

ELWN seminar “Family matters – a liberal view on the reform of the parental leave system in the EU”

The *European Liberal Women's Network* meeting took place as part of a fringe meeting during the ELDR congress in Helsinki on 15 October 2010. More than 45 participants discussed the reform of the parental leave system in the EU during a one hour breakfast meeting.

Vesna Pusic MP (President ELWN, Vice-President ELDR Party) chaired the meeting together with **Margareta Pietikäinen** (Svenska Folkpartiet, Finland, Co-founder ELWN). Three keynote speakers addressed the meeting: **Anneli Jäätteenmäki** (MEP, Keskusta, Finland) who illustrated a broad perspective on the theme of parental leave systems in general (how do they matter and what change has there been over time? What difference do they make on women's and men's status in society, their roles on the job market and within the family?). **Carl Haglund** MEP (Svenska Folkpartiet, Finland) introduced his reflections on reforming the Pregnant workers' directive and **Lousewies van der Laan** (D66, The Netherlands, Vice-President ELDR Party) who gave another European perspective on the issue.

The discussion mainly focused on one of the priorities laid down in the EU's social agenda, which is the need to promote policies to facilitate a work-life balance, aimed at women and men alike. The EU is at present facing a demographic challenge arising from low birth rates and the growing proportion of older people. Better provisions to promote a work-life balance are also a way of coping with a dwindling population. This debate reviewed, from a liberal perspective, current European legislative initiatives on the parental leave system aimed at promoting gender equality in the labour market and thus reducing inequalities between men and women in the workplace and actively promoting a work-life balance.

Background document:

- [European Parliament - extending maternity leave to 20 weeks with full pay](#)