Basic information

2011/2244(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011 **Subject** 4.10.04 Gender equality 4.15.08 Work, employment, wages and salaries: equal opportunities women and men, and for all	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality	IN 'T VELD Sophia (ALDE)	15/03/2011
	Shadow rapporteur JÁRÓKA Lívia (PPE) ROTH NEVEĎALOVÁ Katarína (S&D) WERTHMANN Angelika (ALDE) CORNELISSEN Marije (Verts/ALE) YANNAKOUDAKIS Marina (ECR) GUSTAFSSON Mikael (GUE/NGL) BLOOM Godfrey (NI)	

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
EMPL Employment and Social Affairs	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	

European Commission

Commission DG	Commissioner
Justice and Consumers	REDING Viviane

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary

11/02/2011	Non-legislative basic document published	SEC(2011)0193	Summary
27/10/2011	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
27/02/2012	Vote in committee		
05/03/2012	Committee report tabled for plenary	A7-0041/2012	Summary
12/03/2012	Debate in Parliament		
13/03/2012	Results of vote in Parliament		
13/03/2012	Decision by Parliament		
13/03/2012	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2011/2244(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Annual report
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 55
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	FEMM/7/07283

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE478.338	30/11/2011	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE478.674	11/01/2012	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A7-0041/2012	05/03/2012	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading		T7-0069/2012	13/03/2012	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Non-legislative basic document	SEC(2011)0193	11/02/2011	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2012)387	18/07/2012	
Commission document (COM)	COM(2013)0322	29/05/2013	Summary
Commission working document (SWD)	SWD(2013)0192	29/05/2013	

National parliaments

Document type	Parliament /Chamber	Reference	Date	Summary
Contribution	PT_PARLIAMENT	COM(2013)0322	06/12/2013	

Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

2011/2244(INI) - 29/05/2013 - Follow-up document

In 2002, the Barcelona European Council set objectives in regard to the **development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth**: Member States were to remove disincentives to female labour force participation, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age.

In 2008, a first review revealed that the demand for formal systems of childcare was far from being met, in particular for children under 3. It highlighted the high costs incurred by parents and the opening hours of facilities, which were incompatible with full-time work. Five years on, it can be seen in this second review undertaken by the European Commission that, despite a slight improvement, these challenges remain.

The report's main conclusions may be summarised as follows:

A mixed picture: more than 10 years after they were adopted, the Barcelona objectives have not been achieved by most Member States. Furthermore, the situation is deteriorating in several Member States. Significant improvements still need to be made to achieve a **satisfactory level of availability**, especially for children under 3. Also, the **cost of services** is still a significant obstacle for parents, as are **opening hours**, which are not always compatible with their occupational commitments. **Investment in quality education and care services that are universal and accessible to all must be continued**. This effort must be made largely at Member State level. The Commission is providing support on several fronts.

The development of childcare services under supervision as part of the European Semester: opening up access to the labour market and to employment for a second wage-earner from the household thanks to suitable tax incentives and the introduction of affordable, quality childcare services was identified as a priority in the Annual Growth Survey. Nine Member States (AT, CZ, DE, HU, IT, MT, PL, SK, UK) have received a recommendation on the employment of women and on the availability of childcare services in 2012.

The Structural Funds are an important lever: in the 2007-2013 period, it is estimated that EUR 2.6 billion from the Structural Funds was allocated to actions aiming to promote the employment and sustainable participation of care services for dependants. In addition, around EUR 616 million from the European Development Fund was made available to Member States between 2007 and 2013 to finance childcare infrastructures. Almost all the Member States allocated resources to childcare services. However, the total expenditure varies enormously from one Member State to another depending on the budget available under the Structural Funds and the current state of provision of services.

