EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2009 - 2014

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2012/2301(INI)

27.11.2012

DRAFT REPORT

on the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women's rights (2012/2301(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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PR_INI

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women's rights (2012/2301(INI))

The European Parliament,

– having regard to Articles 2 and 3(3), second subparagraph, of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and to Articles 8, 153(1), indent (i), and 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),

– having regard to Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,

– having regard to the Commission Communication of 18 April 2012 entitled 'Towards a job-rich recovery' (COM(2012)0173) and the accompanying document on exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services (SWD(2012)0095),

– having regard to the Commission Proposal of 6 October 2011 for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a European Union Programme for Social Change and Innovation (COM(2011)0609),

– having regard to the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020), adopted by the European Council in March 2011,

– having regard to the Commission's 2011 Report on the Progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2010 (SEC(2011)0193),

– having regard to the Commission Communication of 21 September 2010 entitled 'Strategy for equality between women and men – 2010-2015' (COM(2010)0491),

– having regard to the Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States – Part II of the Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines (COM(2010)0193),

– having regard to Directive 2006/123/EC of 12 December 2006 on services in the internal market[1],

– having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast)[2],

– having regard to Directive 2004/113/EC of the Council of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services[3],

– having regard to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

[1] OJ L 376, 27.12.2006, p. 36.
[2] OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.
[3] OJ L 373, 21.12.2004, p. 37.

against Women (CEDAW) of 18 December 1979,

– having regard to its resolution of 6 May 2009 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market[1],

– having regard to its resolution of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis[2],

– having regard to its resolution of 19 October 2010 on precarious women workers[3],

– having regard to its resolution of 8 February 2011 on equality between women and men in the European Union - 2010[4],

– having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union[5],

– having regard to its resolution of 6 July 2011 on women and business leadership[6],

– having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2011 on women entrepreneurship in small and medium-sized enterprises[7],

– having regard to its resolution of 25 October 2011 on the situation of single mothers[8],

– having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2012 on equality between women and men in the European Union - 2011[9],

– having regard to its resolution of 24 May 2012 with recommendations to the Commission on application of the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value[10],

– having regard to its resolution of 11 September 2012 on women's working conditions in the service sector[11],

– having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and the opinions of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0000/2012),

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[1] Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0371.
[2] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2010)0231.
[3] OJ C 70E, 8.3.2012, p. 1.
[4] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0085.
[5] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0086.
[6] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0330.
[7] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0367.
[8] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0458.
[9] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0069.
[10] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0225.
[11] Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0322.

A. whereas the European Union is addressing the greatest economic and financial crisis since the 1930s depression and whereas unemployment rates in the Member States have risen significantly as a result of this crisis; whereas the effects of this crisis are particularly serious for women who are affected directly – through loss of their jobs or job security -–- and indirectly via budget cuts in public services and welfare assistance; whereas, that being the case, it is essential that the dimension of gender equality in the handling of this crisis and the development of solutions be examined;

B. whereas when the economic crisis first began, it had a greater impact on men than on women, whereas unemployment has risen since then at different rates for men and women: women were not hit initially by the crisis but they are now feeling its effects and more enduringly; whereas this phase is far less well documented and, consequently, the impact of the crisis on women tends to be underestimated;

C. whereas it should be noted that unemployed women are often not included in official figures because they tend to withdraw from the labour market and to perform unpaid or informal work;

D. whereas budget cuts by governments implementing austerity plans are affecting the public sector, staffed in the main by women – approximately 70 % of the sector's employees – and women are now becoming the main victims of austerity measures;

E. whereas for women a fall in the number of jobs frequently goes hand in hand with an adjustment in working hours, and whereas it is extremely likely that recovery will be felt more rapidly in the industrial sector thereby bringing about recovery in male employment, which will pick up faster than female employment; whereas economy measures in the public services will have a more lasting effect on female employment;

