Women's working conditions in the service sector

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on women's working conditions in the service sector. Members recall that most of the female workforce is employed in the service sector, and in the EU in 2010 this proportion averaged 83.1%, compared with 58.1% of the male workforce. Although this proportion may appear high, it nevertheless, hides another reality: women tend to be **disproportionately represented in the flexible and part-time employment market** in comparison with the male workforce. Members also stress that more women than men tend to be in more precarious jobs and that they are generally under-represented in posts of responsibility.

Women's employment: Members highlight that there is a strong horizontal segregation or gender-specific division of labour in the service sector with almost half of women in employment being concentrated in **10 of the 130 occupations listed in the International Standard Classification of Occupations drawn up by the International Labour Organisation** (ILO). They underline the importance of reducing occupational segregation in order to bridge the gender wage gap.

They also point out that there is also a concentration of women working in the public sector, where 25% of the active female population can be found, compared with only 17% of the active male population, as well as the fact that in this sector women are more vulnerable to loss of employment on account of budget cuts. They call on Member States to ensure that the public sector, which is characterised by transparent and clear recruitment criteria and terms of promotion, displays an exemplary attitude regarding equal access to employment in the public service and especially to management positions.

Parliament calls on the Commission and Member States to take concrete measures towards a further deepening of the market for services in order to develop its significant jobs potential.

Fighting against stereotyping and the feminisation of certain sectors of work: Members stress the importance of combating stereotypes and gender-based discrimination by adopting active policies to ensure that fewer women are associated with domestic work or teaching (sectors where they are over-represented). Women also play a large role in the social care sector where there is less social prestige.

Highlighting the higher proportion of women working part-time (around 32% of the female workforce compared with only 8.7% of the male workforce), Members draw attention to the increasing prevalence of flexible working hours (weekend work, irregular and unpredictable working hours…) making it even harder for women to strike a balance between work and family life, especially single mothers. They emphasise that flexible working hours should be the **worker's decision**, and should not be imposed or enforced by the employer.

The recurring issue of payment: Members stress the importance of ensuring decent working conditions coupled with rights relating to, pay, health and safety standards, accessibility, career prospects, further training, sustainable social security and lifelong learning. They recall, once more, that **women earn on average 16.4% less than men in the EU and** call for responsible measures to be taken in this field starting with an evaluation of the reasons that can justify such a gap. Parliament recalls its resolution of 24 May 2012 on the application of the principle of equal pay.

The issue of training and upskilling: Members want women working in the services sector and belonging to the most vulnerable groups to have access to permanent upskilling programmes and lifelong learning.

They stress the importance of working to get more women into the research sector because, although women are responsible for 80% of the world's purchasing decisions, most products are designed by men, including 90% of technical products. Parliament believes that greater participation by women in innovation processes would open up new markets and increase competitiveness. It also stresses the **great potential for female entrepreneurship**, and highlights the importance of microfinance as an instrument to support female entrepreneurs.

Women in managerial positions: Members call for an end to the glass ceiling in the public sector that prevents women from attaining positions of high responsibility.

They also deplore the important presence of women in the **informal economy** and call on Member States to develop policies aimed at turning precarious workers in the informal economy into regular workers, for instance by introducing tax benefits and service vouchers.

Women who are immigrants or who belong to vulnerable groups: Members reiterate their concern about the situation of female immigrant and undeclared workers in the service sector, in particular those employed in private households, as the vast majority work without a contract in precarious employment. They urge such workers to report abusive working conditions and call on the Member States to ratify ILO Convention No 189 on domestic workers. More generally, they call on Member States to consider **introducing a special regime for the personal and household service sector** in order to regularise the widespread phenomenon of undeclared work, which particularly affects women.

Members also call on Member States to adopt policies on integrating vulnerable workers into the labour market through targeted and tailored occupational guidance, training and apprenticeship programmes.

Better work-life balance: according to a survey published in 2012, 18% of workers reported having a poor work-life balance. Parliament notes that the active participation and involvement of men in reconciliation measures, such as part-time work, is crucial for achieving work-life balance. Parliament suggests that the Member States should correctly apply Council Directive 2010/18/EU on parental leave, through both legislative and educational measures relating to gender equality.

Members urge the Council to **break the deadlock** with regard to the adoption of the amendment to the Pregnant Workers Directive accepting the flexibility proposed by Parliament so that Europe can make progress in protecting the rights and improving the working conditions of pregnant workers and those who have recently given birth. They underline, in this connection, the importance of effectively protecting motherhood and fatherhood by combating i) dismissal from employment during or after pregnancy, ii) salary cuts during maternity leave, and iii) downgrading of job status or remuneration upon return to work.

Violence against women at work: Members stress the need to combat all forms of violence against women in the service sector and call on Member States to take measures to combat the misuse of personal care services to mask services of a sexual nature.

More generally, Members call on the Commission and the Member States to guarantee the **protection of social and employment rights** for the large number of mobile workers in the service sector, and to combat all forms of exploitation and the risk of social exclusion. To this effect, they call for a strong social dialogue and the involvement of employers' and workers' representatives in setting EU priorities for the service sector with regard to the protection of social and employment rights, unemployment benefits and representative rights.

Austerity and its impacts on female workers: lastly, Members note that the economic crisis and so-called austerity measures have led to a reduction in gender equality measures and are **an additional obstacle to the application of the principle of gender equality**. They call on the Commission to collect data on the impact of austerity measures on women in the labour market, with particular emphasis on the

service sector, and stress the need for greater recognition of the interdependence between social and economic issues.