Social platform on research for families and family policies

Reporting

Project Information

FAMILYPLATFORM

Grant agreement ID: 243864

Closed project

Funded under
FP7-SSH

Overall budget
€ 1 558 889,60

EU contribution
€ 1 398 827

Coordinated by
TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITAT DORTMUND
Germany

Start date
1 October 2009

End date
31 March 2011

This project is featured in...

RESEARCH*EU MAGAZINE
Turning waste into the key resource of tomorrow
Final Report Summary - FAMILYPLATFORM (Social platform on research for families and family policies)

FAMILYPLATFORM provided a research agenda on families and family well-being for Europe. Its purpose was to build up a social platform and involve a wide range of stakeholder representatives and policymakers. By matching different societal groups and their perspectives, major trends and societal challenges as well as key policy questions regarding the well-being of families in Europe were identified. Knowledge gaps and demands for future research were worked out. FAMILYPLATFORM provided knowledge on family life and family policies in Europe, worked out important societal trends and explored their possible impact on family life in future scenario workshops and promoted an exchange of knowledge and experience between researchers and practitioners. Stakeholders were involved at every stage of the project.

The research strives to highlight the most commonly agreed issues, built upon a broad and solid societal basis. The agenda has been developed with the overall aim of advancing the well-being 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 compressed to spell out a roadmap for future research.

The following areas were highlighted.

- Sustainable and inclusive care solutions: providing care is the most challenging issue for everyday family life. Finding sustainable care solutions may well be the greatest challenge for the well-being of families. There is a need for comparative research on the characteristics of care solutions for different groups of care receivers. More knowledge is needed about the wishes and demands of care givers and care receivers.
- Life course and transitions: family life changes extensively over the life course of family members. It is a major challenge for families to adapt to changing demands and the socially dynamic context in which they live. There is a need to research different phases of family life and to explore the effects of social policies on different transitions.
- Doing family: the management of everyday family life and the matching of competing demands. Satisfying arrangements are important for the stability and quality of family relations. A better understanding of how families deal with demands calls for new and common indicators in Europe and highly differentiated investigations.
- Harmonisation and evaluation of family policies: family policies vary across the European Union (EU) and stakeholders frequently call for more monitoring and evaluation of these policies. Comparable cross-EU information is needed. One solution might be a European observatory on national family policies.
- Inequalities, migration and mobility: there is a need for a deeper understanding of the social inequalities that exist between families and of the role of families in reproducing social inequalities. A better understanding of how policy can tackle inequalities is also needed, just as research on types of families which may be more vulnerable to poverty.
- New media and information technologies: the main question in this research area is how media shapes family life and behaviour. Thus we should have a look at the development of communication, it's frequency
between family members (and others) as well as the information flow used by them and the risks combined with new opportunities.

Project context and objectives

The overall objective was to elaborate a focused research agenda that addresses fundamental research issues and key policy questions for future research and family policies in Europe. The activities were related to all 27 Member States. The research agenda and its results could be a base for the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) Research Roadmap 2012-2013. The platform matched three relevant perspectives: the perspective of the scientific community, of European families as represented by members of civil society and important stakeholders and the perspective of policymakers and social partners. There are still significant cross-national differences between European societies regarding the living conditions of families. Legal systems, welfare structures, education systems, healthcare systems and economic systems vary from country to country. As a consequence, European family structures, family forms and respective trends and developments are quite diverse. It was crucial to generate a comprehensive overview of various existential fields of family life and family policies in order to derive conclusions for political practice and further research. In the long run, the aim of the platform was to generate key policy questions and to define fundamental research issues. Another important topic was the concept of the well-being of families. The platform aimed to identify research tasks by reviewing existing research and pointing out knowledge gaps. Special attention was paid to the continuous critical discussion of scientific findings with a wide range of stakeholder representatives from family associations, children’s rights organisations, policymakers and social partner representatives. The generated results are based on an iterative process relying on a broad informational and societal basis.

The activities of FAMILYPLATFORM were focused on four main objectives:

1. catching up with the current state of family research and elaboration of significant trends, differences between countries, research gaps and methodological problems of existing family research from the point of view of the research community;
2. a critical review of existing research from the perspective of a wide range of stakeholder representatives;
3. generating key policy questions for future European policy and research issues and tools focused on well-being of families as key concept in European policy;
4. working out a research agenda with fundamental research issues, research areas and tasks of long-term studies and methodological tools.

1: Existing research

The state of our knowledge about families and policies and other non-governmental initiatives are linked sparsely. At the same time, there is a great variety of family life in Europe and its legal and social context conditions. In addition, European policies and research are currently confronted with a situation, in which some aspects of family life are investigated thoroughly, while other aspects are still largely unexplored in scientific terms, with great differences between European countries and regions. Thus, a major objective was the establishment of an empirical foundation for further work. This meant working out the current state
of family research and bringing together recent findings. It included getting an overview of policies and social systems which make up the contextual framework for all aspects of family life. In this respect, the FAMILYPLATFORM took into account a broad range of existential fields of family life and family policy which include family structures and family forms, familial developmental processes, state family policies, family and living environments, family management, social care and social services, social inequality and diversity of families and family, media, family education and participation. Within these eight existential fields, major trends and research gaps have been highlighted.

