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Directorate D:Equality and Union Citizenship
Unit D.2: Gender equality

**Report on the public consultation:
"Working Carers in the EU"**

October 2016

Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
2. OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS	4
2.1. Number of Contributions	4
2.2. Organisations and individuals	4
2.3. Respondents by Country	5
3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS	7
3.1. Questions 1 & 2 – Description of the challenges	7
3.2. Questions 3 & 4 – Policy areas	8
3.3. Question 5 – Policy measures	9
3.4. Question 6 – Is there a need for further EU-level action?.....	10
3.5. Questions 7 & 8 – The EU Legislative framework.....	11
3.6. Question 9 – EU-level policy guidance	12
3.7. Questions 10 & 11 – Monitoring, exchanges of good practice.....	12
3.8. Questions 12 & 13 - Benchmarks	14
3.9. Questions 14, 15 & 16: EU Funding.....	16
3.10. Questions 17 & 18: Awareness-raising.....	17
3.11. Questions 19, 20 & 21: effectiveness of new measures.....	18
3.12. Question 22: Any other comments.....	21

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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 proposal to revise the 1992 Maternity Leave Directive. This initiative aims to address the low participation of women in the labour market by improving and adapting the current EU legal and policy frameworks to today's labour markets and societies to allow for parents or those with other dependent relatives to better balance caring and professional responsibilities, to encourage a better sharing of care responsibilities between women and men and to strengthen gender equality. This initiative is included in the 2016 Commission Work Program as a priority item.

The purpose of the public consultation on "Working Carers in the EU" was to collect views and identify priorities from a broad range of stakeholders on the development and implementation of a range of EU legislative and non-legislative measures, such as policy guidance, improved monitoring, better utilisation of EU funds and knowledge-sharing activities. It was available from 18 November 2015 to 17 February 2016 in 23 official EU languages. A wide range of stakeholders shared their opinions: Member States; social partner organisations; civil society organisations; equality bodies; and other organisations as well as individuals. There was at least one response received from each Member State, with Belgium, Germany, Italy, France and Portugal providing most responses. In total 786 contributions were received, with 229 from organisations and 557 from individuals.

An overwhelming percentage of the organisations, 97.8%, agreed with the description of the challenges laid out in the background document¹ (either completely or partially). Generally, all of the respondents to the survey were supportive of the work that the European Commission is developing on this initiative to help working families; with many responses also including suggestions of more areas that could be covered to make this exercise more complete.

As for what the European Union could do to help working carers, for the respondents who answered as individuals the policy measure with most support is to improve the possibilities and/or incentives for parents and others with dependents to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures. After this comes childcare (availability then affordability), which is also the highest priority for organisations. Most respondents (77%) consider that action by the EU is necessary.

Legislative action was also supported to a certain extent (59%), whereas further EU-level policy guidance was supported by 70% of respondents. Monitoring, exchanges of good practice and benchmarks were also well supported, particularly by organisations (72%, 94% & 80% respectively). However, many respondents answered "I don't know" in response to the questions concerning EU funding.

A huge majority of respondents (91%) support more awareness-raising on these issues, particularly towards employers and national authorities. This was also the proposed policy measure which received the most support when asked which policies would be most effective, along with exchanges of good practice and clearer guidance on the use of EU funds.

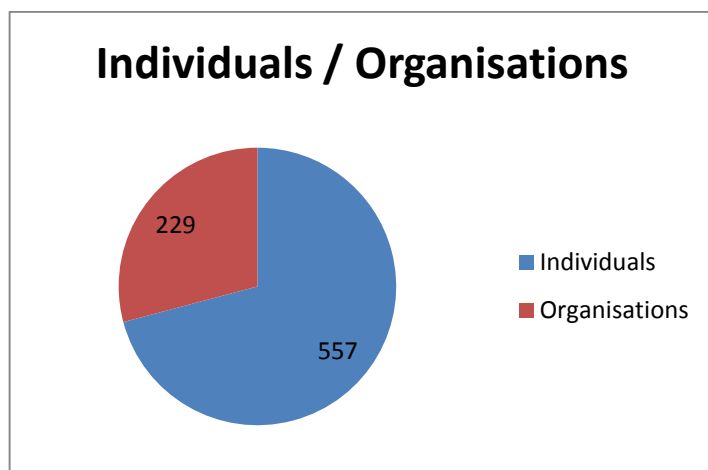
¹ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/gender-equality/files/1511_background_document_fresh_start_en.pdf

2. OVERVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS

2.1. Number of Contributions

In response to this online public consultation the Commission received a total of **786 contributions from all over Europe**. Seven more contributions were received by email². The country with the most overall contributions is Belgium, making up 34% of all replies received followed by Germany (22%) and Italy (11%).

This seems to be a fairly typical response rate to public consultations produced by the European Commission, and is a high level of response given the relatively technical nature of the questions.



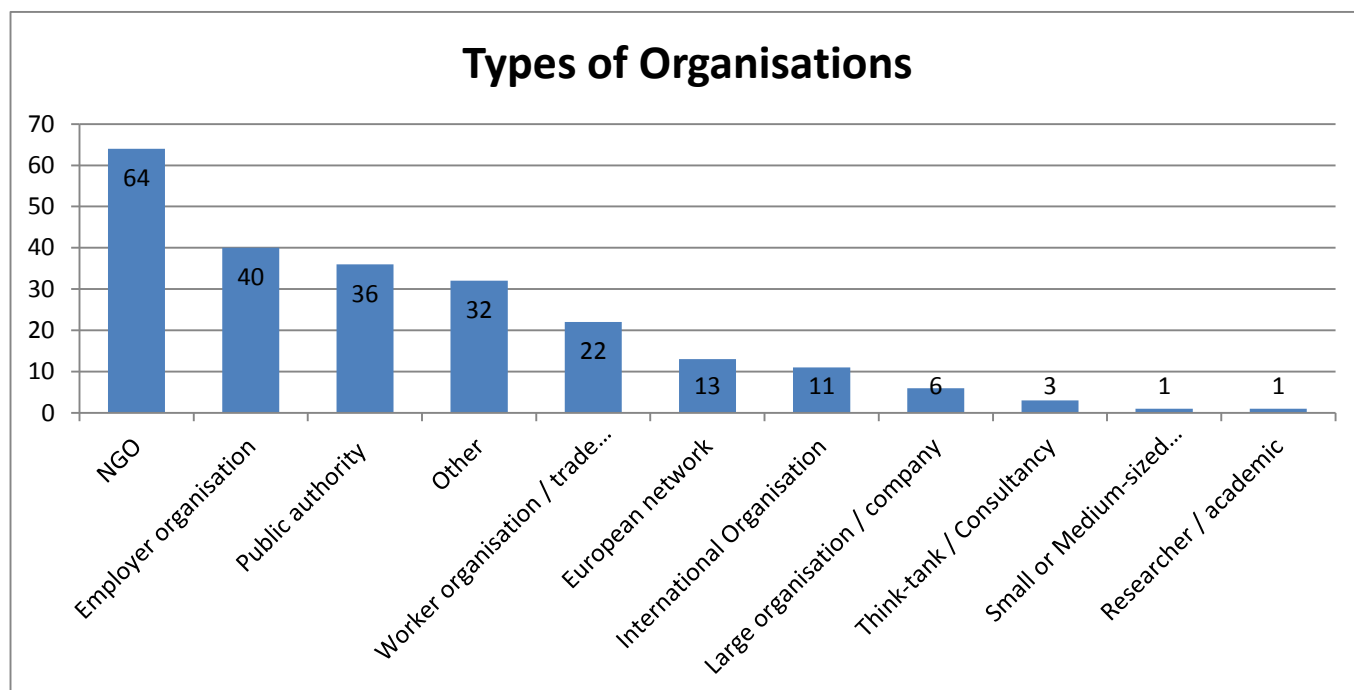
2.2. Organisations and individuals

Of the 786 contributions received via the online questionnaire, 29% (229) were made on behalf of organisations and 71% (557) by individuals.

Of those 229 contributions on behalf of organisations, 64 (28%) were from Non-Governmental Organisations, 40 (18%) from employer organisations and 36 from public authorities (of which 10 were from national government ministries³).

