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NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights: promoting equal labour market participation for women and men
- Presidency steering note

Delegations will find attached the Presidency steering note on the above subject, with a view to the lunch debate at the EPSCO Council on 15 March 2018.

**Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights:
promoting equal labour market participation for women and men**

EPSCO Lunch debate

15 March 2018

In December 2017 the European Council called for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights at Union and Member State level, including by progressing swiftly on pending social files at EU level. The European Council on 22-23 March 2018 will come back to the implementation of the Social Pillar to ensure appropriate follow-up.

In this context, the Bulgarian Presidency has pledged to contribute to the implementation of the Principles agreed upon in November 2017, including Principles 2, 9 and 11.

Principle 2 focuses on *the equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men*, including regarding participation in the labour market and career progression. This is closely linked to the message of *Principle 9* on *work-life balance*, which calls for women and men to have equal access to leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and to be encouraged to use them in a balanced way.

Meanwhile, *Principle 11* on *childcare and support to children* states that children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality. It is a priority for the Bulgarian Presidency to work on promoting early childhood development, as well as on support for families and the welfare of children. The early years of a child's life have a decisive effect on future life chances.

Access to childcare and support to children and access to long-term care services are inseparable from the question of women's labour market participation. In this context two complementary policy approaches present themselves:

- 1) the provision of quality, affordable and accessible childcare and long-term care services and facilities; and
- 2) developing well-designed and adequate leaves and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers.

Certain minimum standards already exist at the EU level for maternity leave, parental leave and flexible working arrangements. However, there is still a clear need to further improve the equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, including with a view to removing disincentives to female labour market participation.

Indeed, already in 2002, the Barcelona **European Council** urged the Member States to remove disincentives to women's labour market participation and to strive to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. According to the latest data available, only ten Member States have met this target.

One of the headline targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy is a 70% employment rate for women and men, and yet in 2016 the employment rate of women was still only 65.3% as compared with 76.9% for men (20-64 age group).

This broad policy field continues to evolve as gender roles change, society ages and patterns of work are transformed. The consensus on the need to facilitate women's labour market participation is growing. Given that their career choices and opportunities are greatly affected by the unequal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men, there is a need to incentivise more men to take up family related leaves.

Against this background, Ministers are invited to consider which policy mix, at national and/or EU level, would best encourage equal labour market participation and focus their interventions on the following questions:

- 1) *Is equal labour market participation possible without a more equal sharing of care responsibilities?*
 - 2) *What policy measures at the EU level can best support Member States in this regard?*
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