2: Focused critical review

Apart from compiling an overview of existing research, the results of previous research have been reviewed by different groups: family association representatives, policymakers and social partners, and the research community. The critical review was focused on two dimensions. First, the eight existential fields of family life and family policies have been focused on. Stakeholder representatives and scientific experts revised the current state of research. This included assessing the current state of research, pointing out gaps and naming expectations towards future research. In this process, critical comments and statements from a wide range of experts and stakeholder representatives were encouraged. There have been two forums for discussion: an Internet platform and a conference. Secondly, the relevant political topics were discussed. Here, the critical examination of existing research became relevant.

National or greater frames of reference have been analysed with regard to their appropriateness for an evaluation. In this respect, common measurements, indicators etc. have been examined in order to point out the most appropriate ones for comparing national findings. It became part of the concern of the platform to point out current research that adequately reflects the situation of families in Europe and the most recent trends and developments. A number of group discussions have been organised on the following topics: gender equality and family, family life and work, family oriented services over the course of life, migration and other topics that are relevant. The results of these discussions were presented on the conference and on the Internet platform. Central points of critique and suggestions for future research were summarised and became part of the research agenda. The results were presented on the Internet platform and opened to the public. General guidelines for publishing the statements and for the presentation of the findings were created.

3: Key policy questions and research issues

A further step was the development of a set of key policy questions with regard to the design of future family policies and research. This was possible on the basis of a prior compilation of existing research and its critical evaluation by stakeholder representatives. The key question was how to realise the well-being of families in Europe. The aim was to work out well-being of families as a key concept in EU policies and for future research. A central objective was to find an answer to the following question: how can European policies and the EU Member States improve the well-being of families in a long term? The project aimed to shed light on the aspect how well-being of families will fit within the wider international family architecture. The term well-being of families has been used as a multi-dimensional concept in this project. It covered two approaches, the objective and the subjective approach: the objective approach was used in several studies. The subjective approach was used mainly by psychologists, sociologists and economists.
The core question of the objective approach is to agree upon a list or dimensions of goods that are necessary for a good life. Well-being is measurable by significant qualities of living conditions. Important dimensions of living conditions and of quality of life are health, employment, education, income, security, housing, family-relationship, social inclusion and environment. In an overview of conceptualisations of well-being, Fathey et al. conclude that these dimensions are commonly accepted. The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) is based on these dimensions. The subjective approach investigates well-being of families on the evaluation of the individual family-life by the family members themselves. The question is: Are the members of European families satisfied with their own family-life? Subjective satisfaction and happiness are central aspects of this approach. In this context, dimensions of social inequality are important. In order to achieve this aim, FAMILYPLATFORM applied the foresight approach, a technique that enables a group of experts and stakeholder representatives to shed light on a common situation, to generate visions about the future and to discuss the realisation of these visions. Based on major trends the participants prepared the frames for several future scenarios. The consortium took into consideration selected existential fields of family life and worked out important variables and societal drivers. The members of the consortium and the advisory board and a few selected policymakers participated in eight future scenarios. They worked out common facets and preconditions of well-being of families, political strategies to realise these preconditions and the tasks of research to support and evaluate political action.

4: European research agenda

In a synopsis in a final stage, the consortium and the stakeholder representatives worked out a research agenda for a possible base for the SSH research Roadmap 2012-2013 and national research programmes. It is not only referring to topics and regional aspects of future research, but also to aspects of the research design itself and to methodological issues. It includes matters like an adequate mix of research methods and time frames to be considered, useful data sources, etc. The research agenda includes the essentials of the state of the art, the essentials of the critical review of existing research, the outcome of the foresight exercises, key policy questions and fundamental research issues. The draft of the research agenda has been discussed with stakeholder representatives, policymakers and experts at the second conference.

Project results

Task 1.1: Reports: preliminary results of the state of the art

Existential field reports written by the consortium are the following: 'Family structures and family forms in the EU', 'Family developmental processes', 'Major trends if state family policies in Europe', 'Family and living environment. part A: Economic situation, education levels, employment and physical living environment', 'Family and living environment, part B: Local politics: Programmes and best practice models', 'Patterns and trends of family management in the EU', 'Social care and social services', 'Social inequality and diversity of families' and 'Media, communication and information technologies in the European family'. The groups completed their task at the end of March 2010. Family Research Centre got eight reports, altogether about 750 pages, and besides that two expert reports, altogether more than 100 pages.
Task 1.2: Family focused stakeholder representatives in the EU

This report was coordinated by COFACE, and jointly authored by authors from COFACE, FDAF and Mouvement Mondial des Meres (MMM). 'Family Organisations at the local, national, European and global level - Three case studies' gives information about how these organisations are structured, how they have developed, their objectives and some of the challenges they face in their work.

Task 1.3: Organising the meeting

The lead participant JYU organised a congress where all members of the consortium, members of the advisory board, stakeholder representatives and experts brought their preliminary results. The results were peer-reviewed and publicly discussed.

