Non-discrimination based on gender and inter-generational solidarity

2008/2118(INI) - 03/02/2009 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 358 votes to 271, with 23 abstentions, a resolution on non-discrimination based on sex and inter-generational solidarity.

The text adopted in plenary had been tabled by the **Greens/ALE** group, pursuant to Article 45(2) of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure, in the form of a proposal for a resolution aimed at replacing the proposal for a resolution contained in the report tabled by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

The resolution recalls that considerable gaps between women and men persist in all other aspects of work quality (for instance, balancing professional and private life) and that the employment rate for women with dependent children is only 62.4%, as compared with 91.4% for men. The Parliament also recalls that 76.5% of part-time workers are women. Moreover, the Parliament stresses that the Lisbon Strategy aims to ensure that 60% of women able to work are in employment. It therefore protests against the waste of these resources and their potential for the durability of pension and welfare systems.

High-quality social services: the Parliament emphasises that the principle of solidarity between generations is one of the structural keys to the European social model. It therefore calls for all social stakeholders to be involved in guaranteeing high-quality social services of general interest for families, young people and all those unable to support themselves. The number and quality of these services differs between Member States. That is why the Parliament reiterates the need for access to high-quality social services in all Member States. In this respect, the Parliament stresses that care work is not equally shared between women and men, which in turn has a **direct negative impact** on women's ability to participate in all aspects of social, economic, cultural and political life.

Strengthening care and assistance services: the Parliament stresses that good-quality affordable childcare facilities, operating at hours which suit parents and children, as well as affordable good-quality care structure for older people and other dependents, must be central elements of the EU social model and **key elements in facilitating women's access to the labour market** and paid employment. In this respect, the plenary reminds the Member States of their commitments, agreed at the Barcelona European Council of 2002, to eliminate obstacles to the equal participation of women and men in the labour market and to introduce by 2010 childcare for 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and for at least 33% of children under three years old. According to the Parliament, similar targets should be put forward for facilities for care for the elderly and sick relatives. MEPs fear that the **Czech Presidency's** proposal for **childcare as a "fully fledged alternative to a professional career"** is geared towards the traditional division of labour between men and women (that is to say the traditional concept of a worker being male whose personal needs are taken care of by 'invisible hands' (women) organising the home and the family). The Parliament is very concerned by the fact that, especially in times of economic recession, the Czech Presidency's proposal forces women to give up their jobs in order to follow their 'natural' path, i.e. to look after children and other dependents.

Reiterating the principle of financial emancipation of women: the plenary refers to the huge imbalance between men and women in the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities, leading mainly women to opt for flexible working arrangements or even to give up work altogether. The Parliament stresses that full participation by a parent or parents in work with decent pay can help to avoid in-work poverty. Moreover, the Parliament reiterates that women's own income and paid employment remains the key to their economic autonomy and to greater equality between women and men in society as a whole.

Independent pension schemes: the Plenary stresses that pension schemes in the Member States still leave many women with only derived rights based on their husband's employment record, with the consequence that the majority of older people living in poverty are women. The Parliament therefore calls on the Member States to address the structural factors contributing to inequality in pension schemes.

Validating domestic skills upon re-entry into the labour market: the Parliament calls on the Commission to bring forward a proposal for a new directive regarding specific rights and safeguards in relation to the reconciliation of working and family life where there are dependent family members (children, elderly and disabled people) and 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**.

More flexible working hours: according to the Parliament, all persons wishing to interrupt their formal careers or reduce the number of hours they work for the sake of intergenerational solidarity should be able to benefit from flexible working arrangements. Initiatives should also be taken to enable working mothers and fathers to better organise their days. In this context, the Parliament proposes **supporting leave arrangements** (parental leave, adoption leave, solidarity leave). The Commission is called upon to launch a review of work-life balance policies, particularly by: (i) guaranteeing that the cost of maternity/paternity 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 those who are reliant on care (children, people with disabilities and the elderly).

Promoting the return of women to the labour market: MEPs call on the 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. Other fiscal measures are also called for, including the individualisation of pension rights and social security system rights.

Combating inequality: lastly, the Parliament calls on the institutions and the Member States to take specific measures in favour of women in order to remedy manifest instances of de facto inequality in relation to men. It also calls on the institutions of the European Union and all public authorities to take the principle of equality between women and men actively into account when adopting and implementing regulations, drawing up public policies, and pursuing their activities as a whole.