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REPORT

on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy (COM(2002) 416 – (2002/2152(INI))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Herman Schmid

Draftsman(*):

Thomas Mann, Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

(*) Hughes Procedure

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 5 September 2002 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report, pursuant to Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure, on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy and the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had been asked for its opinion.

At the sitting of 5 September the President announced that the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities, which had been asked for its opinion, would be involved in drawing up the report, under the Hughes Procedure.

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had appointed Herman Schmid rapporteur at its meeting of 24 January 2002.

It considered the draft report at its meetings of 10 September 2002 and 11 September 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 and Winfried Menrad, vice-chairpersons; Herman Schmid, rapporteur; Sylviane H. Ainardi, Jan Andersson, Elspeth Attwooll, Regina Bastos, Hans Udo Bullmann (for Enrico Boselli), Philip Bushill-Matthews, Alejandro Cercas, Luigi Cocilovo, Proinsias De Rossa, Jillian Evans, Carlo Fatuzzo, Enrico Ferri, Ilda Figueiredo, Fiorella Ghilardotti (for Elisa Maria Damião), Anne-Karin Glase, Richard Howitt (for Harald Ettl), Stephen Hughes, Karin Jöns, Ioannis Koukiadis (for Anna Karamanou), Jean Lambert, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Mario Mantovani, Manuel Pérez Álvarez, Bartho Pronk, Lennart Sacrédeus, Miet Smet, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Bruno Trentin (for Claude Moraes), Ieke van den Burg and Anne E.M. Van Lancker.

The opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities is attached.

The report was tabled on 12 September 2002.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy (COM(2002) 416 – 2002/2152(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication on “Taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy” (COM(2002) 416)¹,
- having regard to Articles 128 and 129 of the Treaty,
- having regard to the Council Decision of 18 February 2002 on guidelines for Member States’ employment policies for the year 2002²,
- having regard to the Council Recommendation of 18 February 2002 on the implementation of Member States’ employment policies³,
- having regard to its legislative resolution of 24 October 2001⁴ on the proposal for a Council decision on the guidelines for Member States’ employment policies for the year 2002 (COM(2001) 511)⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2001⁶ on the Commission communication on the Draft Joint Employment Report 2001 (COM(2001) 438)⁷,
- having regard to the Council Decision of 19 January 2001 on the guidelines for Member States’ employment policies for the year 2001⁸,
- having regard to the Council Decision of 13 March 2000 on the guidelines for Member States’ employment policies for the year 2000⁹,
- having regard to the Council Resolution on the 1999 Employment Guidelines,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 15 December 1997 on the 1998 Employment Guidelines¹⁰,

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² OJ L 60 of 1.3.2002, p. 60.

³ OJ L 60 of 1.3.2002, p.70.

⁴ OJ C 112 E of 9.5.2002, p.147.

⁵ OJ C 75 E of 26.3.2002, p.1.

⁶ OJ C 112 E of 9.5.2002, p.147.

⁷ Not yet published in OJ.

⁸ OJ L 22 of 24.1.2001, p. 18.

⁹ OJ L72 of 21.3.2000, p. 15.

¹⁰ OJ C 30 of 28.1.1998, p.1.

- having regard to the Commission communication on the social policy agenda (COM(2000) 379)¹ ,
 - having regard to the Commission communication on the European Social Fund support for the European Employment Strategy (COM (2001) 16)² ,
 - 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 employment³ and to the Commission communication (COM(2000) 459)⁴ ,
 - having regard to the Presidency conclusions on the Lisbon European Council of 23/24 March 2000, the Göteborg European Council of 15/16 June 2001, the Stockholm European Council of 23/24 March 2001 and the Barcelona European Council of 15/16 March 2002,
 - having regard to the Commission report on the impact of Eastern enlargement on employment and labour markets in the EU Member States,
 - having regard to Rule 163 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 (A5-0301/2002),
- A. whereas the preliminary evaluation indicates that the EES so far has been quite successful,
- B. whereas the evaluation involves both the policy content (guidelines, recommendations and priorities) and the open method of coordination (OMC),
- C. whereas unemployment and particularly long-term unemployment is one of the principle causes of social exclusion in Europe in spite of the expanding of the labour market in the late 1990's,
- D. whereas job creation is becoming the major challenge in the coming years in many present and future Member States, because even well designed and targeted employability support can have minimal effect if there are not enough jobs,
- E. whereas the entrepreneurship pillar has been dominated by a narrow SME-perspective and passive policy measures (removing barriers) rather than dynamic mobilisation policies,
- F. whereas the adaptability pillar remains unclear in purpose with respect to the employment aims of the EES and needs a stronger commitment by the social partners to encourage, foster and develop negotiations and formulate agreements for modernising the way work is structured, to meet the productivity and competitiveness challenges which enterprises face, to raise the quality of work and increase its security,

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² Not yet published in OJ.

³ OJ C 112 E, 9.5.2002, p.29.

⁴ OJ C 337, 28.11.2000,p. 242

- G. whereas the equal opportunities pillar has proved to be so relevant and important that it has been supplemented with a new horizontal guideline,
- H. whereas the Commission has recognised the important link between higher job quality and employment and productivity,
- I. whereas the labour markets of the new Member States face challenges that to a large extent are similar in nature to those of the current Member States, and whereas there are nevertheless some urgent transition problems present, which must be reflected in the revised guideline document,
- J. whereas the Lisbon decisions on the EES gave us a more focussed employment strategy aiming at a dynamic knowledge economy and initiated coordination between macroeconomic policy, social policy and employment policy and the Barcelona European Council agreed on the need to synchronise the calendars for adoption of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and of the annual Employment package; whereas this rationalisation is required in order to ensure consistency with regard to the equally important and mutually supportive economic, employment and social processes,
- K. whereas the European Employment Strategy fails to take adequate account of the environmental sustainability goals of the European Union as decided at the Göteborg summit,
- L. whereas it is necessary to integrate the EES with national, regional and local labour market policy in the Member States and with the ESF policies,
- M. whereas the Commission communication does not deal enough with the importance of proper implementation of the EES in the Member States, which presupposes a certain stability of the future guideline set-up,
- N. whereas a critical assessment by Member States draws attention to extremely short preparatory periods for implementation of the European Employment Strategy with the consequence that positive effects of the measures on employment cannot yet be detected in the majority of cases,
- O. whereas it is important that the coordination policy fully respects the treaty-based relations between the Commission and the Member States,
- P. whereas the parliament or parliaments within the Member States have a crucial role for the legitimacy and democratic accountability of all employment policies in the Member States,
- Q. whereas the OMC is a valuable mode of policy implementation which needs to be further improved,
- R. whereas it is necessary to give the European Parliament a co-decision based role also in employment policy matters which are subject to the OMC procedure,
- 1. Calls on the Commission to put particular emphasis on job creation and mobilisation for employment based on broad partnerships in order to reduce unemployment ;

2. Calls on the Commission to examine the causes of the low level of economic growth in the Community and to submit suggestions for promoting efficient and significant growth in order to increase the demand for labour;
3. Calls on the Commission to specify and strengthen the crucial role of the social partners in all matters regarding the organisation of work and working conditions;
4. Stresses the importance of the gender-specific dimension and of women's rights as an integral part of the fundamental employment objectives to which the European Union has committed itself; calls on the Commission to strengthen the equal opportunities perspective towards a policy for supporting women's employment and protecting women against wage discrimination and precarious work and employment conditions;
5. Calls on the Commission to maintain and strengthen the emphasis on employment strategies designed to develop local and regional labour markets both in urban areas and rural regions and to give new impetus to initiatives designed to attract productive investment and thereby to promote economic balance, social cohesion and employment in less-developed areas and regions;
6. Calls on the Commission to promote the integration of legal immigrants into the labour market in close cooperation with the European social partners and immigrant organisations;
7. Notes that the level of participation in the labour market of disadvantaged groups has not improved compared to the active population in general; calls therefore on the Commission to further promote comprehensive preventive and active employment policies targeted at disadvantaged and discriminated groups, according to their specific needs, including job retention measures for workers that become disabled during their working life;
8. Calls on the Commission to consider how the EES may have to be strengthened, not least with reference to labour market institutions, administrative frameworks within the OMC and other non-economic factors, so as to facilitate the coming extension of the European labour market;
9. Underlines that quality of jobs is as important as quantity of employment and that every person, including the most exposed, should have good working conditions in terms of wages, working time, social protection and workers' rights;
10. Calls on the Commission to consider the growing problem of heterogeneity and different tendencies within the European labour market, to take this into consideration when reviewing the EES, and to call on the Member States to take this into consideration in their NAPs;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to take measures as regards the regulations and priorities of the European Social Fund and EQUAL so as to strengthen the link and improve the interplay between these two on the one hand, and the EES and the NAPs on the other;
12. Calls on the Commission to propose changes of the European employment process so as to turn it into a multi-level process where local, regional, national and European actors -

including NGOs and other actors from civil society - are engaged in two-way interaction and where local and regional policy experiences are communicated from the bottom-up and national and European strategies are communicated from the top-down in a continuous learning and development process;

