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CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE LISBON STRATEGY FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

BRIEFING NOTE

Summary:

This note aims to assess what progress has been made towards achieving the Lisbon objectives in terms of gender equality.

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INTRODUCTION

New strategic goals were agreed at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000 to bring about an economic, social and environmental renewal in the European Union by 2010.

The Lisbon Strategy aims to transform Europe into ‘the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment’. Forged for Europe as a society, it is an ambitious vision that underwrites the fundamental aims of the European Union.

The Lisbon Strategy was born from the Luxembourg process, when a coordinated strategy for employment¹ was initiated, although its roots lie further back in the 1990s with the rise in political awareness of the need to coordinate economic and social policy at a Community level².

The Lisbon Strategy introduced open methods of coordination, which would prove a new and important instrument for attaining fixed objectives. It was designed to help Member States develop their own policies using flexible and decentralised methods, through guidelines and common goals, its aim being to modernise the European social model while allowing for specificities on a national level.

The Lisbon Strategy set itself some ambitious goals regarding Europe as a society and women. These include increasing employment rates, promoting active ageing, developing an information and research society, and lifelong learning. A series of measures were drawn up to facilitate women’s access to the labour market, such as providing childcare facilities and encouraging flexible working arrangements to enable women to enter and remain in the labour market.

This note aims to assess what progress has been made and what challenges have to be faced in terms of gender equality within this mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy.

Consequently, it is necessary to first assess the size of the gender gap on today’s labour market, using underlying factors such as the pay gap, education and lifelong learning **(I)** and secondly, take a closer look at the measures aimed at reconciling work and family life, a necessary condition if we are to attain Lisbon’s ambitious objectives **(II)**.

1. Closing the gender gap in employment and education, a necessary step on the road to social cohesion

The Lisbon Strategy aims to make the maximum use of Europe’s employment potential and regain the conditions for full employment, by creating more and better jobs for all and by implementing gender mainstreaming in order to mobilise the full potential of female employment. However, a gender gap remains.

¹ The European Employment Strategy was drawn up to deal with the difficult situation on European labour markets; in 1990 more than 17 million people, or 10% of the working population, were unemployed. The Lisbon European Council gave further impetus to the Strategy by adding it to the EU agenda for economic and social policy.

² The real beginning of the examination of employment at the European Union level came about with the famous ‘Delors’ White Book’ on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment in 1993.

1.1 EMPLOYMENT

The Lisbon Strategy set several employment targets, taking on board the female employment rate. The aim is to increase the number of women in employment to an average of more than 60%¹ by 2010, with a general employment rate of 70%². This direction was taken further at the Stockholm Summit of March 2001 where intermediate targets were set for a January 2005 deadline (a 57% employment rate for women), and a new clause was added to the Lisbon Strategy on employment for older workers, (aiming for 50% in 2010, after a 38% rate in 2001), as a response to the demographic difficulties Europe faces.

Between 1999 and 2003, the female employment rate increased by 3.2%, reaching 56.1% in EU15³. In 2003, the female employment rate reached 55.1% for EU25, taking into account the unemployment rates in new Member countries⁴. The targets set for 2010 in terms of female employment still seem to be within reach.

Female employment, excepting young women aged from 15 to 24, is rising across all the age groups, including older women. In 2003, the employment rate for older women was 30.7%, proving that a large gender gap still exists between older workers (19.6%).

Female employment rates by country⁵

Pace of progress since 1997 Rates in 2003 (%)	Low	Close to average	High
	>60	DK	AT, FI, PT, SE, UK
55-60	CZ, EE, LT, SI	DE, FR, LV	IE
<55	MT, PL, SK	BE, EL, HU	ES, IT, LU

¹ Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council, 23 and 24 March 2000, point 30.

² **The employment rate** represents the proportion of people working in relation to those of working age (15 to 67 years of age), source Eurostat.

³ Eurostat structural indicators, <http://eu.int/comm/eurostat/structuralindicators>. Update of the annex on statistics from the 2005 Commission report to the Spring European Council.

⁴ Commission Working Document in support of the report from the Commission to the Spring European Council (22 and 23 March 2005) on the Lisbon Strategy of economic, social and environmental renewal, Brussels, 28 January 2005.

⁵ Draft Joint Employment Report 2004/2005, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 9 March 2005.

1.2 THE GENDER PAY GAP

Equal treatment for women and men is a fundamental principle of Community Law and is upheld by case law. It is a fundamental principle of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and is reinforced by the 1976 Community Directive, modified in 2002¹.

However, there are still differences of pay for women and men at the same professional level.

The difference was measured at an average of 16% in EU15 and now sits at about 15%² in EU25 in view of smaller gender pay gaps in the ten new countries.

