

ETUC Executive adopts position on work-life balance

(8 January 2016) The ETUC Executive has adopted a position on the first-stage consultation of the EU Social Partners on a “new start” for work-life balance at its meeting 16-17 December 2015. It also considered a draft response to the public consultation on the Commission's proposals for work-life-balance. The consultation follows the publication of the Roadmap for such a new initiative, next to the Commission's withdrawal of the proposal to revise the Maternity Leave Directive (92/85/EESC). Two consultations were launched simultaneously by the European Commission.

1) The EU Social Partners first-stage Consultation launched on 11 November where the ETUC has elaborated its position- see summary below, and

2) A ***public online consultation “on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers”, which can be answered by all stakeholders until the 17th of February :***
<http://ec.europa.eu/social>.

A blueprint that all ETUC/EPSU members can use to reply to the public consultation is attached to the ETUC position. We encourage all affiliates to respond to the public consultation under the proposed frame.

What does the ETUC position on the EU Social Partners consultation (1) on a “new start” for work-life balance entail?

The ETUC is of the opinion that there is a need to enhance women's labour participation in the labour market by addressing both quantity and quality of employment, the link between the widespread precarious working conditions of women workers, the lack of appropriate reconciliation measures and the effects on the gender pay and pension gap, the need to strengthen men's take up of family related leaves by addressing leaves' payment and stereotypes at work and in society; and the importance of investing in affordable, quality and accessible care services for both children and the elderly; the fact that women continue to bear the

burden of family and domestic work.

It calls to promote “upward convergence” among Member States on “work-life balance” and announces that the ETUC is ready to start discussions and negotiations with employers’ organisations at EU level about modalities of minimum rights and conditions to modernize existing **EU legislation such as maternity leave and address the shortcomings or lack of legislation in areas such as Paternity and Carers’ Leave**. The position also supports that the Parental Leave Directive which is based on a EU Social Partners Agreement could be updated to address income protection in view of reducing the pay gap and the promotion of the uptake of Parental Leave. A priority for action is to tackle the differences that exist in terms of the duration and payment of family-related leaves as well as the wide differences that exist at national level in the provision of quality, affordable and accessible care for children, dependents and the elderly. Therefore the position in addition to the Barcelona target for childcare asks for a similar **EU-wide target for elderly care and long-term care** to be integrated into the European Semester. The key reasoning there is the link between demographic change and reconciliation policies.

The ETUC position also calls for a sound **investment in public services** and addresses the cutbacks in services and family benefits linked to austerity compromising women’s economic independence. The absence of investment at EU level only further enhances already existing inequalities between men and women. The impact of the austerity measures that have been implemented by member states, often without proper involvement of social partners, and which have negatively impacted the organisation of work, the quantity and quality of care and public services in general of which women are the prime users, and the payment of family related leave.

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