Reconciling family, private and professional life to prevent poverty and social exclusion

Reconciliation policies are key to tackle and prevent poverty and social exclusion

There is a clear and direct link between difficulties in combining family, private and professional life, and poverty and social exclusion. Where the need to care for a child or a dependent family member cannot be reconciled with the demands of work, many people – mostly women – are forced to stop work temporarily or go part-time. Having no adequate monthly income and social security coverage threatens vulnerable people with poverty and social exclusion.

Work-life balance is even more crucial for lone-parent families and large families. For vulnerable families, the time dedicated to children’s education is even more sacred as it has to be instrumental in stopping intergenerational transmission of poverty. Families experiencing extreme poverty, need time to meet basic needs and to deal with support services, without impinging on the time spent for the education of children.

Therefore, services for families are key instruments. They have positive impacts on men’s involvement in family work and they participate in the gender mainstreaming. Given the rise in the ageing population, any policy for combining family and private life and work must aim at intergenerational solidarity.

Ensuring quality employment

Quality employment is a precondition to any successful policy for combining family, private and work life. Active inclusion strategies must take into account this qualitative dimension of work and ensure that reconciliation opportunities do exist.

Quality employment means that:

- workers earn decent wages enabling them to make work pay, despite for instance the costs of childcare or of services for other dependent persons. It wage must enable workers to support their families in a dignified life and help women tackle the gender pay gap and desegregating labour market.

- working conditions must be respectful of family and private life, with a limitation of non-standard working hours and precarious employment relationships. People experiencing poverty increasingly have to accept low quality jobs that take no account of the family dimension.

- illegal workers should be legalised in so far as possible.
Including family, private and social times in working and societal time

Despite some progress, reconciliation measures are still mainly addressed by women. COFACE wants the value of family work and private life activities to be given social recognition. This must be done by integrating family and private times in the organisation of working time, and more generally in the societal organisation of time. This must also be translated into social inclusion policies. To this effect:

- leave schemes meeting the variety of family needs must be enshrined into legislation for all categories of workers, irrespective of their professional status or activity.
- part-time work must be upgraded (pay, social rights, status on the labour market, rules for the calculation and payment of overtime hours brought in line with full-time work, etc.);
- flexible working time arrangements must be further promoted, with a strict protection of employment and social security rights;
- public times must be coordinated;
- gender equality must be furthered, including in terms of gender equality in employment and changing role models of women and men.

An integrated approach for reconciliation of family life

Because of the complexity and wide range of policies involved, an integrated approach combining family, private and professional life is required. So far, the approach taken has mainly been work-focused. It is time to put more emphasis on the family and private life angle.

COCFAE believes that reconciliation of family and professional life must be mainstreamed across all relevant policies (employment, social services, social security, education etc.) at EU and national level. At the local level, all relevant stakeholders must be involved in the design of family-friendly policies.

What is COFACE? The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims to promote family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the legislation, programmes and initiatives of the European Union ("Family mainstreaming").

Contact: Tel: +32 2 511 41 79 | E-mail: secretariat@coface-eu.org | NEW WEBSITE: www.coface-eu.org

COFACE is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013): http://ec.europa.eu/progress. This document is produced with the support of the European Commission but does not necessarily express its views.