Equality between women and men: roadmap 2006-2010

2006/2132(INI) - 26/11/2008 - Follow-up document

PURPOSE: presentation of a mid-term progress report on the roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010).

CONTENT: 50 years of Community policy promoting equality have improved the situation for women. However, inequalities persist in a number of areas, and developments, particularly in the context of globalisation and demographic changes, have created new challenges to be faced in order to achieve gender equality.

It is the responsibility of the European Union and the Member States to improve the equality situation in the context of concerted action. The roadmap adopted in March 2006presented the commitments by the Commission to gender equality for the period 2006-2010.

In the roadmap, the Commission announced the actions it intended to take in six policy areas: 1) equal economic independence for women and men, 2) reconciliation of private and professional life, 3) equal representation in decision-making, 4) eradication of all forms of gender-related violence, 5) elimination of gender stereotypes, 6) promotion of gender equality in external and development policies. It also undertakes to monitor and evaluate the roadmap.

This mid-term report describes how, since March 2006, actions have contributed to achieving the roadmap objectives. A final evaluation of the roadmap is scheduled for 2010.

Achievement of the roadmap objectives

1. **Achieving equal economic independence for women and men**: the rate of employment among women in the Union will very probably reach the target of 60% in 2010. However, the pay gap between women and men remains wide (15%). A number of the initiatives set out in the roadmap have been taken in order to take greater account of equality issues in the new 2008-2010 cycle of the **strategy for growth and employment**. Analysis of national measures to implement equality policy under the Lisbon strategy has shown that insufficient attention has been paid to this policy. In order to increase participation in employment, the workforce potential of women needs to be fully exploited and all economic operators need to be more committed. The Commission has analysed the difficulties encountered by women in becoming entrepreneurs and, in particular, has supported the network of **female entrepreneurs**. It recently adopted a Regulation which, in principle, extends the granting of state aid in particular to new enterprises created by women.Practices aimed at encouraging greater equality between women and men have also been supported in the context of corporate social responsibility. Other initiatives have been taken in the field of social protection and social inclusion. The needs of women and men in the field of health and access to care have been taken into consideration. Discussion of the future of policies to combat discriminationused experience acquired through the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007 to highlight the need to combat all forms of discrimination. Actions aimed at the Roma community also showed the importance of integrating equality issues into all the instruments used. The Commission has called on the Member States to integrate equality objectives to facilitate access to employment, education and training, promote participation in decision-making and strengthen the reconciliation of working and family life.

2. **Enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life**: legislative proposalshave been adopted in order on the one hand to reinforce the right of female workers to maternity leaveand, on the other, to ensure equal treatment for self-employed workers and assisting spouses.The Commission has noted the progress made by the Member States in improving the availability of childcare facilities (for 90% of children between the age of three and school age and for 33% of children aged under three). It noted in its report that only a minority of Member States has achieved this objective.Measures for developing childcare structures have been recommended and negotiations have begun on parental leave.
3. **Gender-balanced participation in decision-making**: the Commission has supported action by the Member States in this field; it has collected, analysed and disseminated comparable data and encouraged networking among stakeholders. To this end, a European network to promote women in decision-making posts in politics and economics has been established. For the first time, the network has brought together representatives of European networks in the field with the aim of acting in harmony. In the public research sector, the Union has set a target of 25% for women in leading positions. This target has been translated into a series of actions. Education and training programmes contain measures to reduce imbalances in education and in scientific and technical careers. The 7th Framework Programme for research takes gender equality into account. Women's career trends have been analysed in order to promote women's role in public research institutions, in particular through work by experts on decision-making in the research field. The preponderance of men among workers in the new communication technologies (NCT) sector has been highlighted, and a strategy has been proposed for encouraging women to commit to careers linked to NTC.
4. **Eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings**: actions to prevent and combat all forms of violence, particularly against women, will be pursued under the Daphne III programme. The large number of acts of violence among young people has also led the Commission to include the combating of violence against women among projects under the "Youth in action" programme. The Union's action plan to combat trafficking in human beings encourages the use of all instruments. A common framework for defining indicators and collecting data on trafficking in human beings has been drawn up in order to gain a better understanding of its scope. In addition, the Commission has presented recommendations on identifying and assisting victims of trafficking and supported the principal players and actions such as the Anti-Trafficking Day.
5. **Eliminating gender stereotypes**: sexist stereotypes influence the choice of education pathways and, as the Commission has stressed, result in women frequently being more represented in lower-paid professions. The objectives set by the European Council aim to increase by 15% the number of graduates in mathematics, sciences and technology while at the same time reducing the imbalance between women and men. In order to achieve these objectives and reduce stereotypes in general, gender equality has been integrated as a priority into Community education and training programmes. Stereotyped perceptions, particularly regarding women's ability to carry out certain tasks within undertakings, have led the Commission to launch awareness-raising actions in the business sector.
6. **Promoting gender equality outside the EU**: the Union's strategy for gender equality in development policy, to be followed by an action plan, has led to greater account being taken of gender equality in development cooperation and the EU's external relations. Promoting equality in individual country strategies drawn up under the 10th European Development Fund was supported by the drawing up of programming guidelines and the monitoring of equality issues in national plans. Gender equality was also reinforced under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The new European instrument for democracy and human rights provides for support for equality and women's rights in a number of fields, particularly the participation of women in politics and combating domestic violence and genital mutilation. Other initiatives have also been taken in cooperation with the United Nations and the ILO on decent work in developing countries.

Conclusion: the roadmap provides an ambitious political framework for promoting gender equality in all the Union's policies and activities. There has been significant progress, and much more specific account has been taken of equality objectives in all policies recorded in the roadmap. The most significant

advances appear to be linked to the Union's political commitments, where quantified common objectives guide Community action. However, progress is uneven and highlights the need to continue to act until 2010. A particular difficulty encountered in implementing equality policy is that of providing a clear idea of the challenges it raises. Awareness-raising and adherence to the social and political challenges of the equality objectives should be strengthened, which requires a strong political will. Balanced participation of women in all decision-making bodies, both economic and political, must be promoted at Union level and within structures managed by the Commission.

In 2010 the Commission will evaluate the results achieved and prepare a strategy for following up the roadmap. A conference will be organised in the spring of 2009 to assess the implementation of the roadmap, mobilise policies and raise awareness among players of the challenges of gender equality.