What type of organisation is this?		
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)	64	28.07%
Employer organisation	40	17.54%
Public authority (Central govt., local, regional, equality body, etc.)	36	10.53%
Other	32	14.04%
Worker organisation / trade union	22	9.65%
European network	13	5.7%
International Organisation	11	4.82%
Large organisation / company	6	2.63%
Think-tank / Consultancy	3	1.32%
Small or Medium-sized Enterprise	1	0.44%
Researcher / academic	1	0.44%

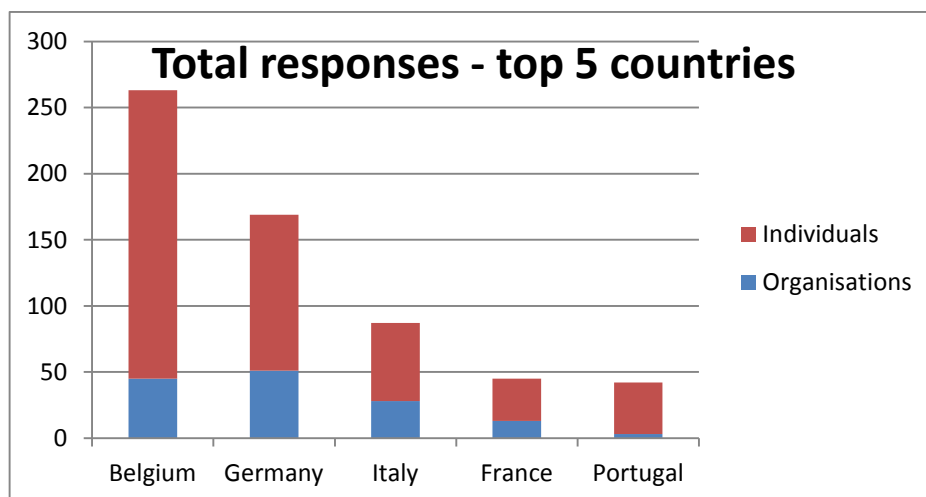
² The contributions received by post or email follow a different format than the online questionnaire and are hence not included in the quantitative analysis of the contributions (e.g. graphs). A response was also received from the UK Government in the form of a letter, so is not included in the figures presented in this report.

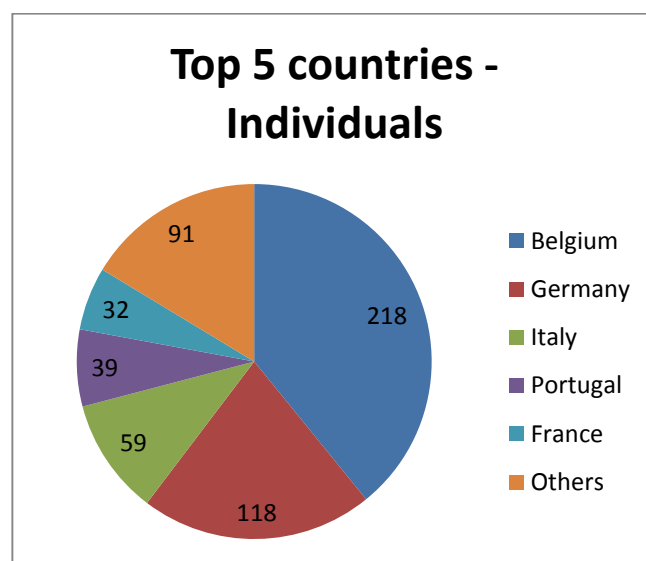
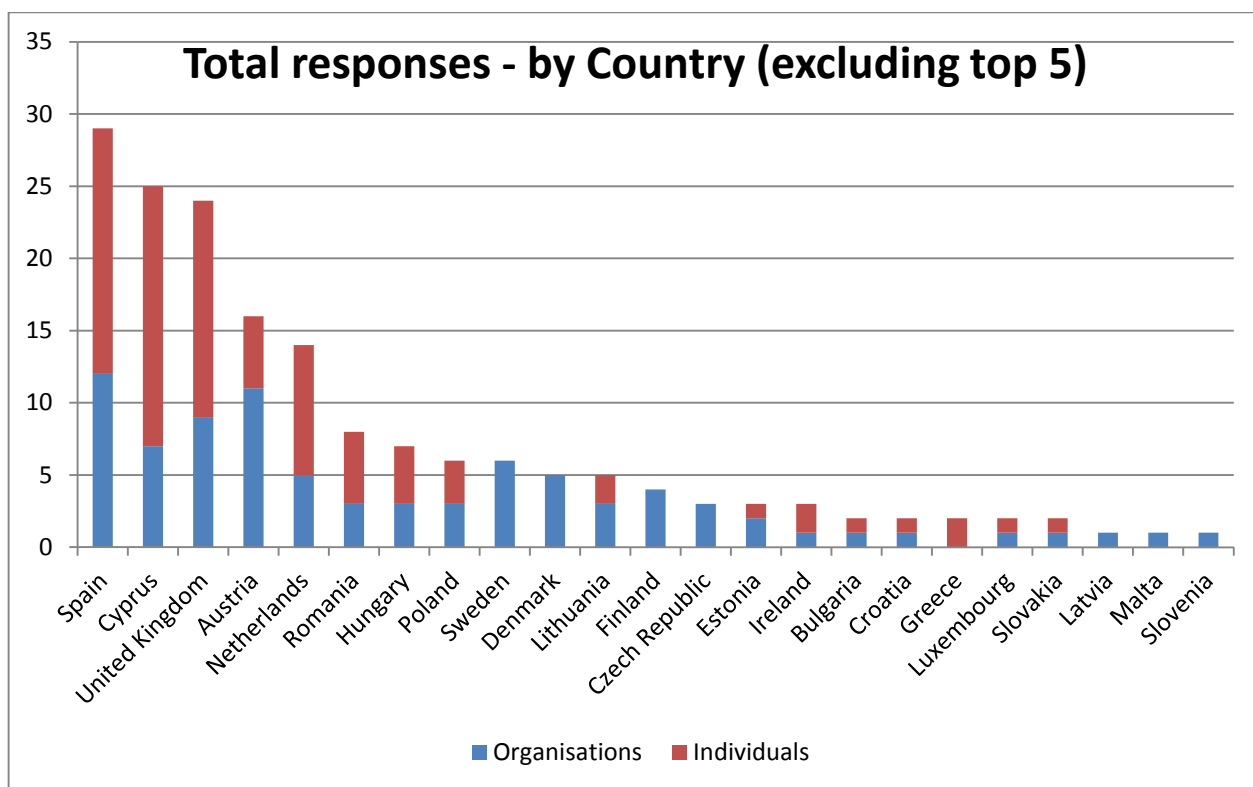


Some responses were received from European Social Partners, who were also consulted through a separate, specific, process in accordance with the Treaty. Phase one of the social partner consultation took place between November 2015 and January 2016 and phase two took place between July and September 2016.

2.3. Respondents by Country

The following graphs show the distribution of all received contributions according to country.





Organisations' contributions came mainly from Germany (51), Belgium (45) and Italy (28).

Most **individual contributions** came from Belgium (218) and Germany (118), followed by Italy (59), Portugal (39) and France (32). All other countries count less than 20 contributions from individuals each.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

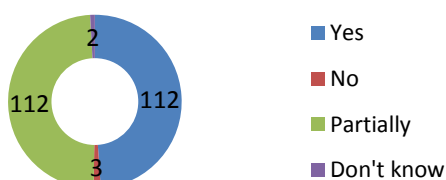
On the following pages, the results will be presented question by question, with the question presented in a box each time.

3.1. Questions 1 & 2 – Description of the challenges

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

1. Do you agree with the description of the challenges?
2. Are there any other challenges that should be taken into account? If so please list the challenges

Q1 - Organisations



Q1 - Individuals



The challenges listed by the background document included the under-representation of women in the labour market (women more likely to work part-time, and in low-productivity, low-skilled and low-paid sectors, on fixed-term contracts, and in jobs below their skills level), the gender pay gap, the greater risk of poverty & social exclusion for women, the lack of work-life-balance solutions, of available, accessible and quality childcare and long-term care services and the unavailability of flexible working and/or paid leave arrangements for fathers, all compounded by work disincentives (eg tax-benefit systems that encourage lower earners in a couple not to work).

The vast majority of individuals and organisations agreed or partially agreed with the description of the current situation. Within organisations 82% of employers, 82% of trade unions, 80% of public authorities (national and local), 73% of NGOs agreed or partially agreed. In response to question two most of those who agreed also suggested other aspects of the challenges that could be tackled by this initiative. Organisations mentioned a wide variety of other challenges which could be tackled. Employers insisted among other issues the need to enhance formal care facilities and the need to combat stereotypes. NGOs mentioned the need to take into account the needs of different groups (single parents, military personnel, self-employed) and to tackle discrimination. Trade unions mentioned the importance of more flexible working arrangements and the challenges of an ageing workforce. Public authorities mentioned the financing of the measures and burden-sharing.