Task 1.4: Report: State of the art of the research on family life and family policies in Europe

WP1 includes one deliverable, deliverable No. 2, the report called 'Research in families and family policies in Europe state of the art'. The first draft was commented by the members of the consortium and completed in June, as planned. The final version of the report was completed on 16th July and published on the website. The findings of WP1 can be defined as six main trends: high dynamics in family forms, all of which challenge the idea of the middle-class nuclear family, although the idea still has power; increasing level of female employment and a decline of a male breadwinner model, although the division of paid work and especially unpaid domestic work continues to be highly gendered, which causes challenges in the reconciliation of family life and paid work; changes and challenges in gender roles, parenthood and even grandparenthood, especially the rise of new models of fatherhood and the growing importance of the media that pose challenges; polarisation in families, especially new forms of inequality between families and in media environments as well, which all mean that EU countries are facing a new complex social structure in which there are two trends, firstly a growing uniformity of life-styles, and secondly the emergence of a dual society with winners and losers; increasing number of migrant families which probably causes new forms of inequalities, but may be an answer to ageing, labour shortage, and caring problems, because migration is more and more a process led by immigrant women; care going public, because EU policy promotes women's labour market participation and therefore public childcare provision, but besides the de-familialisation processes, there exist new forms of familialism. WP2 consists of a critical review of the WP1 report, existing research on families. The report has been used as background information when writing the future scenarios and the research agenda. The consortium published a book presenting shortened and edited versions of all key reports. All deliverables and outcomes from WP1 have been accomplished. Two experts report are 'The professional standards of care workers: The development of standards for social care services for families' and 'Expertise on transitions into parenthood'. All reports are available at the website http://www.familyplatform.eu online These eight reports and two expert reports are outcome No 2.

Task 2.1: State of the art based on outcomes of WP1

All the state of the art reports carried out in WP1 were made available online for consultation and
discussion by stakeholder representatives and experts.

Task 2.2: Platform for discussion

A website was launched by COFACE which allowed for discussion and review both of the state of the art reports and all the materials produced before, during and after the Lisbon conference in May 2010.

Task 2.3: Focus groups

A conference was organised and the critical objective of the 16 working groups was accomplished with the contributions of all participants for the following tasks: to discuss the major trends in family change and developments in research and policies for each existential field or key policy issue; to understand if these trends and issues represent important challenges for the well-being of families in the future; to identify major gaps in research and to discuss possible new developments and future tasks for research and policy making. The debate and critical review was stimulated by the findings of the reports on the eight existential fields, keynote speeches and critical comments by stakeholders, social partners, experts and policymakers. The role of the rapporteur was crucial in giving feedback on the issues discussed within each focus group and workshop in the plenary session on the following day; in preparing a short summary report of the main points of the discussions at the focus group and workshop, with emphasis on the conclusions regarding major gaps in research and suggestions for future research.

Task 2.4: Focus group discussions

Concerning the dynamics of the debate, it is important to highlight the specific contribution of the different actors: in general stakeholders were more goal and policy-oriented, clearly stating the objectives and claims of their organisations. Their statements mainly focused on significant points that might have been overlooked in the reports and major subjects they consider essential to be further researched, drawing attention to the problems of specific or vulnerable families. Stakeholders revealed sensitiveness to local contexts and to the risks and problems affecting many families with children. Another important role of the stakeholders was their contribution in reminding researchers about their difficulties in communicating and exchanging with civil society. Experts were more focused on mapping the state of the art and the gaps in research and revealed more sensitiveness with regard to the diversity of families and the need to confront family and gender changes; they reminded stakeholders about a need for a balanced approach between the knowledge deriving from field experience with families and knowledge deriving from research.

Task 2.5: The first conference

The conference lasted three days and took place in Lisbon. The conference brought together 140 participants. Organisation of the conference involved preparing the rationale of the conference, selecting and inviting all the participants, making sure that stakeholders, social partners and policymakers were provided with the written reports of the WP1 which constituted a major basis for their statements and contributions during the conference and providing all participants with the conference programme as well as technical support and information on what was expected from during the conference. The workshop contained plenary session, focus groups and workshops. The conference was considered as a stimulating
and innovative forum of discussion which promoted debate and exchange between actors that normally do not engage intensely. The conference integrated a plurality of perspectives concerning the design of future research on families and family policies. Some groups were less well represented: social partners and policymakers as well as some types of family associations. There was a general agreement that it is important to include employers in further projects and actions related to the conference's subject.

Task 2.6: Report: Future research on families in Europe

The conference produced significant results and several deliverables. First, it is important to mention the innovative character of this WP which encouraged and put into practice the dialog between experts and civil society. Second, it is important to refer to the conference report which was and published online (see http://www.familyplatform.eu and http://hdl.handle.net/2003/27687 online). This report provides information on the critical review process on the basis of three perspectives: it allows for a detailed description of the structure and main contributions which took place in each one of the 16 working groups; it bears witness to some interactions and processes of the conference, consisting of questions, arguments and discussions, which were overall lively and mutually enriching, but also imparted diverse and sometimes contrasting perspectives on the well-being of families in European societies and the issues to be put on the agenda; it provides a summary presenting the major topics of discussion, highlighting eight selected elements for the research and policy agenda. The report constituted an important input to WP4 and WP5. Among other deliverables and outcomes, several documents may be mentioned, all available on FAMILYPLATFORM website. The partner Mouvement Mondial des Meres (MMM) made a special contribution by carrying out an analysis of motherhood (see http://hdl.handle.net/2003/27685 for details).

