

***Hearing of the Committee on
Women's Rights and Gender
Equality on Maternity,
Paternity and Parental
Leaves***

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Context

- Growing Diversity of Family Patterns
- Increase in the numbers of women in employment
- Increase in educational attainment of women
- A number of work-life balance measures put in place across the EU and in individual Member States
- **Challenges still to be addressed**

Business and Employer Specific Contexts

- Measures can be difficult to plan – and business needs to try to plan
- Can be difficult to manage
 - Keeping in touch
 - Replacement/ cover during absence
 - Perceptions of other in workforce
 - ‘Long’ absences from the workforce
- Inherent tension between
 - Changing customer expectations
 - Changing expectations of employees/potential employees
- There is a cost
- Difficulties/worries in understanding – particularly for SMEs

Comprehensive response

- Comprehensive response must include:
 - Family related leave arrangements
 - Work arrangements
 - Care infrastructures
- The balance between these is different in various Member States and need to be.

Parental Leave

- Original Directive was the result of Social Dialogue
- European level Social Partners currently engaged in negotiations to review it
- Process on-going

Specific Proposals on Maternity Leave – Legal

- At European level, maternity leave is essentially a health and safety issue, and this should remain the case
- Reconciliation measures are important, but should be dealt with separately

Developments across Member States

- Most Member States have gone beyond the minimums set but have come up with their own mixture of measures combining maternity leave/parental leave/flexible working
- This proposal does not take enough account of existing mixture of measures and needs to continue to allow Member States to work out their own balance

Extension of Leave

- Extension from 14 to 18 weeks
- Not clear as to why 14 weeks was not appropriate to protect the Health and Safety of Workers

Additional Leave

- Additional Leave when there is a premature birth, a child is born with a disability or there is a multiple birth is appropriate. It should be proportionate and allow for the special needs of the situation to be accommodated.
- There does need to be clarity on how this will work

Amendments to Article 10

- Prohibition of all preparations for dismissal goes too far
- Justification of dismissal for six months after maternity leave

Amendments to Article 11

- Return to work:
 - Employment rights relating to the employment contract
 - Equivalent posts on terms and conditions that are no less favourable to them

Financial Aspects

- Are clearly the competence of the Member States
- Concerns over potential for undermining choices made in mixture of supports
- Concerns over sustainability of public finances

Conclude

- Employers in Europe are committed to the protection of the health and safety and equal treatment of pregnant and breastfeeding workers.
- Not convinced that amending this Directive is the best way to proceed.