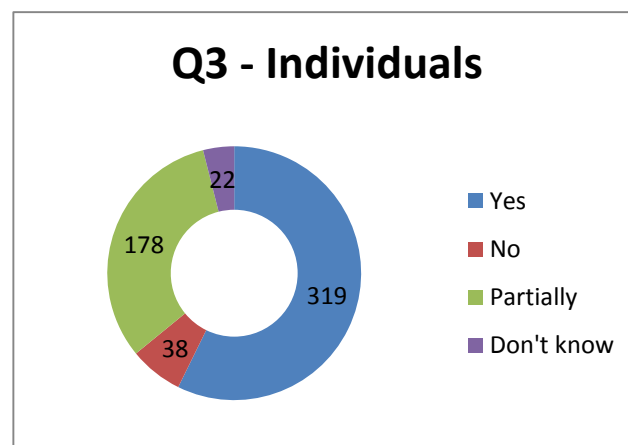
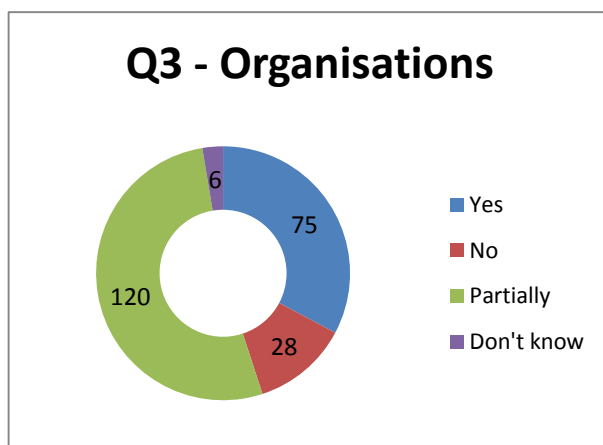
3.2. Questions 3 & 4 – Policy areas

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

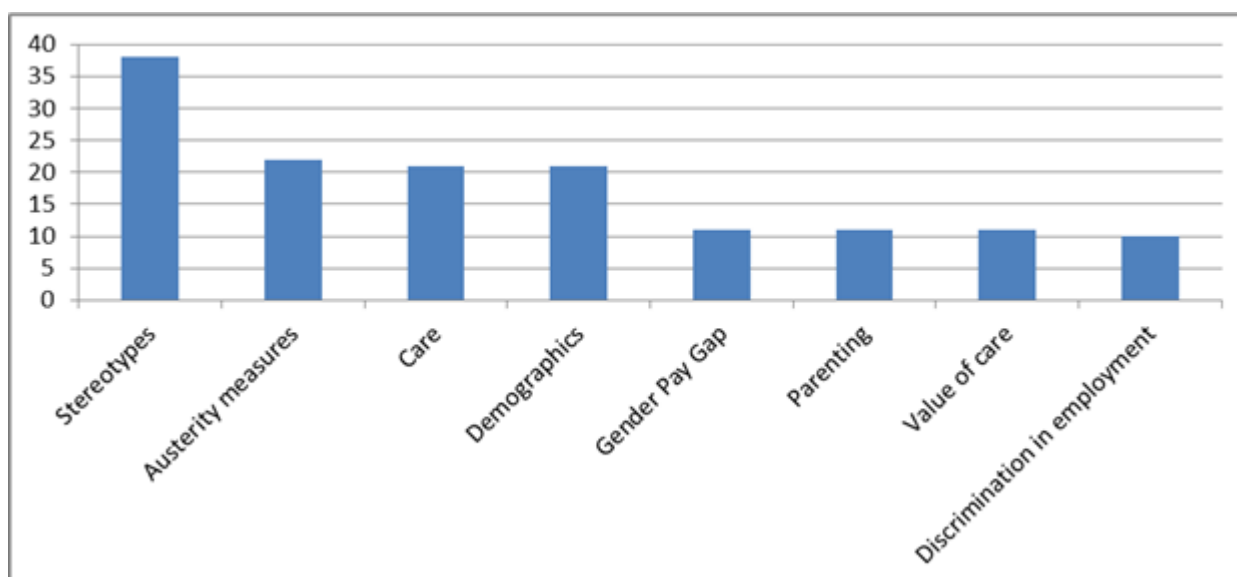
3. Do you believe that the above list of policy areas is accurate and complete?

4. Is there another policy area that is missing? If so, please list it



Most respondents agreed with the list, although many organisations, especially employers and NGOs, thought it only partially complete and suggested other policy areas where action could be taken.

The main areas of concern mentioned by organisations in response to question 4 are stereotypes (especially for NGOs and local authorities), the effects of the austerity measures, care (availability, flexibility, quality – for children and dependent adults), demographic issues, the gender pay gap (especially for trade unions), parenting issues, respect for carers (combatting stereotypes, remuneration for care, etc.) and discrimination in employment.

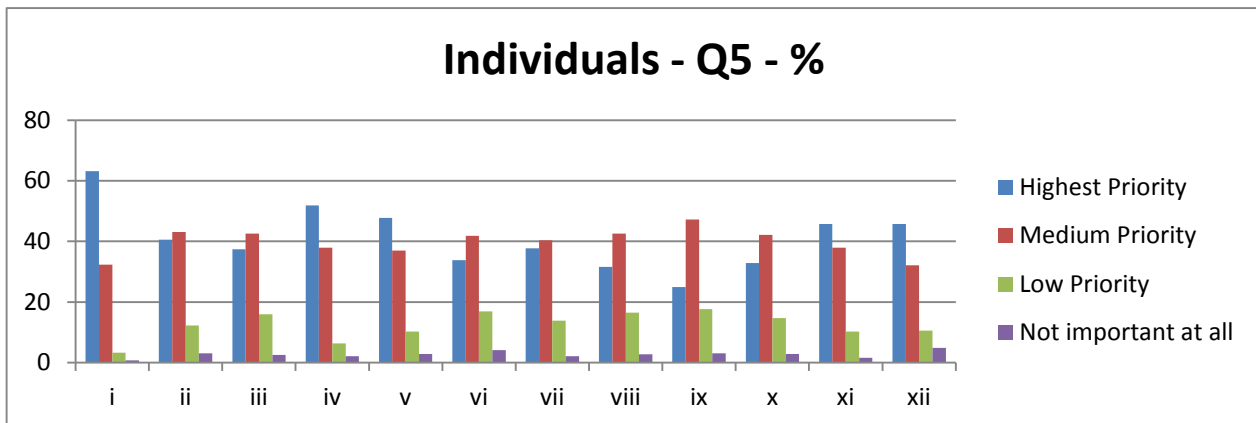
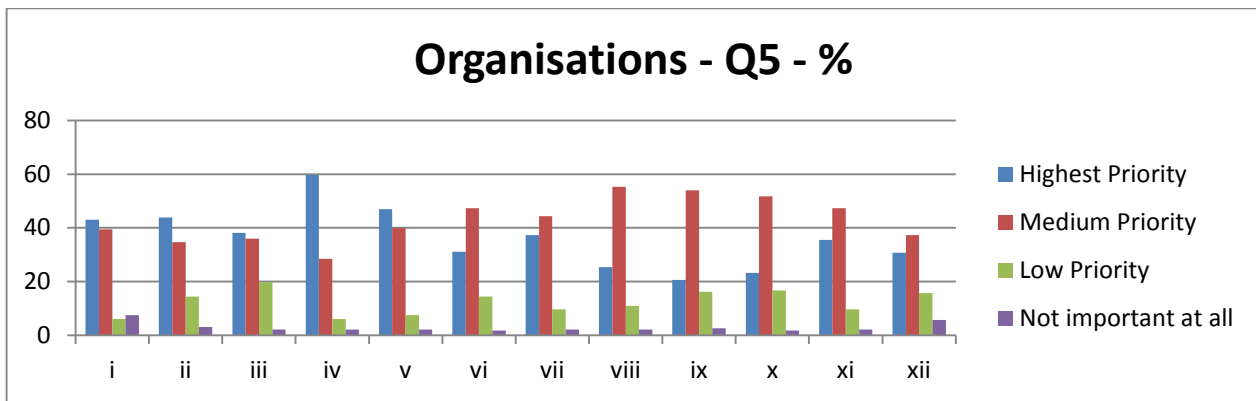


3.3. Question 5 – Policy measures

Question 5 consisted of prioritising a list of twelve possible policy measures.

While organisations (especially employers and NGOs) placed a higher priority on ensuring the availability and affordability of childcare, individuals put a stronger emphasis on flexible work arrangements and leave.

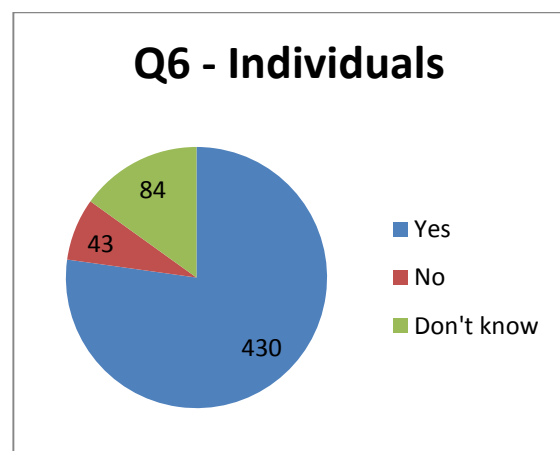
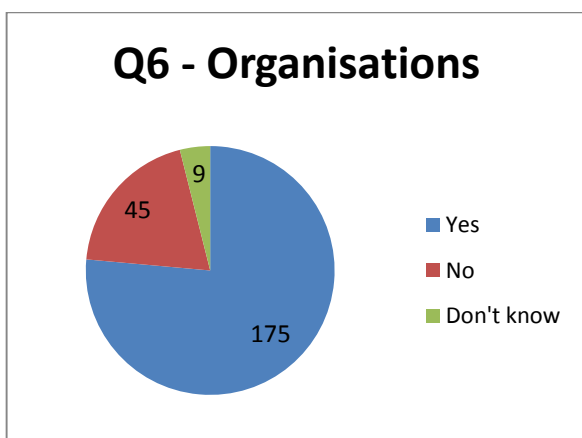
5	Below is a list of possible policy measures. In your view, what would be the most important measures to improve work-life balance and female labour market participation in your country?
i	Improving the possibilities and/or incentives for parents and other people with dependent family members to take-up caring responsibilities and work-life balance measures (such as leave and/or flexible working arrangements)
ii	Improving 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)
iii	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 opportunities while they are on leave)
iv	Improving the availability of childcare (e.g., number of places)
v	Improving the affordability of childcare
vi	Improving the quality of childcare
vii	Improving the availability of formal long-term care services, including home/community-based services
viii	Improving the affordability of formal long-term care services
ix	Improving the quality of formal long-term care services
x	Improving the availability of disability-related home support
xi	Improving support measures for people with ill/disabled/frail relatives (e.g., financial support, support services)
xii	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)

