

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

Session document

FINAL
A5-0092/2004

23 February 2004

REPORT

on reconciling professional, family and private lives
2003/2129(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

Rapporteur: Regina Bastos

Draftsman(*): Herman Schmid, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

(*) Enhanced cooperation between committees - Rule 162a

CONTENTS

	Page
PROCEDURAL PAGE	4
DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	5
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	11
OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS(*)	17

(*) Enhanced cooperation between committees - Rule 162a

PROCEDURAL PAGE

At the sitting of 4 September 2003 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had been authorised to draw up an own-initiative report under Rule 163 on reconciling professional, family and private lives and that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs had been asked for its opinion.

At the sitting of 4 September 2003 the President of Parliament announced that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, asked for its opinion, would be involved in drawing up the report pursuant to Rule 162(a).

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had appointed Regina Bastos rapporteur at its meeting of 11 June 2003.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 4 November 2003, 20 January 2004 and 19 February 2004.

At the last meeting it adopted the draft resolution by 8 votes to none, with 6 abstentions.

The following were present for the vote: Anna Karamanou (chairperson), Olga Zrihen Zaari (vice-chairperson), Regina Bastos (rapporteur), Armonia Bordes, Raquel Cardoso (for pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Lone Dybkjær, Marie-Hélène Gillig (for Fiorella Ghilardotti), Lissy Gröner, Mary Honeyball, Thomas Mann, Ria G.H.C. Oomen-Ruijten (for Miet Smet), Joaquim Píscarreta (for Astrid Lulling pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco and Anne E.M. Van Lancker (for Christa Prets).

The opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs is attached.

The report was tabled on 23 February 2004.

DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on reconciling professional, family and private lives 2003/2129(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 9 June 1983 on family policy in the European Community¹,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Council and of the ministers responsible for family affairs of 29 September 1989 regarding family policies²,
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 1992 on child care³,
- having regard to Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 December 1994 on protection of families and family units at the close of the International Year of the Family⁵,
- having regard to Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 January 1999 on the protection of families and children⁷,
- having regard to the resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, meeting within the Council of 29 June 2000 on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life⁸,
- having regard to the indicators on combining family and professional life adopted by the European Council in 2000,
- having regard to the Joint Report by the Commission and the Council on supporting national strategies for the future of health care and care for the elderly of March 2003,
- having regard to the fact that 2004 has been proclaimed ‘Year of the Family’,
- having regard to Article 136, Article 137(1) and Article 141(3) of the Treaty establishing

¹ OJ C 184, 11.7.1983, p. 116.

² OJ C 277, 31.10.1989, p. 2.

³ OJ L 123, 8.5.1992, p. 16.

⁴ OJ L 348, 28.11.1992, p. 1.

⁵ OJ C 18, 23.1.1995, p. 96.

⁶ OJ L 145, 19.6.1996, p. 4.

⁷ OJ C 128, 7.5.1999, p. 79.

⁸ OJ C 218, 31.7.2000, p. 5.

the European Community,

- having regard to Rule 163 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A5-0092/2003),
- A. whereas one of the aims of the European Community is to promote employment and improve living and working conditions,
- B. whereas the European Community supports and complements the activities of the Member States with a view to achieving the objectives set out in Article 136 of the EC Treaty, in particular in the fields of equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work,
- C. whereas with regard to Article 141(3) of the EC Treaty it is important to protect male and female employees exercising the rights inherent in fatherhood, motherhood or the combination of professional and family lives,
- D. whereas the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000 recognised that it was important to improve all aspects of equal opportunities, in particular by making it easier to reconcile professional and family life, and that such measures should help to ensure that the proportion of women in employment is more than 60% in 2010,
- E. whereas the European Council in Barcelona in March 2002 concluded that the Member States should eliminate obstacles to the participation of women in the labour market and set up, by 2010, childcare facilities for at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and for at least 33% of children under three years old, which facilities must be equally available in towns and in rural areas,
- F. having regard to the commitment of the Member States to allowing men and women to reconcile family responsibilities and professional responsibilities, as envisaged in the Beijing Programme of Action,
- G. whereas 'family' should not necessarily be taken to mean a father-mother-child unit but also refers to different living arrangements based on partnership,
- H. whereas making allowance for the combining of professional and personal life contributes to the personal fulfilment of men and women, promotes an increase in the rate of employment of women and, hence, the overall employment rate and the birth rate,
- I. whereas making allowance for reconciling the different stages of life is not a financial burden for businesses but a useful and relevant investment which will promote long-term growth,
- J. whereas women must be able to choose whether to work, even if they have children, or whether they want to stay at home,
- K. whereas the rights of children must be at the heart of family policies,

