Women's economic empowerment in the private and public sectors in the EU

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Anna HEDH (S&D, SE) on women's economic empowerment in the private and public sectors in the EU.

Across the EU women remain considerably under-represented in the labour market and in management, with the overall **employment rate of women still being almost 12 % lower than that of men**. Adverse social norms, discriminatory laws or lack of legal protection, failure to equally share unpaid household work and care between men and women are among the main barriers to the economic empowerment of women.

According to Eurofound, the total yearly cost of the lower female employment rate corresponded to **2.8% of the EU's GDP** (EUR 370 billion in 2013).

Stressing that women's economic participation and economic empowerment are essential not only to strengthening their fundamental rights but also to the economic growth of the European Union, the report called on the Commission and the Member States to ensure **equality and non-discrimination in the workplace for all**.

1) In order to improve the economic empowerment of women, the report recommended the following actions and tools:

- ***Better reconciliation of work and private life***: Members called for the legal framework for a flexible employment model with an adequate social protection so that men and women can better reconcile their obligations both professional and private. The report called, **inter alia**, to:

- strengthen protection against discrimination and unfair dismissals related to work-life balance and ensure access to justice and legal action in the event of conflict of this kind;
- guarantee rest leave to parents of children with disabilities, paying particular attention to single mothers;
- invest in informal after-school play-centred learning facilities that could provide support for children after school;
- invest in social infrastructure, such as childcare facilities, including in rural areas;
- support the reintegration of women who have interrupted their professional careers to care for dependent persons through active employment and training policies.

- ***Equal pay for equal work***: Members called on Member States and companies to respect the pay parity principle - a principle enshrined in the TFEU - and to introduce **binding measures as regards pay transparency**.

In order to eliminate the gender pay gap, Members proposed to establish a publicly accessible **wage-mapping** framework with data, which would require the public and private sectors to assess their payment structures and redress ant gender-based differences.

- ***Gender balance in the private and public sectors***: Members suggested the idea of introducing quotas in the public sector when public institutions fail to assume their responsibilities of ensuring fair representation. They stressed the effectiveness of tools such as gender quotas and zipped lists in political

decision-making. In addition, the directive on gender balance among non-executive directors of listed companies should be swiftly adopted.

- ***Programs to promote gender equality:*** the Commission is urged to encourage companies with more than 50 employees to negotiate gender equality plans with social partners with a view to enhancing gender equality and to combat discrimination in the workplace. These plans should incorporate a strategy to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

- ***Social partners and collective agreements***: Members called on the social partners to strengthen the position of women within their social partnership structure in decision-making positions and to negotiate gender equality plans at company and sectoral level.

(2) In order to strengthen the economic empowerment of women, the report contains a series of recommendations, including:

- taking gender perspective into account in economic models, tax policies and spending priorities, especially in the event of a crisis;
- adopting reforms to strengthen gender equality in family life and the labour market;
- offering the same opportunities as men for training, promotion, reskilling and retraining, as well as pension rights and unemployment benefits identical to those for men;
- combatting all forms of gender violence, including domestic violence;
- facilitating access to loans and removing barriers that prevent women from starting businesses (women make up 52% of the total European population, but only a third of the self-employed);
- increasing women's access to the information society, with a particular focus on better female visibility in the digital sector and promoting, through information and awareness campaigns, the employment of women in sectors traditionally regarded as masculine, such as science and new technologies;
- preventing, through legislative and non-legislative measures, the over-representation of women in precarious employment and to combat unstable working conditions in these sectors, such as domestic work or care;
- preventing stereotypes from being passed on through curricula and pedagogical material;
- taking measures to combat poverty and social exclusion, which pose particular threats to women.

Lastly, the report called on the Member States to **mainstream the gender perspective into their national skills and labour market policies** and to include such measures in national action plans and as part of the European Semester, in line with the employment guidelines.