Closing the pay gap between men and women is likely to make the labour market more attractive to women and as such is an important factor in increasing the female employment rate.

Member States are asked through Employment Policy Guidelines to pursue closing the pay gap. During the 1999-2001 period, the gender pay gaps slightly improved in Austria, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Ireland and the United Kingdom, and worsened in Germany, Portugal and Sweden³.

1.3 LIFELONG ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Europe's education and access to training debate was renewed at the Lisbon Summit to adapt to the new knowledge-based era where learning skills for both life and work are evolving rapidly.

The Lisbon Strategy set the target of halving the number of young people that drop out of school and do not pursue higher education by 2010. Measures taken by Member States have been piecemeal and, despite some progress, 18% of young people dropped out of school in 2003⁴, which is still way above the 10% objective for 2010. Gender gaps in this area are still evident; in all countries, excepting the Czech Republic and Luxembourg, young women are more likely than young men to complete at least their upper-secondary level education.

Currently, women outnumber men in higher education. The percentage of women graduates increased to 58% in 2003, due to the higher levels of education in the new Member States⁵. Women now also represent 41% of graduates who hold a doctorate.

Lifelong learning must be promoted to allow women to enter and remain in the labour market. Lifelong learning is defined by Community texts as *encompassing all purposeful learning activity undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim to improve skills, knowledge and competence*, and has been made part of the European Employment Strategy. The European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2005⁶ points out that *European excellence in the knowledge economy depends on the creation of a well-educated and highly trained workforce*. The European Parliament therefore asked the Spring European Council to ensure that a mid-term

¹ Community Directive of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, OJ L 269/15, 05.10.2002.

² Commission report on equality between women and men, 2005.

³ Commission Working Document cited above; source Eurostat, Structural indicators, 2005.

⁴ Source, Commission Staff Working Document 2005, cited above.

⁵ Eurostat, UOE, 2003.

⁶ European Parliament resolution on the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, 9 March 2005, par. 23.

review would put education and training, investment in human capital and lifelong learning first, at the forefront of the Lisbon Strategy.

In order to reach Lisbon's ambitious goals, closing the gender gap needs to be accompanied by measures that encourage women to enter and remain in the labour market for longer periods of time.

2. Reconciling work and family life, a necessary precondition for achieving the Lisbon objectives

Reconciling work and family life is defined by Community case-law as *a principle which is widely regarded in the legal systems of the Member States as being the natural corollary of the equality between men and women, and which is recognised by Community law*¹.

Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union recognises reconciling work and family life as necessary for the protection of parental responsibilities². The reconciliation of work and family life, included in the European Constitution, will soon carry constitutional weight.

As one of the Lisbon Strategy's major goals, the reconciliation of work and family life became part of the European Employment Strategy in its fourth pillar '*Strengthening equal opportunities*'. It was maintained after the 2003 Employment Guidelines review, and forms part of the specific 'priority' Guidelines for the Union, alongside the three main European Union objectives, namely full employment, quality and productivity at work and social cohesion. Reconciling work and family life is recognised in the Guidelines as a priority for action for the Union.

Reconciling work and family life, as a policy, is a package of measures that Member States are encouraged to adopt. The difficulty in combining work and family life is largely related to the lack of care facilities for children and other dependants as well as inflexible working arrangements.

2.1 PROVISION OF CHILDCARE

In 2003, the position of women with small children in the labour market was 13.6 p.p. lower than women without children while men with small children had 10 p.p. higher employment rates than men without children³. Women perform the major part of childcare work and consequently have less time for paid work, which shows the importance of providing adequate childcare.

When the Maastricht Treaty entered into force, the only domain linked to employment and family in which the Council made calls for action was childcare⁴; this was before the European Employment Strategy was initiated or made part of the Lisbon Strategy.

¹ CJEC, case of 17 June 1998, C-243/95.

² Article 33, 'To reconcile family and professional life, everyone shall have the right to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child.'

³ Commission Report on equality between men and women, 2005, cited above.

⁴ Commission Recommendation of 31 March 1991 on childcare.

The targets set by the Lisbon Strategy for the year 2010 are for Member States to provide adequate childcare facilities for up to 90% of children between 3 and the mandatory school age, and at least 33% of children under three. This would allow parents, women and men, to reconcile work with their family lives.

The European Parliament has also stressed the crucial role of affordable, good quality childcare in the Member States¹.

Since the year 2000², an increasing number of Member States have set national targets for childcare provision, although these are not always underpinned by actual policy initiatives.

Harmonised statistics on childcare will be available in 2006 and until then national statistics³ are used to follow progress. These include diverse forms of child care that are not fully comparable between countries. For children under 3 years old only Sweden, Denmark and Belgium (partly) reach the target of childcare coverage (33%), while a number of countries have less than 15% coverage. Care provision for children between 3 years and the mandatory school age is somewhat better, with quite a few Member States claiming to have reached or to be close to the target of 90%. Member States seen to be lagging behind are the United Kingdom and Slovenia as well as Finland and Lithuania to a certain degree⁴.

