

OpEd by Kalin and Danielle Anev Janse for OMFIF

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Interviews

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**OpEd by [Kalin Anev Janse](#), ESM Chief Financial Officer & Danielle
Anev Janse, Commission de Surveillance du Secteur Financier
Economist**

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Dual-career couples are no longer the exception, but pockets of the financial world still think traditionally and need to change their mindsets to support modern families.

It is 6.20am when the alarm goes off. Neither of us feels ready to start the day, as the night brought a few surprises and ended with us sharing our bed with our two children. Nonetheless, (work) life goes on, and so we rush through working parents' morning routine. As Kalin drops the children off at nursery, he has rescheduled his meeting to start at 9am, which is the earliest he can make it to the office. Both of us have a busy day ahead at work, while we try to keep the impression of our parental exhaustion to a minimum. Kalin travels out of town, so the nursery pickup and evening routine falls on Danielle. A last-minute, late afternoon meeting invitation causes some stress. It is almost time for the evening routine to start. The day ends how it began: asleep in bed together with the children.

This is the verse of our daily lives. For many couples trying to combine a career and family life, it probably sounds familiar. The 20th century was the age of creating equal opportunities, such as ensuring the same voting rights for women and men. The 21st century must be the age of true equality, from equal pay and top management positions, to equal burden-sharing at home and caring for children or elderly parents.

Dual-career couples are now the norm rather than the exception. It means both need to strike the balance in finding professional satisfaction and success while raising children or caring for elderly parents. Clear communication and backup plans are a necessity. If the children are ill, we need to decide who stays home. If we have overlapping business travel plans, only one of us can go. If a meeting runs over, someone needs to pick the children up from nursery. The challenge encountered by many couples is trying to find the right balance. Trying to do both well can sometimes feel like succeeding at neither.

Perceptions matter

Many institutions have robust rules and procedures in place, but more work is needed to change mindsets enough for true gender equality to become reality. Trying to split domestic responsibilities equally while both pursuing careers still provokes a reaction for either of us. Some may challenge Kalin for taking parental leave, questioning whether a man should take it, or whether a board member should be on leave. Some even ask, 'Don't you have a wife to take care of your children?'

In practice, perceptions matter. What we discovered as a couple is that Kalin tries to overcommunicate his family obligations. Conversely, Danielle under-communicates them, to avoid the impression that her career has low priority. Pockets of the financial world still think traditionally.

But there are positive developments. The European public sector is leading the way. The European Stability Mechanism has introduced generous and diversified human resources policies to support dual career families, including paternity leave, parental

leave, teleworking and paid leave to care for sick children. Luxembourg has made its parental leave policies more flexible and increased its paternity leave and child sick leave. In European countries, more and more fathers are seen on playgrounds while mothers are at work. And among younger fathers, foregoing the right to parental leave is starting to be considered strange behaviour.

The previous generation fought for equal rights for women. This generation is fighting for overall equality. As European public sector employees, we are lucky to be at the forefront. Imagine if the entire world followed. We would live in a different, better world.

Source

OMFIF [Gender Balance Index 2020 Report](#)

Author



[Kalin Anev Janse](#)

Chief Financial Officer and Management Board Member

Contacts



[Cédric Crelo](#)

Head of Communications and Chief Spokesperson

+352 260 962 205

c.crelo@esm.europa.eu



[Anabela Reis](#)

Deputy Head of Communications and Deputy Chief Spokesperson

+352 260 962 551

a.reis@esm.europa.eu



[Juliana Dahl](#)

Principal Speechwriter and Principal Spokesperson

+352 260 962 654

j.dahl@esm.europa.eu