

ETUC POSITION ON THE FIRST-STAGE CONSULTATION OF THE EU SOCIAL PARTNERS ON A 'NEW START' FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Approved at the Executive Committee meeting of 16-17 December, 2015

Key Issues

Good work-life balance has a positive impact on the well-being of workers. It can also contribute to achieving major EU policy goals: stimulating employment (especially among women and older workers) and growth; promoting children and youth development; and eventually achieving gender equality.

It is high time that the EU takes action to promote upward convergence among Member States on work-life balance. There is both a need to modernize existing EU legislation (such as the maternity leave directive), to address shortcomings or lack of legislation in certain areas (such as Paternity and Carers' Leave) as well to strengthen member states' coordination in order to ensure a level playing field regarding the costs and benefits of reconciliation policies.

Investment in public services as well as coherent policies to promote gender equality and family-friendly environments should be promoted. This includes improving the provision of availability, quality, affordability and accessibility of care (for children, dependants and the elderly). The achievement of Barcelona targets by Member States should be monitored through the EU semester process. Targets on elderly care and care for dependants should be also introduced by the EU Council.

Reconciliation policies must not be considered as benefits for women or parents only but rather as a deeper change in employment policies and functioning of businesses, from which all employees, regardless of their gender and family status, as well as employers can benefit.

The ETUC is ready to start discussions and negotiations with employers' organisations at EU level about the modalities in which minimum rights and conditions for the above mentioned forms of leave could be regulated at European level. The ETUC would also be ready to evaluate the EU Social Partners Agreement on Parental Leave with the EU-level employers and improve its provisions with regard to the issue of payment and other issues. These actions should be built on the joint commitment already foreseen in the context of the current EU Social Dialogue work-programme 2015 - 2017.

However, in case these discussions and negotiations would not lead to any concrete outcome in these areas, the ETUC would urge the Commission to provide the necessary initiative and come up with legislative proposals.

Introduction

On 11 November 2015, the European Commission formally consulted (under Art. 154(2) TFEU) the European social partners on the possible direction of the EU action concerning legislative measures to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by men and women.

The consultation follows the publication in August 2015 of a Roadmap¹ for such a new initiative, next to the Commission's withdrawal of the proposal to revise the Maternity Leave Directive (92/85/EEC).

Shortly after launching the social partners' consultation, the European Commission also published a public consultation "on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers"².

The ETUC strongly regrets the fact that the two consultations are being run simultaneously, as this undermines the social partners' privileged role in this field enshrined in the Treaty, and also creates a lack of clarity amongst a wide range of stakeholders on how the different replies will be processed. For this reason, a blueprint that ETUC members can use to reply to the public consultation is attached, based on the main messages of this position.

The issue of reconciliation of professional, private and family life has been on the European political agenda since the 1970s. In particular, the European Commission had two stages of social partners' consultation in 2006 (the so-called 'reconciliation package') to which the ETUC contributed³.

The ETUC assessment of the follow-up given to the 2006 consultation process is very negative. Regrettably, not only did the European Commission fail to revise the Maternity Leave Directive, but it also did not propose any new legislative proposal on paternity leave and proposed only scattered initiatives to meet the Barcelona targets on childcare facilities. The only notable improvement has been the revision of the Parental Leave Agreement by the European social partners which was transposed by Directive 2010/18/EC.

This lack of progress comes during an extremely difficult period for working parents and individuals of whom, working conditions, including leave arrangements and organisation of working time have been negatively affected by the austerity measures imposed by member states in an effort to reduce the public deficits.

In fact, from the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, most of member states have implemented structural changes in their family policy mix, and in most of the cases family support measures were severely reduced.

Amongst the measures undertaken and documented by ETUC members we can recall: closure of public kindergartens; limiting after school activity; limiting care services for elderly and disabled; reduction in compensation for childcare costs; growing childcare fees; reduced services for the elderly and the disabled; closure of hospitals; governments saving on measures that encourage the equal division of care between women and men,

¹ "New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families" http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_just_xxx_maternity_leave.en.pdf

² "Public consultation on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers" http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/opinion/1511_roadmap_reconciliation_en.htm

³ We recall the Council Resolution 2000/C 218/02, the European Parliament resolutions 2003/2129 and 2006/2276, the Council Conclusions of December 2008, and finally, the Commission "Reconciliation Pack" which includes the Communication COM (2008)635 "A better work-life balance: stronger support for reconciling professional, private and family life". More recently, the European Employment Strategy as well as the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 also underlined the important role of reconciliation policies in achieving gender equality.

such as paid paternity leave, and parental leave benefits; reduction of maternity leave allowances; savings on child benefits and other care and family related benefits.