F. whereas the effects of the crisis now will also have a significant impact on women in the longer term on account of their non-linear career path, made up of poorly paid temporary, or even informal, jobs, often with part-time working imposed, and which only entitle them in the end to a very small pension;

G. whereas female employment is affected by stereotypes and whereas the idea that male unemployment is more serious than female unemployment is deep rooted;

H. whereas approximately 23 % of European Union citizens were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2010[1], and this impoverishment of the population affects women most of all who are very often facing a combination of difficulties: single-parent families, for the most part headed by women, difficulties in keeping a job or finding a new one in this context, difficulties in finding housing and taking on responsibility for dependants (children, parents, sick or disabled people);

I. whereas the number of women taking informal and (whether voluntary or not) unpaid work to escape the crisis is rising, and whereas according to an OECD study[2] domestic work accounts for 33 % of the GNP of the OECD member countries;

[1] Eurostat, 23% of EU citizens were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2010 - Issue 9/2012.
[2] OECD, Society at a Glance 2011, OECD Social Indicators, @OECD2011

J. whereas women benefited most from job creation in the EU between 1998 (employment rate for women in the EU: 55.6 %) and 2008 (employment rate for women in the EU: 62.8 %)[1], whereas employment has risen by 12.7 % for women and only 3.18 % for men, but the unemployment rate for women remains slightly higher in 2012[2] (10.7% for women as opposed to 10.6% for men);

K. whereas in 2011, 31.6 % of women worked part-time as opposed to 8.1 % of men;

L. whereas women entering working life are playing a leading role in the return to growth, whereas they enable the family income to rise which brings about a rise in consumption and helps boost the economy;

1. Recalls that gender equality is one of the core objectives of the European Union and that it has to be included as a fundamental principle in responses to the current economic and financial crisis;

2. Recalls that, having seen the employment rate for women climb steadily for over ten years to reach a level of 62.8 % in 2008, the European Union has now seen this rate fall slightly since the beginning of the economic crisis to 62.3 % in 2011; stresses therefore the need for lasting responses that take the gender equality dimension into consideration in policies to safeguard employment and renew growth;

3. Stresses the fact that, despite unemployment rates for men and women being comparable, the crisis affects the latter differently: working conditions for women have become considerably more insecure, their income has dropped significantly because of factors such as the persistent gap of nearly 17 % between salaries for men and women and the resultant inequality in their unemployment benefits, the rise in imposed part-time working and the rise in the number of temporary or fixed-term jobs to the detriment of more stable employment;

4. Recalls that there are still very wide disparities between the various EU Member States, with the employment rate for women varying between 48.6 % and 77.2 %, and that the contrasts in these situations call for tailor-made responses; emphasises moreover the need to have reliable common indicators so needs can be assessed and suitable responses found;

5. Recalls that even before the economic crisis, women were in the majority in temporary or part-time posts and that the crisis has reinforced this trend;

6. Stresses that women have played a vital role in resisting the crisis and that, according to recent publications, they are playing a vital role in the improved competitiveness and performance of business where they are in management, and that involving them in the drawing up of recovery plans in order to encourage social cohesion is therefore a matter of urgency;

7. Insists on the need to ensure that the current economic and financial crisis and the

[1] Eurostat, female employment rate, EU-27.
[2] Eurostat, harmonised unemployment rate for men and women, September 2012, European Union.

ensuing budget restrictions do not jeopardise the progress achieved by policies promoting gender equality nor serve as a pretext for reducing efforts in this respect;

8. Recalls that cuts in public budgets will have the effect of increasing gender inequalities and female unemployment, women being in the majority in the public sector and the principal beneficiaries of social policies and, consequently, increasing the feminisation of poverty;

9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to mainstream the global approach to gender equality in all employment policies, to take the measures needed to assist women in their return to work and to incorporate this approach in the European Union's employment guidelines;

