

# Equal opportunities for women and men in the Union. 2nd, 3rd and 4th annual reports 1997-1999

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**PURPOSE** : to present a report from the Commission relating to equal opportunities for women and men in the European union. **CONTENT** : commitment to equality between women and men was enhanced in 1999 with the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam on 1 May. The principle of equality is now enshrined in Article 2, which sets out the aims of the Union. The European Community has been given new tasks, legislative powers, responsibilities and potential in the field of equal opportunities. This fourth Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Community presents an overview of the main developments and achievements in gender equality at European and national levels in 1999 and outlines the perspectives for the year 2000. The Community strategy of combining the integration of a gender perspective into all of the European Union's policies and programmes with specific actions in favour of women was sustained during 1999. This report identifies the core policy areas where progress has been made in 1999, such as structural policies, research, education, development co-operation, the struggle against violence, and employment policy. Furthermore, the European Community has been one of the prime promoters of changing the status of women in society, not only through law but also through measures promoting de facto equality. However, inequalities continue to exist, in particular with regard to the participation of women at the level of decision making. Unless the participation of women from all walks of life increases in this field, as this report shows, they will not be able to exercise influence properly so that policy making and decisions will reflect the social, economic and cultural values of society as a whole. The agreement reached by the Council to develop a common measurement system of gender progress in political decision-making is a step towards redressing this imbalance. In conclusion, the year 2000 will be a year of reinforcing Community policy on gender equality. The Commission will propose an "Equality Package" before the summer 2000, consisting of several initiatives: a new Framework Programme on Gender Equality (2001-2005), a proposal for a new Directive which will amend Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions by including new provisions on important issues, such as sexual harassment in the workplace, and by specifying better some of the existing provisions. It will also consist of a Commission decision on a more gendered balanced composition of its committees and expert groups.