Cutbacks in services and family benefits have thus compromised women's economic independence, as benefits often constitute an important source of their income and because they use public services more than men. Lone mothers and single female pensioners face the biggest cumulative losses.

The lack of European action in the area of reconciliation combined with the absence of investment and coherent policies to promote gender equality and family-friendly environments should be addressed. It is high time that the EU intensifies its actions to promote convergence instead of increasing differentiation and wider gaps between member states with regard to national policies to support reconciliation. One priority area 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, dependants and the elderly).

In the light of this background, therefore the ETUC welcomes the Commission's decision to launch a social partners' consultation on this topic.

This response has been built on previous ETUC positions on reconciliation and on working time⁴ as well on the discussions undertaken within the relevant ETUC committees.

Ensuring work life balance: an imperative not an option to achieve gender equality

Good work-life balance promotes the well-being of workers. It can also contribute to achieving major EU policy goals: stimulating employment (especially among women and older workers) and growth; promoting children and youth development; and eventually achieving gender equality.

This link has been addressed jointly by the European social partners. First in the context of their Framework of Actions on Gender Equality (2005) then more recently within the work-programme 2015 – 2017⁵ where we agreed to prepare joint conclusions promoting better reconciliation of work, private and family life and gender equality to reduce the gender pay gap.

According to Eurofound, in Europe more than one worker in five is not satisfied with his/her work-life balance. At least several times a month, one out of two workers left work too tired to do household jobs; and one out of three had difficulties fulfilling family responsibilities due to working time.

Conflicts between work and other aspects of life can be caused by long working hours, unpredictable schedules or intense periods at work, as well as by the demands of unpaid work at home, particularly domestic chores and the care of children and the elderly.

⁴ Notably: "ETUC's Position on the First stage consultation of the Social Partners at Community level on the Reconciliation of Professional, Private and Family Life" <https://www.etuc.org/etucs-position-first-stage-consultation-social-partners-community-level-reconciliation-professional>; ETUC's Position on the Second Stage Consultation of the Social Partners at Community level on the Reconciliation of Professional, Private and Family Life https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/ETUC_position_second_stage_-_reconc._work_family_life-2_2.pdf; ETUC strategy on the review of the Working Time Directive https://vcp.nl/symphony/extension/sm_richtext_redactor/getfile/?name=en-etuc-strategy-review-wtd.pdf https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/ETUC_position_second_stage_Annex.pdf

⁵ http://resourcecentre.etuc.org/spaw_uploads/files/FINAL_Joint_Social_Dialogue_Work_Programme_2015_2017.pdf

The Europe 2020 strategy has set the target of 75% of women and men to be employed by 2020. However, the EU overall employment rate in 2014 stood at 64.9 % with a particularly low rate for women (59.6 % against 70.1 % for men aged 20-64) and older workers, aged 55-64 (51.8 %). Therefore, it is clear that to achieve this target, the involvement of women becomes pivotal and that a radical adjustment has to be made to the labour market, ensuring that it is accessible and capable of retaining and promoting their inclusion.

Labour market strategies as well as employment policies and practices have historically been designed around the traditional family and societal structure of the male breadwinner model. Over time this dynamic has evolved, however these changes in society and diversity of family forms have not been followed by modifications in the labour market legislation and policy.

Reconciliation policies are essential to implement this change. Women's employment is tightly linked to the distribution of work and family responsibilities within the couple. Eurofound surveys reveal that for the same amount of working hours, women are more likely to report problems with work-life balance than men, as they spend almost 12 more hours per week doing unpaid work than men.

The double burden of paid work and unpaid work within the family, together with a persistent lack and adequacy of support care services, are some of the reasons behind the declining fertility rate in Europe and can be identified as one of the main barriers to women's full participation in the labour market and decision making at all levels.

