Equal Opportunities for women and men in the Union. 1996 report

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The adoption of this first, comprehensive report on equal opportunities is not only a welcome complement to existing Community policy, but above all marks a new, constructive step in the development of a general and coherent EU equal opportunities policy. It is therefore a very laudable initiative with which the ESC is particularly pleased.Clearly one aim is to provide a way of looking at the impact of Community policy in the Member States. And in relation to a number of areas the Commission does this. For example the exercise has been successful in relation to EC structural policy and the implementation of the Structural Funds. But in other areas there is room for improvement (childcare, exercise of rights). It may be because of the nature and layout of the report that there is little (critical) evaluation of the Community's own policy. The form of report which the ESC would like to see offers more opportunities for this for the future. The focus of the report on equal opportunities is too narrow. It gives the impression that women already have equality as far as rights are concerned. But both aspects are essential; equal rights are the basis and equal opportunities the next step. The Community is increasingly resorting to all kinds of non-binding instruments in order to give form to Community law. It seems that the Commission assumes that recommendations, for example, also entail commitments for the Member States.