Wellbeing of Families in Future Europe – Key Policy and Research Issues

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The consortium consists of the following 12 organisations:

1) Technical University Dortmund (Coordinators)
2) State Institute for Family Research, University of Bamberg
3) Family Research Centre, University of Jyväskylä
4) Austrian Institute for Family Studies, University of Vienna
5) Demographic Research Institute, Budapest
6) Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon
7) Department of Sociology and Social research, University of Milan-Bicocca
8) Institute of International and Social Studies, Tallinn University
9) London School of Economics
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1. Introduction

One of FAMILYPLATFORM's important tasks has been to examine future societal challenges and factors that could have a strong impact on the wellbeing of families. To fulfill this goal, “Future Scenarios” were developed by the Consortium and Advisory Board. Based on the “Foresight Approach”, this work aimed to describe possible futures for families in 2035 by considering a number of factors that were considered important in terms of their impact on the wellbeing of families.

The 12 month exercise was undertaken by FAMILYPLATFORM’s 30-member Consortium and Advisory Board (which encompasses researchers, NGOs, and policy makers)1. Full details of the proceedings, the scientific background to the method, and the results, are documented in detail in “Documentation of the results of the future scenarios”2, which has been prepared by Olaf Kapella from the Austrian Institute for Family Research, University of Vienna.

These results take the form of four scenarios. These were built up by considering different ‘behaviours’ of key drivers that were decided upon as a result of many brainstorming sessions. From these four scenarios, a total of 16 different family ‘narratives’ were created. Each describes a snapshot of the life of different families across Europe in 2035.

One of the main objectives of “Future Scenarios” has been to outline key policy questions and research issues regarding the wellbeing of families derived from the narratives.

The four scenarios and the 16 family narratives constitute the “possible futures” that are the basis of this discussion. We used them to identify several things:

1. What are the uncertainties which could affect the wellbeing of families? What research questions directly relate to future wellbeing of families? Therefore, what are the relevant research issues?
2. What factors or policies improve the wellbeing of families, and how can they be implemented or encouraged?
3. What are the ‘dead-ends’ or ‘bottle-necks’ that could lead to a rupture of families’ wellbeing and what are the instruments to prevent it? Therefore, identification of key policy issues and social innovations.

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1 Discussions among the consortium took place on June 10-11, 2010 in Witten, Germany and were continued by the executive board in Frankfurt on September 9, 2010.
This report therefore outlines our key findings, and serves as a direct follow-up to the report prepared by Olaf Kapella (“Documentation of the results of the future scenarios”).
2. Key Policy Questions and Research Issues

As stated in the introduction, this report aims to provide an overview of the key policy questions and research issues that were derived from the “Future Scenarios” exercise.

Discussions of the narratives and scenarios led to the following issues being identified: the importance of intergenerational solidarity and communities, the importance of sufficient time for families, issues of unpaid work and care arrangements, children's perspectives (rights, best interests, and impact on wellbeing), periods of family transitions, family mainstreaming and individualisation, and the impact of technological advancement on families. These are described in more details below.

2.1 Importance of intergenerational solidarity and communities

A striking element that was brought forward from the scenarios was the importance of intergenerational and community solidarity. In all the scenarios family and community solidarity remain important for families' wellbeing and in some scenarios increase in importance. Indeed, in scenarios with a weak welfare system it becomes crucial.

The scenarios showed that families as well as community networks provided care services for their members, thus freeing the state and the taxpayer from that cost. In a situation of financial crisis or depression, the family and community resources proved vital.

In the vast majority of the narratives, families relied on support and help from grandparents, siblings, cousins, friends, neighbours, etc., as well as from local communities (ethnic, religious, social, and cultural). These offer alternative and reliable solutions primarily for care.

