



Federal Ministry for  
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth



Observatory for  
Sociopolitical Developments  
in Europe



Online conference

# Overcoming COVID-19 – jointly developing prospects for strong families

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on 24 November 2020 in Berlin



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# Background:

## Families are the central pillar of our society

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**The COVID-19 pandemic has shown from the very beginning that families are the central pillar of our society. Many people have supported each other during this time, especially within the family unit. For a large number of families, however, this time had and still has a strong economic and psychological impact. For children, the closure of educational and care facilities meant the loss of contact with friends and peers. The switching to home-schooling caused great challenges in learning for both the children and their parents. For some of the parents, this period also presented major problems with regard to balancing work and family life.**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many families had to cope with fewer financial resources despite the emergency financial measures implemented at short notice in most European countries: Some parents had been paid short-time allowances, others lost their jobs. The uncertainty about their own professional future is an additional burden for many parents.

Especially families that were already in difficult situations before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic feel the consequences of the pandemic and the loss of supportive structures even harder: this applies particularly to families with low incomes, single parents, families with many children, families with a migration background and families with children who have a disability.

There is a risk that social inequalities, especially in education, will be further increased by the COVID-19 pandemic. Initial studies indicate that social inequalities have increased due to differences in access to digital technology and the lack of support for learning at home.

Another development to be observed is the relationship between the violence against children and curfews, contact restrictions and isolation at home.

The different political measures to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on families with children in Europe show that EU Member States are responding with different approaches to the same challenges. This seems to be due to the different starting points of countries in pre-COVID-19 times, especially in the area of family policy and digitalisation.

# Objective:

## Jointly developing prospects for strong families

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**The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), in cooperation with the Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe, within the framework of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, is focusing on supporting families during the pandemic with the international online conference “Overcoming COVID-19 – jointly developing prospects for strong families”. The BMFSFJ is aware of the fact that the measures to reduce the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have been – and continue to be – particularly stressful for many families and children.**

Current challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and possible solutions will be discussed by representatives of the European Commission and the EU Member States as well as experts from politics, science and civil society. The aim is to jointly develop prospects for strong families.

In addition to the question of the sustainability of the measures, four expert panels will discuss key questions regarding the financial stability of families, equal educational opportunities for all children, better reconciliation of family and work life as well as combatting domestic violence.

Moreover, representatives of the EU Member States and the European Commission will discuss in two high-level political panels. The focus here is on what lessons can be learned from national examples of good practice for families and children in times of COVID-19 and how the empowerment of children and families in Europe can be continued through cooperation within the Trio-Presidency.

# Agenda

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# Agenda

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9.00 a.m. – 10.00 a.m.

**Online check-in**

10.00 a.m. – 10.10 a.m.

**Welcome address by moderator**

**Dr Nicola Brandt**

Head of the OECD Berlin Centre

10.10 a.m. – 10.25 a.m.

**Welcome address and lecture**

**Franziska Giffey**

Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

10.25 a.m. – 10.40 a.m.

**Greetings**

**Dubravka Šuica**

Commission Vice President for Democracy and Demography

10.40 a.m. – 11.20 a.m.

**Podiumsdiskussion**

**Franziska Giffey**

Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

**Nicolas Schmit**

EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

**Krista Kiuru**

Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services, Finland

**Adrien Taquet**

Minister of State for Children and Families, attached to the Minister for Solidarity and Health, France

**Georg Graf Waldersee**

Chairman of the Board, UNICEF Germany

**Prof. Michael O’Flaherty**

Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Moderation: Dr Nicola Brandt**

11.20 a.m. – 11.45 a.m.

**Break**

## Agenda

11.45 a.m. – 1.15 p.m.

### Expert panels with the possibility of virtual participation:

#### Panel 1: Financial stability of families with children

**Petra Mackroth**

Head of Directorate-General Family Affairs at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth

**Dr Dominic Richardson**

Chief, Social and Economic Policy, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

**Chaired by: Andreas Heimer**

Director Prognos AG

#### Panel 2: Reducing unequal educational opportunities and supporting infrastructure

**Prof. Hugh Frazer**

Department of Applied Social Studies, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

**Jana Hainsworth**

Secretary General, Eurochild

**Mialy Dermish**

Head of Secretariat, SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education

**Chaired by: Dr Silke Borgstedt**

Director Research & Consulting, SINUS-Institute

1.15 p.m. – 1.30 p.m.

