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## REPORT

on the Commission communication 'Strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy'  
(COM(2001) 629 – C5-0076/2002 – 2002/2034(COS))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Herman Schmid



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## PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 6 November 2001, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication 'Strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy' (COM(2001) 629 – 2002/2034(COS)).

At the sitting of 27 February 2002 the President of Parliament announced that he had referred the communication to the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs as the committee responsible and the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities and the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism for their opinions (C5-0076/2002).

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had appointed Herman Schmid rapporteur at its meeting of 4 December 2001.

It considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 17 April and 27/28 May 2002.

At the latter meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Theodorus J.J. Bouwman, chairman; Marie-Hélène Gillig, Winfried Menrad and Marie-Thérèse Hermange, vice-chairpersons; Herman Schmid, rapporteur; Jan Andersson, Elspeth Attwooll, Regina Bastos, André Brie (for Sylviane H. Ainardi), Philip Bushill-Matthews, Alejandro Cercas, Luigi Cocilovo, Proinsias De Rossa, Jillian Evans, Ilda Figueiredo, Fiorella Ghilardotti (for Enrico Boselli), Anne-Karin Glase, Richard Howitt (for Elisa Maria Damião), Stephen Hughes, Dieter-Lebrecht Koch (for Carlo Fatuzzo), Jean Lambert, Elizabeth Lynne, Mario Mantovani, Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bartho Pronk, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Claude Turmes (for Hélène Flautre), Ieke van den Burg, Anne E.M. Van Lancker, Barbara Weiler and Sabine Zissener (for Enrico Ferri).

The opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities is attached; the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism decided on 22 January 2002 not to deliver an opinion.

The report was tabled on 31 May 2002 .

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

## MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

### **European Parliament resolution on the Commission communication 'Strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy' (COM(2001) 629 – C5-0076/2002 – 2002/2034(COS))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2001) 629 – C5-0076/2002<sup>1</sup>),
- having regard to Articles 128 and 129 of the Treaty,
- having regard to Article 6 of Regulation (EC) n° 1262/1999 of 21 June 1999 on the European Social Fund<sup>2</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Decision of 18 February 2002 on guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the 2002<sup>3</sup>,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 18 February 2002 on the implementation of Member States' employment policies<sup>4</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission White Paper on European Governance (COM(2001) 428, 27 July 2001)<sup>5</sup>
- having regard to the Commission communication on the social policy agenda (COM(2000) 379)<sup>6</sup>,
- having regard to its resolution of 30 November 2000<sup>7</sup> on the Commission communication on "Acting Locally for Employment - A Local Dimension for the European Employment Strategy" (COM(2000) 196)<sup>8</sup>,
- having regard to its legislative resolution of 24 October 2001<sup>9</sup> on the Commission communication on the "Guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2002" (COM(2001) 511)<sup>10</sup>
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2001<sup>11</sup> on the Commission communication on the "Draft Joint Employment Report 2001"(COM(2001) 438)<sup>12</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>2</sup> OJ L 161 of 26.6.1999, p.48

<sup>3</sup> OJ L 60 of 1.3.2002, p. 60

<sup>4</sup> OJ L 60 of 1.3.2002, p.70

<sup>5</sup> OJ C287 of 12.10.2001, p.1

<sup>6</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>7</sup> OJ C228 13.8.2001, p. 16

<sup>8</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>9</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>10</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>11</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>12</sup> Not yet published in OJ

- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2001<sup>1</sup> on the Commission communication on “The implementation of innovative measures under Article 6 of the European Social Fund Regulation for the programming period 2000-2006” (COM(2000) 894)<sup>2</sup> ,
  - having regard to its legislative resolution of 23 October 2001 on the Council common position for adopting a European Parliament and Council decision on “Community incentive measures in the field of employment” COM(2000) 459<sup>3</sup> ,
  - having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2000<sup>4</sup> on Commission draft guidelines for the various types of innovative measures in the context of Article 22 of the General Regulation (EC) n° 12560/1999 of 21 June 1999 - Innovative Measures under Article 6 of the ESF Regulation<sup>5</sup> ,
  - having regard to the Economic and Social Committee opinion of 19 October 2000<sup>6</sup> and the Committee of Regions opinion of 20 September 2000<sup>7</sup> on the Commission communication on Acting Locally for Employment - A Local Dimension for the European Employment Strategy,
  - having regard to the Economic and Social Committee opinion of 28 February 2001<sup>8</sup> and the Committee of Regions opinion of 13 December 2000<sup>9</sup> on the Commission communication on Community incentive measures in the field of employment,
  - having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (A5-0214/2002),
- A. whereas the Employment Guidelines explicitly refer to the need to improve the functioning of local labour markets;
- B. whereas the Committee of Regions and the Social and Economic Committee have particular experience in local and regional employment activities and have been pioneers in supporting the idea of local employment strategies;
- C. whereas local labour markets need to be better integrated with regional, national and international labour markets in a balanced two way relationship since, because of their proximity, they have a better knowledge of the social reality of each area and its social and economic fabric;
- D. whereas local labour markets provide a large share of the total employment and are of particular importance for improving the employment rate;

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<sup>1</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>2</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>3</sup> OJ C337 28.11.2000,p. 242

<sup>4</sup> OJ C121, 24.4.2001,p. 160

<sup>5</sup> Not yet published in OJ

<sup>6</sup> CES 1215/2000. OJ C14, 16.1.2001, p. 63

<sup>7</sup> CDR0187/2000. OJ C22, 24.1.2001, p. 13

<sup>8</sup> CES233/2001. OJ C139, 11.5.2001, p.30

<sup>9</sup> CDR0310/2000. OJ C144, 16.05.2001,p.30

- E. whereas local labour markets provide basic services and vital opportunities for start-up entrepreneurs and enterprises which produce for national and international markets for which competitiveness, based on high-quality work and on lifelong learning, plays an essential role;
  - F. whereas local labour markets have a high proportion of jobs in the service sector, particularly connected to public and private provision of technical, educational and social welfare services;
  - G. whereas local labour markets are embedded in communities and geared to the basic needs of everyday life, and are therefore less sensitive to the ups and downs of the macro-economic cycles;
  - H. whereas those involved in local labour markets should be sensible to the value of sustainable development of local resources;
  - I. whereas local and regional economic development provides employment for people in their home region and so diminishes the need for involuntary geographical mobility;
  - J. whereas local labour markets are more accessible to marginal groups of the labour force, and in general to groups of people who are, in social terms, most in need of help and are therefore of particular importance for social inclusion and integration;
  - K. in view of the fundamental role played by the social economy and the third sector in fostering the qualitative and quantitative development of local employment;
  - L. whereas local labour markets are particularly important in geographically remote or inaccessible areas and in islands, which often have a low population density, and in poor or impoverished areas where private investment tends to be low and the risk for unemployment correspondingly high;
  - M. whereas local labour markets exist and have vital functions also in urban areas where some of the most difficult problems of social inclusion are to be found;
  - N. whereas local and regional actors often report a certain passive resistance or a lack of concern and, at times, a clear lack of interest from central policy makers in the field of employment policy;
  - O. whereas local labour markets are of particular importance for developing the labour markets in the applicant countries, where local and regional employment problems have become alarming during the transition period;
  - P. whereas local labour markets for these reasons, but most of all for their ability to create stable and high-quality employment, are of *the utmost* importance in the European Employment Strategy;
1. Welcomes the Commission communication which stresses the importance of the often neglected local labour markets which are so important both for the European Employment Strategy and for general social cohesion;