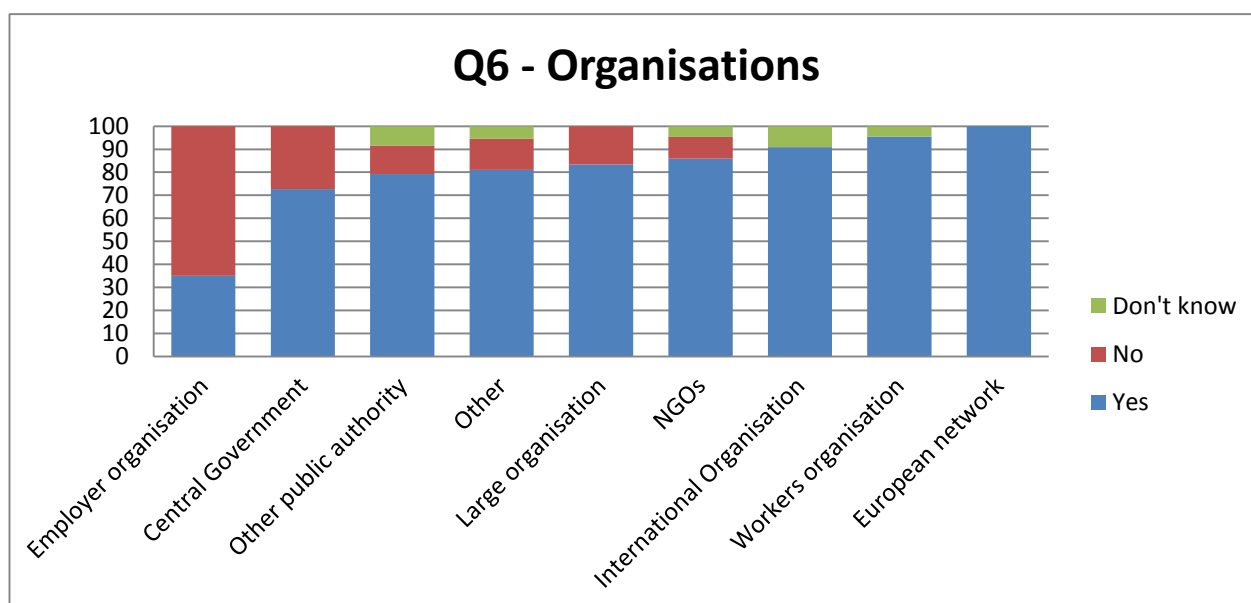


3.4. Question 6 – Is there a need for further EU-level action?

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

In response to question 6, a large proportion (around 75%) of the organisations and individuals answered "Yes". NGOs and trade unions widely agreed on the need for further EU-level action while employer's organisations were more divided between those who considered there to be a need for further EU-level action and those who disagreed.

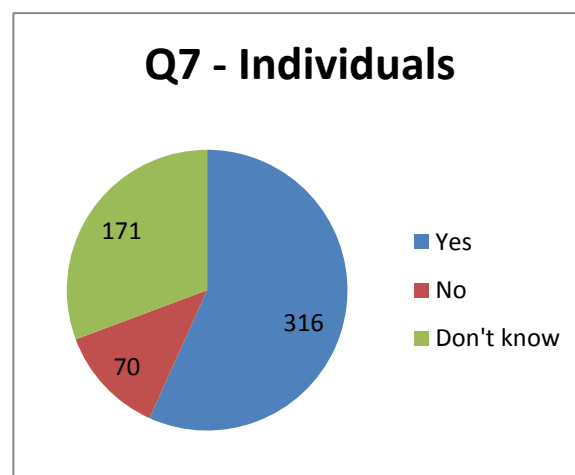
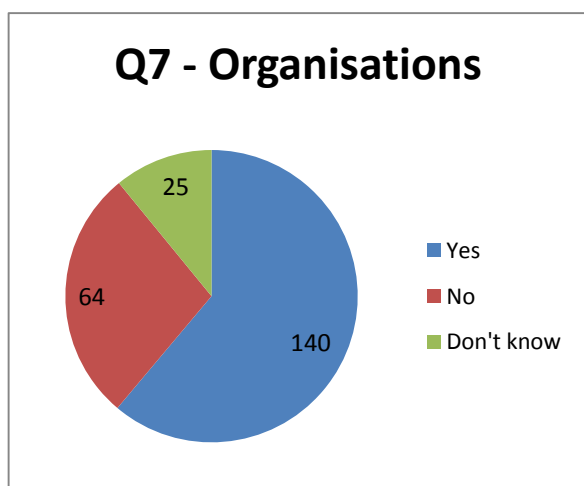




3.5. Questions 7 & 8 – The EU Legislative framework

7. 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?
8. If yes, please explain what type of improvements could be considered as regards the current EU legislative framework.

The results for question 7 show that 61.4% of the organisations and 56.7% of individuals declared themselves in favour of improving the EU-level legislative framework. There were strong disparities among the responses of the organisations. While 100% of trade unions declared themselves in favour of improving the EU-level legislative framework, the share was lower for NGOs (66%), national and local public authorities (60%) and employers (15%).



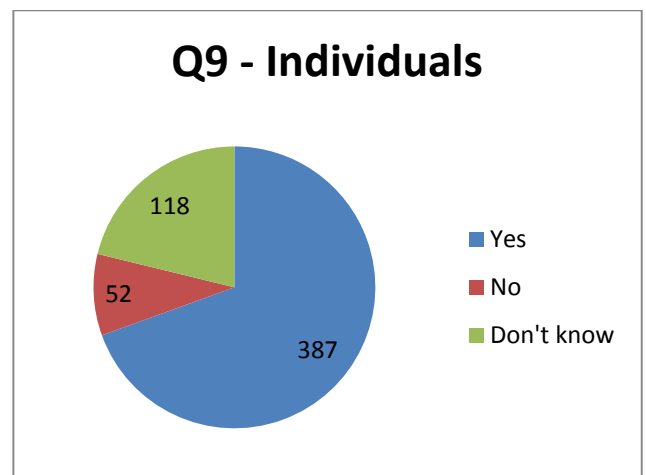
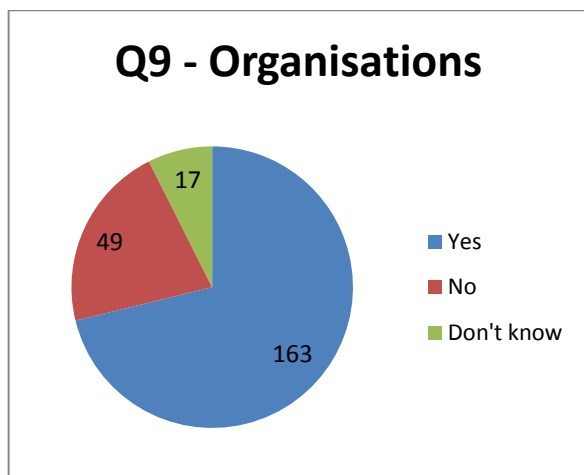
When asked what type of improvements could be considered, 21% of the organisations specifically mentioned the need to improve the EU legislative acquis in this field. Initiatives concerning maternity leave received the biggest support, followed by flexible working arrangements, parental leave, paternity leave, carers' leave and measures for a better sharing of responsibilities between men and women.

26.9% of individuals specifically express support for an improvement of the EU legislative acquis in this field. Out of the specific areas mentioned, flexible working arrangements were most supported, followed by initiatives concerning maternity leave, paternity leave, carer's leave and parental leave.