We can consider the fact that all 16 working sessions were audiotaped as a deliverable. The deliverable of a summary of the critical review process, is available on the website. A significant result of the critical review process was to reach agreement on nine key research areas for future research: contemporary parenthood, motherhood, and fatherhood; children's experiences, trajectories and outcomes; changing family forms, trajectories and networks; post-divorce family forms and relationships; families, social inequalities and living environments; doing family: interactions and daily life, over the life-course; ageing, families and social policies; family policies.

Task 3.1: Workshop and brainstorming

This WP involved the participation of the consortium and the advisory board. This work was finished with the delivery of deliverable 5: ‘Foresight report: Facets and preconditions of well-being of families’ (see http://hdl.handle.net/2003/27688 online). The majority of the work happened during the following meetings. The discussion continued between meetings through feedback loops via e-mail.

Task 3.2: Presentation of results to the stakeholders

In addition to the discussion within the consortium and Advisory Board, a wide range of stakeholder representatives were invited to provide their feedback on the future scenarios on the website and during two conferences.

Task 3.3: Consolidation of scenarios
A central start was to define different facets and preconditions of well-being of the family in the future. The aim was not to establish criteria for a definition of well-being in general, but rather to identify key facets and preconditions, like the following: Security for individual members of the family and for the family itself; individual self-fulfilment; health; involvement in society; love, respect and tolerance; balance; time, equality; support for families; living and environmental conditions. During the work on WP1 and WP2, societal challenges had been discussed. For WP3, the following societal challenges have been prioritised: Work-life balance and time management, changes in behaviour, ageing/demographic changing, uncertainty, gender roles of father and mother, cultural representations of gender roles, gender responsibilities, denial of gender identity, diversity, lack of mainstreaming, families not valued by society, public respect for parents and family values, economic crisis and immigration. The following key drivers which will have a major impact on the development of families in the future: Inequalities on different levels such as social, cultural, economic, gender and ethical, migration, education and values in society care systems

Task 3.4: Foresight report: Facets and preconditions of well-being of families

After defining the facets and preconditions of well-being of the family, main societal challenges and key drivers, the work on building scenarios of possible future family life in 2035 could start.

The following scenarios were developed:
- S1: Equal opportunities, open migration, diverse education and values, mix of private and public care systems;
- S2: Increasing inequalities, no migration, private education and extreme positions in values, privatisation of care systems;
- S3: Increasing inequalities, open limited migration, private education, accepted diverse values - privatisation of care systems;
- S4: Equal opportunities at a low level, restricted migration, rigid public education with very specific curricula, accepted diverse values, public care systems.

The outline for each scenario is the same: First a general description of the societal frame and the challenges of that specific scenario have been given. Following the basic frame, four to five different family forms living in that specific scenario have been described.

Task 3.5: Summary: Key policy questions and research issues

The work on future scenarios has lead us to the following key policy and research issues, which were condensed in outcome 9: ‘Well-being of families in future Europe - Key policy and research issues’ (see http://www.familyplatform.eu online):
- importance of intergenerational solidarity and communities;
- importance of sufficient time for families;
- unpaid work and care arrangements; the recognition of unpaid care work and the monitoring of gender equality policies for effectiveness and unintended consequences as well as to consider alternative care arrangements;
- children’s perspectives, especially in terms of research where the perspective of children and adolescents is often missing;
- family transitions in a life-course approach;
- family mainstreaming as a key European family strategy - family mainstreaming is understood as cross-cutting issue through all policy fields and should cover all disciplines of policy making, address the family group as well as the individual members living in a family and consider all existing family forms; it should look at the families as agents and assets and not as problems;
- impact of technological advancement on families.

Task 4.1: Documentation of the critical review

All outcomes and reports which were produced in WP1 and WP2 were reviewed and analysed. The significant issues and aspects were summarised. These summaries draw the main aspects from all information provided. Based on these summaries several outlines for possible research fields were produced and discussed with the participants of the consortium and the members of the advisory board as a starting point for the research agenda.

Task 4.2: Analysis of the future scenarios

Preparing the research agenda, the report of WP3 has been studied and its outcomes have been integrated carefully in the research agenda.

Task 4.3: Theoretical frames and tools

Within the research agenda, an important theoretical frame for analysing family and family life in Europe is the concept of welfare states or welfare regimes. Additionally, the use of qualitative, quantitative as well as mixed methods was discussed with the focus of using a longitudinal and life course approach.

Task 4.4: Drafting tools and methods

Focus was given to monitoring and evaluating of policies. Particularly with regard to evaluation, formative and summative forms can be distinguished and circumstances for the usability of these approaches were drafted and outlined. The necessity of a deeper and ongoing monitoring of policies on EU level and the level of (future) Member States became evident. The introduction of mixed methods and innovative concepts are seen as steps towards more insight in recent research areas. The need to close existing research gaps to address these fields has been discussed.

