



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

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*Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*

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**2009/2222(INI)**

26.4.2011

## **OPINION**

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

on the future for social services of general interest  
(2009/2222(INI))

Rapporteur for the opinion: Siiri Oviir

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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:

- A. whereas social services of general interest (SSGIs) play an essential role in combating social exclusion and discrimination, protecting human rights and human dignity, and promoting social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations, protection of the rights of the child, the balancing of private and professional life and the achievement of economic, social and regional cohesion,
  - B. whereas gender segregation in social services, both sectoral and occupational, has a detrimental impact on working conditions and pay levels and whereas unpaid domestic work, child care and elderly care work are predominantly performed by women,
  - C. whereas social services of general interest, and in particular access to services for the care of children, the elderly and other dependants, are essential for the equal participation of women and men in the labour market, education and training,
  - D. whereas the expansion of social services of general interest has been a driving force in drawing more women into the labour market,
- 1. Urges the Member States to maintain the availability of accessible, affordable, high-quality social services as during the period of fast economic growth, and to guarantee non-discriminatory access to these services regardless of gender, income, race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or employment conditions; considers that social services are fundamental in ensuring gender equality as, together with health services and childcare facilities, they are one of the mainstays of efforts to increase female employment rates and equality in general;
  - 2. Insists on the need to prevent the current financial and economic crisis and future economic prospects from putting at risk the development of social services of general interest, as this would in the long term harm the growth of employment, economic growth in the EU, the increase in fiscal contributions, the rise in birth-rates and the promotion of equality between women and men;
  - 3. Points out that the expansion of social SGI has been a driving force in drawing more women into the labour force, refers to the 2008 Labour Force survey showing that 79% of the workforce in the human health services, 81% in residential care services and 83% in non-residential social work were women;
  - 4. Calls on the Member States to establish modern proactive welfare strategies to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of social spending, also taking into account gender-equality principles; notes that these policies, including the promotion of inclusive labour markets, prevention and rehabilitation, may require more funds initially, but should lead to cost savings and improve the quality of delivery in the longer term;

5. Calls, with a view to tailoring services as closely as possible to the individual needs of users and improving service quality, for greater attention to be paid to the need for training and preparatory courses for people working with particularly vulnerable groups, such as children, problem youths and elderly people;
6. Underlines the fact that it is essential to promote stronger user-orientation and user-empowerment, to take account of the gender perspective and to enhance access to social rights, particularly for disadvantaged groups, including single mothers, disabled women, women who have been victims of gender violence, immigrant women, women belonging to minorities, women with few qualifications and elderly women, since these groups are especially vulnerable to, and run a greater risk of, poverty in a context where the need for services is becoming increasingly sophisticated and complex; calls on the Commission to ensure and safeguard universal access to health care and social services and propose effective strategies to combat multiple discrimination;
7. Recommends the Member States, when defining social services of general interest, to take account of gender-specific services, especially advisory and social services particularly designed for women, and important services that contribute to women's quality of life and to equality, such as health services, particularly sexual and reproductive health services, education and the care of the elderly;
8. Requests that the Commission use the promotion of equal opportunities as an indicator in assessing the performance of social services of general interest;
9. Points out that the economic and financial crisis and the austerity policies imposed by Member States should not encourage disinvestment in SSGIs, but that, on the contrary, given their importance, such services need to be further consolidated in order to meet women's needs;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to conduct a gender-impact assessment of the various social services of general interest and to ensure that the assessment of proposed EU activities from a gender-equality perspective becomes a regular and transparent process with discernible results and that the gender perspective is included in the budget for all EU and national programmes and policies; also calls on the Commission to include in its monitoring reports the issue of gender equality;
11. Calls on the Member States to ensure the availability, within policies geared to achieving a work-life balance, of accessible, affordable, good-quality, diversified forms of care services for children as described in the Barcelona objectives and to improve the provision of care services for elderly and dependent persons as an essential step towards equality between women and men, since childcare services not only facilitate participation by women in the labour market but also offer job opportunities; requests the Commission and Member States to take action for the recognition of unpaid household, child and elderly care providers, mostly women, who have a very important role for the sustainability of the social systems;
12. Notes that, due to demographic change, care, health and social services in general are a growth sector that has potential to create jobs for both women and men; calls on the Member States to tap this potential by strengthening these underpaid and undervalued

sectors where women are over-represented, by improving wages, infrastructures and professional training;

13. Calls on the Member States to promote agreements between the social partners on work-life balance policies and corporate and territorial welfare initiatives, with due regard for the positive measures taken on a contractual basis in recent years and experiments financed by the European Social Fund;
14. Draws attention to the importance of ensuring that the national, regional and local authorities facilitate access to social housing for women in need or at risk of exclusion, and for women who have been the victims of gender violence, in both cases especially when they have dependent children;
15. Calls on the Commission to take an active part in efforts to achieve the objective of framing and adopting a set of rules agreed by the social partners at EU level aimed at upholding fundamental rights as regards equal opportunities and extending gender-related legal guarantees to cover pay and working conditions, access to life-work balancing measures, training, career development and safety;
16. Points out that it is vital to safeguard the access of the most vulnerable groups of women to training and employment services in order to secure their financial independence and full inclusion in society;
17. Notes that, in order to avoid difficulties in attracting qualified employees, staff shortages and a decline in the quality of social services of general interest in future, Member States should pay more attention to the issue of decent pay for people working in health and social services; points out that it is precisely these sectors in which the largest number of jobs, particularly for women, have been created in recent times;
18. Points to the need for greater recognition to be given to the work performed by people employed in the social services sector, the majority of whom are women, because their jobs are difficult, call for a caring attitude and great personal commitment and are not very socially prestigious;
19. Calls on the Member States to encourage, including by means of tax incentives and specific financial aid, forms of home help and support for elderly and vulnerable persons – especially women – and to reduce the negative impact on the employment of relatives, in particular women, who take care of dependent family members.

## RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

<b>Date adopted</b>	20.4.2011
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 26 -: 0 0: 3
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Regina Bastos, Edit Bauer, Emine Bozkurt, Andrea Češková, Marije Cornelissen, Silvia Costa, Edite Estrela, Ilda Figueiredo, Zita Gurmai, Mary Honeyball, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Constance Le Grip, Barbara Matera, Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, Angelika Niebler, Siiri Oviir, Antonyia Parvanova, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Nicole Sinclaire, Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska, Eva-Britt Svensson, Marc Tarabella, Marina Yannakoudakis, Anna Záborská
<b>Substitute(s) present for the final vote</b>	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Anne Delvaux, Christa Klaß, Katarína Neved'alová, Rovana Plumb