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Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2007/2156(INI)

18.12.2007

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the demographic future of Europe
(2007/2156(INI))

Draftswoman(*): Karin Resetarits

(*) Procedure with associated committees – Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure

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SUGGESTIONS

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

1. Points out that global migration flows have and will continue to have major repercussions for the countries of destination and departure; stresses that, for the EU, the impact of immigrants on population ageing in the EU depends on full economic, social and political integration of migrants, regardless of the Member State in which they are settled; points to the important role of migrant women and calls on the Member States to accord them the place that they deserve in integration policies and to fully guarantee their rights;
2. Points out that policies enabling both parents to balance work and family life, protection for mothers and compliance with the principle of gender equality in both public and private spheres are the only means of countering falling birth rates in the long term;
3. Acknowledges that a society that places children at the centre of its policies is the precondition for a healthier birth rate; insist on a need to create a family-friendly environment and to improve living conditions for families and children and for realising families' real aspirations;
4. Recommends the promotion of a special social policy for teaching responsible parental behaviour;
5. Therefore urges balanced budgetary provision for non-discriminatory access to education at all levels, equal opportunities for men and women and measures in support of families as well as of children, childcare support measures and measures to protect single mothers;
6. Encourages the development of a variety of incentives to assist mothers and their partners in reconciling professional and family life;
7. Welcomes all measures to assist working parents and calls for the recognition of family work provided by parents, especially mothers;
8. Refers to the fact that many people suffer from unintended childlessness; calls on the Member States to adopt harmonised measures aimed at simplifying and speeding up child adoption procedures while safeguarding the rights of the children concerned as well as to drop upper-age limits for those seeking to adopt so that older people can become legally eligible for adoption; stresses that maturity can be an advantage when caring for children who may have led troubled lives;
9. Calls on the Commission to recognise that low birth rates and increased infertility are major factors of demographic decline;
10. Notes that infertility is a medical condition recognised by WHO that can have severe effects such as depression; points out that infertility is on the increase and now occurs in about 15 % of couples; therefore calls on the Member States to ensure the right of

couples to guarantee universal access to infertility treatment and medically assisted procreation by taking steps with a view to reducing the financial and other obstacles;

11. Urges the Member States to apply rules providing for paid maternity/paternity leave at the time of a child's birth and to encourage couples to make use of their entitlements in such a way that parental leave can be shared fairly between women and men; to that end, urges the Member States to combat the economic, social, and cultural prejudices associated with the right to paternity leave; calls on the Commission to revise Directive 96/34/EC on parental leave;
12. Encourages the Member States to implement proactive measures in support of parents, such as additional retirement pension entitlements and tax breaks for company crèches, and to pool best practice in this area;
13. Points out that proactive measures to promote access to the labour market and career advancement will encourage people to become parents;
14. Stresses that family patterns are changing; therefore asks the Commission and the Member States to give serious consideration to this reality when developing and implementing policies;
15. Notes that equal treatment of women and men in the job market has not been achieved as women continue to be recruited to low-paid jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications, and that women shoulder most family responsibilities without gaining anything in return; also notes the failure to create appropriate working conditions for mothers and to entitle women to return to work after a period of maternity or parental leave, which exacerbates the falling birth rate; calls especially in this context for Member States to implement properly Council Directive 75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women;
16. Calls on the Member States to review their tax systems and to implement tax rates based on individual rights; recommends the development of child and family-friendly social security systems;
17. Maintains that the proven inequality, in terms of pay, between men and women and the continuing recruitment of women to badly paid jobs not matching their qualifications undermine women's essential economic independence, which directly influences their decision to have children;
18. Calls, as one of the preconditions for equal rights, for women to be given the legal right to return to work after a period of maternity or parental leave and for such periods to count towards retirement pension entitlements and seniority;
19. Therefore calls for employment law measures finally to end this form of discrimination, especially the gender pay gap, and for gender budgeting to be applied in public budgets; encourages, furthermore, the Member States to promote an equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and to encourage men to make greater use of their parental leave

entitlements;