2. Stresses the need for the integration of different levels of labour markets and points to the need for a “bottom-up” process in the European Employment Strategy, so that local and regional knowledge and commitment can complement and improve the present policy process and realise the kind of circular process which is envisioned in the Commission White Paper on Governance;
3. Stresses the importance of organic connections between the national and local action plans for employment, to be achieved through close relationships and complementary roles for national, regional and local authorities, especially when the plans themselves are being drawn up, based on partnership and the involvement of actors at all levels within institutions, society, entrepreneurial activity, trade unions and associations;
4. Is convinced that the national parliaments, and where appropriate the regional parliaments, should have the main responsibility to integrate the “top-down” European and the “bottom-up” local employment processes in such a way that policy commitments and budget allocations are properly coordinated;
5. Stresses the crucial responsibility of public authorities for initiating local employment strategies which, in close cooperation and through various forms of partnership with the local business community, the trade unions, the NGOs and other relevant local and regional actors, as well as civil society, will improve and increase the effectiveness and coordination of Community policies and instruments in the employment sector to be incorporated in a more comprehensive strategy for sustainable development;
6. Points to the active role played by the social economy and third sector with regard to local labour markets and the development of a local dynamic in terms of social inclusion, entrepreneurship and economic activity (particular in the services sector), and emphasises the need for this state of affairs to be properly taken into account in local, regional and national employment strategies;
7. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to promote women's entrepreneurship and to support women's organisations and cooperatives at local level;
8. Emphasises, in particular, the importance of local government, which, since it constitutes the first level of democratically elected government and, as a result, is closest to the citizens, can play an important role in establishing collaboration between all local, public and private bodies working on promoting employment;
9. Welcomes the development of Local Action Plans for Employment and job creation in close cooperation with regional and national labour market authorities;
10. The local authorities must, in their local action plans for employment, include a separate section on gender equality to promote the exchange of experiences; to raise employers' awareness and encourage them to take measures relating to the under-representation of women at all levels and increasing the range of employment opportunities available to women; to facilitate the creation and management of enterprises by women;
11. Stresses that the national employment action plans must include an account of the action plans worked out at local and regional level;



12. Welcomes the creation of Local Centres for Labour Market Services and intermediate support structures, such as local development agencies and local employment observatories, as well as Job Creation Programs, which should also be able to provide information and training about the various support programs on European, national and regional levels and to assist in making applications for funding;
13. Calls for local employment strategies to develop into integrated packages of measures and action plans which analyse resources and needs, identify those who could be involved, coordinate their actions and provide training and information. It is also necessary to involve the authorities at all levels, take every opportunity to achieve cohesion and democratic participation, for example through the exchange of good practice;
14. Emphasises the importance of Territorial Employment Pacts for local and regional development, which combine local communities in network cooperation and make joint efforts possible; points in particular to the need for provision of risk capital from sources which respect the need for local autonomy and control and of measures designed to give local entrepreneurs easier access to credit, in particular small and micro enterprises;
15. Calls on the Commission to take further initiatives to promote the exchange of good local experiences, with a view to increasing employment among local and regional actors throughout Europe;
16. Emphasises the importance of employment pacts, incorporating employment guarantees between the social partners within firms where appropriate;
17. Draws attention to the importance of lifelong learning programs for local employment aims and points to the need for clear decisions on how to finance the necessary educational expansion; points also to the need for quantitative and qualitative benchmarks on minimum cost levels in basic education and elementary vocational training services; suggests close cooperation with local educational institutions;
18. Emphasises the importance of providing training and information for local officials and all local actors (social partners, businesses, equal opportunities bodies, third sector organisations, voluntary organisations, etc.) regarding employment strategy and equal opportunities policy with a view to devising and effectively implementing local action plans to promote employment for women and help reconcile work and family life;
19. Welcomes the attention paid by the Commission communication to the promotion of local female employment and gender equality, the quality of jobs in local government and public services and the reconciliation of professional and family life, and points to the particular importance of good quality child care provision and the principle of gender neutral wage agreements guaranteeing equal pay for equal work;
20. Reminds that special concern is needed for the employment of those groups in society which are as a rule more vulnerable (the disabled, individuals on the margins of society, older people without jobs or pensions, etc.);
21. Confirms that the Structural and Social Funds and the Community initiatives and programmes (in particular those focused on training, such as Leonardo) provide important support for local/regional employment projects, but points both to the need for supporting

also long term planning and continuous development processes and to the need for simplifying application procedures and project administration rules;

