



European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU)

Press release – 20 June 2011

The European Union fails to deliver on maternity according to trade unions.

The European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) expresses its deep concern that the EU Employment and Social Affairs have failed, yet again, to make progress on the revision of the pregnant workers directive which would provide improved maternity rights for millions of women across the EU. At the meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 17 June, the EU Employment Ministers were unable, and in some cases clearly unwilling, to agree a common position on the revision of the Directive, following the European Parliament's amendments to the Commission's original proposals to amend the legislation¹. Many cited costs as the major obstacle. The ministers' inability to adopt a common position means that progress on the directive has essentially been blocked. Families lose out as EU Governments reveal the contradiction between the EU's policy objectives and the lack of political will to make them a reality.

"We are deeply concerned that some ministers have expressed satisfaction at the current deadlock. The failure to make progress on the revision of this Directive means that millions of mothers across Europe are being denied improved maternity protection. If the governments disagree, they should negotiate with the European Parliament and not walk away from their responsibility." **Carola Fischbach-Pyttel**, EPSU General Secretary commented.

The risk is that women do not only get the prospective 20 weeks of leave proposed by the European Parliament, but also that these governments have blocked progress towards a minimum of 18 weeks maternity leave as recommended by the ILO². EPSU believes it is unacceptable that the political debate regarding maternity leave is increasingly focused solely on financial costs rather than the benefits not only for the mother, baby and the immediate family unit but also for our wider societies. In addition to the pay aspects, the proposals contain improved legal protections for pregnant workers, who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination especially during periods of economic downturn. At a time when women are bearing the brunt of the cost of the crisis, many Governments - notably the wealthiest and those with the largest financial sectors - are using the economic crisis as an excuse for blocking progress on gender equality. The argument that equality is only for prosperous times is an extremely dangerous one.

The Employment Ministers' inability to move forward on this issue reveals a stark contradiction between the EU's stated policy aims of increasing the female participation rates, reducing the gender pay gap and facilitating reconciliation between professional and private life and the lack of political will to take concrete action to achieve these aims.

Additionally, EPSU deplores the state of affairs regarding the anti-discrimination directive on which there has been no movement for almost three years. If the EU is really committed to the principles of

¹ In October 2008, the European Commission proposed increasing the minimum period of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks. In October 2010, the European Parliament amended the proposal recommending a minimum maternity leave of 20 weeks fully paid and 2 weeks fully paid paternity leave.

² International Labour Organisation (ILO) Recommendation 191 encouraged members to strive towards 18 weeks maternity leave.



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equality for all it is time Governments stopped hiding behind tenuous objections and started delivering on their promises.

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EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the ETUC and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 275 trade unions. EPSU organises workers in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local and national administration, in all European countries including in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood. EPSU is the recognised regional organisation of Public Services International (PSI). For further information on EPSU and its work, visit <http://www.epsu.org>