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Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2004/0167(COD)

29.4.2005

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council
on the European Regional Development Fund
(COM(2004)0495 – C6-0089/2004 – 2004/0167(COD))

Draftswoman: Marta Vincenzi

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

Gender mainstreaming is of essential importance to the competitiveness and economic and social cohesion of the European model, and promoting equality between men and women is included among the Union objectives set out in the Treaties (cf. Treaty of Amsterdam). The targets set as part of the European competitiveness strategy (Lisbon Agenda) include raising the number of women in employment to 60% by 2010. The general Structural Funds regulation for the period 2000-2006 (cf. ...) provides for gender mainstreaming at all stages in the planning process, from analysis to the setting of targets, monitoring and assessment. This across-the-board approach needs to be maintained and built upon.

As it stands, the Commission's proposal for a regulation fails to provide for the necessary mainstreaming of equal opportunity objectives in regional development policy. Under the proposal's provisions, the ERDF would be used for regional competitiveness programmes based on support for innovation, the knowledge economy, entrepreneurship, environmental protection and risk prevention. It is significant that explicit reference is made to equal opportunities in connection only with the European territorial cooperation objective (Article 6) and not with the actions coming under the other objectives.

The ESF, on the other hand, would be used to fund national programmes in support of the European employment strategy, with particular reference to social inclusion. This approach tends to indicate that equal opportunities measures would be covered by the ESF alone, which is an unsatisfactory arrangement for a large number of reasons, and one that goes against the principle of gender mainstreaming within the Structural Funds established in Council Resolution 96/C 386/01 of 2 December 1996.

The Member States made a commitment to mainstreaming in connection with the Community Support Frameworks (QSFs), but failed fully to carry that commitment through in terms of practical measures. Given that these instruments are to be discontinued and that Equal, together with the other Community Initiatives, is also to disappear there is a danger that, in general, proper account will not be taken of the extraordinary strategic contribution equal opportunities can make at regional level to improve quality of life, well-being and competitiveness in the EU Member States.

In this connection, attention should be drawn to the role already played by the ERDF during the 2000-2006 programming period in promoting new forms of involvement in the labour market, and in connection with mobility, access to services, safety and environmental protection in urban areas - all of which issues have a major impact on the quality of women's lives. In the proposed regulation, however, no explicit reference is made to implementing gender mainstreaming as an essential added-value means of restoring a proper balance in the regions (Recital 6a (new)).

As regards specific articles of the proposal, the definition of areas requiring additional support that is given in Articles 10 and 11 (areas with natural handicaps and outermost regions) is too restrictive. From an equal opportunities point of view, new criteria are required with a view to introducing measures for regions with marked demographic imbalances which will have a disproportionate impact on women (e.g. regions with a low birth rate and a high concentration

of over sixty-fives among the population). In this connection, it should be remembered that Commissioner Hubner gave an assurance that the Commission was in favour of greater attention being paid to regions with major long-term natural or demographic handicaps.

The draftswoman also takes the view that the provision excluding housing from eligibility for a contribution from the ERDF (Article 7, point d) should be reviewed, particularly in connection with the territorial cooperation objective. A derogation for, inter alia, temporary housing for non-Community nationals would facilitate family reunification for workers often obliged to live in precarious accommodation along with fellow workers.

Greater attention should be paid to social inclusion - a Community objective that should not be left solely up to the ESF - and the ERDF share of funding for ESF measures in urban area in connection with the regional competitiveness and employment objective should be increased, so as to ensure greater interaction between the activities of the two funds.

Lastly, there should be balanced participation by men and women in the management, control and audit bodies provided for in the regulation, so as to guard against any discrimination and to foster equal access to ERDF resources. In the past, an imbalance in gender representation has been one of the most abhorrent features of the process for the appointment of members of Structural Fund management, supervisory and control authorities in many of the Member States.