In the report, the Commission undertakes to:

- continue to work with **social partners who play a key role in the area of work-life balance** in cooperation with the public authorities;
- strengthen **cooperation between its departments working on policies relevant to early childhood education and care (ECEC)**, such as justice, fundamental rights and citizenship, education and culture, employment, social policy, health, etc..
- continue to monitor the Barcelona objectives by helping the Member States to **develop their statistical capacity** by improving data collection and refining the way the use of childcare services is measured for the EU SILC survey, in particular by collecting comparable information on the barriers to these services (cost, unmet demand, etc.).
- continue to support the Member States:

  - whenever necessary, throughout the European Semesters, the Commission will continue to adopt specific recommendations calling on the Member States to achieve the Barcelona objectives and to **maintain public investment** despite the economic crisis;

  - when programming the European Funds, the Commission will work together with the Member States to make full use of the **cofinancing options** offered by the Structural Funds and other Community programmes such as 'Erasmus for all', including during the next programming period, for **developing ECEC services and services for other dependent people, staff training and improving service quality**.

The report points out that developing childcare services for pre-school children is not enough in itself to give women and men free choice of how to best achieve a work-life balance and it **does not take into account the difficulties faced at different stages in life**. The Commission must therefore act:

- by promoting a combination of measures to achieve a work-life balance consisting of flexible working methods, a family leave system and the availability of affordable, quality care services for pre-school children as well as for pre-adolescent children outside school hours and for other dependants;
- by also encouraging the Member States to remove barriers (including tax constraints) to occupational activity for women and to encourage fathers to take on more family responsibilities, for example by taking family leave in the same way as women.

This report reflects the Commission's own commitment, within the limits of its competences, to supporting the achievement of the Barcelona objectives and the development of affordable, accessible and quality childcare services in order to eliminate the obstacles to parents' participation in employment, to foster social inclusion and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

2011/2244(INI) - 05/03/2012 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the report by Sophia IN 'T VELD (ADLE, NL) on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011.

The report recalls that on average 3 in 10 households in the European Union are single-person households, the majority of them comprising women living alone, and that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty. It stresses that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty, in particular at times of economic adversity. Moreover, cuts in public spending are expected to have a disproportionate impact on female employment and wage difference, as many more women than men are employed in the public sector.

In this context, measures should be taken to reinforce the economic independence of women and their potential to take decisions.

Equal economic independence: Member States are called upon to:

- ensure that their marriage and divorce and matrimonial property laws do not directly or indirectly constitute a financial ‘trap’ for the spouses, in particular women, and to ensure that couples who seek marriage are fully informed in a suitable time-frame of the legal and financial implications of marriage and divorce;
- invest in affordable, high-quality facilities for the care of children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly and other dependent persons, making sure that they have flexible times and are accessible so that as many people as possible can combine professional and private life;
- ensure that men and women caring for children or the elderly receive recognition by giving them individual social security and pension rights;
- move towards individualised systems of social security;
- elaborate proposals for the mutual recognition of civil unions and of same-sex families across Europe between those countries which already have the relevant legislation in place, so as to ensure equal treatment with regard to work, free movement, taxation and social security, etc;
- promote women’s entrepreneurship, by setting up training and careers and legal advice services and facilitating access to public and private funding;
- invest current Structural Funds spending for the period 2007-2013 in the development of care services to enable both women and men to combine professional and private life.

The report stresses that fiscal consolidation without consideration for gender equality risks leading to increased gender segregation in the labour market, increased precarious work among women, a wider gender pay gap, increased feminisation of poverty and more difficulties in combining caring and working. Income **and high-quality gainful employment for women are the key to their economic independence** and to greater equality between men and women in society as a whole.

Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value: Members note that, despite countless campaigns, targets and measures in recent years, the **gender pay gap remains stubbornly wide, women across the EU earn 17.5% less on average than men** and there has only been a marginal reduction of the gender pay gap in the last few years. Efforts should be redoubled to put European measures in place with the aim of closing this gap. The report calls for a multifaceted strategy from European institutions, Member States and the Social Partners to tackle the full range of causes of the persistent gender pay, including a European equal pay target to reduce the pay gap by 10% in each Member State. Members are still awaiting a legislative proposal to be put forward by the Commission on this issue.

Members are concerned about the legislation in some Member States which does not expressly prohibit the handing of pre-signed resignation letters to employers when women are recruited, which has the effect of **enabling maternity laws to be circumvented**.

