Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution by 361 votes to 268, with 70 abstentions, on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011.

Parliament 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;
- move towards individualised systems of social security;
- develop the legal concept of shared ownership - in order to ensure full recognition of women's rights in the agricultural sector;
- 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. (in this regard, Parliament regrets the implementation by some Member States of restrictive definitions of ‘family’ in order to deny legal protection to same-sex couples and their children);
- 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.

Parliament 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: Parliament notes 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. It recalls that the gender gap is smaller before family formation and increases when individuals form a couple. It points out that a drop in the employment rate occurs for

women at first childbirth and the labour market disadvantages accumulate in the earlier stages of their life cycle, connected to child-care, which at a later stage changes into care of elderly people, which often flows into in-work poverty.

Efforts should be redoubled to put European measures in place with the aim of closing this gap:

- 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**;
- a **legislative proposal** is called for from the Commission on this issue.

Parliament is 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: Parliament regrets that economic recovery projects still focus mainly on male-dominated employment. It calls 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, it calls for concrete measures to be taken to:

- enhance the presence of women in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs;
- break down stereotypes;
- strengthen the presence of women in the 2014 European elections.

Plenary reiterates Parliament’s call in 2011 for legislation, including quotas, to be proposed by 2012 to increase female representation in corporate management bodies to 30% by 2015 and to **40% by 2020**, while taking account of the Member States' responsibilities and of their economic, structural (i.e. company-size related), legal and regional specificities. It is disappointed that the Commission is refraining from taking immediate legislative measures with a view to improving the balance between men and women in economic decision-making.

Noting that the use of **electoral quotas** has positive effects on women’s representation, Parliament 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: 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), Parliament stresses 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.

Parliament 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 it has already requested in several resolutions.

Parliament also calls 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;
- specific actions and resources to combat all forms of violence against women, including so called honour killings, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriages etc;
- 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.

Parliament defines domestic violence as including all sexual, physical and psychological abuse. It points out that gender violence claims many lives across the EU each year. It thus calls for adequate measures to be taken so that gender-based violence is treated as a **public security issue** rather than as a private, domestic issue and as a violation of fundamental rights, by ensuring, amongst other things, access to forms of prevention, legal protection and assistance, including with regard to stalking.

Parliament reiterates its position on sexual and reproductive health rights and the need for these to be safeguarded. It calls for national budgets for family planning and sexual education to be maintained and calls for more HIV/AIDS prevention measures given 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: Parliament calls 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, it calls on Commission to develop specific support measures for gender equality in those countries.

Parliament deplores the fact that **rape is still used in certain regions of the world as a weapon**. It calls on the European External Action Service to include this phenomenon as a priority on its political agenda. Parliament notes that this year the world population has reached 7 billion and expresses its conviction that family planning should be at the top of the political agenda.

As regards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Parliament calls 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). It calls on Member States to uphold their political and financial support for the MDGs, despite times of economic downturn.

Parliament 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: in an amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament invites the Council to unblock the Council Directive on implementing 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. It also calls 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);
- investigate the treatment of victims of human trafficking and prostitution in the Member States given that, in some cases, these people are treated as criminals instead of getting support.

Lastly, Parliament reiterates its call on the Commission for a Road Map on Equality for LGBTI people, analogous to the Gender Equality Road Map.