Women are more likely to take leave, work part time or withdraw from the labour market. Indeed, because of a lack of or an insufficient number of childcare facilities and work-life balance policies across Europe, 23% of women whose youngest child is under 3 and 18% of women whose youngest child is between 3 and the mandatory school age work part-time or do not work.

In the ETUC's view reconciliation policies are not, and must not, be considered as benefits for women or parents only but rather as a deeper change in employment policies and functioning of businesses, from which all employees, regardless of their gender and family status, as well as employers can benefit. Certain groups such as single parents are more vulnerable to the challenge of work-life reconciliation. It is thus essential to consider not only women, men, parents or non-parents as homogeneous groups, but also pay attention to the heterogeneity within these groups.

Response to specific questions addressed to social partners

Do you agree with the description of the issues in this paper as correct and sufficient?

The ETUC is of the opinion that **the consultation paper broadly points at the most important issues affecting reconciliation in a proper manner**. In particular, the need to enhance women's participation in the labour market by addressing both quantity and quality of women's employment; the link between the widespread precarious working condition 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; the importance of investing in affordable, quality and accessible care services for both children and elderly; the fact that women continue to bear the burden of family and domestic chores.

While the consultation paper underlines how these different factors impact on the quality of work life balance, it fails to address the incoherent policies which have led to the uneven situation among member states in terms of reconciliation policies and women's participation in the labour market. The first element is 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.

The economic downturn has particularly affected the protection of women during pregnancy and on return to work. Women are experiencing discriminatory practices in the labour-market as a direct result of pregnancy and/or giving birth, despite legislation that prohibits direct and indirect discrimination against pregnant workers. The practice of having the worker sign an undated letter of resignation at the time of hiring for future use by the employer at his or her convenience and which affects more specifically pregnant women has become even more widespread since the start of the crisis and documented at various levels, including by the ILO. At the same time various countries have, temporarily, reduced maternity leave allowances in order to cope with budgetary deficit.

Another effect of the crisis has been the **growth in part-time employment** in almost all member states. This upward trend can be found more strongly for involuntary part-time employment. According to Eurostat, in 2013 29% of part-time workers had non-standard types of work because they could not find a full-time job. No fewer women than men accepted part-time work 'involuntarily'. Because of the large gender disparity in part-time working, the increase in the numbers of involuntary part-timers was actually much larger among women – almost double – although in percentage terms the surge was stronger among men.

When looking at the organisation of working time and its relevance for work-life balance, **extremes in working hours** should be also considered. Eurofound surveys show that men more frequently work longer hours (48 hours or more) and women more frequently work shorter hours (fewer than 20 hours). However, if unpaid and paid working hours are cumulated women's working hours are longer than men's. Reducing long hours and upgrading marginal part time work can be addressed in various ways, including by giving workers genuine options for adapting their working hours to their needs, within a protective collective or legislative framework.

In the ETUC's opinion the Commission consultation paper also fails to capture the key link between reconciliation policies and **demographic change**. Research shows that there is a strong link between the optimal use of work life balance options and the increase in the birth rate.

Do you consider that improvements should be made to EU legislation to improve work-life balance for parents and for people with caring responsibilities in view of the issues raised in point 4 of this document, and if so what type of improvements?

The ETUC firmly believes that **EU legislation on work life balance should be improved to enable upward convergence**. There is both a need to modernize existing legislation, to address shortcomings or lack of legislation in certain areas as well to strengthen member states' coordination in order to ensure a level playing field regarding the costs and benefits of reconciliation policies.

EU action in this field should look at **reconciliation from a coherent perspective and promote long-term investment**. A more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men should be promoted and in particular it should aim at improving the take up by men of family responsibilities, and not further weaken the position of women in the labour market. Legislation would help a cultural change in mentality, not only of women and men themselves, but also in workplaces and at the level of management.

In the ETUC's view there is a strong need for a coherent policy with regard to reconciliation that should offer: good quality, available and affordable child and elderly care facilities; a variety of paid leave options that should be taken by both parents and especially encourage men to use them; recognition of the role of fathers with regard to childrearing; flexible working time arrangements and the possibility to reduce or extend one's working time (reversible part time work) and sound investment in public services.

