



PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 07 December 2017

The right to carer's leave: a necessity in today's context of demographic change

AGE Platform Europe is releasing [its response to the European Commission's proposal for a directive on work-life balance](#) today. The proposal contains the right to five days of paid carers' leave per year and the right to request flexible work arrangements to care for family members, which have become necessary advances in the current context of demographic ageing.

AGE highly supports these proposals: currently 80% of care is provided by informal carers and most of them are women among whom many in middle and late middle age who, while participating in paid employment, take also responsibility for the care of their ageing parents and support the care of their children or grandchildren. The right to carer's leave is vital to allow them to deal with care emergencies when members of their family fall seriously ill or become dependent without risking to lose their job as it is currently the case.

*'Demographic change does not only mean that we will have more older persons in need for care and assistance', said Anne-Sophie Parent, AGE Secretary-General, 'but also that family carers are expected to remain at work while their ageing parents start needing care. **More and more persons who are still of working age have to cope with the loss of autonomy of their ageing parents and struggle to stay in employment.** With this directive, the EU will for the first time in history recognise the enormous burden and amount of stress that informal carers are facing. The labour market must adapt to this new reality and make it possible not for workers to provide care to their young children but also to look after their ageing relatives when they need care and assistance. **This directive is indispensable to maintain the intergenerational contract of our societies.**'* AGE also [co-signed a letter for the Council of Employment and Social Affairs \(EPSCO\)](#) together with other social NGOs supporting a swift adoption of the proposal.

According to Eurofound, more and more older workers have become economically inactive because of caring responsibilities in the past seven years.¹ This trend is set to continue if

¹ AGE Platform Europe, 'Economic inactivity 50% higher for older workers than for others' <http://www.age-platform.eu/policy-work/news/economic-inactivity-50-higher-older-workers-others>

measures are not adopted to allow working carers to take some time off and to request flexible working arrangements. In the face of a gender pension gap of 40 % on average in the EU28 and the threats about the adequacy and sustainability of pension systems, it is vital to allow older workers to continue working for as long as they wish or need to acquire a decent pension. This is also in the interest of businesses, which in many sectors are struggling to recruit skilled younger candidates and would have to bear the cost of longer pension claims.

AGE's position states clearly that **durable investment into quality long-term care** is also needed in addition to carers' leave. While five days per year do not seem a lot, they can be crucial to organise care when a case of dependency appears, provided **quality care services are available and affordable – including services to informal carers themselves**. The flexible uptake can allow carers to take time off only once in a while to provide important emotional and psychological care. **Flexible working arrangements have a vital role to play when employees need more time off** or need to be more present to their loved ones beyond the five days/year.

As the gender pension gap is the expression of lifetime disadvantages faced by women in the labour market, **AGE also supports the other aspects of the Commission's proposal**, notably to strengthen investments in early childhood education and care, to improve work-life balance of parents of young children and to incentivise the uptake of parental leave by both parents by remunerating it at minimum at the sick-pay level.

AGE proposes a number of improvements to the initial proposal. For instance, the directive should not exclude potential carers from the right to carers' leave by taking a very restrictive definition of the family. **AGE calls for an extension of the right to carers' leave to the full first- and second-degree family of a dependent person**. While the directive will mean an important improvement of the quality of life of many carers, some still will need to stop working altogether. Therefore, **AGE calls for a flanking Council recommendation on the social protection of informal carers**, covering minimum income, health insurance and maintenance of rights to unemployment benefits, but also pension credits for times spent caring informally. *'We hope that the recently proclaimed EU Pillar of Social Rights will lead to further initiatives which eventually will effectively enforce all relevant social rights needed across the whole life span'*, concluded AGE Secretary General.

Useful information:

- [AGE Platform Europe, Work-life balance: an urgent and necessary initiative also for older workers!](#)
- [Joint Statement to Employment and Social Affairs ministers: Call to support swift progress on Work-Life Balance Directive at EPSCO Council](#)

Note to the editor

About AGE Platform Europe:



AGE is a European network of organisations of and for people aged 50+ aiming to voice and promote the interests of the 190 million citizens aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most. www.age-platform.eu

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AGE policy work is co-funded by the **Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme** of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of AGE Platform Europe and ENNHRI and cannot be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.