



European Federation
for Services to Individuals

Avenue du Port 86C box 302
1000 Brussels

T +32 (0)2 204 08 73

F +32 (0)2 203 42 68

info@efsi-europe.eu

www.efsi-europe.eu

EFSI's contribution to the public consultation “Possible action to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers”

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

1. *Where are you based ?

Belgium

2. * Are you replying on behalf of an organisation ?

- No, I'm replying as an individual citizen
- Yes

***What is the name of the organisation ?**

The European Federation for Services to Individuals.

***What type of organisation is this ?**

- Central Government / Ministry
Other public authority (local, regional, equality body, etc.)
- Worker organisation / trade union
- Employer organisation
- European network
- Small or Medium-sized Enterprise
- Large organisation / company
- Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)

- Researcher / academic
- Think-tank / Consultancy
- Media
- International Organisation
- European Institution
- Other

***What is your organisations's Transparency Register number?**

Register ID number: 57795906755-89

3. Contributions received from this survey will be published on the European Commission's website (for further information, please consult the privacy statement). Do you agree to your contribution being published ?

- Yes, my contribution may be published under my name (or the name of the entity I represent)
- Yes, my contribution may be published but should be kept anonymous (without my name or the name of the entity I represent)
- No, I do not want my contribution to be published. (The details of your contribution will not be published but it may be used for statistical and analytical purposes)

THE PURPOSE OF THIS CONSULTATION

In August 2015, the Commission published a "Roadmap" for the initiative 'A new start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families' to replace the 2008 Commission proposal to revise the Maternity Leave Directive¹. The objective for this initiative is to increase the participation of women in the labour market by modernising and adapting the current EU legal and policy framework to today's labour market to allow for parents with children and/or dependent relatives to better balance family and work life, allow for a greater sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, and to strengthen gender equality in the labour market.

In line with Article 154(2) TFEU, the Commission has launched the first stage consultation with the European social partners to obtain their views on the possible direction of European Union action, in particular on legislative measures concerning family leaves and flexible working arrangements that could address these challenges. In accordance with Article 155 TFEU, during the first stage consultation social partners may inform the Commission on their wish to initiate a negotiation process for a social partner's agreement. In such a case, the Commission suspends its initiative for the duration of the negotiations. If these are successfully concluded, social partners may request their agreement be implemented by the Commission presenting a proposal for a Council Decision.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_just_xxx_maternity_leave.en.pdf

Legislative and policy measures can be complementary elements in a package in order to improve work-life balance. Therefore the roadmap also outlines possible non-legislative options for the way forward, including comprehensive policy guidance to Member States in the area of work-life balance, as well as reinforced monitoring, better use of EU funds and knowledge-sharing activities.

The purpose of this consultation is to gather views on the development and implementation of a range of possible tools at EU-level to support work-life balance.

A. GENERAL FEEDBACK

The background document outlines several challenges to work-life balance and women's participation in the labour market.

4. Do you agree with the description of the challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- Don't know

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Challenges 1

In addition to the lack of care services and the unequal sharing of caring and domestic activities between women and men, the lack of affordable and accessible household services is a key challenge.

Challenges 2

n.a.

B. POLICY AREAS

The background document outlines several key policies that have a positive impact on work-life balance and women's participation in the labour market. These policy areas include:

- * Childcare
- * Long-term care services
- * Family-related leave arrangements for both women and men
- * Flexible working arrangements for both women and men
- * Tax-benefit systems that make work pay for both partners

6. *Do you agree that the above list of policy areas is accurate and complete ?

- Yes
- No
- Partially*
- Don't know

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please specify

Ensuring access to formal, affordable and qualitative household services should also be considered as a key area given that EU citizens spend on average 11 hours per week on housework and cooking.

8. Below is a list of possible policy measures. In your view, which would be the most important measures to improve work-life balance and female labour market participation in your country?

	Highest Priority (max. 3)	Medium Priority	Low Priority	Not important at all	Don't know
*Improving the possibilities and/or incentives for parents and other people with dependent family members to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures (such as leave and/or flexible working arrangements)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
*Improving the possibilities and/or incentives for men, in particular, to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures (such as leave and/or flexible working arrangements)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
*Better facilitating parents' transitions back to work after taking maternity/parental leave (e.g., adapting workplaces to better allow for breastfeeding, informing them of employment promotion and training)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

opportunities while they are on leave)					
*Improving the availability of childcare (e.g., number of places)	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the affordability of childcare	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the quality of childcare	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of formal long-term care services, including home/community-based services	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the affordability of formal long-term care services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the quality of formal long-term care services	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving the availability of disability-related home support	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Improving support measures for people with ill/disabled/frail relatives (e.g., financial support, support services)	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*Removing tax-benefit disincentives for parents/people with caring responsibilities to enter the labour market (e.g., tax disincentives for the lower earning partner to work, benefit traps)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Other policy measure(s)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C. EU-LEVEL ACTION

9. *In your view is there a need for further EU-level action on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

10. * In your view, is there a need to improve the EU-level legislative framework in order to address the challenges of work-life balance, for example in relation to maternity leave, parental leave, flexible working arrangements, carers' leave and/or paternity leave?