- L. whereas in the European Union 17% of the population is under 15 years old, 16% of the population is over 65 years old and people with disabilities make up between 10 and 12% of the population; whereas, furthermore, at least 15% of children suffer, to varying degrees, from specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit disorder, etc.),
1. Underlines that the European Employment Strategy as well as the Lisbon Strategy aims at increasing the employment rates for women and men and at supporting the social changes needed for this end; calls on the Commission, therefore, to give practical effect to the employment guidelines by clarifying the action programmes used to co-finance active measures on national labour markets to promote equal opportunities;
 2. Points out that the adoption of policies and the taking of measures to promote the reconciliation of professional and private life will also constitute a decisive contribution to tackling the demographic problem faced by the majority of the Member States;
 3. Considers that family policy should create preconditions to enable parents to spend more time with their children and that in many cases a more equal division of parents' time between paid work and caring for their children would lead to better contact between parents and children and also have a positive impact on family formation and family stability;
 4. Is convinced that the significant pay gap between men and women is both a major cause of and is caused by the present unequal division and value of labour between men and women;
 5. Encourages the Commission to draw up, on the basis of the indicators on combining professional and family life adopted by the European Council in 2000, a follow-up report on the situation in the Member States and the accession states, and at the same time encourages the Member States to develop various forms of cooperation and networks for the exchange of good practice, in order to obtain accurate information on the actual situation;
 6. Calls on the Member States and accession states to reconsider the national systems for gathering data and gradually to perfect them, in order to ensure that statistics on the nine indicators adopted by the European Council in 2000 can be produced every year; also calls on the Member States and the accession states to create Internet sites incorporating data banks on existing support structures;
 7. Encourages the Member States and accession states to analyse the impact of their policies on families (family mainstreaming), while at the same time calling on them to separate gender mainstreaming and family mainstreaming; also calls on the Commission, in the context of its communication of 2002 on impact assessment¹, to take account of the various dimensions and definitions of the family in order to identify the social impact of the measures proposed;

¹ COM(2002) 276, 5.6.2002.

