Information on the European Alliance for Families

Following the Commission communication of October 2006 on Europe's demographic future, the EU heads of state and government, at the European Summit of 8 and 9 March 2007, decided to establish a European Alliance for Families. The aim of the Alliance is to create impulses for more family-friendly policies through exchanges of ideas and experience in the various Member States and to foster cooperation and fruitful learning from each other in the European Union.

The details of the operation of the Alliance were outlined in the EPSCO Council Conclusions and Commission's Communication "Promoting Solidarity between the Generations" of May 2007. In particular, the Council Conclusions stipulated that at the European level, no new structures would be created but existing instruments, resources and bodies should be used to that end in a coherent, effective and targeted way. In consequence, the Alliance would take the form of a "platform for exchanges and knowledge concerning policies for families and best practices in the Member States, with a view to meeting the challenges of demographic change."

The idea of a European Alliance for Families was well received and immediately accepted across the EU, demonstrating willingness to review the traditional ways in which families are supported and to work together on the modernisation of family policies. Such modernisation implies notably a shift in emphasis from cash benefits to forms of family support that help mothers and fathers to reconcile their professional and private lives. Better reconciliation has to be achieved through the provision of childcare (and increasingly also elderly care) and through family-friendly work organisation and working time arrangements.

Since 2007, the following activities took place to contribute to the goals of the Alliance:

(1) Expert Group on Demographic Issues

As specified in the 2007 Communication, the Group’s task is to advise the Commission on the preparation of reports and of the Demographic Forum and to assist with analyses and exchanges of experience. The activities of the Group include, but are not limited to, exchange of information on recent developments in the areas of families and family policies.

(2) Demography forums, seminars and workshops

(a) Demography Forum
The Commission organises every two years a European Demographic Forum to take stock of the demographic situation and the implementation of the orientations proposed in the 2006 communication on the demographic future of Europe.

(b) Stakeholder seminars

The meetings of the Expert Group on Demographic Issues are usually accompanied by stakeholder seminars that allow members of the Group, stakeholder representatives and researchers to discuss policy-relevant issues.

(c) Best practice workshops

The purpose of the best practice workshops is to present successful measures taken in Member States to tackle demographic change. The workshops are attended by the representatives of interested Member States and stakeholders.

(d) Regional seminars

Within the framework of the Alliance, two meetings on regional initiatives for a better reconciliation of family and work and for intergenerational solidarity were held in Brussels. The events, focusing on Germany and Italy, were organised jointly by the European Commission, Permanent Representations and the regional authorities.

A full overview of the events organised by the European Commission within the framework of the Alliance is annexed to this document.

(3) OECD family database

The Commission has given financial support for the development and extension of the OECD’s family database, and both organisations have jointly worked to develop policy analysis tools so that the Member States can assess the strengths and weaknesses of their policies in the light of broad goals such as allowing families to have their desired number of children, gender equality and, more broadly, equal opportunities and social inclusion, especially for children. The report resulting from those activities is available at the web portal of the Alliance.

(4) Research activities

In 2008, a Eurobarometer survey on "Family life and the needs of an ageing population" was carried out by the European Commission. The full report and the executive summary are available online.

Other reports commissioned within the framework of the Alliance include a review of literature on the costs of raising children, and study on the social situation of families with caring responsibilities.

In the autumn of 2009, following a call for proposals managed by the DG Research, a 'social platform' (modelled on the 'technology platforms' supported under the RTD FP) on research on families (FAMILYPLATFORM) was launched. The platform is an innovative way of bringing together researchers as well as representatives of civil
society and policy makers, who will jointly assess the existing research on families and family policies and prepare a foresight report on the conditions for the well-being of families with a view to developing a research agenda (to be used when launching the next EU Framework Programme).

(5) Web Portal

The Web Portal of the European Alliance for Families presents information on policies for families implemented by the Member States, relevant studies and reports, news and announcements of events. In addition, a section on good practice, i.e. family-friendly actions on the national, regional, local and company level, is being developed.

(6) Network on Family Policies

In order to facilitate the co-operation with the national correspondents to the web portal, and in reply to requests by Member States to strengthen the analytical side of the Alliance, the European Commission has established a loose network on family policies. The network is composed of the national correspondents to the web portal and researchers in the area of family policies who had been designated by the national governments through the members of the Expert Group on Demographic Issues. The network meets two times a year to facilitate discussions between researchers on family policies and policy makers (in most cases, the correspondents to the web portal of the European Alliance for Families are officials representing national ministries), to provide feedback on the development of the web portal of the Alliance, and to discuss its editorial programme.

(7) Promoting the use of the European Structural Funds

In its 2007 Communication, the Commission called on the Member States to ensure that the operational programmes they have submitted can be used to finance activities to support equal opportunities and the balancing of professional and family life. To this end, the Commission has prepared a practical guide for local and regional stakeholders.

As announced in the 2007 communication, the Commission will deliver to the third European Demographic Forum (scheduled 22-23 November 2010) a report on the achievements of the European Alliance for Families. In order to prepare this report, an evaluation has been launched.
ANNEX

List of events organised by the European Commission within the framework of the European Alliance for Families

DEMOGRAPHY FORUMS:
2006 – 2008 – 2010*

STAKEHOLDER SEMINARS

"Mutual learning tools for more family-friendly policies and better childcare provision" 28/11/2007

"Towards a Framework for Assessing Family Policies in the EU" 23/06/2008

"Framework for Assessing Family Policies in the EU and outcomes of recent European studies" 10/06/2009

"Transition to adulthood: how does it affect demographic trends?" 25/11/2009

"The impact of the global crisis on the opportunities of the Member States to respond to the challenges of demographic change in five key areas" (session "Promoting better conditions for families") 22/02/2010

MEETINGS OF THE EU NETWORK ON FAMILY POLICIES

"Promotion of Active Fatherhood – a New Objective of Family Policies?" 11/06/2009

"Supporting Families in Times of Economic Crisis" 26/11/2009

"Policies for families: reconciling child well-being and employment promotion" 25/06/2010*

BEST PRACTICE WORKSHOPS

National level

"Child care by childminders in France" 29/06/2009 [report]

"For a Better Reconciliation Between Work and Family Life: National Measures and Experimental Initiatives" 09/10/2009

"The »Reserve Grandparent programme« in Denmark" 16/10/2009 [report]

"Promoting Family-Friendliness at Workplace through Awards, Audits and Labelling Schemes" 26/03/2010

"Supporting Lone Parents - How to Best Integrate Them into the Labour Market?" 02/06/2010
Regional level

"Regional initiatives for a better reconciliation of family and work and for intergenerational solidarity: Examples from the German Bundesländer" 08/12/2008

"Regional initiatives for a better reconciliation of family and work and for intergenerational solidarity: Examples from the Italian Regions" 27/03/2009

"Integrated system of structural policies for family well being in Trento" 15/06/2010*

*) Planned events