22. Recognises the fact that social partner organisation and representation is usually weaker on local levels; points therefore to the need for special measures to strengthen local partnership participation and local social dialogue. Stresses that greater encouragement should be given to the creation of local and regional partnerships with all the relevant actors, and calls for regular mapping out at national level of the extent to which such partnerships are being created;
23. Is fully aware of the risk that decentralised employment strategies may result in uneven development between local regions; insists therefore on special measures to strengthen interregional and social cohesion;
24. Calls attention to the recent Common Decision to strengthen incentive measures for improving local employment strategies and calls for concrete action plans and proposals in this respect; welcomes the Commission's statement that innovative measures under Article 6 of the Regulation on the European Social Fund are of major importance for the European employment strategy at local level, as well as the Commission's undertaking to keep the European Parliament informed of the priorities selected;
25. Criticises the Commission once again for its earlier reluctant attitude to the implementation of heading B-503 'Local Employment Commitment', which showed a very poor take-up rate in 2000 by reason of an inadequate information policy;
26. Welcomes the fact that in 2002-2003, in the context of innovative measures under Article 6 of the ESF, the development of local employment strategies will be given priority support to the tune of €40 m each; regrets, however, that no trans-national but only national project partnerships will be supported; hopes that beyond 2003 parts of the funding provided under Article 6 can be used for the promotion of local employment policy;
27. Supports the Commission proposal to arrange a Local Development Forum in 2003 with wide participation from all actors concerned; calls on the Commission to investigate whether it would be desirable to organise such a forum on an annual basis;
28. Reminds the Commission that the local dimension of the employment strategy is just as relevant for the applicant states as for the present member states and points to the particular importance of horizontal transnational East-West partnerships for employment and economic development;
29. Observes that the relevant Commission communication devotes too little attention to the specific problems of certain categories of women – especially migrants, asylum-seekers and political refugees – and calls on the Commission to formulate a more specific policy for these categories;
30. Calls on the Commission to reinforce consultation with the Committee of Regions and the Social and Economic Committee for common efforts to improving and democratising the European Employment process;
31. Calls on the President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, the Governments and Parliaments of the members states and the Social Partners.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Commission's communication last year on 'Acting locally for employment' which attracted much attention has now been followed up by a communication on 'Strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy'.

Here the Commission states:

'While the EES (European Employment Strategy) has so far relied mainly on efforts at European and national level, there is a growing awareness that the objectives that the Union has set itself to improve performance in the area of employment cannot be achieved without greater participation of the regional and local levels' (p. 5-6).

It goes on to state that the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy has received increasing attention in recent years. The Commission refers to the employment guidelines for 2001, in particular, paragraph 11 which states:

*"Member States will (...) take into account, where appropriate, in their overall employment policy the regional development dimension (...); **encourage local and regional authorities to develop strategies for employment** in order to exploit fully the possibilities offered by job creation at local level and promote partnerships to this end with all the actors concerned, including the representatives of civil society (...)."*

It is no secret that many have criticised the European Employment Strategy as ineffective and incapable of mobilising actors and decision-makers at regional and local level in the Member States. Now that the economy and employment have stagnated, this criticism may increase. It is therefore extremely welcome that the Commission should in this way be attempting to strengthen the EES by linking it to the regional and local levels, where employment is less sensitive to the economic cycle.

### What is local and what is regional?

Some Member States are federal states, whose sub-states are often called 'regions'. Economically, socially and culturally, however, these regions are more like the small Member States of the EU. This creates a conceptual confusion which may be difficult to handle. In this report I am using the concept of 'region' to denote a level between the local and the 'national', where 'nation' then means a national state (Finland, Netherlands) or a federal sub-state (Catalonia, Bavaria).

### The 'local dimension' or the 'local market'?

It is a little unclear what the Commission actually means by 'the local dimension'. There is an ambivalence in the communication between two approaches. At times, 'local' is identified with rural and peripheral areas that have difficulty in keeping up with developments and that need special regional and local aid and development programmes. At other times, 'local' is referred to as the level in an integrated national labour market where all specific work tasks are carried out ('all work is in a sense local'). The first approach can be said to be too narrow and the second one to be so comprehensive that we cannot understand what actually distinguishes 'the local dimension'.

The European employment guidelines contain the term ‘local labour markets’ (guideline 11, 4<sup>th</sup> sentence) which can usefully be employed to illustrate what the local dimension may involve. The labour market system is vertically structured and it is possible to distinguish between local, regional and national levels. A local labour market consists of work performed locally and consumed locally. It includes all those working to provide everyday services, e.g. care, welfare and social services, local transport, administration and technical services, schools and cultural amenities, craft trades, everyday commodities and some manufacturing, etc. In the Member States local labour markets in this sense can be assumed to account for as much as one third of total employment.