The ETUC position for each of the topics is as follows:

Leave facilities should offer a genuine perspective of combining work, family and/or private life, they should be paid and ensure the right combination of length and flexibility without impacting workers' capacity to come back to work after the leave period or affect negatively their career, wages and pensions rights.

With regard to **maternity protection**, the ETUC shares the Commission's opinion that Directive 92/85/EEC should be revised. The Commission notes two areas in which improvements should be made: easing mothers' transition into work such as the provision of appropriate breaks and/or privacy and fostering protection against dismissal. While we consider these important elements to be focused on, especially the protection against dismissals, the ETUC is of the opinion that issue of full payment of maternity leave, should be also tackled.

Ensuring that women are paid their full salary for the duration of maternity leave, is the only way to provide those who have recently given birth with substantive equality and to ensure that they are not economically penalised for having children. The issue of pay during maternity leave cannot be dissociated from the broader issue of the gender pay gap: reductions in pay during maternity leave contribute significantly to substantive pay inequality throughout women's lives, as evidenced by the gender pension gap. Payment of maternity leave also means that women would continue to pay tax and social security contributions which would also contribute to the public purse. If Europe is serious about wanting to reduce poverty and inequalities, particularly affecting European women and children, the full payment of maternity leave must be a part of this strategy.

Secondly, the ETUC agrees with the EC paper that the protection against dismissal is not strong enough in the current directive. Pregnant women and new mothers are among the most vulnerable workers in the labour market, a situation which is exacerbated in times of economic difficulty. Maternity leave provisions must be accompanied by measures protecting the rights of expectant and new mothers prior to and on their return to work, including protection from dismissal and also from imposed night shifts and overtime or inflexibility towards breastfeeding mothers for at least six months.

Other elements of the Maternity Leave Directive which need attention are the health and safety dimension, notably in terms of prevention and risk assessment, and the need to strengthen the right to breastfeeding facilities. Another important matter is to extend its protection to all workers in atypical forms of employment, including domestic workers.

The ETUC believes that maternity protection and leave for women in relation to their role as child bearers must be clearly distinguished from leave and other facilities for parents for the purpose of care. For this reason, the ETUC strongly supports the introduction of new types of leaves to better meet the needs of workers in reconciliation of work, private and family life.

First, a **new Directive on Paternity leave** should be introduced in order to give the right to male workers (or partners in same-sex couples) to take some time off around the birth of their child to assist the mother and allow them to establish a relationship with the new born child. Paternity leave should be paid and its length should be adequate (from two weeks to one month). The paternity leave should be individual and non-transferable, and preferably mandatory, i.e. an automatic right and not depending on request.

To ensure that paternity leave can be taken by fathers at all wage levels it should always be paid, ensure job protection and job related rights, and it should not lead to a loss in terms of social security or pension rights.

The ETUC would also strongly welcome the introduction of a **Carers' Leave Directive**, as a supplement to the provision of affordable professional care. An entitlement to leave, similar to parental leave, could be considered, to enable workers to care for an elderly parent or a family member with a disability or terminal illness. The ETUC could imagine that in these cases both long term leave in various forms (full time or part time) as well as leave for 'force majeure' as regulated in the existing Parental leave Directive could offer adequate solutions to workers in different situations.

A carer's leave would be extremely beneficial to address the specific challenges faced by workers (and especially women) from the age of 50 years and above. Workers in this age category have often very low opportunities to find a job which reflects their qualifications and experience. In 2015, the gap between male and female employment of people aged 55-64 was 14.2%. Instead of leaving older workers longer in minimum income or unemployment schemes, there should be a real strategy for training and labour-market inclusion and avoid discrimination. Older women more often than older men are not encouraged to start working after longer career breaks for family duties, because they will not have enough time to build up minimum pension rights. Women in this situation are discouraged from looking for work because their country's pension system does not reward carers' leave with adequate entitlements to pensions. A carers' leave directive could introduce these pension rights for carers' leave and have positive effects on the employment of older women taking care of an ageing or disabled family member. This should include measures for protection of employment rights and provision of training and certification for persons coming out of a longer career break because of caring for family members.

