

Brussels, 30 November 2009

Longer parental leave and incentives for fathers agreed by EU ministers

Parents will have the right to longer parental leave, under new rules agreed by EU ministers today. The revised Directive on Parental Leave will give each working parent the right to at least four months leave after the birth or adoption of a child (up from three months now). At least one of the four months cannot be transferred to the other parent – meaning it will be lost if not taken – offering incentives to fathers to take the leave. The new Directive also provides for better protection against discrimination and a smoother return to work. It puts into effect an agreement between European employers and trade union organisations.

"Full equality on the labour market between men and women will only be attained if working fathers take more responsibility in family affairs, such as looking after their children", stated Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. He added: "The Directive agreed upon today is a decisive contribution to allowing working parents to better balance family and work. I believe that this will strengthen women's position in employment".

The main changes in the new Directive are:

- **Longer leave** – each parent will be able to take four months off per child (previously three months). The extra month cannot be transferred from one parent to the other, thereby encouraging fathers to take their leave. In the past many working fathers have transferred their right to leave to the mother.
- **No discrimination** – an employee applying for or taking parental leave will be protected from any less favourable treatment for doing so.
- **Temporary changes to work schedules** – employees returning from parental leave will have the right to request changes to their working hours for a limited period. In considering such requests, employers will be obliged to balance the needs of the employee as well as the company.
- **Parents of adopted children and children with a disability or long-term illness** – governments and employers/unions will be obliged to assess the specific needs of such parents.
- **Work contracts** – the new rights will apply to all workers, regardless of their type of contract (e.g. fixed-term, part-time, agency workers); however the possibility of a qualification period of maximum one year is maintained.

All matters regarding the income of workers during parental leave are left for Member States and/or national social partners to determine.

The Framework Agreement on parental leave, on which the Directive is based, was signed by the European social partners (BUSINESSEUROPE, ETUC, CEEP and UEAPME) on 18 June 2009 (see also [IP/09/948](#)). It revises an earlier agreement from 1995.

The new Directive will replace Directive 96/34/EC, which put into effect the 1995 social partner agreement and established for the first time minimum standards on parental leave at EU level. More than 15 years later, these rights for working parents have now been strengthened and clarified.

After the political agreement by the Council today, the new Directive will be formally adopted in the coming months. Member States will then have two years to transpose the new rights into national law.

For further information

Video news release:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=671&langId=en&videoId=2141&vI=en>

Commission proposal (COM(2009)410 final):

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2009:0410:FIN:EN:PDF>

Current EU law on reconciliation of work, private and family life:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=420&intPagelId=581&langId=en>

Press release on signing of parental leave agreement (18 June 2009):

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/948&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Press release of the European social partners (18 June 2009):

<http://www.etuc.org/a/6279>

<http://www.buinesseurope.eu/DocShareNoFrame/docs/4/BAEICIEADJMCJKFIFANPIKGNPDBG9DW6719LTE4Q/UNICE/docs/DLS/2009-01395-E.pdf>

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