



## Europe's last chance

### Work-Life Balance: time to bring work and welfare policies in line with 21st century

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We are seven European networks of NGOs and since 2012 we have been working together to raise awareness about the daily challenges faced by women and men across the EU in reconciling their work, family and private life. We represent millions of children, adults and families across the EU, and we are convinced that the upcoming package on challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers that the European Commission is planning to publish in the coming months could be a unique opportunity to bring positive change to the life of many families.

In 2015, many of us published a comprehensive policy document, the "[European Reconciliation Package](#)", to propose concrete and coherent policy solutions calling for a life cycle approach to facilitate a better reconciliation of work, family, care and personal life. More recently we strongly supported the EP Resolution "[Creating labour market conditions favourable for work-life balance](#)" and the need for an ambitious and coherent EU work-life balance package, including legislative and non-legislative measures, "as regards maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave, access to quality care and support services and flexible working time arrangements" in the recent EP Resolution on the "[European Pillar of Social Rights](#)".

We believe that to better achieve its goals the EU package should be a combination of legislative and non-legislative measures but with a strong legislative core, to secure rights and ensure no one in the EU is left behind.

We are convinced that this package could represent a positive and concrete response to the needs of women and men in Europe, clearly showing the benefits of the European project and helping to close the growing gap between the people and the European Institutions.

More concretely, **we call the European Commission to publish an ambitious proposal in the area of leave schemes (maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leave), adequate provision of quality, affordable and accessible care services (childcare, other care needs and long-term care) and working arrangements.** Such a proposal, whilst fully acknowledging the importance of families as primary carers, particularly women, should also give primary consideration to the best interests of the child. It should also ensure that children are recognised as rights bearers, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the European Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage'.

## Leave schemes

We call on the European Commission to present a coherent legislative package on different forms of leave, including maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leaves, to promote a more equal share of care and support responsibilities between women and men.

- Maternity Leave: review the current legislation (Directive [92/85/EEC](#)) in terms of pay, length, discrimination and protection from dismissal when returning to work.

- Paternity leave: present a proposal for a paternity leave directive, of at least two weeks fully paid.

- Parental leave: review the current legislation (Directive [2010/18/EU](#)) to introduce minimum pay levels, flexibility so it can be taken full time or part time, increase the length of leave and the age of the child until which the leave can be taken. The leave period should be distributed in 3 blocks, one allocated specifically to one parent (mother or father), another to the other parent (or second primary caregiver) 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" (non-transferability) must be applied to the whole duration. Employers must inform and support fathers to take up their paternity and parental leaves.

- Carers' Leave: present a proposal for a carers' leave directive for parents or family members with caregiving responsibilities towards a family member with a chronic disease, a disability or other long-term ageing family member's care and assistance needs. This directive should include adequate standards for financial compensation during carers' leave as well as the possibility for informal carers to take a leave on a full time, part time or needs basis, and to be provided with flexibility to switch from full time to part-time and vice versa, and to avail of non-discrimination provisions.

The proposal should also include measures for the provision of certified trainings, which would not only strengthen and recognise the skills developed by carers but also help them go back to the labour market following a long career break resulting from caregiving activities. 'Care credits' should also be introduced to offset breaks from employment taken in order to provide informal care to family members and these should be fully covered by social protection (health, accident, unemployment insurance) and counted towards pension entitlements. Finally, special attention should be devoted to making it possible for male workers to take up their share of carer's leave as well.

## Care facilities: Childcare, other care needs and Long-Term Care and support

Care and support services are fundamental to support parents and carers to enter and remain in employment but they are primarily a resource for their users, to positively develop and receive the support and care they need. Therefore, a system of care services that has the rights and well-being of children, elderly and persons with disabilities at its centre should be the focus. These services must be of the highest quality but also affordable and accessible and in line with the principles and provisions of the UN CRC - UN Convention on the Right of the Child, ratified by all EU Member States and the UN CRPD – UN Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by the EU and 27 of its 28 Member States.

To increase the coverage of quality, accessible and affordable care and support services, the EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) must be used in a strategic way to invest in quality social and health services (infrastructure and staff development), which can support all families in their diversity to meet their work-life balance challenges. Moreover, we call on the European Commission to closely

monitor the use of the funds to implement and monitor the work-life balance Country-Specific Recommendations through the EU Semester.

#### Early childhood education and care

- Mainstream a child rights based approach to early childhood education and care policies, to ensure that measures bring valuable benefits to children whilst improving parents' contribution to the labour market.
- Promote a holistic and integrated approach that links early childhood education and care policies to measures on parental leave, labour market participation, and family support.
- Introduce a care guarantee, i.e. a legal right to a high quality, accessible and affordable childcare place for all children and families (including those in vulnerable situations) after the end of the leave period and 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. To this end, improve the standing, recognition and qualifications of childcare professionals and make use of the [Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care](#).
- Improve inclusiveness of early childhood education and care for children with special needs, through physical adaptation, additional staff resource, specialised training for staff.
- Call on Member States to meet their existing obligations agreed by the Council in Barcelona in 2002, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

#### Other care needs, long-term care and support

- EU Strategy on Carers: The European Commission should, following the European Parliament Interest Group (2014) demand, propose and 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 recognising their legal status in Member States. This should be based on the Proposed EU-wide initiative "[Enabling Carers to carers](#)" (Eurocarers, 2017) and [EU Charter for Family Carers](#) (COFACE, 2017) 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.
- Ensure availability, accessibility and affordability of quality long-term care and support services, including direct payments for personal assistance budgets. All services should respect the rights of the persons in need of care and/or support, with these persons having the free choice on which services to use. This will allow persons in need of care or support an independent life with dignity and integrated in the society. Families should receive necessary support in order to allow all family members to continue their employment.
- Respite care and peer support should be available for family carers as well as persons in need of care and/or support. Care facilities should subscribe to the [European Quality Framework for Long-Term](#)

[Care Services](#). In addition, introduce targets on long-term care according to the projection of care needs due to demographic change and monitor them as part of the European Semester.

### **Flexible work arrangements**

Being able to work flexibly when needed supports work-life balance for parents and carers and, ultimately, reduces the risk for them to unwillingly reduce their working hours or dropping out of employment.

The EU and Member States should support collective bargaining and 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 and enable men to take their share of care. However, the EU should ensure that the best interests of the child are not sacrificed in the effort to increase labour market participation.

The EU should assess implementation and, if necessary, review legislation and policy aiming to create a proper environment for quality part-time employment and smart working, promoting a shift from the culture of presence at work towards an output driven one, where possible.

However, measures to prevent the risks of shifting towards a culture of total availability of employees due to technologies and digitalization should be put in place.

Member States should fully implement the [Directive 2006/54 on equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation \(recast\)](#) and the European Commission should monitor the implementation. 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.

The revised [Working Time Directive \(2003/88/EC\)](#) should support a better reconciliation of work, family and private life. We support the European Parliament call on the Commission to evaluate the existing national legislation on the right to request flexible working which gives employees the ability to request changes in the number of hours they work, their work schedule and their place of work and carry out a study on the added value of an EU initiative in that respect.

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Who we are: [AGE Platform Europe](#) | [COFACE Families Europe](#) | [ENIL – European Network on Independent Living](#) | [European Women’s Lobby](#) | [Eurocarers](#) | [Eurochild](#) | [Make Mothers Matter](#)