The ETUC also supports the Commission's views that the **Parental Leave Directive** (2010/18/EEC), which is based on the EU Social Partners' agreement, could be updated to better achieve its aims. The ETUC shares the Commission's opinion that the current text of the Directive needs to foremost provide for adequate income protection during parental leave, in the interest of both women (reduction of the pay gap) and men (promotion of their take up).

The ETUC would therefore be ready to evaluate the EU Social Partners Agreement with the EU-level employers and improve its provisions with regard to the issue of payment. Other issues, suggested by the EC paper, such as greater flexibility in the parental leave arrangements as well as the maximum age of the child could be also part of this assessment.

The Commission consultation paper also address the issue of **flexibility in working time arrangements**. The ETUC agrees that any update of the regulatory framework should not limit itself to leave facilities, but also address the issue of working time to ensure policy coherence and a balanced combination within them.

The ETUC wants to stress that flexible working arrangements must be clearly understood as working patterns which are adapted to workers' needs (men and women) throughout a life-cycle approach. Workers need more time sovereignty for a good work-life balance. Furthermore workers need to be able to plan and organise their life, therefore they need scheduled working time well in advance.

Nowadays workers (and especially women) are often confronted with precarious work and under-employment, such as zero hour contracts, broken hours, mini-jobs, etc. Irregularity and unpredictability of working hours (often referred to as 'flexibility'), the widespread culture of presenteeism as well unsocial hours working time arrangements are a problematic issue from the perspective of reconciliation.

For those workers, planning their working and private lives is in fact impossible as they have to handle unnecessary uncertainty of their working patterns. Workers are also confronted with the intensification of work and growing flexibility in working time arrangements, with new forms of work due to the possibilities resulting from new technology and mobile devices, they are becoming and expected to be reachable anywhere and at any time.

What is needed is for employees to have greater control over their working time. One way to achieve this is to provide a right for zero-hour (and other part-time) employees to request full-time work and to place a corresponding obligation on the employer to seriously consider the employee's request and provide that only where there are serious reasons allow the employer justify the refusal. A close examination of the Part Time Work Directive 97/81/EC based on the Framework Agreement on part-time work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC) suggests that such a measure is already necessary to full that Directive's requirements.

In the ETUC's view flexible working patterns could be taken up at EU level while the development of detailed solutions is the task of collective agreements at the appropriate levels taking into consideration the different national practices. They should provide for a supportive and protective framework that allows workers to adapt their working hours and working time patterns without losing employment and social security protection. Individual solutions on flexible working arrangements should be avoided as they tend to polarize and further reinforce gender segregation in the labour market. Furthermore, it is of major importance that flexible working patterns are open to men and women alike, not only focussing on mothers or parents with small children, and be reversible.

The **European social partners' telework agreement** aimed at ensuring greater security for teleworkers employed in the EU by establishing a general framework at EU level concerning their status and working conditions. As mentioned in the preamble, with our agreement we wished to contribute to the modernisation of the organization of work, improve the opportunities for workers to reconcile working and family life, and prepare the EU to the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society in line with the objectives of the Lisbon process. Telework patterns should be organised in a way that they do not entail risks in terms of social protection and career perspectives and should not be limited to workers returning from family leaves. Social dialogue agreements on telework should be promoted and workers' capacity to exert genuine influence on the organisation of their work should be ensured.

Previous ETUC comments and positions on family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements should be combined with the **availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of early childhood education, elderly and dependent care facilities** in all member states. They are pivotal factors for women's employment and for gender equality, and thus reconciliation of work and family life for working parents.

As indicated in a joint letter signed with the EU-level employers in July 2008⁶, the EU social partners recognise that although ensuring the availability of childcare is first and foremost the responsibility of public authorities, we can play a complementary role by taking part in tripartite discussions, promoting ESF projects and in informing public authorities about labour market needs so that childcare services enable greater participation levels in the labour market.

The ETUC's new Path for Europe clearly indicates that investment in early childhood education and care for elderly should be part of any European investment plan as they are key issues to enhancing gender equality and to generate employment, which would boost additional income and tax revenue and consumption, thereby contributing to the expansion of the economy.