Task 4.5: First version of the research agenda

The IFB was responsible for the scientific monitoring of the project and the development of a research agenda. Based on the state-of-the-art research undertaken by WP1 and its critical review and reflexion undertaken in WP2 and WP3, key policy questions, societal challenges and fundamental research themes were identified and developed that make up the basis for future research. The first outline for the planned research agenda was presented to a wide range of stakeholder representatives during the conference in Brussels. Based on the results of the discussions, a first draft version of the research agenda was elaborated and discussed with the members of the consortium and the advisory board.
Task 4.6: Organising the meeting

An important milestone was a meeting with all members of the consortium, the members of the advisory board and experts. It took place in Bamberg with the aim to discuss the main aspects of the research agenda and to update the participants on the state of the work. In the Bamberg meeting, the first steps towards the research agenda have been discussed and the most important research fields have been chosen. The IFB presented the main outcomes of the WPs. There were two days of discussion on the content of the research agenda. In the end a prioritisation of research areas was made and it was decided to prepare six research fields for the conference in Brussels: monitoring and evaluation of social policies and generating a data pool for Europe, care, life-course and transitions, doing family, mobility and migration as well as demographic change.

Task 4.7: Organising the second conference

Another important milestone was the final conference: Research agenda - research issues for family research and key policy questions in Europe. The aim of this conference in Brussels was to discuss the draft of the research agenda with stakeholder representatives, policymakers and scientists and to give all of them a platform to collect statements and issues. The Brussels conference was organised by the IFB with help from COFACE and Technical University Dortmund. It was attended by 112 participants. To refresh the information about the project's proceedings short presentations were given concerning the findings of the state of the art, the results of the foresight approach and of the critical review.

Afterwards, stakeholder representatives had the possibility to give input and comments on the work done until then and also concerning their interests for the research agenda. The team of the IFB presented the research fields chosen during the meeting in Bamberg, excluding demographic change due to limited time and the decision to use this cross-sectional topic as background. Every presentation was followed by a discussion in the plenary. The statements were collected and the remarks during the discussions were noted to analyse them and take them into account when writing the research agenda.

Task 4.8: Research agenda

Important results derive from the two meetings where the decision on the main research areas was made.

After some necessary changes the following structure was implemented:

- main societal trends
- challenges for policy and research
- important research fields and methodological issues
- general methodological remarks
- family policy
- care
- life-course and transitions
- doing family
- migration and mobility
- inequalities and insecurities
- media and new information technologies.

Beside the main topics some of the issues discussed in the FAMILYPLATFORM either have a shorter explanation in the research agenda or are worked out as crosscutting topics within the main research areas.

The research agenda was finished at the end of March. During April, it was reviewed by the participants of the consortium. It is currently proofread and will be published in Mai 2011.

The research agenda highlights the following main research fields.

1. Sustainable and inclusive care solutions:
The work of FAMILYPLATFORM conclusively demonstrates that providing care is the most challenging issue for everyday family life. Finding sustainable care solutions may well be the greatest challenge for the well-being of families in future Europe. The project identified a substantial lack of research on care: there is a need of comparative research on the characteristics of care solutions for different groups of care receivers. Additionally, more knowledge is needed about the wishes and demands of caregivers and care receivers, especially children. It is vitally important to know more about how decisions relating to care are made in families. These processes are undoubtedly influenced by different welfare provision systems and it is therefore important to discover if provision matches needs. Finally, the impact of care on the life courses of caregivers needs to be taken into account.

2. Life course and transitions:
FAMILYPLATFORM highlighted the fact that family life changes extensively over the life course of family members. It is a major challenge for families to adapt to changing demands and the socially dynamic context in which they live. In this context, there is a lack of research on the life courses of families and their individual members. We know too little about different phases of family life and how families cope with transitions between life phases, about the effects of social policies on different transitions, and are in need of more research on the outcomes of different transitions such as divorce on the well-being of children.

3. Management of everyday family life:
Another main research area is what researchers call 'doing family'. In short, this means 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. A better understanding of how families deal with demands calls for new and common indicators in Europe and highly differentiated investigations.

4. Harmonisation and evaluation of Family policies:
Family policies vary across the EU and stakeholders frequently called for much more monitoring and evaluation of family policies. In order to achieve this, comparable cross-EU information is badly needed. One solution might be a European observatory of national family policies. In addition, stakeholders called for ‘family mainstreaming' to assess the impact on families of all fields of policy. Advanced research
methods would be needed to help answer questions relating to future family well-being. In addition, there is a lack of harmonised basic data on financial deprivation, well-being and inequality. Greater efforts are needed to identify good practices and find creative ways of fostering family well-being.

5. Inequalities, migration and mobility:
There is a need for deeper understanding of the social inequalities that exist between families, as well as of the role of families in reproducing social inequalities. There is also a need for a better understanding of how policy can tackle inequalities. Furthermore, research is needed on specific types of families which may be more vulnerable to poverty. Given increases in immigration and mobility, research on immigrant families and on families from minority ethnic groups is urgently needed, because of the challenge this poses for European policymaking. Knowledge about different forms of mobility and their impact on family life is needed.

6. New media and information technologies:
Research has to face two directions of influence: The first is how the trends in media development and spread shape family life and behaviour. Thus we should have a look on the development of communication, its frequency between family members as well as the information flow used by them and the risks combined with new opportunities. Looking at the flow of communication from the other direction, it is essential to understand which trends in family life influence the development and the demand for media. Here the question arises which social groups force and characterise trends and which families will be excluded.

Task 4.9: Presentation of the research agenda

The final conference in Brussels has been organised by WP4 with help from Technical University Dortmund and COFACE. While the preceding work has been displayed by the leaders of WP1, WP2 and WP3 the draft of the research agenda was presented by the members of WP4. Additionally the collection of statements and other contribution was made by WP4 in order to integrate these votes in the final concept of the research agenda. An additional presentation of the research agenda was organised by Technical University Dortmund and held in the European Parliament in Brussels on 22.03.2011 by WP lead participant 1, 2 and the overall coordinator.