**Break**

1.30 p.m. – 3.00 p.m.

### Expert panels with the possibility of virtual participation:

#### Panel 3: Reconciliation of family and work life

**Dr Monika Queisser**

Head of Social Policy Division, OECD

**Prof. Dr Miriam Beblo**

Professor for Economics, University of Hamburg

**Dr David Juncke**

Principal, Family Policy and Reconciliation of Work and Family Life, Prognos AG

**Chaired by: Dr Hans-Peter Klös**

Managing Director and Head of Research, German Economic Institute (IW)



## Agenda

### Panel 4: Combatting domestic violence

**Prof. Dr phil Jörg Maywald**

Managing Director of the German League for the Child

**Dr Cara Ebert**

Deputy Head of Berlin Office, RWI – Leibniz-Institute for Economic Research

**Dr Astrid Podsiadlowski**

Project Manager - Rights of the Child, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

**Chaired by: Prof. Dr Janina Steinert**

TUM School of Governance, Technical University of Munich

3.00 p.m. – 3.30 p.m.

**Break**

3.30 p.m. – 4.10 p.m.

**Presentation of the results of the discussion groups**

4.10 p.m. – 4.40 p.m.

**Outlook with representatives from the Trio Council Presidency**

**Juliane Seifert**

State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany

**Ana Sofia Antunes**

State Secretary for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Portugal

**Cveto Uršič**

State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia

**Moderation: Dr Nicola Brandt**

4.40 p.m. – 4.45 p.m.

**Closing remarks**

**Dr Nicola Brandt**

# **Overview of the conference topics**

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# Overview of the conference topics

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## High Level Panel

### Good practice examples: How policies can strengthen family reconciliation and what contribution a digital infrastructure can make

The panel will focus on the exchange of good national practice examples on reconciliation policies in the field of family policy and digitalisation, especially in the area of employment and education. The aim is to discuss whether individual countries that already had implemented a wide range of family policy measures to balance family and work life (e.g. childcare, all-day schools, parental leave and parental benefits, flexible working hours, home office regulations) or had a well-developed digital infrastructure before COVID-19 were able – and still

are able – to better cope with the challenges of the pandemic for children and families.

#### Key questions are:

- How can national measures be retroactively assessed in terms of implementation and effectiveness?
- What can be done in the future, at European and/or country-level, to strengthen families?

## Expert Panel 1: Financial stability of families with children

Among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic has left families in financial distress. As a result of the measures to counter the pandemic, parents had been forced to take unpaid leave, work short time or even lost their workplaces altogether. In order to relieve the financial impact on families due to the pandemic, EU Member States took various measures.

For instance, several states decided to pay out additional one-off benefits for families. Alternatively, some states adapted existing benefits, for example by temporarily increasing payments or extending the duration for which they may be collected, simplifying application procedures or expanding the circle of entitled persons.

In addition, some states also decided to provide temporary services and benefits specifically to help socially disadvantaged families cope with the crisis,

in order to help this already disadvantaged group cushion not only the financial but also the psychological and social impact of the pandemic.

#### Key questions are:

- Have application and approval procedures for benefits and services been adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g. through online procedures, simplified application or faster processing? If so, what were these changes?
- How was information about (modified) services communicated to families?
- What experiences/data was collected with regard to the uptake of benefits and services?

## Expert Panel 2: Reducing unequal educational opportunities and supportive infrastructure

In order to slow down the spread of COVID-19, child care facilities and schools were closed for several months in many EU Member States during the first half of 2020. This means that for the majority of children their usual social environment outside of the family disappeared from one day to the next.

Switching to home-schooling and digital learning in schools has increasingly highlighted already existing deficits in the field of digital education in many countries. This applies to the educational staff as well as to the pupils' competences. Classes were cancelled which led to less educational opportunities for children, the consequences of which are still unforeseeable today.

Learning difficulties appeared in particular among children from families who did not possess the teaching and material resources to carry out distance

learning. Children with a migration background and children with disabilities also had a particularly difficult time in distance learning. Initial surveys from various states confirm the fear that educational inequalities have increased during this time.

