Situation of women approaching retirement age

2011/2091(INI) - 13/07/2011

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Edit BAUER (EPP, SK) on the situation of women approaching retirement age. The committee recalls that in the EU-27 the older population (aged 65+) increased by 3.7%, this is projected to increase from 17.4% in 2010 to 30% in 2060. In 2008, the risk of poverty among elderly women stood at 22% as against 16% for elderly men.

Faced with this situation and the increased risk of poverty for older women, Members call for effective measures, including measures to strengthen women's pensions. They encourage the use of **equality-enhancing actuarial calculation of pensions for men and women.** Steps should be taken to decrease the risk of poverty, to tackle the poverty currently experienced by older people, to improve the quality, accessibility and affordability of (health) care and to end the practice of mandatory retirement, while allowing older women to participate in the labour market by tackling discrimination.

Members call on the Member States to make additional provision in their pensions legislation for widows' pensions so as to make older women less vulnerable to the risk of poverty. The Commission is called upon to further develop and improve the collection and analysis of accurate, relevant, comparable European gender- and age-specific data, particularly on the employment and unemployment rate of older women. Members point to the importance of taking measures to promote the inclusion of women in the most vulnerable categories, that is to say, immigrants, women belonging to minorities, women with disabilities, women with little education, women without work experience, women in prison, etc., in order to guarantee their right to a decent life.

Furthermore, the report calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote initiatives to foster understanding of the language and culture of new technologies so as to enable the older female population to bridge the digital divide.

Women in the labour market: Members propose a series of measures to enable older women to stay as long as possible in the labour market. They are as follows:

- encourage employers to improve their equal opportunities policies so that ageist attitudes towards older women are tackled;
- establish without delay a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, gender-sensitive and age-friendly approach to employment and social policies in order to guarantee employment and social inclusion of women;
- carry out an in-depth review of the situation of the generation of older women who are already living in poverty and to speedily take appropriate, effective measures to take these women out of poverty;
- further develop and improve the collection and analysis of accurate, relevant, comparable European gender- and age-specific data, particularly on the employment and unemployment rate of older women, exchange best practices in improving the quality of working conditions of older women;
- include older women in life-long learning processes;
- ensure that the disadvantages faced by women in the labour market, particularly those stemming from care responsibilities, should not penalise them in their pension or other social security entitlements;
- make provision in welfare systems for aggregation arrangements enabling contributions from periods of salaried employment and self-employment, or accounted for by different jobs, to be added together, if this has not yet been done;
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develop and promote gender-assessed pension systems as a means of support and a safeguard against older women's higher risk of poverty;

- take, without delay, effective measures to implement the principle of **equal pay for equal work** (e. g. by means of a mandatory job evaluation scheme and equality action plan at the workplace) in order to eliminate the gender pay gap;
- implement appropriate policies to reconcile work, family and private life and to integrate the ageing dimension into all relevant policies, by means of age mainstreaming, taking account of the various periods of life;
- make full and efficient use of the existing EU instruments and programmes, including the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, to increase participation of older women in labour markets and to tackle discrimination against older women in all areas;
- encourage active participation by older women in the business sector by encouraging, and providing support for, women who start new businesses and facilitating women's access to financing, especially through microcredit, and equal representation of men and women in economic decision-making bodies, including in company boards;
- improve the procedures for imposing penalties on employers who discriminate against older female employees;
- draw attention to the need to include these policies in the Small Business Act.

Women as care-providers: a series of measures have been proposed as follows. Members reiterate their call to **guarantee the accessibility and affordability of such quality care**. They point to the need to make sufficient provision of an appropriately high standard for care services for children, older people and other dependent persons and that these care services for children and dependants constitute a substantial source of jobs that could be filled by older women, whose employment rate is currently one of the lowest. Members encourage the Member States to extend access to parental leave for grandparents and **children taking care of their parents**. Recognising that women approaching retirement age are often grandparents, the report asks Member States to consider child care facilities that can offer grandparents, should they wish, the freedom of choice to participate in other activities. Member States should consider exploring a range of accommodation options and supporting community groups and organisations as a way of combating isolation among elderly women and creating a favourable environment for intergenerational solidarity.

Health issues: Members call on the Commission and the Member States to recognise the gender dimension in health as an essential part of EU health policies. They recognise the vital role of screening and preventive treatment in health care, and encourage the Commission to use the open method of coordination to ensure exchange of views, promote harmonisation of screening across the EU, identify best practices and establish guidelines. They welcome the efforts of some Member States which provide free access to prevention of gender-related diseases, and encourages Member States which have not yet done so to strengthen preventive healthcare for older women by providing, for example, for accessible and regular mammograms and cervical smear tests, to erase age limits in access to health prevention such as breast cancer screening, and to raise awareness of the importance of screening.

The report encourages the Commission and the Member States to develop measures that ensure better health and safety at work. Lastly, Members call on Commission and the Member States to combat all forms of violence against older women.