8. Urges the Commission to take the measures needed to draw up a European Parliament and Council framework directive on reconciling professional, family and private lives, with a view to implementing the ad hoc Council resolution of 29 June 2000 and the conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona;
9. Calls upon the EU institutions to promote their employees' possibilities for combining work, family and personal life in a lifetime perspective with innovative models for working time and work organisation, bearing in mind that both genders must have equal possibilities and responsibilities and that as a minimum provision the social policies acquis of the Union is fully reflected in the working conditions of all its staff;
10. Calls on the Commission to organise an annual conference on 'Reconciling work and family life' together with the European social partners, the Member States, NGOs and representatives of the EP's competent committees in order to take stock of progress made and to analyse and find solutions to outstanding problems;
11. Recommends that the Commission should conduct an awareness-raising campaign and introduce pilot projects to facilitate the balanced participation of women and men in professional and family life;
12. Urges the Member States and accession states to promote information and awareness-raising campaigns in order to change attitudes so as to bring about better sharing of family responsibilities within couples among both the general population and the specific target groups;
13. Observes that private households can also be a source of qualified jobs in the field of running the household, bringing up children and care, and calls on the Member States to promote home economics as an occupational field;
14. Suggests that each Member State and accession state should draw up an information and awareness-raising guide for the social partners, business leaders, human resources directors and employees, setting out arguments in favour of promoting good practice with the aim of reconciling professional and family life more effectively;
15. Notes that, alongside support for parents in caring for children and persons in need of care in the form of regular allowances and tax exemptions or reductions, a new way should be found to offer parents greater freedom of choice, for example in the form of cash benefits or vouchers (childcare vouchers, vouchers for the recruitment of home helps, service vouchers or coupons) and that moreover those who opt to work within the family and to bring up children must enjoy the same social protection in old age as those who have been gainfully employed;
16. Recommends the adoption of fiscal policies which do not discriminate against the family and do not penalise households on the basis of size; welcomes the policies with social aims of this kind already adopted successfully by the Member States and by regional and municipal authorities, within the scope of their respective competences; furthermore, without prejudice to respect for the principle of subsidiarity, considers that if there are discriminatory weightings in policies governing taxation, other levies and tariffs, they

should be of a positive nature, favouring families and their unifying role, and never negative forms of discrimination penalising families, in particular larger households;

17. Also stresses the need to introduce specific allowances in all the Member States and accession states, especially for children with disabilities, families with a large number of children or multiple births and to help low-income families with three children or more;
18. Notes the specific needs of single-parent families, mostly women, and hence calls on the Member States and accession states to increase aid to such families, to increase the credit given for periods spent bringing up children and to guarantee individual social security rights;
19. Calls on the Member States and accession countries to use an 'audit for a family-friendly working environment' to encourage firms to implement a family-oriented personnel policy;
20. Calls on the Member States to consider that part of the expenditure incurred by businesses relating to employees with families should be borne by the State, for example measures eligible for this tax rebate might encourage part-time work, the involvement of employers in paying for childcare, and recruiting people to replace those on maternity, paternity and parental leave etc.
21. Welcomes the conclusions of the European Council in Barcelona, which commit the Member States to eliminating obstacles to the participation of women in the labour market and to introducing by 2010 childcare for 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age, and for at least 33% of children under three years old; stresses, however, that in order to achieve these objectives, the national, regional or local authorities must step up their financial contribution for the creation and/or operation of high-quality childcare services at affordable prices;
22. Is deeply concerned about the work-family situation in the new member states where the previous child care infrastructure has been largely demolished;
23. Calls on the Member States and the accession states to encourage flexibility and diversity in services for the care of children, the elderly and other dependants, in order to increase choice and cater for the preferences, needs and specific circumstances of children and their parents (especially children with special needs), including the availability of such services in all areas and regions of the Member States and the accession states;
24. Also encourages the national, regional or local authorities, the social partners, businesses and other competent entities to facilitate the development of mini-crèches in firms or groups of firms, as well as the flexibility of working hours, school timetables (including extracurricular activities and supervised homework) and the timetables of urban services (in particular opening hours for services and shops, transport, etc.);
25. Recommends, without prejudice to respect for the principle of subsidiarity, that the Member States and regional and municipal authorities, within the scope of their respective competences, should devise and pursue family-friendly housing and town-planning

policies, creating inclusive and human urban environments with a sense of community and space in order to meet the basic needs of households consisting of several generations (children and young people, people of working age and retired elderly people) in conditions likely to promote the compatibility of the school, professional, personal and family lives of all their members;

