

Role of women in industry

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Ilda **FIGUEIREDO** (GUE/NGL, PT) on the role of women in industry. The resolution was adopted by 508 votes for, 41 against and 24 abstentions. 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)) others have a very low female representation, namely in cutting-edge technology sectors. Parliament 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** (which occurs most frequently in certain sectors such as the textile industry). They stress the need for urgent measures for the full implementation of Directive 75/117 EEC in order to combat wage discrimination, particularly by greater trade union involvement and by drawing up phased sectoral plans, with precise targets, which will make it possible to put an end to wage discrimination.

Parliament calls on the Commission and the sectoral social partners to define high standards for health protection at work that take account of the gender dimension, and in particular maternity protection. It notes that women are overrepresented in sectors in which repetitive movements are responsible for occupational diseases such as musculo-skeletal disorders, and that special consideration should be given to such conditions.

It emphasises the fact that most studies show that single-income households, especially where women earn that income, are particularly affected by **poverty**. The eradication of poverty and social exclusion must remain a political priority for the EU. 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.

Some regions are characterised by a high concentration of undertakings in the textile and garment sector, in which sector a large proportion of working women are employed, particularly those coming from less-favoured regions of the EU. Parliament calls for particular attention to be paid to the import of products from third countries. It stresses the need to concentrate on controlled structural change in the textile industry and the need to direct women to undertake further education in order to improve their employability in the growing branches of industry.

Parliament regrets the **low level of participation of women** in organisations set up by the social partners. It calls for balanced representation of women and men on the management boards of companies, particularly where the Member States are shareholders, and stresses the need to encourage the creation of women's networks within individual companies, between companies in the same industrial field, and

between the different industrial fields. It also regrets the low proportion of women in the advanced technology sector.

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. Parliament considers that relocations have affected industries with a high concentration of female labour, such as textiles, clothing, footwear, cabling, ceramics, electrical and electronic equipment and various segments of the food industry, and that this situation more seriously affects Member States with a lower level of economic development, causing unemployment and jeopardising economic and social cohesion. It stresses the need to monitor the relocation of companies in EU Member States and re-orientate the policy on granting Community funds so as to guarantee jobs and regional development.

Lastly, it calls 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.