Implementation of gender equality programme (2001-2005)

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Ilda FIGUEIREDO (EUL/NGL, P) on the application of the gender equality work programme (2001-2005). It pointed out that the Community framework strategy for equality between men and women in all areas of Community policy, of which the work programme formed part, needed to be implemented rapidly and fully. The Commission should therefore ensure that compliance with all the relevant Community legislation in this area by the Member States was properly monitored and assessed so that the legislation could be properly targeted and adapted where necessary. By way of example, it drew attention to the 1986 directive on equal treatment between men and women who are self-employed and the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood, which it said needed to be substantially amended. There was also a need to establish common indicators regarding childcare structures and the disparity in wages and other forms of income between men and women, by sector. The committee pointed out that the Lisbon Council target of ensuring that 60% of women were part of the working population by 2010 would only contribute to equality of opportunity for men and women if the majority had quality and properly-paid jobs. Moreover, the target would only be achieved if sufficient facilities were put in place for the care of children and dependent persons and a wider range of career choices was open to girls. The report said that gender equality was also a factor to be borne in mind when drawing up economic policy guidelines. The forthcoming roundtable discussions on social exclusion and poverty which would take place during the Danish Presidency should focus in particular on the gender-specific aspects of poverty and exclusion. Moreover, in the context of the accession process, it was important to prevent any adverse effects on gender equality of the processes of privatisation, liberalisation and cuts in public expenditure in the social sectors. The committee indeed called for an increase in funding for the social sphere in order to prevent social exclusion and combat trafficking in women. Still on the subject of enlargement, it also noted that women's participation and representation in politics in a number of the applicant countries was lower than the EU average. The Commission should therefore encourage those countries to establish programmes for female politicians and candidates to ensure that they were prepared for the EU institutions and the elections. It should also sponsor campaigns inviting women to run for the 2004 European Parliament elections with the aim of ensuring that at least one third of MEPs are women.