AMENDMENTS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following amendments in its report:

Text proposed by the Commission¹

Amendments by Parliament

Amendment 1
Recital 1 a (new)

(1a) Article 13 of the Treaty provides that the Community may take action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Amendment 2
Recital 1 b (new)

(1b) On 3 July 2003 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 'gender budgeting - building public budgets from a gender perspective' (2002/2198(INI)).*

**** OJ C 74 E, 24.3.2004, p. 746.***

Amendment 3
Recital 5

(5) Efficient and effective implementation of the action supported by the ERDF relies on

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¹ OJ C ... /Not yet published in OJ.

good governance and partnership among all the relevant territorial and socio-economic actors, and in particular regional and local authorities.

good governance and partnership among all the relevant territorial and socio-economic actors, ***including non-governmental organisations, inter alia those active in the area of equal opportunities***, and in particular regional and local authorities, ***the social and environmental partners, and the recognised non-governmental organisations engaged in promoting equality of men and women. Member States should ensure that all the competent bodies participate and that decisions are taken democratically.***

Amendment 4
Recital 6 a (new)

(6a) With reference to the Council resolution of 2 December 1996 on mainstreaming equal opportunities for men and women into the European Structural Funds, the promotion of gender equality should be included in ERDF-funded programmes.

The dimensions of gender, social inclusion and the fight against all forms of discrimination must be incorporated in the operational programmes funded by the ERDF.

Justification

The principle of gender mainstreaming should be upheld in the ERDF regulation.

Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999, of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds makes equal opportunities a key objective of the activities of all the funds. Over and above incorporating the gender dimension, the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against all forms of discrimination must be included as an objective in the operational programmes.

Amendment 5
Recital 8

(8) It is necessary to ensure that the action supported by the ERDF in favour of small and medium sized firms takes into account and supports the implementation of the European Charter for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises adopted at the European Council in Santa Maria de Feira.

(8) It is necessary to ensure that the action supported by the ERDF in favour of small and medium sized firms takes into account and supports the implementation of the European Charter for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises adopted at the European Council in Santa Maria de Feira, **and also takes account of the need for special measures to be taken in support of female entrepreneurship.**

Justification

Female entrepreneurship in SMEs is severely hampered in many Member States by a lack of proper welfare support. This deters women from working, as can be seen from the particularly high levels of female unemployment. This situation undermines competitiveness, quality of life and the efficiency of the European economic system.

Amendment 6
Recital 8a (new)

(8a) Particular attention should be given to implementing equal opportunities in the sense of introducing gender mainstreaming into actions co-funded by the ERDF.

Justification

The general Regulation No. 1260/1991 on the structural funds, which applies to the programmes under all the funds, provides for equal opportunities as a fundamental objective of the funds in the sense of introducing gender mainstreaming into actions co-funded by the ERDF.

Amendment 7
Recital 11

(11) The ERDF should ensure synergy with assistance from the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund. It should also ensure complementarity and consistency with other Community policies.

(11) The ERDF should ensure synergy with assistance from the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund. It should also ensure complementarity and consistency with other Community policies **and the integration of the policy of gender equality in the form of a percentage indicator which will be an important factor in determining the**

eligibility of programmes.

Justification

The principle of equal treatment of the two sexes is expressly provided for in the General Regulation on the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund. Consequently, gender equality must be expressly provided for and taken into account in the planning and implementation of the programmes and actions under the present, individual Regulation, in particular through practical measures such as quantified indicators as a criterion of eligibility.

Amendment 8
Recital 14a (new)

(14a) Article 14 of Regulation (EC) No. .../... makes provision to ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective is promoted during the various stages of implementing the Funds. Consequently, special provisions are required in the present Regulation concerning the achievement of that objective and the type of activities which the ERDF can finance in the context of promoting gender equality.

Justification

See justification to Amendment 2.

