



Brussel, 2 maart 2010

Dear Madam,  
Dear Sir,

In a recent survey, some 89% of the Europeans expressed their worry about the potential impact of the environment on their health. Furthermore, new technologies, changing lifestyles, work and life patterns, present new and sometimes unexpected impacts on the environment and its influence on health. **COFACE (Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union) and the Gezinsbond (League of Families in Flanders) can confirm this concern of families.** Justified, because enough scientific evidence exists today to show that pollutants have a negative effect on our health and in particular on those of our children.

We are pleased that the final draft declaration for the fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health reconfirms the commitment to the CEHAPE (Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe). In this context, COFACE and the Gezinsbond urge policy makers to introduce an **instrument to ensure a safer and better quality of life for children: the 'child norm'**.

**This standard should give policymakers a signal to establish the right of children for a good physical and mental health and thus adapt our living environment according to their needs and well being. It is a call to the different administrative levels to improve the quality of life for children starting from their needs and not those of adults. In the end, we will all benefit from a healthier environment: 'fit for children = design for all'. Any norm should be established for the protection of the most vulnerable groups of the population, e.g. children.**

The philosophy behind the child norm lies within the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> birthday last year. Some member states, like Belgium, have developed a measuring instrument reporting the impact of new legislation and regulatory decisions on children (JOKER = child and youth impact reporting). In practice, a measuring instrument will not function as long as we lack **a reference, a child norm**, that allows us to compare and improve. The child norm should be based on the **precautionary principle**.

**To this end, the Gezinsbond will organize a seminar on 23 November in Brussels** to discuss the concept with experts, stakeholders and policymakers what children need to ensure their right for a safer and healthier life. Four themes have been identified: **1) environmental pollution 2) food 3) traffic 4) open space.** Looking at policy from the needs of a child, environmental standards and product standards should be based on the health of children and other vulnerable groups because of the damage of pollutants to the developing children's bodies and the lack of data on the effects of pollutants to children (in particular 'cocktails' and long-term effects). Food contains too much hidden salt, sugars and fat leading to health problems and too little information is available for consumers to make balanced choices. Traffic is another area where many victims could be saved by introducing a child norm where children would be more visible and protected. Less and less children play outside. The lack of public space that is adapted to children's needs is named as one of the main causes for this tendency.

**The final draft declaration actually proposes in different paragraphs that the needs of children should be taken into account but these needs should become effective. For the measures proposed in the different RPG's (Regional Priority Goal) the needs of children should be identified to enable us to deduce the norms and standards that safeguard the well being of children. The draft declaration states for example in RPG 2, ii: "We will integrate the needs of children into the planning and design of settlements, housing, health care institutions, mobility plans and transport infrastructure." The child norm would identify the minimum to guideline the policy. RPG 4, ii on harmful substances reasons from a 'child perspective' with the words 'we aim to protect each child [..]', but what standards are needed to ensure no risks for children? All the proposed measures should be seen through the eyes of a child by defining its needs and only then these measures will become effective.**

**To make the living environment and the quality of life better for our children and the generations to come, sustainable health should be a priority for all policy makers. The 'child norm' could be the instrument to make the difference.** Children need air, water and food without worrying about the impact it may have on their health on the long term. The condition of the body is certainly not the individual responsibility of people alone. We can not only rely on the willingness of producers and retailers on the supply and composition of healthy products. More enforcing incentives are needed and the child norm could be the answer to that need. **COFACE and the Gezinsbond ask for your support to our proposal and help us to introduce the 'child norm' as a principle. We would also welcome your engagement to develop this concept together in the future.**



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