

Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

As president of COFACE, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union, it is my pleasure to warmly welcome you to our conference today jointly organised by The UN focal point on the Family, For the first time since COFACE obtained the consultative status of the UN in 2014.

I would like to thank Renata Kaczmarek from the UN for the good cooperation with our COFACE team in the organisation of our conference here in Amsterdam.

I would also like to thank Mrs Van den Boom, rector of the University of Amsterdam, for the hospitality and the partnership!

Several good reasons why we are here today!

*COFACE has a good tradition of organising events in cooperation with European Union Presidencies ,in this first semester of 2016, this brings us to The Netherlands .We are delighted that Minister Bussemaker will join us later today.

*COFACE is a growing European network and we are keen to bring new Dutch partner organisations on board given the wealth of knowledge and expertise available in this country on family-friendly policies.

*The conference venue today is the room where students annually graduate, a symbolic room therefore where the University gives young women and men a kick-start in their future career. In many countries, the trend is towards higher female graduation rates than male. Yet women still follow a very different career path!

So this conference room is a good place for COFACE to launch discussions on “gender equality and empowerment of girls“!

Let me briefly present our organisation.

Since 1958 COFACE links together a large number of civil society organisations all over Europe and gives a voice to millions of families. With 59 member organisations in 23 EU countries today we have a quite unique position!

COFACE is recognized by the European Commission as an important and representative voice in matters of childcare, social and financial inclusion, disability and especially reconciliation of work and family life.

COFACE has the ambition to build, helped by his members, a more social Europe, a Europe closer to the families.

(We advocate for strong social policies that guarantee equal opportunities and respond to the wide diversity of family needs.)

This ambition is more relevant than ever! We are witnessing in Europe further increases in inequality. According to European Commission [figures](#) published last week, economic recovery is slow, with large disparities in employment growth across Member States. Existing European policies in place are not delivering fast enough on poverty reduction and employment promotion, including employment of women.

Now is the time to evaluate, take stock, and adapt European policies to meet emerging realities.

With representative organisations in 23 countries, COFACE regularly informs key policy-makers on the challenges and problems faced by families in Europe, and makes policy recommendations to address these challenges effectively.

Our “European Reconciliation Package” adopted in 2015 includes a wide range of policy recommendations and inspiring practices to implement these policies in the fields of care, women’s employment and childcare.

In the context of the “New start” Roadmap consultation launched by the European Commission last year, our European Reconciliation Package summarises and translates the Work-Life needs of families through concrete proposals.

If we want to build a cohesive and strong Europe, it is essential:

- that the wide diversity of family needs is reflected in the solutions Europe proposes.
- that women and men can benefit from the same rights, opportunities and advantages all over Europe.

Family-friendly policies are a crucial investment for Europe’s future, with an impact not only in social terms on the quality of life of families but also in economic and environmental terms since families are also workers and consumers. For COFACE what families all over Europe need most can be resumed in RST.

R for Resources: Adequate resources, decent work and income, allowances.

S for Services: services; available, affordable and quality services like childcare and others are key factors for families.

T for Time: Families need Time, flexible working time arrangements to care for their children and other relatives in order to build the generations of the future.

We have so much data now stating that when girls and women can make choices for themselves personally and professionally it's good for their health, their families' health and their countries' economies.

Empowering girls and women is essential to building strong economies, to establish more stable and just societies and to improve quality of life for women, men, families and communities.

Thanks to the efforts worldwide and in the EU to reduce the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap we have made progress BUT we are still not there yet!

As Commissioner Timmermans declared recently: "It is unacceptable that my daughter still has less opportunities than my sons to build a career , to reach the top."

Studies (namely by the ILO) show that women seem to sacrifice personal life more than men and every woman has to make trade-offs of some kind. Women cannot have it all!

But can men have it all?

(We see men struggling to combine career and families responsibilities.)

COFACE put the focus today on the gender care gap: women continue to take on more caring responsibilities than men: for children, for elderly family members...

Work-Life Balance is not something that women alone have to sort out.

We see that attitudes and aspirations of millennial men and women are converging. In many countries both women and men are family-oriented and seek a personal life beyond work.

The best path to advance the situation of women is to see WLB as a **generational issue, not as a gender issue.**

(It is clear that companies risk losing men as well as women by not allowing them to accommodate their family life with their work.)

Let's focus on measures so that people, men and women! Are able to contribute to the economic life as well as raise their families.

Tomorrow different experts will focus on the involvement of men/fathers, and the so-called care gap.

Our 2-day conference will touch upon the role of the EU in implementing the SDG's and the role of civil society organisations for the achievement of the SDG's.

The formula for comprehensive and effective policy making/policies consist of a combination of commitment and partnerships between European and national governments, public institutions, local authorities, academia and civil society organisations.

We are happy to have all parties on board .So many experts gathered in this room here (not only on stage)!

Our conference offers a platform for exchanging ideas, offers opportunities to showcase inspiring practices from all over Europe, and share views, projects, plans, which can drive family policy innovation in the future.

We have the ambition to join forces and to realise together an Amsterdam action plan as an output of this conference, as a contribution to achieving greater gender equality at all levels.

So we're launching a call to all of you to make the most of our time together here today and tomorrow, to put forward new ideas and concrete proposals for the future.

e.g. actual discussion : request of a little girl to American president Obama to put a woman on dollar note Gender equality is our goal but it is also a condition for sustainable development.

Brings me back to "SDG" and keynote speaker Jan Vanmoortele.

I wish you all a very fruitful and inspiring conference.