

The Connexion

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What is new for France in 2018

by OLIVER ROWLAND

THE new year 2018 promises a raft of changes affecting everyday life.

Among new measures are several which will hit drivers, smokers and letter-writers in the pocket although there is compensation as one of France's main local taxes, the *taxe d'habitation*, is cut by a third for most households.

Earnings face a 1.7% rise in the CSG social charge and, while a new wealth tax now only targets 'unproductive' property assets, mortgage holders will

be able to hunt for cheaper insurance. Micro-entrepreneur earnings ceilings are being doubled but the VAT thresholds are not, complicating the 'simple' business regime at the top end.

Commemorations to mark the end of the First World War will be shared between France and the UK as November 11 is a Sunday, meaning that both Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday will be on the same day.

Sports fans have three notable 'firsts' with the Ryder Cup golf, the Gay Games in Paris and the return of the French Formula 1 Grand Prix.

On healthcare, children will face new obligatory vaccines and a new programme of breast and cervical cancer screening starts for women.

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Child rape laws must change



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I was raped from age of 8 but law does not protect the young

by SAMANTHA DAVID

DANCER *Andria Bescond* dances to 'repair' herself. "From the age of 8 I was repeatedly raped by a family friend. I was broken and need to repair myself but I don't need healing, because I wasn't ill," she said.

She suppressed the traumatic memories, which gradually came back in flash-backs.

At age 21 she accused her rapist, who was given a 10-year sentence and she has gone on to build a successful career – last year she was made Chevalière de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. However as well as choreographing and dancing she is also committed to changing French law, which she considers too lax.

"France is so backward concerning child abuse: 81% of sexual offences against minors happen in their homes, and the law as it stands does not protect them. Too many barristers defend the indelible just for the money, and the law is bizarrely full of loopholes and get-out clauses, particularly where there is no physical violence."

Her show *Les Châtouilles* tells the story of Odette, a child who is raped by a family friend, and her path through the subsequent guilt, self-blame, anger and pain to redemption.

"Doing this show is salvation for me. When I wrote it, this was all burning in my head and my heart, and putting all this anger and pain out there, writing it all, and concentrating on it, developing it into a real show was cathartic."

Critics say it is technically brilliant, funny and touching. It won France's national theatre award, the Molière, for best solo show in 2016.

Award-winning dancer *Andria Bescond* whose show about child abuse is transferring to London



"Every time I perform it, people approach me afterwards and tell me they've lived this too. It's been hard to bear. My social media pages are jammed with victims."

"Child abuse is all over the place. I had no idea. I thought it was only me. But people from all backgrounds, all locations, all ages tell me they've been through this too."

She adds: "Our world is hypersexualised, and sexual abuse dehumanises children, but through my dance we all share the experiences."

"It helps me to know there are others in the same situation even though it's horrible knowing the statistics."

"The Council of Europe says one-in-four girls and one-in-six boys in the EU are victims of sexual abuse of one sort or another. One-in-five sees porn on

the internet, and that's a form of grooming them, and yet grooming isn't a crime in France. But it should be."

Andria Bescond deplores the fact that child sexual abuse not involving penetration is a *délit* not a *crime* (only rape, defined as involving penetration, and murder are categorised as the worst kind of offence – *avie crime*) and that time limits mean some people whose memories of childhood rape have been suppressed cannot prosecute.

Judges accept rape and sexual abuse, and send paedophiles to psychologists instead of jail, but since there aren't enough psychologists these people just go free."

Les Châtouilles is being made into a film, to be released in September, and the stage performance is going to London. "I'm really happy because it

No age of consent... and force must be proved in child rape

FRANCE has no legal age of consent, meaning there is no such concept as 'statutory rape' – it only has an 'age of sexual majority', set at 15.

In an ongoing case, a man (aged 28 at the time) claims his victim, 11, consented to sex. He is therefore accused of a sex offence against a minor (punishable by five years' prison and a €75,000 fine) and not rape – in French law rape must involve force, threats or surprise.

In another case a man who was 22 was accused of raping a girl of 11 and acquitted on the same grounds. It was discovered when the girl became pregnant. The prosecution is appealing.

All sex involving an adult with someone under 15 (18 if someone in authority, like a teacher, is involved) is punishable, but unlike English law, France considers a child may consent and the issue is considered case by case as with adults.

Outcry over the latest cases led to calls for an age to be set below which all sex is seen as non-consenting and therefore rape (this is 13 in the UK).

France's Equality Minister Marlène Schiappa proposes an age between 12 and 15 and the government plans to introduce a law this year.

The UK has no prosecution time limit for serious sexual offences, whereas in France for sexual offences against children the victim may take legal action up to age 38 if they were aged under 15 at the time, or 28 if aged 15-18.

shows that the theme is universal. But I can't just dance. I have to continue lobbying alongside other activists for changes to the law.

"Those who are over 28 are a sacrificed generation who cannot complain [due to current time limits on prosecution] but victims should be able to prosecute at any point in their lives."

"I want to see 15 as the age of consent with an exception for relationships between teenagers from 13-15 where there is a maximum three-year age gap between them. I want statutory rape to always be punished by a jail term, with no quibbles or arguments."

"In France men still kid themselves that romantic/sexual love is possible between an adult and a child, but it isn't. A child is a child. And sex with a child should be a crime."

Gulf between French and UK pensions

FRENCH retirees are uniquely well-off compared to average earnings says a report.

France's pensioners aged over 65 earn more than the average national wage. In addition, the OECD found they have the highest life expectancy on reaching retirement (25 years).

And while the average retirement age will rise to 64 (from 61.7) in coming decades, it is still expected to be one-and-a-half years lower than the OECD average around mid-century.

At the same time the average paying-in time is rising (it will be 43 for people born in 1973 or later, which will be around the European average).

The typical 'replacement rate' (percentage of current income that would be covered by a pension at retirement) in the private sector is 74% – higher than the EU average of 71% and the OECD average of 63%.

The same survey found that pensioners in the UK were not so well-off, with 18.5% of those aged 75 or over living in relative poverty (less than half of national median household income).

UK pensioners receive 82.6% of national average incomes, below the OECD average 87.6%. They can also expect the lowest OECD replacement rates (an average 29%, though low earners can expect 52%).

Even so, it should be borne in mind that average salaries tend to be higher in the UK and many Britons also have private pensions. In addition, comparing UK and French pensions is difficult, as the former are based on a set amount for all who paid in for at least 35 years while French ones vary on how much was paid in social charges on wages, so are higher for higher earners.

Both countries also operate top-up benefits for poor pensioners, as well as other benefits such as for housing which may be more generous in the UK.

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