Equality in decision-making: Members regret that economic recovery projects still focus mainly on male-dominated employment. They call on the Member States and the Commission to give high priority to addressing barriers to women's participation in the labour market with particular emphasis on women with disabilities, migrant and ethnic minority women, etc.

Once again, Members call for concrete measures to be taken to:

- enhance the presence of women in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs;
- break down stereotypes;
- support women in their career development and efforts to reach managerial positions (within the EU, on average only 12% of the executives of the major listed companies are women, with only 3% female chairs);
- propose legislation, including quotas, by 2012 to increase female representation in corporate management bodies to 30% by 2015 and to 40% by 2020;
- strengthen the presence of women in the 2014 European elections.

The report points out that the use of **electoral quotas** has positive effects on women’s representation and welcomes the legislated parity systems and gender quotas introduced in France, Spain, Belgium, Slovenia, Portugal and Poland. It calls on the Member States with particularly low representation of women in political assemblies to consider introducing equivalent measures.

The Member States are called upon to promote **female entrepreneurship** and to provide financial support, vocational guidance and training to encourage women setting up their own

companies.

Dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence: Members urge the Commission to include homophobic and transphobic violence and harassment in its action programmes against gender-based violence. Welcoming efforts, both at Community and national levels, to combat violence against women (such as the European Protection Order, the Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and the legislative package to strengthen the rights of victims in the EU), Members stress that **this phenomenon remains a major unresolved problem**. They call on the Commission and the Member States to adopt and implement policies to combat all forms of violence against women including all sexual, physical and psychological abuse, domestic violence, harassment and the need to include the fight against gender-based violence in EU external and development cooperation policies.

The report reiterates the need for the Commission to present an EU-wide strategy to end violence against women including a legislative criminal-law instrument to combat gender-based violence as requested by Parliament in several resolutions.

Members also call for:

- the establishment of information programmes concerning harassment and mobbing at work, so that women who are subjected to such treatment can take effective counter-measures;
- adequate measures to be taken so that gender-based violence is treated as a public security issue and as a violation of fundamental rights rather than as a private, domestic issue by ensuring, amongst other things, access to forms of prevention, legal protection and assistance, including with regard to stalking;
- specific actions and resources to combat all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence, harassment, so called honour killings, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriages and other forms of violence and violation of individual rights;
- the introduction of rehabilitation and psychological programmes for perpetrators of physical abuse, which would reduce the incidence of such abuse;
- the enhancement of social and economic autonomy which are important preconditions for fighting against violence.

Members reiterate their position on sexual and reproductive health rights and express concern in this respect about recent funding cuts to family planning and sexual education and also restrictions on access to sexual and reproductive health services in some Member States, in particular pregnancy and maternity protection and safe and legal abortion. They also express concern over the rising incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmissible diseases, in particular amongst women and point out that 45% of young women and girls who are newly infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old.

The Member States and the Commission are called upon to pay special attention to vulnerable groups of women: disabled women, women of advanced age, women with little or no training, women with dependent persons in their charge, female immigrants and women belonging to minorities, all of whom constitute specific groups on whose behalf measures adapted to their circumstances must be taken.

Gender equality beyond the Union: Members call for human rights for women and the ability to use them effectively to be given the highest priority in the EU's external policies. Whilst welcoming the Arab Spring, Members call on Commission to develop specific support measures for gender equality in those countries.

The report deplores the fact that rape is still used in certain regions of the world as a weapon. They call on the European External Action Service, to include this phenomenon as a priority on its political agenda.

As regards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Members call for the improvement of maternal health and reproductive health by 2015 (about 1000 women still die each day from entirely avoidable pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications). They call on Member States to uphold their political and financial support for the MDGs, despite times of economic downturn.

The report welcomes the recent decision of the United Nations to create an **International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October**, which is a powerful way to highlight the particular needs and rights of girls.

Governance: Member calls on the incoming Council to reassess the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation with a view to adoption during the Danish Presidency. They call on the Council, within the on-going negotiations on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, to introduce gender-responsive budgeting in the EU budgetary process.

