

## COFACE MEMBERS IN ACTION TO SUPPORT INCLUSION OF MIGRANT FAMILIES



COFACE members are identified family experts advocating for and engaging in local projects supporting all family rights and support measures. While our members are not firmly rooted in migration policy, their support services in social, family and education policy covers migration in different ways and contributes to building inclusive societies in Europe. We consulted our network to find out more about their advocacy work and projects targeting children and families in migration. We received feedback from members across European regions regarding current state of plays, emerging challenges, and current activities. Here below are some examples from Belgium, Spain, Finland, Bulgaria and Greece, which highlight how family organisations contribute to building a Welcoming Europe.

### BELGIUM

Ligue des Familles advocates for inclusive societies and education. They build community capacities through their Voisins Solidaires<sup>1</sup> programme, a sponsorship project for individuals and families wishing to establish links of proximity and mutual help with persons or families who recently attained refugee status. This project seeks to promote solidarity in communities where newly arrived people have embarked. Ligue des Familles offers Belgians and long-time resident citizens to get in touch with refugees living in their immediate neighbourhoods. Residents assist with the integration process by including newly arrived persons and families in their activities and daily lives. The programme offers a variety of services depending on participants availability, skills, desires, and needs and the wishes of refugees. The type of support provided may be different for each person but is identified together between the refugee and community participant. Activities may include: helping with homework or transport, discovering the neighbourhood or city, conversations in French or sharing a meal. Furthermore, Ligue de Familles fights prejudice through awareness-raising actions such as disseminating information of different migration challenges and mobilising communities to end discrimination. The intention of the project and the toolbox for information and resources is to build solidarity within the community and to support contact and relationships which ease the integration processes for migrant families.

Ligue des Familles also engages in educational activities to promote global citizenship. As partners of the Red Cross, advocacy and education interventions have been filtrated into schools to raise awareness of migrant and refugee challenges. Their goal is to promote responsible, active, critical, and supportive citizens. One programme the Red Cross offers is an animation where students put themselves in the shoes of a refugee.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.laligue.be/association/activites-mouvement/le-projet-accueil-migrants/le-projet-voisins-solidaires>

Ligue des Familles initiated a similar programme<sup>2</sup> in a local school carrying out a morning of activities to demonstrate some of the experiences refugees may encounter when fleeing their country. Activities are developmentally appropriate for the participants and are a way to engage in reflection for students and their families. Other education tools are also provided for students and parents in prompting conversation and reflection for receiving communities. Ligue des Familles promotes a variety of books and tools to guide reflection for families.

Lastly, in partnership with Federation Wallonie-Brussels, Ligue de Familles supports the DASPA programme<sup>3</sup> ongoing since 2012 in the reception and schooling system for newly arrived pupils in education organised or subsidised by the French-speaking community. DASPA services tackle a variety of challenges through learner accommodation plans for the transitional periods and motivated and trained teachers who participate in formal and informal educational supports.

Inclusive Education, global citizenship initiatives, and communal capacity building are at the core of the Ligue des Familles' work in addressing the challenges newly arrived people and migrant communities.

## SPAIN

Asociacion Salud y Familia<sup>4</sup> focuses on the health and well-being of all families and supporting intercultural relations. The organisation works with people and families at risk of exclusion, mainly women and children, and most of them (about 85%) have migrant origins. Salud y Familia acknowledges that migrant children and families are amongst the most vulnerable groups within society. They face a multitude of challenges such as lack of income and employment, poor health, difficulties locating adequate housing, and lack of citizenship rights, which can lead to poverty and social exclusion. For this reason, Salud y Familia targets migrants with a specific focus on women and children.

The organisation offers a portfolio of services under their programmes including: family planning and pregnancy counselling, law counselling, and psychosocial counselling. On staff are cultural mediators with experience within different countries such as China, Pakistan, Latin-America, and Maghreb. Their role is highly valued in developing programmes to enhance participation in society and support implementation of projects by translating and facilitating communication and relations with other associations and professionals. Under their Compass<sup>5</sup> programme beneficiaries have access to family law legal advice, provided so that women are aware of their rights and know how to use them. Legal, as well as psychological, guidance and support are offered to women in life-changing and conflict situations, such as family reunification, child benefits, raising a family, divorce, domestic violence and abandonment.

