

Citizens' summary

EU proposal – parental leave

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Parental leave is special leave from work for parents to look after their children for a certain period of time. It:

- helps people **balance the demands of work and family life**.
- can **give women equivalent work opportunities** to men.
- gives parents **greater freedom** to decide how many children they want.

WHAT EXACTLY WOULD CHANGE?

Working parents were given the right to parental leave in a 1995 agreement between European employers and trade unions.

The proposal would make a **recently revised** version of that agreement **law across the EU**, with the following effects:

- **longer leave** – each parent would be able to take **4 months off per child** (previously 3 months). The extra month could not be transferred from one parent to the other.
- **no discrimination** – an employee applying for or taking parental leave would be protected from any form of discrimination for doing so.
- **temporary changes to working hours** – employees returning from parental leave would have the right to request changes to their work schedules for a limited period.

In considering such requests, employers would be obliged to balance the needs of the employee as well as the company.

- **parents of adopted children / children with disability or long-term illness** – governments and employers/unions would be obliged to assess the specific needs of such parents.

WHO WOULD BENEFIT AND HOW?

Working parents

- **longer leave** (many EU countries currently offer only 3 months) and better protection against discrimination.
- **encouragement for fathers** to take on more family responsibilities because the 4th month could not be transferred to mothers and would be lost if not taken.
- **more women in the workforce** because it would become easier to share family responsibilities.

Employers

- employees' **return to work would go more smoothly** thanks to specific measures, such as employers keeping in touch with them during the leave period to ensure they are aware of key developments while away.

WHY DOES ACTION HAVE TO BE TAKEN BY THE EU?

- National governments are mainly responsible for employment policy. But the EU has a complementary role, setting **minimum labour standards** and creating a **level-playing field** for European employers.
- In practice, this involves European federations of employers groups and trade unions negotiating **agreements on minimum European standards** – some countries currently offer longer leave, others shorter – which are then implemented across the EU.
- This **sets a minimum level of protection in every EU country.**

** The proposal lays down **general rules only**. The details would be worked out by national governments and national employers groups/trade unions.*

WHEN IS THE PROPOSAL LIKELY TO COME INTO EFFECT?

- **Late 2011** (if approved as planned by end 2009).