

# briefing

## European Parliamentary Labour Party

### Social Europe: our achievements in your workplace

One of the very first acts of the Labour government after winning the 1997 Election was to sign the European Social Chapter. This has changed the working lives of all working British women and men. For Labour MEPs, the European Union is much more than simply a single market for goods or services. Labour has supported Social Europe campaigns to improve working conditions and increase the minimum levels of workplace rights.

Some of the European Parliamentary Labour Party's most proud achievements have been policies to enhance the social dimension to the European Union. These successes have been fought and won in the European Parliament by Labour MEPs and in the Council of Ministers by the Labour Ministers. By working together in this way we have secured social rights for all our citizens.

#### Know your rights

##### Equal Pay

Legislation for equal rights has meant that individuals and unions can campaign and win equal pay between men and women where they are engaged on work of the same or broadly similar nature or of similar value. This has brought to an end the disparities that often left women at a disadvantage for promotions or annual bonuses.



**Socialist Group in the  
European Parliament**

**European Parliamentary  
Labour Party**

##### Protection from discrimination

EU law bans discrimination in employment on the grounds of gender, race, religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation.

Labour MEPs played a key role in drafting new EU laws so that men and women must have equal pay for equal work and in banning race discrimination in the UK and now across Europe. British law already offers a high level of protection, but for many other EU countries, the European anti-discrimination law was a first.

##### Equal rights for part time workers

Labour MEPs have helped secured rights for part time workers, this means that for the first time there are equal rights to paid leave, pensions, maternity leave, access to training and other benefits. Many women workers, in particular, were at a disadvantage before this law was adopted because they were not given full maternity rights or access to company pension schemes.

##### Maternity, paternity and adoption rights

Labour is committed to a healthy work life balance, allowing women and men to make more time for their families and their children. In large measure thanks to EU laws, maternity, paternity and adoption rights have been vastly

improved. Maternity leave currently stands at 26 weeks and paternity leave at two weeks. Adoptive parents also have equal rights. In this way parents have the security of knowing that their job is protected, and women know they cannot be refused employment, dismissed or made redundant because they are pregnant. Labour MEPs continue to champion the progress made for these rights and to campaign for greater improvements.

##### Four weeks paid holiday

Since 2000 all British workers must receive at least four paid weeks holiday. This guaranteed right to paid leave is part of the Social Chapter and did not exist in the UK before. From next year Bank Holidays must be in addition to the number of holiday days. In this way many low pay workers will be entitled to an extra 8 days holiday a year.

##### Protection when business changes hands

Thanks to campaigns won by Labour MEPs there are minimum standards of protection and consultation for workers facing redundancy or insolvency. EU law ensures that workers in a company that is taken over will retain their basic employment rights. Pension and seniority rights are both safeguarded under these

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### our achievements in your workplace...

laws. Labour MEPs have helped give workers and their trade unions the right to be informed at an early stage when their business is closing or being taken over. Thanks to EU law workers now have the right to be consulted and informed on all significant changes affecting their company.

#### Equal rights for fixed-term workers

Up to 1.3 million British workers who are employed on fixed-term temporary contracts have benefitted from EU laws that grant equal rights. These workers now receive comparable conditions to full-time employment for pay and paid holiday entitlements.

#### Health and safety at work

Workplace deaths have been decreasing over the last decade, nevertheless work-related injuries and deaths remain high. From work related cancers, industrial deafness, vibration protection to asbestos exposure, Labour MEPs have legislated and continue to campaign for safety in the workplace.

#### Controlling your working week

Labour MEPs have campaigned for a better life-work balance. Workers in the UK spend longer at work than the average European citizen, yet productivity levels have been proven to be lower than average. This is one of the reasons Labour MEPs wanted to end the practice of working such long hours. Working time laws mean that everyone is entitled to at least one day off per week. While at work, proper breaks have been enforced and shift work is limited.

#### Why the European Social Chapter matters to you

The Social Chapter is designed to make work more family friendly, allowing more flexibility in working hours, which can significantly help women and parents who work.

Measures in the European Social Chapter include equal treatment for employees on fixed term contracts as well as part time workers. Time off is a right of all workers, with paid annual leave and in cases of family needs including parental leave.

Anti-discrimination rights in employment are protected in every member state of the European Union. Workers have the right to be informed and consulted on decisions relating to the future of the company when they employ over 50 employees and the right to consultation via European Works Councils in cases where the company employs over 1000 people in two or more European Union countries.

Without these rights so many of the workplace advantages that British workers enjoy could be in danger of disappearing. From the UK minimum wage to time off for adoptive parents, the European Social Chapter is a safeguard to a better work-life balance. If the UK were ever to opt back out of the social chapter of European membership there is no guarantee that workers would have any of the existing protections. The flexibility of part time work, fixed-term contracts or agency work could be de-coupled from the rights to holiday pay, maternity leave and pensions.



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