



**2020/2040(INI)**

11.11.2020

# **OPINION**

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the gender dimension in Cohesion Policy  
(2020/2040(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Lena Düpont

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## SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas equality between women and men is a core value of the EU enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 8 and 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union; whereas gender mainstreaming is therefore an important tool in the horizontal integration of this principle into EU policies, measures and actions, including Cohesion Policy; whereas greater efforts are needed to address the multiple forms of discrimination and inequality that women face; whereas Article 7 of the Common Provisions Regulation<sup>1</sup> for 2014-2020 establishes that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective must be taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation and implementation of programmes;
- B. whereas Cohesion Policy addresses disparities between various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions with a view to achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion, of which the achievement of gender equality is an essential component, through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the Just Transition Fund (JTF), which are subject to the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality; whereas these funds should pay particular attention to women living in rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps such as regions with a very low population density and island, cross-border and mountain regions;
- C. whereas the full economic, employment and social consequences of the pandemic are still unknown; whereas preliminary studies suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, such as an increase in care work and gender-based violence, having a disproportionate impact on women and girls, which Cohesion Policy should take into account; whereas although the aim of Cohesion Policy is to decrease the gap between regions within the EU, it should also improve equality between women and men and address gender gaps in order to enforce the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value and equal labour market opportunities; whereas collective bargaining is an important tool to reverse and overcome inequalities between men and women; whereas the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis has to be mitigated in order to ensure sufficient allocation of funding for the implementation of gender equality policies, including projects addressing discrimination and domestic and gender-based violence;
- D. whereas improving the accessibility and affordability of quality care facilities is of the

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 320.

utmost importance in enabling women to remain active in the labour market by promoting work-life balance and contributing, among other things, to closing the gender pension gap, as women carry out a disproportionately higher share of unpaid care work compared to men due to persistent gender stereotypes and pay gap structures with deep implications in terms of women's labour market representation and performance; whereas in the light of emerging demographic trends, such as ageing societies, lower birth rates and, consequently, the decline of the working age population, the need for care services has become more important than ever; whereas COVID-19 has exposed a long-standing problem in care provision in the EU; whereas care needs to be viewed holistically along a continuum, from childcare through after-school care, to care for persons with disabilities and care for older persons; whereas investment in the care sector will also provide employment opportunities in the formal economy for informal carers;

- E. whereas promoting gender equality is essential for achieving the main goals of Cohesion Policy, namely, long-term and sustainable regional economic and social development in the EU, and whereas Cohesion Policy is the appropriate instrument to tackle the gender inequalities present in rural areas, as women in rural areas have more limited access to employment and social services, especially in depopulated rural areas or areas facing demographic handicaps; whereas Cohesion Policy may contribute to implementing specific actions focused on preventing and combating gender-based violence, as well as promoting and enhancing gender equality by tackling horizontal and vertical labour market segregation and persistent gender gaps in employment, social inclusion and education, by promoting business start-ups and entrepreneurship among women, by facilitating women's access to research and innovation, as well as by taking women's needs with regard to transport and social infrastructures into account;
- F. whereas the participation of women is still limited at all stages of the Cohesion Policy cycle, especially in the development of Operational Programmes, decision-making processes and the integration of gender equality into the implementation of the selected projects;
- 1. Stresses the important role that the Cohesion Funds should play in promoting gender equality and implementing the EU Gender Equality Strategy; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to step up their efforts to promote gender equality and non-discrimination in Cohesion Policy through effective gender mainstreaming in all phases of the policy cycle, including gender equality goals, targeted measures and dedicated sub-themes, showing strong political commitment at EU, national and regional level to advance gender equality; encourages close cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and national equality bodies in that regard, providing high-quality research and data to support better-informed and evidence-based decision-making by policymakers and other key stakeholders working to enhance equality between women and men; stresses that knowledge sharing by the EU institutions and agencies and support for capacity building is key to preventing high administrative costs and an unnecessary increase in bureaucracy; stresses the importance of close cooperation with civil society organisations in the Cohesion Policy cycle and calls for the implementation of gender impact assessments in this area and the collection of gender-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators in order to measure social and economic inequalities, and to ensure the inclusion of the gender perspective in the evaluation criteria and in the implementation and monitoring systems

of the funds;

