

Social dialogue for a Union of Equality

Key recommendations from the Social Protection Committee

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PROJECT 101145648: SD4EU

TRANSNATIONAL SEMINAR ON GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

ROME, 26 SEPTEMBER 2025

Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 - A Union of Equality

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:

*To find the right balance for such EU action, it is of utmost importance **to consult and listen to social partners and national administrations** [...] More broadly, the Commission will re-launch the discussion with the social partners on how to **improve gender equality in the world of work**, including within their structures, and encourage them to intensify efforts in **addressing the gender employment and pay gaps**.*

Social Protection Committee



Develop proposals regarding gender policies and assess the impact of EU policies and legislation on gender equality in the field of social protection, with the aim of drafting recommendations to strengthen social dialogue.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

Promote financial compensation mechanisms for career interruptions due to care responsibilities

- Through **collective bargaining** tools at all levels and sectoral **bilateral bodies**.
- Recognizing **unpaid care work** as a factor impacting long-term income and pensions.
- Ensuring that the eligibility requirements for access to social protection benefits are based on **personal income** rather than household or spousal income, in order to prevent **economic dependency** during career interruptions.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

— Ensure equitable and accessible parental leave for both parents

- Promote the implementation of individual and non-transferable parental leave supported by adequate **income replacement**, ensuring that compensation levels are sufficient to discouraging leave requests by only one parent, especially in low-income households.
- **Extend parental leave entitlements to self-employed and non-standard workers**, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive protection.
- Promote **cultural and institutional measures** - including simplified procedures, awareness campaigns, and examples of best practice - to normalize the involvement of all family members in caregiving activities.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

Integrate Childcare Policies and Services into the Social Protection Ecosystem

- Recognize that the **lack of accessible and affordable childcare** is a major **structural barrier** to women's full and continuous labour market participation.
- Encourage **sustained investment in public and private childcare services**, as a core pillar of inclusive social protection.
- Involve social partners in designing and negotiating **childcare solutions through collective agreements** and with the support of the sectoral bilateral bodies.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

Adapt Working Time Frameworks to Support Income Protection and Care Responsibilities

- Promote **flexible working time arrangements** through collective agreements, enabling workers to maintain **employment and income continuity**, avoiding long career breaks during periods dedicated to family care.
- Support individual **rights to request flexible working**, particularly in sectors where service delivery allows it.
- Encourage the integration of **gender-sensitive defaults in workplace systems** so that employees returning from leaves are automatically **reintegrated into wage progression, bonuses, and career tracks** thereby ensuring continuity in social protection.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

Ensure Adequate Income for a Dignified Life

- Promote adoption of the **Living Wage concept**, based on the real cost of living, encouraging social partners to align collective bargaining outcomes with these adequacy principles, ensuring that all workers — including low-paid and part-time — can meet **essential needs**.
- Recognise that income inequality and poverty risks persist even among **working professionals**. It is important to guarantee that contributory social protection systems are accessible and financially sustainable for self-employed and non-standard workers with **irregular income patterns**.
- Ensure that **pension systems are financially sustainable and adapted to longer working lives**, without penalising those with fragmented or part-time careers—particularly women. Addressing the gender pension gap must be part of a broader strategy to prevent future income insecurity and ensure **dignity in old age**.

Social Protection Committee recommendations

Strengthen the Role of Social Partners in building inclusive Social Protection

- Reinforce the capacity of social partners to **co-design social protection instruments**, ensuring that European policies are monitored and implemented to promote gender equality, income adequacy, and inclusive access to social protection
- Promote **collective bargaining** as a key tool to close coverage gaps and extend rights to **self-employed and non-standard workers**, encouraging the use of **bilateral bodies** and **welfare funds** to provide **complementary benefits**
- Promote the **inclusion of small professional organisations and micro-enterprise** representatives in national and sectoral dialogue structures, ensuring that emerging voices are heard and supported with institutional resources.

Conclusions

Social partners play a crucial role in building an inclusive and sustainable social protection system:

- ✓ They help fill the gaps in public policies through collective bargaining.
- ✓ They commit to ensuring that national and European regulations reflect the social and labor market changes that they observe daily through their field activities.
- ✓ They promote gender equality and universal access to social rights.



Social dialogue is the key to fair and sustainable social protection



Thank you!

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