The local labour market is now more or less integrated with regional, national and international markets. Many of those consuming local services and goods are themselves employed in jobs producing goods and services for export to other localities, regions and nations. Some local communities are extremely dependent on companies that are actually part of a national or international economy. Yet these larger companies are conversely also very dependent on the local labour market which is responsible for basic services and the everyday needs of the workforce. Not least, the local market means a great deal for the creation of new small businesses and it is well known that there are local communities and regions where new entrepreneurship enjoys particularly favourable conditions.

### Three types of local employment problems

I. All over Europe there are small local communities which are stagnating. Young people move away and the older population becomes more and more dependent on economic transfers from the state and from insurance and pension systems, etc. Often whole regions are affected by this pattern in a way which is socially and politically unacceptable. The question is as to the role which local employment strategies can play on these ‘autonomous’ local markets.

II. There is another category of localities and regions where employment is dominated by one single or a few large employers that are part of the national or international economy. When these key companies are closed down or relocated, dramatic difficulties often ensue for the locality and the local labour market which they leave behind. In smaller localities this may threaten the future of the entire local community, but in larger localities and in urban regions as well, it can result in shocks for the local labour market, particularly as crises and restructuring affecting companies often occur simultaneously and trigger a kind of series of shocks. The question is as to how local employment strategies can manage these situations which are typical of ‘dominated’ local markets.

III. In major cities and entirely urbanised regions the labour market is versatile and more integrated. Mobility between local and other labour markets is greater and the need for a local dimension in employment policy does not appear so clearly or does so in the form of quite specific problems. For example, socially segregated city areas emerge with their own local labour market situation characterised by low wages, insecure employment conditions, black labour and high unemployment. And, conversely there are socially privileged urban areas with the opposite features. How is a local employment strategy to manage these problems which arise in the ‘integrated’ local labour markets?

The local labour markets can thus vary a great deal but they still have many specific features in common. They are dominated by service industries and female labour, they are an important part of local everyday life and they are more accessible to those with a marginal position on the

labour market, i.e. young people, the elderly, part-time female workers, etc. In many local communities family patterns are to be found with independent agricultural work being combined with temporary employment on the local labour market or with one of the partners working in a local undertaking and another one in a national company in the locality.

The local labour market is generally more stable and less sensitive to the economic cycle than national and international labour markets. It therefore plays a special role at times of economic crisis.

These special features are plain to see in the case of rural communities where national and international companies are few and often physically and socially demarcated. They are less clear but just as important in larger communities and towns where the local community is not as visible but does exist and plays a major part also in the economy and employment as a whole.

### Local employment strategies

When talking of local labour markets and local employment strategies, differences of the kind outlined above should be taken into account. The different local labour markets are faced at least to some extent with different circumstances, difficulties and opportunities.

This means in turn that the strategies must be developed and rooted locally. It is fine if they tie up with the general objectives and guidelines that are formulated in the employment strategy but they must be framed in accordance with the specific circumstances prevailing in the local situation.

The first thing to do is to identify the principal actors and their needs and interests, i.e. public authorities, private employers, employees and their organisations and, not least, the unemployed.

Often developments run in parallel in many local areas within a larger region. Here strategies are required for coordinated regional mobilisation that have as their starting point the specific conditions on the ground. Although the importance of individual entrepreneurs should not be overlooked, local partnerships and territorial cooperation pacts are often essential requirements for reconversion and development.

It ought to be the task of national and European labour market policy to back up such local initiatives and, as far as possible, help create conditions for development that are sustainable in the long run. Local communities are capable of mobilising many resources themselves but other things need to be provided from outside such as risk capital, training facilities and social welfare services that are essential in order to prevent young people moving away from the area.

In local communities where one or a couple of major companies have a decisive bearing on developments, national and European authorities must help regulate these companies' obligations towards the local labour market and the people in the locality. Long-term development agreements to counteract speculative start-ups and closures can be crucial for local enterprise and population growth.