3.6. Question 9 – EU-level policy guidance

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

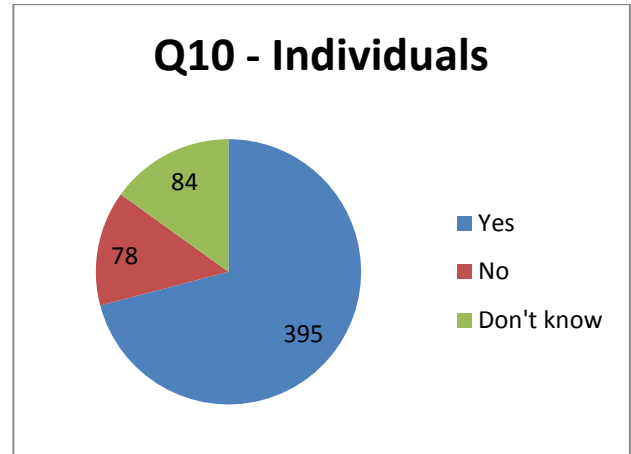
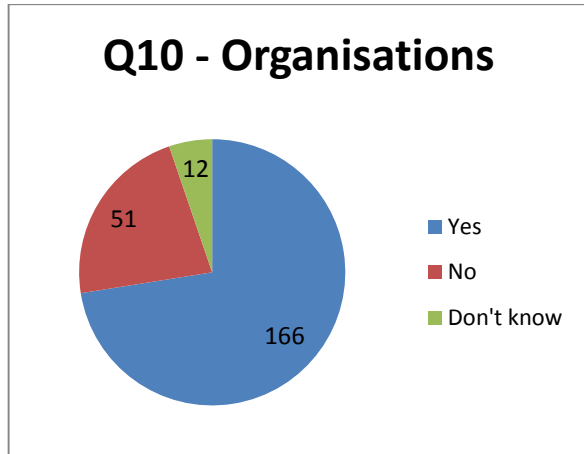
A majority of organisations and individuals agree that there is a need for further EU-level policy guidance; the organisations who disagree were mainly employer organisations together with a few NGOs (55% of employer organisations and 16% of NGOs, including fathers' organisations, answered "No").



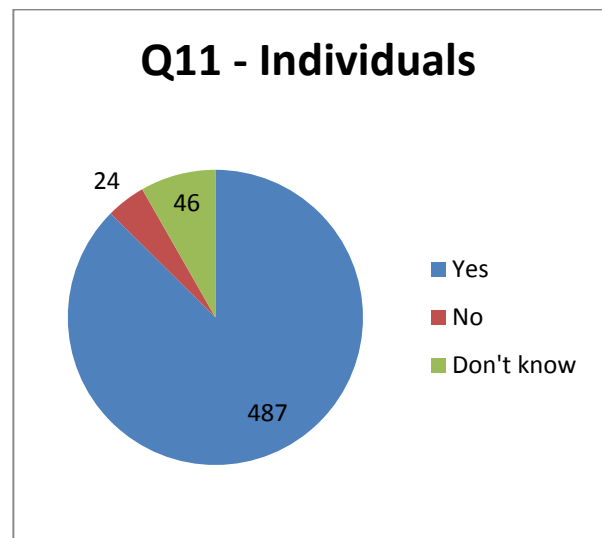
3.7. Questions 10 & 11 – Monitoring, exchanges of good practice

10. In your view, is there a need for strengthened monitoring at EU-level on measures to address work-life balance challenges?
11. In your view, could the EU support further exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders in this area?

Individuals and organisations were all generally in favour of strengthened monitoring by the EU. Half of the organisations which answered "No" were employer organisations. In contrast, 63% of national and local public organisations, 83% of NGOs and 91% of trade unions supported strengthened monitoring of work-life balance measures at EU-level.



Concerning the exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders, the vast majority of respondents are supportive.



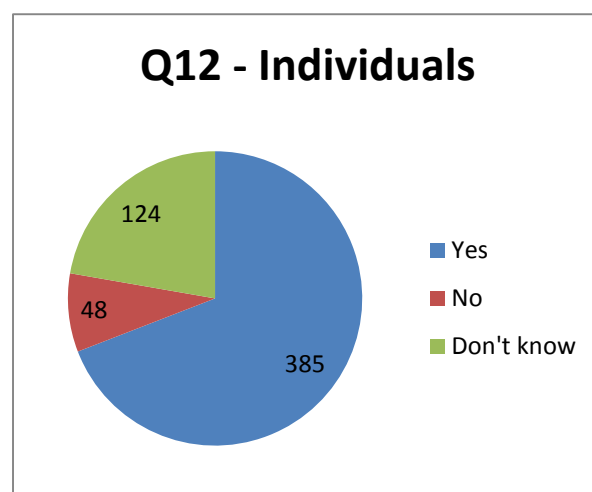
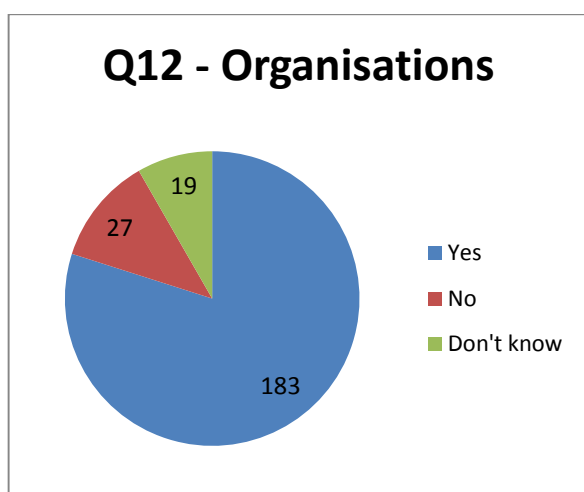
3.8. Questions 12 & 13 - Benchmarks

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

13. If yes, please indicate which policy areas these benchmarks could cover.

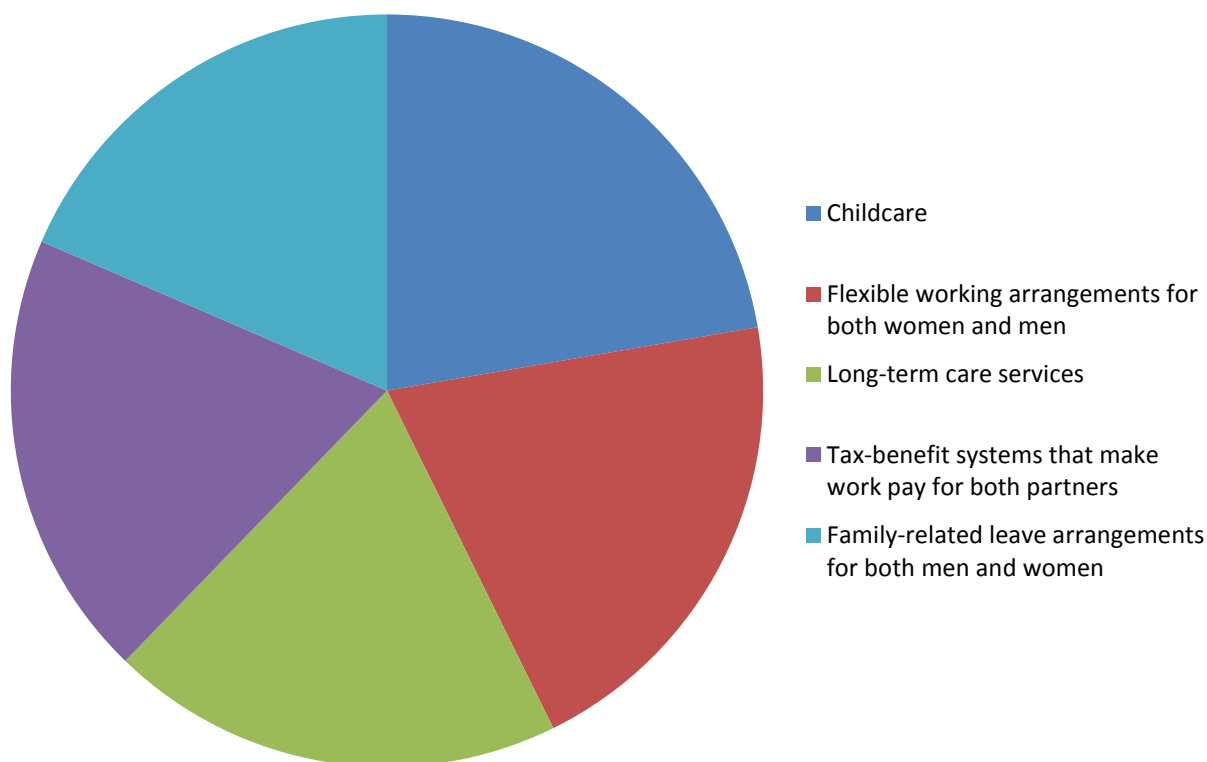
Childcare	
Long-term care services	
Family-related leave arrangements for both women and men	
Flexible working arrangements for both women and men	

In response to question 12, the idea of benchmarks was generally supported, although 11% of organisations were not in favour. 46% of the organisations who were not in favour were employer organisations. (9% of external and local public authorities, 83% of NGOs and 91% of trade unions were in favour of the EU developing meaningful benchmarks in the area of work-life balance. Don't know