Task 5.1: Interactive Internet platform

The work began in November 2009 on the logo for the project. With this decided at the end of December 2009, FAMILYPLATFORM worked with its contractor from January - March 2010 to develop a multi-functional web-platform. Features include chat, messaging system, user directories, a file directory, an interactive map, protected areas and multiple access levels and restrictions for users. From the official launch date on 2 March 2010 (at the Brussels Info Day), the website continued to be developed until it was fully functional by early April 2010. This deviates from the Annex, which stated that the platform would launch in month 1. Clearly, this timescale was not realisable, because even getting information from partners about their WPs, and their areas of expertise, and their logos took more than a month. Although it would have been preferable to have launched the fully functioning site in time for the final info day, this proved technically impossible - as it took at least a month of development and testing before the site was fully functional. However, the impact has not been particularly negative, because without material the site
was effectively just a shell. In effect, the site was ready at the best time for the launch of the reports. At the time of writing, the site attracts around 150 page 'hits' a day, and 31 unique visitors to the site per day. Over 350 external stakeholders have registered in addition to the 45 members of the consortium and advisory board, all of the reports produced by the project have been published, and all of the stakeholder presentations produced for the critical review and research agenda stages of the project. In addition, we have a number of photos and videos of FAMILYPLATFORM events included on the site. When searching for a variety of 'family' related terms using a search engine such as Google, FAMILYPLATFORM website is on the first page of results.

Task 5.2: Mailing list

Several different mailing lists have been produced:

1. there are internal consortium and advisory board mailing lists used for internal communication;
2. there is a stakeholder mailing list which is used to contact stakeholders about new newsletters and publication of reports;
3. we have a press and policy publicity list of over 1000 individual e-mail addresses which is used to highlight some of the key milestones of the project.

Task 5.3: Information material

Once a logo had been chosen, it was possible to begin work on the project brochure. Around 1500 copies of the initial project brochure were produced in February 2010 and these were disseminated at the three info days, at the conference, to COFACE members, and sent by post to all of the consortium and advisory board members across Europe. An additional 300 copies with some updated details were printed in September 2010. A project folder was designed and 400 copies printed in February 2010. These were used for the info days, the two conferences and the two research agenda dissemination presentations. A project banner was also produced in time for use at the info day in Milan (February 2010). Information letters were produced for the three info days. These were sent to all COFACE members; MMM also submitted lists of potential participants.

A project booklet titled 'Families - A summary of the situation in Europe today' was produced to coincide with the research agenda conference. This booklet was based on the key discussions of the critical review conference in Lisbon, and summarised the findings of the state of the art and critical review phases of the project, listing findings and key policy and research issues. It represents a stocktaking of knowledge gained from WP1 and WP2, turning the mass of documents produced by researchers into digestible chunks of information.

An electronic copy was distributed to over 1000 contacts, and 1000 copies were printed, a large part of which were distributed at the research agenda conference. A booklet based on a similar format and design to the previous one was produced titled 'A research agenda on the family for the EU'. The text was prepared by IFB, and this was then reworked with input from Technical University Dortmund and MMM; it summarised the key points of the research agenda, and was designed to publicise the full report as well as help disseminate the main findings / proposals of the research agenda. Some 800 copies were produced.
in English, and because of the timing of a Hungarian Presidency on Families and Demography (Budapest, March 2011) the booklet was translated with input from Demographic Research Institute Budapest and 200 Hungarian language copies printed and disseminated in Budapest. Electronic copies of the English and Hungarian versions of the text have been made available on the website and an e-mail will be sent announcing publication to coincide with publication of the research agenda. Work on the policy brief began in January 2011. IFB supplied the text, and this was reworked with input from colleagues at Dortmund, and the European Commission (EC). A draft version is currently circulating, and once a few minor alterations have been made it will be finalised and published online. Draft versions of the policy brief were circulated at a presentation of the demographic experts group and the REPRO / FAMILYPLATFORM dissemination presentation.

Task 5.4: Editing the inputs for the internet platform

All FAMILYPLATFORM reports have been copy-edited and proofread. This has been done to ensure a consistency of language conventions and increase the readability of the reports. Usually, reports are returned for clarification to authors, and then a final version is produced. After this, all reports are formatted to ensure or at the very least increase, internal consistency - and when possible a consistency across all FAMILYPLATFORM outputs. Front / back covers have been added to public reports, and disclaimers added to reports after those of WP1.

Task 5.5: Providing the regular info letters for stakeholder representatives and policymakers

Three issues of the internal newsletter have been produced, and these complement the mailings to registered stakeholders and consortium and advisory board members about upcoming events and new published reports. The first issue was sent out May 2010, and the second issue July 2010, a third in December 2010. In addition, a final issue to mark the very end of the project may be produced some time in spring / summer 2011.

