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REPORT

on the role of women in an ageing society
(2009/2205(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the role of women in an ageing society (2009/2205(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission Communication of 29 April 2009 on ‘Dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU (2009 Ageing Report)’ (COM(2009)0180),
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 11 May 2007 on ‘Europe’s demographic future: facts and figures’ (SEC(2007)0638),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 10 May 2007 on ‘Promoting solidarity between the generations’ (COM(2007)0244),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 12 October 2006 on ‘The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity’ (COM(2006)0571),
- having regard to the Commission Communication of 1 March 2006 entitled ‘A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010’ (COM(2006)0092),
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, particularly Articles 23 and 25 thereof, on gender equality and the rights of the elderly, as well as Articles 34, 35 and 36 of the Charter, which specifically define the right to social and housing assistance, a high level of human health protection and access to services of general economic interest,
- having regard to Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which emphasises values common to the Member States such as pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity, and equality between men and women,
- having regard to Article 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which refers to combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation,
- having regard to the European Pact for Gender Equality adopted by the European Council in March 2006¹,
- having regard to the ILO (International Labour Organisation) Older Workers Recommendation R 162, 1980,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to its resolution of 3 February 2009² on non-discrimination based on sex

¹ Bulletin EU 3-2006, point I.13.

² OJ C 67E, 12.03.2010, p.31

and intergenerational solidarity,

- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2009 on the transposition and application of Directive 2002/73/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 21 February 2008 on the demographic future of Europe²,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0237/2010),
- A. whereas the ageing of society is too often seen in negative terms, i.e. in terms of challenges to the age structure of the labour force and the sustainability of social protection and health care, although older people also represent an economic resource and a fund of experience and offer key community and family support as carers for dependents and as labour consultants, given their wide professional experience, as well as helping to maintain rural communities,
- B. whereas the 2006-2010 Roadmap for gender equality has highlighted gaps in the achievement of full gender equality, and has, in some cases, driven the gender equality agenda forward, but overall progress has been modest,
- C. whereas the current economic and social crisis is having particularly serious consequences for women and especially for aged women and the services provided to them, exacerbating inequalities and discrimination based not only on gender but also on age and state of health,
- D. whereas elderly people face a higher risk of poverty than the general population, reaching a rate of around 19% of those aged 65 years and over in 2008 in the EU-27, while in 2005 the figure was 19% and in 2000 it was 17%, and whereas women aged over 65 years are at high risk of poverty (the at-risk-of-poverty rate is 22%, i.e. 5 points higher than for men),
- E. whereas the EU-27 population is projected to grow older, with the proportion of the population aged 65 and over rising from 17.1% in 2008 to 30% in 2060, and rising for people aged 80 and over from 4.4% to 12.1% over the same period,
- F. whereas the working population is predicted to become relatively smaller, and the inclusion of groups currently not active in the labour market becomes increasingly important,

¹ OJC 46E, 24.02.2010, p. 95

² OJ C 184E, 6.8.2009, p. 75.

- G. whereas gender is a significant factor in ageing as life expectancy is about six years longer for women than for men, with statistics for the EU-27 in 2007 showing men living to 76 years old and women to 82 years old, and whereas, contrastingly, Eurostat figures show that the gap between the healthy life expectancy of men and women is much narrower: 61.6 years for men and 62.3 years for women,
- H. whereas women are traditionally at greater risk of poverty and limited pensions, especially women aged over 65, who are often in receipt of pensions barely above the minimum subsistence level for various reasons such as the wide gender pay gap, which directly affects pension rights, the fact that they have taken a break from or stopped work to take on family responsibilities, or the fact that they have worked in their husband's undertaking, mainly in the business and agriculture sectors, without remuneration and without social security affiliation, and whereas in times of economic recession the risk of falling into poverty is even greater for these women,
1. Welcomes the Communication from the Commission on dealing with the impact of an ageing population but regrets, however, that the definitions, statistics and situations considered are not sufficiently based on an awareness of gender inequalities in older age, which result mainly from accumulated gender-based disadvantages during a whole lifetime;
 2. Endorses the Commission's focus on the strategy decided by the Stockholm European Council in 2001¹ as a long-term guide to dealing with the challenges and possibilities that ageing creates in societies; endorses also the Communication's proposal that a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach should be taken to ageing as well as to creating opportunities, especially in the field of markets for products and services geared to the needs of older people and the needs of the informal carers of dependent people; calls on the Commission to pay special attention to the protection of older people's consumer rights since they are too often misled or taken advantage of;
 3. Calls on the institutions to create a more positive attitude towards ageing as well as raising EU citizens' awareness of ageing issues and its real effects; urges the Commission to tackle the burden-oriented attitude towards ageing by, for example launching a study on the effects and potential of the silver economy in which older women are active subjects; warmly welcomes the Commission's initiative to launch 2012 as a year of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity;
 4. Sees adopting a life course approach, in which the interconnections of ageing and gender are taken into account, as the way forward in ageing policies; sees also adopting an age and gender approach in which age and gender mainstreaming become an indispensable method and instrument in policy-making in all relevant fields (economic, social, employment, public health, food safety, consumers rights, digital agenda, rural and urban development, and so on) as the way forward in creating more social inclusion and social cohesion;