13. Calls on the Commission to consider how the OMC repertoire of administrative policies should be further developed towards a pattern of cooperation based on equal status and mutual respect between institutions and Member States;
14. Calls on the Commission to propose to the Council and the Member States that the National Action Plan, which each Member State is committed to have, should be debated and adopted by the parliament or parliaments within the Member States concerned;
15. Calls also on the Commission to ensure that the guidelines and recommendations from the annual employment package are communicated to and debated by the national parliaments;
16. Welcomes the recent Communication of the Commission on streamlining the annual economic and employment policy coordination cycles as set by the Lisbon process; regrets however that the Commission has neglected to take on board the process concerning social integration and insists on the need for a coordination and synchronisation process involving the Broad Economic Guidelines, the Employment Guidelines and social protection on an equal footing and with respect for the specific contribution of each within a framework of sustainable development;
17. Recognises that any streamlined policy coordination cycle must be adopted by the Council in accordance with the principles of the Amsterdam Treaty (by QMV), but insists on the need for a change of the Treaty so as to give the European Parliament co-decision rights with respect to the full coordination policy cycle and its elements ; expects this improvement to be proposed by the Convention for the new Treaty;
18. Points out that to achieve this, the different Council formations concerned, under the guidance of the European Council, should better coordinate their work on an equal footing; stresses also that the indispensable role of the social partners should be strengthened, as requested by the social partners in Laeken;
19. Considers that, in a medium-term perspective, the economic policy guidelines and employment strategy must be incorporated into a programme for economic, social and employment policy, to be proposed by each new Commission working together with the social partners and adopted by the Council and the new elected European Parliament;
20. Calls on the Commission to work towards strengthening and democratising the open coordination method both in the field of employment and in other areas through the formal involvement, for example, of the two sides of industry and of the European Parliament, and is in favour of the methods being enshrined in the Treaties in those areas in which this is not currently the case;
21. Calls on the Commission to involve the candidate countries in the process and in the open method of coordination to ensure that the European employment strategy and the objectives of the Lisbon strategy can be successfully implemented;

22. Insists on the need to adopt European, but also national ambitious targets linked to precise indicators to measure and monitor Member States' performance in implementing these Guidelines;
23. Notes the significant role which women's organisations and regional authorities have assured in devising a policy geared towards sustainable development and combating unemployment;
24. Regrets that many EU Member States have not set any employment rates for women in their NAPs. In spite of this rise in employment, the employment rate for women is still some 5% below the Lisbon target. Statistically, their employment rate is around 17% below that for men;
25. Reiterates its call to the Member States to promote greater access for women to education and occupational training; welcomes the guideline objective of combating gender-specific discrimination in access to general and occupational education; to that end, stresses the need to set quantitative goals in the NAPs in this area too;
26. Notes the Member States' initiatives seeking to reconcile work and family life, but considers that the progress made so far is still limited; therefore supports the Commission's call on the Member States and the social partners to commit themselves to the creation of more family-friendly working conditions; notes in this connection that the Member States must set quantitative objectives for improving facilities for the care of children and other dependants and define specific national targets;
27. Calls on businesses to give greater weight to the family-friendly organisation of work so as to permit a fair division of family commitments: one method for achieving this would be a more flexible division of parental leave or measures to assist reintegration into work following parental leave; calls on the Member States in this connection to ensure that parents are not disadvantaged when they attempt to combine work and family life;
28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States and the Social Partners.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The rapporteur welcomes the Commission's decision to make a separate communication on the evaluation of the EES in order to stimulate the debate before the final adoption of the Employment Guidelines for 2003. The Communication is a cautiously elaborated document based on preliminary analysis of a large evaluation material, which awaits further and deeper analysis by the academic research community. Essentially it advocates policy continuity rather than innovation and change. The rapporteur is in agreement with most of the analysis, but finds that the major problems concerning the open method of coordination (OMC) merit much more open and change-oriented discussion.

