The EU Pregnant Workers Directive 92/85/EEC and planned 2008 Revision

Costs

£2bn per year in costs to the Treasury – Daily Mail/UK Government Impact Assessment

Talking Points:

Existing Directives add in flexibility

The 1992 Pregnant Workers Directive on maternity leave and parental rights allows for member states to be flexible in administering maternity pay. The original directive linked maternity pay to the amount paid for sickness absence in order to balance the needs to support pregnant workers with national budgetary discipline.

Costs to bankrupt countries

The UK already has generous maternity cover. Forcing governments across the EU to spend more, when they should be spending less, will only add to the economic woes of the continent.

Prevents women reaching the top of their careers

By paying 20 weeks maternity leave at full pay, this will near triple the costs for pregnant workers higher up the pay scale. Given the constraints on businesses large and small in the economic climate, businesses just can't afford the rigidity of full pay for nearly half the year.

The UK Government is against the Directive

The UK Government at the Council of Ministers opposes the Directive, putting the Council at loggerheads with the Parliament that voted it through.

What is it?

A draft directive to raise standards of maternity pay and leave. The directive amends the 1992 directive by forcing member states to provide full pay for the first 20 weeks of maternity leave.

Currently, under UK maternity pay rules, pregnant workers are provided with 90% of their pay for the first 6 weeks then £123 per week for a further 33 weeks.

The directive also gives statutory time off for workers to breastfeed. Under the draft proposals, breastfeeding needs one hour time off and a half hour for each additional child birthed. For example, a mother with triplets would be eligible for two hours off to breastfeed. A mother with octuplets, for example, would be eligible to take off four and a half hours for breastfeeding.

The UK Government joined a number of other European Union governments in opposing the Directive.

Disagreements at the Council of Ministers have left the plans in limbo, but their passage through the European Parliament keeps the issue alive.

Third Party Opinions

"When public finances across the EU are tight, encouraging economic growth in the private sector must be the top priority," said [British Chambers of Commerce] policy director Dr Adam Marshall. "We urge ministers to reassess the financial implications." He warned that the regulations could impose "unacceptable costs" on national social security systems across Europe and urged British politicians to fight against the directive." (Source)