Women and the economic crisis

The impact of the crisis on women and women's rights-related legislation

Workshop for journalists - 6 March 2013

The workshop for journalists organised by the European Parliament's Press Service on 6 March 2013 on the subject of "Women and the economic crisis", aims to provide an overview of the impact that the economic and financial crisis is having on women. MEPs and journalists will have the opportunity to exchange views on this issue while taking into consideration the possible options for action at European level. This workshop is being held on the eve of the Interparliamentary Committee Meeting organised by the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament, entitled "Women’s Response to the Crisis".

This leaflet provides extracts from a compilation of papers prepared by the European Parliament’s Policy Departments on "Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs", on "Economic and Scientific Policy" and on "Structural and Cohesion Policies" in relation to the impact of the economic crisis on women.

Within the European Parliament, the role of policy departments is three-fold: to provide timely specialised advice to all parliamentary bodies; to carry out research addressing their needs; to manage the budgets for external expertise according to the decisions taken by committees, under the supervision of the directors and the directors-general.

Scan the QR code or just click on the title of the publication to access it directly.

Gender aspects of the effects of the economic downturn and financial crisis on welfare systems

Available in EN - February 2013

This study explores the impact on women of the economic and financial crisis of 2007/8 and 2009/10, in terms of social welfare systems across the EU. It reviews EU level statistics and provides six in-depth case studies of EU Member States (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Sweden and the UK), exploring the gender impacts of reforms introduced as a result of the crisis.

The study suggests that women are at a greater risk to be negatively affected by the current austerity policy. Parallel cuts in benefits and childcare facilities could increase the already higher risk of poverty.

Committee: Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Analysis of five National Reform Programmes 2012 regarding the pursuit of the Union's gender equality objectives

Available in EN - December 2012

This study evaluates the Member States’ progress towards the EU’s gender equality objectives in the context of the EU 2020 Strategy and of the European Semester, noting that the gender dimension has a low profile in all documents developing them. It pays special attention to the National Reform Programmes or Adjustment Programmes 2012 of five countries in particular (Austria, Greece, Italy, Poland and Sweden). Gender-specific indicators are not applied in the current policy coordination process, therefore the study offers guidance for policy makers at national and EU level on how to address gender equality aspects deemed essential to achieve the EU 2020 targets in the framework of the 2013 European Semester process.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Women living alone - an update

Available in EN - October 2012

This study presents the main changes in the situation of women living alone in Europe that have occurred since 2008 and assesses how developments in pension, labour market and assistance policies are affecting their living conditions. It includes qualitative analyses of such policies from countries selected as representative of European welfare systems: France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Amongst other things, the study notes that in most European countries, lone women exhibit lower labour market participation and lower employment rates than lone men. Conversely, the activity and employment levels shown by lone women are often higher than those of women not living alone.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality
The Impact of the Financial Crisis on the Job Creation Potential of SMEs

This study reviews the effect of the current crisis on Europe’s economy, as well as measures taken by governments and social partners to support SMEs in the crisis. The study discusses in detail the experience and potential of two main types of measures (short-time working arrangements and skills development and training) for a number of Member States. Most of them have implemented measures in the form of packages rather than stand-alone individual measures. The study reviews recent experiences with such packages in Austria and Lithuania and ends with conclusions and recommendations.

Committee: Employment and Social Affairs

Enforcement of Fundamental Workers’ Rights

This study provides an overview of international and European law regulating a selection of fundamental workers’ rights (freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, age antidiscrimination, the right to health and safety at work). It then analyses their enforcement in seven Member States (France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands and United Kingdom).

On the basis of these findings, it explores possible ways forward for improved enforcement of fundamental workers’ rights in the European Union, not only in times of economic crisis, but also in the long term.

Committee: Employment and Social Affairs

Data for the evaluation of the European Semester process from a gender equality perspective

The study sets out 83 indicators for the inclusion of the gender perspective in the evaluation of the Europe 2020 Strategy (for coordinating the European macroeconomic, fiscal and social policies) during the European Semester process (synchronising the assessment of fiscal and structural policies of the EU Member States). The indicators encompass the five EU 2020 headline targets and are meant to introduce a gender perspective into the indicators dashboard of the European Semester. The proposal for a WIKI EU Semester & Gender Equality Web Platform is put forward as an option enhancing contributions and the follow-up of the European Semester process from a gender equality perspective by civil society organisations.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Gender quotas in management boards