2. Regrets the fact that for the new programming period, the Commission did not put forward new measures to improve gender equality, but instead removed both gender equality conditionality from the Common Provisions Regulation and the sub-programme 'Women in rural areas';
3. Emphasises that one essential aspect of Cohesion Policy is to ensure social, territorial and economic cohesion through, among other measures, combating disparities between women and men; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States to apply the principles of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting with targeted measures to combat multiple forms of discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, and incorporate an intersectional perspective, necessary for the protection of vulnerable individuals and women from marginalised groups; calls, in this regard, on the Commission to provide guidelines to facilitate the implementation of this approach in the Cohesion Policy cycle; stresses that it is essential that investments in job creation are gender-responsive and therefore improve women's employability; underlines the crucial role of Cohesion Policy in investing in high-quality services, which has a positive effect on combating gender inequalities; calls, therefore, for the integration of the gender perspective within the Policy Objectives established in the Common Provisions Regulation in order to improve women's access to infrastructures and services, their opportunities on the labour market and in the economy, and to enhance the contribution of Cohesion Policy to socio-economic growth;
4. Points out the relevant role of the Cohesion Funds in securing investment in care services; calls on the Member States to prioritise available funds within Cohesion Policy for the provision of care to meet not only the growing demand for care infrastructure, but also to effectively address gender gaps in employment, labour market segregation and, as a result, the pay and pension gaps; encourages the Member States to share best practices at European level about the efficient use of EU funds to contribute to the development of quality care services;
5. Calls on the Commission, the Member States and regional and local authorities to raise awareness of the need for gender equality and to develop and provide specific tools and guidelines, while respecting the division of competences between the Member States and the EU, to help the Member States integrate a gender perspective at the design, implementation and monitoring stages, making use of the existing tools developed by EIGE such as its toolkit for gender budgeting in the EU Funds; stresses the importance of linking national gender equality strategies to Cohesion Policy, as ESI Funds are a key instrument to promote structural changes in society; stresses the importance of gender mainstreaming training for the officials managing the Cohesion Policy funds at European, national, regional and local levels;
6. Stresses the role played by the cities and regions that have long been at the forefront of working towards gender equality; welcomes the fact that the Commission recognises in its Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 that gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequality and affect all areas of society; highlights the necessity to address these gender stereotypes and structural discrimination against women in all Cohesion Policy areas, and of local and regional authorities being involved in combating them; calls on the Commission, the Member States and their respective authorities to follow the

principles of the rule of law, including the principle of non-discrimination and respect for fundamental rights when it comes to decisions on funding programmes or regions, followed by monitoring, investigation and appropriate actions in cases of breaches of these principles, while always ensuring the protection of final beneficiaries; believes that infringement procedures could potentially be launched if breaches of Union law are suspected and that a conditionality mechanism for the disbursement of EU funds based on the Commission's annual monitoring report on Union values could be essential in this regard; stresses that so-called LGBTI-free zones undermine these principles and therefore welcomes the Commission's decision to reject six town twinning applications involving Polish authorities that had adopted resolutions on 'LGBTI-free zones'; calls on the Commission to closely investigate complaints pertaining to the misuse of EU funds by these authorities and to continue rejecting Union funding applications by authorities which have adopted such resolutions;

7. Calls on the Member States and their respective authorities to deliver programmes that are aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and at helping the victims of violence, given that domestic and gender-based violence has increased during the COVID-19 crisis in most Member States; highlights the necessity for local authorities to involve regional employers and NGOs in their work in order to promote gender equality, raise public awareness of gender inequalities, as well as of domestic violence, and to protect victims, while providing targeted support; stresses the important role of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; urges all Member States that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to do so; urges the Council to conclude the EU's ratification of the Istanbul Convention;
8. Encourages the Member States and the Commission to ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of the gender perspective is promoted at all stages of the evaluation, implementation and monitoring of ESI Funds; calls on the Commission, the Member States and the managing authorities to share good practices in the application of gender mainstreaming through knowledge sharing, technical assistance, training and awareness raising; calls for the involvement of gender experts, equality bodies, the social partners and civil society representatives in the process of preparing, implementing and monitoring the Operational Programmes of ESI Funds in accordance with the partnership principle, and encourages the use of community-led projects through existing instruments such as community-led local developments (CLLDs) and integrated territorial investments (ITIs) to ensure a bottom-up approach in the development of projects; calls for gender-balanced representation within the Cohesion Policy bodies to improve diversity in decision-making and invites the Member States and their respective authorities to support such gender-balanced appointments within decision-making committees;
9. Calls on the Member States to utilise Cohesion Policy funding to further reduce regional economic and social disparities with a particular focus on combating the feminisation of poverty, unemployment among women and exclusion from many economic opportunities, on preventing and combating all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, on promoting and pursuing women's empowerment through improving access to and reintegration into the labour market and on addressing health-related priorities as defined in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as a fundamental human right and an essential

