Precarious women workers

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on precarious women workers. Stating that precarious work affects women more than men and that the over-representation of women in precarious work is a key contributing factor to the gender pay gap, Parliament adopts a series of recommendations which may be summarised as follows:

Gendered nature of precarious work: Parliament points out the gendered nature of precarious employment and recalls the shift in the labour market from standard to non-standard types of employment. It considers that, in order to combat these problems, legislative and contractual rules on standard work and atypical work need to be aligned. Members urge the Council and the Commission to identify the characteristics of precarious employment in the guidelines for the Member States' employment policies and in the new gender equality strategy. Parliament outlines that precarious work refers to 'non-standard' forms of employment with any of the following characteristics:

- little or no job security owing to the non-permanent, often casual nature of the work, with contracts containing poor conditions or without any written contract, for instance in the case of temporary, involuntary part-time contracts, unclear working hours and duties that change according to the employer's will;
- a low level of remuneration, which may even be unofficial and unclear;
- no social protection rights or employment-related benefits;
- no protection against discrimination;
- limited or no prospects for advancement in the labour market;
- no collective representation of workers;
- a working environment that fails to meet minimum health and safety standards.

Member States are called upon to take legislative measures to put an end to **zero-hour contracts**, which are common in jobs typically occupied by women in sectors such as domestic work, care work, catering and the hotel industry. Parliament also calls for the introduction of extensive control instruments to regulate all types of attendance at firms and work places which are formally agreed for guidance and training purposes but which in practice are becoming a further source of abuse, concealing actual services which are provided without proper payment or protection. The Commission and Member States are called upon to develop strategies on precarious work in order to emphasise decent and green jobs and incorporate gender balance in order to **reduce the double burden of work on women**, one of the reasons for women's over-representation in precarious employment.

Social conditions: disappointed that EU legislation on atypical work does not adequately address the precarious nature of employment, Parliament calls on the Commission and the Member States to take further specific legislative measures, such as introducing binding minimum social standards for employees (and granting all employees equal access to social services and benefits, including maternity leave, health care and retirement pensions, as well as to education and training).

Member States are also called upon:

- to implement legislation ensuring **reasonable limitation of working hours**, rest and leisure for workers;
- to ensure that employers who subject female workers to abusive or harmful treatment are brought to justice as early as possible;

- provide women in precarious jobs with the option of protection of entitlements such as decent pay, maternity leave, fair and regular working hours and a non-discriminatory working environment, which are crucial for these women;
- to penalise the imposition of obstacles to trade union participation;
- to deliver on the Barcelona **childcare** targets in order to improve labour market participation;
- to plan and implement measures to facilitate satisfactory education, training and studies for girls and young women, providing particular support for girls and young women with a migration background;
- to **combat undeclared work** by transforming it into regular employment, by means of preventive measures such as granting immunity from prosecution to employees who report their illegal employment status and taking dissuasive action against employers;
- to create quality jobs and introduce measures to ensure that they do not become precarious, and, in this context, provide for **more rigorous work inspections**;
- to adopt legislation regulating the social and legal status of seasonal workers;
- to enhance their monitoring of minimum health and safety requirements in the workplace, paying particular attention to the specific risks to female workers.

Domestic workers: Parliament notes that, in industrialised countries, domestic work accounts for between 5 and 9% of all employment and that such work is mostly precarious, undervalued and informal, meaning that domestic workers are often discriminated against and can easily be subjected to unequal, unfair or abusive treatment. In this context, it invites Member States to make full use of the co-financing opportunities offered by the Structural Funds, in particular the European Social Fund, to ensure broader access to affordable, quality childcare and elderly care facilities so that women are not forced to undertake these duties on an informal basis. Member States are also called upon to **develop a campaign for a step-by-step transformation of precarious workers into regular workers**.

Regulate rules regarding au pairs: Parliament calls specifically on the Commission to endorse a programme aiming to educate workers on the effects and impacts of precarious work, including on occupational safety and health and to propose a new European agreement on the rules regarding au pairs, which would lower the age limit from 30 so that adult breadwinners in their late 20s cannot be placed as au pairs. The purpose of this would be to limit an au pair's role to helping out with day-to-day family duties and taking part in family activities, which must not exceed **30 hours per week**.

Migrant workers: Parliament calls on the Commission to strengthen its commitment to promote gender equality in migration and integration policies. It points out that the social integration of migrant women is even more difficult than that of their male counterparts, given that they are subject to dual discrimination. It therefore encourages employers to take specific measures to facilitate the social integration of women migrant workers, for instance by offering them language training and/or support services, and to ensure that migrant workers are registered, so that they are entitled to benefits.

Research on the subject: lastly, Parliament calls for the improvement of research in this field, in particular by means of the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality.