



## IEU Policy - Work Life and Family Balance

### Preamble

Changes in social, family and labour market structures *continue* to put increased pressure on families making balancing work, life and family a key industrial and social priority. In addition, the trend towards de-institutionalisation of care for dependents with a disability or frail, elderly dependents has increased the need for support for employees with a wider range of caring responsibilities, particularly the "sandwich generation" of employees who care for both children and elderly parents.

Recent research identifies that a person's life-course might now include numerous transitions around education, caring, full and part-time work, further education, possible retrenchment and unemployment and then retirement. It is uncommon for people to experience one singular transition. In fact throughout their lifetime a person may make several, if not all the transitions specified. An active approach to dealing with a non-linear life-course is needed to ensure protection from the risks inherent in a transitional labour market.

Almost all IEU members will have short or long term caring responsibilities at some stage of their working lives. While family needs are continuous, this policy recognises that there are key times in people's lives which are of particular significance and where people may have specific needs. These include:

- The formation of families, particularly the birth, care and up bringing of children;
- The need to provide care and support for family members in times of illness, death or crisis;
- The need to provide care and support for elderly family members; and
- The need to fully participate in significant family events.

Employment practices which support and foster work life balance also provide for a positive work environment. Employment provisions which provide for a work, life and family balance contribute to equality in the workplace by recognising that employees have various caring responsibilities and enables

them to have fair access to workplace opportunities.

Employees who have the opportunity to balance their work and family responsibilities have greater capacity to increase their health, well being and quality of life. The changing age demographic of the workplace, and wider population generally, impacts on members in their workplaces. Job share and continuing part-time work will increasingly be seen as an option for employees in the mid and latter periods of their working lives. There are as well demands placed on employees by community involvement that need to be addressed and managed.

Further, current Workplace Gender Equity legislation has placed renewed emphasis on employees as carers. The legislation reflects a shift in focus from equal opportunity for women to equality between the genders and encourages workplaces to allow men and women to work flexibly to meet family and caring responsibilities.

IEU members are entitled to access meaningful and progressive career pathways. Equally IEU members are entitled to be supported by workplace policies, industrial provisions, Federal and State/Territory legislation to ensure that they can reasonably access a balance between their career and life demands at the various life stages.

Whilst progress has been made in improving and regulating the working conditions for IEU members, the interaction between work, life and family for IEU members will remain an important aspect of the IEU industrial, organising and campaigning agenda. The challenge our members face is to make a work, life and family balance more achievable.

### Policy Purpose

The IEU policy on Work Life and Family Balance provides a set of coherent principles which can be used to guide the development of industrial provisions and member education processes which support employees in achieving their work, life and family balance needs.

## **Policy Principles**

IEU members come from a wide variety of cultural and family backgrounds; nuclear families, same sex couples, extended families, multi-generational households, Indigenous kinship structures and sole parent families. The IEU believes that all these variations of family are legitimate and must be taken into consideration when defining work, life and family balance.

The following key principles underpin this policy:

- Provision of entitlements should be made equally available to men and women;
- All Australian workplaces should provide the minimum standards outlined in various International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions to employees;
- Employers have a social responsibility to organise work in a manner which assists employees to meet family responsibilities;
- Employees have a right to have their family needs accommodated in the workplace, and employers should make employees familiar with these rights;
- Employees should not suffer career disadvantage because they exercise their rights in relation to their family responsibilities;
- Entitlements should be made equally available to all categories of employees;
- Employers should not discriminate in the provision of entitlements on the grounds of race, colour, sex, sexual preference, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin; and
- Employers must guarantee the maximum level of support for employees returning to work from parental leave.

## **Actions Arising from Policy Principles**

The IEU is committed to ensuring that our members have genuine choices and power over balancing the needs of the workplace

with those of their own life and the needs of their families.

The IEU believes that there is a shared responsibility between union, employer and governments to support employees to balance their work and caring responsibilities.

Further, the IEU believes that, in order to support our members as they balance their career with the various caring responsibilities, we have a responsibility to:

- Negotiate mechanisms which provide for manageable workloads and reasonable hours;
- Insist that workplaces genuinely consult with their employees about workloads and workplace change in order to take into account family and broader community needs;
- Negotiate for best practice paid leave entitlements and flexible work provisions which support employees to care for their families;
- Ensure that those who take time out of their profession to be with their families are not disadvantaged but encouraged and, on returning to work, are able to access fair and reasonable conditions;
- Negotiate for greater regulations which provide security of work;
- Ensure dignity in retirement is provided to employees through negotiation of superannuation entitlements accrued during paid leave and access to flexible transitions to retirement provisions in the workplace;
- Negotiate for the recognition of cultural diversity in a workplace through provisions which recognise cultural and family needs;
- Eliminate any form of direct or indirect discrimination employees suffer because of family or carer responsibilities;
- Advocate for employees rights to a safe home, community and workplace; and
- Provide assistance and guidance to worksites as they develop and implement policies and procedures that support work life and family balance.