

Press release: Workers' rights to be protected in UK law

- Parliament to be given a vote on adopting future EU rules on workers' rights
- government will consult with trade unions and businesses on future workers' rights proposals
- proposals include introducing a single enforcement body to protect vulnerable and agency workers
- new parliamentary power builds on the government's Good Work Plan, announced last year

The new measures will protect and improve workers' rights after Britain leaves the EU and this follows the government's commitment in December to the largest upgrade to workers' rights in a generation.

The government has made a commitment not to reduce the standards of workers' rights from EU laws retained in UK law and will ensure that new legislation changing those laws will be assessed as to whether they uphold this commitment.

Parliament will be given the right through the Withdrawal Agreement Bill to consider any future changes in EU law that strengthen workers' rights or workplace health and safety standards, and vote on whether they too should be adopted into UK law.

The measures will require Parliament to be given regular updates on changes to EU legislation in this area and will give MPs a choice on the action government will take in response, including whether MPs want to decide that the UK should remain aligned with the EU. In preparing those updates, trade unions, businesses and the relevant select committees of Parliament will be consulted with.

This new process will start with 2 EU Directives that come into force after we have left and following the Implementation Period – the Work Life Balance Directive and the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive. The government has voted in favour of both of these directives in the European Council and intends to ask Parliament if it wants to adopt them into UK law.

The Work Life Balance Directive introduces new rights for parents and carers, such as 2 months of paid leave for each parent up until the child is 8 and also 5 days of leave for those caring for sick relatives.

The Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive will set the terms of employment for workers by their first working day and provides more stability if you work in shifts. The government is already committed to many of these measures.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

We have as a country led the way in workers' rights while maintaining a flexible labour market. The enormous success of our jobs market and the wealth of opportunities for workers across the nation have long been underpinned by the policies and standards that exceed the minimums set by the EU and that has been driven by successive governments of all parties.

After Brexit it should be for Parliament to decide what rules are most appropriate, rather than automatically accepting EU changes. When it comes to workers' rights this Parliament has set world-leading standards and will continue to do so in the future, taking its own decisions working closely with trade unions and businesses.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of establishing and improving the rights of working men and women from Shaftesbury's Factories Acts, through William Hague's Disability Discrimination Act to the Minimum Wage introduced by a Labour government, bolstered into the National Living Wage by a Conservative government.

While the EU sets minimum requirements in many areas of workers' rights, time and again the UK has led the way and chosen to exceed them. We are determined to maintain this record of leadership outside the EU. Yet it is a fact that some people felt that the rights of workers would not be adequately addressed, so as part of the Withdrawal Agreement Bill we will ensure parliament is given a vote on the action government will take in response to changes to EU legislation on workers' rights.

There will also be an extra package of measures to strengthen enforcement of workers' rights.

Proposals include bringing a range of enforcement bodies under one roof. Currently, HMRC enforces the national minimum and living wages; the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority investigates reports of exploitation and illegal activity in the workplace; and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate protects the rights of agency workers.

Proposals for a single labour market enforcement body will be brought forward in the coming months. It would have the power, for example, to enforce holiday payments for vulnerable workers and ensure agency workers are not underpaid. It would also have a duty to consult unions and employment unions on its work.

- The Prime Minister, in her role as Minister for Women and Equalities,

drove forward the legislation that introduced parental leave, something no EU regulation provides for.

- In January, the government set out new further proposals to protect pregnant women and new parents returning to work. This move goes further than current EU requirements on maternity entitlements and parental leave.
- As Home Secretary, the Prime Minister brought the Gangmasters Licensing Authority into the Home Office, aligning it with the National Crime Agency so that bosses who exploited workers could be more easily identified and prosecuted.
- In December 2018, Business Secretary Greg Clark announced the largest upgrade to workers' rights in a generation through the [Good Work Plan](#), including a day one statement for all workers setting out entitlements and pay. It will also put an end to a legal loophole that enables some firms to pay agency workers less than permanent staff
- Today (Wednesday 6 March), secondary legislation on measures set out in the Government's Good Work Plan will also be debated in the House of Commons, including ending the legal loophole which enables some firms to pay agency workers less than permanent staff and quadrupling maximum employment tribunal fines for employers who have shown malice, spite or gross oversight from £5,000 to £20,000