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Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2008/2330(INI)

13.2.2009

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on Renewed social agenda
(2008/2330(INI))

Rapporteur: Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou

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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:

- having regard to its resolution of 13 October 2005 on women and poverty in the European Union¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of [...] February 2009 on non-discrimination based on gender and inter-generational solidarity²,
- A. whereas Article 2 of the EC Treaty stipulates that solidarity and equality between men and women are among the founding values of the European Union, and it is the responsibility of the Commission and the Member States to ensure that women's rights are observed and to facilitate participation in economic and social life for all members of society,
- B. whereas poverty is a violation of human rights and combating it must be a priority, with a particular focus on women who face a higher risk of poverty than men, because of their economic dependency (many of them being unpaid family workers), the persistent gender pay gap in the labour market and the fact that they represent a large majority of single parents and the elderly,
- C. whereas investing in gender equality implies working towards lifting poor women out of poverty, thus reducing the risk of perpetuating poverty into the next generations,
- D. whereas important fields such as labour mobility, knowledge mobility, and healthcare mobility have a different impact on women's lives than on men's,
1. Notes the presentation of the renewed social agenda by the Commission, permitting developments to go one step further and providing for a more targeted and integrated approach to social policies by mobilising the fields of employment, equal opportunities, education, health, and the information society, and hopes that this will contribute to furthering equality between women and men, the creation of more and better jobs and efforts to tackle poverty, discrimination and social exclusion;
 2. Deeply deplores the fact that the renewed social agenda does not place women among the Commission's priorities, and calls on the Commission to mainstream women's rights in all the key areas of action, so as to explicitly take into consideration the impact that all actions have on women, in order to prevent them from becoming the new exploited class of the 21st century;
 3. Recalls the increase in poverty, precarious work and inequalities; calls on the Member States to adopt policies for the recovery of wages and pensions, which will contribute to

¹ OJ C 233 E, 28.9.2006, p. 130.

² Texts adopted on that date, P6_TA(2009)[...].

greater justice in the distribution of wealth, improved living standards for workers and pensioners - specially women - and economic recovery;

4. Regrets in particular that the package lacks a review of the Equal Pay Directive, accompanied by a gender-neutral work evaluation system, to reduce gender pay gaps both within and between economic sectors, as well as special measures on reconciling work and private life;
5. Asks the Member States to level up by 2010 the gender equality legislation, to mainstream gender equality in all policy areas, as required by Article 3(2) of the EC Treaty, and to ensure the effective transposition and implementation of Directive 2002/73/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women concerning access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions;
6. Stresses that, in view of the new demographic challenges, the best solution to counteract negative tendencies is to address the situation of women who live in poverty, with unequal and inadequate access to nutrition, housing, education, pay, and who do not have the benefit of being able to reconcile work and private life;
7. Asks the Commission to carry out studies on the medium and long-term impact that the different types of mobility have on women and to propose measures to mitigate its negative effects;
8. Considers that the EU's interests and values, among which gender equality features, must contribute to influencing decisions taken at international level within the framework of the Agenda on Decent Work, the application of fundamental rights and international conventions, particularly those concerning the work of women, mothers and children, but also education;
9. Reaffirms its rejection of the draft directive of working time and calls for the withdrawal of this proposal; furthermore, calls on the Council to make a strong commitment to reducing working-time without lowering wages, and on the Member States to coordinate their efforts to gradually reduce working time to achieve the short-term objective of a 35-hour week; considers that a reduction in working time without lowering wages should be seen as another way to create jobs - specially for women - and stimulate the economy;
10. Considers that flexibility and security must be used in favour of the socially disadvantaged, especially with regard to women and the elderly, who are more exposed to risks of extreme poverty, a fact highlighted by the Commission's studies; to this end, a balanced approach must be adopted regarding the interests of working women, as well as retired women, but also concerning the integration of women's potential and active contribution for promoting economic growth;
11. Underlines the need to implement new incentives to improve the reconciliation between family and professional life by providing women with the full range of social services;
12. Emphasises that there is no response to the crisis and its consequences without an improvement in public welfare; asks the Member States to strengthen the social functions of the State and social protection systems, strengthen public investment in infrastructure,

particularly in nurseries and homes for the elderly, develop a housing policy that guarantees the right of everyone to housing, protect and develop public health services and enhance public education;