26. Urges the Member States and the accession states to facilitate access to paid parental leave with a non-transferable portion, respecting freedom of choice for parents, as well as access to other forms of long-term leave, including career breaks, as well as special short-term leave (leave for breast-feeding or if a family member is ill), whilst envisaging a degree of flexibility in the organisation of leave, in order to facilitate the resumption of work by returnees to the labour market;
27. Calls on the Member States and accession states to implement fully Directive 75/117/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women, and to take decisions on parental leave and other periods of absence on the basis, *inter alia*, of equal pay;
28. Calls for accompanying, training and further training measures to be stepped up in order to ensure the integration of returnees to the labour market, including after a period of sabbatical leave, in which connection special care should be taken to ensure that it is possible to take advantage of further vocational training courses during parental leave;
29. Recalls that the realisation of learning through the entire working life as well as access for women to the information society, is possible only if study leave is financially viable, either through public funding or through employment-related arrangements;
30. Also stresses the importance of flexible working hours and distance working, where possible, allowing both male and female employees to meet their professional, family and educational responsibilities, with a balance between their interests and those of the employer;
31. Considers it essential to promote quality part-time work for both men and women; stresses, however, that part-time work may be an effective way of reconciling family and employment and promoting equality of opportunity only if people with all levels of qualification are offered part-time work, if long-term career prospects are not affected, the level of social protection provided is reasonable and the workload is manageable;
32. Criticises the fact that the issue of assistance for the oldest section of the population is not receiving the attention it deserves, and urges the Member States to promote adequate provision of high-quality services, including domestic help for the elderly, provided by staff with adequate training;
33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments of the Member States and the accession countries.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. The situation in a European context

1.1. Is there such a thing as a common family policy?

The European Union does not have any competence in the field of ‘family policies’, which come under the competence of the Member States, who define and implement them.

However, we can see that the first directives dealing with the family and directly affecting it were the outcome of legislative activity in various fields, in particular equal opportunities between men and women, consisting of measures aimed at reconciling family and professional life.

The European Union has to tackle a dual challenge, the declining population and economic growth. Family policies encouraging demographic growth are therefore needed, as well as policies to promote the participation of women in the labour market.

1.2. Measures and instruments at European level

In current European legislation, the first tangible measures (recommendations or directives) dealing with this subject more closely began to be taken in the 1990s in response to the impetus provided by the ‘Communication on family policy’, published by the Commission in August 1989, which was taken up in the conclusions of the Council of Ministers responsible for family affairs of 29 September 1989.

In 1992, the Council Recommendation on childcare was adopted¹, as well as the directive aimed at improving the health and safety at work of pregnant workers and workers who have given birth², which envisaged a minimum period of 14 months’ paid maternity leave³.

In 1994 the European Parliament adopted its first resolution on protection of families and family units at the close of the International Year of the Family.⁴

The first agreement between the social partners resulted in the adoption of a Council directive on parental leave and leave for family reasons in 1996⁵. The directive allows any employee, whether man or woman, to take parental leave of at least three months and to take leave of absence from work for ‘urgent family reasons’⁶.

¹ Council Recommendation 92/241/EEC of 31 March 1992 on childcare. OJ L 123, 8.5.1992, pp. 16-18.

² Council Recommendation 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers, and workers who have recently given birth or are breast-feeding. OJ L 348, 28.11.1992.

³ In 1999 the European Commission adopted a report on the implementation of this directive in the Member States. Commission COM(1999) 100, 15.3.1999.

⁴ OJ C 18, 23.1.1995, p. 96.

⁵ Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC. OJ L 145, 19.6.1996, pp. 4-9.

⁶ In June 2003 the European Commission submitted its report on the transposition of this directive COM(2003)358, 19.06.2003.

A number of agreements were also concluded and turned into European legislation, in particular one on part-time working in May 1997 (directive in December 1997) and fixed term contracts in March 1999, which was the subject of a directive three months later. A new European agreement on teleworking was signed on 16 July 2002.

In January 1999 the European Parliament adopted a second resolution on the protection of families and children¹. The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities has on several occasions stressed² the importance of combining professional and family life in such a way as to enable women to obtain a lasting income which ensures them economic autonomy and individual social security rights.