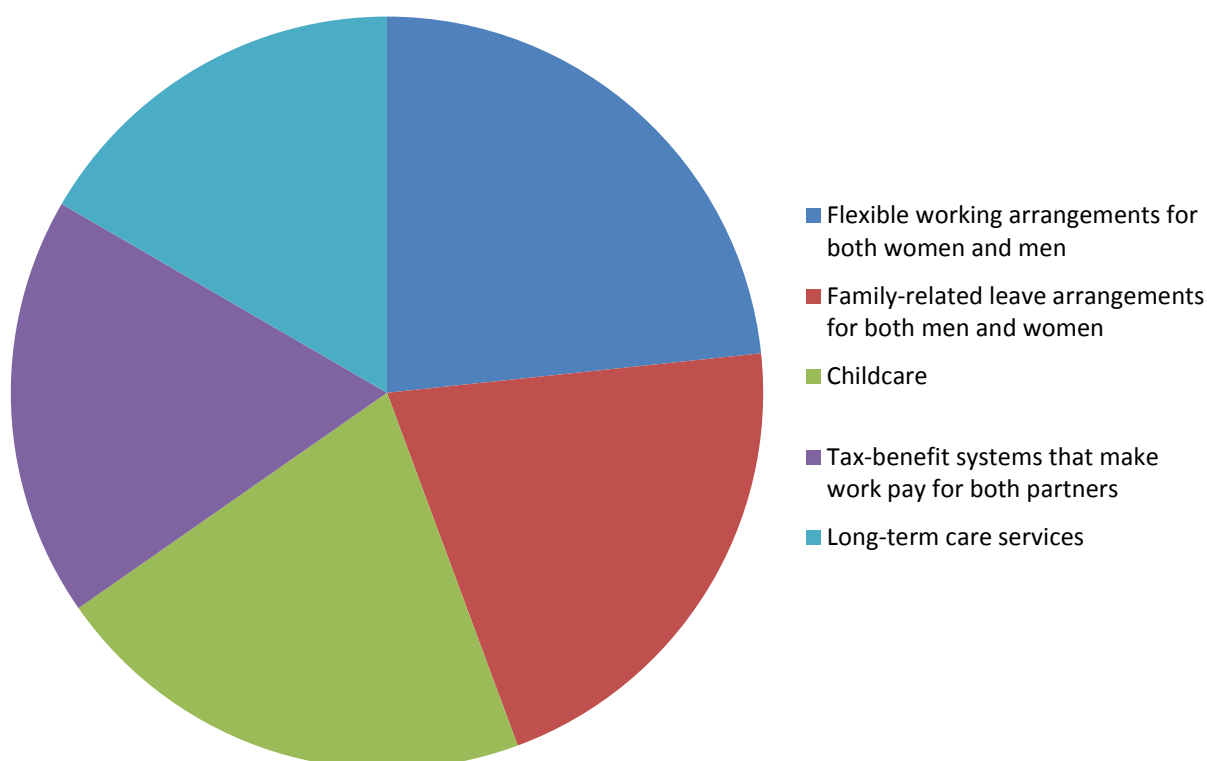


The suggested EU policy areas where benchmarks could be used mentioned in Question 13 were all approximately equally supported (between 16% and 23% for each of them), and a few other suggestions were made concerning shorter working weeks, support for carers, and the gender pay and pension gaps. Within organisations, employers mainly focused their responses on childcare and tax-benefit systems whereas trade unions, NGOs and public authorities's responses covered more equally the five policy areas.

Q13 - Organisations



Q13 - Individuals

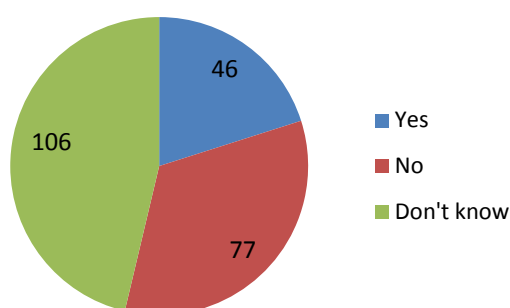


3.9. Questions 14, 15 & 16: EU Funding

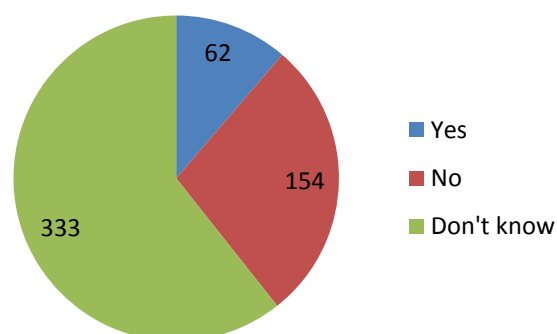
14. Currently, the EU financially supports Member States in their implementation of work-life balance policies through its funds, notably the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund. Do you find the current funds and their regulations effective in supporting work-life balance?
15. If no, please explain.
16. 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?

When asked if the current EU-level funds and regulations are effective in supporting work-life balance, 55% of respondents answered that they do not know and 29% answered "No". As potential ways forward, respondents mentioned investing in childcare and long-term care facilities, earmarking funds for gender-specific issues and work-life balance and incentivising employers to apply for funding. Respondents also referred to the need for providing more information to local authorities on potential financing opportunities, simplifying access to funds and increasing absorption capacities in general. There were important disparities within the responses of organisations. Whereas no trade union and only 13% of employers organisations responded "Yes", 43% of public authorities responded that the current funds and regulations were effective in supporting work-life balance.

Q14 - Organisations



Q14 - Individuals



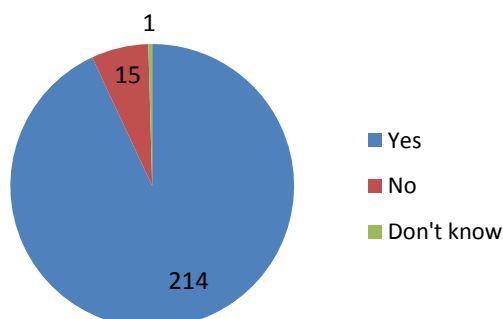
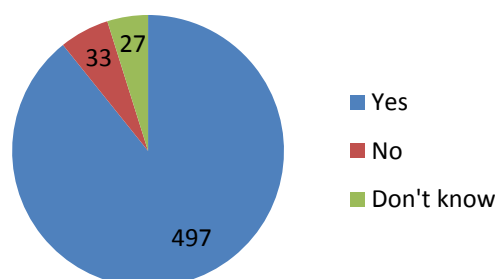
3.10. Questions 17 & 18: Awareness-raising

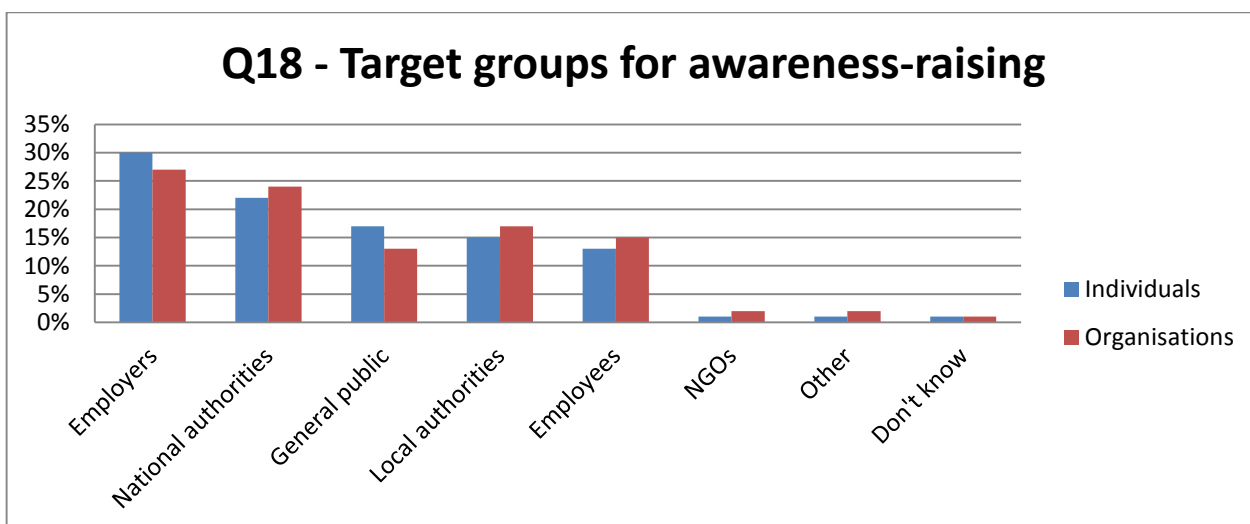
17. In your view, is there a need for further awareness raising activities on work-life balance policies?

18. If yes, who should be in the main target group? Please select from the list below (max 3)

National authorities	
Local/regional authorities	
NGOs	
Employers	
Employees	
General public	
Other area: ((*free text with limit of 200 characters*))	
Don't know	

In response to question 17 a very large majority of both individuals and organisations replied there should be more awareness-raising activities on work-life balance policies. When asked who should be in the main target group, the respondents emphasized the role of employers and national authorities. While employers organisations emphasized on the need to target public authorities, trade unions mostly responded that the focus should be shared between public authorities, employers and employees. On top of the three latter categories, public authorities and NGOs also often mentioned the need to raise awareness among the general public.