13. Considers that the elimination of lower wages in some professions, predominantly occupied by women, is a precondition for achieving a new model of social fairness and economic independence;
14. Underlines the importance of education in social policy; stresses the need for young people to benefit from a qualitative education in order to eradicate the phenomenon of early school leaving; further stresses the urgent need to combat school segregation throughout the EU; moreover youngsters, and especially girls and women, should be informed about the possibilities available to them in the field of education and training; invites the Commission to go one step further in the field of lifelong learning by adopting measures promoting equality between men and women, such as offering new skills (for example in the use of new technologies) to enable the reintegration of women in the labour market;
15. Encourages the enhancement of the dialogue with social partners, leading to an improvement in parental leave; welcomes the new proposals from the Commission concerning maternity leave and the rights of the self-employed; underlines the need to ensure that women can be reintegrated into the labour market, and accordingly calls on the Commission to promote it efficiently;
16. Stresses the importance of the participation of women in the labour market, both as employers and employees, with a view to reaching EU's objectives in the field of employment and social affairs, particularly social inclusion but also growth and well-being; stresses that opportunities should be given to women in order to develop their existing qualifications and to make use of their education and training; however, underlines the need to offer women options which facilitate a better organisation of their family and private life;
17. Urges the Commission to actively encourage women's entrepreneurship, which enables them to better reconcile family and professional life; calls on the Commission to ensure flexibility in the proposed legislation in order to avoid any administrative or financial burden that might restrict women's initiatives in the field of entrepreneurship;
18. Is of the opinion that employment does not in itself constitute adequate protection against extreme poverty and that, mainly as a consequence of occupational segregation, more women than men work in lower-paid jobs, while it is often the case that social security payments alone do not offer protection against extreme poverty either;
19. Invites the Commission to combine the renewed social agenda with other initiatives such as the European pact for gender equality, the European Youth Pact and the European Alliance for families, in order for disadvantaged social groups to have better access to social benefits;
20. Stresses that extreme poverty and the ensuing social exclusion cannot be understood solely in economic terms on the basis of figures, but must also be understood in terms of

human rights and citizenship; recognises that the principle of the free movement of capital and goods cannot, in itself, eradicate poverty or chronic poverty (especially persistent poverty) and that extreme poverty deprives those affected of opportunities and prevents them from fully taking part in the community life by making them indifferent to their surroundings;

21. Calls for the close partnership with the very poorest women and families to be consolidated at all levels of the decision-making process so that their experience can be drawn on in devising measures and means to combat chronic poverty effectively and eradicate the ensuing social exclusion; calls, in order to make the above-mentioned partnership possible, on all the institutions concerned to adjust the open method of coordination and the operational framework for the renewed social agenda to the needs of women in situations of great poverty;
22. Calls on the Member States to adopt additional support measures, when implementing the renewed social agenda, that will help particularly working women who are single parents, or who have large families, to find forms of employment with flexible working hours so that they can meet their more extensive family commitments;
23. Commends the very poorest women in their daily struggle against extreme poverty, and acknowledges that the work performed by volunteers who assist and support them is an important contribution to the implementation of the renewed social agenda; pays tribute to the work of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as Caritas Internationalis or ATD Fourth World, which display a long-term commitment to the most disadvantaged groups, and to European NGO networks in the welfare sector;
24. Calls on the institutions charged with implementing the renewed social agenda, at all decision-making levels, to adopt the same definition of poverty as the one Parliament has adopted in all its resolutions on respect for fundamental rights in the European Union, namely: the lack of basic security means the absence of one or more of the factors, particularly employment, that enable individuals and families to assume professional, family and social responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights; such a situation may vary in extent, its consequences can vary in gravity and may to a greater or lesser extent be irreversible; the lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of life, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities;
25. Invites the Commission to combine the renewed social agenda with other initiatives such as the European pact for gender equality, the European Youth Pact and the European Alliance for families, in order for disadvantaged social groups to profit from social benefits.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	10.2.2009
Result of final vote	+: 18 -: 0 0: 5
Members present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Hiltrud Breyer, Ilda Figueiredo, Věra Flasarová, Lissy Gröner, Urszula Krupa, Pia Elda Locatelli, Astrid Lulling, Doris Pack, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Zita Pleštinská, Anni Podimata, Christa Prets, Teresa Riera Madurell, Eva-Riitta Siitonen, Eva-Britt Svensson, Britta Thomsen, Anna Záborská
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Gabriela Crețu, Ana Maria Gomes, Donata Gottardi, Elisabeth Jeggle, Maria Petre