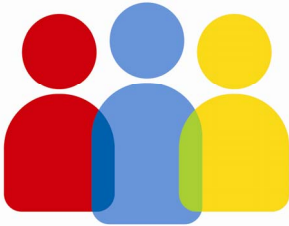




# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



FAMILYPLATFORM

## Family wellbeing

### A challenge for policy and research

Policy implications of FAMILYPLATFORM, a social platform involving 12 partners and over 170 experts and stakeholders from policy, civil society and research organisations.

June 2011

## INTRODUCTION

### Objectives of the research

The main objective of FAMILYPLATFORM was to draft a **Research Agenda on Families and Family Wellbeing for Europe**. Key milestones included charting of the major trends of existing cross-national (European-level) research on families, a critical review of that existing research, and developing a vision of future challenges facing families and family policies.

### Scientific approach/ methodology

In addition to wide-ranging literature reviews, participatory methods such as focus groups, the Foresight Approach, Delphi method and ranking tools were used so as to benefit from the knowledge of a wide range of experts and stakeholders. An interactive website facilitated the input of stakeholders in the project, and results of all of the work were attentively documented and incorporated into the eventual Research Agenda.

### New knowledge and/or European added value

FAMILYPLATFORM provides an overview of what is currently known about family life in Europe, highlights gaps in existing research, and describes major societal trends and their impacts on family life. In addition, future challenges facing families are outlined, and policy and research required for dealing with these upcoming challenges are outlined.

### Key messages for policy-makers, businesses, trade unions and civil society actors

One of the most important issues highlighted by FAMILYPLATFORM is the importance of reconciling family life (including care for children and the elderly) with competing demands coming from outside the family, in particular employment. Understanding and supporting reconciliation is essential if families are to be guaranteed the freedom to live their family lives as they choose.

## KEY OBSERVATIONS

### **Assembling a knowledge base and charting research gaps**

FAMILYPLATFORM strengthens and consolidates knowledge about family life and family policies in Europe. It covers social policies, care (for children, disabled, elderly, ...), social services, life-course and transitions, different family forms, changing gender roles, migration and mobility, living environments, local policies, as well as inequality and diversity, media, communication and information technologies. Important research gaps and knowledge needs for European research were identified within the critical review phase.

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### **Societal trends and their impact on family wellbeing**

The constitution of welfare systems and care systems, migration and mobility, education and values, and societal inequalities are the most important factors that will impact on the future wellbeing of families in Europe. Four future scenarios and sixteen family narratives were elaborated based on these factors, enabling key policy and research issues to be identified.

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### **Participatory approach**

FAMILYPLATFORM promoted an exchange of knowledge between researchers and practitioners. At least 120 stakeholder representatives were involved, representing international and European level organisations (e.g. European Commission, European Parliament, OECD, ILO, UNICEF, EUROFOUND, EU state ministries, 19 international and European-level civil society organisations, 30 national grassroots organisations, and researchers from 23 European Member States, plus Switzerland, Norway, the USA and Canada (see <http://www.familyplatform.eu/en/full-list>).

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

The key messages of the project cut across a broad range of policy areas including social and labour affairs, justice and fundamental rights, health, consumers, and the environment.

### Acceptance of plurality

Alongside the still predominant ‘traditional’ nuclear family, a number of different family forms are in existence in European Member States. These include multi-generational and large families, single parent families and gay and lesbian families. Different family forms are often - but not always - the result of decisions taken by individuals, and have historical tradition of co-existence in Europe. This highlights the need for policies that accept and support different family forms and lifestyles. Member States need to look for good models of educating parents and other care givers so that all families can strengthen their resources.

### Gender equality

Two important issues have to be addressed by politicians and other social actors: first, the preconditions for male engagement in daily family life, particularly in relation to care responsibilities, perhaps by means of labour market regulations (legislation on part-time work, flexible working hours, well-paid leave schemes, life-long learning) and incentives for employers (e.g. promotion of a family-friendly label). Second, these must be reconciled with men and women having the freedom to choose how to live.

### Easing the “rush hours of life”

One of the most frequently discussed issues was how to ease the “rush hours of life”, when many transitions come together, such as starting a career and family formation. While financial independence and having a stable job are generally regarded as preconditions for family formation, they are usually attained quite late in life because young people stay in education for longer periods of time and are therefore dependent on their parents till later on in the life course.

