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EFSI's feedback on the roadmap "New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families"

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As the European Federation for Services to Individuals, EFSI represents national federations and companies involved in the development of personal and household services (PHS) in Europe. These services comprise of a broad range of activities that contribute to the well-being of families and individuals which are: home services (housework, ironing, gardening, small repair work, delivery of food, etc.), child care facilities including all kind of services (nursery, nanny, shared childcare, holiday centres, child-minders, baby sitting, etc.), tutoring (school help, IT assistance, etc.) and services to enable disabled, dependents and elderly people to continue to live in their own home. Following the publication on the 3rd of August 2015 of the roadmap related to the forthcoming initiative "*New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families*", EFSI takes this opportunity to express its opinion on the issues addressed.

First of all, EFSI welcomes the European Commission's willingness to address the low participation of women in the labour market throughout a renewed work-life balance strategy. EFSI has been advocating for a European strategy on work-life balance for several years now. In this regard, it has been actively involved in the 2014 awareness raising campaign on reconciling work and family life coordinated by COFACE (Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union) and has published multiple positions on the subject¹.

¹ ▪ "*Personal and household services: key tools for work-life balance*", November 2014, [http://www.efsi-europe.eu/fileadmin/MEDIA/Event/6th European Conference/PHS a key tool for WLB EFSI November 2014.pdf](http://www.efsi-europe.eu/fileadmin/MEDIA/Event/6th_European_Conference/PHS_a_key_tool_for_WLB_EFSI_November_2014.pdf)

Context and issue

While, overall, EFSI agrees with the description made of the obstacles to a better work-life balance, we deplore that only caring responsibilities are considered as having an impact on women's employment. Indeed according to Eurofound, EU citizens spend on average per week 23 hours caring for children and 8 hours caring for elderly or disabled as well as 11 extra hours on cooking and housework. The impact of household tasks on work-life balance cannot be ignored, when one knows that 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 months. Thus, EFSI calls on the European Commission to address in its new work-life balance strategy the need to have access to affordable, accessible and qualitative childcare, home care and household services.

Several EU Member States (e.g. Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Sweden or United-Kingdom) have already implemented policy measures and fiscal incentives that favour the access to personal and household services with the aim to increase work-life balance. Thus, the tax reduction introduced in Sweden (called "*RUT-avdraget*") to ensure the affordability of formal domestic services had proven its positive impact on women's participation on the labour market. A study² revealed that for every purchased hour of household services, married women (aged 25-55) gained 1.8 hours, out of which 60% is used for paid work. Therefore, it increased women's participation to the labour market. EFSI invites the European Commission to refer to its booklet entitled "*PHS: key tools for work-life balance*"³ to get a better insight of the various PHS support mechanism that could be implemented.

Furthermore, EFSI underlines that the scope of the work-life balance strategy should not be restricted to "*parents with children or workers with dependent relatives*" as stated in the roadmap. On the contrary, the strategy should target both men and women be they parents or carers of elderly or dependents, and all workers must be fully integrated in it regardless the size of the organisation they work for. In this regard, EFSI shares the point of view expressed by COFACE in the European Reconciliation Package that "*reconciliation policies are not, and must not, be considered as benefits for women only but a deeper change into employment policies and functioning of businesses, from which all employees, regardless of their gender and family status, and employers can benefit. Designing, developing, promoting and implementing reconciliation measures is not, and must not be considered as a gesture for women or (young) working parents but a fundamental and profound change in the way we organize work, family, community and society*"⁴.

▪ Report "*PHS and work-life balance: what economic and social contribution to our future ?*", verbatim report of the 6th European Conference on personal and household services, to be published in October 2015.

² Halldén, K. é Stenberg, A. (2014), *Underhåll och Tvätt: Betydelsen av RUT-avdrag för Kvinnors arbetsmarknadsutbud* in Boye, Katarina & Neramo (ed.) SOU 2014:28 Lönsamt arbete – familjeansvarets fördelning och konsekvenser.

³ http://www.efsi-europe.eu/fileadmin/MEDIA/Event/6th_European_Conference/PHS_a_key_tool_for_WLB_EFSI_November_2014.pdf

⁴ COFACE, European Reconciliation Package, March 2015, p. 30, http://www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/ERP/ERP_COFACE_2015_web.pdf

In addition, EFSI would like to express its questioning on the articulation of this initiative with the future renewed strategy “*Equality between women and men in the EU*” considering that the public consultation on the latter largely addressed the issues of women in the labour market and sharing care activities, which are also addressed in the roadmap. Whereas a dedicated EU strategy on work-life balance is needed, its consistency and articulation with the forthcoming gender equality strategy must be ensured.

Policies objectives

From the Lisbon strategy in 2000 to the current Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Union’s role in relation to work-life balance has largely focused on promoting employment especially of women, ensuring equality between men and women as well as affordable and high quality childcare. Despite an active approach by the EU in relation to policies aimed at reconciliation, the impact on Member States has varied and remains globally insufficient.

This is why, EFSI calls on the Commission to adopt a **comprehensive strategy enabling all EU citizens to properly balance their private and professional life**.

In this regard, the renewed Europe 2020 Strategy should commit that at least 50% of Europeans workers have access to measures ensuring a better balance between professional and private lives by 2020. It should also actively seek a reduction in the overall difference in the labour market participation rate of men and women, while reaching an employment rate of 75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed.

This strategy should target both men and women be they parents or carers of elderly or dependents relatives, all workers must be fully integrated in it regardless the size of the organisation they work for. It should be driven by the principle of freedom of choice of EU citizens and promote both the implementation of state support and workplace solutions. This strategy should combine working time arrangements as well as access to PHS. When it comes to ensuring an adequate access to personal and household services, EFSI recommends this Strategy should:

- **recognise PHS major contribution to work-life balance**, as being a flexible solution respecting EU citizens’ preferences and needs (such as requirements linked to specific working times) as well as reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- **promote the exchange of best-practices** among EU and national stakeholders, including social partners towards the adoption of State support and workplace policies;
- **ensure 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 and quality PHS. These measures should promote a wide and fair solvency of the demand among providers and guarantee users’ freedom of choice. They can take the form of in-cash benefits, tax deduction and exemption schemes, VAT reduced rates or services vouchers and should be made available to EU citizens, employers and PHS providers;
- **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;

- **underline the need for public authorities' long-term commitment** as a prerequisite for any WLB strategy's success;
- **help Member States** to carefully analyse the benefits and drawbacks of such policies as well as estimate their earn-back effects (i.e. job creation, formalisation of undeclared work, increased female employment rate, etc.) so that the current austerity measures should not prevent Member States from adopting work-life balance measures.
