

Possible action to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers

Fields marked with * are mandatory.

Identifying Information

* Where are you based?

Belgium

* Are you replying on behalf of an organisation?

- No, I'm replying as an individual citizen
- Yes

* What is the name of the organisation?

Secretariat of COMECE (Commission of the Episcopates of the European Community)

* What type of organisation is this?

- Central Government / Ministry
- Other public authority (local, regional, equality body, etc.)
- Worker organisation / trade union
- Employer organisation
- European network
- Small or Medium-sized Enterprise
- Large organisation / company
- Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)
- Researcher / academic
- Think-tank / Consultancy
- Media
- International Organisation

- European Institution
 Other

* Please specify

Organisation representing churches and religious communities (Section V of the Transparency Register)

What is your organisations's Transparency Register number?

4735003690969

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Do you agree to your contribution being published?

- Yes, my contribution may be published under my name (or the name of the entity I represent)
 Yes, my contribution may be published but should be kept anonymous (without my name or the name of the entity I represent)
 No, I do not want my contribution to be published. (The details of your contribution will not be published but it may be used for statistical and analytical purposes)

The purpose of this consultation

In August 2015, the Commission published a "Roadmap" for 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 Maternity Leave Directive[1]. The objective for this initiative is to increase the participation of women in the labour market by modernising and adapting the current EU legal and policy framework to today's labour market to allow for parents with children and/or dependent relatives to better balance family and work life, allow for a greater sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, and to strengthen gender equality in the labour market.

In line with Article 154(2) TFEU, the Commission has launched the first stage consultation with the European social partners to obtain their views on the possible direction of European Union action, in particular on legislative measures concerning family leaves and flexible working arrangements that could address these challenges. In accordance with Article 155 TFEU, during the first stage consultation social partners may inform the Commission on their wish to initiate a negotiation process for a social partner's agreement. In such a case, the Commission suspends its initiative for the duration of the negotiations. If these are successfully concluded, social partners may request their agreement be implemented by the Commission presenting a proposal for a Council Decision.

Legislative and policy measures can be complementary elements in a package in order to improve work-life balance. Therefore the roadmap also outlines possible non-legislative options for the way forward, including comprehensive policy guidance to Member States in the area of work-life balance, as well as reinforced monitoring, better use of EU funds and knowledge-sharing activities.

The purpose of this consultation is to gather views on the development and implementation of a range of possible tools at EU-level to support work-life balance.

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

Need to reverse negative demographic trends in most Member States. Migratory influxes cannot be the primary solution. Structural, solid, cross-cutting family policies/laws are the long-term answer.

Challenge 2

200 character(s) maximum

Enabling parents to fulfill their responsibilities towards their children (educational role, quality time). Leaves' impact on physical/mental health of mothers, fathers and their children.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the affordability of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*Improving the quality of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the quality of formal long-term care services	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of disability-related home support	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="radio"/>
Other policy measure(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

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

The failed revision of the Maternity Leave Directive must be followed by flexible solutions that better safeguard standards in the national systems. Resuming work on the Directive must be part of the initiative. Option 1 together with elements of Option 2 is the best solution. The revision of Directive 2006/54/EC should focus on the added social value of family life. Long-term care should be, when adequate, de-institutionalised. The economic value of domestic/home care work should be recognised.

[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

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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*4. More exchanges of good practice amongst Member States and stakeholders	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*5. EU-level benchmarks	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*6. Strengthened EU-level financial support	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*8. Further awareness-raising activities	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*9. Other measures	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please specify

200 character(s) maximum

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

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

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

1500 character(s) maximum

The one to a balance between family and professional life is a fundamental right to be effectively protected. The expression "work-life" balance does not reflect the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and overlooks the central role of the family in society. Proposals for the area should respect Articles 7, 9, 23, 24 (in particular: child's best interest) and 33 of the EU Charter.

EU texts on leaves should encourage both the mother and the father to take up their vocation and shared responsibility for their children. Their unmet wish

for having children has to be tackled. It would be opportune to integrate the concept of "family mainstreaming" in EU laws. Studies show that large families are particularly vulnerable to poverty: their specific needs should also be integrated in EU family policies/legislation.

National legislations can inspire EU solutions (e.g. to protect parents who have children with disability/serious or long-term incapacitating illness). National options, including on the particular protection of family founded on marriage, must be respected.

Fatherhood and motherhood as such are a positive and essential contribution to the common good of society and cannot be connoted as an obstacle. Rather the surrounding environment or ineffective policies/legislation create work-related obstacles for parents.

We express support for the contributions of the European Sunday Alliance and of the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE).

Background Documents

Background Doc BG (</eusurvey/files/dc24054a-23e3-42ef-a7ab-e290979f48dd>)

Background Doc CS (</eusurvey/files/5367e84c-c4ec-421c-9123-f06815e02a90>)

Background Doc DA (</eusurvey/files/2e81a83b-52c0-4c17-a3a6-8834b001154b>)

Background Doc DE (</eusurvey/files/b4aa5e36-d1f4-4c5b-b21e-62f1cd6f0541>)

Background Doc EL (</eusurvey/files/c26f27d9-4424-4efd-a907-f3801b7fd0c1>)

Background Doc EN (</eusurvey/files/9e9b2435-490a-4d99-b9e3-d90456d43cb0>)

Background Doc ES (</eusurvey/files/3fc9e8bb-dad9-4749-a353-ae3913a098b>)

Background Doc ET (</eusurvey/files/d1666456-6efc-4b44-b6ed-dcf55247b52a>)

Background Doc FI (</eusurvey/files/94094072-1f76-48dc-9c47-5d1f5690153c>)

Background Doc FR (</eusurvey/files/6a3e3413-4eb2-4cfe-b4d9-4064331c840d>)

Background Doc HR (</eusurvey/files/b5916d33-28ef-4f41-a429-5483a060f2f1>)

Background Doc HU (</eusurvey/files/beb4cd69-fc94-4e17-91bf-b11497aa1f21>)

Background Doc IT (</eusurvey/files/8bc96cb6-3a05-4ce1-ba76-22a93f71128d>)

Background Doc LT (</eusurvey/files/0fe97693-2b5d-474a-86ab-b5f8d6dc6422>)

Background Doc LV (</eusurvey/files/69ab3e04-af5a-4ad6-8d5d-b7360ada1204>)

Background Doc MT (</eusurvey/files/bfb34fda-70d3-4f82-a5ec-d481d6ce0445>)

Background Doc NL (</eusurvey/files/373ccf66-e7fc-4071-bd66-7a0696bd1e49>)

Background Doc PL (</eusurvey/files/2a74ff96-be99-4be4-8cfc-980cbcd8adf6>)

Background Doc PT (</eusurvey/files/777551de-6f0f-4d24-95fe-103f0b358449>)

Background Doc RO (</eusurvey/files/ea7ea588-0555-4da7-8b55-8542ec3ee03f>)

Background Doc SK (</eusurvey/files/5d0513e4-455f-443e-a083-da44caf915c5>)

Background Doc SL (</eusurvey/files/70a45731-f9cf-48ef-85a4-2a34a5729eb6>)

Background Doc SV (</eusurvey/files/a8f78b35-98d0-4663-a03f-e7b8bcd363f1>)

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