The subject of reconciling professional and family life was one of the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency. On 29 June 2000 the European Council adopted a resolution on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life³. This resolution referred back to the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000, which recognised the importance of furthering all aspects of equal opportunities, including reducing occupational segregation, and making it easier to reconcile work and family life. It added that one of the aims of the measures should be to increase the proportion of women in employment to more than 60% by 2010.

The French Presidency, in its turn, drew up indicators on combining family and professional life in the context of the annual examination of the implementation of the Beijing Programme of Action by the European Council.

The Barcelona European Council of 15 and 16 March concluded that Member States should remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years old.

Finally, reconciling professional and family life is an extremely topical issue, not least because 2004 has been designated International Year of the Family.

¹ PE 228.457.

² Especially in its opinions on the report on the Commission communication on a draft joint report on social inclusion (A-0158/2002) and on the report on the communication on the social policy agenda (A5-0291/2000).

³ Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for employment and social policy, meeting within the Council of 29 June 2000, on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life. OJ C 218, 31.7.2000.

2. The situation in the Member States

2.1. A summary of the situation

(a) Rate of employment among women¹

In the European Union one woman in six (17.6%) between the ages of 25 and 54 is not in paid employment, i.e. is neither employed nor unemployed, because of family responsibilities².

The proportion of women aged 15-64 as a proportion of the total female population was approximately 55% in the European Union in 2001. There are considerable disparities between the Member States. For example in the Nordic countries the proportion varies between 72.4% and 72% in Sweden and Denmark and 65.4% in Finland, whilst in the southern European countries the percentages are 40.9% in Greece, followed by Italy with 41.1% and Spain with 43%. In the accession countries, the rates vary between 58.8% in Slovenia and 31.6% in Malta.

(b) Fertility³

The total fertility rate in the European Union in 2002 remained virtually unchanged at 1.47 children per woman compared with 2001 and 2000, with the highest rate recorded in Ireland (2.01), followed by France (1.88) and the lowest in Greece, Spain (1.25 each) and Italy (1.26). Among the accession countries, fertility rates only ranged between 1.17 in the Czech Republic and 1.57 in Cyprus (2001 data)⁴.

(c) Distribution of paid employment and work at home⁵

Women in all the countries of the European Union spend much more time than men looking after their children. In the countries of southern Europe and Ireland they spend about three to four times as much time as men do. In eight Member States, women between 20 and 49 spend more than 45 hours per week looking after children, whereas men spend less than 30 hours per week in almost all the Member States.

(d) Types of families/households

The trend towards fewer marriages in the European Union continues falling from 2.2 million to 1.8 million in 2002 (- 19%). The number of divorces, on the other hand, has increased 42% during the same period, reaching 715,000 in 2002.

¹ Source: Eurostat, Employment rate - females - employed women aged 15-64 as a share of the total female population of the same age group.

² Source: Eurostat, spring 2001.

³ Source: Eurostat, Statistics in focus, population and social conditions, No 20/2003, 'First results of the demographic data collection for 2002 in Europe'.

⁴ The fertility rate in 2002 was 2.06 in the United States, 1.37 in Japan and 2.98 in India.

⁵ Source: Eurostat: 'The life of women and men in Europe, a statistical portrait, data 1998-2000'. Eurostat: 'How women and men use their time' Population and social conditions 12/2003.

The different kinds of family with or without children have changed and now there is a greater variety of households. Single-parent households as well as one-person households are becoming increasingly common. Single-parent families now account for an average of 14% of all families with children (in the United Kingdom the proportion is 23% and in Spain and Greece 8% and 7% respectively) and 90% of lone parents are women¹.

2.2. Legislation and measures

All countries provide a series of cash benefits, measures designed to organise working hours and benefits in kind. The following summary takes account of the main benefits common to all countries.