In certain scenarios (especially 2 and 3), governments have almost completely withdrawn from provision of welfare in the widest sense (care, health, education). Societies, in those narratives, have become deregulated with practically no government intervention. To fill the gap in public support, strong community-based support has emerged. Societies without public welfare are greatly affected by social inequalities and tend to consist of segregated local communities focused around common ethnic, religious, class and income related socio-cultural groups. As integration in these so-called "tribal societies" (Scenario 2) is only possible by being a member of a specific association or group, there is strong segregation in society between these people integrated into communities.
and extended families and those who are excluded, which is likely to produce a lot of (possibly violent) conflicts.

Quoting scenarios:

“Each community organises childcare in its own way. In more ‘traditionally’ focussed communities, care is delegated to older women; in more egalitarian communities, everyone takes turns. Those living in communities with non-market values see more and more people being active and volunteering within the community until they are forced to stop due to ill health. In many communities, volunteers are well-respected and play an important part in society. Care for the elderly is often provided by the “young-old” (mid-50s to mid-70s), supported by technical innovations. Robots, for example, play an important role in care for the elderly as do alarm and monitoring systems, which means that older people can live independently for longer in their own homes” (S2)³.

“Childcare is largely organised in the family (siblings and cousins rather than grandparents) and the community. A rotation system was built up where a group of parents take turns to look after each others’ children, one day a week for each family” (S2.1). There it is not only to fill-in care support, but also for purposes of education, health, social control and cohesion: “community school[s]...[where] well-educated community members teach for some hours a week as part of their contribution to the community” (S2.1). “Every social or cultural group can offer schooling in accordance with their beliefs and values. Access is either for community members only or, for the commercially-operated schools, regulated by fees” (S2).

Some of the results found in the scenarios and narratives include “[there is a] great pressure within the community...to conform” (S2.1). Or, “Because of the lack of public care systems, having children is very important for parents to ensure that they are cared for in old age, in case they don't have enough money to pay for it” (S2.2). Or, “We see a “tribal society” which has built up strongly on affiliation to one or another group. Integration of individuals occurs by being a member of a specific association or different group (e.g. migrants, poor people). This leads to segregation of young people into two groups: those who are integrated into communities and extended families and those who are excluded, which is likely to produce conflicts” (S3). Or, “Anna...lives in a community of solidarity with some kind of social cohesion. She is happy that her “work” not only brings in money, but also produces some kind of commonality and brings people together” (S3.2). Or, “Relationships, kinship and networks are an important part of society and are highly valued. The energy crisis and closing the borders have brought people together. Long-term and committed relationships are valued and easier to achieve with greater gender equality and greater personal freedom” (S4). Or, “Many communities have developed their own community insurance

³ Please note the meaning of the following abbreviations: S2 means Scenario 2, S2.1 means Narrative 1 of Scenario 2, and so on.
schemes that people can pay into, and pensioners are generally either looked after in their families or communities, or by a market based solution. Many people work until they die, and early retirement is increasingly rare and generally confined to market-oriented families and communities” (S2).

It seems that intergenerational solidarity and community support have become the backbone of support for families in our narratives. But a society where care and education are only based on community support was also seen as being particularly prone to 'falling apart'. Therefore one important challenge for future research and policy in Europe is to study the consequences of different welfare mixes and to balance community solidarity with social welfare services.

Empty neighbourhoods versus lively neighbourhoods during working hours were discussed, putting an emphasis on the difference it makes in terms of security, care, social cohesion and neighborhood relationships.

This leads to:

- Intergenerational policies and community support implemented at an EU level: Family should be considered as an intergenerational unit. Networks of extended family solidarity should be encouraged.

- Housing, environment and community development: Given the increase of the costs of housing, there may be a need for thorough and comprehensive urban planning that includes:
  
  ⇒ Analysis of how close families live, work and go to school
  ⇒ Housing and neighbourhood planning
  ⇒ Public spaces (such as playgrounds)
  ⇒ Public and private transportation
  ⇒ Neighbourhood networks
  ⇒ Proximity of care institutions, etc.

