



Alþýðusamband Íslands

ASI Policy on work-life balance

ASI's 43rd Congress demands a society allowing for a fair balance between participation in the labour market, family responsibilities and private life. Integration of labour market participation and private life is a necessary premise for acceptable conditions at work and the quality of life to which all workers have a right.

A growing number of workers can no longer withstand the strain, speed and demands of today's labour market. At the same time they face the demanding task of caring for their children, spouses and parents. This includes young people tackling exacting jobs and family responsibilities, as well as those who are older and faced with changes and new demands in their jobs. People also have limited opportunities for leisure time, to rest and enjoy the good things in life. The result is increased stress and burnout, which can at the worst of times lead to serious illness and disability. This development must be acted upon before it is too late. It is the joint interest of workers, industries and society as a whole.

The most important responsibilities in people's life are work and family. It is a fact that women work more unpaid hours in the home and spend more time on care than men do, even though female labour force participation in Iceland is the highest in the world. Women are constantly seeking more education and more diverse jobs. These facts are of great economic importance for society and constitute a large factor in Iceland's prosperity. This arrangement calls for a change in gender roles in the workplace and new ways of harmonising work and family life.

It is a major premise for work-life balance as well as labour market gender equality that the maternity/paternity and parental leave system be strengthened. In order to achieve the objective of the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave it must be secured that children spend time with both parents irrespective of family pattern, and the gap in children's care, between maternity/paternity leave and kindergarten, must be closed. The rights of single parents must also be protected. It is also of importance that schools, sports and recreational activities as well as the industries meet the needs of children in kindergarten and primary school.

Parents' right to a paid leave of absence for taking care of and attending sick children must be reconsidered. Furthermore, this right needs to be extended to taking care of other family members, while respecting different family structures.

Labour market participation makes an ever growing demand on workers for more education and competence to meet changes and new challenges. Flexibility must be increased in order to meet these demands and workers must be given opportunities to attend educational programmes and continuous education during working hours without a loss of wages.

The population is ageing and people's health is generally better than before. However, an account must be taken of the fact that job requirements differ and no two individuals are the same. It is important to address these different circumstances and allow for flexibility when it comes to worker retirement. That includes among other things the possibility of part-time employment and not linking retirement with a specific age.

ASI Policy

- The effects of new technology and changes in jobs, such as unclear boundaries between working hours and private life, must not upset the work-life balance. Therefore work outside customary working hours shall be defined in a contract of employment.
- Parental leave be lengthened to 12 months immediately and in the next three years to up to 18 months. The maximum parental leave payment shall be raised and the minimum means of support be secured.
- The rights of single parents must also be protected.
- All children must have a right to attend kindergarten and the gap in children's care between the parental leave and kindergarten must be closed.
- Schools, sports and recreational activities as well as parents' rights in the labour market must reflect parents' needs as well as those of children in kindergarten and primary school. It is important to balance flexible working hours and childcare provisions for children in kindergarten and primary school. Children must also be able to partake in any recreational activities, irrespective of their parents' financial status.
- Parents' right to a paid leave of absence to attend sick children must be reconsidered. That right shall be extended to include taking care of other family members.
- People need to be given an opportunity for further studies and continuous education during working hours, with sufficient flexibility and without reducing wages.
- Flexibility in the labour market needs to be increased and workers' right to a time off from work for continued education, part-time work or other personal reasons must be secured.
- Workers need more practical alternatives when it comes to flexible retirement, taking into consideration different circumstances in the labour market.
- ASI shall initiate research that will shed light on how workers stand and what options they have for balancing their work and private life.

ASI Tasks

- Press for a clear definition of work duties and separation of working time and private life.
- Demand a review of the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave on the basis of ASI's objectives. The review shall include different family forms.
- Demand that all children be guaranteed a right to secure daycare immediately following the maternity /paternity leave.
- Press for schools, sports, daycare, recreational activities as well as labour market rights to better meet the needs of parents of children in kindergarten and primary school.
- Press with the member unions to increase the parental right to be absent from work when teaching is suspended, for children in kindergarten and primary school.
- Press with the member unions for revision of the rules on parental right to paid absences due to a child's illness. That right shall be extended so as to include taking care of other family members.

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- Press for workers' right to seek education during working hours without pay cuts, in cooperation with ASI member unions.
- Negotiations shall begin immediately with the authorities and employers' organisations on a framework agreement for flexible retirement, taking into account different individuals and circumstances in the labour market.