Amendment 9
Article 1, subparagraph 2

It lays down specific provisions concerning the treatment of urban and rural areas, of areas dependent on fisheries, of the outermost regions, and of areas with natural handicaps.

It lays down specific provisions concerning the treatment of urban and rural areas, of areas dependent on fisheries, of the outermost regions, and of areas with natural ***and demographic*** handicaps.

Justification

With a view to ensuring that the provisions are consistent and comprehensive, explicit reference should be made to demographic handicaps which affect sparsely populated areas.

Amendment 10
Article 2, subparagraph 2

In so doing, the ERDF shall give effect to the priorities of the Community, and in particular the need to strengthen competitiveness and innovation, to create sustainable jobs, and to promote environmentally sound growth.

In so doing, the ERDF shall give effect to the priorities of the Community, and in particular the need to strengthen competitiveness and innovation, to create sustainable, **high-quality**, jobs, **to promote social inclusion, to combat all forms of discrimination, by laying the emphasis on equal access and treatment for men and women**, and to promote environmentally sound growth.

Justification

This compromise amendment condenses and synthesises the set of three amendments.

Amendment 11
Article 4, point 2

2) Information society, including development of local content, services and applications, improvement of access to and development of on-line public services, aid and services to SMEs to adopt and effectively use information and communication technologies (ICTs);

2) Information society, including development of local content, services and applications, improvement of access to and development of on-line public services, aid and services to SMEs, **through direct investment**, to adopt and effectively use information and communication technologies (ICTs), **and the promotion of their use by young people, people with special needs and, in particular, women**;

Justification

Women, especially older women, are at a particular disadvantage as regards access to ICTs. This objective must be socially inclusive.

Amendment 12
Article 4, point 8

8) Education investments, which contribute to increasing the attractiveness and quality of life in regions;

8) Education investments, **in vocational training and life-long learning, particularly of young people and women**, which contribute to increasing the attractiveness

and quality of life in regions;

Justification

The education, vocational training and life-long learning sectors are significant factors in strengthening and developing employment, particularly in the regions, where young people and women encounter significant problems in finding work.

Amendment 13
Article 4, point 9

9) Health, including investments to develop and improve health provision which contribute to regional development and quality of life in regions;

9) Health, including investments to develop and improve health provision which contribute to regional development and quality of life in regions; ***particular attention should be given to special services for the health and quality of life of women.***

Justification

Given that the female population in the regions is falling at a faster rate than the male population and that they have particular problems gaining access to services relating to health and quality of life, a special effort must be made to make life in the regions more attractive.

Amendment 14
Article 4, point 10

10. Direct aid to investment in SMEs contributing to creating and safeguarding jobs.

10. Direct aid to investment in SMEs contributing to creating and safeguarding jobs, ***particularly for women, young people and disadvantaged people, including those with disabilities.***

Justification

Women, young people and disadvantaged people, including those with disabilities, are the groups that face the most difficulty when it comes to employment. This is why employment aid for SMEs must take special account of them.

Amendment 15
Article 5, point 1, (d)

d) creating new financial instruments and

d) creating new financial instruments, ***local***

incubation facilities conducive to the creation or expansion of knowledge-intensive firms.

infrastructure conditions and incubation facilities conducive to the creation or expansion of knowledge-intensive firms.

Amendment 16
Article 5, point 1, (d a) (new)

da) supporting female entrepreneurship by funding measures to make it easier for women to gain access to the labour market and to enable them to withdraw from it on a temporary basis; such measures shall include the introduction of business mentors, maternity support for entrepreneurs and child- and senior-citizen support services.

Justification

Such measures are intended to relieve women of various responsibilities that make it difficult for them to enter the labour market.

