



## **SECOND-STAGE CONSULTATION OF EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS ON RECONCILIATION OF PROFESSIONAL, PRIVATE AND FAMILY LIFE CEC POSITION**

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CEC recognizes that reconciliation of work and family life is one of the major topics on the European social agenda and is especially relevant for executives and managerial staff. Indeed reconciliation of work, private and family life for men and women is indispensable to boost the insufficient fertility rate, increase women employment rate and share more equally the caring responsibility towards the children and the elderly.

Globalisation obliges many managers to travel and work a lot in order to keep up with their duties. This makes the reconciliation of professional, private and family life difficult. However, managers have like any other employee families and they should have the same rights and opportunities to reconcile professional, private and family life.

To achieve this result, specific obstacles have to be abolished. In first place, regulations on leave and maternity protection need updates. Secondly, the reconciliation of professional, private and family life has to be made possible at the workplace through raising awareness campaigns and different practical tools developed below.

### **CEC answers to the questions:**

#### **The Commission requested the social partners:**

- 1. To forward an opinion or, where appropriate, a recommendation on the objectives and content of the envisaged proposals that follow, concerning the update of the regulatory framework through the introduction of new types of leave and a greater attention to maternity protection.**

#### **a. New types of leave**

##### *(i) Paternity leave*

CEC is in favour of introducing a paternity leave, i.e. a short period of leave reserved for fathers around the time of the birth or adoption of a child. Indeed this kind of leave does not exist in many European countries and the length is very variable from one country to another (2 to 90 days).

Issues relating to the duration of such leave, payment, employment rights, etc., should be left out to the Member States together with the social partners. Thus the European regulatory framework would only set out minimum requirements on the model of parental leave. Moreover the regulation should state a protection against dismissal and/or to return to the same post which is not the case in all countries where the leave is possible.

Paternity leave would encourage fathers to take a more equal share of caring responsibilities. However CEC underlines that the crucial point will be to give the possibility to fathers to effectively make use of this leave. Indeed in many countries, paternity or parental leave for the father especially for managers is still perceived in a negative way at

the workplace and even among relatives. A French study illustrates this situation by showing that men in managerial or higher position in the private sector make less use of their paternity leave<sup>1</sup> (page 5 and 6). This is due to social habits and longer working hours.

This is why, according to CEC, a strong information and raising awareness campaign is indispensable in order to disseminate a positive image of fathers sharing equally care for the family and domestic duties within the couple. This initiative should also focus on male managers in order to break stereotypes at the workplace.

Otherwise, and despite appropriate regulations, the burden of house-keeping and of childcare will keep falling on women, hindering a real reintegration of women at work and impeding them to access managerial positions.

*(ii) Leave to care for dependent family members*

*(iii) Adoption leave*

CEC supports the introduction of such leaves as it would enable managers, both men and women, to be involved in their family life while being able to keep up with their professional obligations. As for the paternity leave, issues relating to the duration, payment, employment rights, etc., should be left out to the Member States together with the social partners. The European regulatory framework would only set out minimum requirements.

#### **b. Maternity protection**

*(i) Duration of leave*

*(ii) Level of payment*

*(iii) Protection of women returning from maternity leave*

CEC judges the conditions of maternity leave currently disposed by European law quite satisfactory. However considering the growing importance of reconciliation policies and demographic changes, an increase in the duration of the leave could be considered.

CEC advocates for a personalized follow-up of women through an interview with the hierarchy before and after maternity leave. This would guarantee female managers a smoother reintegration into a dynamic and sometime stressing working environment.

#### **2. To notify the Commission, where applicable, of their intention to initiate the negotiation process on the basis of those proposals, in accordance with Article 138(4) and Article 139 of the EC treaty.**

Following the recommendations stated in the previous question, CEC is in favour of initiating the negotiation process in order to update regulations on leave and maternity protection and make reconciliation policies accessible also for managers.

#### **3. To assess the provisions of their framework agreement on parental leave with a view to its review and to report on progress by March 2008.**

Considering the importance of the topic, CEC is in favour of a review of the framework agreement on parental leave, in order to assess the progresses achieved throughout Europe and the necessity to improve or update it.

#### **4. To forward an opinion on the items that follow.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Etudes et résultats*, n° 442, novembre 2005, le congé paternité. Denise BAUER, Sophie PENET  
Ministère de l'Emploi, de la cohésion sociale et du logement, Ministère de la Santé et des solidarités, Drees :  
<http://www.sante.gouv.fr/drees/etude-resultat/er442/er442.pdf>

There are several practical tools to support reconciliation policies. They do not necessarily demand considerable organisational changes. Some improvements could be achieved, if the propositions are supported and implemented in the companies.

#### **i. Childcare and care facilities for other dependants**

The support for childcare and for the care of other dependants enables managers to be involved in their family life while keeping up with their obligations. This is essential especially for managers but also for single parents.

CEC proposes the following solutions that could be promoted in the companies in order to encounter the needs of employees with regard to their private life:

- Creation of multi-enterprises nursery or day care with the help of Member States subsidies: specially convenient for SMEs that could not afford a company day care or nursery.
- Cheques delivered from employment services to pay the babysitter or housekeeper to which both the employee and the employer should financially participate. They should also benefit from a tax reduction<sup>2</sup>.
- Partnership between the enterprise and childcare associations, with a possible financial support from the enterprise and/or the works council. Tax reduction should also be conceded.
- Free access to addresses and database of childcare structures through the company or works councils in order to ease the research and administrative formalities.

#### **ii. Exchange of good practices**

European Social Partners like CEC play an active role in the exchange of good practices, thanks to their network of national member organisations.

The annual conference of the CEC on the topic of equal opportunities is a good example. It allowed the exchange of experiences between different countries regarding reconciliation policies through the workshop dedicated to women in management.

The European Commission could open a specific call for proposals to foster exchange and information campaigns on this topic. A network dedicated to work-life balance issues could be promoted and managed at European level.

#### **iii. Encouraging men to take up reconciliation measures**

As formerly stated, CEC considers that changing mentalities is the priority, as family matters concern not only the parents but the whole society.

- **Fighting stereotypes through education** is one of the first steps to be accomplished. ACEO, Greek member organisation of CEC, brings with its contribution some interesting propositions which are being tested at national level:
  - Extension to the primary education, of programs aiming at training and awareness-raising of teachers on matters of gender equality, relations between the sexes. Evaluation of secondary education textbooks, from the viewpoint of the gender dimension and equal opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> Chèques Emploi Service Universel (CESU) used in France

- Redefinition of school vocational orientation in the direction of eliminating the gender-based gap in the field of work, with a parallel implementation of the mainstreaming policy in syllabuses of vocational orientation.
- Reinforcing consultative centers on matters of girl-students' entrepreneurship.
- Establishment of a Registry for Gender Equality Advisors in primary and secondary education, who are going to handle relevant issues in school units in the future.

CEC believes that breaking stereotypes at the earliest age is crucial and that the benefits will be visible within the next generation of employees. Young managers having an educational background free from gender-related stereotypes will be ready to invest more time in their family responsibilities. Employers sharing the same mentality will not hinder this evolution.

#### • **Fighting stereotypes at the workplace**

To encourage fathers to take up reconciliation measures they should benefit of the same advantages as women concerning the duration and payment of parental leave, but also flexible working arrangement.

Employers must also be aware of the benefits that reconciliation policies can bring to the company in terms of quality of work, productivity and corporate image. Subsidising the labour costs during the leave could also encourage employers and managers to make use of these leaves.

Again CEC considers that massive information and communication campaigns to promote reconciliation policies at all levels and involving all actors (fathers and mothers, employers and workers' representatives within the enterprises, institutions) represent the milestone to assure a real application of the legal provisions and to break stereotypes.

#### **iv. New ways of working**

##### ➤ **Flexible and family friendly working hours**

Flexible and family friendly working hours enable managers to be more involved in their family care. Additionally, it facilitates and supports women in the access to managerial positions.

Some companies have set up a flexible working time allowing employees to arrive between 7am and 9am and to leave between 4pm and 6pm for example, while respecting the mandatory common attendance between 9am and 4pm and the weekly working time. It could be the answer to the employees' needs while preserving a full efficiency for enterprises.

If the employee has to work longer he can cumulate the hours and use them as short leaves. This system allows employees to organize their work according to their extra professional activities.

Another solution has been developed by CCP, CEC Spanish member, through the "Basic Proposal on the managers working time distribution", inspired by the experience of L'Oréal in France. It contains measures of flexible working time in order to encourage men to be more involved in family cares by having the possibility of better organising their working time. The aim of this tool is also to eliminate obstacles that women face to access managerial positions because of the long working time it requires.

Those tools could be generalised through collective bargaining at national level, branch or company level.

➤ **Communication technologies**

Telework represents an interesting option when it is compatible with the company activity and employees function. It reduces tiredness and time loss due to long transportation time in urban areas while allowing more availability for family care.

Enterprises should promote this kind of work arrangement on a voluntary basis and in the full respect of the Framework agreement on telework.

Communication facilities could also enable employees or more particularly managers on parental leave to be informed of the progression of their work and thus facilitate their reintegration after the leave.

➤ **Professional training during parental leave and part-time activity**

The possibility to take a professional training during a leave or a part-time activity should be eased, when possible, to allow employees to keep up with the development of their company. Thus they would not lose their close connection with the company.

➤ **Raising awareness and training of managers on the issue**

Managers have a dual role because they fulfil employers' functions in complement to their role as an employee. Therefore, their awareness must be raised on this issue in order to favour and promote the reconciliation of professional, family and private life.

**v. Equal pay**

CEC asks for a strong commitment of the European Institutions on this issue, as the present evolutions of the labour market (mobility, trans-national projects managed by the enterprises, etc.) make the need of a uniformed orientation throughout Europe more urgent. The issue of an equal pay is very important to encourage the access of women to managerial positions.

An equal wage in relation to the same tasks and at the same level of responsibility should be assured via a stricter application of the existing legislation and through the negotiation of collective agreements on gender equality at all levels.

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