

# Non discrimination and gender equality: European year of equal opportunities for all 2007

2005/0107(COD) - 01/06/2005 - Legislative proposal

**PURPOSE:** to designate the Year 2007 as the "European Year on Equal Opportunities for All".  
**PROPOSED ACT:** Decision of the European Parliament and the Council.

**BACKGROUND:** the Commission's Communication on the Social Agenda for the period 2005-2010, emphasised the importance of promoting equal opportunities for all in order to achieve a more cohesive society. It announced the Commission's intention to develop a new framework strategy on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all. 2007 will be a significant year for the European legislative framework in the area of antidiscrimination given that the extra time accorded to some Member States to transpose both the disability and age provisions of Directive 2000/78/EC will have expired. Thereafter, all individuals, irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age and sexual orientation, will be entitled to uniform protection against discrimination throughout the EU. In addition, by 31 December 2007, Member States will have to transpose the provisions of the Gender Equality Directive 2004/113/EC into their national legal orders.

**CONTENT:** a considerable body of European legislation has been put in place over the past thirty years in an effort to tackle sex discrimination related to pay, working conditions and social security. However, despite the enactment of far-reaching EU anti-discrimination and equality legislation, discrimination and inequality continues to be a feature of everyday life in the EU. The background to this proposal speaks of persistent inequalities for women and migrants. Large-scale surveys conducted by the International Labour Organisation in some EU countries have shown that with equal qualifications, personal characteristics such as ethnicity, disability and age have a bearing on the prospects of finding a job. In addition, Europe's population is ageing as a result of the decline in fertility and mortality rates and this will have huge consequences for the labour market. Europe will see its working age population decline by over 20 million during the next 25 years. This development clearly underlines the need for offsetting the demographic effects on labour supply by raising the participation rates of those excluded, for whatever reason, from the labour market. In many EU countries, international migration and increased mobility have accentuated the trend towards more ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. The enlargement of the Union has drawn more attention to the situation of Roma people, who constitute the most disadvantaged ethnic minority group in Europe.

The **European Year of Equal Opportunities** for all will provide an opportunity to promote a more cohesive society that celebrates differences within the framework of EU core values, such as gender equality. It will seek to raise awareness of the substantial EU acquis in the field of equality and non-discrimination, as well as stimulating debate, dialogue and exchanges of good practice.

The specific objectives of the European Year are rights, representation, recognition and respect.

**Rights - raising awareness on the right to equality and non-discrimination:** there is a need to improve public awareness about EU legislation on equality and non discrimination. The EU has one of the most advanced legislative frameworks in the world in these areas but there appears to be limited public awareness of the rights and obligations that this legislation confers. The European Year will seek to highlight the message to the public at large that all people, irrespective of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation are entitled to equal treatment.

**Representation - stimulating debate on ways to increase the participation in society:** debate and dialogue should be engaged as appropriate to promote greater participation of under-represented groups in all sectors and at all levels of society. Equal opportunities policy is not simply limited to the elimination of discrimination. It also means promoting full and equal participation of all. The disadvantages experienced by some communities e.g the Roma are so wide-scale and embedded in the structure of society that positive action may be necessary to remedy the nature of their exclusion. In this regard, the European Year will seek to highlight the need to promote and develop policies and initiatives to increase the participation of groups that are under-represented in society.

**Recognition- Celebrating and accommodating diversity:** the European Year will aim to raise awareness of the positive contribution that people, irrespective of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age and sexual orientation make to society as a whole. It will seek to engage the wider public in an open debate on what diversity means in today's Europe and how to create a positive climate in which differences are valued and in particular the right to protection against discrimination is respected. The European Year will acknowledge the diversity of Europe as a source of socioeconomic vitality which should be harnessed, valued and enjoyed because it enriches the social fabric of Europe and is an important component of Europe's economic prosperity.

**Respect and tolerance – Promoting a more cohesive society:** the European Year will seek to raise awareness about the importance of promoting good relations between the various groups in society, and in particular among young people. It will also seek to bring different people or groups together in an effort to promote and disseminate the values of equal treatment and fight against discrimination. Key to this will be to work on eliminating stereotypes and prejudices.

The actions designed to meet these objectives entail the development of or the provision of support for:

- meetings and events;
- information and promotional campaigns;
- cooperation with media, business and enterprise;
- surveys and studies on a Community or a nation- wide scale.

**Participating countries will be requested to:**

- designate a national coordination body including representatives of the Government, social partners, targeted communities and other segments of civil society;
- establish a broad partnership with a view to integrating equal opportunities issues into all relevant policy areas, including in the employment and education sector, the media, and the business and policy-making sectors.

**Complementarity:** the Commission will ensure that the activities financed during the Year will be complementary to other relevant Community action. Coordinating mechanisms will therefore be put in place to avoid overlap and to channel support towards promoting the key messages of the Year.

**Budget:** the financial framework for implementing the activities for the period 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2007 will be **EUR 13.6 million**.

The financial arrangements are as follows:

- measures which are Community-wide in nature may be subsidised up to 80% or give rise to procurement contracts financed from the general budget of the European Communities;
- measures which are local, regional or national may be co-financed from the general budget of the European Communities up to a maximum of 50% of the total consolidated costs of the actions implemented at local, regional or national levels.

**For a more detailed assessment of the budgetary implications of this proposal, please refer to the financial statement.**