Equality between women and men - 2008

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PURPOSE : annual report 2008 on equality between men and women.

CONTENT : this is fifth annual report on equality between women and men, produced in collaboration with the Member States at the request of the European Council.

Gender gaps: between 2000 and 2006 employment in EU-27 grew by nearly 12 million, including more than 7.5 million women. The female **employment rate** went up each year, reaching 57.2% in 2006, 3.5 % more than in 2000, bringing the objective of 60% by 2010 within reach. However, several aspects of the quality of women's work remain problematic. The indicators for pay, labour market segregation and the number of women in decision-making jobs have not shown any significant increase for several years. The **pay gap** has remained steady at 15% since 2003, and has narrowed by only one point since 2000. **Sectoral and occupational segregation** by gender is not diminishing and is even increasing in certain countries, a sign that women who have recently joined the labour market have gone into sectors and occupations already dominated by women. The presence of **female managers** in companies has stayed at 33%, and the number of female politicians is rising only very slowly. Furthermore, gaps between women and men may persist in all other aspects of work quality, e.g. **reconciling professional and private life**, working arrangements which do not fully exploit people's skills and in the field of health and safety at work. More than three-quarters of part-time workers are women (76.5%), corresponding to one woman in three, as against less than one man in ten. Temporary employment contracts are also more common for women (15.1%, one point more than for men).

In other words, it would appear that the substantial efforts made in connection with the European Strategy for Growth and Jobs have proved more successful in terms of quantity than quality. Gaps also remain on the socialside which may reflect the gaps on the labour market.

More efforts need to be made to create more and better jobs, taking account of the importance of a flexicurity approach and bearing in mind the differing impact of employment policies on women and men during their lifetime. This approach must cover both the intrinsic quality of work and all the aspects affecting it, such as the development of infrastructures to allow everyone to enter and remain in the labour market, or the possibility for individuals to achieve their professional ambitions and personal choices outside all the stereotypes. It is also essential to create the institutional tools needed to ensure good governance and effective implementation of political commitments.

The Commission's recommendations concern the following issues:

Quality jobs to foster equal economic independence: the creation of more jobs must go hand in hand with an improvement in quality.

–The efforts directed at eliminating gender gaps in employment must be continued and intensified as part of the new cycle of the European Strategy for Growth and Jobs.

–Support for the reconciliation of professional and private life should be stepped up, for example through innovative and flexible work and leave arrangements.

–Advanced training for workers should be ensured.

–The approach to issues of health and well-being at work and quality of the work environment should take account of the specific situations and problems of women and men.

–The potential offered by the Structural Funds must be fully exploited in order to support policies aimed at creating more and better jobs.

Quality services making for reconciliation of work and private life: the quality aspects need the same attention as accessibility.

–Efforts to improve the availability and accessibility of childcare services and care services for dependent persons should be continued and intensified.

–The quality of services should be enhanced by providing continuing training and skills upgrading and by fostering job enrichment. The quality of services of general interest, in particular transport services and employment administration or services, should be ensured.

–The potential offered by the Structural Funds must fully exploited in order to support the improvement, accessibility and quality of services.

Tackling stereotypes, support for individual choices: getting rid of stereotypes is one of the priorities of the Roadmap and the European social partners' framework on gender equality.

–Action to combat gender-based stereotypes must start at a very young age and should promote behaviour models which value individual choices of education pathways.

–It is necessary to remove cultural barriers in order to facilitate access for women and men to non-traditional occupations, including decision-making jobs. Approaches to ongoing training, professional development and vocational guidance should disregard all stereotypes, and training professionals should be made more aware of this issue.

–The media must participate in efforts to tackle stereotypical images of women and men.

Institutional mechanisms in support of political commitments and implementation of legislation: the Roadmap attaches great importance to the good governance that is necessary in order to ensure effective means of implementing these commitments.

–It is important to develop training and implementation tools which will allow all stakeholders to include a gender perspective in their respective areas of competence. It is vital to ensure the effective use of existing tools, such as the manuals for gender mainstreaming of employment policies produced by the Commission.

–It is essential to develop the capacities of the main players working for gender equality, so that they have the skills, instruments and resources they need to implement their policies.

–The implementation and follow-up of policies must be ensured using quantity and quality indicators as well as gender-based statistics which are reliable, comparable and available.