Salud y Familia's *Mothers between two cultures*<sup>6</sup> programme seeks to build bridges and promote intercultural dialogue through collaboration with local hospitals. This programme provides a safe meeting place for mothers to express and share their projects, doubts, and difficulties with other mothers; guidance on public resources on family planning, inclusive education, and employment and social assistance; and guidance and support to ensure that children grow up healthy and to their full potential. Finally, this programme provides support and exchange between local and migrant families through cultural activities and health education.

The actions of Salud y Familia contribute to develop experiences for communities to understand cultural diversity, social cohesion, and support of migrant families in their basic needs. They work to promote the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of families and management of healthy life-styles that are key for social inclusion.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.laligue.be/ligueur/une-matinee-dans-la-peau-d-un-refugie>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.laligue.be/leligueur/articles/un-enfant-en-sejour-illegal-peut-il-aller-a-l-ecole>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.saludyfamilia.es/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.saludyfamilia.es/en/support-women-families/compass>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.saludyfamilia.es/en/immigration-health/mothers-between-cultures>

Unión Asociaciones Familiares (UNAF) advocates for the rights and well-being of all families with an inclusive perspective of family diversity. It comprises 22 organizations working together on this mission from different areas: health, education, gender equality, children, elderly people, disability and other vulnerable situations.

In this framework, UNAF works for and with migrant families through different services - family mediation, mediation between parents and teenagers, counselling for reconstituted families, mediation and conflict resolution awareness-raising at schools -, and develops specific programmes for the promotion of sexual and reproductive rights through sexual education with a human-rights, gender equality and intercultural approach, mainstreaming the prevention of gender based violences. To this end, UNAF works in advocacy, awareness-raising, capacity building and promotion of sexual health as well as prevention of female genital mutilation.

Sexual education offers an integral space for learning and developing the well-being of the general health of people. From sexual education we address a wide variety of topics: explore values and beliefs about the body and the expression of sexuality, understand the cultural, religious, social and family conditions on the feminine and masculine, on the different models of family and as a couple and about pleasure and love. In addition, sexual education offers information on the psychosexual development of people, on the functioning of our reproductive system, helps us identify and recognize discomforts and manage resources and tools to ensure our sexual health. It offers a space to learn to know each other giving the same value to men and women to be able to live with greater freedom respecting sexual diversity and plurality. Sexual education emphasizes the recognition of integral care of the body: (re)-recognizing, accepting, and appreciating the parts and diversities of bodies, insisting on care and good treatment without excluding parts considered socio-culturally a taboo such as the genitals. UNAF promotes sexual and reproductive rights, the right to integrity, pleasure and well-being.

From this approach, UNAF also drives a behavior change against female genital mutilation with a respectful approach, far from racism, prejudices and cultural stereotypes, giving voice to the actors involved and with the empowerment of the communities and particularly women as key agents for the change. UNAF has the support of intercultural mediators and activists from the countries of origin, for an effective dialogue between professionals and communities.

UNAF provides training, strategies and tools for sexual health promotion and abandonment of FGM through: awareness-raising workshops for both professionals and migrant communities with a human rights, gender and intercultural perspective; awareness-raising events; specialized materials; communication activities; and networking and collaboration with international, national and local organizations and public entities.

## **FINLAND**

Vaestoliitto (the Family Federation of Finland)<sup>7</sup> is a strong advocate for inclusive education and lifelong learning in Finland. The Finnish school system organises comprehensive schools which seek to promote excellence through equitable opportunities for all learners. Education leadership is strong and schools set clear goals in collaboration with other societal actors to bridge gaps between schools and society and leisure time.