Task 5.6: Preparing and maintaining the forum for debate on the internet platform

Preparation for debate included continuous testing of the website during early days, and encouraging visitors to register. It was decided early on that only registered stakeholders who provided sufficient information about their interests and organisation could get involved in an online debate. In addition to 'messaging' debates, a consultation was also initiated as part of the future of families. Much could be written about the merits, challenges, and possibilities of online debate - suffice to say, a one-year project is rather too short to commence a lively debate, the existence of an online community is a precondition for this to be achieved. Despite this, there has been some online debate, and it has been a key asset for the project to say that everyone has the possibility of having an input.

Task 5.7: Planning, editing and publishing the online journals

Work began in January 2010 on the Online Journal, and the first issue was published April 2010 on family structures and family forms. Volume 2 was published October 2010 on Intergenerational Solidarities in Families. Volume 3 titled 'Demographic change and the family' was published January 2011. Volume 4 on
'Volunteering and families' was published March 2011. These publication dates differ from those stated in the Annex for a number of reasons, not least because the dissemination could not begin until the project manager had been hired and articles prepared. However, the delays had had no impact on the work of FAMILYPLATFORM as a whole, and all of the outputs were delivered successfully by the end of the project. Each volume of the journal consisted of two or three longer articles, supplemented by shorter pieces. There is an editorial article in each volume, a consistency of style, and balance of articles from civil society, policy and academia. Each volume was edited by a different participant whose role was to solicit articles and prepare the texts. COFACE's role was to support this and to edit, format, publish, and disseminate the material online.

Task 5.8: Preparing the calls for statements for the conferences (WP5 lead participant)

COFACE has been involved in developing the invite lists for the critical review conference and the research agenda conference. However, work package leaders of WP2 and WP4 put calls out for statements rather than COFACE. Once the statements have been made, COFACE publishes these on the Internet platform where they are available to download and to be discussed.

Task 5.9: Press relations: press releases, press conferences. Contact to international organisations by participant No. 12

Press releases have been produced about the launch of the website, the critical review conference, the research agenda conference and for the publication of the future of families report in January 2011. One final press release is foreseen in April 2011, to coincide with publication of the final research agenda. All info days have included invitations to local, national and European press, and opportunities for press to discuss the project with the coordinators. Participant 12 were responsible for the contact with international organisations and they had a meeting with representatives of the Council of Europe, and were able to invite a representative from the United Nations (UN) to attend the Lisbon Conference.

Task 5.10: Editing and compiling the text book publication: ‘Future perspectives for families in Europe’

This book was self-published using a slightly adapted title: Well-being of families in future Europe - Challenges for research and policy. It has an assigned ISBN number and has had around 500 copies printed. The book contains the final reports of WP1, WP2, WP3 and WP4. All articles were redrafted by WP leaders, commented upon by COFACE / Dortmund, and then proofread. This final text was then prepared for typesetting and in liaison with COFACE the final book was prepared. A second book was also prepared containing the four volumes of the FAMILYPLATFORM Online Journal. All of the texts were again carefully edited and proofread. This book was printed in time for the dissemination presentation in March 2011 in Budapest; 400 copies were printed. Both books were disseminated to all consortium and advisory board members, and also to a list of over 65 key contacts in the institutions, academics, contributors of the articles, and research funding bodies throughout Europe and some further afield.

Task 5.11: Organising an info day for stakeholders in Brussels, Milan and Budapest

Three info days were held, in Budapest, Milan and Brussels. In total, 113 external stakeholders attended, many of whom have gone on to act as multipliers and others who have contributed regularly to the
Potential impact

The FAMILYPLATFORM is part of activity 8.3; 'Major trends in society and their implications'. According to the work programme, the platform contributes to advancing the 'knowledge base that underpins the formulation and implementation of policies in Europe and the development of European research communities in these domains'. The research agenda and its results are a possible base for the SSH Research Roadmap 2012-2013 and the following Framework Programme. The research agenda includes the state of the art, a critical review of existing research, key policy questions and fundamental research issues. It will contribute to pointing out methodical deficiencies of existing research approaches. It developed perspectives of how impacts and national disparities of family policies can be assessed and evaluated in the long run. The agenda considers: Ideas for a new Eurobarometer survey, a design of new longitudinal and comparative studies, the development of suggestions for an adequate harmonisation of research topics and national statistics and the development of a common theoretical framework. The research agenda provides effective standards, criteria and indicators for impact assessments of family policies. The agenda contributes to a stronger focus on application-oriented research for politics. It will support the EC in guaranteeing a long-term and well-directed advancement of research. The consortium outlined possible research projects for the call 2012 and 2013 in Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) SSH.

By using the concept of family well-being as a starting point, the activities of the project contribute to a stronger consideration of needs and desires of families in policy and research. The concept of family well-being has been worked out by representatives from family associations, policymakers and researchers. With the help of this concept, the interlinkage of future strategies of family-related policies and research perspectives can be improved. A broad public discussion of the concept of family well-being is expected and its confirmation as key concept in EU policies as well as for future research.

The project developed a system which is the premise to build a knowledge base for the formulation and implementation of family relevant policies. Although there are already some knowledge systems in family research, they only qualify for the formulation and implementation of policies to some extent. The system underlying the review the state of the art is based on eight existential fields of family life and family policies: family structures and family forms, familial developmental processes, state family policies, family and living environments, family management, social care and social services, social inequality and diversity of families and family, media, family education. This form of knowledge system is productive for the formulation of key policy questions and research issues due to the following reasons: The existential fields are relevant to both research and policy, as they refer to central areas of the life of families and family policies. With the help of these fields, major trends and national developments can be sketched and key policy questions can be derived. The interlinking of research and policy can be improved. The existential fields refer to three levels of family life and family policies: on the micro-level with family structures and family forms; the meso level with family and living environments, social care and social services; the macro level with state family policies.