While recognising the need for simplification and clear priorities the Commission obviously hesitates to take a stand at this early point in time. It mentions "four main issues for the reform of the EES"¹, which taken together form a complex analysis rather than a strategy. However, it is to be welcomed that the overall objectives from the Lisbon document should structure the forthcoming guidelines.

It is also welcome that a lifetime perspective on employability is adopted. One natural consequence of this would be to drop the ambiguous term "employability" and to use clear concepts like "qualifications" and "competence development" to describe the need to develop the labour force. The activation policies have been quite successful in most Member States, and the Commission Communication rightly underlines the importance of individualised activation measures.

The entrepreneurship pillar, which should really be called "the job creation pillar" in order to emphasise that we are talking about the labour market as a whole and not just the SME sector, needs to be developed considerably. A number of Member States and a majority of the applicant states need more jobs rather than more people in most segments of the labour market. Passive measures like tax reductions and administrative simplification must be complemented with active and innovative policies for local, regional and national development based on broad partnerships between public, private and civil society actors.

The adaptability pillar is the one that has been least successful, at least in terms of employment policy. Certain important improvements in health and safety at work have been brought about, and the status of the labour unions has been enhanced, but whether this has improved the adaptability of enterprises to changing external conditions is not clear. It appears to the rapporteur that the crucial dimension of the pillar is the social partner relationship, which definitely deserves attention within a simplified version of the guidelines.

From a pure employment growth perspective, the equal opportunities pillar is the most important. Whereas employment rates for men have followed the general economic trend, rising female employment mirrors a real and sustainable social change in a number of Member States. It is welcome that the Commission so clearly advocates this development and points out the further need to improve the job quality and conditions of employment for women.

¹ Commission communication on "Taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy" (COM(2002) 416), section 3, p.17.

All in all, it appears to the rapporteur that the current pillar structure has served its purpose, and that it has been left behind by policy development during recent years. The Lisbon summit decisions, which are a focus for the Commission in this work, introduced much more dynamic priorities and the EES changed from being a "model" or "framework" into a real strategy with well-defined priorities such as a dynamic knowledge economy based on full employment with quality jobs, lifelong learning, equal opportunities and social inclusion.

The applicant countries and their employment problems are not really dealt with in the communication. The Commission says briefly that "the challenges in the labour market of the candidate countries are not fundamentally different in nature from those of the current Member States"¹, but this is true only in a very abstract sense. The Commission has announced a separate communication on employment in the applicant countries, but the problem here is what consequences the extension will have for the present EU labour market. It is necessary to discuss the future European labour market as a whole and not least to identify the adjustments in the present Member States that will be needed to facilitate the integration of the new Member States. While the fears of labour mobility from the East to the West are probably grossly exaggerated, there are other aspects, which need to be considered. Economic development and mobilisation of resources will be the absolutely dominating factors for years to come in these countries. This is another strong argument for developing the present entrepreneurship pillar with guidelines on mobilisation. The enlargement perspective also highlights the need to establish new labour market institutions, which can establish bridges between the educational system and working life at large, and broad partnerships for new employment. Finally, the enlargement perspective really highlights the difficult relationship between a common generalising European policy level and the need for concrete policy developments at the national level.

This is not a new problem, but it will be greatly enhanced in the enlarged Europe of up to 27 Member States. We may have differences in unemployment between Member States ranging from below 5 % to above 15 % and even larger differences in average productivity levels. In such a situation it may not be enough only to have a few very general common guidelines for all, we may also need to differentiate and to operate with a set of different but parallel strategies and to think about a European labour market based on different, specialised markets and a cooperation based on exchange rather than convergence.

Most of the concrete labour market problems are dealt with at national and subnational levels, but there is at least one area where a concerted European approach may be necessary, namely the employment problems facing immigrants and third country nationals, especially in regions where the competition for jobs is hard. The present EU legal framework against discrimination is valuable and so is the ESF program EQUAL, but there is a growing need for a common proactive approach to support the employment of immigrants in the present situation where a number of the Member States tend to give priority to narrow national concerns

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is the method and mode of realising the EES. It has attracted a lot of interest as a new means of governance by "soft law", and due to its relevance it has spread from employment to other policy fields.

¹ Ibidem, p.17

It is designed for policy areas where Member States retain autonomy even though there are functional relations of interdependence. Europe has no common labour market but national labour markets with so far very limited integration, but we have a common market for commodities and services and a common framework for economic policy. The solution is 'open coordination' or a kind of soft regulation for common purposes. However, the contradiction between national and European interests is always present in the background. There is always a kind of silent contest between convergence forces and autonomy policies.