The Commission is called upon to:

- put forward proposals for leave arrangements for care for elderly or sick relatives;
- put forward a comprehensive communication on the situation of single-person households in the EU, with policy proposals to achieve fair treatment in areas like taxation, social security, housing, healthcare, insurance and pensions;
- publish reliable gender-disaggregated data and qualitative gender indicators so as to be able to properly evaluate and update the Commission' s Strategy for equality between Women and Men (2010-2015) as well as to monitor the cross-cutting nature of gender equality in all policies;
- present a Road Map on Equality for LGBTI people, analogous to the Gender Equality Road Map;
- investigate the treatment of victims of human trafficking and prostitution in the Member States.

Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

2011/2244(INI) - 13/03/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution by 361 votes to 268, with 70 abstentions, on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011.

Parliament recalls that on average 3 in 10 households in the European Union are single-person households, the majority of them comprising women living alone, and that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty. It stresses that these households are more vulnerable and more at risk of poverty, in particular at times of economic adversity. Moreover, cuts in public spending are expected to have a disproportionate impact on female employment and wage difference, as many more women than men are employed in the public sector.

In this context, measures should be taken to reinforce the economic independence of women and their potential to take decisions.

Equal economic independence: Member States are called upon to:

- ensure that their marriage and divorce and matrimonial property laws do not directly or indirectly constitute a financial ‘trap’ for the spouses, in particular women, and to ensure that couples who seek marriage are fully informed in a suitable time-frame of the legal and financial implications of marriage and divorce;
- invest in affordable, high-quality facilities for the care of children, the sick, the disabled, the elderly and other dependent persons, making sure that they have flexible times and are accessible so that as many people as possible can combine professional and private life;
- move towards individualised systems of social security;
- develop the legal concept of shared ownership - in order to ensure full recognition of women's rights in the agricultural sector;
- elaborate proposals for the mutual recognition of civil unions and of same-sex families across Europe between those countries which already have the relevant legislation in place, so as to ensure equal treatment with regard to work, free movement, taxation and social security, etc. (in this regard, Parliament regrets the implementation by some Member States of restrictive definitions of ‘family’ in order to deny legal protection to same-sex couples and their children);
- promote women’s entrepreneurship, by setting up training and careers and legal advice services and facilitating access to public and private funding;
- invest current Structural Funds spending for the period 2007-2013 in the development of care services to enable both women and men to combine professional and private life.

Parliament stresses that fiscal consolidation without consideration for gender equality risks leading to increased gender segregation in the labour market, increased precarious work among women, a wider gender pay gap, increased feminisation of poverty and more difficulties in combining caring and working. Income and **high-quality gainful employment for women are the key to their economic** independence and to greater equality between men and women in society as a whole.

Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value: Parliament notes that, despite countless campaigns, targets and measures in recent years, the gender pay gap remains stubbornly wide, women across the EU earn 17.5% less on average than men. It recalls that the gender gap is smaller before family formation and increases when individuals form a couple. It points out that a drop in the employment rate occurs for women at first childbirth and the labour market disadvantages accumulate in the earlier stages of their life cycle, connected to child-care, which at a later stage changes into care of elderly people, which often flows into in-work poverty.

Efforts should be redoubled to put European measures in place with the aim of closing this gap:

- a multifaceted strategy from European institutions, Member States and the Social Partners to tackle the full range of causes of the persistent gender pay, including a **European equal pay target to reduce the pay gap by 10% in each Member State**;
- a **legislative proposal** is called for from the Commission on this issue.

Parliament is concerned about the legislation in some Member States which does not expressly prohibit the handing of **pre-signed resignation letters** to employers when women are recruited, which has the effect of enabling maternity laws to be circumvented.

Equality in decision-making: Parliament regrets that economic recovery projects still focus mainly on male-dominated employment. It calls on the Member States and the Commission to give high priority to addressing barriers to women's participation in the labour market with particular emphasis on women with disabilities, migrant and ethnic minority women, etc.

