Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2012

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Inês Cristina ZUBER (GUE-NGL, PT) on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2012. Whilst noting that European directives on equal treatment for men and women adopted since 1975 had made a considerable contribution towards effectively promoting gender equality, Members considered that **many inequalities still existed**, whether in terms of women's careers, employment and pay prospects, access to education and health services, or participation in the economy, decision-making or political representation.

Economic independence and wage equality: stressing the fact that the crisis affected women differently, Members pointed out that working conditions for women had become considerably more insecure, especially with the increasing prevalence of **atypical forms of contract.** Wage inequality stood at 16.2 % on average in the EU, and lower wages for women lead inevitably to lower pension contributions, and therefore, translated into **lower pensions**.

Members called on Member States' governments and the social partners to draw up an **action plan and concrete, ambitious targets,** and to **assess the gender impact** of the economic and financial crisis through gender equality impact assessments. They pointed also to the **rise in compulsory part-time working**, and in the number of temporary or fixed-term jobs to the detriment of more stable employment, noting that part-time work formed almost one third of total employment for women in 2012 (32.1% as against 8.4% for men) and involuntary part-time work increased to 24 % of overall female part-time employment in 2012 (as against 20% in 2007). They pointed out that, according to OECD projections, equal participation by men and women in the labour market would result in a **12.4% increase in per capita GDP by 2030.**

The report made a series of observations and called on Member States to:

- ensure public social security rights and the right to training for workers with atypical contracts;
- ensure specific measures targeted at the long-term unemployed, essentially focusing on vocational training and swift reintegration into the job market;
- 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 opening times and are accessible;
- ensure that the fundamental principle of 'equal pay for equal work' is observed for women and men alike, and maintain **public labour inspections** in accordance with national legislation to identify the existence of low-paid forms of work where the workforce is mainly female and which create situations of indirect wage discrimination;
- increase their investment in public services, education and health, particularly primary care health services relating to sexual and reproductive health, reducing gender inequalities in public health systems and ensuring that equal access to those systems prevail;

- safeguard women's right to free, high-quality public gynaecological and obstetric healthcare services and to sexual and reproductive health in general, including the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy;

- develop educational programmes in secondary schools, for teenagers from the age of 12 and above, to combat gender stereotyping.

The report went on to call on the Commission to pay more attention to ensuring that the EU directives on the equal treatment of women and men were **properly applied by all Member States.** It stressed the role of collective negotiation in combating discrimination against women, especially regarding access to employment, payment, conditions of work, and career development and training.

Members reiterates that Directive 2006/54/EC, in its current form, was **not sufficiently effective to tackle the gender pay gap** and achieve the objective of gender equality in employment and urged the Commission to propose amendments to the Directive, following the detailed recommendations set out in Parliament's resolution of 24 May 2012.

Equality in decision-making: the report pointed to the need to redouble efforts at European level to increase the representation of women in political spheres and in the European institutions, including the European Parliament. It stressed that 15.8 % of seats on the boards of the largest listed companies were currently held by women and that **progress in rectifying the situation had been slow**, and called for measures to **promote a better gender balance** in management positions in companies. Members welcomed the Commission's proposal for a directive aimed at boosting women's representation on non-executive boards of listed companies by laying down a 40 % minimum target for women, to be met by 2020. They called on the **Council to engage in negotiations with Parliament** in relation to its first reading of the file in order to reach an agreement among all the EU institutions by the end of the seventh legislative term.

Violence against women: the committee insisted on zero tolerance towards all forms of violence against women as one of the top priorities of all institutions throughout Europe. It called on Member States to **expand targeted prevention programmes** to tackle the sources of violence against women and to ensure that access was available to prevention, legal protection and assistance in relation to domestic violence, and stalking. Members called on the Commission to promote cooperation at all levels in order to implement an efficient strategy to fight violence against women.