Better work-life balance for parents and carers in the EU: Council adopts new rules

The Council today adopted a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers which aims to increase the participation of women in the labour market and the take-up of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements. The new act also provides opportunities for workers to be granted leave to care for relatives who need support. The legislation means that parents and carers will be better able to reconcile their professional and private lives, and companies will benefit from more motivated workers.

Main elements of the directive

- **paternity leave** - fathers or second parents will be able to take at least 10 working days of leave around the time of birth of a child paid at a level equal to that currently set at EU level for maternity leave (in line with article 11 of Council Directive 92/85/EEC). The right to paternity leave will not be subject to a prior service requirement. However, the payment of paternity leave can be subject to a six-month prior service requirement. Member states with more generous parental leave systems will be able to keep their current national arrangements
- **parental leave** - an individual right to 4 months of parental leave, from which 2 months are non-transferable between the parents and are paid. The level of payment and the age limit of the child will be set by member states
- **carers’ leave** - a new concept at EU level for workers caring for relatives in need of care or support due to serious medical reasons. Carers will be able to take 5 working days per year. Member states may use a different reference period, allocate leave on a case-by-case basis, and may introduce additional conditions for the exercise of this right
- **flexible working arrangements** - the right for parents to request these arrangements has been extended to include working carers.

Background and next steps

The Commission presented its proposal in April 2017. On 21 June 2018, the Council adopted its position which formed the basis for the negotiations with the European Parliament. The presidency of the Council and the Parliament reached an agreement on 24 January 2019, followed by a vote by the EP on 4 April 2019. After today’s adoption by the Council, the text of the directive will be published in the Official Journal of the EU. It will enter into force on the twentieth day following the publication. Member States will then have three years to adopt laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with the directive.

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