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

1997/2028(COS) - 12/02/1997 - Non-legislative basic document

OBJECTIVE: This first annual report on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union aims to review the advances which have been achieved by the Union and its Member States with regard to equal opportunities for women and men. It is also an instrument for monitoring the equal opportunities policies provided by Community mainstreaming (application across the board of the principle of equality in all Community policies). SUBSTANCE: This report is the first to cover Community policy on equal opportunities as a whole. It is divided into two parts: - scope and challenges of the fourth Community Action Programme on equal opportunities and description of the policies and situation at national level in the various sectors, -advances of the Beijing World Conference on Women. According to the report, policy in the field of equal opportunities between the sexes is in a transitional phase of renewal. Implementation strategies have not advanced at the same pace as awareness of the need for new methods and approaches to equal opportunities. In the long term the Commission advocates that the principle of equality is taken into account in all the Community's policies and objectives, even if the results of this policy are felt only very gradually (mainstreaming). The communication makes a certain number of observations on various sectors of economic and social life: - labour market: in this sector the report notes an increased number of women in jobs despite the discrimination which persists in all areas of employment. Women tend to be grouped tightly in a narrow spectrum of professions and employment areas, in particular in the service industries. They also tend to move more easily from one category of employment to another and are clearly more affected by unemployment than men: since the 1980s the level of unemployment among women has always remained high and since 1995 the proportion of women who are long-term unemployed amounts to 50% of the female work force. Women are also most affected by atypical work, in particular in the services sector where the majority of part-time jobs are held by women. Lastly, the increase in the number of women in the work force has not reduced the inequality in pay (on average women earn about 20% less than men for the same job); - family life and working life: responsibility for young children places a block on the achievement of the principle of equality between the sexes. While the level of mothers' participation in the labour force differs considerably from country to country it is strongly affected by the presence of children; - balanced participation in decision-making: the general trend over the last ten years has been for the number of women in decision-making posts to decrease despite an important change in their status role and contribution. The Nordic countries have shown a consistent track record in electing a larger number of women to decision-making posts while in the Union as a whole there has been an increase of 4% of women elected to the lower houses and 2.6% to the upper houses. At government level the general improvement is shown by the fact that average political participation by women has increased from 11% during the 1980s to 16% today.