Employment policy must be an integrated part of an overall public policy for development. Work, housing, day-care centres and schools, health care and services for the elderly, transport and other local infrastructure are factors that operate together. The integration of all these areas

must take place within the framework of the national political process. The government and national parliament along with regional and local political bodies must formulate objectives, frame strategies and mobilise resources.

European employment policy must therefore, to a far greater extent than hitherto, be linked together with national policy at different levels. The national parliament must debate and take responsibility for the national action plan, allocate the resources which it requires and subsequently administer it in democratic coordination with the regional and local levels where the national parliamentarians have their political base.

The European guidelines which come from the top down and the priorities and recommendations of the national political process which come from the bottom up must therefore be assembled and assessed together in the national action plan for employment. This is entirely in keeping with the argument set out in the Commission's White Paper where, in the section on subsidiarity, mention is made 'of a virtuous circle, based on feedback, networks and involvement from policy creation to implementation at all levels'. What the Commission in its earlier report called the bottom-up approach must therefore be combined with the top-down approach that has hitherto predominated so that local resources are mobilised for developments which are not only local but also linked to national and European developments.

The EU also has a particularly important role to play in supporting the local and regional employment policies of the candidate countries. In particular, encouragement should be given to trans-national horizontal partnerships capable of combining job placement with job-creating cooperation projects and local/regional economic development. In these countries it may take a long time to develop an effective labour market, and forms of support that allow long-term planning should therefore be devised.

23 April 2002

## **OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy  
(COM(2001) 629 – C5-0076/2002 – 2002/2034 (COS))

Draftsperson: Regina Bastos

### **PROCEDURE**

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities appointed Regina Bastos draftsperson at its meeting of 22 January 2002.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 27 March 2002 and 18 April 2002.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Anna Karamanou, chairman; Marianne Eriksson, Jillian Evans and Olga Zrihen Zaari, vice-chairmen; Regina Bastos, draftsperson; Lone Dybkjær, Fiorella Ghilardotti, Koldo Gorostiaga Atxalandabaso, Lissy Gröner, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Astrid Lulling, Thomas Mann, Christa Prets, Anne E.M. Van Lancker and Joke Swiebel.

## SHORT JUSTIFICATION

At the end of 2000 Parliament expressed its position on the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy (EES), as presented by the Commission in its communication COM(2000) 196. The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities now reiterates Parliament's position on the subject and welcomes the fact that the Commission has, in its new communication on strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy, taken up most of the points stressed by the EP in its resolution.

The committee endorses the approach adopted in the communication to the question of local development, given that it takes in not just the employment dimension but also gender equality, the social dimension, economic development, innovation and the information society. The Commission will evaluate these aspects with a view to proposing new measures; these will necessitate, in the near future, a new political impetus, a consciousness-raising effort and a more intensive exchange of best practice.

Another key aspect of the communication is its recognition that measures to promote gender equality are more effective at local level; if equality is to be attained, women's dual role as both agents and beneficiaries of local employment strategies will require the implementation of gender mainstreaming at local level in the application of all the decentralised policies.

If women are to play a genuinely proactive role within the proposed strategy, it is all the more necessary for more effective measures to be taken to ensure the compatibility of work and family life and to act immediately to develop women-friendly professional qualifications and structures.

All the Community financial instruments (the ESF; the initiatives, notably EQUAL; the ERDF, etc) must take account of the human aspect and, in particular, the gender aspect of local actions. Increased funding will be required, especially for the ESF, with a view to the forthcoming enlargement. This will be vital if we are to achieve the Lisbon targets - creation of quality jobs and promotion of social integration, equal opportunities and the knowledge society - and the related mid-term objective, as set at the Stockholm European Council, of a 57% female employment rate by January 2005.

Today there is a greater need than in the past for a more flexible organisation of work. This need arises from the accelerated rhythm of change in our technology-driven society and from the diverse character of the labour markets. We must develop innovative policies at local level, which will take the necessary account both of local characteristics and of such new forms of work as teleworking, homeworking and part-time and voluntary working, all of which are of particular interest to women in view of their desire to reconcile productive activity with family life in the context of modern society. The voluntary sector has a key role to play in providing employment for women in the local context; its objectives should be taken heed of and it should be involved in partnership arrangements under the EES at local level.