Vaestoliitto is a big player for reception and welcoming of newly arrived families. They promote a Welcome Guide covering topics of trust, participation, supporting education, discrimination, relationship building, homework and school glossary, and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Positive reception, cooperation between home and school, and parental support has a variety of benefits including: improving child's learning and academic successes, fostering positive attitudes towards education reducing early school leaving, and developing social and emotional skills.

The Parents Association in Finland (with whom Vaestoliitto cooperates closely) works on shaping the education system in early years including ECEC and primary schooling. Including migrant families into this

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.saludyfamilia.es/>

association promotes active participation in democratic school cultures and child development. There is a wide variety of volunteer work done to advance the growth, learning and welfare for all children; and its primary goal seeks to create co-operation between school and home life. Parents associations create a social network for migrant families and are an opportunity for intercultural dialogue and understanding cultural factors through events and celebrations.

Newly arrived migrants and refugees are included into schools from their arrival either in mainstream or in preparatory education with language learning. There are opportunities for mother tongue education and host community languages can be considered for foreign language credits. Finland promotes education as a family project, with parental education levels also being a factor into social inclusion. Vaestoliitto promotes adult education, providing opportunities for parents to supplement previous attainments and complete basic education and postgraduate skills. Finland officials are also trying to increase the share of pupils in higher education by developing immigrant and language training programmes, promoting foreign language training through a variety of polytechnic schools and universities. Within this initiative they are looking to identify and recognise highly educated migrants with different statuses and ensure that they are guided to the right path.

Vaestoliitto's Centre for Multicultural Expertise works on psychosocial challenges concerning immigrants' family life, childrearing, and parenthood and more generally on immigrant integration and inclusive societies. The platform offers consultation and advice via telephone, organising discussion (peer) groups for parents to support parenthood, create peer support, and encourage father participation in the upbringing of their children. Group discussions are held in seven languages and may discuss a variety of topics such as: the immigration experience and changing parenthood, raising a child in Finland, supporting bilingualism and schooling, fathers' participation in family life, family dynamics arising with immigration, or local support networks. Discussions are organised together with migrant populations, immigrant associations, organisation, and public authorities.

## **BULGARIA**

The Center of Women's Studies and Policies (CWSP)<sup>8</sup> establishes coordination, information exchange, and networking with other NGO's addressing women's issues and capacity building for gender equality. Its Equal Space<sup>9</sup> project is an Erasmus+ partnership on intersectionality between gender and diversity in adult education fostering transnational exchanges between organisations from Austria, Bulgaria, France and Portugal. Equal Space works to train community educators and facilitators to fight against the educational disadvantages of refugee, migrant and minority women. There are strong connections between educational attainment and social outcomes; therefore, parental lifelong education influences family integration into receiving societies. Inclusion of migrant adults in education and utilising trained educators and facilitators in communities promotes active citizenship and civil engagement; but it also channels trained individuals with migrant/refugee backgrounds into employment and leadership positions which is positive for children with migrant/refugee backgrounds to observe. CWSP works for building capacities and developing skills of different stakeholders to manage diversity in their everyday work, as for example NGOs, schools, public authorities. They work in urban and rural environments challenging discrimination and finding solutions for gender-based violence.

During the Equal Space project research in 2017, CWSP explored the national state of play for involvement of women refugees and migrants in national educational programmes with supports of Caritas Bulgaria<sup>10</sup>. The Bulgarian non-profit organisation works to strengthen the social situation for vulnerable populations, families and well-being for future generations. After assessing the programming of Caritas through online resources it was discovered that one their focuses is to keep young people and adults engaged in learning. Migrant children who reside in accommodation centres in Bulgaria are often excluded from mainstream education until their

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cwsp.bg/en/htmls/home.php>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.equalspace.eu/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://caritas.bg/en/>

applications are approved. As exclusion from education only widens the gaps and delays learning progresses, Caritas provides trained volunteers and resources to accommodation centres throughout the country. Trained volunteers participate in activities for the training and education of young people and adult refugees in reception centres. Activities such as Bulgarian and English language learning, cooking, arts, music, and theatres are offered. Similarly, trained professionals organise play and entertainment for young children and adolescents, including: language, science, art, and school preparatory courses. After status is granted, refugees can participate in the Centre for integration of Refugees and Migrants where services are focused specifically on integration into the receiving communities. Services include: psychological and social supports, language, registrations, home and employment assistances, art, mentoring, and more. Caritas Bulgaria advocates for fair social policies, economic solidarity, and interconnectedness for vulnerable populations including migrating third country nationals.

