

Model Letter to EU Ministers of Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality, all European decision-makers

Subject: Rethink Refit - Save the Maternity Leave Directive now!

[Date]

Dear Minister,

[Your confederation/trade union] calls on you to save the proposal to revise the Maternity Leave Directive, which has been on the table since 2010 and is threatened to be withdrawn by the European Commission, as “red tape”.

We invite you to accept the proposal to set up a Working Group to break the deadlock and resume negotiations.

The threat to remove the Maternity Leave Directive from the legislative process is serious as it contradicts Europe's rhetoric on its commitment to gender equality and effective work-life balance for women and men in Europe. It will also create a serious precedent of the “better regulation” agenda (REFIT), which is sacrificing social standards in the name of administrative burdens.

On the contrary, adopting a stronger Maternity Leave Directive would have a positive and direct benefit to millions of families and would send a positive message to people across the EU that it is committed to their rights and a more social and fair Europe.

Background

In 2008 the European Commission proposed to raise maternity leave to 18 weeks, the standard of the UN International Labour Organisation. Since then there has been no agreement on how much to increase and pay maternity leave. The European Commission said in December 2014 it will withdraw the proposal (e.i. by end of June 2015) if agreement is not reached within 6 months and replace it by a “modern alternative”. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) however, fears that such a proposal would not be legally binding and would consequently have little or no benefit.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), together with its affiliates has been calling for 18 week paid maternity leave that would ensure higher standards for women in countries including Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. In only 2 countries – Croatia and Germany – would maternity leave have to be increased by as much as 4 weeks in order to reach the 18 week international standard.

18 weeks maternity leave is an international standard. Better protection for pregnant workers is needed for health and safety reasons, as well as to stop the rising tide of unfair dismissals of women when they inform their employer of their pregnancy or return to work after maternity leave. This Directive is needed to improve women's rights and economic independence, and far greater gender equality across the EU.

Women in Europe continue to earn on average 16% less than men. It is often at the moment of childbirth that the gender pay gap kicks in, with life-long often irreversible consequences, including women's pension 40% less than men.

A clear stand against the withdrawal of the Directive from [COUNTRY] is essential. We call on you to resume negotiations to ensure that a robust Maternity Leave Directive guarantees equal opportunities and health and safety standards for all women in Europe.

Yours sincerely,