

Withdrawal of EU maternity leave directive is 'lost opportunity'

Written by Des Hinton-Beales on 9 July 2014 in News
News

Vice-chair of parliament's women rights and gender equality committee Inês Zuber has called the decision to withdraw the controversial maternity leave directive a blow for the "social rights" of working mothers.



Zuber raised her concerns at a press conference in the European parliament on Monday, where she criticised the European council's refusal to discuss the directive, saying, "The council can negotiate, but it lacks the will."

MEPs approved a revision of the directive in 2010, which allows for "20 weeks paid maternity leave and two weeks paid paternity", said Zuber, who added that "the revision also says that when a working mother returns to her place of work that she cannot be discriminated against for being a mother".

"We should defend equality," stressed the Portuguese MEP, who said that the 2010 revision would

"improve social rights for mother workers".

"Women are discriminated against for being mothers, they earn less if they are mothers and this contributes to the EU's gender pay gap" - Inês Zuber

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"There should be negotiations with the council. There is a danger that we cannot achieve a goal that was achieved four years ago and that means that the council will not respect the decision of the European parliament," said the GUE/NGL deputy.

MEPs have made overtures to the council to negotiate on member state concerns over the potential cost implications of increased maternity leave, but stressed that the EU2020 strategy target of 75 per cent employment rate for women would be unattainable without further reconciliation of work and family life.

"The decision to withdraw this directive is scandalous as potential and pregnant women workers are being taken hostage but so too are men as the proposed directive also includes provisions on paternity leave" - EWL

Because of council's unwillingness to negotiate, the commission is withdrawing the draft directive under the regulatory fitness and performance (REFIT) programme, which is designed to make EU law simpler and to reduce regulatory costs.

Zuber called on national organisations to exert pressure on member state governments, warning that if the directive is withdrawn it would represent a "lost opportunity".

In an open letter to commission president-elect Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Women's Lobby was also highly critical, saying, "The decision to withdraw this directive is scandalous as potential and pregnant women workers are being taken hostage but so too are men as the proposed directive also includes provisions on paternity leave."

Zuber repeatedly called on national organisations to hold the European council to account in their member states, stressing that "the revision of the directive, would have improved the benefits and rights that mothers and workers had in a lot of countries".

"This is not a nice act of the council or European commission," she concluded.

About the author

Des Hinton-Beales is deputy editor of the Parliament Magazine

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