One could also look into new housing opportunities and spaces to accommodate several generations that address the needs of families in their daily lives (for example, houses for three generations of the same family). This could help augment social cohesion in neighborhoods.

- Family associations: In the scenarios, we witness increased participation of local, public/private, paid/volunteer, organised/informal communities. Policy should further encourage family-related associations and organisations that can help families.

- Ageing and social cohesion: Derived from the intergenerational and community discussion came the idea of a “skills market” as a social innovation. The group imagined local offices that assemble offers and
Help increase the recognition of volunteering
Care-receivers become caregivers
Be supplemental to a professional care job rather than replacing it
Enable creation and re-establishment of community connections, thereby preventing isolation

2.2 Importance of sufficient time for families

Another strong commonality across the 16 narratives of family life in 2035 is the aspect of “time”. The wellbeing of the families appeared to be related to how much time they spent together as a family. Lack of time often generated stress, tensions, more difficult family relationships, endless negotiations, health troubles, etc.

The narratives showed that in similar environments, the personal choices of parents to allow themselves more or less time for their family played an important role in the wellbeing of each family member, on the stability of the family and on the number of children in the family. It was observed that both parents working full-time often made it difficult to find enough time for family matters, regardless of the family form and the economic status of the various families.

This 2035 society still shows that it is composed of different “time zones”. One can name it the “institutional” time (school education and work) versus “family” time. There seemed to be great difficulty co-ordinating and synchronising these times. Families and individuals demonstrated that they wanted to be empowered to spend time together as a family and as a couple and to maintain family relations, and to have time to care and to be able to manage family and personal tasks.

Quoting the scenarios:

“Klara works in a private company very successfully. Her job sometimes requires working late and trips abroad. Both of them are socially and politically active outside of their work and family life. In the afternoons, the grandparents usually take care of the children. Since the grandparents are often away on holiday, other forms of day-care for the children are necessary. As a family the main challenge they have to face is prioritising between their career and parental responsibilities, alongside working on the quality of their relationship. This is
creating a fair amount of stress within the family and starting to endanger the wellbeing of the family” (S1.1).
- “[Although their housing and financial conditions are not very good]), They don’t want stressful jobs and are quite satisfied with their lifestyle – they have time for themselves and their good friends who support them” (S3.1).
- “Emily and Phillip are confronted with the challenge of combining two careers with childrearing. They spend a lot of their free time with their children… but the children are still on their own a lot” (S2.3).
- “Lesse devotes a lot of time to his family and he enjoys it. He had to give up a lot of leisure activities, but he doesn’t feel bad about it, because he is happy with his situation. His colleagues are in the same situation. They value their family time” (S2.4).
- “There is more freedom and less pressure in personal relationships, since the state takes care of individuals’ basic needs. The pressure and stress of precarious employment can, to a certain extent, be cushioned by the state, which provides childcare, schooling, housing, etc. This will reduce pressure on mothers and fathers, as long as they are not employed in a high-pressure private sector job. With the minimum wage or welfare benefits in case of unemployment, a minimum standard of living is possible and so there is more time for family and personal interests” (S4).
- “Kristel is also pleased with this arrangement, because somebody is now there for her at home and she does not have to be alone so much” (S4.3). The same immigrant couple was pictured in two different scenarios. When they can spend more time together they have another child and integrate better in Scenario 1 (S1.3), than in Scenario 3, where “They need to work extra hours in order to save and be able to pay for medical services during pregnancy, including giving birth. They have very little time together. After the child is born Roza is allowed only one month off work, her employers being generous and paying her salary as usual. As they do not want to change the carer, Roza brings the baby with her to work…The Muslim community provides childcare at moderate cost, but in the new situation they cannot afford moving out from a shared apartment with two other couples, as they hoped they would. In these conditions they do not have a second baby” (S3.3).

