



COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION



## Council Conclusions on Gender equality: strengthening growth and employment - input to the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy

*2980th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND  
CONSUMER AFFAIRS Council meeting*

*Brussels, 30 November 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

### 1. RECALLS

- a) that gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the EC Treaty and one of the objectives and tasks of the Community, and that mainstreaming equality between women and men in all its activities represents a specific mission for the Community<sup>1</sup>;
- b) Article 137 of the EC Treaty, which states that the Community shall support and complement the activities of the Member States in domains such as working conditions and equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work, and Article 141, which lays down the principle of equal pay for women and men for equal work or work of equal value;
- c) the legislation adopted in the field of equal treatment of women and men, including Directive 2006/54/EC<sup>2</sup> recasting seven equal treatment directives;

<sup>1</sup> See Articles 2 and 3(2) of the EC Treaty.

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

# P R E S S

- d) Regulation 2006/1922/EC establishing the European Institute for Gender Equality<sup>3</sup>;
- e) that the European Council held a special meeting on 23-24 March 2000 in Lisbon to agree a new strategic goal for the Union in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy, and that, on this occasion, the European Council outlined measures to develop an active employment policy in the context of "More and Better Jobs for Europe" and considered that the overall aim should be, *inter alia*, to raise the employment rate for women from 51% at that time to more than 60% by 2010;
- f) the commitments entered into by the Member States at the Barcelona European Council of 15-16 March 2002 to strive, taking into account the demand for childcare services and in line with national patterns of childcare 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;
- g) the Commission's Roadmap for Gender Equality 2006-2010<sup>4</sup>, which states that gender equality is a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion and that the gender dimension of the Lisbon Strategy must therefore be strengthened;
- h) the Council Decision on Guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (2008-2010)<sup>5</sup>, which states that special attention should be paid to substantially reducing the persistent employment gaps between women and men, and the gender pay gap, and to addressing the reasons for the low wage levels in professions and sectors which tend to be dominated by women;
- i) that the European Council of 22-23 March 2005 adopted the European Youth Pact, which includes the objective of strengthening the possibilities for young women and men to reconcile working life with family life; and that the European Council of 23-24 March 2006 adopted the European Pact for Gender Equality, noting the need to make full use of the productive potential of the European labour force, and encouraging action at national and EU level;
- j) that the European Council of 8-9 March 2007 agreed to the establishment of an Alliance for Families which would serve as a platform for the exchange of views and knowledge on family-friendly policies as well as of good practices between the Member States;
- k) the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality adopted by the European Social Partners (2005)<sup>6</sup>, which aims to address gender roles, to promote women in decision-making, to support work-life balance and to tackle the gender pay gap;

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<sup>3</sup> OJ L 403, 30.12.2006, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 7034/06.

<sup>5</sup> OJ L 198, 26.7.2008, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/framework\\_of\\_actions\\_gender\\_equality\\_010305-4.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/framework_of_actions_gender_equality_010305-4.pdf)

- l) the Council Conclusions on Balanced roles of women and men for jobs, growth and social cohesion<sup>7</sup> (2007); the Council Resolution on the Opportunities and challenges of demographic change in Europe<sup>8</sup> (2007); the Council Conclusions on Eliminating gender stereotypes in society<sup>9</sup> (2008); and the Council Conclusions on the Reconciliation of work and family life<sup>10</sup> (2008);
- m) that France, the Czech Republic and Sweden signed a Trio Presidency Declaration on 14 November 2008 in Lille, on the promotion of gender equality in the European Union, identifying professional equality between women and men as an important component of the Lisbon Strategy;
- n) the Conference entitled “What does gender equality mean for economic growth and employment?”, held in Stockholm on 15-16 October 2009, where the need to visibly integrate gender equality across all relevant policy areas in the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy was emphasised and women’s participation on the labour market was recognised as an important factor for economic growth.