The effects of this contradiction can be found in the communication. The Commission talks about a 'surveillance' process designed to stimulate a 'stress of convergence' on each Member State, but has to admit that 'Member States have often resisted setting national targets'¹.

The most comprehensive form of national resistance is the tacit refusal to implement the EES strategy in national policies. It has been confirmed by a number of independent research reports that the EES works fine between the Commission and the network of national civil servants in charge of European employment policy, but that it has not been integrated with national policies and that it remains largely unknown to local and regional employment policy actors and to mass media and the public at large. The national action plan for employment is considered to be a government document, but it is not adopted by the national parliament or otherwise integrated in the national employment policy system.

The Commission has tried to break this passive resistance in a number of ways. It has appealed to local and regional actors, it has invited civil society into the field of employment and social policies, it has engaged the European social partners to mobilise their national organisations, it has tried to combine the ESF funded activities with the EES strategy, it is now trying to connect the labour exchange systems in an all European exchange network, etc., but so far without much success.

The result is that the EES is not being implemented at the levels where employment decisions are taken in enterprises and labour exchange offices, and therefore that its functional efficiency is at best indirect and in any case rather low.

According to the rapporteur this is the major problem to be faced in the present evaluation and revision of the EES strategy.

It is suggested that a key to improving the situation would be to have each national government present the proposal for a national action plan as a bill to the parliament for adoption. That would lead to the integration of the NAP with the ordinary labour market policy process, and it would imply that the economic responsibilities entailed in the plan would be properly considered. It would make it natural to integrate regional and local labour markets with the EES, and it could render a new vitality to the EES as a whole.

It would, on the other hand, make it more difficult to impose a stress on European convergence. Instead of the silent struggle, we would have to develop a dialogue between national (local, regional in a bottom-up process) policies and common European (top-down)

¹ Ibidem, p.15.

policy proposals, which would result in realistic compromise and probably a lot more activity and innovation in the field of employment policy all over Europe.

As an extra bonus this would imply a democratisation of the EES process which would help to strengthen its legitimacy and relevance in the eyes of working people in Europe.

Similarly, it has become increasingly necessary to find a place in the EES for the European Parliament. As national governments have to share powers with their parliaments, also the Council will have to accept a co-decision process with the European Parliament in OMC policies as is already the case of hard law policy areas.

9 September 2002

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

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Taking stock of five years of the European Employment Strategy
(COM(2002) 416 – 2002/2152(INI))

Draftsperson: Thomas Mann

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities appointed Thomas Mann draftsperson at its meeting of 10 July 2002.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 27 August 2002 and 9 September 2002.

At the latter meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Anna Karamanou, chairperson; Olga Zrihen Zaari and Jillian Evans, vice-chairpersons; Thomas Mann, draftsperson; Regina Bastos, Lone Dybkjær, Fiorella Ghilardotti, Lissy Gröner, Hans Karlsson, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Maria Martens, Christa Prets, Miet Smet, Patsy Sørensen and María Izquierdo Rojo (for Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco).

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:

- A. having regard to the Commission communication on the Joint Employment 2001 Report¹,
 - B. having regard to the Proposal for a Council Decision on Guidelines for Member States' employment policies for the year 2002²,
 - C. having regard to the draft recommendations to the Member States,
 - D. having regard to the conclusions of the European Council of 23-24 March 2000 in Lisbon, which stated as one of its overall aims the achievement of an employment rate of 70% (60% for women) by 2010,
 - E. having regard to the conclusions of the Council Presidency of 7-10 December 2000 in Nice,
 - F. having regard to the conclusions of the Council Presidency of 23-24 March 2001 in Stockholm, which set as its intermediate target an employment rate of 67% (57% for women) by 2005,
 - G. having regard to the conclusions of the Council Presidency of 15-16 June 2001 in Göteborg,
 - H. whereas the participation of the Employment and Social Affairs Council in drawing up the broad macro-economic guidelines, and of the ECOFIN Council in drawing up the employment guidelines, would give added value to the coherence of the EU's economic and employment policy,
1. Stresses the importance of the gender dimension and of women's rights as an integral part of the fundamental employment objectives to which the European Union has committed itself;
 2. Notes the significant role which women's organisations and regional authorities have assured in devising a policy geared towards sustainable development and combating unemployment;
 3. Notes the importance of reasoned reporting on gender-specific impacts, so that the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination can be implemented in practice;
 4. Welcomes, in connection with the evaluation of the European employment strategy, the visible progress which has been made on the European labour market. In 1997 there were 17 million people unemployed in the EU, in 2001 the figure was 12.9