Q17 - Organisations**Q17 - Individuals**



3.11. Questions 19, 20 & 21: effectiveness of new measures

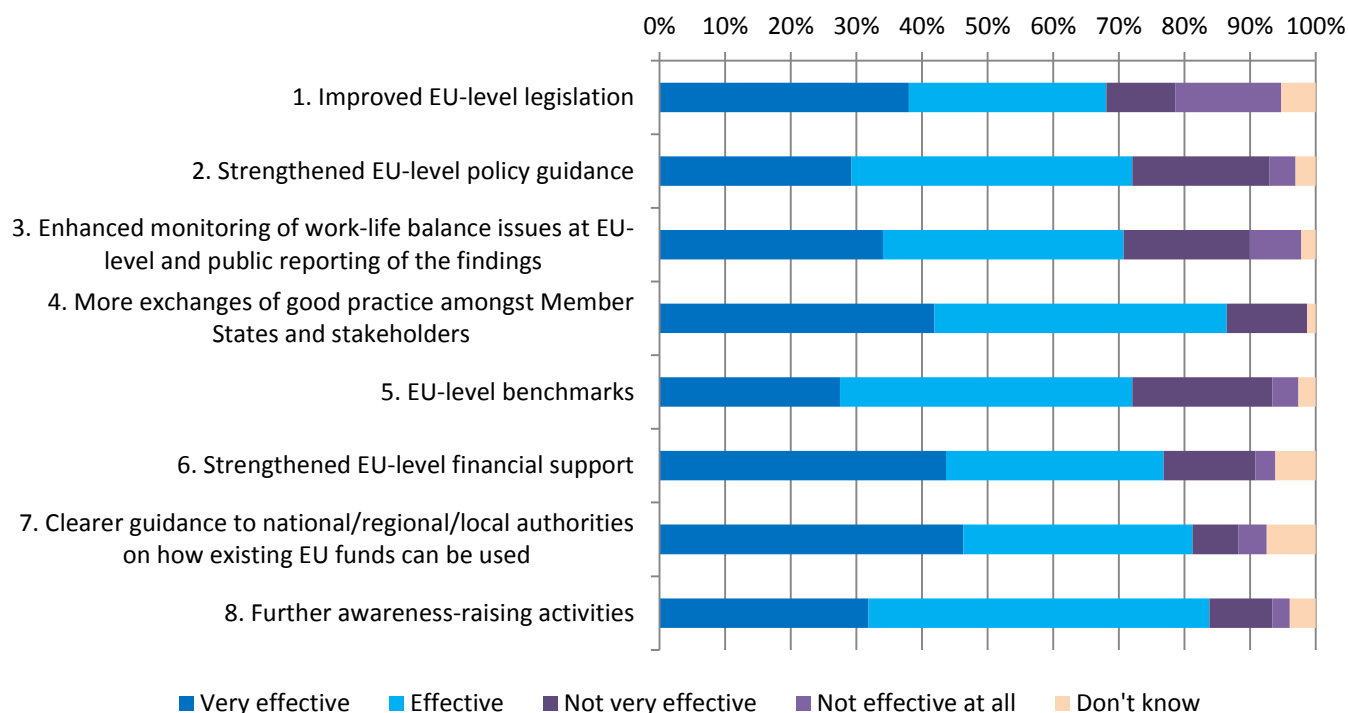
19. In your view, how effective would the possible new EU-level measures mentioned below be in addressing work-life balance challenges?

Improved EU-level legislation	
Strengthened EU-level policy guidance	
Enhanced monitoring of work-life balance issues at EU-level and public reporting of the findings	
More exchanges of good practice among Member States and stakeholders	
EU level benchmarks	
Strengthened EU-level financial support	
Clearer guidance to national/regional/local authorities on how existing EU funds can be used	
Further awareness raising activities	

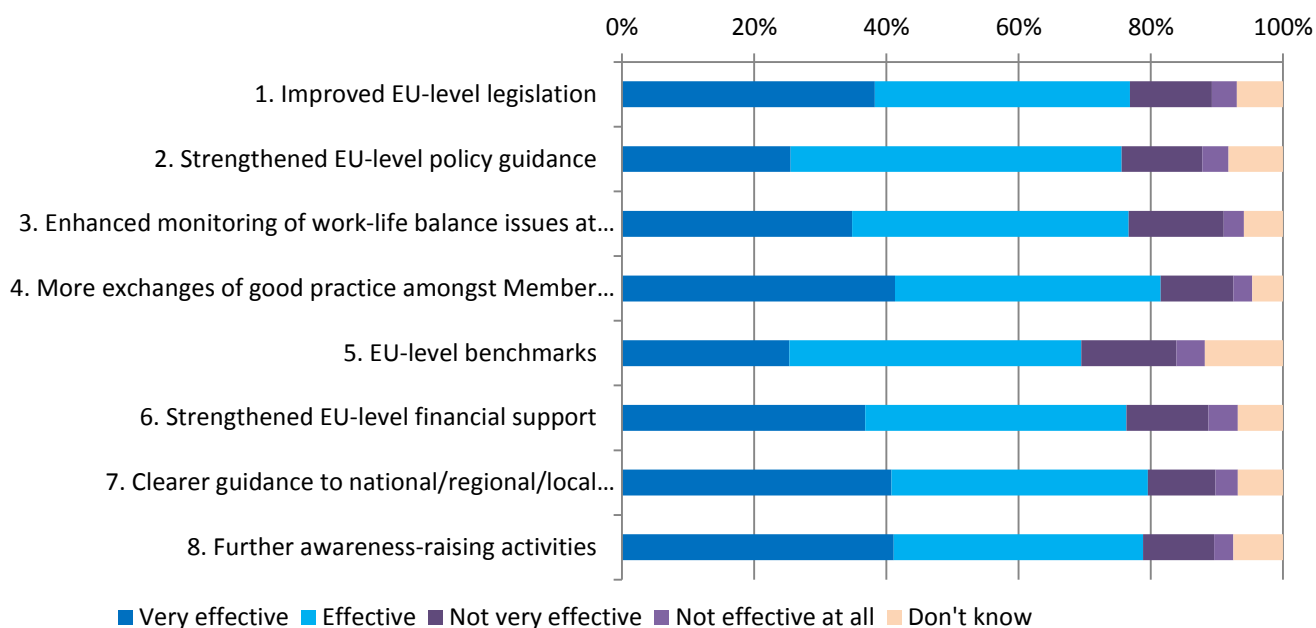
A vast majority of respondents agree that all the new EU-level measures mentioned would be effective – ranging from 64% to 86% support (very effective or effective).

Both organisations and individuals clearly have a strong preference for more exchanges of good practice amongst Member States and stakeholders, especially for awareness-raising and clearer guidance on using EU funds. The different types of organisations had different opinions concerning the most effective measure: for example, trade unions mostly considered improved EU-legislation to be very effective whereas employers organisations mostly considered EU-legislation to not be effective at all, putting the emphasis on sharing good practices and guidance on the use of EU funds.

Q19 - Organisations

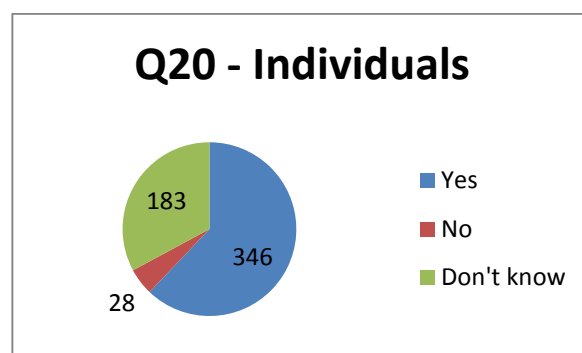
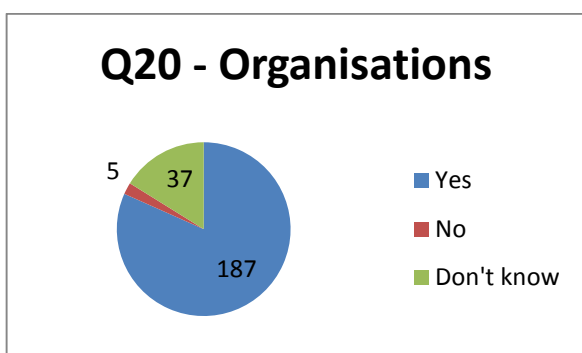


Q19 - Individuals



20. Do you think the effectiveness of the above individual measures could be increased by combining them with others?
21. If yes, please specify which measures could be combined by using the numbers in the table below.