Tackling age discrimination

¹ Presidency Conclusions of the Stockholm European Council of 23 and 24 March 2001.

5. Calls for the anti-discrimination directive to be adopted as soon as possible;
6. Recognises that age discrimination must also be tackled with more effective judicial measures and with more accessible procedures, especially in cases of discrimination in working life where specific legislation exists and where support for the individual and investigation of the circumstances are essential; therefore, calls on Member States to ensure that the necessary legislation to tackle age and other forms of discrimination is effectively implemented;
7. Calls for a more rights-based approach to ageing so that older people can act as empowered subjects instead of objects;
8. Asks for more resources and research and the development of **existing** monitoring mechanisms, as age discrimination is seldom recognised and tackled; recognises that greater awareness in the Member States is needed and would welcome input from the Fundamental Rights Agency and the new European Institute for Gender Equality;
9. Highlights the need to recognise the multiple discrimination that older women often face in societies where they are subject to discrimination on the basis of their age, gender, state of health and disability;
10. Is deeply concerned by the extent to which the most vulnerable groups of women are subject to multiple discrimination: migrant women, women with disabilities, homosexual women, women who belong to minorities, women with few qualifications and elderly women, as they suffer discrimination on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity and sexual or religious orientation, etc., and calls for positive discrimination measures;
11. Asks the Member States to conduct fully-fledged campaigns to raise awareness of the fundamental role that older people play in society and the need to enable older women to play an active role, inter alia by promoting small trades and crafts;
12. Calls on the Commission and Member States to take into account the specific situation of older LBT women;

Reconciling work and care

13. Calls on Member States to introduce new types of leave that make it possible to take paid leave for caring duties other than parental leave, and promote a more equal division of unpaid care between women and men, because informal care in the home restricts a carer's possibilities of working outside the home; takes the view that in this context one way to reduce poverty amongst older women is to support arrangements, such as part-time work and job-sharing, that provide the option of flexible working; stresses in this context, however, that the employment rights of flexible workers must be equal to those of full-time workers; points out that unemployment among older women must be tackled in order to achieve the employment objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy;
14. Asks that the Member States develop mechanisms to ensure that the accumulation of pension rights is sufficient even during those times when the income level of a carer is

temporarily lower due to caring duties, a situation which mainly concerns women; asks the Commission to launch a study on the different impacts that pension systems in the Member States have on women and men;

15. Calls on the Member States to take into account the gender dimension when reforming pension systems and adapting the retirement age, considering the differences between women and men in work patterns and the higher risk of discrimination against older women in the labour market;
16. Calls on the Member States to promote forms of mutual assistance that bridge the gap between young and older people, harnessing the enthusiasm of the former and the experience of the latter;

Health, care and social services

17. Calls for a rights-based approach to be taken in order to enable older people to play an active role when decisions are made on the choice and the design of the care and social services and treatments provided for them whenever options exist; calls also for a demands-based approach to be implemented in regard to the provision of any type of care services in order to enable older people to live independently for as long as they wish;
18. Calls for policies to be promoted to provide support within nuclear families, enabling people to decide whether to opt to care for elderly family members themselves or to call on supplementary social services; such assistance should be equally remunerated in both cases;
19. Emphasises that public and private services should be easily accessible, of high quality and affordable for older people and that the structure of public and private services should support the longest possible period of care at home;
20. Considers that a comprehensive support policy is needed for informal carers, the majority of whom are women, encompassing their status, benefits and social security rights, the provision of social services and support services, availability of professional care services, etc.;
21. Stresses that volunteer work or informal care that often rests on women's shoulders should not make up for social care deficiencies and asks for proper social measures to be put in place to allow women to engage in chosen paid activities;
22. Calls for the establishment at Member State level of assistance packages involving programmes of measures to enhance employability, mitigate the impact of unemployment and raise employment levels among people over 50 years of age;
23. Points out that the quality of care should be ensured in order to improve the quality of old age and also in order to avoid the physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse that is often inflicted on the elderly; emphasises that people living in public and private institutions for elderly care should have the right to participate in the decision-making of these institutions through board and administration structures; considers that Member