## GREECE

KMOP (Family and Childcare Centre of Greece)<sup>11</sup> focuses on building kinder and more resilient communities, placing empowerment and human development at the centre of their work. In 2015, MIPEX reported that education emerged as the greatest weakness in integration policies in most countries. KMOP made it its focus to strengthen educational networks, enhance environmental and professional capacities, and include communities in its processes. In regard to migration, the organisation addresses challenges of health and well-being, integration, and discrimination. KMOP is highly active in a variety of different initiatives, and their work impacts the lives of many migrant children and families.

Vitality Intervention<sup>12</sup> integrates health education into schools and communities of newly arrived migrants and long-term unintegrated migrants. Its goal is to promote good health and well-being and information about health systems in receiving countries. KMOP advocates that good health and well-being and ability to access and manage the existing health systems is a pre-requisite for successful integration. Vitality Intervention provides small, ready-to-use health learning units to communities and educators to help support migrants to stay in good health, adopt healthy lifestyles, and stay informed.

E-COURSE<sup>13</sup> is a transnational exchange project which KMOP currently leads. It aims to enhance the participation and learning performance of newly arrived, third country national children in primary schools across in Germany, Greece, Italy, France, and Cyprus. Similarly, the transnational exchange project INTEGRATED<sup>14</sup> aims to strengthen successful participation and combat early school leaving for newly arrived third country national children in secondary education. Both initiatives strive to disseminate information and build stronger capacities for intercultural competences amongst teaching and non-teaching staff. Each of the projects aim to combat discrimination against third country nationals, refugees, and migrant communities through comprehensive and inclusive education frameworks. Lastly, KMOP programme staff establish relations with local, regional, national representatives to influence inclusive educational policy planning.

The Mediterranean Inclusive Schools Programme's (MEDIS)<sup>15</sup> goals include strengthening and consolidating social cohesion, intercultural education, and local language for newly arrived migrants throughout their whole education. The MEDIS programme is active in Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Bulgaria, acknowledging the challenges of many newly arriving migrant groups when included in schools (language acquisition, psychological barriers, low expectations, insufficient familial or communal support, and discrimination). While the final beneficiaries are the migrant children and families, the programme focuses on addressing capacity building in schools and equipping teachers and classrooms with the resources and tools needed to teach and manage diversity. MEDIS strives to create safe and inclusive learning

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.kmop.gr/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.kmop.gr/index.php/current/416-vim-vitality-interventions-for-migrants>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.kmop.gr/index.php/current/421-e-course-enhancing-the-participation-and-learning-performance-of-migrant-and-refugee-children-in-primary-school-education>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.kmop.gr/index.php/current/415-integrated-promoting-meaningful-integration-of-3rd-country-national-children-to-education>

<sup>15</sup> <http://cesie.org/project/medis/>



environments, develop professional skills with inclusive methodologies and pedagogical approaches, raise awareness of social inclusion of migrants at school and promote benefits of diversity and tolerance in schools. The programme leaders strive to establish relations with local and national policy makers to make recommendations and create consistent change within the educational systems.

KMOP recently launched its first mobile application against bullying in Greece, based on the Greek “Live Without Bullying” platform.<sup>16</sup> In a world where people are more connected than ever, children, parents, and teachers need more transparent information and support in digital engagements. The mobile app is aimed at 13-18 years old leaders, parents, and teacher who now have a platform to chat with professional psychologists about struggles with discrimination. Live Without Bullying includes awareness campaigns, parent updates, and seminars for teachers and children which take place at schools. The website and app are mobile platforms working to address discrimination, empower and guide parents and children on how to manage specific situations and strives to prevent such situations from occurring in the first place.

