Non-discrimination based on gender and inter-generational solidarity

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own initiative report by Anna **ZÁBORSKÁ** (EPP-ED, SK) on non-discrimination based on gender and intergenerational solidarity, recalling that the Lisbon Strategy aims to ensure that 60% of women able to work are in employment. However, while this objective is commendable and worth reaching, considerable gaps between women and men persist in all other aspects of work quality, for instance balancing professional and private life. MEPs point out that the employment rate for women with dependent children is only 62.4%, as compared with 91.4% for men. They also recall that 76.5% of part-time workers are women.

Making the invisible creation of national wealth visible: noting that the number of households is gradually rising, but their size is being reduced (single-parent families), and that more and more children are living in blended families, MEPs believe that families, irrespective of the type, need to be supported so as to ensure that individual households will not have to bear the brunt of the challenges and changes now occurring and hence serve as the main social buffer in the face of unemployment, sickness, and disability, becoming a theatre of violence. It is therefore necessary to find appropriate medium and long-term solutions to avert the risk that young people and women will be exposed to a greater risk of poverty.

The solutions proposed by MEPs include the need to:

- look into current studies which suggest that the employment contract should be replaced by an **activity contract** (so as to allow for mobility, alternation, life cycles, and career breaks, as regards both employment and work in a self-employed capacity, accounted for by training or caring);
- assess how society and female employment might be affected by measures serving to **confer recognition on caring**, not least by means of symbolic calculation for pension purposes.

The Commission is called upon to present specific initiatives to validate the skills acquired in carrying out educational tasks, caring for dependent persons and household management so that these skills are taken into consideration upon re-entry into the labour market. MEPs also call on the Commission to conduct an awareness-raising campaign and to introduce pilot projects to facilitate the balanced participation of women and men in professional and family life.

As for Member States, they are called upon to consider flexible working hours for parents (as a result of free choice) and flexible times for childcare institutions, to help both women and men to combine work and family life more successfully. Member States are also urged to take measures to **recognise invisible and informal work in the field of intergenerational solidarity** carried out by women/mothers, men /fathers and carers at a legal, social and economic level (particularly as regards social security, professional status, earnings and equal opportunities for men and women).

The Commission is also called upon to promote in the Member States, by way of exchange of best practices, the model of the '**universal service employment cheque**', which is designed to facilitate aid services for individuals. Moreover, initiatives should be taken in the Member States to take account of the extraordinary potential represented by young retirees, from both a social and an economic point of view.

Promoting a balance between family plans and professional ambitions: MEPs call for additional measures to be taken to enable working mothers and fathers to be assisted under policies aimed at promoting a work-life balance. They call on Member States to ensure that **all persons who have**

temporarily interrupted their careers to bring up children or care for elderly or dependent persons can (re)enter the labour market and **retain the right to return to their former position** and level of career advancement.

Moreover, Member States are called upon to:

- develop policies that promote multigenerational activities, such as 'bridge-between-generation' centres where older adults are paid to take care of children;
- give priority to leave arrangements (parental leave, adoption leave, solidarity leave) applicable to persons wishing to interrupt their careers to look after a dependant;
- provide for the introduction of maternity leave of one year, allowing mothers who so wish to foster the fundamental bonding relationship with their children and to encourage paternity and parental leave.

The Commission is called upon to launch a review of work-life balance policies, particularly by: (i) guaranteeing that the cost of maternity is not borne by the employer, but by the public purse, in order to support demographic renewal; (ii) improving accessibility to care and assistance services for dependent people (children, people with disabilities and the elderly).

Furthermore, MEPs note that finding a work-life balance must not be achieved to the detriment of the future pensions of the persons concerned. Member States' **pension schemes** must be reformed so as to ensure that women – who are much more likely to interrupt their careers – are not penalised. It is therefore important for Member States to address the structural factors contributing to inequality in pension schemes. They should also promote a fiscal policy that takes account of household financial obligations, and particularly the costs of childcare and looking after elderly and dependent persons through a system of taxation or tax breaks. Moreover, MEPs call on Member States to ensure the **individualisation** of pension rights and social security system rights.

With a view to giving effect to the principle of equality between women and men, MEPs call on the Member States to take specific measures to remedy manifest instances of de facto inequality. The principle of equal treatment and opportunities should also be taken into account in all economic, employment, and social policies, as this will help to avert segregation on the labour market and eliminate pay gaps, as well as boosting the growth of female entrepreneurship and enhancing the value of the work that women do, **including domestic work**.

Lastly, MEPs call on the media to give positive and consistent attention to intergenerational relationships, through coverage of intergenerational issues.