### Key questions are:

- Are the measures taken to reduce unequal educational opportunities sustainable, also with regard to the time after COVID-19?
- What challenges became apparent due to the quickly implemented digitalisation?
- Which children had access to emergency care and how was the loss of services such as school lunches and leisure activities compensated?
- Are there initiatives to improve the digital competences of teachers, educators and other childcare workers?

## Expert Panel 3: Reconciliation of family and work life

The COVID-19 pandemic has not just increased the economic pressure on families. Following the closures and/or restricted operation of educational and childcare facilities, reconciling family and work life has become even more difficult – or even impossible in some cases – for mothers and fathers. Some families have adopted a more traditional role distribution, while others have been able to solve tasks more cooperatively than before. Above all, single parents, families with toddlers or families with children with a disability had to face severe challenges balancing family and work life.

A large number of states have introduced or adapted measures in form of leave of absence for working parents. Some employers offered flexible working

hours or enabled employees to work from home. The amount of parents who worked from home highly increased in all EU Member States during the pandemic.

### Key questions are:

- To what extent do these measures enable partners a fair sharing of care work? Has the fair sharing of care work helped overcome the challenges of the pandemic?
- How did employers handle the situation and how did they support families?

## Expert Panel 4: Combatting domestic violence

The COVID-19 pandemic and the relating contact restrictions and curfews forced families to stay at home over weeks – in some states even for months – in very confined spaces. This increased the risk of violence within the family, particularly against mothers and children. The permanent contact between perpetrator and victim as well as the non-existing contact to people outside the family complicated the reveal of cases of violence.

The access to local support services and safe houses was limited by contact restrictions. Due to the high demand for support services, providers of counselling services were and still are overburdened. The EU Member States took measures to financially support and increase the existing infrastructure for service and helplines, especially the online offer.

### Key questions are:

- What measures that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic have been effective?
- What methods were found that could replace “outreach counselling” and “close monitoring” (e.g. by educators) and how were those affected made aware of these support services?
- Are these measures sustainable with regard to the time after COVID-19?
- How can the EU Strategy on children’s rights planned for early 2021 by the European Commission support the fight against domestic violence?

## Outlook with representatives from the Trio Council Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia

The European Commission has announced a strategy on children’s rights for early 2021. The Europe-wide Child Guarantee, which is planned as a Council recommendation, is intended to give children affected by poverty and socially disadvantaged children access to high-quality services, for example in the areas of education and healthcare. At European level, the focus is already on strengthening children and their families in the long term – and thus also after overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic.

To ensure that children and families in the EU Member States emerge well from the crisis and are sustainably strengthened, it is important that Germany and its successors to hold the Presidency of the Council constructively accompany these two European initiatives and set common priorities.

### Key questions are:

- What are the Trio Council Presidency’s programme aims with relation to strengthening families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Which aims are connected to the introduction of a European Child Guarantee and what further steps are planned?

# Speaker

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# Speaker

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## Ana Sofia Antunes

### **State Secretary for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at the Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Portugal**

Ana Sofia Antunes has been the State Secretary for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at the Portuguese Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security since 2015. She was elected for the Portuguese Parliament in 2015 and 2019. Previously, she was a member of the Association of the Blind and Amblyopic of Portugal (ACAPO), having held the position of President of the National Directorate of the Association between 2013 and 2015.

## Prof. Dr Miriam Beblo

### **Professor for Economics, University of Hamburg**

Miriam Beblo is an applied micro economist with a focus on labour and family policy issues, gender and migration. She is professor of economics at the University of Hamburg. Former positions include the Berlin School of Economics and Law (HWR), the Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW) in Mannheim and the Freie Universität (FU) Berlin.

## Dr Silke Borgstedt

### **Director Research & Consulting, SINUS-Institute**

Silke Borgstedt is Director Research & Consulting at the SINUS-Institute in Berlin. Her specialties are: Family sociology, youth research, trend research, everyday aesthetics, environmental awareness and semantics, and the cultural and media industries. She studied music, psychology and education. In 2007 she earned a Ph.D. from the Humboldt University of Berlin.

