

European Reconciliation Package

Recommendations

On the occasion of the public consultation of the European Commission on “**possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers**”, COFACE would like to, in addition to its formal response to the consultation (available here: <http://tinyurl.com/consultation-wlb-coface>), present a broader set of recommendations, developed around four main areas. These four areas must not be seen as alternatives but as complementary. We believe, indeed, that only working in all of these fields, we will be able to create a supportive environment for families and make a real difference.

These four areas are: 1. Carers, 2. Women’s employment, 3. Work-Life balance at the workplace, 4. Childcare. The recommendations are the results of the work developed in collaboration with the Alliance 2014 and they are included in the European Reconciliation Package, together with a number of positive examples and a more detailed policy context.

1. Carers

Europe is the continent with the highest number of older citizens, with women who have a longer life expectancy than men, and an ageing process that will continue for the remainder of this century. However, despite these well-known trends, about 80% of care for people with a disability or for older persons is still provided by informal carers: family, friends, or neighbours, with a great difference from one Member State to the other and



with significant differences between women and men. Age groups are also affected differently and, despite a growing number of young carers, the highest share of care is provided by women age 50 or older.

The lack of services and support to those with family needs, long waiting lists for childcare and care for older and disabled persons, including services promoting independent living, coupled with difficulties in reconciling work and care responsibilities has had a strong impact on employment, especially for women. This has, for many women, often resulted in having no other choice than reducing working hours or dropping out completely from paid employment.

Recommendations

EU level

EU strategy for carers

The European Commission should, following the European Parliament Interest Group (2014) demand, develop a comprehensive strategy on Family and Informal Carers at EU level that will mainstream recognition and support for carers throughout the European Policies and legislation.

EC Recommendation on family and informal carers

The European Commission should initiate a Recommendation on the recognition of family and informal carers and for the adoption of provisions recognizing their legal status in Member States. This should be based on the EU Charter for Family Carers (COFACE, 2007) and would be the natural continuation of the existing EU policy documents, including the Social Investment Package and its Staff Working Document on Long Term Care.

Carers' leave directive

The Commission should inform about the outcomes of the consultation launched in 2011 on carer's leave and prepare a directive on this issue, giving an adequate amount of leave to workers who are faced with care duties for their family members with disabilities or elderly dependents. This directive should contain recommendations for financial compensation during carer's leave as well as the possibility for family and informal carer's to switch from full time to part-time and vice versa. Special attention should be devoted to making it possible for male workers to take up their share of carer's leave as well.

Migrant care workers

To develop a legislative framework for their employment and skills acquisition/validation that also recognizes the psycho-social and reconciliation needs of the carer.



National and local level

Legal recognition of status of family/informal carer

Member States should introduce legal instruments to recognize the status of family and informal carers, including provisions for their social rights and assimilating periods spent caring to employment, especially in the calculation of their pension and for their access to specific medical and social support; their eligibility for training and skills validation.

Support and services for carers

Respite care services should be provided to all carers. In particular, carers should be enabled and offered opportunities to (self-)assess their needs and physical and mental well-being. Campaigns and information sessions and materials should be made available to the wider public to raise awareness about the existence and the role of family carers.

Education and training of professionals and staff in the detection of abuse or violence is essential to guarantee good treatment to elderly and persons with disabilities. This could be achieved by incorporating the prevention of abuse in the curriculum of professionals in the fields of health, justice, education and social services and by enforcing an EU framework of quality standards in care provision for the prevention, detection and protection from neglect and abuse in home and residential care settings.

2. Women's employment

During the last century, labour market strategies as well as employment policies have been designed based on the traditional family and societal structure of the male breadwinner model. Over time this dynamic has evolved. However, these changes in society and diversity of family forms have not been followed by revisions of the labour market legislation. Reconciliation policies and practices are essential to implement this change and promote the employment of women, which, in the EU in 2013, stands at 62.5% (against 74.2% for men). Furthermore, the gender pay gap remains at 16% and the pension gap has reached 39%.

Women's employment is tightly linked to the distribution of work and family responsibilities between women and men. The unequal share of unpaid work in the family has a direct impact on gender segregation, because women still adjust their working arrangements considering their caring responsibilities especially when they have children or when they need to care for an elderly or disabled relative. Subsequently, women are more likely to take leaves, work part time or withdraw from the labour market.

Leaves are still often ground for discrimination and despite existing legislation on the protection of pregnant workers, women continue to be discriminated on the grounds of childbirth. Furthermore, it is very difficult for women to reintegrate the labour market after a long care period.



Recommendations

Empowerment

Reconciliation policies are essential to implementing change and promoting employment of women. More awareness raising campaigns are needed to foster an understanding of what reconciliation of work and family life means in practice (a more equal way of sharing paid work and unpaid care and household work between men and women).

Leaves

To adopt a coherent legislative package on leaves, including maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves, to promote a more equal share of care responsibilities between women and men.

Paternity leave measures should be adopted at EU Level. Provisions can be included in a revised Maternity Leave Directive, which should be approved rapidly.

Concerning Parental leave, we call for the leave period to be distributed in 3 blocks, one allocated specifically to the mother, another to the father (or the mother's partner) and a third to be taken as the family chooses, by any or both of the parents.

To support fathers in taking their leave period, the principle of "take it or lose it" must be applied. Employers must inform and support fathers taking up their paternity and parental leaves.

Carers' Leave Directive for parents or family members (including grandparents) taking care of an ageing or disabled family member should be initiated as soon as possible. This should include measures for provision of trainings and certification for persons coming out of a longer career break because of caring for family members (see examples in chapter 1).

Employment

The EU and Member States should support the negotiations of flexible working arrangements, to be negotiated at national or company level, with workers themselves and their representatives, local or company-based "reconciliation plans" in order to attract and retain women in the labour market.

The EU should support legislation and policy aiming at creating a proper environment for quality part-time employment and smart working, promoting a shift from the culture of presence at work towards an objective driven one.



Member States should fully implement the Directive 2006/54 on equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast).

The European Union and Member States should give more visibility and mainstream awareness campaigns on the gender pay gap and on the business case for diversity.

3. Work-Life balance at the workplace

First and foremost, reconciliation policies must not be seen and identified as measures to support young parents only, or benefit only employees in large corporations or in the public sector where employers can put in place special arrangements for their employees with certain types of jobs, mainly managerial and white collar. On the contrary, reconciliation policies are to be considered as a review and improvement of the working environment in order to improve the working conditions and well-being of all employees and workers, as well as a contribution to the productivity and success of the company.

They are not a “one-solution-fits-all” type of policies and tailored instruments must be elaborated and used to fulfil the specific needs of the workers and of the company, according to its size and sector, or developed to favour specifically the self-employed and entrepreneurs. They should provide a coherent framework, aiming to reform the labour market but also to create a “Reconciliation economy” on the model of the “green economy”, developing and promoting a social impact indicator, rewarding those companies with low social impact, for the benefit of the entire community.

Recommendations

Legislative

“Reconciliation economy” on the model of the “green economy”: develop and/or promote a social impact indicator, rewarding those companies with low social impact. Tools for assessment and rewarding mechanisms must be easily accessible (bureaucracy) and appealing. They can include, for example, tax-reductions and incentives, or specific requirements that are included in public procurement and tendering processes.

The revised Working Time Directive should support a better reconciliation of work, family and private life by granting rights to request specific working time arrangements to fit their outside-of-work responsibilities (e.g. flexitime, telework).

Include in legislation (where it is not the case) the possibility for company-level collective agreements to design specific reconciliation measures, that can be translated in secure and needs-based solutions within each company, making sure that these measures are



applicable to all workers or, where not possible, to design specific measures for non-office workers.

Empowerment

Support, promote and award the creation of networks of companies, that come together in order to pool resources and better respond to the needs of their employees and invest in the community through the creation or support to existing services, particularly for care services.

Support women who wish to become self-employed and entrepreneurs by developing or supporting existing programmes in schools and in employment services, and to stay in self-employment and entrepreneurship by adapting legislation in order to provide them with the same access to leave schemes as employed women in terms of social security payments.

4. Childcare

Indeed, because of insufficient or a total lack of childcare facilities and policies, across Europe, 23% of women whose youngest child is under three and 18% of women whose youngest child is between 3 and mandatory school age work part-time or do not work at all. To counterbalance this trend, it is important to put in place measures supporting women to access and stay in employment but also encouraging men in taking a higher share of the family and care responsibilities. Childcare arrangements, their availability, affordability, accessibility and quality are a pivotal factor for women's employment and for gender equality, and thus reconciliation of work and family life for working parents.

Recommendations

Policy and legislative

Guarantee a legal right to a childcare place for all children after the end of the Leave period.

View ECEC as an important investment, and thus improve public finances to 0-3 childhood care and education places, which should lead to the improvement of accessibility and capacity, as well as lower the costs for parents.

Support the mobility of families within the EU by an enhanced promotion of the harmonisation of basic competence levels of school-aged children throughout the EU.



Monitor, evaluate, communicate and promote early years and childcare competence frameworks ensuring European-wide compliance.

Services (coverage and standards)

Promote flexibility and diversity in childcare provision.

Ensure provision of quality services, in the best interest of both the children and their parents, attached to a European wide quality assurance system.

Improve the standing, recognition and qualifications of childcare professionals including skills and qualifications, career progression, recruitment and retention, and workforce planning – to ensure that all those working in early years settings have the right skills and experience to deliver high-quality early learning and childcare across Europe.

Promote early years and childcare as a career of choice.

Improve inclusiveness of early childhood education and care for children with special needs, through physical adaptation, additional staff resource, specialised training for staff.

Guarantee a healthy balance of childcare availability and access in urban and rural (remote) areas to ensure that all parents have access to childcare within a reasonable distance from their work or their home.

Employment and parenting support

To support working parents to be physically and emotionally available for their children – by family-friendly measures, incentives for employers to offer flexible working hours in to support of parenting, etc.

With the support of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI)

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