⁶ https://www.etuc.org/sites/www.etuc.org/files/Final_draft_joint_letter_childcare_04.07.08_1.pdf

Conversely, due to austerity measures in many member states, publicly funded care services have been severely cut or are even non-existent, which results in private provision, often at unaffordable prices, and often with demand outstripping supply.

The **Barcelona targets** on childcare which were introduced in 2002 have not yet been realised and in the ETUC's opinion the Commission should systematically address country specific recommendations to member states lagging behind the targets until they fully meet them. In various member states, seemingly generously long maternity or parental leave periods (although often with low or no pay) try to mask the lack of childcare facilities, and maintain a vicious circle in which women have little choice other than to leave the labour market for long periods when they have children, and have great difficulty re-entering after several years of absence.

Regarding the promotion of the provision of **elderly care** and care for dependants, the ETUC has already proposed in the past the introduction of a **new target** to be set by the EU Council (similar to the Barcelona target) but with monitoring tools, possibly within the European Semester. Data on care of dependants is scarce and there is a critical lack of provision for the care of older people. A large majority of this work is done by women, and is either provided on a voluntary basis or in informal employment relationships, including undeclared work. Demand for this type of care is on the increase and there is a projected shortage of a million long term care workers in Europe by 2020. So it is essential that a resourced, comprehensive and proactive European employment strategy for this sector is developed, which priorities quality, professional jobs, as vital to improving the quality, affordability and accessibility of long term care, while taking into account that formal care does not substitute but rather complements informal care arrangements by relatives and communities.

Regrettably, the consultation paper makes no explicit reference to the broader context of care delivery and its effect on care workers and social exclusion. It is essential that the ongoing restructuring and privatisation of public services does not impact negatively on workers and care service users, a majority of whom are women. A gendered and social analysis of the changes introduced by privatisation is therefore also needed.

In many countries, families, the sick and the elderly increasingly rely on essential household services provided by workers, mostly women and often from a migrant or ethnic minority background, who often work under very informal and unprotected arrangements. In 2011 the ILO adopted the Convention 189 on Domestic worker. The ETUC believes the EU should adopt a regulatory framework for domestic work with a view to both provide domestic workers with basic protection and equal opportunities and to organise household services in a more sustainable way.

Would you consider initiating a dialogue under article 155 TFEU on any of these issues identified in point 4 of this consultation?

The ETUC is ready to start discussions and negotiations with employers' organisations at EU level about the modalities in which minimum rights and conditions for the above mentioned forms of leave could be regulated at European level. Such negotiations would underpin necessary developments and arrangements both in terms of collective bargaining and legislation at national and sectoral level.

The ETUC is ready to work together with European employers' organisations to ensure that genuine progress is made with regard to the parental leave directive as well as introduction of new forms of paid leaves such as paternity and carers' leave. These actions should be built on the joint commitment already foreseen in the context of the current EU Social Dialogue work-programme 2015 - 2017.

However, in case these discussions and negotiations would not lead to any concrete outcome in these areas, the ETUC would urge the Commission to provide the necessary initiative and come up with legislative proposals.

Annex: Blue print for public consultation

A. General Feedback

The background document outlines several challenges to work-life balance and women's participation in the labour market.

*Do you agree with the description of the challenges?

- Yes
 No
 Partially
 Don't know

Are there any other challenges that should be taken into account?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

Challenge 1

200 character(s) maximum (155 characters left)

- Crisis + austerity measures (see ETUC text)

Challenge 2

200 character(s) maximum (163 characters left)

- Demographic changes (see ETUC text)

B. Policy areas

The background document outlines several key policies that have a positive impact on work-life balance and women's participation in the labour market. These policy areas include:

- * Childcare
- * Long-term care services
- * Family-related leave arrangements for both women and men
- * Flexible working arrangements for both women and men
- * Tax-benefit systems that make work pay for both partners

*Do you agree that the above list of policy areas is accurate and complete?

- Yes
 No
 Partially
 Don't know

Below is a list of possible policy measures.

In your view, which would be the most important measures to improve work-life balance and female labour market participation in your country?

