

Dying to Work MEP Focus Group Briefing Pack

#dyingtoworkEU

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What is the Dying to Work Campaign?

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The Dying to Work Campaign is about securing better protection for employees who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

On reading those last words, you may be surprised that this could be an issue in the first place. For most of us, our first reaction when we hear someone has a terminal illness is one of sympathy. We would not expect that this person should have to face an uphill struggle with their employer in order to keep their job. This is clearly the last thing a terminally ill person should need to worry about.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what happened to a woman called Jacci Woodcock, a constituent from my region in the UK.

Jacci was diagnosed with terminal breast cancer and had planned to continue to work, not only because she was a single mother and it was financially necessary, but also because she enjoyed her work. Jacci informed her employer of her diagnosis, expecting support and appropriate measures to be put in place. However, Jacci received no support and in fact her employer tried to unfairly dismiss her.

Thankfully for Jacci her trade union was there to support her and together they successfully challenged Jacci's employer. But what about those who aren't so lucky? If you found yourself in that situation, would you really want to spend the precious time you have left fighting with your employer?

As it currently stands, there are no protections for terminally ill employees under EU law. This is what the Dying to Work campaign wants to change. We want to see:

- New EU legislation, similar to the Pregnant Workers Directive, which safeguards the rights of employees, by identifying 'terminal illness' as a protected characteristic.
- Protections for the employee's death in service benefits which are lost if the employee is fired. This benefit linked to workers' employment contracts can be used to cover funeral costs and can ease the financial burden of the family that the individual leaves behind.

What will the MEP Focus Group do?



The Dying to Work campaign started in the UK, but we know that this is an issue across Europe. With no proper EU legislation in place, the ECPC has confirmed cases of terminally ill cancer patients across the EU who have faced unfair treatment at work.

That's why the campaign team have increased the scope of the campaign to the EU level, bringing their message to the European Parliament in 2015 and working with partners such as the ETUC, EPF and ECPC to drive EU-wide cooperation on the campaign.

As the European Parliament Spokesperson for the campaign, I want to bring together a wide range of people to take the campaign forward. That is why I am launching the Dying To Work MEP Focus Group. The Group will be a cross-party, cross-national hub, bringing MEPs and their offices, together with interested external partners, to discuss how best to advance the Dying to Work campaign at the EU level. The Group's activity will include:

- Working with EU partners (for example, unions and patient groups) on how best to obtain campaign objectives through existing and ongoing EU legislation
- Awareness raising activities across the EU27
- Exploring possibility to collect more data across Europe to better capture the scale of the problem
- Expanding the reach of the voluntary charter to the EU level, encouraging EU-wide employers to sign up
- Identifying relevant opportunities for intervention within European Parliament's events and activities



The EU has a proud record of protecting workers across Europe - it is only right that this protection extends to employees who have been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

By becoming a member of this Focus Group, you can help the campaign achieve its important objectives at the EU level and bring about real change for thousands of workers across Europe.

FAQs

But why would a terminally ill person want to carry on working?

It may at first seem shocking that someone who has received the devastating diagnosis of a terminal illness would want to carry on working.

However for many people, a terminal diagnosis does not stop the fact that there are bills to pay, or mouths to feed.

This worry is compounded by the fact that in several EU countries, a number of in work benefits such as Life Assurance and Death in Service payments, which provide future financial security to the families left behind, are all tied to employment. This can mean that by losing your job in the final weeks or months of life can put your family in a challenging financial position.

Whatsmore, work can provide an important distraction and sense of normality and helps people retain their dignity and identity during this difficult period.

This is a campaign about choice. The campaign does not seek to force people to stay in work but instead to have the ability to select the right option for themselves and their families based on their own personal and financial circumstances.

By preventing unscrupulous employers terminating the employment of terminally ill workers, people will still be able to leave their employment, apply to take ill health retirement, bring forward their pension or any other action which would be in their interest.

Is this a problem outside of the UK?

Unfortunately Jacci's story is not unique. From speaking with European patient groups and trade unions, we know that unfair treatment against employees who become seriously ill is a problem across the EU.

And although there are laws on discrimination and protections in place in most EU countries, there are no specific protections covering terminally ill workers under any EU law.

However, due to the sensitive nature of terminal illness, there is little data surrounding the employment status of these people. This means we simply have no way of knowing the scale of the problem. This is one of the things the Dying to Work MEP Focus Group wants to change.

Why is this campaign different from other work being done to enhance employment opportunities for patients?

European patient organisations and trade unions are already currently active in a lot of fantastic work to support the return to work of people who have been diagnosed with serious conditions, such as chronic illness.

However within these conversations, the situation of terminally ill employees is often overlooked. Whatsmore, terminally ill employees have distinct needs from those of other patients. This is because the nature of terminal illness means workers often have little time to adapt to their changing conditions and for any workplace adjustments to be made.

Moreover, for somebody who is in the final few months or years of their lives, undergoing standard assessments to determine their capability to continue working will add additional stress and strain at a time when they simply do not need any further concern and worry.

That is why the Dying to Work campaign is ultimately calling for terminal illness to attain the status of a “protected characteristic” under EU law. Similar to the situation under the Pregnant Workers Directive, this would mean that the employee’s status is protected within a set period of time following their terminal diagnosis.

What can I do to support the campaign?

1. Come to the launch event on the **28th February, 13h-15h in JAN4Q2**.
2. Tweet your support for the campaign [#dyingtoworkEU](#)
3. Encourage a big employer in your home country to sign the [voluntary charter](#)
4. Could you help get the campaign objectives into the campaign manifestos for your national and European elections?

This campaign has the support of the following organisations:



If you have any further questions, get in touch with us:
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