## Mialy Dermish

### **Head of Secretariat, SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education**

Mialy Dermish is an education specialist, previously working with the UNHCR's Regional Representation to the European Union in Brussels. She has been a preschool teacher in Hong Kong, an ESL teacher for migrants in London, conducted research and advocacy campaigns and started her own non-profit organisation. She holds an M.Ed in International Education Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE).

**Dr Cara Ebert**

**Deputy Head of Berlin Office,  
RWI – Leibniz-Institute for Economic Research**

Cara Ebert is a senior researcher at RWI – Leibniz-Institute for Economic Research in the competence area “Labor markets, Education, Population”. Her research focusses on topics of family, gender and human capital in low- and middle-income countries.

**Prof. Hugh Frazer**

**Department of Applied Social Studies,  
National University of Ireland, Maynooth**

Hugh Frazer is Adjunct Professor at Maynooth University. He specialises in issues of poverty, social exclusion, community development and European social policy. He was a former director of the Irish government’s Combat Poverty Agency and the independent study editor and part of the core team of experts of the Feasibility Study for an EU Child Guarantee.

**Franziska Giffey**

**Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth**

Franziska Giffey has been the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth since March 2018. Previously, she was, among other things, Mayor of the district Neukölln in Berlin. Apart from her diploma as an administrative manager, Franziska Giffey also did her Master of Arts for European administrative management.

**Jana Hainsworth**

**Secretary General, Eurochild**

Jana Hainsworth is Secretary General of Eurochild and oversees day-to-day management and strategic development of the network. Eurochild has almost 200 member organisations and individuals who are working with and for children throughout Europe. Eurochild strives for a society that respects the rights of children, guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Eurochild was part of a team of experts involved in the Feasibility Study for an EU Child Guarantee.

**Andreas Heimer**

**Director Prognos AG**

Andreas Heimer is Director of Prognos AG and focuses on family and social policy as well as civil society commitment and participation of people with disabilities in all areas of the society. He has extensive experience in feasibility studies, formative and ex-post evaluation of pilot projects and funding programmes.

**Dr David Juncke**

**Principal, Family Policy and Reconciliation of Work  
and Family Life, Prognos AG**

David Juncke was a member of the founding team of the Research Centre for Family Aware Personnel Policy at the University of Münster, where he dealt intensively with the question of compatibility and family policy in companies. His work at Prognos AG is structured accordingly: In addition to German federal, state and local family policy, his areas of consultancy include companies and the employability of their employees.



Speaker

#### **Krista Kiuru**

##### **Minister of Family Affairs and Social Services, Finland**

Since 2011 Krista Kiuru has served as a Minister in the Finnish government. First, she was Minister of Housing and Communications and Minister of Education. Since 2019, she is Minister for Family Affairs and Social Services.

#### **Dr Hans-Peter Klös**

##### **Managing Director and Head of Research, German Economic Institute (IW)**

Hans-Peter Klös studied economics and received his doctorate at the University of Marburg. He has been working at the Institute of German Economics since 1988 and has been Managing Director and Head of Science since 2014. His research and publication focus is on innovation, digitalisation, labour market and education policy as well as demography and family economics.

#### **Petra Mackroth**

##### **Head of Directorate-General Family Affairs at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**

Petra Mackroth joined the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in 2002 as head of the management group and the ministry's office and has been Head of Directorate-General Family Affairs since 2014. She completed an apprenticeship as a documentalist and graduated as a sociologist in Frankfurt am Main. Petra Mackroth worked as a consultant in youth education and joined the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) executive board in 1988 as a consultant for demographic change, new age and family policy.

#### **Prof. Dr phil Jörg Maywald**

##### **Managing Director of the German League for the Child**

Jörg Maywald is Managing Director of the German League for the Child and Spokesperson of the National Coalition Germany - Network for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

#### **Prof. Michael O'Flaherty**

##### **Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights**

Michael O'Flaherty is Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Previously, he was Established Professor of Human Rights Law and Director of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at the National University of Ireland Galway, and served as Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

#### **Dr Astrid Podsiadlowski**

##### **Project Manager – Rights of the Child, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights**

As project manager, Astrid Podsiadlowski's areas of expertise include: discrimination and social inequalities, migration and integration and research methodologies. She previously held academic research and teaching positions in Europe as well as New Zealand and the USA, and has been the project leader of several international research projects.