10. Welcomes the proposal for a directive on a better gender balance in management posts in businesses;

11. Asks Member States to introduce policies on extensive training for employees to prepare them for job changes and new jobs bearing the specific place of women in mind; calls for training plans to be implemented systematically in businesses to prepare employee retraining, to propose individual job transfers, and to offer training suitable for job seekers and low-skilled workers;

12. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote vocational-training policies and programmes for women, in order to increase their participation in the various business sectors, envisaging specific support measures so women are able to combine their workload, training and family life; recalls the important role played by the European Social Fund in assisting entry into employment through training policies and suggests the Member States and local authorities promote recourse to this fund;

13. Recalls that in a great many Member States, it has become more difficult since the start of the crisis for young women (aged between 15 and 24) to find their first full-time job and that many of these young women are now prolonging their studies as a solution to this problem; observes that, despite this trend and the fact that better training gives women better protection on the whole, their status is not enhanced by their qualifications as much as would be the case for a man;

14. Calls on the Member States to promote female entrepreneurship, by encouraging and supporting women who set up companies, by facilitating women's access to finance, in particular via microcredits, and by promoting the development of female entrepreneurship and sponsorship networks;

15. Calls on Member States to promote female entrepreneurship in the green economy which is a source of new jobs; notes that renewable energy can create new job opportunities for female entrepreneurs in areas where female unemployment is particularly high;

16. Calls on Member States to support job creation in the social economy which is dominated by unpaid work by women;

17. Urges the introduction of a public transport policy which takes gender equality into

account, enabling women to be more active in the labour market and in searching for work by making them truly mobile and helping them to achieve a better work-life balance;

18. Calls on the Commission and the Council to adopt an action plan to achieve the targets that were set in Barcelona for better childcare provision with the development of company and inter-company crèches; stresses the importance of collective bargaining between management and labour in order to improve the work-life balance at sectoral, national and regional level;

19. Stresses the fact that decisions taken by some Member States to cut their budgets for childcare, education and extracurricula activities, and carers have direct implications for women who take on the majority of the additional tasks entailed;

20. States that female poverty has not just been caused by the recent economic crisis, but by a variety of factors: stereotypes, pay gaps between men and women, lack of a work-life balance, women's longer life expectancy and, in general, all kinds of gender-based discrimination which affect mainly women;

21. Observes that the economic crisis contributes to harassment, violence of all kinds, and prostitution, with women as the victims, in breach of human rights;

22. Calls, in the absence of reliable data, for the consequences of the economic crisis on women's working conditions to be appraised: discrimination during recruitment, increased workload, pressure and stress at work, bullying and psychological harassment;

23. Calls once more on the European Institute for Gender Equality to embark upon constant monitoring of the impact the economic and financial crisis is having on gender equality, that this may become a genuine policy scoreboard, with an annual report to Parliament and to the Commission, using precise and reliable indicators;

24. Calls on the Commission to take the lead in mitigating the gender-differentiated impact of austerity policies in Europe, to use the European semester and the country-specific recommendations and processes to ensure that austerity's negative effects on women and gender equality are brought under control at national level with their elimination in mind;

25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Since 2008, the world economy has been dominated by a series of crises: financial, economic and now social. The social crisis has, by and large, been underestimated by governments in Europe. Initially they took action on financial recovery so they could then introduce budget savings plans to stop public deficits spiralling and bring them into line with the Maastricht Treaty. Budget consolidation by Member States has largely hidden the social crisis fostered by the combined effects of the economic crises and which is affecting women in particular.

When the economic crisis first started in 2008, its immediate impact on men's work was stronger than on women's. Women were not, therefore, the first victims of the crisis, but the situation changed steadily from 2009 onwards.

Nonetheless, its impact should be qualified depending on the Member State and business sector concerned. Job losses for men occurred in the industrial sector, which reacted fastest to the crisis; as women are primarily employed in the services sector, they were not affected until later. Likewise, young women with better education and training were protected against the crisis for longer, even if appreciation of the value of their qualifications fell, with a knock-on effect on their salary.

