

Brussels, 18 June 2009

Parental leave: the European social partners sign the revised version of the Framework Agreement

The new Framework Agreement concluded by the social partners increases the duration of parental leave from three to four months per parent and applies to all employees regardless of their type of contract. It is the result of six months' negotiations between the social partners and reflects the changes that have occurred in society and on the labour market since the first Framework Agreement on parental leave was signed in 1995. Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities attended the official signing this morning.

"This agreement proves that the European social partnership works and delivers concrete results for workers and companies in Europe", stated Vladimír Špidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. He added: "This agreement specifically addresses one of the priority objectives of gender equality and shows a determination to find ways of improving the balance between family and working life, while at the same time taking account of the diversity of national regulatory frameworks, practices and traditions".

The new Framework Agreement on family leave was signed this morning by the European social partners: ETUC, BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME.

The new Agreement:

- increases parental leave from three to four months for each parent. One of the four months shall be non-transferrable between the parents;
- states that it applies to all workers, regardless of their type of contract (fixed-term, part-time, etc.);
- also gives parents returning to work after parental leave the opportunity to request a change to their working conditions (working hours, for example);
- increases protection not just against dismissal but also against any unfavourable treatment as a result of the exercise of the right to parental leave.

The Commission must now examine the provisions of the agreement. Before the summer, it will submit a proposal to the Council for implementation of the agreement by a directive while taking into account the Treaty provisions on social dialogue. The directive must be adopted by a qualified majority of the Council.

Background

After the two stages of consultation on reconciling private, working and family life with the involvement of the European social partners, the cross-industry social dialogue institutions decided to negotiate an agreement on parental leave. This resulted in the conclusion of the first Framework Agreement at Community level in December 1995, followed by a Council Directive in 1996 (Directive 96/34/EC). Almost 15 years later, considering that it was time to update the contents of this agreement, the partners decided to negotiate a revised version. The negotiations started in September 2008 and were completed in March 2009.

For further information

Further information on social dialogue:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=329&langId=en>

Further information on the promotion of gender equality:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=418&langId=en>

2009 annual report on equality between women and men:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/booklets/equality/pdf/eul1450_090330_bas_en.pdf

Pay gap campaign website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/equalpay>

Video News release: Fighting the gender pay gap in Europe

http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=detail&prodid=8786&src=1

Video News release: Women to the top

http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/video/video_prod_en.cfm?type=detail&prodid=8787&src=1