As a result, many decisions and requirements come together in a short period of time, and family formation tends to be delayed as a result. This often leads to decisions to have fewer children, or to have none at all. If societies want to enable their citizens to have the number of children they desire, the right kinds of support have to be put in place. This not only means supporting young people to become autonomous, but also means finding concrete policy measures that deal with reconciliation of work and family life.

### Sustainable care arrangements and individual choice

Another topic of discussion was care. Reconciliation of care - for children, elderly, ill, and disabled relatives - with other responsibilities is a real and existing challenge. Families need to be able to choose from a wide spectrum of options, so that they can select appropriate care solutions. This almost certainly entails a combination of institutional and family care.

Therefore flexible leave schemes, allowances, and appropriate valuation of family work in general are required. In addition, the

effects of family-friendly provisions and attitudes need to be more thoroughly evaluated. Flexibility towards and respect for the needs of employees' family lives can motivate employees and increase productivity. Concrete support provisions, such as childcare facilities, can help alleviate difficulties in reconciling work and family life.

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### **Support for intergenerational solidarity and communities**

As women's participation in the labour market and demands on their mobility have increased, informal support from family members, local community networks, and from formal social services has become more important. As a result, it is important to research the consequences of different 'welfare mixes' and to balance community solidarity with social services.

There is a need for thorough and comprehensive urban planning and local policies which support neighborhood and intergenerational solidarity and encourage social networks. Social innovations which encourage family solidarity at a local level are also needed, such as further development of local alliances for families.

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### **Analysis of policies**

Many different policy measures aiming to support families can be found in the EU. Greater understanding of the effects of different measures and policy mixes is required, particularly with respect to class and cultural background. Policies should be based on firm evidence, and family mainstreaming should be introduced into all decision making processes.

This is true for all Member States, but especially so where family policy has no specific institutional representation. There are difficulties even in Member States where family policy has specific representation, because other policy areas (such as education, economy, taxes, etc.) also affect everyday family life and have to be taken into account. In essence, every policy area needs to be sensitive to the effects it has on families.

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### **Participation**

New and better ways of integrating stakeholders into decision making processes would enable the needs and wishes of families to be better taken into account when formulating policy. The participation of representatives of family organisations in policy making should be improved, and new forms of formal and informal participation should be piloted. This would require use of advanced research methods, for example demonstration or networking projects.

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## Research Agenda on Families and Family Wellbeing for Europe

The main result of FAMILYPLATFORM is a research agenda built on consensually agreed issues and based on a firm and solid societal basis. This agenda has been developed with the overall aim of advancing the wellbeing of all families, irrespective of their form, cultural background, religion and ethnicity. Families are connected to almost every area of society and therefore the range of possible topics had to be condensed in order to spell out a succinct roadmap for future research.

### Sustainable care solutions

FAMILYPLATFORM conclusively demonstrates that providing care is the most challenging issue for everyday family life, and may well be the greatest challenge for the wellbeing of families in future Europe too. The project identified a substantial lack of research on care, including a need for comparative research on the characteristics of care solutions for different groups of care receivers. In addition, more knowledge is needed about the needs and wishes of care givers and care receivers, especially children. It is also vitally important to know more about how decisions relating to care are made in families; these processes are undoubtedly influenced by different systems of welfare provision and it is therefore important to discover if provision matches needs. Finally, the impact of care on the life-course of caregivers also has to be taken into account.

### Life course and transitions are of rising importance

FAMILYPLATFORM highlights the fact that family life changes extensively over the life-course of family members. Research on the life-courses of individuals and its interplay with families is lacking. Too little is known about different phases of family life, how families cope with transitions between life phases, and about the effects of social policies on different transitions. Evidence is also missing on how the wellbeing of children is affected by different transitions, such as divorce.

### Management of everyday family life has become more complicated

Another important research area is what researchers call 'doing family': the management of everyday family life and the matching of competing demands such as employment, education, neighbourhood services and living environments. For this research the target group is opened up to employers and social services amongst others. Satisfying arrangements are important for the stability and quality of family relations and a better understanding of how families deal with demands calls for new and common indicators in Europe, and highly differentiated investigations.

