Brussels, 19 May 2020

To the Attention of: President of the European Council Charles Michel
President of the European Parliament David Sassoli
President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen

Copy: Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli
Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights Nicolas Schmit
Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides

Subject: Request to mobilise CRII, CRII+, EU Funds and the upcoming updated Multiannual Financial Framework to support families and family carers during this COVID-19 pandemic

Dear President of the European Council Charles Michel,
Dear President of the European Parliament David Sassoli,
Dear President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen,

The current health and economic crisis is showing the value of care in our societies and the key roles of families. On top of this they have to fill in the gaps in the public provision of early childhood education and care, and long-term care. These gaps were widened by austerity cuts to welfare systems, and the current crisis exacerbated this situation at the expense of the most vulnerable. The whole system is now even more reliant on informal care: the closure of thousands of social services across Europe impacted the living conditions of millions of children and adults in need of daily care and support, as well as those of their families and informal caregivers, who are losing their financial stability, physical and mental health.

We cannot expect families to take on everything previously covered by the social and educational sectors. We call on you thus to include support to parents, families and family carers in your plan to address the current crisis.

For a long time now, COFACE Families Europe and its (50+) member organisations are advocating for an economy at the service of society which values and recognises the informal work that parents and family carers do daily.

In 2017, our Study “Who Cares?”, which consulted over 1000 family carers from 16 countries about their needs and challenges, highlighted a lack of information, recognition, social protection and compensation of this informal work. This often resulted in financial instability, marginalisation, and exclusion from the labour market. Our S.H.I.F.T. Guide, launched last year identified key areas, tools and actions for a meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families, and encompassed actions towards the recognition and support to the parents of children with disabilities and family carers.
In our last position paper, we asked to redirect the existing and future EU budget streams towards family support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, and to go beyond emergency and short-term deliverables, by injecting long-term thinking in the form of a paradigm shift towards an economy of well-being. The new Multiannual Financial Framework and its Recovery Strategy represent a fundamental opportunity to make this happen and leave no one behind. We call on you to start with recognition and support to the most invisible workforce in Europe: family and informal carers, mainly composed of women, who were providing 80% of long-term care services before the crisis, and even more today.

We call on the EU institutions to respect and implement the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, the UN Convention of the Right of the Child, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which requires States Parties to take appropriate measures to prevent all forms of abuse or violence ‘by ensuring, inter alia, appropriate forms of gender- and age- sensitive assistance and support for persons with disabilities and their families and caregivers’.

We urge you to take new actions to mobilise investments and resources to ensure continuity of care and education for children and adults with support needs, through additional funding to these sectors, to ensure their safety and inclusion. Persons with disabilities and their carers need accessible information on available services, in-home support, financial help to buy IT and assistive devices, training, income support and/or the possibility to take up extensive and adequately paid carer and parental leaves, respite services, and ad hoc rules for confinement.

Families of children with disabilities are all around us, are all different, and the caring role can also fall on siblings. It is fundamental to assess their needs and to respond to individual circumstances, personal experiences and new constraints. The EU and Member states must mobilise all available resources and expertise to ensure that all children access education regardless of their disability, ethnic background and economic condition of their families.

The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII+), the SURE instrument, the forthcoming updated Multiannual Financial Framework, and Recovery Fund should therefore include specific and explicit guidance to help Member States ensuring such resources are used to support families and informal carers.

We thank you in advance for your consideration. COFACE Families Europe is ready to work in partnership to assess the needs of parents and carers, and in the planning of policies to recognise and support all families and NGOs working in this field.

Annemie Drieskens
COFACE Families Europe President