

**Making Education Accessible and Inclusive for
Families, Parents and Family Carers:
The Need for a 'Family Test' in EU Education and Training Policies**

**Joint Statement by COFACE Families Europe and the European Association for the
Education of Adults (EAEA)
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In the context of the European Commission [public consultation](#) on the European Education Area, COFACE and EAEA call for a 'family test' in EU education and training programmes. The aim of such a test is to ensure that programmes are designed with the work-life balance of families in mind, so that parents and family carers can receive extra supports if needed and more flexible education and training formats which reflect their caring realities. This 'families perspective' is currently missing from many EU education programmes, affecting a large share of people in the EU, especially in vulnerable situations. This joint statement aims to shed light on these issues and put forward concrete solutions. COFACE and EAEA stand ready to work with the EU institutions on make this proposal a reality.

Everyone has the right to education, training and lifelong learning, as enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Yet, many people in Europe cannot enjoy this right because systemic barriers make it difficult to access education and training. These obstacles disproportionately affect parents and family carers and, in particular, those that may be at increased risk of social exclusion and poverty, including single mothers, parents caring for children with disabilities, and low-income families. **While EU education and training policies recognise the importance of diversity and inclusion, the family perspective is often neglected. This translates into less effective programmes, excluding those people that may benefit the most from training and lifelong learning.**

Families of today come in different shapes and forms, such as single parents, grandparents as primary caregivers, transnational families, and various other configurations. Considering that almost 25% of households in the EU have at least one child, the lack of a family dimension in EU policies means that the reality of many in Europe is not adequately taken into account. Key EU education and training policies are not responsive enough to the needs of families, parents and family carers. For instance, while the Implementation Guidelines of the Erasmus+ Programme note that being a parent or a caregiver may prevent people from participating in the initiative, no targeted measures are provided to remove relevant barriers (e.g. lack of access to childcare services in the destination country). Especially in the fields of Higher Education and Adult Education, such obstacles may discourage learners from training in another country. Similar observations are also to be made for the European Social Fund+ and the 2023 Council Recommendation on improving digital skills.

Calling for a 'Family Test' in all EU education and training policies

The data underline the need to make EU education and training policies more inclusive for families, parents and family carers. For this reason, inspired by best practices in other sectors, the EU should **introduce a 'Family Test' to ensure that all education and training programmes funded or promoted by the EU are accessible by design for families, parents, and caregivers.** The following table outlines the main features of a potential 'Family Test'.

Scope	<p>The Family Test should apply to all policies, programmes and initiatives funded, recommended or promoted by the European Union in the field of education, training and upskilling/reskilling in all sectors and at all levels.</p>
When	<p>The Family Test should be taken into account before, during and after the implementation of policies and programmes and, in particular, in the following phases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparatory works/policy or programme design; • Impact assessment; • Stakeholder consultations; • Implementation; • Interim and Ex-post evaluations. <p>Stakeholders representing families and education sectors should be regularly consulted and involved.</p>
How	<p>The Family Test entails four key questions that should be addressed by policy makers and implementation authorities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is this policy/recommendation/programme accessible by design for families, parents and family carers? Are there targeted measures to address the specific needs of families, parents and family carers? Are eligibility criteria and/or the definitions of target groups adopting a multi-generational approach? <p>Targeted measures may include, among other things: childcare provision offered on the training facility, access to childcare/caregiving services, vouchers for childcarers/caregivers, flexible/modular learning pathways for parents and family carers, distance/online learning options for parents and family carers, extended paid training leave, additional leave, reduced tuition fees and scholarships, dedicated counselling.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Is this policy/recommendation/programme validating and recognizing the broad range of skills and knowledge acquired in the family context, especially by parents and family carers? <p>For example, parents and caregivers are likely to develop valuable transferable skills, such as time management, conflict resolution, budgeting, planning, organisational and communication skills.</p> <p>Additionally, parents and family carers can deliver trainings and contribute to learning environments by sharing their firsthand experiences and practical knowledge. They can actively participate in material and curriculum development, bringing a unique perspective that enriches educational content. By involving families in these processes, programs can become more relevant and relatable, providing a more inclusive and effective learning experience.</p>

	<p>3. Is this policy/recommendation/programme promoting and developing skills and knowledge that are relevant in the family context, especially for parents and family carers? Are learning objectives addressing the needs, the expectations and the ambitions of families, parents and family carers?</p> <p>4. Is this policy/recommendation/programme ensuring representation of diverse family realities in education and training materials? Are materials inclusive of various family structures, backgrounds, and experiences?</p> <p>For instance, educational materials should feature a range of family compositions, including single-parent households, blended families, same-sex parents, and multigenerational households. By representing diverse family realities, materials can foster a sense of belonging and recognition among learners from different backgrounds. Additionally, including diverse family narratives and perspectives enriches the learning experience by promoting empathy, understanding, and appreciation for the uniqueness of each family unit. It is crucial that education and training materials reflect the diversity of families to create inclusive learning environments that resonate with all participants.</p>
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What would the 'Family Test' mean for citizens? An example

Take Lisa, a single mother of two young children, working as a cook in a school canteen. Lisa was an early school leaver as she had to take care of a sick family member in her youth, and no help for students with parenting/caregiving responsibilities was offered at that time. Things have changed, as the EU has now adopted the 'Family Test' for any education initiative. A new digital skills training programme is launched and it becomes available in Lisa's town. The training is provided in the evenings, when Lisa does not work but has to take care of the children. However, the training provider offers on-site childcare at the same time of the classes free-of-charge. This means that Lisa is able to attend her classes and focus on learning, while her kids can play with other children under professional supervision. As Lisa explained to the trainer just before starting the class, she already masters internet browsing and emails, since she is used to searching things online when the kids need help with their homework. So, Lisa is able to skip the corresponding course unit and can enjoy more time for herself without losing the credits needed to get the final certificate. In the intake conversation, she told the trainer that she is worried about online safety for her kids and would like to know more. The trainer therefore adapts the module on online safety and cybersecurity to devote more time to this topic. At the end of the training, Lisa is very pleased with her training experience and decides to embark on a new course to become a software developer.

Turning obstacles into opportunities, new targeted initiatives could be developed: for example, as the European Citizens' Learning Mobility Panel recommended, the EU could launch a learning mobility programme for families, facilitating access to mobility for people with young children.

As the fictional story of Lisa illustrates, this proposal can have a concrete impact for many people: **including the family perspective in EU education and training policies has the potential to remove substantial barriers that still hinder the enjoyment of the right to education, training and lifelong learning for many.**

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