

Scottish Universities Insight Institute project



From competition to collaboration: the interface between informal and formal carers

EU policy story: Championing Carers Rights at the EU Level

Just a quick word about the organisation, Eurocarers. We're based in Brussels. We are a network with member organizations across Europe. Europe as a continent, by the way, not only the EU. So we have members in non-EU countries; UK, Scotland, Norway, Switzerland, but we do work a lot with the EU institutions. So the focus of what my presentation will be about to you is the institutions.

In particular, I wanted to shed light on work we were involved in a few years ago, which was a new directive on work life balance for parents and carers. Let's overcome the jargon straight away. A directive is a legislative act which defines goals for Member States to try and achieve. All my stories will relate to this directive. It was about work, life and parents and carers. I need to clarify that although the initial draft spoke about carers, it was about childcare. Informal, long-term care was not captured.... Obviously we have a continuous dialogue with the institutions and the Commission in particular, and pushed heavily to ensure that any carer would be captured.

WHAT WILL THE NEW DIRECTIVE IMPROVE?		
	CURRENT EU LAW	IMPACT OF THE NEW DIRECTIVE
Paternity Leave 	No minimum standards for paternity leave at EU level.	Working fathers will be able to take at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of the child. Paternity leave will be compensated at least at the level of sick pay.
Parental Leave 	At least 4 months per parent, out of which 1 month is non-transferable between parents. No minimum rules on allowance/payment.	At least 4 months per parent, out of which 2 months are non-transferable between parents. Parents can request to take the leave in flexible forms (full-time, part-time or in a piecemeal way). The 2 non-transferable months of parental leave will be compensated at a level set by Member States.
Carers' Leave 	No minimum standards for carers at EU level (except "force majeure" allowing to take short time off for imperative and unexpected family reasons).	All workers will have the right to 5 working days of carers' leave per year.
Flexible Working Arrangements 	Right to request reduced and flexible working hours upon return from parental leave. Right to request part-time work for all workers.	All working parents with children up to at least 8 years old and all carers will have the right to request the following flexible working arrangements: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. reduced working hours 2. flexible working hours 3. flexibility on the place of work

What the directive introduces is new rights for informal carers; essentially 5 days of leave unpaid per year. As I like to say, the most important word when you read the directive is a *minimum* of 5 days. So it's an entry point for us, with also the possibility for carers to negotiate with their employer for flexible working conditions. So all my stories will focus on this. Let's start with the positives.

There's more than one way to skin a cat

So basically, Eurocarers was created 20 years ago with the overall objective to try and have a new initiative on informal carers. Our comfort zone was in long-term care. And this is the very first legislative act mentioning explicitly the need to support informal carers, and it's about employment, which took us by surprise. This meant that the first turning point in the movement, actually came about through an area in which we were not directly involved, in which the majority of our member organisations do not have expertise. But the opportunity arose and we went with it. And we tried to inform the decision as much as we could. So I remember, for example, we attended probably over the 3 years, more than 150 meetings on the topic.

I remember a particular meeting at the European Parliament. The Commission was presenting the idea of the directive and during the Q and A there was a question about employment and access to the labor market for those who have care giving responsibilities. There was a strong gender dimension, focusing on women's inclusion in employment. And we asked, do you realize that the directive also makes sense from the perspective of an ageing society. The fact that our long-term care systems are failing, and that, supporting informal cares also makes sense from that perspective. So this is an additional justification you know, in terms of the value of the directive. That was new to them. Obviously they were very pleased to be able to add you know, arguments in favour of the proposal to their list. But just to say, I suppose the key message I wanted to share here is it's important to be creative. It's important to look for entry points for our message in places, you know, that do not seem comfortable at first glance. It doesn't mean we need to change our message, you know, drastically or completely, it's just a way of reframing the message or even learning the terminology. I trained as a linguist originally believe it or not. I see it as a way of translating concepts, you know, from one group to the other.

You have to make waves to see ripples

Related to this there was a bit of a domino effect or ripple effect. Once we had succeeded with this work on the directive and the new rights in process, we had also highlighted the economic dimension of informal care and that triggered many new initiatives. So straight after the Worklife Balance Directive, in our dialogue with the Commission, we said every study focusing on the economic dimension of informal care tends to highlight the cost of informal care for society. But what about the contribution, of carers to society? And so we carried out this pilot study, looking at the different methodologies available to look into that. The final product is that the Commission launched, then, a very broader study. And it's not going to be surprising for people in this room the contribution of informal carers is way higher than the cost for society. And that

that was a second turning point, because then, you know, between the need to ensure that informal carers can remain productive, the economic contribution to society. All parties suddenly had to look at the topic. It became relevant for all policymakers. That's for the positive side. Let's look at the downside of it.

The pursuit of rights can be intimidating

First of all, what we realised throughout the process is that the pursuit of rights can be intimidating, for many, including informal carers. So in many of the meetings on the directive we were faced with adversaries. But sometimes, allies were telling us – “But I mean if we create the legal status for carers. aren't we entrapping them into their caregiving role?” And frankly, at first it was difficult to counter this argument... So once again, it's very important to do the homework and be prepared for any counterargument to have a narrative in place to convince people.

Your greatest adversaries are sometimes disguised as your closest companions

A few other things I wanted to mention to you. There's a fear of change. The power dynamic. The main adversary we had in front of us when it comes to the directive, was employers and organisations representing employers. The key question was okay, new rights for carers, who's going to pay for that perceived loss of control from employers. Obviously there were economic concerns, but also some social and cultural resistance. So the directive was about informal carers. It was also about parental leave and paternity leave. We had some Member States represented by women who were saying, “Okay, we are prepared to support the directive, provided that it's gender neutral. So basically, we leave it up to families to decide who in the family will take the leave.”

We also realised that some other fellow NGOs suddenly became difficult to deal with. We can have difficulty collaborating with the disability sector which tends to see the emergence of new rights for carers as a barrier to their own message in terms of the autonomy of people with disability. So if the carer has new rights, you know, does the person with a disability still have the possibility to decide their own life. The greatest adversaries are sometimes disguised as your closest companions. Many employers were certainly using first of all feminist arguments such as, Oh, we don't want the directive on rights for carers, because, you know, it will entrap women and so on. So it's important to be prepared.

Perfectionism can stand in the way of excellence

My last point; perfection, perfectionism, can stand in the way of excellence. Another difficulty we had in this lobbying campaign is that many of our members, or some members and partners held that 5 days per year, unpaid, is not enough. So we want to be more ambitious, but at the risk of basically losing completely. And so I suppose my main message here is; it's also important to try and strike a balance between ambition and realism in what we try to achieve on behalf of carers.