20. Stresses the needs to introduce work-life balance policies covering, in addition to people in work, young people still in higher or vocational education or training, so as to enable them to balance their educational and family aspirations;
21. Encourages the Member States to acknowledge the educational, social, human and economic value of informal work within the family, looking after children or dependants, including by granting retirement pension and social security entitlements to carers, and to take appropriate steps to ensure that informal skills acquired in this way may be put to good use on the labour market;
22. Maintains, given the social and economic challenges posed by the falling birth rate, that the right conditions must be put in place to enable couples to have as many children as they wish, as otherwise no society of any kind will be able to exist or develop, and that mothers and fathers must be supported accordingly; calls for social security and welfare services to be made child- and family-friendly, for the reimbursement of, among other expenditure, childcare costs, and for lower rates of VAT to be charged on all products intended for children;
23. Urges the Member States to promote tax measures conducive to a rise in the birth rate and draws attention to the need, after the birth of a child, to offer specific protection and support to women, and to young single mothers in particular, bearing in mind the growing number of one-parent families, 85% of which are headed by women and which are more exposed than others to a serious risk of poverty;
24. Takes the view that targeted labour law measures should be taken to put an end to all forms of indirect discrimination based on workers' parental responsibilities;
25. Considers that resources from the Structural and Social Funds should be used to create family-friendly living spaces in rural and urban areas;
26. Calls on the Member States to increase the availability of proper housing for families, especially for one-parent families and elderly people, for example by means of "intergenerational projects", in connection with urban development and town planning;
27. Calls for flexible child care places of good quality for all children, and other family-friendly services, regardless of their parents' financial situation, to give children maximum equality of opportunity; and so that parents can freely choose how best to combine family and work life;
28. Notes that a purely quantitative increase in childcare places, as defined in the Barcelona objectives, is not enough; above all, greater diversity of supply and an increase in quality are required; as well as the needs of parents who freely choose to care themselves for their children, within the family should be considered; calls on the Member States to seek to provide the high standard of care at affordable prices needed in order to accommodate children and other dependent persons, as laid down in the objectives charted by the 2002 Barcelona European Council, whereby Member States were called upon, by 2010, to provide childcare for at least 90% of children from age 3 to the start of compulsory

- schooling and at least 33% of children under 3; maintains that the above measures must be such as to enable parents to adjust their working patterns according to their way of life;
29. Therefore recommends combined public-private investments in the childcare sector and the pre-school education system;
 30. Considers that family members accompanying immigrant labour should be given residence permits and, where appropriate, work permits;
 31. Calls on the Commission to draw up a comparative study by Member State of the various pension and social security schemes for women in order to identify best practices for increasing women's employment and facilitating the combination of family life and work;
 32. Stresses the need, in the light of demographic changes, to review the effectiveness and appropriateness of the existing schemes in the Member States under which women leave the labour market early, particularly in view of the general trend towards revising pension schemes;
 33. Calls on the Member States to take the steps required to modernise social security and welfare systems, including pension schemes, in order to make them financially viable and enable them to cope with the effects of population ageing; maintains that special attention should be focused on the situation of elderly women, who are more vulnerable to isolation and poverty;
 34. Proposes that the Member States create and subsidise “bridge-between-generation centres”, in which older people would undertake paid work in caring for and educating children;
 35. Recommends that the Commission reopen its ‘Childcare Network’ department in the relevant Directorate-General, to help pool best practice and rise to the demographic challenge;
 36. Considers that immigrant labour should have the same benefits and rights/obligations as the host country's citizens;
 37. Calls on the Member States, primarily together with labour and management, to give priority to increasing the level of employment of women and all those with an immigrant background;
 38. Notes that birth rates are rising in a society which guarantees all citizens economic and social rights with ensuing security for all citizens;
 39. Considers that any measures envisaged with a view to the demographic future must take account of the increase in productivity of all the working population, that is to say that not only the number of the economically active compared with the economically non-active is of significance but that the increase in productivity must also be taken into account;

40. Insists that people of other ethnic origin must never be used as buffers against economic shocks.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

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| Date adopted | 17.12.2007 |
| Result of final vote | +: 18 -: 0 0: 9 |
| Members present for the final vote | Edit Bauer, Emine Bozkurt, Hiltrud Breyer, Edite Estrela, Věra Flasarová, Claire Gibault, Zita Gurmai, Esther Herranz García, Piia-Noora Kauppi, Pia Elda Locatelli, Doris Pack, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Zita Pleštinská, Christa Prets, Karin Resetarits, Eva-Britt Svensson, Anne Van Lancker, Anna Záborská |
| Substitute(s) present for the final vote | Gabriela Crețu, Iratxe García Pérez, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, Donata Gottardi, Anna Hedh, Kartika Tamara Liotard, Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva, Maria Petre |
| Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote | Manolis Mavrommatis, Paul Rübig |