### Monitoring and evaluating family policies and family mainstreaming

Family policies vary across the EU and stakeholders call for more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of family policies. In order to achieve this, comparable cross-national EU information is needed. FAMILYPLATFORM calls for the establishment of a European observatory of national family policies as a possible solution.

Stakeholders also call for ‘family mainstreaming’ to assess the impact of all fields of policy on families. Advanced research methods including longitudinal studies and mixed methods are needed to help answer questions relating to future family wellbeing, as there is a lack of harmonised basic data on financial deprivation, wellbeing and inequality. Greater efforts are required to identify good practices and find creative ways of fostering family wellbeing.

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### **Inequalities, migration and mobility**

There is need for a deeper understanding of the social inequalities that exist between families, as well as the role of families in reproducing them. More research is needed on how policies can effectively tackle inequalities, and whether specific types of families are more vulnerable to poverty than others. In addition, more needs to be known about the impacts of different forms of mobility on family life. Given increases in immigration and mobility, research on immigrant families and on families from ethnic minority groups is urgently needed.

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### **Participation**

The processes of policy making have to be properly researched, and there are gaps in research on how families and their representatives currently participate in decision making and how they might be involved in the future.

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## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

### Objectives of the research

FAMILYPLATFORM's main objective was to develop and elucidate a **Research Agenda on Families and Family Wellbeing for Europe**. As a co-ordination and support action for the European Union funded by the Seventh Framework Programme, its purpose was to build up a social platform and involve a wide range of stakeholder representatives. Major trends, societal challenges, and key issues affecting the wellbeing of families in Europe were identified, as were gaps in current knowledge and requirements for future research.

### Scientific approach / Methodology

There were four key stages:

- 1. Stock taking:** working out the state of the art of cross-national European family research in eight "Existential Fields", including a comprehensive summary of state family policies.
- 2. Critical review of existing research:** discussion of key policy issues and important research gaps involving over 120 stakeholder representatives.
- 3. Foresight approach:** identification of factors influencing family wellbeing, future challenges facing families and description of four future scenarios involving scientific experts and representatives from social and family organisations.
- 4. Research agenda:** summation of all results in a consensual research agenda.



Results of the project have been documented in a project newsletter, reports published on the website, two information booklets for stakeholders, and two book publications.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Coordinator</b>	Prof. Dr. Uwe Uhlenborff, Technical University Dortmund, Germany
<b>Consortium</b>	<p><b>Family organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), Belgium</li><li>• Forum delle Associazioni Familiari, Italy</li><li>• Mouvement Mondial des Mères Europe, Belgium</li></ul> <p><b>Research institutes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State Institute for Family Research, University Bamberg, Germany</li><li>• Family Research Centre, University of Jyväskylä, Finland</li><li>• Austrian Institute for Family Studies, University of Vienna, Austria</li><li>• Demographic Research Institute Budapest, Hungary</li><li>• Institute of Social Science, University of Lisbon, Portugal</li><li>• Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milan-Bicocca, Italy</li><li>• Institute of International and Social Studies, Tallinn University, Estonia</li><li>• Department of Media and Communication, London School of Economics, United Kingdom</li></ul>
<b>Duration</b>	October 2010 – March 2011 (18 months)
<b>Funding scheme</b>	Co-ordination and support action
<b>Budget</b>	EU contribution: €1,400,000
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.familyplatform.eu">http://www.familyplatform.eu</a>
<b>Further reading</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Research on Families and Family policies in Europe: State of the Art</li><li>- Critical Review of Research on Families and Family Policies in Europe</li><li>- Foresight Report: Facets and Preconditions of Wellbeing of Families</li><li>- European Research Agenda on Families and Family Policy</li><li>- Family Wellbeing: Challenges for Research and Policy</li><li>- Spotlights on Contemporary Family Life</li></ul>
<b>Related websites</b>	<a href="https://eldorado.tu-dortmund.de/handle/2003/27684">https://eldorado.tu-dortmund.de/handle/2003/27684</a>
<b>For more information</b>	<a href="mailto:info@familyplatform.eu">info@familyplatform.eu</a>