid the mistakes made a decade ago where both social and health policy were sacrificed in the after-math of the 2008 financial crisis. At present, any and all recovery strategies rely invariably on increasing debt, either private or public, in order to jump start the economy. The burden of the recovery falls invariably on either SMEs, individual families/consumers (via encouraging private consumption) or governments (which will translate to higher taxes at some point in the future to bring public debts in line with the Maastricht treaty, thus being equivalent to forcing every EU citizen to borrow a proportional share of the excess public debt). It is of utmost importance to define, at EU level, minimum standards for private insolvency in order to avoid vulnerable families with high levels of indebtedness from sinking further into poverty and over-indebtedness. Finally, the EU should initiate an open reflection on alternative economic/monetary policies which do not rely solely on increasing debt to achieve a successful recovery.

7. Upscale NGO-driven good practices through European networks

We call for the upscaling of existing and future good practices in the NGO sector, which are based on emerging real-time needs in local communities. For instance, our [Digital Families Map](#) provides a European snapshot of innovative practices from civil society organisations which represent and/or support families in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Spain, and Finland. The map highlights existing practices to support families and children to adapt to a reality where digital tools are slowly but surely becoming the norm for schooling, working, socialising, gaming, staying connected with family members.

What does implementation look like?

Using the 20 principles of the EPSR as the guiding vision, change can be triggered both top-down through the leadership of the EU, and bottom-up through the leadership of NGO practitioners who see first-hand how families cope with different challenges in their life. Where good practices exist, they must be promoted, spread, evaluated and even replicated where relevant in the framework of EPSR actions and supported by EU funding programmes (EASI, Erasmus+, ESF+, AMIF and more). EASI-funded networks like COFACE are essential networks for the incubation of ideas, exchange of knowledge, good practice, mutual support and solidarity to help local leaders find real-time and sustainable solutions in local communities. Transnational exchanges of good practices are not only beneficial to families and children, but also have an impact on Europe through NGO practitioners realising they can work together across countries to solve local challenges.

8. Developing and consolidating EU legal frameworks with a social impact

We call for the use of European legal frameworks to implement the EPSR principles where relevant and in respect of the mandate given in the Treaties in different fields including the social and employment fields. Namely [TFEU article 153](#), which gives the mandate to propose directives and minimum standards to complement Member States in areas such as equality between women and men in the labour market, social security and social protection of workers, and the integration of persons excluded from the labour market.

What does implementation look like?

This has already proven the case with new Commission legislative proposals over the last years, most of which have successfully been adopted by European Parliament and Council of Ministers. The EU work-life balance directive adopted in 2019, now in transposition phase, contains minimum EU standards on adequately paid paternity, parent, carers leave, as well as flexible work arrangements. Such legislation provides binding rules to equalize access to social rights across all countries. This can serve as a model for minimum standards in other related areas such as Minimum Wage (directive proposal currently under discussion) or indeed any new proposals on Minimum income or the Right to Disconnect. Furthermore, EU regulations and directives in other areas should be monitored closely, to ensure they are in line with the principles of the EPSR. Examples include implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation, and the transposition of the Audio-Visual Media Services Directive and the European Accessibility Act.

9. Education and awareness-raising for community building

We call for the use of education and awareness-raising to be used as one of the implementation instruments in the future EPSR action plan, both from the EU institutions themselves and key European civil society partners. This should focus on how the 20 principles are being implemented, and create synergies with complementary European campaigns which support the vision of the EPSR from different perspectives. A case in point is our annual pre-Christmas [Toys & Diversity campaign](#) or our [#Iwantworklifebalance campaign](#) in favour of the EU work-life balance directive.

What does implementation look like?

While different EU networks have their own approach to social rights and run their own campaigns, partnerships can be built between civil society and EU institutions when awareness-raising objectives are mutual and aligned. This can be the case for an EPSR principle like gender equality, which is boosted by the Toys&Diversity campaign which highlights gender, disability and racial stereotypes in toy production, catalogues and shops, and raises awareness among toy producers, advertisers, retailers and consumers about the need for toy diversity. While the EPSR might not be mentioned in this campaign, it is directly contributing to reaching the goals of the EPSR and the SDGs. As for the #Iwantworklifebalance campaign, more explicitly linked to the EPSR and adoption of an EU directive on work-life balance, the synergies are clear with numerous possibilities with [Commissioners](#), Members of European Parliament and many more to maximize outreach to EU citizens.

10. Think beyond social and employment policy

We call for mainstreaming of EPSR principles in economic, financial, monetary EU policy objectives. This was the main message from our [seminar](#) in 2018 on economics for society. The economic status of families has a huge impact on their health and well-being. A healthy economic environment which benefits society supports the family's ability to nurture, care and provide for one another, and to engage actively in the economy. Measures beyond social and employment policy should in no way hinder social rights and the goals of the EPSR.

What does implementation look like?

There are different ways of implementing EPSR in synergy with other connected fields. For instance, using principle 20 on access to basic financial services. Access to a basic bank account is a necessary precondition for social inclusion. Without a bank account, it is often impossible to receive social benefits, a salary, pay for utility bills or access housing (renting). Migrant and homeless families are among the most vulnerable when it comes to accessing basic financial services. Despite existing [regulation](#) to facilitate access to a basic bank account, the lack of coordination and consistency between various European directorates renders these regulations inoperable. The basic bank account directive is rendered useless due to anti-money laundering and terrorist financing (AML/TF) regulations, which impose strict conditions (know your customer- KYC), impossible to fulfill for many vulnerable families. The implementation of the EPSR must include reviews of existing/future regulations to find workable solutions (e.g. basic bank accounts with limited features, with caps on monthly deposits and number/amount of daily transactions).

What is COFACE? The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims to promote family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the legislation, programmes and initiatives of the European Union (“Family mainstreaming”).

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