States should ensure that those employed as carers of older people in the public and private sectors receive continuous training and regular evaluation of their performances and that a greater economic value be given to their work, including pay, insurance, and working conditions;

24. Calls on the Member States to offer incentives for the provision of training in psychological and physical assistance for older people and of appropriate facilities to accommodate them;
25. Encourages the transformation of nursing homes usually operating as hospitals to friendly establishments where the model of the family is applied, as a way to avoid institutionalisation;
26. Proposes that the launch of the European Action Plan on Alzheimer's Disease duly recognise older women's role in caring for people with dementia and is speedily implemented; considers, in addition, that national programmes are needed to map what measures could be taken to improve the quality of life of older women; proposes that the Alzheimer associations be consulted to map and implement these measures;
27. Asks that a gender perspective be taken into account when making medical diagnoses, to ensure that they are precise and that people receive appropriate treatment and care; asks that tools for diagnosis, health services and care not be restricted solely because of a patient's age and gender, so that screening for breast cancer, cervical cancer, lung cancer and colorectal cancer as well as cardiovascular screening, for example, should be available to elderly women; asks, in addition, that greater attention be given to the prevention and treatment of diseases to which older women are especially prone, such as osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis;
28. Asks that the gender and age perspective be used in recommendations concerning nutrition; asks also that the gender and age perspective be used in recommendations concerning food safety issues such as food labelling, health claims, REACH regulation and novel foods;
29. Points out that both technology and technical improvements can be important in adapting society to the needs of an ageing population; calls for innovations developed in close cooperation with older people to become more widely used, some examples of which are simplified mobile phones and Internet connections, smart sensors in specific products in order to reduce the number of accidents, trained dogs to assist people such as those suffering from diseases affecting the memory, etc., and calls for programmes especially designed on the basis of lifelong learning for elderly people to be supported by the state;
30. Calls for trials of medicines which are under development to study their effects on the bodies not only of men but also of women;
31. Proposes that statistical surveys be carried out on the increase in violence against elderly people with the aim of casting light on this serious problem – which elderly people are normally incapable of reporting, since they may accept the ill-treatment they suffer as part and parcel of being old and dependent – and with a view to combating elder abuse more effectively and with greater commitment on the part of society as a whole;

32. Calls, with a view to preventing older women from becoming excluded from society, for targeted cultural and educational schemes to be set up and for older women to be involved in local community initiatives;

Moving ahead

33. Asks the Commission to propose by the end of 2011 an action plan containing:

- an examination of the need for more resources for scientific research on ageing,
- measures to ensure the quality of care and the quality of the working conditions of carers,
- changes to increase coherence in the area of social security, including pension schemes, care leaves and part-time working arrangements,
- a gender-sensitive concept of age-related diseases and measures for their optimum recognition and treatment,
- yearly reporting, based on the principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and managed by the Fundamental Rights Agency at the institutional level and national agencies in the Member States, on the violation of older people's rights and on measures to be taken at EU and national level to abolish direct and hidden discrimination,
- non-legislative measures to tackle age discrimination, such as awareness-raising campaigns,
- mainstreaming of the perspective of older migrants and LGBT people,
- measures to support intergenerational solidarity, such as plans to support women who care for grandchildren while the parents are absent due to employment reasons,
- measures to make use of the knowledge and professional experience of older people, for example by setting up associations of older people to provide advice for job-seekers,
- exchange of best practice;

34. Asks the Commission to update and strengthen monitoring mechanisms regarding the implementation of fundamental rights issues by the end of 2012; calls also for increased awareness of these, often under-used, mechanisms as older people in general, and women in particular, are especially uninformed about their rights;

35. Affirms that every man and woman in the EU must have a right to adequate, affordable and quality social and health services of general interest, according to their specific needs and preferences; calls on the Commission to put forward a directive on basic services, which would take national conditions into consideration; emphasises that older women are especially vulnerable and invites the Commission to consider a system where all men and

women in the EU are granted the right to a basic income that is dependent on the Member State's standard of living;

36. Calls on the Commission to seek to ensure that Community funding is earmarked for projects involving, among others, socially disadvantaged single and older women;

37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The population of the European Union is ageing. In political rhetoric, this development is usually referred to as a “problem” or a “burden”. The ageing population is seen as a future burden for national economies and potential of the elderly is often ignored as they are more often seen as passive objects than active subjects.

