

Health and safety at work: workers who are pregnant, have recently given birth or are breastfeeding

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The Council held a policy debate on key questions of a Commission's proposal concerning the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.

On the basis of questions suggested by the Presidency, a majority of Member States supported the extension of maternity leave entitlement from 14 to 18 weeks. However, some called for opening up the leave also for fathers and to take into account the outcome of the social partners' negotiations on other types of family leave.

A number of Member States wished to keep the right to decide within their national legislation whether a part of maternity leave should be taken before childbirth.

Some Member States expressed concern that a further extension of maternity leave might be at the expense of broader rights to parental leave and might adversely effect the situation of women on the labour market.

Furthermore, Member States agreed that further discussion would be needed concerning the dual legal basis of the proposal, namely Article 137(2) (on workers' health and safety) and 141(3) (on equal treatment between women and men) of the Treaty.