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National Council of Women of Malta
EESC Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC)
Presentation

Public Hearing: A Regulatory Framework for measures to reconcile family life and a period of studies for young women in the EU

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
Tuesday 27 February: 10.30-12.30

Addressing the issue of family life and a period of studies for young women in the EU requires taking into consideration several aspects:

- The Lisbon Strategy and the targets regarding women's participation in the labour market ¹
- The family and demographic change ² and
- Poverty among women in Europe ³

There is the need to integrate these aspects in providing effective measures for young women to have equal access to personal development and to be in a position to fully use their potential to contribute to the economic and social development of society. Measures addressing the needs of young women need to be implemented horizontally at national and European level.

A clear identification of the age groups to be addressed is necessary in order to address their needs effectively. These should include the 12-16 year olds, 16-21 year-olds and 21-35 year-olds.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that couples are postponing having children for a number of reasons, not least for financial reasons and longer periods of study. As a result we have a reduction in birth rates and in fertility rates. Priority should be give to address these issues in the short and long term

Young women in different situations going through a period of studies:

¹ COM(2006) 92 final: A Roadmap for Equality between men and women 2006-010

² SOC/245 The family and demographic change

³ SOC/207: Poverty among women in Europe

The problems that young women face vary according to the different situations in their life. These include:

- Young women or mothers with family duties - care of children or siblings, elderly relatives or disabled children - who are still studying or who wish to further their studies but are **not** in employment
- Young women who wish to further their studies but who for financial reasons or lack of qualifications had to seek immediate employment
- Young women in employment who wish to study to advance in their career
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Women in vulnerable situations

- Single mothers
- Disabled mothers
- Young women with health problems including HIV/AIDS
- Young women with mental problems
- Young widows with lack of funds to further their studies, who are in employment and have care responsibilities
- Young women suffering from different forms of violence at home and at the workplace
- Female immigrants and ethnic minorities

Seeking solutions:

More flexible study and work arrangements are necessary to be able to cater for the different needs of young women, some of which are more urgent than others

Proposals:

- Programme of studies for school-girl mothers:
 - a. preparations for giving birth and child rearing
 - b. continuation of courses begun at secondary levelexamples of good practice Malta ; Education Department provides such programmes called 'Ghozza'
- Further programmes of early intervention preventive measures through formal and non-formal education to reduce illiteracy and early school-leaving rates at national level
- Developing ICT facilities and access to ICT for young women who are still studying and have family care responsibilities. Career guidance should include units with information to encourage young women to further develop ICT skills and not be

content with minimum requirements as this gives them the opportunity to work from home and therefore reduce time for travelling which could be used for study periods

- Developing distance learning, self-teaching technology programmes to be able to study from home.
- Education systems with flexible time frames for course programmes at secondary and tertiary levels. The Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST) has started introducing flexible time frames for courses
- Revision of learning methods, study skills for the different age groups. Lifelong learning programmes to be extended to the needs of young mothers
- Provision of more affordable and accessible childcare facilities to match the needs of young mothers' study periods.
- Strengthening social security systems and addressing the issue of exploitation of part-time employees that is also affecting female employees in this age group
- The role of employers to allow young women who are in the labour market to further their studies by further developing flexible work time frames, needs to be highlighted.
- Employment and Training Corporations could offer vocational training with recognised certification specifically for young prospective female workers
- Initiatives of companies to get together to provide vocational training with recognised certification in collaboration with education systems at national level should be encouraged.
- Trade Unions should include measures in collective agreements, that provide for opportunities for young women in employment to further their studies in the public and private sectors

The role of fathers

- Fathers play an important role, and therefore measures to facilitate opportunities for fathers to share in family responsibilities are indispensable, particularly during study periods.
- Introducing incentives for fathers to support young mothers who wish to take up studying on the lines of 'paternity leave' for study purposes should be considered
- Education for life: building on relationships/change in mentality

Other initiatives

The role of NGOs to become Learning Centres for young mothers, not only to develop ICT but also for vocational training, should also be developed. These should also include entrepreneurial skills training. NGOs as Learning Centres already have a number of success stories in the field of ICT and Empowerment courses.

General Comments:

- The European Social Model is not static: the need to adapt to changing needs of society is important.
- Making use of current EU programmes and initiatives, focusing on the needs of young women can speed up implementation and possibly reduce costs
- Initiatives carried out for the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities should address the needs of young women who are going through a period of study or wish to study further.
- Sharing of good practices should be encouraged
- Each signatory to the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life should be encouraged to commit itself to addressing the needs of young women in implementing and revising its Equality Action Plan

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