2.2.1. Cash benefits²

Family benefits in cash, which accounted for around 5% of social protection benefits in 2000, vary greatly within the European Union. For example Luxembourg spends the most, whilst southern European countries spend less.

(a) Family allowances or child allowances

The level of family allowances is less favourable in southern European countries. Supplementary benefits or specific allowances are provided in certain cases: if the parent/guardian is raising a child alone (for example the 'extra' allowances in Denmark, or the single/sole parent allowance in France and in Sweden); in the case of children with disabilities (Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Netherlands, Austria and Portugal); in the case of families with many children (Greece, Spain, France, Italy and Austria); in the case of multiple births (Spain, France, Ireland, Finland and Sweden, where an extension of the period covered is also provided); in order to help low-income families with at least three children (the family supplement in France and Ireland).

(b) Maternity leave and related allowances

The European directive stipulates a minimum of 14 weeks' maternity leave. In the various Member States it ranges between 14 weeks and 28 weeks (in Denmark).

Maternity allowances generally seem to constitute a replacement income. The amounts are granted on either a monthly or a weekly basis during the statutory period of leave, provided that the mother has actively participated in the employment market.

(c) Paternity leave and related allowances

Fathers are given 18 days' leave in Finland³. In Denmark, France, Italy and the United Kingdom (from April 2003 onwards) paternity leave is two weeks. In Sweden, Austria and

¹ Source: Eurostat-INSEE, 1996.

² Source: Eurostat, Population and living conditions, 19/2003: 'Social protection: cash family allowances in Europe'. Source: Mutual Information System on Social Protection in the Member States of the EU and the EEA, MISSOC.

³ There is a proposal for one month's paternity leave.

Belgium fathers are given 10 days. In Portugal they are given 5 days and in Germany 3 days. In the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Spain they are given two days. In Greece one day's paid leave is granted to fathers working in the private sector. Only in Ireland is there no paternity leave.

In some Member States, in particular Belgium, Denmark, Italy, France, Portugal and Spain, part of the maternity leave may also be taken by the father.

(d) Parental leave and related allowances

Parental leave was established and harmonised at European level as a result of an agreement between the European social partners and in accordance with European Directive 96/34/EC on parental leave. According to the directive, any man or woman in paid employment is entitled to parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child, in order to enable them to take care of that child for at least three months. Such leave is granted in respect of children up to eight years old. Even though it is not stipulated that this should be paid leave, individual Member States may draw up more favourable conditions than those laid down in the directive.

Thus the duration of parental leave ranges between three months (in most countries) and two years. It may be taken by the mother, the father or both parents at once if they so choose. In every country, after the period of leave, parents are guaranteed reinstatement in their job or in a comparable post. Parental leave is unpaid in Greece, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and the United Kingdom¹.

It should be noted that in Finland, Sweden and Denmark there is a 'parental allowance' paid during varying periods of time (158 days in Finland, 480 days in Sweden and 52 weeks in Denmark) after expiry of the maternity leave.

In a number of countries employees are also entitled to 'special' leave if, for urgent family reasons - serious illness or accident - their presence is essential in order to care for a child. Such leave, rarely paid, is generally subject to a time limit.

2.2.2. Organisation of working hours

More and more countries consider flexible or reduced working hours, part-time work², career breaks or teleworking as effective tools to enable parents to reconcile family and professional life and to increase the amount of free time, so that individuals may do the things they want to. At the same time there are legislative initiatives in the Member States aimed at transposing the European directives.

¹ In Belgium, under certain conditions, leave may be paid.

² 37% of women between the ages of 20 and 49 in the European Union work half time (less than 30 hours per week) and look after their children (1998). Source: Eurostat: *The life of women and men in Europe, a statistical portrait, data 1998-2000*.

2.2.3. Benefits in kind¹

The proportion of children under three years old benefiting from assistance varies greatly from country to country. For example the figures are 64% in Denmark, 48% in Sweden, 5% in Spain, 4% in Austria and 3% in Greece. However the proportion of children over three years old (and up to the mandatory school age, between five, six and seven years) varies between 99% in France and 46% in Greece².

