

# Equal and Non-transferable Parental leave rights within EU 2020 Strategy

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## **Proposal: Reform of parental leave regulations in order to improve gender equality**

\*PPIINA: Plataforma por Permisos Iguales e Intransferibles de Nacimiento y Adopción (*Platform for Equal and Non-transferable Parental leave*) [www.igualeseintransferibles.org](http://www.igualeseintransferibles.org) and [www.equalandnontransferable.org](http://www.equalandnontransferable.org)

Every year, the European Commission ‘Report on inequalities between women and men’ points out to the enormous differences between women and men in the labour market. In the last four years, as this Report stresses, there have been ‘quantitative but not qualitative progress’, meaning that women continue to enter the labour market but mostly in precarious jobs. This and many other documents agree that one major handicap for women to access quality employments is the uneven division of care and housework. ‘Measures should be taken to finish up with this situation’, and ‘men should take their part in co-responsibility’, EU authorities claim.

The ‘Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women’ states that ‘central importance for gender equality’ is attributed to this policy area and that “Policy development in this area should be based on the goal of gender equality and the achievement of full equality in practice between women and men in both the public and the private spheres of life – enhancing participation by women in the labour market and by men in household tasks and caring work”. Besides, “Policy development in this area should challenge societal stereotypes of men as ‘breadwinners’ and of women as ‘homemakers; it should be designed to increase men’s participation in care work”.

The Advisory Committee reports that “the introduction of paternity leave is identified as a good mechanism of promoting active fatherhood” and reflects that men take fully paid leaves but not generally unpaid leave. In fact, there is abundant scientific evidence on the effects of different kind of leave, thanks especially to the long date experience of Nordic Countries. The found effects are:

- Part time is female in all countries
- Non paid leave, and leave paid at low rates, is mostly taken by women and not by men
- If the leave is joint and/or transferable within parents (as is the case of the called ‘parental leave’) is mostly taken by women and not by men.

In other words, men tend to take leaves when they are. 1) non transferable; 2) paid at rates closed to 100% of the salary.

While all this evidence is acknowledged, there are serious reasons of concern about the guidelines issued by the European Commission. We are already used to good analysis of the inequalities and good objectives, while the policy measures are taken in opposite direction than declared goals

**The European Commission as issued a proposal of Directive for the extension of the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 weeks (set in the directive 92/85/EEC) to 18 weeks.**

**At the same time, there is another proposal of Directive to increase parental leave rights, which are: 1) mostly transferable between parents and 2) not necessary paid at high rate of the salary.**

**Moreover, the EC does not propose any Directive setting any minimum period of paternity leave.**

The persons and entities who subscribe this petition express our concern about the persistent inequality between maternity and paternity leave. This inequality reflects the idea that care is primarily a women responsibility. Increasing the forms of leaves taken up by women will not achieve gender equality but, on the contrary, will reinforce the *male breadwinner/dependent spouse* gender regime.

After so many years of rhetoric, it is highly time to take action in order to assure individual rights which allow women economic independence. This implies countering new mechanisms that, below the old argument of the (family) right to choose, try to make women (and men) responsible for the situation, while Public Policies continue to be gender biased. With unequal and joint leaves, for instance, an equalitarian woman can not decide to take only half of the leave if her husband does not want to take the rest of it. On the other hand, if paternity leave continues to be shorter than maternity leave, an equalitarian man has not the legal right to share the caring responsibilities at 50%. How can we accept that the Social Security does not give this contributory benefit to men, given that they pay the same contributions as women do?

As long as leave rights continue to be unequal (and/or joint) for mother and fathers, women and men will continue to be pushed by companies, families and society for keeping traditional gender roles. Besides, research provides evidence that the birth of a child is a crucial episode in the process of sedimentation of differential positions of women and men within the couple.

As EU authorities endless declare, gender equality is not only a question of justice but necessary to improve economic efficiency. Then, there is no reason to keep these inequalities in social rights.

**We urge the European Union Authorities to give directions to the member countries in order that leave regulations are reformed: Equal and non-transferable parental leave should be established in all countries.**