

6 May 2020

To [REDACTED]@ec.europa.eu
President von der Leyen
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Dear President,

Re: EU Pay Transparency Directive

We are contacting you to raise with you the concern of the Northern Ireland Women's European Platform about the Commission work programme. We understand from the ETUC and the European Women's Lobby that the EU Commission is considering a plan to put the EU Pay Transparency Directive and the whole Gender Equality Strategy on ice.

We urge you to reconsider. In our assessment such an approach would be a mistake with far reaching consequences.

President, you made gender equality a cornerstone of your Presidency. Binding Pay Transparency was one of your first 100 days commitments. Action to secure gender equality cannot be called into question even in times of COVID-19 crisis. Equal pay is a requirement of the EU Treaty, it is not a fair weather option. There is a strong interconnection between the EU road to recovery plan and establishing the new normal after Covid-19, this underscores the need for a Gender Equality Strategy. Throughout the EU, key workers, in sectors where the work is predominantly undertaken by women are underpaid and undervalued. This needs to be tackled as part of the recovery, working women should not be put to the back of the queue to be dealt with after the recovery.

The announced Pay Transparency Directive must go ahead and moreover must be reframed to tackle the root causes of inequality and undervaluing of work. Covid-19 has spotlighted how the unfair market-determined salaries of workers such as cleaners, retail, transport, care and healthcare workers have diverged from the real value that they provide to society and the economy. It is long past time that low-wage workers secure a permanent income boost and earn a fair wage with adequate benefits.

The Pay Transparency Directive can do this by including provisions that assist workers and their unions to re-evaluate the pay and to secure increases that reflect the real value of the work to the organisations and society. Crucially it must empower unions to bargain to build a new normal where work that is done by women is properly valued and paid.

6 Mount Charles
Belfast BT7 1NZ

Tel: +44 (0)28 9031 1149
E: niwep@btconnect.com

blog.niwep.org

This crisis will mark a new beginning. We need to remember those who are working on the frontlines, in services, care, cleaning, we can't repeat what happened after the 2008 crisis when companies bounced back but working people and gender equality paid the price.

NIWEP is a member of the European Women's Lobby and would like to re-emphasise the Lobby position that women cannot wait longer for equal pay, and that action must be taken now to ensure women, as key frontline workers, are not paying the price for the COVID-19 crisis. NIWEP is also keen to see this Directive progress, as it not only contributes to gender equality in the EU, but provides a model for the UK as a third country in a post Brexit context. While the UK will be creating separate policy, policy within the EU will continue to be an important context. Organisations in the women's sector will also continue to use examples of progressive policy in the EU to advocate for positive change in the UK, and this Directive is a particularly significant one in the context of a likely that will hit women hardest, following an already extremely difficult period of austerity.

I look forward to your positive response and we remain available to assist you in your endeavours to secure an EU where Gender Equality is a reality for all women.

Yours sincerely



Elizabeth Law
Chair

6 Mount Charles
Belfast BT7 1NZ

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