There are great differences between the Member States as regards the number of types of child care services. There are 136 types of service listed, with a minimum of 4 in Greece and 14 in the United Kingdom, with other Member States having between 5 and 11 different types each. Thus some countries offer a wide range of child-care services to meet the different needs of families, whilst others provide a limited choice for parents.

However, not all the needs of families are satisfied. For example there are very few services operating full time and only in a few Member States are there specific services for children with special needs (usually children with disabilities).

As regards child-care allowances, Denmark, France, Finland and the United Kingdom are the only countries which provide special allowances for child care³.

However, the issue assistance for the elderly and other dependants is practically ignored, which is illogical in view of the ageing population in the EU⁴.

The percentages of elderly people (over 65 years old) living in institutions are, for example, 8.7% in Sweden, 6.5% in France, 5.1% in the United Kingdom, 3.9% in Italy and 1.0% in Greece. In these countries the percentages of elderly people over 65 receiving help at home are 11.2% in Sweden, 6.1% in France, 5.5 % in the United Kingdom and 2.8% in Italy⁵.

¹ Benefits in kind include day centres (crèches and child-minders), accommodation (institutions and host families), help at home, etc.

² Source: OECD Employment Outlook, provided by national sources, 2001.

³ Source: Mutual information system on social protection in the EU Member States and the EEA, MISSOC. Since 1 January 2002 a new kind of benefit has been offered experimentally in Austria, the child-raising allowance.

⁴ Between 1960 and 1999 the proportion of people over 60 years old in the European population increased considerably, from 16% to 21%, the highest proportions being in Italy, Germany and Greece. The 'elderly dependence ratio' (ratio between the number of people over 60 and the population aged 20-59) rose from 29.4 in 1960 to 38.6 in 1999, which raises problems as regards care.

⁵ Source: 11th European Social Services Conference, Venice, 2 -4 July 2003: Supporting carers of older people in Europe: a comparative report on six European countries.

16 February 2004

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

for the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities
on the reconciliation of work, family life and privacy
(2003/2129(INI))

Draftsman: Herman Schmid

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs appointed Herman Schmid draftsman at its meeting of 22 October 2003.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 21 January 2004 and 16 February 2004.

At the latter it adopted the following suggestions by 14 votes to 6, with 0 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Theodorus J.J. Bouwman (chairman), Marie-Hélène Gillig (vice-chairwoman) Winfried Menrad (vice-chairman), Marie-Thérèse Hermange (vice-chairwoman), Herman Schmid (draftsman), Jan Andersson, Elspeth Attwooll, Regina Bastos, Johanna L.A. Boogerd-Quaak (for Anne André-Léonard), Alejandro Cercas, Harald Ettl, Roger Helmer, Stephen Hughes, Anne Elisabet Jensen (for Marco Formentini), Karin Jöns, Jean Lambert, Elizabeth Lynne, Thomas Mann, Mario Mantovani, Ria G.H.C. Oomen-Ruijten (for Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou), José Ribeiro e Castro (for Nello Musumeci pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Herman Schmid, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, Anne E.M. Van Lancker and Barbara Weiler.