	Highest Priority (max. 3)	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not important at all	Don't know
*Improving the possibilities and/or incentives for parents and other people with dependent family members to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures (such as leave and/or flexible working arrangements)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the possibilities and/or incentives for men, in particular, to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures (such as leave and/or flexible working arrangements)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Better facilitating parents' transitions back to work after taking maternity/parental leave (e.g., adapting workplaces to better allow for breastfeeding, informing them of employment promotion and training opportunities while they are on leave)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of childcare (e.g., number of places)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the affordability of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the quality of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of formal long-term care services, including home/community-based services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the affordability of formal long-term care services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the quality of formal long-term care services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of disability-related home support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving support measures for people with ill/disabled/frail relatives (e.g., financial support, support services)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Removing tax-benefit disincentives for parents/people with caring responsibilities to enter the labour market (e.g., tax disincentives for the lower earning partner to work, benefit traps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other policy measure(s)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify

200 character(s) maximum (117 characters left)

ETUC suggests that you tick the boxes that are relevant for your national situation

C. EU-Level Action

* In your view, is there a need for further EU-level action on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

* In your view, is there a need to improve the EU-level legislative framework in order to address the challenges of work-life balance, for example in relation to maternity leave, parental leave, flexible working arrangements, carers' leave and/or paternity leave?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

* Please explain what type of improvements could be considered as regards the current EU legislative framework.

500 character(s) maximum (362 characters left)

Revision of the maternity leave directive (payment, protection against dismissals, time-off for breastfeeding, health and safety matters)

[NB] A separate consultation is being conducted with the social partners on issues in the current EU legal framework, such as in the area of leaves and flexible working arrangements. The outcome of this public consultation shall not influence the outcome of the consultation with the social partners.

* In your view, is there a need for further EU-level policy guidance on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

* In your view, is there a need for strengthened monitoring at EU-level on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

*In your view, could the EU support further exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders in this area?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*Do you think the EU could develop meaningful benchmarks * in the area of work-life balance policies that could be monitored, for example, through the European Semester process?

* A benchmark can be defined as "a standard or point of reference against which things may be compared or assessed" (Pearsall, 1999: 125).

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please indicate which policy areas these benchmarks could cover (choose all that apply)

- Childcare
- Long-term care services
- Family-related leave arrangements for both men and women
- Flexible working arrangements for both women and men
- Tax-benefit systems that make work pay for both partners
- Other
- Don't know

Currently, the EU financially supports Member States in their implementation of work-life balance policies through its funds, notably the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund.

Do you find the current funds and their regulations effective in supporting work-life balance?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*Do you think that the EU could provide clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds could be used to financially support work-life balance?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*In your view, is there a need for further awareness raising activities on work-life balance policies?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*Who should be in the main target group for any awareness-raising activities? Please select 3 from the list below.

at most 3 choice(s)

- National authorities
- Local / regional authorities
- NGOs
- Employers
- Employees
- General public
- Other
- Don't know

In your view, how effective would the possible new EU-level measures mentioned below be in addressing work-life balance challenges?

	Very effective	Effective	Not very effective	Not effective at all	Don't know
*1. Improved EU-level legislation	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*2. Strengthened EU-level policy guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*3. Enhanced monitoring of work-life balance issues at EU-level and public reporting of the findings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*4. More exchanges of good practice amongst Member States and stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*5. EU-level benchmarks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*6. Strengthened EU-level financial support	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*7. Clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds can be used	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*8. Further awareness-raising activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*9. Other measures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Do you think the effectiveness of the above individual measures could be increased by combining them with others?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please specify which measures could be combined by using the numbers in the table below
(for example, if you think measure 6 should be combined with measure 3 and 5, type in "3,5" next to measure 6).

	The number(s) of the measure(s) to which you would combine this measure (max 6)
1. Improved EU-level legislation	1,2
2. Strengthened EU-level policy guidance	
3. Enhanced monitoring of work-life balance issues at EU-level	3,5
4. More exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders	1,4
5. EU-level benchmarks	5,6,7
6. Strengthened EU-level financial support	
7. Clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds can be used	
8. Further awareness raising activities	1,4,8
9. Other measure (if specified above)	

If you have any additional comments and/or suggestions, feel free to use the open answer box below.

1500 character(s) maximum (1490 characters left)

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