According to the statistics, women live longer than men. In 2007, women’s life expectancy was six years more than that of men. Whether this is for biological or behavioural reasons, it leads to the situation where women more often face the negative attitudes towards ageing. The gap between the life expectancies of men and women seems to be decreasing, however, which could partly be explained by growing similarities of lifestyles.

Discrimination based on age is prohibited in EU-legislation when it comes to working life. The legislation in place, however, does not directly lead to a situation where age discrimination no longer exists at work places. In general, women still face difficulties to ascend in their careers, leading to a situation of strong imbalance where men are overrepresented in upper management functions, especially among older women and men. In addition, women more often face difficulties when seeking re-employment, and the older a woman gets the less value-added she usually has in the eyes of an employer.

With coming into force of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in December 2009 and the Lisbon treaty in the beginning of 2010, the prohibition on discrimination on all basis became part of the European Union’s legislative competence. According to the article 21 of the Charter “any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited” whereas the article 25 states that “[t]he Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life”.

These fundamental rights in the EU legislation must also be put into action. Thus, alongside the protection at workplace, aged women must be protected in all areas of life as discrimination on the basis of age and sex contravenes fundamental rights. In order to combat the double discrimination older women often face, the following aspects need to be recognised and sensitised:

Firstly, elderly women face a greater risk of ending up living in poverty. This year being officially launched as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the situation of aged women in poverty should be given serious attention. There are several reasons for older women’s poverty, such as accumulation of pensions being lower for women than men. The accumulation is lower especially within so called second and third pillar pensions, which refers to pension schemes linked to employment and individual pension savings. The differences between pension schemes in member states lead to a situation where older women in certain member states are in an especially vulnerable situation. Thus, all European citizens should be granted the right to a basic income linked to the standard of living in each member state.

The lower level of pensions is usually a direct consequence of the lower wage levels of women in general and also of the sectors employing mostly women. In addition to this, women are more likely to have temporary reductions of their income levels due to caring duties (maternity leave, child care, caring for ageing parents).

Poverty among older women also derives from caring duties. The generation of women +50 is described as a “sandwich generation” or as “working daughters and working mothers” as they often take care of their parents and their grand children. Informal and unpaid caring duties complicate working outside home. Thus, increasing possibilities to work part-time would help to increase older women’s income. Income attained from part-time work after retiring should not affect the pension level in a negative way.

Secondly, ageing women are particularly dependant on public and private services as well as on public health care – this meaning also that ageing women are especially affected in case of their lack or bad quality. Developing the services facilitating long-term care at home would affect women as carers as well as the ones being cared for. The quality of care can be insured through adequate resources and education in the health care sector.

In addition, access to public and private services affects older women. Many basic services, such as bank services, are more easily and cheaply available on the Internet, to which older people often have restricted access – either due lacking facilities or lack of skills. This can be seen as a discriminatory element in societies. Older people are in fact a remarkable group of consumers and there is an immense growth in demand for services for the elderly.

Thirdly, ageing women suffer relatively often from age-related diseases, such as memory diseases and cancers. The prevalence of dementia and Alzheimer disease is higher among elderly women than among elderly men. Of different cancer types, women suffer particularly from breast cancer – which is the most common cancer that causes women’s deaths in Europe – as well as of colorectal cancer. One of the main causes of mortality among women is cardiovascular diseases and heart attacks, which often remain undiagnosed as the symptoms are often different than those of men.

This been said, although women live longer, the gap between healthy life expectancies of women and men is smaller than that of total life expectancy. Whereas women were expected to live six years longer than men in 2007, the difference between healthy life years of women and men was less than one year. In addition to proper medical treatment, some keys for healthier life also lie in proper nutrition. General nutrition recommendations don’t meet the specific requirements of elderly people.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	14.7.2010
Result of final vote	+: 27 -: 1 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Emine Bozkurt, Marije Cornelissen, Silvia Costa, Tadeusz Cymański, Edite Estrela, Ilda Figueiredo, Iratxe García Pérez, Zita Gurmai, Lívia Járóka, Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Siiri Oviir, Antonyia Parvanova, Nicole Sinclair, Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska, Eva-Britt Svensson, Marc Tarabella, Britta Thomsen, Anna Záborská
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Christa Klaß, Mariya Nedelcheva, Chrysoula Paliadeli, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Zuzana Roithová