2.2 ENCOURAGING PART-TIME WORK

Part-time employment as a proportion of total employment has increased to 18.6% for EU15 and 17.1% for EU25 in 2003. This is particularly relevant for women: 30.5% of women work part-time in the European Union⁵. The proportion of part-time work is not as high in the new Member States, because of inflexible labour markets and lower levels of salaries making this choice a costly one.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, part-time work has been considered a means to create jobs and facilitate the access or return of women to the labour market. However, it is work that tends to have irregular hours, outside the ordinary working hours.

The number of part-time posts in the European Union has grown, having been heavily subsidised by the public sector, which has both stimulated job creation and increased the risk of 'part-time constraints'. What is more, part-time work could increase the proportion of women in the working poor and even lead to social exclusion.

2.3 ENCOURAGING NEW FORMS OF WORK ORGANISATION

The European Employment Strategy considers new forms of work organisation important to create better jobs and reconcile work with family life.

¹ European Parliament resolution on the strategy for full employment and social inclusion in the run-up to the 2002 Spring Summit in Barcelona: *Lisbon process and the way to follow*, Brussels, 28 February 2002.

² On 28 January 2005, data are not yet available for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Slovenia. National sources are used. Fully comparable data will be available only after 2005 with the launch of the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

³ Commission Working Document, Brussels, 28 January 2005.

⁴ Data from National Action Plans 2004, source Commission Staff.

⁵ Against 6.6% of male employees.

The European Parliament has already approved the development of new working arrangements such as teleworking, which it considers to be one of the *'innovative and flexible strategies which enable people to decide on their appropriate form of participation in the labour market'*¹. A Framework Agreement on Telework, signed by European social partners, was considered to be a major step forward. From 16 July 2002² it set up a framework for teleworkers' working conditions that reconciled both flexibility and security for workers. Telework is 'a form of organising or performing work using information technology, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis'.

Telework covers two major types of work organisation, i.e. long-distance working and working from home. The second form could prove interesting for women who wish to reconcile work and family life, on condition that it is determined by free choice and not constraint, which could foster social exclusion³. The Framework Agreement also gives an important role to the social partners who are regularly encouraged to play a more active role in the attainment of the Lisbon objectives. The contractual text will be implemented on the national level in the usual manner; the national members of the signatory parties have three years in which to implement the text at national level.

2.4 AN EQUAL SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITIES

To date, efforts to promote gender equality in the attainment of the Lisbon objectives have mainly focused on women. The Coordinated Strategy for Employment addresses, albeit in a theoretical manner (no tangible measures are proposed), the issue of an equal share of responsibilities for women and men and the need for men to devote more time to family matters.

The situation for women is paradoxical: more women are in gainful employment, they are better educated, hold more diplomas and qualifications than men, and yet inequalities are still very marked in the home and in the family sphere. Women continue to work 'double days'. According to statistics, in couples with children under 7 years old, men take on less than 40% of household chores and only 25% - 35% of tasks related to the children's education⁴.

Member States are often urged to promote the right to parental leave more effectively⁵, so that men play a larger role in the education of children and consequently allow women to enter or re-enter the labour market.

As we have already seen, the proportion of men doing part-time work is 6.6% on average, compared to 30.4% for women. It seems that men do not use this flexible work pattern to reconcile work and family life more effectively, leaving most household chores and most of the work related to children's education to women.

¹ European Parliament resolution, cited, par 14.

² Framework Agreement on Telework, 16 July 2002, http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/jul/145_en.html.

³ The European Framework Agreement recognises and guarantees free choice in this form of working, as much for the employer as for the workers concerned.

⁴ How Europeans spend their time, Eurostat, 1998-2002.

⁵ The right to parental leave is enshrined in Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Conclusion

Seen from the gender perspective, the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy must also take account of the policy of mainstreaming. Mainstreaming has been a feature of European policy-making for many years and was institutionalised by the Treaty of Amsterdam¹. It aims to promote the elimination of inequalities as a separate objective in all Community policies. Alongside the coordination of economic and social policy, mainstreaming is deemed to be the most appropriate instrument for the attainment of the Lisbon objectives. That is why, since 1999, the Employment Guidelines as well as the fourth pillar, specifically dedicated to gender equality, have introduced the gender dimension into all the pillars.

It is worth noting, however, that the mid-term review of the various practices, like the access to new information technologies, remains independent and does not take sufficient account of the gender perspective.

¹ Article 3(2) of the EC Treaty: In all the activities referred to in this article, the Community seeks to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women.

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