Once again, it calls for concrete measures to be taken to:

- enhance the presence of women in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs;
- break down stereotypes;
- strengthen the presence of women in the 2014 European elections.

Plenary reiterates Parliament’s call in 2011 for legislation, including quotas, to be proposed by 2012 to increase female representation in corporate management bodies to 30% by 2015 and to **40% by 2020**, while taking account of the Member States' responsibilities and of their economic, structural (i.e. company-size related), legal and regional specificities. It is disappointed that the Commission is refraining from taking immediate legislative measures with a view to improving the balance between men and women in economic decision-making.

Noting that the use of **electoral quotas** has positive effects on women’s representation, Parliament calls on the Member States with particularly low representation of women in political assemblies to consider introducing equivalent measures.

The Member States are called upon to promote **female entrepreneurship** and to provide financial support, vocational guidance and training to encourage women setting up their own companies.

Dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence: welcoming efforts, both at Community and national levels, to combat violence against women (such as the European Protection Order, the Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and the legislative package to strengthen the rights of victims in the EU), Parliament stresses that this phenomenon remains a major unresolved problem. They call on the Commission and the Member States to adopt and implement policies to combat all forms of violence against women including all sexual, physical and psychological abuse, domestic violence, harassment and the need to include the fight against gender-based violence in EU external and development cooperation policies.

Parliament reiterates the need for the Commission to present an EU-wide strategy to end violence against women including a **legislative criminal-law instrument to combat gender-based violence** as it has already requested in several resolutions.

Parliament also calls for:

- the establishment of information programmes concerning harassment and mobbing at work, so that women who are subjected to such treatment can take effective counter-measures;
- specific actions and resources to combat all forms of violence against women, including so called honour killings, Female Genital Mutilation, forced marriages etc;
- the introduction of rehabilitation and psychological programmes for perpetrators of physical abuse, which would reduce the incidence of such abuse;
- the enhancement of social and economic autonomy which are important preconditions for fighting against violence.

Parliament defines domestic violence as including all sexual, physical and psychological abuse. It points out that gender violence claims many lives across the EU each year. It thus calls for adequate measures to be taken so that gender-based violence is treated as a **public security issue** rather than as a private, domestic issue and as a violation of fundamental rights, by ensuring, amongst other things, access to forms of prevention, legal protection and assistance, including with regard to stalking.

Parliament reiterates its position on sexual and reproductive health rights and the need for these to be safeguarded. It calls for national budgets for family planning and sexual education to be maintained and calls for more HIV/AIDS prevention measures given that 45% of young women and girls who are newly infected with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old.

The Member States and the Commission are called upon to pay special attention to **vulnerable groups of women**: disabled women, women of advanced age, women with little or no training, women with dependent persons in their charge, female immigrants and women belonging to minorities, all of whom constitute specific groups on whose behalf measures adapted to their circumstances must be taken.

Gender equality beyond the Union: Parliament calls for **human rights for women** and the ability to use them effectively to be given the highest priority in the EU's external policies. Whilst welcoming the Arab Spring, it calls on Commission to develop specific support measures for gender equality in those countries.

Parliament deplores the fact that **rape is still used in certain regions of the world as a weapon**. It calls on the European External Action Service to include this phenomenon as a priority on its political agenda. Parliament notes that this year the world population has reached 7 billion and expresses its conviction that family planning should be at the top of the political agenda.

As regards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Parliament calls for the improvement of maternal health and reproductive health by 2015 (about 1000 women still die each day from entirely avoidable pregnancy- or childbirth-related complications). It calls on Member States to uphold their political and financial support for the MDGs, despite times of economic downturn.

Parliament welcomes the recent decision of the United Nations to create an **International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October**, which is a powerful way to highlight the particular needs and rights of girls.

Governance: in an amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament invites the Council to unblock the Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation with a view to adoption during the Danish Presidency. It also calls on the Council, within the on-going negotiations on the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, to **introduce gender-responsive budgeting in the EU** budgetary process.

