



Opinion on the European Commission's (Directorate-General Justice and Consumers) Public consultation on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers

The Alliance for Maternal Health Equality brings together key actors at EU and national level to work towards ensuring that policies exist and are implemented to deliver equity of access to quality maternal health at all levels.

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The Alliance for Maternal Health Equality (AMHE) welcomes the [European Commission's Public consultation on possible action addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers](#). As the consultation discussed the new Roadmap on the initiative 'A new start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families' (to replace the 2008 Commission proposal to revise the 1992 Maternity Leave Directive), the Alliance fully supports the main objective of the document, namely increasing the participation of women in the labour market.

Following careful consultation of the [Roadmap](#), together with the accompanying [Background document](#), AMHE noted a close alignment of the text with two of our main objectives, as outlined in our [Factsheet](#) and [Manifesto](#):

- Focus on evidence and real-life statistics on the situation of all mothers in Europe
- Policies focusing on empowering and creating a favourable environment for women

In line with the two objectives outlined above, AMHE welcomes the Roadmap's recognition of the difficulties and obstacles faced by women in Europe, in particular in their role of mothers and caregivers, combined with the higher prevalence, compared to men, of under-skilled and/or underpaid work, short-term contracts and part-time jobs. In light of these issues, the roadmap follows the AMHE objectives through the following:

- In terms of non-legislative measures:
 1. the need for EU-level benchmarks (under the form of Council Recommendations, namely through the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), as well as any other relevant Council Configurations, among which the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and the Economic and Financial Affairs (Ecofin)): these should be included on the Council agenda for discussion as soon as possible, ahead of the actual implementation of any legislative measures related to the Roadmap

2. regular monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the framework (through the European semester and thematic reports)
 - In terms of legislative steps:
 1. the enforcement and introduction of legislation that allows for leave-related and flexible working arrangements
 2. coherent legislative package on leave policies, including maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leave
 3. the incentivisation of paternity leave for fathers, and the inclusion the principle of non-transferability to parental leave

However, AMHE believes that all these measures aim to resolve external factors (e.g., employee discrimination by the employer), and, in light of its first objective (universal access to maternal health), **we would like to highlight the need to consider maternal health, and maternal health equity for all women across the EU as part of the Roadmap.** Despite health being included as one of the main policy fields of interest to the document, there is a considerable lack of focus on the matter at this stage.

Issues such as returning to the workplace and flexible working arrangements go hand in hand with the mental and physical wellbeing of the mother, before, during and after pregnancy. This is particularly important in a Europe of declining demographics, where women face a twofold pressure: on the one side, to be active participants in the labour market, and on the other, to embark on motherhood.

In light of all outlined above, AMHE would like to underline the need to approach women's participation in the labour market (mothers and caregivers in particular) in a holistic and encompassing manner. This means focusing on external and internal factors (maternal health) alike, as well as the inclusion and mainstreaming of maternal health in all of the relevant measures the Roadmap considers, particularly the EU-level benchmarks, monitoring of the situation, as well as any legislation serving to enforce and/or introduce maternity leave, flexible work arrangements or any related actions.

Sincerely,

The Alliance for Maternal Health Equality