Equality between women and men in the European Union — 2009

2009/2101(INI) - 10/02/2010 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 381 votes to 253, with 31 abstentions, a resolution on equality between women and men in the European Union.

Gender equality at a time of economic upheaval: Parliament congratulates the Commission for emphasizing, in its 2009 report, the importance of strengthening gender equality policies at a time of economic upheaval, but points to the need for further practical action and new policies. Members are critical of the fact that economic recovery projects mainly focus on male dominated employment. They underline that support for the future of men's rather than women's employment increases rather than decreases gender inequality, and insist that **gender equality must be mainstreamed in European, national and international plans for economic recovery**. Parliament considers that the crisis is likely to affect women above all because of budget cuts in the Member States.

Parliament urges the Council, Commission and Member States to take certain measures to defend social rights and to guarantee that the economic and financial crisis will not lead to cuts in social benefits and social services, in particular child care and care for the elderly. It calls on the Member States which have to implement fiscal consolidation policies to prepare recovery policies that reflect the specific needs and circumstances of women and men, particularly through the use of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.

Improve the quality of work for women: Parliament welcomes the fact that the target of a 60% female employment rate by 2010, set at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000, will soon be reached, but notes that a high proportion of the jobs concerned are, regrettably, insecure and poorly paid. It deplores also the major disparities among the Member States in this field, (the rate of employment varies from 37.4% to 74.3%, depending on the Member State), and asks the Member States, therefore, to take the measures needed in order to apply Directive 2006/54/EC effectively. Members also suggest other measures, such as (i) giving consideration to the situation of spouses helping in small family businesses and developing the legal construct of shared ownership, in order to ensure full recognition of women's rights in the agricultural sector; (ii) positive action to integrate women in projects and programmes on ecological transformation, i.e. in the renewables sector, and (iii) promoting female entrepreneurship in the industrial sector.

Equal pay for equal work: Parliament points out that women's personal income and paid employment remains key to their economic autonomy. They are exposed to a higher risk of poverty because the gender pay gap has remained stubbornly wide. Member States are asked to apply Directive 2006/54/EC immediately and, in particular, to promote the principal of 'equal pay for equal work' or that of 'work of equal value'. Action should also be taken with a view to reducing pension disparities between women and men. Parliament deplores the fact that the Commission has still not presented its legislative proposal for the revision of the existing legislation relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women (following its resolution of 18 November 2008).

Sharing of family responsibilities: the Commission and Member States are asked to run awareness-raising campaigns in schools, workplaces and the media in order to promote the diversification of career choices, especially for girls, and to combat persistent sexist stereotyping and degrading images, with particular emphasis on campaigns that highlight men's role in better **sharing of family responsibilities**.

Facilitating work-life balance: Member States are called upon to foster the spread of good practices in this area. Parliament emphasises the importance of pre-school childcare provision, child-minding services and the provision of assistance to elderly persons. Whilst it congratulates the Commission on the steps it has taken and particularly on its proposals for revision of Directive 92/85/EEC in relation to maternity protection and Directive 86/613/EC in relation to 'assisting spouses' in family businesses, it considers that the Commission's proposed revision of Directive 92/85/EEC falls short of what would be desirable from the point of view of promoting work-life balance for men and women. It maintains that **paternity leave is an issue that needs to be addressed at European level**. It considers that maternity leave should be linked to paternity leave so as to afford better protection to women on the labour market.

More women in positions of responsibility: Member States are asked to take effective steps, notably through legislation, to encourage gender balance in corporate, administrative and political positions of responsibility, with **binding targets** to ensure the equal representation of women and men. Parliament notes in this regard the positive effects of the use of electoral quotas on the representation of women. It welcomes the significant increase in the numbers of female chairs of parliamentary committees and female EP vice-presidents. Members consider in this regard that the proportion of women Commissioners (representing 33% of the total) - achieved with great difficulty - is the bare minimum. It proposes that, in future nominations, there should be two candidates, one of each gender, so as to facilitate the composition of a more representative Commission.

Parliament indicates that the proportion of female MEPs rose from 32.1% in the 2004-2009 parliamentary term to 35% after the elections of 7 June 2009 and there were increases, too, in the proportion of female chairs of parliamentary committees, up from 25% to 41%, and the proportion of female EP vice-presidents, up from 28.5% to 42.8%.

Migrant and vulnerable groups of women: Parliament calls for particular attention to be given to the integration of migrants while also ensuring that they are given access to education and training, and courses in the language of their host country. It asks for particular note to be taken of more vulnerable groups of women – disabled women, women with dependants, elderly women, minority and immigrant women and women prisoners – and to develop targeted measures to meet their needs.

Fight against trafficking: Members call on the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden to act at once to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. They point out that violence against women is still a major problem, and call on the Commission to establish a European Year for combating violence against women. Parliament endorses the Spanish Presidency's proposals to establish a European inter-gender violence monitoring centre and introduce the European protection order for victims and a common EU-wide telephone helpline for victims. It recalls that some 20-25% of women suffer physical violence, and more than 10% sexual violence. This is why Parliament calls on the Commission to start drawing up a proposal for a comprehensive directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including trafficking (see this point in the joint resolution adopted on the same day – RSP /2009/2782)

Sexual and reproductive rights: lastly, with 361 votes for, 237 against and 40 abstentions, the plenary stressed that women must have control over their sexual and reproductive rights, notably through easy access to **contraception** and **abortion**. Women must have access free of charge to consultation on abortion, and Parliament supports actions to improve women's access to sexual and reproductive health services and to raise their awareness of their rights and of available services.