Gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis

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The European Parliament adopted by 352 votes to 85, with 176 abstentions, a resolution on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis.

Financial crisis: **women more affected by men**: Parliament points out that equal treatment of women and men is one of the objectives of the EU and therefore one of the key principles in any policy response to the economic and financial crisis. It stresses the need to prevent the current financial and economic crisis, and future economic issues, endangering what has been achieved so far in the field of gender equality. The resolution states that women are more likely to be affected by the recession. Members stress the need to prevent the current financial and economic crisis, and future economic issues, endangering what has been achieved so far in the field of gender equality and to avoid the recession being used, as is already the case in some Member States, as an argument for **scaling back gender equality measures**. Member stress that, at the same time, the recession can be used as a unique opportunity to make economic and social policies more gender-inclusive and to move towards creating a more gender-equal society.

Hidden costs of the crisis: the resolution points out that women's integration into the workplace in recent decades means not only a greater direct impact of the crisis on women themselves but also on households, where incomes will be significantly affected by female job losses. It invites the European Union institutions and the Member States to take into account the hidden cost of the crisis, including the different and often unacknowledged gendered consequences. It also highlights that macro-economic policies are predominantly associated with an increase in the gender segregation of labour, destabilisation of women's employment through subcontracting, increases in the gender pay gap, reduction in women's access to health and education, increased inequality in access to credit, land and property, and deepening of the feminisation of poverty. It recalls that **wage differentials** between women and men persist and are liable to be aggravated by the economic and financial crisis. Members call on the European Institutions and the Member States to adopt clear objectives and propose binding measures to combat wage differentials. The Commission is urged to submit a legislative proposal on the revision of the existing legislation relating to the application of the principle of **equal pay for men and women**.

Contrary to the position adopted by the committee, plenary does not call for the need to reduce the pay gap to **0-5% by 2020** by adopting a zero tolerance approach through application of sanctions by adopting a zero tolerance approach through application of sanctions. Parliament does however insist on the need to reduce the pay gap.

Female unemployment: regretting that many women have already lost or are expected to lose their jobs, Parliament also highlights a decrease in earnings among self-employed women workers (especially those in the agricultural and rural sectors). Although women's employment in the EU is close to meeting the target of 60% in 2010, there is a need to set a more ambitious target of 75% by 2020. Members stress that **female unemployment can be expected to rise disproportionately** as public sector budget cuts are announced, since women are disproportionately employed in education, health and social services.

In parallel, Parliament emphasises the positive effect that gender equality has for economic growth. It points out that some studies estimate that if employment, part-time employment and productivity rates for women were similar to those for men, GDP would increase by 30%. Members call on the Commission to bring forward legislation specifically aimed at SMEs to fulfil its objective of reducing administrative burdens on business by 25% by 2012 to help foster this entrepreneurial spirit. They call on the Council,

the Commission and the Member States to integrate gender equality with specific targets into the employment and macro-economic guidelines and the EU 2020 Strategy, and to introduce gender budgeting in all policies.

Helping the most vulnerable women: the crisis will have the worst effect on vulnerable groups of women: disabled women, immigrant women, women from ethnic minorities, women with few qualifications, women who are long-term unemployed, single women without means and women caring for dependents, etc. The resolution points out that the lack of care policies and infrastructure has led to an increase in female migrant domestic workers filling these gaps in private homes without access to social and work-related protection and benefits. It calls on the Member States to urgently combat illegal employment and integrate legal migrant workers into social security and healthcare schemes. Members call on the Member States to urgently combat illegal employment and integrate legal migrant workers into social security and healthcare schemes.

Combating stereotypes: Parliament reiterates the need to combat stereotypes in all walks and at all stages of life, since these are one of the most persistent causes of inequality between men and women in affecting their choices in the field of education, training and employment, the distribution of domestic and family responsibilities, participation in public life and participation and representation in decision-making positions, and in their choices regarding the labour market.

Women and decision-making: the Commission and the Member States are asked to improve women's participation at all levels of decision-making, especially in the areas of **budgeting and of governance arrangements for European financial systems**, including the European Central Bank. In this context, Parliament stresses the need to promote financial literacy for girls and women. Members welcome the Norwegian Government's decision to increase the number of women on the boards of public limited companies to at least 40 %, which has made it possible to raise the proportion of women on boards to the current figure of 41%. They call on the Commission and the Member States to take the Norwegian initiative as a positive example and move in the same direction for listed companies. The resolution welcomes the need for increasing the number of women on boards of public limited companies, but stresses that national governments should take action which is appropriate to their own needs. Parliament asks the European institutions, the Member States and the local and regional authorities to take effective steps, notably through legislation, to encourage gender balance in corporate and political positions of responsibility, including on boards of directors, and in local, regional, national and European public institutions, administrations and organisations, etc.

Developing more affordable care: Parliament calls on the EU and its Member States to analyse and counteract the negative effects of reductions in public spending and social benefits, especially in the context of cuts in public spending at local level, in order to ensure that women are not left with a disproportionate burden of care (children, the elderly, and dependent persons). It calls on the Member States to develop affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependants, in line with the European targets, and to ensure that the availability of those services is compatible with women and men's full-time working schedules. It urges the Commission and the Member States to fully capitalise on the potential of the Structural Funds and of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and to facilitate access to the financing of quality services. Plenary points out that public expenditure in the area of health is the responsibility of individual Member States and their national parliaments and/or local authorities.

Raising awareness on violence against women: pointing out that violence against women and men increases in times of economic upheaval, Parliament encourages the Member States to use national legislation to address all forms of gender-based violence and welcomes the Spanish Presidency's initiative to set up an Observatory on Violence against Women.

Mobilising the European Funds for women: Parliament calls for the full mobilisation of the Structural Funds to address the effects of recession. It calls for the EAFRD Regulation to be amended to enable proactive measures to be taken in support of women in the 2014-2020 programming period, which was possible in previous periods but not in the current one, and which will have very beneficial effects on women's employment in rural areas. Plenary invites the Council, the Commission and the Member States to set up a **financial reserve within each Fund** for equal opportunity activities. It calls on the Member States to develop mechanisms for equality governance to include gender expertise within governmental departments and other agencies that implement measures under the Cohesion and Structural Funds and promote women's organisations and networks.

Mobilising women in 'green jobs': in the light of the EU 2020 Strategy, the 'green economy' is crucial. Parliament underlines the fact that 'green jobs' have the potential to become a key growth segment of the future European labour market, that today more than 20 million jobs in the European Union can be considered as 'green' and that recent evidence shows that jobs in the renewable energy sector alone have a potential to double to 2.8 million by 2020. The ecological conversion of the economy and the transition to a low-carbon economy will create a huge demand for skilled workers. The resolution refers to the fact that female workers are strongly under-represented in the renewables sector and especially in science and technology-intensive jobs. Therefore, it asks the Council, the Commission and the Member States to make sure that female workers are included more in training projects and programmes on ecological transformation, i.e. in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs.

Lastly, Parliament calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to take the necessary steps to mainstream the gender perspective into all EU policies and to review the existing legislation so as to ensure that gender equality is correctly applied and that positive discrimination measures can be applied where these are necessary. It urges the Commission to propose a **directive on paternity, adoption and filial leave**.