The Commission is called upon to:

- put forward proposals for leave arrangements for care for elderly or sick relatives;
- put forward a comprehensive communication on the situation of single-person households in the EU, with policy proposals to achieve fair treatment in areas like taxation, social security, housing, healthcare, insurance and pensions;
- publish reliable gender-disaggregated data and qualitative gender indicators so as to be able to properly evaluate and update the Commission' s Strategy for equality between Women and Men (2010-2015);
- investigate the treatment of victims of human trafficking and prostitution in the Member States given that, in some cases, these people are treated as criminals instead of getting support.

Lastly, Parliament reiterates its call on the Commission for a Road Map on Equality for LGBTI people, analogous to the Gender Equality Road Map.

Equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011

2011/2244(INI) - 11/02/2011 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: presentation of the Commission Staff Working paper on Annual Report 2010 on equality between men and women.

CONTENT: the report points out that, despite a general trend towards more equality in society and on the labour market, **progress in eliminating gender inequalities remains slow**. Meeting the employment targets in the Europe 2020 Strategy will be a challenge, and this report highlights the importance of gender equality for reaching those targets.

This report takes stock of the situation for gender equality in the European Union in five significant areas in the first year of the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015). It points out that despite a general trend towards more equality in society and on the labour market, **progress in eliminating gender inequalities remains slow**. Meeting the employment targets in the Europe 2020 Strategy will be a challenge, and this report highlights the importance of gender equality for reaching those targets.

Most Member States do have ongoing gender equality plans or strategies, which both support gender mainstreaming and initiate specific actions. In previous years, gender equality policies everywhere in the EU have not only improved the situation and rights of women, but have significantly contributed to economic growth and social welfare.

By launching its new Strategy, the European Commission reiterates its **commitment to promoting gender equality in all its policies**.

This report is the first annual report presented after the adoption of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Commission's new Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015). It describes recent developments in gender equality in the EU and presents statistics on all areas covered as well as recent new developments in the Member States.

It establishes a state of play for the five priority areas of the Women's Charter and the Strategy, namely:

(1) Equal economic independence: sustained employment participation will strengthen women's lifelong economic independence and enable them to have adequate pensions. Between 2009 and 2010 the difference between female and male employment rates narrowed by 0.4% from 13.3% to 12.9%. At national level, significant differences exist throughout the EU. Still, any positive assessment of the trend in women's employment is offset by the fact that so many work part-time. A major reason for women's low employment rates is the challenge of reconciling work, family and private life. The labour market participation of mothers is 11.5% lower than that of women without children, while the rate for fathers is 8.5% higher than that for men without children. In addition, poorly designed tax and benefit systems, in particular joint taxation, can - in combination with a lack of affordable and high quality childcare facilities - create strong disincentives for second earners to take up work.

Providing a sufficient number of **high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare** is a vital step in offering parents, and especially women, a genuine choice to work. Moreover, **care for the elderly** and disabled is becoming a significant challenge with the ageing of the population, for society as a whole and for women in particular. Mothers often take care of both children and older relatives, sometimes at the same time. In the EU, around 30 % of women with care responsibilities say they are inactive or work part-time because of the lack of care services for children and other dependent persons.

The year 2010 saw the adoption of Directive 2010/41/EC on the application of the principle of **equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity**. This was the first provision at EU level for a maternity allowance for self-employed workers and their spouses or life partners.

(2) Equal pay: women across the EU earn 17.5% less on average than men and there has been no reduction of the gender pay gap in the last few years. Member States have fully transposed the EU legislation on equal pay but the pay gap is unlikely to be solved by legal means alone. The underlying causes remain numerous and complex, not only reflecting discrimination on the grounds of sex but also **inequalities linked to education, the horizontal and vertical segregation of the labour market, the difficulty of reconciling work, family and private life**, the unequal distribution of family and domestic responsibilities, the lack of pay transparency and the impact of gender roles influencing the choice of education and vocational training courses. The Council conclusions adopted under the Belgian Council Presidency on the gender pay gap are thus an important step. In its conclusions, the Council invites Member States to adopt or pursue a comprehensive set of measures to tackle the full range of causes of the gender pay gap linked to the labour market inequalities between women and men.