This leads to suggestions for policies to ease the “rush hours” in the lifecycle of families:

- Policy makers should consider strategies to ease or slow down the “rush hours” over the course of life and help synchronise institutional and family times. **Based on the needs and objectives of the families**, policies of time management and choices are needed as well as incentives for the employers to help employees better reconcile their work and family life. Obviously, the main stakeholders, the employers, have a major impact and need to be involved in the elaboration and decision process.
• One could question if European policies encouraging the dual-earner full-time household model during the whole course of life are sustainable in the long-term for families.
• The scenarios often highlight the importance of new technologies that can help ease these “rush hours” or “time bottlenecks”.
• A possible social innovation brought forward in the scenarios that might ease the “rush hours” in the lifecycle of families is “Time Care Insurance” or a “time credit” account of several years designed for individuals to take care of other people (young and old), to be invested over the course of family life.

2.3 Unpaid work and care arrangements

The arrangement for care is another important issue in all of the scenarios and narratives. Unpaid work is closely linked to this issue ("time for work/family") and was very often addressed during the brainstorming sessions of the Future Scenarios. There is a clear need for recognition of the unpaid work (largely care-work) generated within families and communities.

In all scenarios the “care work” had to be done by the state with public money, by the market with private money or by families and communities for “no money” (therefore “unpaid work”). In Scenario 2, when the state withdrew and did not provide any institutional care, “The state no longer provides any care whatsoever and private insurance and market solutions for care have increased rapidly as a response. On the other hand however, communities are providing the care services themselves. In both cases, responsibility within the families and intergenerational help is increasing” (S2).

Whether or not the state is involved in promoting institutional care or parental responsibility, gender equality showed a certain impact on the different explored societies in 2035.

I. Where the state withdrew completely from financing institutional care, inequalities between different social groups were higher and society was increasingly polarised, as in Scenario 2: “The privatisation of childcare...has resulted in the emergence of different care markets catering to different financial and cultural needs. Quality and price are directly correlated, resulting in a polarisation between highly-qualified and well-paid carers on the one hand, and poorly-educated and badly-paid carers on the other. Poor families and families with more than one child do not have access to high quality childcare on the market. Many families in this situation who cannot draw on the support of a community deliberately only have one child” (S2).

II. Where the state was very strongly involved, there were lower levels of societal inequality and less polarisation. Some tasks of parents could be taken
over by the state-paid care institutions in these scenarios and intruded to some extent on privacy and parents' rights: “... state takes the next step in trying to bring the relationship to an end: they want to take Konstantin under Public State Care services, because administrators and social assistants are afraid of the negative effect the father could have on his son” (S4.3).

III. In Scenario 1 “Care systems are primarily organised at the local level by local government and a pluralistic welfare system has developed. Local authorities provide money directly to families, and families can choose how they wish to use it (either directly for care, or to be paid to others for care services). Care is more sensitive to demands and is de-commodified. In this mix of private and public systems, there is freedom of choice to select between familial care and outsourced care” (S1).

In several scenarios, parents struggled particularly with sick and handicapped family members (young and old).

The link between gender and unpaid work/domestic tasks is changing and this is generating a need for negotiation: “Family life and the relationship between Klara and Joseph will change as they and their children get older. Permanent negotiations take place to ensure an equal share between the two of them, since gender roles have changed into equality and the role as a mother and a father have to be redefined” (S1.1).

This leads to:

- The “recognition of unpaid care work”, closely linked to the above topic of “sufficient family time”.
- A policy framework which enables families and communities to carry-out care work in an environment of equality, ensuring the right balance between state involvement and parents' and communities' care responsibilities in public care policies.
- Monitoring the impact of gender equality policies for effectiveness and unintended consequences.
- Policy which considers alternative care arrangements, especially the ones linked to intergenerational (mainly grand-parents) and local communities: are they viable and possible? Are they desired by both the care givers and care receivers?
- A societal challenge is how the quality of public care could be assured and how the optimal balance between public and private care could be provided by regional, national and European policy.
2.4 Children’s perspectives: rights, best interests, and impact on wellbeing

The majority of the narratives address issues about those receiving care and how it is accomplished, but they do not necessarily take into account the perspective of the children involved. When given a voice in Scenario 1: “Mum I want you tomorrow at home! I want you or daddy at least!” (S1.1). As today, the wellbeing and mental health of some of the children in the scenarios is affected by the pressure they face from lack of time for themselves and with their families due to labour market expectations, the performance-driven society, family environments, lack of affection, etc.

