

Balancing Family Life and Work  
« Exploring the possibilities of a European family-friendly label »

Raise Awareness Meeting

**Address to Commissioner Laszlo Andor  
by Anne-Claire de Liedekerke,  
President of the European Delegation of MMMI**

European Parliament, International Day of the Family 2013

Commissioner,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

**MMM, acronym of Make Mothers Matter**, originally Mouvement Mondial des Mères, apprehends the situation of women in the specific angle of women who are mothers. Therefore we discuss conciliation between family life and professional life from the specific situation of mothers, knowing that we represent mothers in the diversity of their situations: economic, family, social situations and in their career choices.

MMM acknowledges the essential role of fathers and supports policies in favour of a growing involvement of fathers in family tasks.

Motherhood is a specific reality, inevitable and desirable in the European demographic context. This is a specifically feminine reality not only by pregnancy and childbirth but also because statistics show that often women more than men are putting their family responsibilities first. This specificity should not hinder women's careers but be considered as an asset, an additional competency, a contribution to society. We think that by caring for and educating their children, women are they are playing a full part in society.

But today, every time a child is born, the salary of his mother falls by 12%. Today the pension gap between men and women is huge because women more than men are taking career breaks for family reasons. We are saying that gender equality and balance between family life and work will never be achieved unless motherhood is specifically taken into account, not only in policy making but also by employers. We are aware that it is a real challenge for companies, but let's try to think out of the box and find innovative solutions because it really is a societal challenge.

MMMI conducted a study on the priorities and concerns of European mothers about their wellbeing and that of their children.

Almost 12.000 mothers answered. At the end of the questionnaire they could write an open message to policy makers. What they said was very similar all over Europe. They wanted

- **More recognition for the importance of their role as mothers.** They know, and they were saying it, that they are contributing not only to the well being of their children and their family but to the future of European society by caring for and educating future European citizens.
- **More time with their children.** The fight between the homemaker and the workingwoman seems to be over. Now it is **the same woman** who wants both to work AND to be able to take care of her family, giving priority to one or the other depending on her life period. Allowing more time for the family when the children need her more and progressively going back to work full time when they are more independent.

We had a specific question asking mothers about their **preferences in time use** considering the **ages of their children**. The answers show that when children are young (up to 3 years old) a majority of mothers would prefer to stay home. Then from 3 to 18 years old, the majority of mothers would prefer to work part time (adolescence is frequently referred to as an age when a parental presence is necessary). And it is only after, that a majority of mothers want to work full time.

That is if they could afford it: financially and without jeopardizing their career and retirement allowances. But this is difficult to do in reality because it hinders their career and their pension, putting them and their children at risks of poverty.

It is a necessity to address this issue. The OECD said it in the report, *Doing Better for families*, 2011

*« OECD countries need to find an optimal balance between preparing families for life in the labour market and preparing the labour market for the lives of families... »*

Ideas to do that were put forward in this conference. Employers and policy makers should work on this issue with a real political will. Because when there is a will there is a way and we believe that a European “family friendly label” is a way to better balance family life and work.