Women in the EU are being affected by a silent crisis. The effects of the crisis have crept up on them less brutally than on men, but they are being affected nonetheless. However, male employment will pick up quicker whereas the cuts in public services will have a long-term effect on female employment.

More deep-rooted still is the idea that male unemployment is more serious than female unemployment.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality has already examined some aspects of these issues in several reports since the beginning of the 7th parliamentary term.

Budgetary austerity policies: a double blow for women

Already before the crisis unemployment, temporary work and low salaries affected women more than men. Now they are feeling the effects of crisis adjustment measures taken by governments to cut public deficits.

Women in the public sector, where they make up on average nearly 70 % of employees, are the main victims of budget cuts made by Member State governments. In some Member States civil service staff have been cut by as much as 25 %[1]. What is more, salaries have been cut or frozen in the public sector and fixed-term contracts are frequently not being renewed.

Measures to cut family allowances, maternity leave and single-parent allowances have had a further negative effect, increasing the risk of women falling into poverty and making them

[1] International Labour Office, Global Employment Trends 2012, p. 18.

more dependent on other members of the family.

Women who keep their jobs are often in jobs for which they are overqualified. Risk of deskilling is the price paid for remaining in employment. Moreover, fixed-term contracts or part-time work are becoming more common than permanent contracts.

In 2011, 31.6 % of women were working part-time. It has reached the point where the Commission no longer talks about part-time work but about part-time unemployment instead[1].

To avoid being unemployed, young women are prolonging their studies or apprenticeships in order to delay their entry into the labour market. Some have even decided quite simply not to seek employment.

For women who remain in work, there is the question of reconciling work with their private life. They have to combine their work with domestic tasks, a major share of which falls to them, and also quite often with caring for dependents (children, parents, the sick or disabled).

Cuts in social security benefits and to the budgets for social welfare infrastructure, education, childcare, health and care services has led to households – normally women –taking over these responsibilities. As a result women have left paid employment or reduced their hours in order to take over services which the state no longer provides or which they themselves can no longer afford.

Informal work acts as a refuge for some women, either because they can no longer cope with the burden of all these different responsibilities, or because their level of pay is too low to cope with higher taxes and cuts in social security benefits. They prefer therefore to leave the labour market and enter the informal economy. The combined effects of these different factors contributes to perpetuating gender inequality.

Recommendations in view of exiting the crisis

Gender equality must be mainstreamed in public authorities' responses to the crisis.

One of the first steps lies in education and training, both initial and lifelong, in order to be able to adjust to changes in the labour market. Job forecasts for the forthcoming years predict that 15 % of less well-qualified jobs will disappear while high qualifications will be needed for 15 % of new jobs created[2]. All training policies must be rethought therefore with the specific place of women in mind.

In line with this, the European Social Fund must be deployed as well as all the other EU programmes to enable greater social integration through employment.

Stressing how budget restrictions have an adverse effect on the work-life balance is important since this affects single parents, more often than not women, in particular. Better childcare

[1] European Commission, Report on Equality between Women and Men 2010.
[2] European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2011 on the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, P7_TA(2011)0466.

facilities with the establishment of company and inter-company crèches will help keep women in employment. This can be achieved through collective bargaining between management and labour.

The crisis has aggravated the incidence of violence against women (harassment, violence at work and domestic violence). Budget cuts must not threaten funding for programmes and associations that seek to stop this violence.

Women have an important role to play in exiting the crisis. This needs to be emphasised and as such the European Commission's proposals on a gender balance in decision-making posts are heading in the right direction. After that, there are a whole raft of measures that need to be taken so that women's place in society evolves and they become more involved in political and economic decision-making.

Lastly, the Commission's role is vital in ensuring that EU employment policies and economic policies take gender equality goals and commitments into account. The Commission must also make use of the recovery plans to enhance women's rights and include the gender equality dimension in all facets of the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework.