Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the report by Sophia IN 'T VELD (ADLE, NL) on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011.

The report recalls that on average 3 in 10 households in the European Union are single-person households, the majority of them comprising women living alone, and that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty. It stresses that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty, in particular at times of economic adversity. Moreover, cuts in public spending are expected to have a disproportionate impact on female employment and wage difference, as many more women than men are employed in the public sector.

In this context, measures should be taken to reinforce the economic independence of women and their potential to take decisions.

Equal economic independence: Member States are called upon to:

- ensure that their marriage and divorce and matrimonial property laws do not directly or indirectly constitute a financial ‘trap’ for the spouses, in particular women, and to ensure that couples who seek marriage are fully informed in a suitable time-frame of the legal and financial implications of marriage and divorce;
- invest in affordable, high-quality facilities for the care of children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly and other dependent persons, making sure that they have flexible times and are accessible so that as many people as possible can combine professional and private life;
- ensure that men and women caring for children or the elderly receive recognition by giving them individual social security and pension rights;
- move towards individualised systems of social security;
- elaborate proposals for the mutual recognition of civil unions and of same-sex families across Europe between those countries which already have the relevant legislation in place, so as to ensure equal treatment with regard to work, free movement, taxation and social security, etc;
- promote women’s entrepreneurship, by setting up training and careers and legal advice services and facilitating access to public and private funding;
- invest current Structural Funds spending for the period 2007-2013 in the development of care services to enable both women and men to combine professional and private life.

The report stresses that fiscal consolidation without consideration for gender equality risks leading to increased gender segregation in the labour market, increased precarious work among women, a wider gender pay gap, increased feminisation of poverty and more difficulties in combining caring and working. Income **and high-quality gainful employment for women are the key to their economic independence** and to greater equality between men and women in society as a whole.

Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value: Members note that, despite countless campaigns, targets and measures in recent years, the **gender pay gap remains stubbornly wide, women across the EU earn 17.5% less on average than men** and there has only been a marginal reduction of the gender pay gap in the last few years. Efforts should be redoubled to put European measures in place with the aim of closing this gap. The report calls for a multifaceted strategy from European institutions, Member States and the Social Partners to tackle the full range of causes of the persistent gender pay, including a

European equal pay target to reduce the pay gap by 10% in each Member State. Members are still awaiting a legislative proposal to be put forward by the Commission on this issue.

Members are concerned about the legislation in some Member States which does not expressly prohibit the handing of pre-signed resignation letters to employers when women are recruited, which has the effect of **enabling maternity laws to be circumvented**.

Equality in decision-making: Members regret that economic recovery projects still focus mainly on male-dominated employment. They call on the Member States and the Commission to give high priority to addressing barriers to women's participation in the labour market with particular emphasis on women with disabilities, migrant and ethnic minority women, etc.

Once again, Members call for concrete measures to be taken to:

- enhance the presence of women in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs;
- break down stereotypes;
- support women in their career development and efforts to reach managerial positions (within the EU, on average only 12% of the executives of the major listed companies are women, with only 3% female chairs);
- propose legislation, including quotas, by 2012 to increase female representation in corporate management bodies to 30% by 2015 and to 40% by 2020;
- strengthen the presence of women in the 2014 European elections.

The report points out that the use of **electoral quotas** has positive effects on women's representation and welcomes the legislated parity systems and gender quotas introduced in France, Spain, Belgium, Slovenia, Portugal and Poland. It calls on the Member States with particularly low representation of women in political assemblies to consider introducing equivalent measures.

The Member States are called upon to promote **female entrepreneurship** and to provide financial support, vocational guidance and training to encourage women setting up their own

companies.

Dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence: Members urge the Commission to include homophobic and transphobic violence and harassment in its action programmes against gender-based violence. Welcoming efforts, both at Community and national levels, to combat violence against women (such as the European Protection Order, the Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and the legislative package to strengthen the rights of victims in the EU), Members stress that **this phenomenon remains a major unresolved problem**. They call on the Commission and the Member States to adopt and implement policies to combat all forms of violence against women including all sexual, physical and psychological abuse, domestic violence, harassment and the need to include the fight against gender-based violence in EU external and development cooperation policies.

The report reiterates the need for the Commission to present an EU-wide strategy to end violence against women including a legislative criminal-law instrument to combat gender-based violence as requested by Parliament in several resolutions.

Members also call for:

- the establishment of information programmes concerning harassment and mobbing at work, so that women who are subjected to such treatment can take effective counter-measures;
- adequate measures to be taken so that gender-based violence is treated as a public security issue and as a violation of fundamental rights rather than as a private, domestic issue by ensuring, amongst

other things, access to forms of prevention, legal protection and assistance, including with regard to stalking;
- specific actions and resources to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment, so called honour killings, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriages and other forms of violence and violation of individual rights;
- the introduction of rehabilitation and psychological programmes for perpetrators of physical abuse, which would reduce the incidence of such abuse;
- the enhancement of social and economic autonomy which are important preconditions for fighting against violence.

Members reiterate their position on sexual and reproductive health rights and express concern in this respect about recent funding cuts to family planning and sexual education and also restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health services in some Member States, in particular pregnancy and maternity protection and safe and legal abortion. They also express concern over the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible diseases, in particular amongst women and point out that 45% of young women and girls who are newly infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old.

The Member States and the Commission are called upon to pay special attention to vulnerable groups of women: disabled women, women of advanced age, women with little or no training, women with dependent persons in their charge, female immigrants and women belonging to minorities, all of whom constitute specific groups on whose behalf measures adapted to their circumstances must be taken.

Gender equality beyond the Union: Members call for human rights for women and the ability to use them effectively to be given the highest priority in the EU's external policies. Whilst welcoming the Arab Spring, Members call on Commission to develop specific support measures for gender equality in those countries.

The report deplores the fact that rape is still used in certain regions of the world as a weapon. They call on the European External Action Service, to include this phenomenon as a priority on its political agenda.

As regards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Members call for the improvement of maternal health and reproductive health by 2015 (about 1000 women still die each day from entirely avoidable pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications). They call on Member States to uphold their political and financial support for the MDGs, despite times of economic downturn.

The report welcomes the recent decision of the United Nations to create an **International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October**, which is a powerful way to highlight the particular needs and rights of girls.

Governance: Member calls on the incoming Council to reassess the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation with a view to adoption during the Danish Presidency. They call on the Council, within the on-going negotiations on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, to introduce gender-responsive budgeting in the EU budgetary process.

The Commission is called upon to:

- put forward proposals for leave arrangements for care for elderly or sick relatives;
- put forward a comprehensive communication on the situation of single-person households in the EU, with policy proposals to achieve fair treatment in areas like taxation, social security, housing, healthcare, insurance and pensions;
- publish reliable gender-disaggregated data and qualitative gender indicators so as to be able to properly evaluate and update the Commission's Strategy for equality between Women and Men (2010-2015) as well as to monitor the cross-cutting nature of gender equality in all policies;

- present a Road Map on Equality for LGBTI people, analogous to the Gender Equality Road Map;
- investigate the treatment of victims of human trafficking and prostitution in the Member States.