We also see situations occurring where parents’ wellbeing does not match their children’s wellbeing. Rights and interests depending on the parties involved are very different – they usually complement each other but can conflict: for example, in a divorce custody situation or in distributed family life situations. See narrative 3.1 where the complicated family situation results in a financial strain for the parents and psychological problems for the children.

This leads to the following policy questions:

- Policymaking and research should look at what is important for the healthy development of the children and what is in their best interest, and not just children’s rights or the parent’s best interests.
  ⇒ More psychological research on children’s wellbeing is necessary with regards to the variety of family forms the children live in and different care arrangements.
  ⇒ Policies need to take into account the balance between the children’s interests and those of their parents.

- Policies should encourage social services to empower and support families.

2.5 Family transitions

Like today, the families pictured in our scenarios are not static. They go through transitions and their needs and choices vary. Being able to adjust to the changes is an essential part of family wellbeing.

This leads to the need for:

- Policies that consider the life-course, including the many transitions and phases in the life of a family, taking into account the dynamic developmental processes of families (where families face both selected and unexpected events which have consequences). Families must not be considered as static entities.
• Policies that favour building environments where parents are able to create and select conditions that sustain parent and child wellbeing over their life-course, and at different stages of transition.
• Policies that support actions helping couples prepare for the transition to parenthood. Policy can also support actions that acquaint potential parents with their parental responsibilities and raise awareness of the child’s development and needs.

The scenarios reveal dynamic changes taking place within families as they cope with evolving external conditions and the changing challenges faced by family members. Research focusing on families often concludes that specific family forms are disadvantaged, that different family configurations should cope with differing hardships. Many of these discussions do not assume explicitly that the family is a dynamic entity, but indirectly assume that family forms are static. Research should be focused more strongly on the causes and consequences of family dynamics.

• Regarding the causes: structural and ideational factors should be considered.  
  ⇒ Among structural factors, institutional arrangement, family related policies, labour market, housing, the unequal distribution of resources should be considered.  
  ⇒ Regarding the ideational factors, value orientations and attitudes, happiness could be considered.
• Considering consequences: both the material and immaterial dimensions should be understood. These are: material situation, time pressures, satisfaction, mental health, stable family relationships, etc.
• If considering the dynamics of families, several kinds of dyadic relationships in the family reality should be stressed. Namely, research should focus not only on the dynamic character of partnerships (partnering, marriage, separation or divorce, re-partnering, the quality of partnerships) but also on the dynamics of childhood, parenthood, grandparenthood, network-dyads, and their changing meanings.
• The well-known life-course transitions (leaving home, leaving education, getting a first job, partnership-formation, the birth of a child, divorce, unemployment and employment, retirement, becoming widowed, etc.) should be also integrated into the family dynamics.
• Further, possible social innovations are mediation and counselling centres, which support families and their needs during certain intended and unexpected family transitions. Policy could encourage the building-up of such centres.
• Implement pilot programmes to evaluate the specific needs of families, employers and economic stakeholders. Family transitions call for adaptive rather than lifelong employment policies.
• Research should seek to understand the above-mentioned transitions, and the fragility of the individuals and families in the transitions. It is also
• Research should also investigate how to reach the families who especially need help. What are new concepts to support families and prevent and resolve conflict?
• *Comparative research*, using quantitative and qualitative methods are able to reveal the causes and consequences of family dynamics.

### 2.6 Family mainstreaming and individualisation

The central question of *Europe's family strategy* is the impact on families of all European policies. Moreover, whether a proposed policy is local, national or European, the effect of any policy on families should be studied.

The level and the form of social security rights provided in a society are seen to have an impact on family forms and the family cohesion. In scenarios where the current trend towards individualisation of social security rights has continued and basic social security is provided by the state as an individual right of every family member, we witness more societal individualisation and less family cohesion. As there are more possible life choices for the individual in such societies, people *could* loosen the bound to their family or their local, religions or ethnical community and find independent ways of personal self-fulfillment – but they could also put a focus on strong family bounds being relevant for their individual life.

Where there are no or very low levels of social security, family bonds and local, ethnical or religions solidarity are crucial for 'staying alive'. Hence family and local bonds were strong in those situations but often no matter of choice which might influence the quality of these relations.

Therefore, the individualisation of social rights was seen to have ambiguous consequences. On the one hand, individualised social rights foster social mobility, life choices and possibilities and can improve the wellbeing of family members. On the other hand, there is the risk that policies aiming only at the individual endanger family bonds and solidarity. Therefore there is an argument that the family should be considered as a unit and not only as an addition of individuals, as illustrated in Scenario 4. “*European policies focus on the individual… There is no family oriented policy… These policies are not addressed towards families or designed to support families as an institution, but to support special groups (e.g. children, people with disabilities, older people, etc.).”*

Below is another example of the impact of the individualisation of social security rights. Whether attached or not to the employment status makes a difference on the wellbeing of the family. The second narrative of Scenario 1 compares two
family situations where two types of benefits are described: benefits attached to the individuals of the family regardless of employment status versus benefits attached to employment status of the parent. The outcomes on the families are drastically different:

Lily: “Public funding is attached to the child, so her working full or part-time doesn’t affect what is available for her children”.

Cecilia: “…benefits are all publicly funded but tied to her working full-time… She is waiting for test results for a serious illness and she is worried as to what might happen to her benefits when she stops working. In the event of a serious illness, she would need to switch to private care, which might cause financial problems. She has worked all her life and while she has not had to spend money on care, which was publicly funded, she has had to pay high taxes. She doesn’t have lots of savings, which might make it difficult for her if she has to give up her work. She worries about her children and her mother who might need to switch to welfare day-care”.

This leads to needs for:

- Research on the consequences on the family as a unit (as opposed to the individualisation of social security rights), of the possibility of choices made within the family for care arrangement, on the consequences on all family forms.
- A study of “How should the support of family happen?”
  ⇒ Should support be means-targeted or universal?
  ⇒ What about tax policy? Taxation policy considering the family as a unit and taking into account family size (number of dependents).

This leads to “Family mainstreaming” as the framework of all policies:

1. Covers all different types of policies that can have an impact on families: employment, law, education, migration, etc.
2. Address the family group, address individuals as people living in a family. Policies for special groups or targeted policies for family members as individuals are not enough
3. Include elderly members of the family
4. Consider all family forms
5. Look at families as agents and assets and not as problems
6. Engage their participatory approach on all aspects, what do families really want: bottom-up process in policy making
7. Clarify the true objectives of policy
8. Include on-going measurement of family wellbeing (i.e. included in GDP)
2.7 Impact of technological advancement on families

As part of our 16 narratives, the emergence of new technologies plays an undeniable role in shaping the wellbeing of family members, even if it is not the leading factor. Although technological advances have not been a specific focus in the elaboration of these scenarios, the authors involved in the exercises remain convinced that still-to-be invented technologies will have an impact on the wellbeing of families. The following outline a few of the technological advancements which were briefly discussed:

• **Surveillance techniques**: In Scenario 4, there are many mentions of non-stop surveillance systems and techniques (for example, chips implanted on children under the age of 14 with medical and other identifying information that allow for constant surveillance). Some of the impacts: “Parents who do not constantly know the whereabouts of their children are considered negligent” (S4.1) and “childhood depression [is] diagnosed in a large number of children…There are a substantial number of children at school with such illnesses, which are thought to arise from the constant surveillance and general lack of privacy” (S4.1). On the other hand, surveillance techniques also support the care task of families for example with television control or “assisted living technologies” for elder people (S1 and S3.2).