- Yes

- No
- Don't know

11. * Please explain what type of improvements could be considered as regards the current EU legislative framework².

EFSI considers that a coherent and comprehensive perspective of the existing legislative initiatives is currently lacking. Thus, any EU investment plan should target care and household services in the long run. Secondly, a proactive European employment strategy for personal and household services sectors is needed in order to ensure that there is enough qualified workers to meet the demand. Finally, reconciliation measures should be systematically monitored within the European semester.

12. * In your view, is there a need for further EU-level policy guidance on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

13. * In your view, is there a need for strengthened monitoring at EU-level on measures to address work-life balance challenges?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

14. * In your view, could the EU support further exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders in this area?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

15. * Do you think the EU could develop meaningful benchmarks³ in the area of work-life balance policies that could be monitored, for example, through the European Semester process?

- Yes
- No

² [NB] A separate consultation is being conducted with the social partners on issues in the current EU legal framework, such as in the area of leaves and flexible working arrangements. The outcome of this public consultation shall not influence the outcome of the consultation with the social partners.

³A benchmark can be defined as "a standard or point of reference against which things may be compared or assessed" (Pearsall, 1999: 125).

Don't know

Please indicate which policy areas these benchmarks could cover (choose all that apply)

- Childcare*
- Long-term care services*
- Family-related leave arrangements for both men and women
- Flexible working arrangements for both women and men
- Tax-benefit systems that make work pay for both partners
- Other*
- Don't know

Please specify

In addition, benchmarks in the area of work-life balance should cover household services (i.e. cleaning, cooking, ironing, home repairs, gardening, maintenance and remedial classes).

16. Currently, the EU financially supports Member States in their implementation of work-life balance policies through its funds, notably the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund. Do you find the current funds and their regulations effective in supporting work-life balance?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know*

Please explain (500 character(s) maximum)

n/a

17. *Do you think that the EU could provide clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds could be used to financially support work-life balance?

- Yes*
- No
- Don't know

18. In your view, is there a need for further awareness raising activities on work-life balance policies?

- Yes*
- No
- Don't know

19. *Who should be in the main target group for any awareness-raising activities?

Please select 3 from the list below.

at most 3 choice(s)

- National authorities
- Local / regional authorities
- NGOs
- Employers
- Employees
- General public
- Other
- Don't know

20. In your view, how effective would the possible new EU-level measures mentioned below be in addressing work-life balance challenges?

	Very effective	Effective	Not very effective	Not effective at all	Don't know
*1. Improved EU-level legislation	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*2. Strengthened EU-level policy guidance	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*3. Enhanced monitoring of work-life balance issues at EU-level and public reporting of the findings	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*4. More exchanges of good practice amongst Member States and stakeholders	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*5. EU-level benchmarks	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*6. Strengthened EU-level financial support	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*7. Clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds can be used	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*8. Further awareness-raising activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*9. Other measures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

21. Do you think the effectiveness of the above individual measures could be increased by combining them with others?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Please specify which measures could be combined by using the numbers in the table below (for example, if you think measure 6 should be combined with measure 3 and 5, type in "3,5" next to measure 6).

	The number(s) of the measure(s) to which you would combine this measure (max 6)
1. Improved EU-level legislation	2
2. Strengthened EU-level policy guidance	1, 4
3. Enhanced monitoring of work-life balance issues at EU-level	5
4. More exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders	1, 2, 8
5. EU-level benchmarks	3
6. Strengthened EU-level financial support	7
7. Clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds can be used	6
8. Further awareness raising activities	4
9. Other measure (if specified above)	

EFSI considers that reconciliation policies must not be considered as benefits for women or parents only but rather as a deeper change in our society targeting all workers, regardless of their gender, family status or the size of the organisation they work for. As stressed previously, caring responsibilities are not the only one impacting women's employment: 53% of EU workers declared in 2011 that they came home too tired to do household jobs that need to be done several times a month (Eurofound). Thus, EFSI calls on the European Commission to address jointly the need to have access to affordable, accessible and qualitative childcare, home care and household services (i.e. cleaning, ironing, etc.). As such, PHS major contribution to work-life balance, as being a flexible solution respecting EU citizens' preferences and needs must be recognized. It should be ensured that EU laws do not constitute an obstacle to the implementation at national level of an adequate fiscal and regulatory framework enabling EU citizens to have access to affordable PHS. In addition, an EU strategy must work toward the development and structuration of PHS supply so as to ensure that qualitative services are accessible to as many EU citizens as possible, and underline the need for public authorities' long-term commitment as a prerequisite for its success. Finally, guidance should be provided to help Member States to carefully analyse the benefits, drawbacks and earn-back effects of such policies.