



UnlockEquality: Level up your workplace

4.EU Legislation on Pregnancy, Parenthood & Work-Life Balance

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Council Directive 92/85/EEC (Pregnant Workers Directive)

Full Title

Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on 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.

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Summary

This directive establishes minimum EU requirements to protect the health and safety of pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth, and those who are breastfeeding. It requires employers to carry out risk assessments and take appropriate measures to eliminate or reduce identified risks, including adjusting working conditions or working hours where necessary.

The directive also provides for maternity leave of at least 14 weeks and explicitly prohibits dismissal from the beginning of pregnancy to the end of maternity leave, except in exceptional cases unrelated to the worker's condition. These protections aim to ensure that pregnancy does not negatively affect employment status, working conditions, or career prospects.

Connection to Organisational Policies

Organisations must implement clear policies ensuring that pregnancy does not result in dismissal, disadvantage, or loss of opportunities. Employers should conduct individual risk assessments for pregnant employees and provide necessary adjustments to duties, working hours, or working conditions to ensure safety.

Workplace practices should guarantee that pregnant workers retain equal access to training, promotion, and performance-related benefits. Clear internal procedures must be in place to prevent discriminatory treatment and to support employees throughout pregnancy, reinforcing a safe and inclusive working environment.

Official EU Reference

Council Directive 92/85/EEC

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1992/85/oj/eng>

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Directive 2006/54/EC (Equal Treatment Directive)

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Full Title

Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.

Summary

This directive ensures equal treatment between men and women in employment, including access to jobs, working conditions, pay, promotion, and dismissal. It establishes that any less favourable treatment related to pregnancy or maternity constitutes direct discrimination on the grounds of sex.

The directive requires Member States to provide effective legal protection against discrimination and to ensure that individuals have access to remedies and enforcement mechanisms. It also addresses indirect discrimination and promotes equality in workplace practices and policies.

Connection to Organisational Policies

Organisations must ensure that all employment practices are based on objective, job-related criteria and are free from gender-based discrimination. Policies should explicitly recognise that pregnancy-related disadvantage is unlawful and must be prevented.

Employers should review recruitment, promotion, evaluation, and remuneration systems to ensure equal treatment. Internal procedures should allow employees to report discrimination safely, and organisations should provide training to managers and staff to promote awareness of equality obligations.

Official EU Reference

Directive 2006/54/EC

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2006/54/oj/eng>

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Directive (EU) 2019/1158 (Work-Life Balance Directive)

Full Title

Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers.

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Summary

This directive establishes minimum EU standards to support work-life balance for parents and carers. It introduces rights to paternity leave, parental leave, and carers' leave, as well as the right to request flexible working arrangements such as remote work, flexible schedules, or reduced hours.

The directive also ensures protection against dismissal and less favourable treatment for employees who take leave or request flexible working arrangements. It guarantees the right to return to the same or an equivalent position after leave.

Connection to Organisational Policies

Organisations should implement clear policies that inform employees about their rights to parental and carers' leave, ensuring transparency and accessibility. Employers must ensure that taking leave or requesting flexibility does not negatively affect career progression, performance evaluation, or remuneration.

Workplace culture should normalise the use of parental leave for all genders and support flexible working arrangements without stigma. Employers should also ensure structured reintegration processes for employees returning from leave, including training and career continuity measures.

Official EU Reference

Directive (EU) 2019/1158

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158>

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Council Directive 2000/78/EC (Employment Equality Framework)

Full Title

Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

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Summary

This directive establishes a general EU framework prohibiting discrimination in employment and occupation on several grounds, including age, disability, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. It applies to recruitment, working conditions, promotion, training, and dismissal.

The directive defines discrimination broadly, including both direct and indirect discrimination, and recognises harassment as a form of discrimination when it creates a hostile or degrading environment.

Connection to Organisational Policies

Organisations must ensure that workplace policies and practices do not result in discriminatory treatment. Equal access to opportunities, including flexible working arrangements, promotions, and assignments, should be guaranteed for all employees regardless of personal characteristics or family status.

Employers should implement clear anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies, establish complaint mechanisms, and provide regular training to staff and management. These measures help create an inclusive and fair working environment aligned with EU legal standards.

Official EU Reference

Council Directive 2000/78/EC

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32000L0078>

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Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 33 - Family and Professional Life)

Full Title

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 33 - Family and professional life.

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Summary

Article 33 recognises the right to reconcile family and professional life. It guarantees protection against dismissal for reasons connected with maternity and establishes the right to paid maternity leave and parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child.

This article forms a fundamental rights basis within EU law, ensuring that workers are able to balance employment with family responsibilities without facing discrimination or disadvantage. It applies to EU institutions and to Member States when implementing EU law.

Connection to Organisational Policies

Organisations should ensure that workplace policies support the reconciliation of work and family life. This includes respecting maternity and parental leave rights, preventing dismissal or disadvantage linked to pregnancy or parenthood, and enabling employees to combine professional responsibilities with family obligations.

Employers should promote a supportive work environment where taking parental leave is normalised and not associated with negative career consequences. Policies on flexible working, reintegration after leave, and equal treatment should reflect the principles of this article.

Official EU Reference

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 33

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

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