**Dr Monika Queisser**

**Head of Social Policy Division, OECD**

Monika Queisser is the Head of Social Policy Division at the OECD in Paris, where she supervises and coordinates the work on social protection, social indicators, pensions, affordable housing, family and LGBTI policies. Prior to joining the OECD, Monika Queisser worked at the World Bank in Washington, D.C.

**Dr Dominic Richardson**

**Chief, Department for Social and Economic Policy, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre**

Dominic Richardson leads the department for Social Policy and Economic Analysis at UNICEF, Office of Research – Innocenti. He previously worked with OECD Social Policy Division on a broad range of studies covering child well-being, evaluating family policies, integrating human services, and social impact investment. He has led or co-authored multiple reports on children and families prior to, and during COVID-19.

**Nicolas Schmit**

**EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights**

Since December 2019, Nicolas Schmit has been the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights. His responsibilities include strengthening the EU's social dimension, working conditions, and implementing the Pillar of Social Rights, including the development of a European Child Guarantee to fight poverty and secure children's access to basic services. Before that he was briefly a Member of the European Parliament, following several years as Minister for Labour in Luxembourg.

**Juliane Seifert**

**State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany**

Juliane Seifert has been State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth since March 2018. From 2016 until 2017 she held the position of Executive Secretary of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). Before this, she worked at the State Chancellery of Rhineland-Palatinate and two federal ministries. She studied history in Berlin, Düsseldorf and Florence and completed the German-French course "Master of European Governance and Administration" in Paris and Potsdam.

**Prof. Dr Janina Steinert**

**TUM School of Governance, Technical University of Munich**

In 2020, Janina Steinert joined the TUM School of Governance as Professor in "Global Health". Her research focus lies primarily in the fields of global health and development economics. Research topics include the examination of inter-dependencies between poverty and disease, the prevention of domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, and the identification of ethical challenges in development research.

**Dubravka Šuica**

**Commission Vice President for Democracy and Demography**

Since December 2019, Dubravka Šuica is Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Democracy and Demography. She is a Croatian politician from the city of Dubrovnik, where she served as the first female mayor. From 2013 to 2019 Dubravka Šuica served as a Member of the European Parliament.

#### Adrien Taquet

##### **Minister of State for Children and Families, attached to the Minister for Solidarity and Health, France**

2017 Adrien Taquet was elected to the National Assembly. As a member of the Social Affairs Committee he is involved in social, health and education issues. In 2020, Adrien Taquet was appointed Minister of State for Children and Families, attached to the Minister for Solidarity and Health. Before, he was Minister of State at the same ministry responsible for implementing the strategy for protecting children.

#### Cveto Uršič

##### **State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Slovenia**

Cveto Uršič has been State Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in Slovenia since 2019. From January 2018 to March 2019 he was Secretary General of Caritas Slovenia, previously in the Directorate for People with Disabilities in the same ministry. From 2008 to 2010 he was elected to the UN Committee of Experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. He has also been a member of various committees in the Council of Europe and the European Union.

#### Georg Graf Waldersee

##### **Chairman of the Board, UNICEF Germany**

Georg Graf Waldersee has been member of international executive committees of Arthur Andersen and EY (formerly Ernst & Young) and is now Chairman of the Board of the German organisation of EY and on the supervisory board of various other companies. Since 2016, Georg Graf Waldersee has been working on the honorary board of UNICEF Germany.

#### Moderation

#### Dr Nicola Brandt

##### **Head of OECD Berlin Centre**

Nicola Brandt has been Head of the OECD Berlin Centre since October 2019. She holds a doctorate in economics and has advised governments on defining their economic and financial policies for many years. Furthermore, she was responsible for the OECD Economic Surveys for Mexico, Chile, France and Poland.

## **Imprint**

This PDF is part of the public relations work of the Federal Government;  
it is made available free of charge and is not intended for sale.

### **Published by:**

Bundesministerium  
für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend  
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Public service telephone number for all government agencies and offices: 115\*

**As of:** November 2020

**Designed by:** [www.zweiband.de](http://www.zweiband.de)

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