Amendment 17
Article 5, point 1, (d b) (new)

(db) promoting equality of men and women, including: promoting the establishment of businesses, specific measures for businesswomen to facilitate the economic exploitation of new ideas and networking among businesswomen, and promotion of infrastructure and services enabling family life and employment to be combined;

Amendment 18
Article 5, point 1(d c) (new)

(dc) support for businesswomen in the form of funding for measures to facilitate access to loans and grants for setting up businesses; the necessary measures should also be provided to ensure that female heads of businesses can take maternity leave in accordance with Council Directive 86/613/EEC of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood¹,

¹ ***OJ L 359, 19.12.1986, p. 56***

Justification

Directive 86/613 exists and a reminder should be given here to apply it.

Amendment 19
Article 5, point 3 a (new)

3a) tourism, including promotion of natural and cultural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism, protection and enhancement of the cultural heritage in support of economic development, aid to improve the supply of tourism services through new higher value-added services.

Justification

Takes over Article 4(5). Support for tourism should not be left out of the priorities for Objective 2 areas, particularly in view of the fact that the sector's workforce is predominantly female.

Amendment 20
Article 8, paragraph 2

2. By way of derogation from Article 33(2) of Regulation (EC) No (...), the ERDF funding of measures under the “Regional competitiveness and employment” objective falling within the scope of Regulation (EC) N° (...) on the European Social Fund shall be raised to **10%** of the priority concerned.

2. By way of derogation from Article 33(2) of Regulation (EC) No (...), the ERDF funding of measures under the “Regional competitiveness and employment” objective falling within the scope of Regulation (EC) N° (...) on the European Social Fund shall be raised to **20%** of the priority concerned.

Justification

In view of the positive experience gained with the Urban Community initiative programme, ERDF funding for measures relating to the urban environment which come under the ESF should be increased, so as to give local authorities greater room for manoeuvre when tackling local problems.

Amendment 21
Article 10, heading

Areas with natural handicaps

Areas with natural **and demographic** handicaps

Justification

Areas with particular demographic handicaps (low birth rate, high percentage of older people among the population) are particularly disadvantaged in development terms, and women are disproportionately affected by this situation.

Amendment 22
Article 10, subparagraph 1

Regional programmes co-financed by the ERDF covering areas facing natural handicaps as referred to in Article 52(1) b) of Regulation (EC) No (...) shall pay particular attention to addressing the specific difficulties of those areas.

Regional programmes co-financed by the ERDF covering areas facing natural handicaps as referred to in Article 52(1) b) of Regulation (EC) No (...) **and demographic handicaps as referred to in Article (...) thereof** shall pay particular attention to addressing the specific difficulties of those areas.

Justification

Areas with particular demographic handicaps (low birth rate, high percentage of older

people among the population) are particularly disadvantaged in development terms, and women are disproportionately affected by this situation.

Amendment 23
Article 14, paragraph 3 a (new)

3a. The Member States shall ensure balanced representation of men and women within the single management, certification and audit authorities referred to in Article 14(1).

Justification

A proper gender balance in the composition of the management, supervisory and control bodies is necessary in order to guard against any discrimination and to foster equal access to ERDF resources. In the past, there have been major imbalances in gender representation among the members of Structural Fund management, supervisory and control authorities in many of the Member States.

PROCEDURE

Title	Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Regional Development Fund	
References	(COM(2004)0495 – C6-0089/2004 – 2004/0167(COD))	
Committee responsible	DEVE	
Committee asked for its opinion Date announced in plenary	FEMM 1.12.2004	
Enhanced cooperation	No	
Draftsman Date appointed	Marta Vincenzi 16.12.2004	
Discussed in committee	31.03.2005	26.4.2005
Date amendments adopted	26.4.2005	
Result of final vote	for:	14
	against:	0
	abstentions:	0
Members present for the final vote	Hiltrud Breyer, Nicole Fontaine, Claire Gibault, Lissy Gröner, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Pia Elda Locatelli, Siiri Oviir, Christa Prets, Amalia Sartori, Eva-Britt Svensson, Britta Thomsen, Anna Záborská	
Substitutes present for the final vote	Marta Vincenzi	