## 2. CONSIDERS THAT

- a) gender equality is crucial for fulfilling the EU objectives of economic and social cohesion and of a high level of employment<sup>11</sup>, as well as for ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness, and for tackling the demographic challenge; all these aims can be furthered by reaching the target of higher employment rates for women and men;
- b) women have largely accounted for the rise seen in the average employment rate within the EU during the last decade<sup>12</sup>, thereby contributing to the economic growth experienced during much of that decade;
- c) women’s participation in the labour market not only contributes to their economic independence, but is also the best safeguard against poverty and social exclusion. It also leads to economic development by allowing women to contribute as consumers of goods and services, which generates jobs and productivity, and it improves the sustainability of public finances;
- d) there is still scope for increasing women’s labour force participation even further in all the Member States, with a view to pursuing the goal of full employment;
- e) there is a positive correlation between high rates of female employment, the availability of care services for children and other dependants and high fertility rates in the EU<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Doc. 14136/07.

<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council: Opportunities and challenges of demographic change in Europe: the contribution of older people to economic and social development. Doc. 6216/1/07.

<sup>9</sup> Doc. 9271/08.

<sup>10</sup> Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action. Women and the Economy: Reconciliation of work and family life. Doc. 17474/08.

<sup>11</sup> Article 2 of the EC Treaty.

<sup>12</sup> Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Equality between women and men — 2009. Doc. 7017/09.

The equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities between women and men, the provision of affordable, accessible and quality care services, and facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life for both women and men are essential steps, not only for the achievement of gender equality, but also for reaching the EU objectives for employment and growth.

### 3. STRESSES THAT

- a) tackling the current global economic and financial crisis is one of the most important challenges the European Union has ever faced. The crisis might have a differential impact on women and men. Already now, in some countries and sectors, men's employment has been harder hit, while in others, women's employment has declined more. Therefore, it is important that the Member States and the EU find ways to integrate a gender equality perspective into the analysis of the impact of the crisis and into all policy responses to the recession, in accordance with their respective competences;
- b) 2010 offers an opportunity to give gender equality policies new momentum: the economic crisis could jeopardise the progress achieved in the field of women's employment, but it is also a chance to renew the commitment to the equal treatment of women and men, especially when the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy and the Commission's future strategy for gender equality are prepared and when the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action is reviewed ("Beijing + 15"). It is important to consider how these different processes interact and how they can be used to create synergies;
- c) although the gap between the employment rates of women and men has narrowed, further efforts are needed in this field, as are efforts to improve the quality of work. The gender pay gap has not diminished since 2000 and has even increased in some Member States, while sectoral and occupational segregation by gender persists, and the number of women managers has also not increased over the last few years<sup>14</sup>;
- d) appropriate action in the area of education, including vocational training and vocational guidance, is vital for the promotion of gender equality in the labour market as a whole, especially among young women and men; and effective measures are needed, in particular, to ensure that educational choices are not predetermined by gender stereotypes, and to combat gender-based segregation and educational under-achievement by either sex;
- e) the possibility of working part-time could facilitate transitions into the labour market for women and men currently excluded from it and enable others to stay on the labour market. However, the unequal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities leads more women than men to opt for part-time and flexible work, which may have a

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<sup>13</sup> See the Commission's Report on equality between women and men 2009 (doc. 7017/09).

<sup>14</sup> See the Commission's Report on equality between women and men 2008 (doc. 5710/08).

negative impact on women's careers, income, pension rights and economic independence, and which may also increase their risk of poverty and lead to persistently high levels of in-work poverty<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, access to better part-time jobs that offer, for example, training, promotion prospects and flexible working hours, may reduce the negative impact of part-time work on the careers of both women and men;

- f) although gender equality and gender mainstreaming are recognised in the European Employment Strategy as being essential for progress, the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) for 2008 reveal that gender mainstreaming is not always sufficiently implemented across policy domains<sup>16</sup>;
- g) the use of targets and the monitoring of progress within the Lisbon process have proved to be effective ways of encouraging action on the part of the Member States, for example in the area of female employment and childcare<sup>17</sup>.

4. CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, in accordance with their respective competences

- a) to strengthen the gender dimension when adopting the post-Lisbon Strategy in 2010 and to visibly integrate gender equality therein, by ensuring that gender is taken into account in all relevant policy areas, in the steering documents, guidelines and other follow-up mechanisms, in peer reviews, and in the development of indicators and reports, and by also ensuring that gender equality is promoted in a consistent manner;
- b) to ensure that the differential impact on women and men of the global economic and financial crisis is taken into account in the development and adoption of policy measures to tackle the crisis, with a view to addressing the specific needs of women and men, to ensuring equal opportunities for both sexes, and to achieving gender equality;
- c) to note that female employment in the EU is approaching the Lisbon objective of 60% by 2010, and to consider assessing this objective, with a view to further narrowing the employment gap between women and men and to increasing labour market participation and improving the quality of work for all;
- d) to continue developing and adopting measures to combat gender stereotypes in all spheres of society;
- e) to continue to reduce the persisting gender gaps in the labour market, *inter alia*, as regards employment, unemployment, part-time work, career development, decision-making positions, pay, sectoral and occupational segregation, and entrepreneurship, with a view to providing opportunities for both women and men to meet their aspirations and to fulfil their potential and to preventing in-work poverty;

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<sup>15</sup> See the Commission's Report on equality between women and men 2009 (doc. 7017/09).

<sup>16</sup> The National Reform Programmes 2008 and the gender aspects of the European Employment Strategy:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=748&langId=en&moreDocuments=yes>

<sup>17</sup> The National Reform Programmes 2008 and the gender aspects of the European Employment Strategy:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=748&langId=en&moreDocuments=yes>

- f) to fully and effectively implement both gender mainstreaming and specific measures, with a view to eliminating the existing gaps and inequalities in the labour market, in the economy and in social policy, and to achieving *de facto* gender equality;
- g) to address the needs of women in vulnerable situations, so as to help them to enter, re-enter and remain in employment and, where appropriate, to use active measures to support them, so as to allow them to fulfil their potential;
- h) to ensure that current and future measures and programmes to encourage entrepreneurship take into account the needs of all entrepreneurs regardless of their sex or background, especially as regards access to finance and the provision of advice and training for new entrepreneurs; and, where appropriate, to use active measures to support women's entrepreneurship;
- i) to consider how targets and timetables could be reinforced and developed, where relevant, so as to promote an active and effective approach to gender equality, and also how the different starting points in the various Member States could be taken into account in target-setting; and
- j) to recognise that some of the indicators developed for monitoring progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action could offer a valuable tool for reinforcing the gender perspective in the monitoring mechanisms of the Lisbon Strategy post 2010, and to take them into account where relevant.

## 5. CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES

- a) to reaffirm the European Pact for Gender Equality adopted by the European Council in 2006, which can contribute to the strengthening of the gender dimension in the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy;
- b) to consider reviewing relevant policies and schemes, with a view to promoting incentives for both women and men to enter, re-enter and remain on the labour market, while providing access to quality services and adequate income support<sup>18</sup>;
- c) in consultation with the social partners, to adopt and implement appropriate policies to improve the opportunities for women and men to reconcile work, family and private life, including policies aimed at achieving the 2002 Barcelona targets for childcare, taking into account the demand for childcare services and in line with national patterns of childcare provision, and at promoting care services for other dependants, including by using the potential of the Structural Funds; and to encourage men to share, on an equal footing with women, responsibilities for the family and domestic responsibilities;

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<sup>18</sup> See Key Messages from the EPSCO Council to the 2009 Spring European Council, doc. 6449/09, p. 6.

- d) to take into account the gender dimension of the Employment Guidelines of the European Employment Strategy and of the Common Principles on Flexicurity when implementing reforms, with a view to promoting the equal sharing between women and men of caring and domestic responsibilities; and
  - e) to consider the conclusions of the Commission's Annual report on Equality between Women and Men when designing and implementing employment and social policies.
6. INVITES THE INCOMING SPANISH PRESIDENCY, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE COMMISSION, to use its best endeavours to ensure that both gender mainstreaming and gender-specific issues are prominently reflected in the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy and in future employment and social policies, including in the work of the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee, by integrating a section on gender into the key messages to be adopted by the EPSCO Council and submitted to the Spring European Council of 2010."
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