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² OJ C 75E, 26.3.2002, p. 1.

million – women have benefited in particular from this increase in employment; regrets, however, that a significant proportion is precarious rather than quality employment. In the Union as a whole, almost 33% of women work part-time, whilst the corresponding figure for men is only 6%; in the long term, jobs must above all be created in the full-time sector in order to provide options for women in particular;

5. Regrets that many EU Member States have not set any employment rates for women in their NAPs. In spite of this rise in employment, the employment rate for women is still some 5% below the Lisbon target. Statistically, their employment rate is around 17% below that for men;
6. Notes that women still only earn on average 76% as much as men for the same work or work of equal value, and regrets that in the national action plans (NAPs) for employment there are no suggestions for significant improvements over the previous year in seeking to put the equality initiative into practice; calls on the Member States to implement the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value; also calls on the Member States to consider these practices of wage inequality generally incompatible with receipt of EU aid; calls in particular on the social partners to implement and comply with the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value in wage negotiations, stipulating that it should be possible to test its implementation against quantitative targets, and stresses the need for the Commission to submit a report on the subject, including the measures which should be adopted to comply with Council Directive 75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975;
7. Reiterates its call to the Member States to promote greater access for women to education and occupational training; welcomes the guideline objective of combating gender-specific discrimination in access to general and occupational education; to that end, stresses the need to set quantitative goals in the NAPs in this area too;
8. Supports the Commission's call on the Member States to facilitate access by women to lifelong learning and in particular to training in the field of information technology; recalls the decision adopted at the Stockholm summit to the effect that special attention must be given to ways and means of encouraging women, in scientific and technical studies;
9. Agrees with the proposal in the guidelines that mothers should be encouraged to remain at work or return after an absence, that incentives should be offered and the framework conditions improved, e.g. by more retraining measures or pilot projects in the field of work flexibility, particularly partial retirement;
10. Emphatically supports the Commission's call to the Member States to review their complex and bureaucratic tax and social benefit systems which have a negative effect on job creation, and where appropriate to adjust them, without calling into question workers' rights and the social transfers which help reduce social inequalities; in addition, the entrepreneurship of women wishing to found firms or become self-employed should be promoted; women must be given targeted support, inter alia by reducing the burden on businesses, (particularly at the start-up stage), simplifying the necessary formalities or setting up funds; measures to increase workers' employability achieve results when there is a demand for labour: such a demand will above all be

created if more firms are started up and if quality jobs are created, in particular for women;

11. Stresses that the social partners should take an active role in promoting equality between the sexes on the labour market; calls on the social partners, therefore, to involve women more closely in eliminating the gender wage gap, e.g. by ensuring more transparency in the wage formation process; a more balanced participation of women in the social partners' decision-making bodies should be ensured;
12. Notes the Member States' initiatives seeking to reconcile work and family life, but considers that the progress made so far is still limited; therefore supports the Commission's call on the Member States and the social partners to commit themselves to the creation of more family-friendly working conditions; notes in this connection that the Member States must set quantitative objectives for improving facilities for the care of children and other dependants and define specific national targets;
13. Calls on businesses to give greater weight to the family-friendly organisation of work so as to permit a fair division of family commitments: one method for achieving this would be a more flexible division of parental leave or measures to assist reintegration into work following parental leave; calls on the Member States in this connection to ensure that parents are not disadvantaged when they attempt to combine work and family life;
14. Welcomes the call to the Member States to devise national targets for the provision of social care facilities for children and those requiring care, and hopes in this connection that a definition of 'European' targets can be achieved in the framework of future guidelines;
15. Notes that women are clearly in the majority in the field of part time work, insecure jobs and work with low qualifications; supports in this connection the new objective of the guidelines to increase the quality of jobs; calls therefore on the Member States to create better jobs and better working conditions;
16. Reiterates the call for the European employment strategy to be a process at several levels, encouraging local, regional, national and European actors to interact and cooperate; local and regional political experiences should be passed on from the grass roots to the top; conversely, national and European strategies and experiences should be passed back on to the grass roots, all of this in the context of a continuing process of learning and development.