SUGGESTIONS

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

1. Underlines that the European Employment Strategy as well as the Lisbon Strategy aims at increasing the employment rates for women and men and at supporting the social changes needed for this end; calls on the Commission, therefore, to give practical effect to the employment guidelines by clarifying the action programmes used to co-finance active measures on national labour markets to promote equal opportunities;
2. Points out that reconciliation of work, family life, and privacy is invariably considered in relation to women (as for instance in the cases of childcare leave and allowances); calls, therefore, for fathers likewise to be made a target group for family policy;
3. Points out that dependent elderly relatives, disabled family members, and children are still looked after mainly by women; recalls that men and women must equally be given the possibility to combine a professional career with the care for children and other dependent family members and also with a participation in social life as responsible citizens;
4. Points out that the adoption of policies and the taking of measures to promote the reconciliation of professional and private life will also constitute a decisive contribution to tackling the demographic problem faced by the majority of the Member States;
5. Is convinced that the significant pay gap between men and women is both a major cause of and is caused by the present unequal division and value of labour between men and women;
6. Calls on the Member States and accession countries, when transposing the directive on parental leave, to take account of the division of family responsibilities within partnerships between fathers and mothers;
7. Points out that going back to work after a lengthy career break (on account of care responsibilities) is often difficult; calls on the Member States and accession countries to offer reinstatement aid and further training coupled with childcare facilities during the time spent away from work and for persons returning after a lengthy break to look after children;
8. Calls on the Member States and the accession countries to give full effect to Directive 75/117/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women, to enable men and women to take decisions concerning parental leave and other periods of absence proceeding from the premise of equal pay;
9. Warns against the present tendency to see women's part-time work as a general solution for combining work and family life, because this solution cements the unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men and harms the balance of the labour

market;

10. Stresses that flexible work forms like temporary work or tele-work can be solutions for combining work and personal life only if they are voluntarily chosen by the employees themselves and suit their life situation; calls for adequate social security cover for all employment;
11. Calls on the Member States and accession countries to use an 'audit for a family-friendly working environment' to encourage firms to implement a family-oriented personnel policy;
12. Considers that family policy should create preconditions to enable parents to spend more time with their children and that in many cases a more equal division of parents' time between paid work and caring for their children would lead to better contact between parents and children and also have a positive impact on family formation and family stability;
13. Considers that a general reduction of daily working time is the best way for combining work and family life and for promoting gender equality whereby the revision of the Working Time Directive can contribute in a positive way;
14. Renews its standpoint that the Barcelona childcare target should be raised to ensure that a wide range of reasonably priced high-quality and varied childcare services geared to local needs will be provided to cover all children up to mandatory school age by 2010; stresses that affordable and good-quality care services are also needed for dependent older people as well as the disabled and handicapped;
15. Calls on the Member States and acceding countries to develop the services and facilities required to enable disabled children to attend school, as is necessary in order to integrate them more effectively into our societies;
16. Points out that a family does not necessarily have to conform to the father-mother-child pattern;
17. Notes that one-parent families, the parent in most cases being a woman, have specific needs and calls, therefore, on the Member States and accession countries to increase their aid (transfers or measures concerning facilities) for these families, ensure that time spent bringing up children is taken more generously into account, and guarantee social security entitlements for all persons seeking to enter the labour market;
18. Is concerned about the fact that fathers still use their right for parental leave much less than mothers, but welcomes the increase; is convinced that higher reimbursement levels for parental leaves would enable more fathers to take this option; also a leave of longer duration would make it possible for more families to share the leave; is therefore of the opinion that the Parental Leave Directive should be revised ; emphasises, in addition, the need for measures to be taken to facilitate a smooth return to the post held by the parent, after parental leave has been used;
19. Recalls that the realisation of learning through the entire working life as well as access for

women to the information society, is possible only if study leave is financially viable, either through public funding or through employment-related arrangements;

20. Is deeply concerned about the work-family situation in the new member states where the previous child care infrastructure has been largely demolished;
21. Calls upon the EU institutions to promote their employees' possibilities for combining work, family and personal life in a lifetime perspective with innovative models for working time and work organisation, bearing in mind that both genders must have equal possibilities and responsibilities and that as a minimum provision the social policies acquis of the Union is fully reflected in the working conditions of all its staff.
22. Calls on the Commission to organise an annual conference on 'Reconciling work and family life' together with the European social partners, the Member States, NGOs and representatives of the EP's competent committees in order to take stock of progress made and to analyse and find solutions to outstanding problems.