

Equality between women and men in the European Union — 2010

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the report by Mariya NEDELICHEVA (EPP, BG) on equality between women and men in the EU – 2010.

Members, firstly, note that there are still considerable inequalities between men and women with disparities in pay received by women and men still averaging 18% in the EU, exceeding 25% in certain countries. They also highlight the fact that the burden of domestic responsibilities is heavier on women than on men and that this situation has not been evaluated in any way. They also point out that, according to estimates, 20 to 25% of women in Europe suffer from physical violence during their lives. In view of these issues, they call for new measures to be taken to fight inequality.

Women are more affected by the crisis than men: Members stress that male-dominated sectors were the first to be hit by the crisis but that the crisis has since spread to more gender-mixed sectors, thus leading to greater female unemployment. They point out that, despite the stated intention of the Member States and the Commission, consistently equal conditions have not yet been achieved:

- more women than men are affected by poverty, unemployment and insecure employment;
- the risk of not being re-employed is higher among women than among men;
- economic recovery plans are focused on male-dominated sectors
- **women are over-represented among those persons facing poverty.**

In Members' opinion, the economic and financial crisis should be seen as a chance to put forward new and innovative proposals on women's employment, remuneration, working hours and the filling of positions of responsibility.

Strengthening inclusion measures in favour of women: Members call for targets to be set for women to be included in activities or sectors, or at levels, from which they have previously been excluded and in which they are still under-represented. They invite Member States in particular to ensure that the policies deployed to realise the objectives of the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) in the areas of poverty and social inclusion are aimed at women in proportion to the share of people experiencing poverty that they represent.

Strengthen the place of women in the jobs market: Members point out that several studies have calculated that, if women's employment, part-time employment and productivity rates were similar to men's, the EU's GDP would increase by 30%. Equality between women and men, therefore, clearly has a positive effect on economic growth. This is the reason why they put forward a series of measures to promote women's employment:

- to strengthen new sectors with a strong potential for job creation, such as ecology, the environment and new technologies;
- to fight to eradicate poverty, by revising Member States' macroeconomic, monetary, social and labour policies;
- to develop strategies to promote a fair distribution of income, guarantee minimum income, pay and decent pensions, create more high-quality jobs with rights for women, ensure access to high-quality public services for all women and young girls, and improve social welfare and respective local services, particularly crèches, nurseries,...

Most of the envisaged measures should come within the framework of the **Europe 2020 Strategy**. In this context, Members point out that demographic change makes it necessary to realise the potential of women, and to increase their employment in order to reach the target employment rate of 75% for women and men aged between 20 and 64, as provided for in the EU-2020 strategy. More generally, the Commission should strengthen the gender dimension in all parts of the EU-2020 strategy and favour binding proposals instead of non-binding strategies and policy documents in the field of gender equality.

Tackling the pay gap: among the issues that need to be campaigned on with force, Members mention the pay gap between men and women. By way of example, Members recall that more than 50 years since the inclusion in the Community treaties of the principle of equal pay for equal work, a female citizen in the EU has, on average, to work **418 calendar days to earn what a man earns in a calendar year**. They regret the lack of debate on the subject and call on the Commission to take action without delay. They call on the Member States to increase their efforts to prevent segregation of job markets by gender and to counter the trend for many women to work in the worst-paid occupations. Several measures are proposed:

- the revision of the existing directive, drawing up phased sectoral plans with specific objectives, which could include reducing the pay gap to 0.5% by 2020;
- action on the issue of gender inequality in unpaid work, and the introduction of equality plans in companies and other workplaces;
- the introduction of measures aimed at solving the current paradox in which women, despite being better educated, are still less well paid than men;
- the application of the principle of gender equality to national pension systems as concerns both age and pay;
- the implementation of legislation on equal pay for equal work properly, and the application by the Commission of sanctions for non-compliant Member States;
- the launch of an EU-wide campaign on this question.

Balancing family and professional life: once again, Members call for concrete proposals with a view to achieving a better work-life balance, particularly with regard to help with care of dependent persons and child care. It is vital that the Commission ensures that the various European rules on work-life balance are correctly transposed by the Member States by adapting working conditions between men and women and that positive measures are introduced, notably in order to facilitate returning to work after a period devoted to the family (bringing up children and/or caring for a sick or disabled relative). They note that **part-time employment can have an adverse impact on the individual** concerned, for example by placing obstacles in the way of careers and leading to poverty in old age, or alternatively that they may, on account of smaller incomes, require supplementary State assistance for purposes of subsistence or in the event of illness or unemployment. In parallel, Member States are invited to encourage the setting up or improvement of childcare facilities and facilities for the elderly and other dependants with a view to providing good-quality, affordable services at times compatible with full-time working hours for as many people as possible. Members emphasise that the **family is a cornerstone of our society and is inherently associated with the transmission of values and with cooperation in a spirit of solidarity**. They underline that introducing flexible working hours and providing teleworking opportunities, as well as extending child care and professionalising home help for the elderly, represent an important step towards making it possible to combine work and family life and to enhance equal participation of women and men in the labour market and in education and training. They regret the fact that the lack of adequate leave schemes, parental leave schemes and flexible working arrangements for both parents, as well as the slowness in the change of mentalities in this regard.

Strengthening the presence of women in positions of responsibility: Members consider that there is a need to step up efforts at European level to increase women's representation in all spheres: in the European institutions, in business and in public administration. Members note in this regard the positive effects of the use of **quotas** on representation of women. They stress the need for the Member States to take steps, particularly through legislation, to set binding targets in this area.

Eliminating stereotypes: Members note that a lot of inequalities result from persistent stereotypes that need to be combated in particular by awareness campaigns in schools, workplaces and the media. They stress the importance of communication campaigns to ensure the gender neutrality of traditionally male or female trades or activities. They call on the Member States to ensure, through awareness programmes within the education sector, that girls are not steered automatically in the direction of traditionally feminised sectors and careers.

Combating violence against women: Members point out that violence against women is a major hindrance to gender equality. They call on the Commission to start **drawing up a proposal for a comprehensive directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women** – whether physical, sexual or psychological –, including trafficking. They urge the Member States to take measures to ensure access to support services aimed at preventing gender-based violence and welcome the establishment of a **European protection order** and the Directive on Human Trafficking. They call for the rapid entry into force of the latter. Once again, Members call for the launch of a European Year to combat violence against women, of a wide-ranging survey to determine the real scope of the problem in Europe, as well as better training for staff in the health sector, social services, the police and the judiciary, regarding all forms of violence against women, including rare forms of serious physical and psychological violence such as acid attacks.

Lastly, Members call for action in the following areas:

- the adequacy of women's pensions because women's careers are often interrupted to look after children and the sick;
- encouragement of women to take part in vocational training in the context of lifelong learning;
- the full recognition of women's rights in the agricultural sector;
- support for the employment of 'pregnant women or mothers performing domestic tasks on their own';
- particular attention to vulnerable groups of women: disabled, elderly, immigrant, lesbian, bisexual and transgender or those belonging to minorities, such as the Roms;
- better assistance in relation to reproductive health (the right of all women to contraception and abortion);
- integration of the gender dimension in the preparation of the European and national budgets.