The objectives of gender equality using the structural Funds

2002/2210(INI) - 19/02/2003

The committee adopted the own-initiative report by María Antonia AVILES PEREA (EPP-ED, E) on gender equality objectives in the use of the Structural Funds. It began by pointing out that, although equal opportunities objectives had been incorporated by law into operations co-financed by the Funds since 1999, progress in this area was "far from satisfactory". As in the past, the European Social Fund (ESF) was continuing to play a more prominent role vis-à-vis the equal opportunities objective, but the committee regretted that in other important areas (e.g. infrastructure, transport, enterprise policy, the information society, R&D, etc.) the programmes only touched on the issue of equal opportunities. Moreover, measures under the EDF tended to pay little attention to reducing the horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market or pay inequalities, or to promoting the role of women in such fields as ICT, entrepreneurship or the decision-making process. Member States were urged to ensure systematic mainstreaming of equal opportunities at every stage of the programming and implementation of measures as well as balanced participation by both women and men in decision-making, selection and monitoring bodies. The report also called for the Structural Funds to be used to a greater extent to make it easier to combine work and family life, for example by developing facilities for the care of children and for elderly, sick and disabled dependents, promoting the reorganisation of working time for men as well as women, etc. MEPs stressed that the managing authorities should establish relevant equal opportunities criteria for the selection of projects cofinanced by the Structural Funds and should penalise projects which failed to satisfy these requirements by, for example, rejecting project proposals or returning them to applicants for revision. They regretted that the majority of Structural Funds programmes did not include an analysis of economic and social inequalities between women and men or an estimation of the expected impact of the measures on both sexes. There was a need to develop statistics at national, regional and local level in order to give a true picture of the respective situation of women and men, for the purposes of programming. It was also important to establish gender-specific indicators for monitoring and evaluation. The Commission and the Member States were urged to ensure that the 2003 mid-term review made a proper evaluation of the extent to which the objective of equal opportunities had actually been achieved in the Structural Funds measures and to make any necessary adjustments to the programming of projects for the remaining programming period. Lastly, the report highlighted the important role the Structural Funds could play in combating the adverse effects that economic and social restructuring was having on women in the candidate countries, and called for adequate financial support to be provided to the NGOs concerned with equal opportunities in those countries.