

ETUC Press Release

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To: Veerle Solia

Two years overdue: time for the European Council to deliver on maternity leave directive

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The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European Women's Lobby (EWL) representing millions of working women across Europe have written an open letter calling on EU leaders to move forward on the revision of EU maternity legislation. Both organizations are very concerned that over two years have passed since the European Parliament adopted its first reading position on the European Commission's proposal to revise the Pregnant Workers' Directive and that no official response has been forthcoming from the European Council. Refusal to adopt a strong maternity directive is sending a negative message to society as a whole.

Pregnancy and maternity protection is essential for achieving gender equality and the protection of women's rights. There is evidence that maternity related discrimination is still a significant problem and increasing due to the crisis. This is a reason why, the ETUC and the EWL believe that the proposals put forward for a revised Directive would make a positive difference to millions of women and their babies. Women's participation in labour market is crucial to our economy and the recovery.

Moreover, the issue of pay during maternity leave cannot be dissociated from the broader issue of the gender pay gap. Reductions in pay during maternity leave contribute significantly to substantive pay inequality throughout women's lives.

Pregnant women and new mothers are among the most vulnerable workers in the labour market, a situation which is exacerbated in times of recession. This illustrates the urgent need to strengthen the protection of women during pregnancy and on return to work.

The economic crisis should not be used as an excuse for inaction on important health & safety and equality measures. The EU must reaffirm and fulfill its long standing commitments and Treaty obligations to equality between women and men.

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