The individual fields are suitable as tertium comparisons, for comparisons of countries and for the analysis
of the impacts of political acts. The project developed a knowledge system on the basis of existential fields of family life and family policies. Building on this system, the project created a knowledge base for formulation and implementation of policies in Europe on a long-term basis. By means of these existential fields, problems of families as well as tasks and impacts of family policies on regional, national or EU level can be described more precisely. An extensive knowledge base for the formulation and implementation of policy has not been developed so far. Although there are a number of studies and surveys dealing with a multitude of areas and themes regarding families and family policies, they have not been brought together systematically yet. The current state of research concerned with family life and family policies in Europe was summarised systematically with regard to the existential fields. The results have been published for a broad audience. The reports published by offer a systematic overview of the current state of knowledge regarding family life and family policies in Europe. There is a common knowledge and discussion basis for researchers, policymakers and family stakeholder representatives. On this basis, problems of families and state policy, as well as deficiencies in politics and research can be pointed out.

Another impact of the project derives from the critical review of the current state of research which was undertaken by at least 160 representatives from family organisations, policy and research institutes. Major trends of family life and their implications for national, regional and EU policies have been addressed and central problems of families and state policies in Europe have been pointed out. Future tasks for family friendly policies and research have been designated. Taking into account the critical review of existing research, the project developed key policy questions and fundamental research issues for future Europe. The project opened a broad discussion of future family-friendly national, regional, and EU policies. This included involving a broad number of external interested persons in the discussion. The diverse and partly conflicting expectations of groups of stakeholders have been made apparent. The discussions lead to a common sense with regard to key policy questions and fundamental research issues.

The project enabled a productive exchange of ideas between policymakers, social partners, representatives from family and children’s rights organisations and the scientific community. The individual groups were encouraged to express their interests and expectations with regard to research and policy. The moderation techniques used within the social platform enabled a way of communication that was mostly characterised by understanding and respect. At least 160 stakeholder representatives and up to 58 researchers from different disciplines were directly involved in conferences, focus groups, workshops, and future scenarios of the project. The discussion forums of the Internet platform allowed the participation of outsiders in the platform. The project initiated a productive shared learning process of stakeholders and researchers with regard to the possibilities and limitations of policy and research. The project contributed to the development of a persistent network of scientists, representatives from family associations and policymakers. This network will continue to deal with the research questions and future family policy on a long-term basis.

Dissemination

One of the central tasks of the project was to make be made public from the start in order to be visible to policymakers, family and children's rights associations, social partners, the international research community, and to the general public. One objective was to involve as many stakeholder representatives as possible in the activities of the platform. At the end of the project more than 160 persons were involved.
Interim and final results have been presented to the broad public. In order to spread the information as effectively as possible one WP concentrated on the implementation of targeted dissemination strategies: Networking, communication, and dissemination. The dissemination actions were supported by the project coordination team. The elaboration and circulation of a project brochure gave an overview of the concept, the objectives and details of the platform. Right at the beginning, it has been sent to family and children’s rights organisations, important policymakers, and social partners. The brochure was displayed at relevant conferences. During the first months of the project, an internet platform has been created. This website provided a detailed overview of the concept, objectives and details of the project. Furthermore, the Internet platform contained a library of documents and of links, a calendar and a message board for the community, the possibility of launching discussions and surveys and public consultations. This Internet platform still exists. Visitors of the platform can get detailed information about the participants. It provided an overview of the activities planned during the work of the platform and presents the results of the work done. In addition, short portraits of the stakeholders and researchers involved are provided.

There is a download section where visitors can download reports. All of the texts have been written in a comprehensible way, in a language intelligible to all. There is another section on the Internet platform where users can download short documentations of conferences. In addition, the Internet platform was a portal for discussion forums with regard to specific topics. Here, stakeholder representatives registered, made statements and took part in discussions. The participants and the stakeholder representatives, who participate draw attention to the project by their own individual websites. During the course of the project, four online journals have been published. They addressed the broad interested public and inform about important topics and results. They were subscribed free of charge and could be downloaded on the website. They were sent to interested persons directly on request. At the end of the project, press statements were sent to large daily papers and to periodicals in order to inform about contents and consequences of the platform. At the end of the last conference, a press conference took place.

Important policymakers and scientists working in the area of family and social politics, civil society organisations, economy representatives and media have been informed by two project booklets. A policy brief was published at the end of the project. All stakeholder representatives participating in the project have been regularly informed about its current state by info letters. The partners of the consortium presented the project and its results on specialist conferences and congresses. The project was also presented at the European Parliament. Within the context of the project, two books have been published. Articles in scientific journals and family journals informed about the outputs of the platform. The most important reports and outputs of FAMILYPLATFORM were archived and made permanently accessible on the edoc-server of the University of Dortmund.

Project website: http://www.familyplatform.eu
E-mail: info@familyplatform.eu
FAMILYPLATFORM report archive: http://hdl.handle.net/2003/27684

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Related documents

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Last update: 18 January 2013
Record number: 55803