## NEXT STEPS

According to the Global Compact for Migration<sup>17</sup>, ‘Migration has been part of the human experience throughout history, and (...) it is a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalised world’ but it is also interlinked with the difficult living conditions in the third countries of departure and it will be a free choice only when these improve.

Migrant children’s ability to exercise their right to education is fundamental for the overall inclusion and acceptance in their new home. Schools and educational platforms should be places that foster the democratic values, attitudes, skills, knowledge needed to interact in diverse environments. Furthermore, they should be safe and accepting of learners from all backgrounds. Education is the foundation to breaking cycles of poverty, creating sustainable development, and living in more peaceful societies. In 2017, the three European Institutions proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights. Under this joint responsibility the EU, Member States, and social partners committed to ensure social protection and inclusion for the people of Europe – including migrant populations. This encompasses children’s right to education, but moreover identifies the right to affordable and quality ECEC, protection from poverty, and equal opportunities for those of disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, the pledge to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals commits European institutions to providing a quality education (SDG4), reducing inequalities (SDG10), and achieving peaceful, just, and strong institutions (SDG16). Europe can fulfil its duty and promises with the proper collaboration and policy cohesion, and is taking key steps forward under the leadership of the European Commission.<sup>18</sup>

COFACE Families Europe strives to build inclusive societies for all families in Europe. At the core of our priorities, we cooperate with a variety of stakeholders from the European institutions, member states, and local influencers to ensure that policy and practice remains inclusive and meets the needs of all families, including third country national families. We are assessing the current state of play of migrant children and education across Europe, and to better understand the role of family organisations in this respect. We are also exploring the European frameworks, funding programmes, and current initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion for migrant populations, and discovered different EU resources to support newly arrived families in Europe (e.g. the Parent Help Web Platform<sup>19</sup>). Education can be a tool for equality to contest both prejudice and discriminative actions. Citizenship programmes, both European and global, can develop and foster the competences needed to be more welcoming and participative citizens. Lastly, inclusion of migrant children and families through pathways of education not only promotes stronger mental-health and well-being, but also

---

<sup>16</sup> <https://livewithoutbullying.com>

<sup>17</sup> <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact>

<sup>18</sup> See the Multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the SDGs, of which COFACE Families Europe is member.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/global-topics/sustainable-development-goals/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/global-topics/sustainable-development-goals/multi-stakeholder-platform-sdgs_en)

<sup>19</sup> <http://parenthelp.eu>

greater productivity in building and contributing to inclusive communities. Education is family project that can impact social capital.

COFACE members in several EU countries are currently in action, contributing to organise support, ensure knowledge and protection of rights, and break down the barriers to inclusion. The projects named above specifically focus on community solidarity, anti-discrimination, professional training, and support services needed to ensure that migrant children and families have equal opportunity to lead safe and fruitful lives. We hope these examples will inspire civil society and family organisations to continue supporting families in vulnerable situations, supported by funding and public authorities at local, national and EU level. We will continue monitoring family, education and migration policies, trying to build bridges between these different policy fields with a view to achieving a more inclusive, sustainable and welcoming Europe.

**Many thanks go to Caitlin Ackerman, COFACE intern on migration and education, who authored this policy brief.**

More information, contact [secretariat@coface-eu.org](mailto:secretariat@coface-eu.org)

COFACE Families Europe - Rue de Londres 17, 1050 Brussels  
Tel: +32 2 511 41 79 Email: [secretariat@coface-eu.org](mailto:secretariat@coface-eu.org) Website: [www.coface-eu.org](http://www.coface-eu.org)

---

© COFACE Families Europe has been involved for 60 years in building a strong social, family friendly Europe. COFACE Families Europe advocates for strong social policies that take into consideration family needs and guarantee equal opportunities for all families.

COFACE is supported by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-20). The information contained in this document does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission