

Equality between women and men - 2007

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PURPOSE: to present the fourth Commission report on developments towards gender equality and orientations for gender mainstreaming of policy areas.

CONTENT: this report is the fourth that follows the request of the Spring European Council of March 2003 to report annually on developments towards gender equality and orientations for gender mainstreaming of policy areas.

Main developments: 2006 saw two major events with a bearing on gender equality in the EU: the adoption by the Commission of the **Roadmap for equality between women and men** for the period 2006-2010, and the adoption of the **Pact for Gender Equality**. These two key initiatives testify to the EU's continued commitment to achieving genuine equality between women and men. The Roadmap represents the Commission's commitment to continuing and intensifying its actions in this area. Detailed follow-up reports will be compiled annually. The Pact demonstrates the Member States' determination to implement policies aimed at promoting the employment of women and guaranteeing a better balance between professional and private life in order to meet the challenges of demographic change. In this context, it would appear essential to develop childcare services in order to achieve the Barcelona objectives.

The ageing of the population, combined with declining birth rates, raises considerable challenges for our societies, as demonstrated in the **Communication on the demographic future of Europe** (COM (2006) 057.) It is clear that policies on gender equality will contribute significantly to meeting those challenges: on the one hand, by stimulating the employment of women, thus compensating for the forecast decline in the working population; and, on the other, by supporting the individual choices of women and men, including decisions on the number of children they wish to have. At the same time, the Commission launched a **formal consultation among the social partners** on the possible thrust of Community action regarding the reconciliation of professional, private and family life, including the promotion of flexible working arrangements, the development of crèche and care services and the possible revision of existing provisions regarding maternity leave and parental leave. The legislative framework for gender equality improved considerably with the adoption of Directive 2006/54/EC, which simplifies and updates existing Community legislation on the equal treatment of women and men as regards employment. As regards transposition of the Directive of 2002 on equal treatment, procedures for failure to fulfil an obligation were initiated against nine Member States, four of which were still open as at the end of 2006.

Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 created a **European Institute for Gender Equality**. The Institute is required to provide significant technical support for the development of policies on equality between women and men. 2006 saw the adoption of the new regulation of the **Structural Funds** (Regulations (EC) 1081/2006 and 1083/2006) and of the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion for the period 2007-2013, which foresee both specific measures and the integration of the gender perspective in all actions. Poverty often affects women, particularly the elderly and single-parent households. Moreover, health and social welfare systems are not always attuned to the different needs of women and men. This is why the promotion of equality between women and men is among the overarching objectives of the new framework for the open coordination of **social protection and inclusion** policies adopted by the European Council in March 2006.

As regards violence and human trafficking, the Commission put forward a strategy to measure crime (including human trafficking, violence against women and domestic violence) and criminal justice. (COM (2006)0437). Gender equality is also recognised as a factor in economic development in the framework of

the EU's External Affairs. By the beginning of 2007, the Commission will prepare a Communication on the integration of gender equality in **development cooperation**. In addition, a five-year Action Plan designed to strengthen the role of women in Mediterranean societies was adopted in November 2006 as part of the **Euromed** partnership. This Plan provides a framework in which the EU and Mediterranean countries can cooperate in strengthening the role of women in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres.

The female labour force continues to be the engine of employment growth in Europe. Since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, six of the eight million jobs created in the EU have been taken by women. In 2005, the **rate of female employment** rose for the twelfth consecutive year, to stand at 56.3%, i.e. 2.7 points above its 2000 level, compared with a 0.1 point rise in the rate of male employment. If this favourable trend continues, the Lisbon objective of 60% female employment by 2010 will be attained. Similarly, the rise in the **rate of employment of women over the age of 55** has been significantly faster than that of men, and now stands at 33.7%, i.e. almost 7 points more than in 2000. Despite this positive trend, the increased difficulty which women are facing in **reconciling their professional and private lives**, and the unequal division of domestic and family responsibilities, remain very marked. In addition, the labour market remains largely partitioned. **Occupational and sectoral segregation** indices by sex show no sign of a significant decline. It would therefore appear that the increase in female employment is being achieved mainly in sectors of activity and in professions which are already dominated by women. Moreover, there continues to be an imbalance between women and men in **decision-making positions**, both political and economic. Less than one-third of managers are women, and the management boards of the 50 biggest listed European companies had only one woman for every ten men in 2005. One of the consequences of the differences and inequalities which women face on the labour market is the persistent **gender pay gap**. Women earn an average of 15% less than men for every hour worked.

Conclusions: building on this report and in line with the priorities set out in the Roadmap and the European Pact for equality between women and men, the European Council is invited to urge the Member States to urgently take up the challenges described above, in cooperation with the various stakeholders. Particular emphasis will need to be placed on:

- taking all possible steps to eliminate the gender pay gap;
- strengthening gender mainstreaming in the implementation of employment policies;
- continuing the efforts aimed at allowing men and women to reconcile their professional, private and family lives, and supporting the social partners in implementing measures in that area;
- adopting an approach to issues of demographic change which takes account of and supports gender equality;
- making full use of the potential offered by the Cohesion and Rural Development Policy to support the promotion of equality between women and men through programmes cofinanced by the Funds;
- acting promptly to transpose Directives 2006/54/EC on the equal treatment of men and women (recast) and 2004/113/EC on the equal treatment of women and men in the access to and supply of goods and services.