



Annemie Drieskens' welcome speech at the conference “Shaping a healthy environment fit for children”

For over 60 years Coface Families Europe, our pluralistic network, stands up for families, fighting for strong European social policies.

We want to ensure all families without discrimination have access to sufficient financial resources, available quality services and adequate time arrangements in order to live in dignity. Our Coface RST mantra

In close cooperation with our members, our dynamic team and with the financial support of the European Commission we provide a strong voice for families.

Thanks to our major common effort we achieved the adoption of the European directive that offers better work life balance for all families. This is an important milestone for women and men and is also crucial for children; research shows that family leaves policies lead to better nutrition, reduced stress in families and better outcome for children.

Coface launched recently a “NEW Deal for families of today” We call on the European Commission for a mix of actions to support families in their diversity and to further invest in children and to build a healthy society, environment and economy fit for children. We are convinced and confident the new European Commission will support Coface’s ambition and help us progress in the realization of this New Deal.

One of the key priorities is that families want a healthy environment for their children to thrive. This year, it is the 30th anniversary of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#). To celebrate this and with [Sustainable Development Goal 3 \(Good Health and Well-Being\)](#) in mind, COFACE Families Europe and Vaestoliitto joined forces with the Finnish Presidency of the EU to organize this event here in Helsinki!

I would like to thank the Vaestoliitto team for the hospitality and good cooperation with the Coface team.

Indeed, Finland is the right place for our discussion of today. Finland tops the world happiness list thanks to a social safety net combined with personal freedom and a good work life balance. Fins feel good about their environment, public services and education.

The Finnish presidency focused earlier on the "Economy of wellbeing", and discussed how to redirect economic resources on people's health and quality of life.

So close to Coface's call for economics at the service of society. We fully support the Finnish presidency in this effort and we are looking forward to concrete proposals!

An African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child", reminds us that children will thrive only if their family thrives and if the whole of society cares enough for them.

Raising children healthy in body and mind is the families and village's first obligation.

Family is a key learning environment. Warm and supportive (grand)-parent-child relationships are an essential element of children's wellbeing. Everyday life provides ongoing opportunities to encourage children's talents and teach core values and beliefs. In so many fields the solution begins at

home. Families should be considered as “natural” social protection systems and supported.

Like many parents I feel there is much to worry about when it comes to raising children in our fast changing society.

Today’s world is more complicated, with new technologies, changing work and life patterns, disappearing jobs, fragile families.

We pay enormous attention to economic growth and the wellbeing of our economy,

Hundred millions go into advertising and especially in campaigns directed to children, who with a smartphone in their hand are particularly susceptible.

Mass consumerism and advertising will continue to influence children values, beliefs and their health. Parents and society must be aware and stand up to defend the best interest of children.

Today we know much more about the importance of the quality of nutrition, and about the impact of malnutrition, the impact of the environment on health and about new treats/risks on health as childhood obesity and asthma.

We know also that children are no mini –adults. Their body and mind is in full development and that makes them more vulnerable.

Children have many lessons to share with us, lessons about what they need, what makes them happy, how they view the world.

Millions of children and young people around the world are on strike, confronting us with the results of our failure to invest in

the environment. They address us a powerful and clear message and demand action.

So: Are we doing enough to shape a healthy environment fit for children??

With our event today Coface families Europe wants to contribute to the ongoing conversation.

In the open spaces and the networking hotspots we bring to the fore the expertise of the COFACE network and partners and we will explore different areas which impact the health and wellbeing of children.

We are delighted to have so many family professionals, so much expertise from all over Europe and the U.S. here for our discussion of today. This is the best way of covering the different aspects important for the wellbeing of children and ensure that wellbeing is available to all children, especially for the most vulnerable.

We are particularly happy to have also youth ambassadors with us today to bring the voice of youth.

We invite you to meet and engage with each other, to learn, to share your perspective, and help us to develop our “child compass” .

This “child compass” will guide our work and ensure that children and their families are fundamentally at the core of everything governments do.

I am very much looking forward your proposals and ideas and wish you all an inspiring conference which is guaranteed with the list of promising speakers on our programme today!