If the European Employment Strategy is to be coordinated with the national employment plans and the regional and local development initiatives, there will be a need for broad-based participation by social agents in all fields, and, especially, the participation of women. It will also be vital to ensure a permanent information-sharing process leading to the exchange of experiences and the dissemination of best practice throughout the EU. In this connection, the



creation of local interconnected networks could play a major role in developing the local dimension of the EES.

The gender dimension cannot be applied at local level alone, although the relevant measures may have the greatest impact locally: gender equality must be applied at every level of the EES, including the regional and local partnerships and the Territorial Employment Pacts. For monitoring purposes, the inclusion of women's NGOs at the various levels would help ensure the presence of the gender approach. This approach currently needs to make a major qualitative leap. It is necessary to be aware of women's situation in modern society and be prepared for future developments: equality is likely to be transposed from the public to the private area, and there will probably be a need for a social contract between the genders in the area of employment and social welfare.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities calls on the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its motion for a resolution:

1. The local development of the EES is essential, as it is at this level that job creation has proven most effective; however, in the context of a more wide-ranging project encompassing such areas as quality of life and neighbourhood solidarity, the actual achievement of gender equality must be a priority;
2. If women are to derive maximum benefit from the local employment strategies, the preconditions must be created to enable both parents to reconcile work and family life; this will necessitate greater efforts to establish affordable and high-quality facilities for old people and children, such as crèches and old people's health centres, achieve a more flexible organisation of work (via part-time working, teleworking and other arrangements) and ensure access to skills training (in ITC, etc) and to quality jobs;
3. The local authorities must, in their local action plans for employment, include a separate section on gender equality to promote the exchange of experiences; to raise employers' awareness and encourage them to take measures relating to the under-representation of women at all levels and increasing the range of employment opportunities available to women; to facilitate the creation and management of enterprises by women; and to provide women entering or returning to the labour market with information about new job opportunities with an assessment of the conditions prevailing in each region. Such measures must take account of the tax and social security aspects and the need for flexible working hours; the Member States are called on to ensure that the relevant Community directives are correctly implemented;
4. The NAPs (National Action Plans) and local action plans must be coordinated as part of a whole in order to promote employment for women and measures to help reconcile work and family life; they must also clearly indicate the role and degree of participation of local authorities and the opportunities for involvement of all local actors in measures for gender equality; the gender dimension must be incorporated into the LDEIs, to ensure that they contribute to the objectives of improved planning of measures adopted in the relevant area;
5. The establishment of local training agreements and initiatives under the partnership arrangements should have as its objective increased emphasis on training in occupations in which there are fewer women and the introduction of ITC and new learning systems, with priority access for women;
6. Emphasises the importance of providing training and information for local officials and all local actors (social partners, businesses, equal opportunities bodies, third sector organisations, voluntary organisations, etc.) regarding employment strategy and equal opportunities policy with a view to devising and effectively implementing local action plans to promote employment for women and help reconcile work and family life; suggests that, as part of the mainstreaming policy, local authorities should periodically organise region-city conferences and establish coordination units at all levels to ensure that measures taken under the various local action plans are complementary;

7. While it is recognised that the social economy has a broader role to play than local development in the context of the European Employment Strategy, it is stressed that this sector can play a key part in developing women's employment at local level; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take measures to promote women's entrepreneurship and to support women's organisations and cooperatives at local level;
8. Local employment agencies have an important role to play in the process of decentralising the EES, thanks to their awareness of the specific characteristics of local employment and their closeness to the grassroots; calls on the Member States, in so far as lies within their powers, to require employment agencies to develop and draw up plans for promoting the employment of women;
9. Observes that the relevant Commission communication devotes too little attention to the specific problems of certain categories of women – for example migrants, asylum-seekers and political refugees – and calls on the Commission to formulate a more specific policy for these categories;
10. In view of the EES's equality objective, the funding allocated to it under the ESF is not sufficient. The Commission is called on to supply a breakdown by specific actions of the ESF (2000-2006) in the context of the promotion of equality in job creation and local level, and to increase the funds allocated for this purpose.