

Role of women in industry

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Ilda **FIGUEIREDO** (GUE/NGL, PT) on the role of women in industry. Firstly, it recalls that the presence of women in industry varies according to the sector in which they work. While there appears to be overrepresentation in some sectors (textiles, garments, embroidery, footwear, cork, cabling, electrical and electronic equipment and food, sectors in which repetitive movements are responsible for musculo-skeletal disorders) others have a very low female representation, namely in cutting-edge technology sectors. The committee also recalls that, on average, around 14% of women in employment in the EU work in industry, but this figure rises to 25% in some countries – with a high proportion of part time employees, women represent 65% of part-time workers in this sector.

With this in mind, MEPs call for the role of women in industry to be promoted and encouraged through equal pay, better working conditions and career prospects, professional training and compliance with maternity rights. In this context, large companies are urged to draw up and introduce their own negotiated equality programmes on a compulsory basis and to encourage small and medium-sized undertakings to do likewise.

Reaffirming that the promotion of decent work forms an integral part of the European Union's values, MEPs call on the Member States to take measures with a view to complying with social standards vis-à-vis women in industry but, above all, to abolish all forms of exploitation of women in the workplace (namely in the textile industry). They also call on the Commission and social partners to define high standards for health protection at work that take full account of the gender dimension.

Combating poverty: highlighting that single-income households, especially where women earn that income, are particularly affected by poverty, MEPs call on the EU and Member States to make the eradication of poverty and social exclusion a political priority. With this in mind, MEPs call on the Commission to promote professional training policies for women, namely in cutting-edge technology sectors, to encourage research and innovation and to plan development programmes for women in industrial SMEs.

Towards better representation of women: as supports of a greater representation of women in industry, MEPs also call for better representation of women in trade unions and other social partners. The presence of women on management boards of companies must also be promoted.

Better access to funds: MEPs call on the Member States and the Commission to take account of the gender dimension when distributing European Global Adjustment Fund aid, so as to ensure that such aid also reaches sectors with a high concentration of female labour. MEPs also plead for Member States to promote female entrepreneurship in the industrial sector and to provide financial support for women setting up companies. At the same time, MEPs call for Community aid not to be granted to companies which, after benefiting from such funding in a Member State, transfer their production to another country without fully implementing contracts concluded with the Member State concerned. In the event of irregularities, funds granted must be returned.

Lastly, MEPs call on those responsible inside firms to include flexible family policy measures in their workforce management plan to make it easier for employees to return to work after a career break.