

Impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women's rights

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Elisabeth MORIN-CHARTIER (EPP, FR) on the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women's rights.

Members recall that the effects of the current economic crisis are particularly serious for vulnerable people, and in particular for women, who are affected directly – through loss of their jobs or pay cuts or loss of job security – and indirectly through budget cuts in public services and welfare. They note that approximately 23% of EU citizens were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2010, and this impoverishment of the population affects women most of all.

They recall that gender equality is one of the core objectives of the European Union and that it must be a key consideration when defining the response to the current economic and financial crisis. **The gender dimension should be integrated into all policies**, in particular those concerning: impact of austerity measures and recovery from the crisis; gender-based violence, declining maternal and child health, and poverty among older women.

Rising unemployment rate: Members recall that, having seen the employment rate for women climb steadily for over ten years to reach a level of 62.8% in 2008, that rate fall slightly since the beginning of the economic crisis, to 62.3 % in 2011. They consider a further adaptation of the Structural Funds, in order to ensure additional support for areas of women's employment likely to be affected by the crisis. The report states that the crisis affects women differently. Working conditions for women have become considerably more insecure, especially with the **increasing prevalence of atypical forms of contract**, and that women's incomes have fallen significantly thanks to a number of factors, including the persistent wage gap (nearly 17%) between men and women. The Commission is called upon to submit, as soon as possible, a proposal for a directive setting out measures for **overcoming the gender pay gap for equal or equivalent work**.

Members recall that very wide disparities still exist between Member States as regards the employment rate for women (notably amongst young women and disadvantaged groups), involving a different response and taking into account the respect for the right to work.

Combat against undeclared work: Members deplore that women account for a larger proportion of the informal economy than men, partly because there is greater deregulation in the sectors in which women traditionally work, for example domestic service or care work. The informal economy has grown as a result of the crisis, although it is very difficult to obtain a clear picture of it in the absence of reliable data on incidence and impact. Women's rights should be defended and the sharing of family and household responsibilities promoted.

Reforming macroeconomic, social and labour market policies: in order to guarantee economic and social justice for women, Members call for a series of measures aiming to:

- develop strategies to promote the fair distribution of wealth,
- guarantee a minimum income and decent wages and pensions,
- reduce the gender pay gap,

- create more high-quality jobs for women coupled with rights to enable them to benefit from public services of a high standard (creches, etc).

Recalling that cuts in **public budgets are not gender-neutral** but are, rather, the result of the Union's macrostructural economic policies, Members believe that a change in policy is therefore required, since women are in the majority in public-sector employment and are the principal beneficiaries of social policies. They call, therefore, for the relevant budget headings to be increased.

Members call on the Member States to integrate **proper gender budgeting, especially in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020.**

Further measures called for include:

- ‘return-to-work’ policies and business sector insertion schemes;
- promoting an active labour market policy, a strong social dialogue;
- encouraging mothers to enter the labour market, for instance through teleworking, vocational training, with a view to promoting an ‘assisted’ return to work after maternity leave;
- encouraging a better gender balance among non executive directors of companies listed on stock exchange;
- reviewing social protection systems with a view to individualising pension rights and rights under social security schemes thus guaranteeing equal pension rights;
- promoting vocational training policies and programmes for women of all age groups;
- promoting female entrepreneurship in the green economy;
- ensuring the participation of women in the decision- making process;
- investing in affordable quality services, such as full-time childcare, all-day school places and care for the elderly;
- ensuring a proper balance between security and flexibility in the labour market by providing adequate social protection for those in periods of transition or on temporary or part-time employment contracts.

Better evaluation of the implications of cutbacks on women: Members stress the fact that the decisions taken by some Member States to cut their budgets for childcare, education and extracurricular activities, school meals, transport subsidies and assistance for those caring for dependents have direct implications for women, who have to take on the majority of the additional tasks entailed. **Cutbacks in public services providing childcare have a direct impact on the economic independence of women.** In 2010, 28.3 % of women's inactivity and part-time work was explained by the lack of care services, as against 27.9 % in 2009. Member States are called upon to invest in the care sector.

Members call on the Commission to undertake a review of Directive 2006/54, especially with reference to the **gender pay gap**, as called for by Parliament in its [resolution of 24 May 2012](#), which included recommendations to the Commission concerning application of the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work.

Fight against violence towards women: Members observe that the economic crisis contributes to harassment, abuse and violence of all kinds directed against women. There is a need to increase the public, financial and human resources available to combat this rising social phenomenon and to contribute to financing refuges and women’s rights organisations.