aspect of people's well-being and the advancement of gender equality; calls, furthermore, for the improvement of synergies between Cohesion and Recovery Funds and other existing programmes with the aim of improving working conditions for women – including by combating the gender pay gap, precarious employment and informal work – investing in care facilities, combating and preventing gender-based violence and ensuring access to SRHR services among others;

10. Stresses the role of Cohesion Policy funding, in the light of the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 crisis, in supporting, facilitating and promoting programmes that, through consideration of the special needs of women, including rural women and those living in poorer, mountainous and outermost regions, as well as remote areas and border regions, with proactive measures through the EAFRD to encourage women's employment in rural areas and entrepreneurship, facilitate their childcare duties, enhance work-life balance and well-being and, in general, to strengthen their role, improve their access to land, credit and financial instruments, boost their skills and performance through education, training and advisory services, increase their participation in decision-making at national and regional level, in local action groups and the development of local partnerships, and address infrastructural deficiencies, including in relation to the provision of different types of care; stresses that cooperation at European level, together with the efficient use of EU funds, can contribute to the development of high-quality, accessible and affordable care services that are vitally important to maintaining women's labour market activity;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote women's activity in the labour market and entrepreneurship, particularly in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and artificial intelligence (AI); recalls that in supporting the digital and green transitions, Cohesion Policy should pay special attention to ensuring access to training for women in order to bridge the digital gender gap; emphasises the need to strengthen regional, national and European networks of women in the fields of business, entrepreneurship, science and technology, education, the media and civic and political leadership, especially in remote and rural areas and in border areas; stresses the need to combat the vertical and horizontal segregation between women and men on the labour market, given that the most precarious and lowest-paid jobs are very female-dominated, which affects the pay and pension gaps in particular.

## INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

<b>Date adopted</b>	9.11.2020
<b>Result of final vote</b>	+: 29 -: 4 0: 0
<b>Members present for the final vote</b>	Simona Baldassarre, Robert Biedroń, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Annika Bruna, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Frances Fitzgerald, Cindy Franssen, Helène Fritzon, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Livia Járóka, Arba Kokalari, Alice Kuhnke, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska, Karen Melchior, Maria Noichl, Sandra Pereira, Pina Picierno, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Samira Rafaela, Evelyn Regner, Diana Riba i Giner, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Sylwia Spurek, Jessica Stegrud, Isabella Tovaglieri, Ernest Urtasun, Hilde Vautmans, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou
<b>Substitutes present for the final vote</b>	Maria da Graça Carvalho, Jadwiga Wiśniewska



## FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

29	+
PPE	Maria da Graça Carvalho, Rosa Estaràs Ferragut, Frances Fitzgerald, Cindy Franssen, Livia Járóka, Arba Kokalari, Sirpa Pietikäinen, Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi, Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska
S&D	Robert Biedroń, Vilija Blinkevičiūtė, Helène Fritzon, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Maria Noichl, Pina Picierno, Evelyn Regner
Renew	Karen Melchior, Samira Rafaela, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Hilde Vautmans, Chrysoula Zacharopoulou
GUE/NGL	Sandra Pereira, Eugenia Rodríguez Palop
Verts/ALE	Alice Kuhnke, Diana Riba i Giner, Sylwia Spurek, Ernest Urtasun
ID	Simona Baldassarre, Isabella Tovaglieri

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ECR	Jessica Stegrud, Jadwiga Wiśniewska, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión
ID	Annika Bruna

0	0

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention