

PM+: Empowering families will boost EU economy

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Opinion Plus

EU policymakers need to support families in reconciling work, family and care responsibilities, argues Agnes Uherezky.



Every year international women's day gives organisations like mine the opportunity to highlight important issues that need the attention of policy and decision makers.

Usually, the press releases, tweets and blog posts point to existing challenges and problems, and aim to focus on those under the spotlight of the IWD.

This year however, in concert with the day's 2015 theme 'make it happen', we can actually offer something concrete, and refer all those who are interested to a document that we published earlier this month - the European reconciliation package.

It is especially around this time that we have the opportunity to connect the dots, and benefit from a very broad and diverse audience to highlight the systemic changes that are needed.

Changes on issues that I don't even like to call 'women's issues', as tackling them would be beneficial to everyone – men, women, children, society, even the economy.

Unfortunately the financial and economic stagnation that we are still experiencing, offers policy makers a pretext for the further cutting of budgets to social services, allowances, and other so-called 'soft-measures', that could have grave repercussions on women's choices and lives. Isn't this the polar opposite to 'make it happen'?

Women, men and families do not make choices in isolation. They try to anticipate their opportunities, risks, challenges and possibilities. They do this when choosing their studies, their homes, their jobs and when to start a family.

And there are always many hard choices. Who will take care of the children during the summer, who will take care of granddad with his Alzheimer's, or when to quit a paid job, because it no longer pays to be employed, when set against the costs of childcare or elder-care, especially in the private sector.

Because as soon as there are budgetary constraints, there are shortages in public services, with fewer beds, less childcare places and if a family wants a secure service, and perhaps better quality, they have to pay out of their pockets.

That's why we have spent several years cataloguing the problems faced by families, and analysing and collecting inspiring practices and legal instruments at regional, national and EU level, as well as identifying workplace solutions that work for all – not only working parents with small children.

This package highlights the different policies and practices developed at local and national level that can support families in reconciling their work, family and care responsibilities.

It reflects on the challenges and opportunities and presents recommendations of what needs to be done at EU and national level to empower families, and ultimately contribute to gender and pay equality, increased employment, improved childcare and care infrastructure and better well-being overall.

It really works like an 'à-la-carte experience' for policy makers. You can choose the chapter most relevant to your work, and go straight to that topic.

But we also hope that people will go through the entire document, because it is by understanding the 360 degree policy and services environment that govern the choices of women and families, that we can make more effective legislation, create better quality services and improve opportunities and outcomes for all.

To view the European reconciliation package, click below.

<http://www.coface-eu.org/en/Publications/European-Reconciliation-Package/> [1]

About the author

Agnes Uhereczky is director of the confederation of family organisations (COFACE).

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