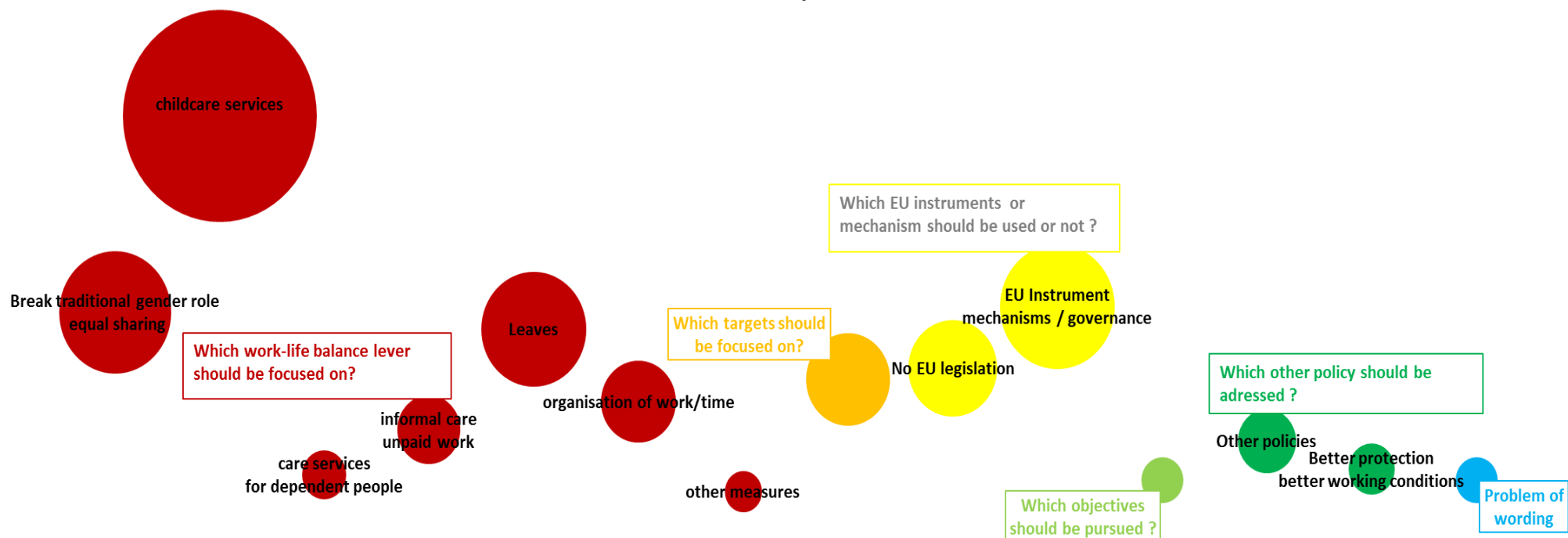
While the majority (68%) of respondents indicated that a combination of measures would be more effective to support work-life balance than individual measures, when participants were asked to identify which measures could be combined, the replies to this question included almost all possible permutations of combined policy measures and no clear trend was visible.



3.12. Question 22: Any other comments

22. If you have any additional comments and/or suggestions, feel free to use the open answer box below

All replies



In response to question 22, 130 organisations (56%) and 131 individuals (24%) gave additional suggestions. The diagram above gives a visual representation of the different themes raised by the respondents all together – the bigger the 'bubble', the more the theme was mentioned.

The different themes raised relate to:

- The "work-life balance levers" that should be focused on;
- The targets that should be reached or focused on;
- The EU instruments that should be used or not;
- The objectives that should be pursued;
- The other policy fields that should be also addressed;
- And some problem of wording or translation that can lead to misunderstanding.

The diagrams on the following pages show which specific issues were raised under each of these generic themes by organisations and individuals.

Organisations primarily focused their comments on which work-life balance lever should be used:

- 52% of them, including many employers, mentioned the availability, quality and affordability of childcare, together with the need to have all day schools and suitable opening hours of childcare services.
- Many different types of organisations (34% of all organisations) emphasized the need to break gender roles and the importance of the role of men both in the workplace as professional carers, and in the family by taking leave and increasing their role in informal care.
- 28% of the organisations, including many NGOs, focused their comments on the need for comprehensive family leaves and the need to protect women from maternity discrimination and to facilitate their re-entry to the labour market after a long leave.

A large proportion of organisations commented on which EU instrument or mechanisms should be used or not:

- 24% of the organisations focused their comments on the EU instruments to be mobilized, such as the structural funds, to improve service provision and investment in quality social infrastructure. They mentioned the need to optimize the application of the European Semester and the need to set benchmarks concerning the provision of essential services. They recalled the necessity to reach the Barcelona targets, but coupled it with application of the European Quality Framework on early childhood education and care (ECEC). They called for an EU strategy on gender equality and improved gender mainstreaming.
- 21% of the organisations mentioned that the existing legislation is sufficient and that the EU should not act and not interfere with national systems, and national social dialogue in particular.

The third most important group of comments concerned targets, with 21 % of organisations highlighting the necessity to take into account specific groups such as self-employed, single mothers, women with disabilities, parents of disabled children, large families and families in situation of divorce.

Replies from organisations

Affordable and quality childcare services
all day schools
suitable opening hours
52%

Break traditional
gender role;
encourage men
in caring;
equal sharing 34%

Comprehensives provisions
of family leaves
Protect women from
maternity discrimination
Support re entry in the
labour market after
long leave 28%

Support to informal
carers and parents
Recognition of
unpaid work 13%

Affordable and quality
care services
for dependent people 11%

Offer more
flexible working
arrangements 14%

Affordable and quality
personal household
services 9%

Take into account
self employed and
all workers
Special focus on
single mothers
women with disabilities
parents of disable child
large families
situation of divorce 21%

Existing legislation
is sufficient
EU should not act
EU should not
interfere with
national systems
& social dialogue 21%

Monitoring into European semester
Support with structural funds
Improve gender mainstreaming
Call for an EU strategy on gender equality
Include equality bodies
24%

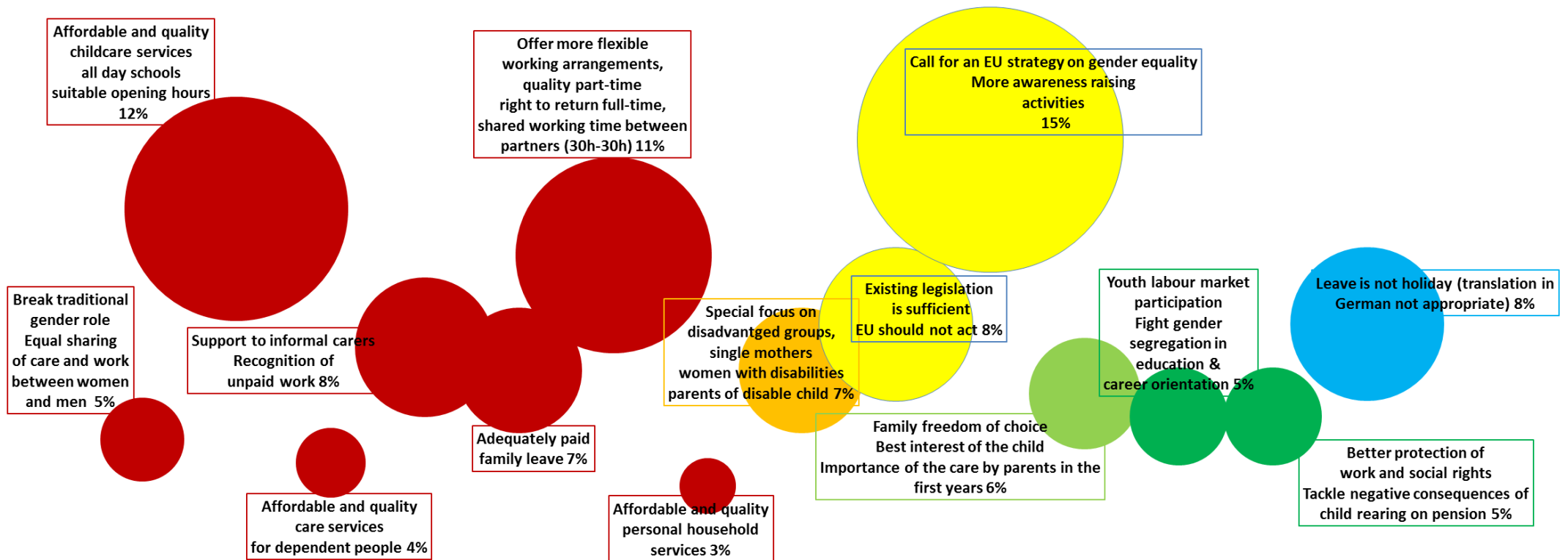
Tackle the gender pay gap
Gender equality in decision making
Fight gender segregation in education &
career orientation
Better access to
life-long learning 16%

Family freedom of choice
Best interest of the child
Health and well being 8%

Care in situation of dependency
instead of Long Term Care.
Leave is not holiday 5%

Better protection of
work and social rights
Improve working conditions
in care sector
Tackle undeclared work
Tackle negative consequences of
child rearing on pension 11%

Replies from individuals



Contrary to comments from organisations which address several topics, comments from individuals address mostly one topic only.

- 15% of individuals (of which 2/3 are German) called for an EU strategy on gender equality and highlighted the role of the EU in raising awareness of society, women and in schools.
- 12% of individuals focused their comments on the availability, quality and affordability of childcare, together with the need to have all day schools and suitable opening hours.
- 11% of them stressed the need to offer more flexible working arrangements, quality part-time with a right to return full-time as well as the need to offer more innovative solutions for carers such as shared time between partners where both could work 30 hours.
- 8% of individuals called for the recognition of unpaid work and better support for informal carers.
- 8% of individuals stressed that there is no need for further EU regulation and that family and work-life balance policies should be dealt with at national and even local level.