(3) Equality in decision-making: the higher up the hierarchy, the fewer women there are. The percentage of women in key political and economic positions is roughly unchanged from last year. In 2010, the governments of three EU Member States (Germany, Finland and Slovakia) were led by women, while the average number of female members of national parliaments (single/lower houses) was 24%, one p.p. higher than in 2005. In parallel, still only 3 % of the largest publicly quoted companies have a woman chairing the highest decision-making body.

Yet the majority of the population are women and their participation in decision-making can make for more targeted policies and stronger and more prosperous democracies. The business case for having women in senior positions has been boosted by independent research suggesting a c**orrelation between companies with women in decision-making positions and good performance**. It also seems that gender diversity brings a number of vital benefits to boardrooms, such as higher returns, better overall performance, better risk management and greater employment of female talents.

Some countries also have corporate governance codes stressing the importance of diversity and gender equality. Corporate codes sometimes contain special transparency rules on the composition of the board. Generally speaking, countries that have introduced these types of codes also have a higher proportion of women at board level — for instance Sweden and Finland.

Other measures to improve gender balance include voluntary commitments. Denmark and the Netherlands have charters to promote women in management. The United Kingdom is undertaking a review on how obstacles can be removed to allow women to make it to the boards. The Commission will establish a direct dialogue with industry and urges private companies to make special efforts to address persistent imbalances in decision-making positions.

(4) Fight against sexual violence: fighting against all forms of violence against women is one of the top priorities of the current Trio of presidencies (Spain, Belgium, Hungary) and of the European Commission but there is still a lack of timely, reliable, accurate and comparable data at both national and EU level. There are several reasons why data are scarce.

A recent Eurobarometer survey appears to reveal the widespread nature of domestic violence across the EU: one out of every four respondents claims to know a woman among friends or in the family circle who has been a victim of domestic violence. During the 'Women Ministers Summit on violence against women' organised by the Belgian Presidency, a declaration was signed in order to encourage and support further appropriate action at EU level. The Commission will in 2011 propose an ambitious but realistic package of legislative and practical measures aimed at changing attitudes towards victims and bringing them into the heart of the criminal justice system. This **'victims' package'** will also include measures to combat gender-based violence more effectively.

(5) Gender equality beyond the Union: as part of the enlargement process, the Commission will continue to monitor the transposition, implementation and enforcement of EU legislation in the gender equality area in the candidate countries and potential candidates in 2011. Gender equality is also addressed in the accession negotiations on social policy and employment with Turkey and Iceland.

Cooperation with, and the support of, civil society organisations and women's networks working in this area remains a key objective of EU policy. Several Member States also have action plans to implement Resolution 1325. In 2010, more than 130 EU delegations in non-EU countries were actively involved in the implementation of the 2008 EU Guidelines on violence against women and girls and the combating of all forms of discrimination against them. Gender equality issues were also discussed in several human rights dialogues and consultations.

UN WOMEN, the new UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, became operational in January 2011 when several bodies merged to form a new, stronger gender entity, marking a milestone in UN reform. UN WOMEN amalgamates the UN's policies and practical work in this area and will improve the promotion of effective system-wide gender mainstreaming in the UN. Cooperation between the EU and UN WOMEN boosts the promotion of gender equality outside the Union.

As part of the Commission strategy to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), it adopted a Plan of Action on Gender Equality and **Women's Empowerment** in Development for the period up to 2015. The Action Plan's overarching objective is to meet the MDG more quickly and in particular MDG 3 ('Promoting gender equality and empowering women') and MDG 5 ('Improving maternal health').

Lastly, as regards **governance**: the new Strategy for Equality between Men and Women sets out the Commission's work programme for incorporating gender equality into all its work and taking specific action to promote equality between women and men. It lays the foundations for cooperation with the EU institutions and the Member States. Partnership with all stakeholders at EU level has proved to be the key to progress in achieving gender equality. In line with the European Parliament's proposal, the Strategy seeks to strengthen the partnership by holding an annual top-level Gender Equality Dialogue. Council conclusions on the new Strategy were adopted under the Belgian Presidency.