This note compares the effectiveness of legal instruments for narrowing the gender gap in corporate management boards with that of voluntary regimes. Findings suggest that legal instruments to enforce quotas are an effective and fast means of achieving change. The use of voluntary regimes has led to some increase in the proportion of women on corporate boards, but the effects are significantly smaller and slower than when applying legal instruments. Indeed, the only instance of achieving 40% of each gender was through the use of legal instruments to enforce quotas. The note also identifies and reports on the positions and recommendations of nine international bodies on this matter.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality
The Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020 from a gender equality perspective

Available in EN - January 2012

This document assesses the potential impact of the European Commission’s proposals for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 on women’s rights and the advancement of gender equality, using a gender-based assessment of budgets. The main areas dealt with are: economic independence; education and training; health, well-being and the environment; fundamental rights; and external relations. The EU Budget will finance the EU2020 Strategy, a pivotal tool for economic recovery intended to make gender mainstreaming the main strategy for gender equality. However, this gender budgeting exercise has shown that the gender perspective is far from being assumed in all policies, at all levels and at every stage of the policy making process.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Social Cohesion and Demographic Development in a Sustainable Europe

Available in EN, FR, DE, PL - November 2011

This note brings together documents of the Joint Parliamentary Meeting on "Social Cohesion and Demographic Development in a Sustainable Europe". Held in Brussels in December 2011, this meeting was organised jointly by the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, the Regional Development Committee and the Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Committee. The documents in this note focus on the following issues: the economic and budgetary impact of demographic change, aspects related to social cohesion and regional development, as well as the social and equality aspects of employment and demographic trends.

Committees: Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee, Employment and Social Affairs Committee, Regional Development Committee, Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Committee

Gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis

Available in EN - September 2011

This study focuses on the gender situation in the European Union as a result of the current economic and financial crises, beginning from 2008. Statistical findings regarding gender gaps seem to conclude that the initial phase of the crisis has had a stronger impact on men than on women. However, the study suggests that as the crisis shifts towards public finances, hitting the public sector and family benefits, the negative effect on women may increase. Indeed, a decrease in the rate of progress towards gender parity in employment can already be noticed. Also included in this report are four in-depth case studies (Greece, Italy, Poland and UK) on the impact of the crisis on gender-related aspects.

Committee: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Occupational Health and Safety Risks for the Most Vulnerable Workers

Available in EN - July 2011

Each of the groups of workers addressed in this study – women, ageing workers, workers with disabilities, young workers, migrant workers, temporary workers and low-qualified workers – faces specific occupational health and safety risks.

While the EU has a strong body of legislation and a comprehensive strategy addressing worker health and safety, this study shows that the categories of vulnerable workers analysed face ongoing occupational safety and health risks that deserve further action at EU level. Options are proposed, drawing on the analysis of needs as well as a review of specific measures implemented in the Member States.

Committee: Employment and Social Affairs
The Integration of Migrants and its Effects on the Labour Market
Available in EN - June 2011

This study provides an overview of the situation of immigrants in the European Union, by focusing on the process of their integration and its impact on the labour market. Amongst other things, it explores: the employment situation of immigrants, their distribution across the industrial sectors and how this compares with the native population; the legal status of seasonal workers, posted workers and intracorporate transferees from outside the EU; obstacles to the integration of immigrants and their children within the educational system and their assimilation into the labour market; and best practices taken at the national and company level which have been successful in promoting the integration of immigrants. The study also gives some policy recommendations.

Committee: Employment and Social Affairs

Costs and benefits of maternity and paternity leave
Available in EN - September 2010

This report focuses on the Commission’s proposal for a Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers, as well as workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding. A medium term ex-ante impact assessment of the introduction of a fully paid maternity leave (18 or 20 continuous weeks) in ten EU Member States has been carried out to determine related costs and benefits to the employees, employers, government budgets and society as a whole. The document also includes a brief note reviewing the evidence on the consequences of the extension of maternity/parental leave entitlements on women’s labour market outcomes.

Committees: Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, Employment and Social Affairs

Policy Departments

Effective parliamentary work relies on specialised, objective, high-quality and up-to-date information. To this end, five units responsible for research, analysis and policy advice, known as policy departments, were created to provide this expert advice. Their activities cover all areas of competence of the European Parliament, producing high-level independent advice, based on research carried out either in-house or by external researchers.

Policy departments deliver a wide range of expertise, comprising texts as diverse as in-depth studies on complex legislative issues, comparative studies and short background briefings. These documents aim to support the work of the various parliamentary bodies. They serve a variety of purposes: they can feed directly into the legislative work of a specific committee or serve as a briefing for delegations of Members. Apart from a few confidential documents, all texts produced by the policy departments are available on the Parliament’s website for the benefit of all Members and the wider public.

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Where to find the studies?
Link to the e-studies database: www.europarl.europa.eu/studies.html