• **Virtual schooling** is brought forward in several narratives: “virtual schooling has become standard. Children in different towns, regions and countries can all be present in the same virtual classroom. For this reason, every social or cultural group can offer schooling in accordance with their beliefs and values. Access is either for community members only or, for the commercially-operated schools, regulated by fees. Very expensive face-to-face private schooling is still available and serves the purpose of creating international elite networks. Consequently, social, ethnic or cultural groups ensure that their children are educated and raised the way they choose, and this has led to a high diversity and de-standardisation of education systems and increasing social segregation. The (social, financial) background of families thus affects the educational development of their children and educational inequality between social groups is increasing” (S2).

• **Virtual relationships**: One narrative (2) in Scenario 4 is primarily based on virtual relationship between parents and their left-behind children. What impact do they have on the “users” and how different are they from face-to-face relationships?

• **Communication tools and customisable media**: Houses have “3D media rooms” where the walls represent the screens (S2.4); video-conferencing is highly developed in some scenarios and nearly omnipresent in others and enable more working at home and reduced business travel; “People no longer need to write or type because of voice recognition technology so a good preschool would need to train reading and voice skills” (S3.1). There are customisable TV programs where the viewer is “virtually transferred” in the program and becomes the hero of the program.
This leads to:

- Policy should hold ‘forums of discussion’ on using technological development to support families, studying their intended and unintended consequences on all family members including the children.
3. Summary

In summary, the Future Scenarios exercise based on the “Foresight” technique helped highlight crucial policy issues and research questions that have a major impact on family life today and in the future.

We think of how intergenerational and communities’ solidarity played an important role in our narratives. Similarly, allowing sufficient time for families came up constantly. Other major topics that affect the wellbeing of our families in 2035 were the care arrangements and how unpaid care work is recognised or not. The group often discussed the lack of children’s and adolescent’s perspectives taken into account as well as the balance between their rights and best interests and their parents'. Family transitions over the life-course was another topic that constantly called for research and policy attention. Given our scenarios took place in 2035, technological advancements were embedded in the day-to-day life of our personages. They also affect the wellbeing of families in many different ways. Individualisation of social security rights is an ambivalent topic requiring a careful attention. Across the different discussions, family mainstreaming was an underlying element which calls for a European family strategy.

Across the different discussions, we identified some potential social innovations, such as:

- The “skills market” (exchange of support) as a factor of social cohesion
- “Time care insurance”
- Mediation and counselling centres
4. Conclusions

In creating the future scenarios we could not describe people other than trying most of the time to do the best they could, making choices and trying to be happy, “doing families” in their own way, as was stated in some discussions. In this way, what we describe in 25 year’s time are people very much like ourselves today.

While the families that we analysed were very different in form, type and style, overall these families seem to struggle with the same everyday challenges that families face today. What we could see in the future is that the complexity of the world is not expected to decrease by 2035 – on the contrary, in some of the narratives it very much increased, at least from our perspective.

Family and intact family bonds remained a crucial field for the wellbeing of the individuals in all narratives invented. The complexity of each family’s environment changes and affects its members, but most families are valued by their members because, as a safety net, they reduce uncertainty and provide a framework for mutual support in the complexity of their environment. These “essentials” need to be addressed first and foremost when doing research or family policies.

Families need the support of local, national and European policies to build the families they wish. Policies should help them to have the number of children they desire, have specific assistance when difficulties are faced, and to lead their lives according to their choices while respecting their obligations. Ensuring this would enable families to have and raise children which become the responsible citizens of tomorrow’s Europe.

Because of the importance of the wellbeing of families for the future of Europe, policy makers should make it a key priority. The EU2020 strategy and most European treaties are centred on the economy; we are calling for more attention to the families who are producing the economic agents of the future.
All reports available from [http://www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu)

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