



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

2014/2152(INI)

4.2.2015

DRAFT REPORT

on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015
(2014/2152(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Rapporteur: Maria Noichl

CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	13

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015 (2014/2152(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 2 and Article 3(3), second subparagraph, of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Article 8 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 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR),
- having regard to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),
- having regard to the 1949 UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others,
- having regard to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women on 15 September 1995 and to the subsequent outcome documents adopted at the United Nations Beijing+5 (2000), Beijing +10 (2005) and Beijing +15 (2010) special sessions,
- having regard to European Parliament and Council Regulation 606/2013 of 12 June 2013 on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters¹,
- having regard to European Parliament and Council Regulation 1567/2003 of 15 July 2003 on aid for policies and actions on reproductive and sexual health and rights in developing countries²,
- having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2012/29/EU of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA³,
- having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2011/99/EU of 13 December 2011 on the European protection order⁴,

¹ OJ L 181, 29.6.2013, p. 4.

² OJ L 224, 6.9.2003, p. 1.

³ OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, p. 57.

⁴ OJ L 338, 21.12.2011, p. 2.

- having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2011/36/EU of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA¹,
- having regard to European Parliament and Council Directive 2010/41/EU of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC,²
- having regard to Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC³,
- having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and the Council 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)⁴,
- having regard to Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (tenth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16 (1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)⁵,
- having regard to Directive 2004/113/EC on implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services and the related judgment of 1 March 2011 of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the Test-Achats case (C-236/09)⁶,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),
- having regard to the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020), adopted by the European Council in March 2011⁷,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2010 entitled ‘A Strengthened Commitment to Equality between Women and Men: A Women’s Charter’ (COM(2010)0078),
- 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 Commission communication of 3 March 2010 entitled ‘EU 2020: a European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2010)2020),

¹ OJ L 101, 15.4.2011, p. 1.

² OJ L 180, 15.7.2010, p. 1.

³ OJ L 68, 18.03.10, p. 13.

⁴ OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

⁵ OJ L 348, 28.11.1992, p. 1.

⁶ OJ C 130, 30.4.2011, p. 4.

⁷ Annex to Council conclusions of 7 March 2011.

- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 September 2011 entitled ‘Supporting growth and jobs – An agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems’ (COM(2011)0567),
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document of 16 September 2013 entitled ‘Mid-term review of the Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015)’ (SWD(2013)0339),
- having regard to the Commission Staff Working Document of 8 March 2010 entitled ‘EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010-2015)’ (SWD(2010)0265),
- having regard to the conclusions of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council of 19-20 June 2014,
- having regard to the study by European Parliament Policy Department C entitled ‘Study on the Evaluation of the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 as a contribution to achieve the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action’, published in 2014,
- having regard to the report of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) entitled ‘Violence against women – an EU-wide survey. Main results’ published in March 2014,
- having regard to its resolutions of 15 June 1995 on the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing: ‘Equality, Development and Peace’¹, of 10 March 2005 on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women – Platform for Action, Beijing +10², and of 25 February 2010 on Beijing +15 – UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality³,
- having regard to its resolutions of 10 February 2010 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2009⁴, of 8 February 2011 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2010⁵ and of 13 March 2012 on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2011⁶, and on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2013⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 12 September 2013 on the application of the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value⁸,

¹ OJ C 166, 3.7.1995, p. 92.

² OJ C 320 E, 15.12.2005, p. 247.

³ OJ C 348 E, 21.12.2010, p. 11.

⁴ OJ C 341E, 16.12.2010, p. 35.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2011)0085.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0069.

⁷ A8-0000/2014.

⁸ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0375.

- having regard to its resolution of 12 March 2013 on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU¹,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis² and of 12 March 2013 on the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality and women’s rights³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 6 February 2013 on the 57th session on UN CSW: Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls⁴,
 - 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 value⁵,
 - having regard to its resolution of 20 November 2013 on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures⁶,
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 February 2014 with recommendations to the Commission on combating Violence Against Women⁷,
 - having regard to its resolution of 6 February 2014 on the European Semester for economic policy coordination: Annual Growth Survey 2014⁸,
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A8-0000/2015),
- A. whereas the right to equal treatment is a defining right which is deeply rooted in European society and is essential for the further development of this society and should apply both in case law and in real life;
- B. whereas the previous Commission strategy attained some of the goals that had been set, but failed to achieve full gender equality, while evidence for the interaction of various forms of discrimination, precise targets and effective evaluation measures were often lacking and gender mainstreaming continued to be applied only to a limited extent;
- C. whereas gender equality is a basic value of the EU and is essential as a strategic objective to achieve the overall EU objectives, such as the employment rate target within the Europe 2020 strategy;

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0074.

² OJ C 236 E, 12.8.2011, p. 79.

³ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0073.

⁴ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0045.

⁵ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2012)0225.

⁶ Texts adopted, P7_TA-PROV(2013)0488.

⁷ Texts adopted, P7_TA-PROV(2014)0126.

⁸ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0128.

- D. whereas the economic and political situation in Europe can only be maintained and the consequences of demographic change averted if the talent and potential of all women and men is used;
- E. whereas this year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and its goals are now more relevant than ever;
- F. whereas one in two women experiences one or more forms of sexual harassment in the course of her life and a life free of violence and characterised by self-determination is a prerequisite for full participation in society;
- G. whereas, owing to traditional structures and tax disincentives, women have had second-earner status imposed on them, in the form of segregation in the labour market, an incomplete employment history and gender-specific wage inequality, and whereas also unpaid care, nursing and domestic work is performed much more frequently by women who thus have less time available to pursue paid work, which in turn results in a much lower pension, which is why the compatibility of work and family life, in particular to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, should continue to be supported by practical measures, a process in which men in particular need to become more involved;
- H. whereas positions of power and decision-making are occupied almost exclusively by men, and women are therefore severely limited in their ability to wield influence;
- I. whereas the face of poverty in Europe is female, and it is particularly single mothers, young and old women who are affected by poverty and social exclusion, a situation aggravated by the crisis and specific austerity measures because it is particularly public sector jobs and services in the care sector that are being eliminated;
- J. whereas gender stereotypes and traditional structures have a negative impact on health and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the associated rights is a fundamental human right;
- K. whereas the roles of girls and boys are being strengthened by stereotypes in education materials and structures in educational institutions, and their choices are being thereby limited, and these role patterns are being further reinforced especially by media representations;
- L. whereas the EU has a responsibility and a role as model for gender equality world-wide, gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential if the international development goals are to be attained and for a successful EU foreign policy and women all over the world are especially affected by the consequences of climate, environmental and energy policies;
- M. whereas institutional mechanisms form a necessary basis for the achievement of gender equality; whereas also gender equality, as a cross-cutting task should serve as a basis of all policy areas in the EU and its Member States, together with the concepts of gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and gender impact assessment;

General Recommendations

1. Calls on the Commission to draw up and adopt a new strategy for gender equality between women and men in Europe aimed at eliminating discrimination against all women and men in their diversity (ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, nationality and age);
2. Calls on the Commission, to involve civil society and the social partners in a structured way in the development and continuous evaluation of the strategy;
3. Calls on the Commission to make clear the EU role that it wishes to play in the world and in working with the Member States with regard to the promotion of gender equality and to pursue these goals both through the concept of gender mainstreaming in all areas and through individual targeted and specific actions;
4. Calls on the Commission to introduce a specific pillar for equality between women and men in the Europe 2020 strategy, to consider the objectives of the future strategy as an aspect of the European Semester and to insert a gender perspective in the country-specific recommendations and the Annual Growth Survey ;
5. Calls on the Commission to gather gender-specific data in all policy areas;
6. Calls on the Commission to draft the strategy in the form of a practical action plan, ensuring that it takes into account in particular the following specific suggestions in the areas of violence against women, work and time, women in power and decision-making, financial resources, health, knowledge, education and the media, the wider world and institutional mechanisms and gender mainstreaming;

Violence against Women

7. Reiterates the appeal to the Commission it made in its resolution of 25 February 2014, with recommendations to combat violence against women, to submit a legal act providing both a consistent system for collecting statistical data as well as a uniform approach by Member States to the prevention and suppression of violence against women and girls;
8. Calls on the Commission to promote the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the Member States through the new strategy and to work actively for its ratification by the EU with a view to combating violence against women;
9. Reiterates its appeal to the Commission to designate 2016 European Year for combating violence against women and girls;
10. Considers it urgently necessary to further monitor the implementation of the Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, the Regulation on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters and the Directive on the European Protection Order up to 2015 and beyond;

11. Calls on the Commission to enshrine ‘zero tolerance’ campaigns in the strategy and to push forward the debate in the Member States about the origins of violence and abuse and the reasons why women resort to prostitution and emphasises the importance of including men more specifically in the fight against violence against women;
12. Calls on the Commission to adopt a new strategy to combat human trafficking after the current strategy expires;
13. Calls on the Commission to assist Member States in drawing up their action programmes for gender equality and to pay special attention to new forms of violence against women, such as *cyber-harassment* and *cyber-stalking*, and to carry out continual evaluations; stresses in this connection also the importance of close cooperation with civil society in order to recognise problem areas at an earlier stage and to address them more effectively;

Work and Time

14. Calls on the Commission in the new strategy to pay special attention to the various ways of reconciling family life and work and regrets in this connection the faltering of the negotiations on the adoption of the Maternity Protection Directive and reiterates Parliament’s unrestricted willingness to cooperate;
15. Calls on the Commission to monitor the attainment of the Barcelona objectives and to continue to support Member States in creating high quality and affordable child care with reasonable hours of attendance; emphasises in this connection the importance of nursing and care services for the elderly and persons requiring special care;
16. Stresses the importance of flexible forms of work in allowing women, but more especially men, to reconcile work and family life and instructs the Commission to coordinate and promote exchanges of best practices; stresses in this connection the need for awareness campaigns for the equal division of domestic work and care and nursing, for the inclusion of men and the introduction of paternity leave of at least 10 days and parental leave to be divided between both parents;
17. Stresses the importance of gathering qualified, gender-specific data relating to the allocation of time to care, nursing and domestic work and leisure, with the aim of making a regular assessment;
18. Calls on the Commission, as part of the strategy, to encourage Member States to ratify Convention 189 of the International Labour Organisation in order to strengthen the rights of European domestic and care workers;
19. Calls on the Commission to support Member States in creating incentives for employers to convert unofficial work into official employment;

Women in Power and Decision-Making

20. Calls on the Commission to include specific measures to promote the equal representation of women and men in leadership positions in the strategy and to support

the Council in the negotiations for the adoption of the Directive for a balanced representation of men and women on supervisory boards and to expand the scope of this Directive to include executive boards;

21. Calls on the Commission to create incentives for Member States to obtain a more balanced representation of women and men in parliaments and in the Commission and emphasises in this connection the importance of electoral lists alternating by gender and of proposing both a woman and a man candidate for senior EU positions;
22. Stresses the importance of support programmes for women entrepreneurs and for women in science and academia and urges the EU to support these programmes in a more tangible manner;

Financial Resources

23. Calls on the Commission to present specific measures to ensure the transparency of salaries and thereby to reduce the gender pay gap within the next 5 years to less than 10% on average in the EU and to submit an annual progress report on this matter; proposes that Member States should be encouraged also to review the public procurement procedures directives and to expand them to include the social aspect of gender equality in line with the EU 2020 strategy; emphasises in this connection the possibility of introducing fines for companies;
24. Calls on the Commission to tailor both the investment package adopted in 2014 and the Youth Guarantee more closely to the specific situation and needs of girls and women;
25. Stresses the importance of publishing best practice examples and initiatives so as to counteract the tendency towards de-skilling and to improve the recognition of diplomas and qualifications, because otherwise the skills, especially of women migrants, which are of great importance for the economic, political and social development of the Member States and the EU, will remain unused;

Health

26. Calls on the Commission to assist Member States in ensuring high-quality, geographically appropriate and readily accessible services in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, safe and legal abortion and contraception as well as general health care;
27. Stresses the importance of awareness-raising campaigns for gender-specific symptoms of disease, as well as gender roles and stereotypes having an impact on health, and calls on the Commission to provide financial support for gender-sensitive research programmes;
28. Calls on the Commission to encourage Member States to enshrine (medical) fertility support as an individual right;

Knowledge, Education and the Media

29. Calls on the Commission to create incentives for competent training in the critical use of the media in the Member States to encourage the questioning of stereotypes and structures and to share best practice examples so as to review the ways in which roles have been stereotyped in the educational material used so far; calls on the Commission, in this connection, to support programmes to raise awareness of stereotypes and traditional gender roles in the education and media sector; emphasises in this connection the importance of gender-equitable teaching methods for teachers, so that they can clearly explain the benefits of gender equality and a diverse society;
30. Stresses that compliance with gender equality should be considered a criterion for all EU-funded research programmes;
31. Instructs the Commission to conduct a study of the everyday impact of the gender portrayal in public life, the media and educational institutions;
32. Calls on the Commission to focus campaigns for the active participation of citizens in society especially on women and women migrants;
33. Calls on the Commission to assist Member States in the establishment of university Chairs for gender studies and feminist research;

The Wider World

34. Underscores that universal access to sexual and reproductive health and the associated rights is a fundamental human right, and calls on the Commission to ensure that European development cooperation adopts an approach based on a human rights; emphasises the importance of family planning services, information and education to reduce maternal and infant mortality and eliminate female genital mutilation, child-bride and forced marriages, selective, gender-based abortion and forced sterilisation;
35. Calls on the Commission, in the Neighbourhood Policy and development cooperation, trade and diplomatic relations, to work for the introduction of a standard that defines women's rights as a human right and makes respect for this right mandatory; emphasises the importance of participatory collaboration with all stakeholders, especially with civil society organisations in the context of development cooperation;
36. Calls on the Commission to promote the creation of an action plan on UN Resolution 1325 by the Member States;
37. Stresses the importance of a gender-sensitive asylum and migration policy and the development of appropriate guidelines and the coordination of best practice examples; emphasises in this connection the indispensability of an individual right to stay, especially for migrant women in cases of domestic violence;
38. Calls on the Commission to gather gender-specific data so as to conduct an impact assessment for women in the areas of climate, environment and energy policy

Institutional Mechanisms and Gender Mainstreaming

39. Calls on the Commission to promote the use of gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and gender impact assessment in all areas, both at EU and at national level and thus ensure specific gender equality targets;
40. Calls on the Commission also to encourage cooperation between Member States, women's NGOs and the social partners;
41. Stresses the importance of adequate funding for national anti-discrimination bodies; calls in this connection also on the Commission to support the continuity of non-governmental organisations through adequate and predictable financial assistance; calls in this connection also for continued financial support for the Daphne programme and for its profile to be maintained in order to continue to allow in particular women's rights organisations on the ground in the Member States to combat violence against women;
42. Stresses the importance of the partnership between the Commission and the Parliament and therefore proposes that the Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality submit an annual progress report in oral and written form to the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality - from the perspective both of the Commission and of Member States - on the objectives set out in the strategy;
43. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

From a European and a global point of view, this report comes at a key juncture, that is to say in 2015. This year, to mark the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the objectives set out in the Beijing Platform and the cut-off date for the UN Millennium Development Goals, assessments of various kinds will be carried out all over the world in order to determine how much progress has been made towards achieving the aim of gender equality. These assessments will once again show very clearly that true gender equality, extending to every sphere of life, is progressing only by inches. That point is underlined by the Gender Equality Index, drawn up by the European Institute for Gender Equality, in which the EU scores an average of 54 points out of a possible 100. Be it the right to protection from injury and to live a decent life, a better division of nursing and caring tasks, or making the most of talents and skills: not every goal has been achieved, and hence, even within the EU, real gender equality has yet to be brought about.

The main aim of European gender equality policy over the next five years should be to produce effective, coherent strategies to do away with all forms of discrimination against women and men. Women and men alike must be sure that they will not be discriminated against on account of their ethnicity, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, a disability, their religious beliefs, their class, their nationality, or their age. Attention also needs to focus on multiple discrimination.

The aims of equality, which have been repeatedly affirmed for decades, are being watered down by the continuing financial crisis and fiscal consolidation measures in Member States. One way to forestall that process would be by targeting funds sensibly and effectively and applying gender mainstreaming to programming and continuous assessment. Women would not then be so inordinately hard hit.

The rapporteur is of the opinion that the EU's economic, social, and employment aims cannot be achieved unless gender equality is fully realised. Equality must therefore be understood as a strategically significant universal goal. Given the crisis and the ever-present danger of backward steps, the Commission's new strategy needs to be adopted in order to reaffirm that approach.

Violence against women

Violence against women and girls is a serious violation of human rights. It is also an expression of gender inequality, which in turn has implications for actual equality. Only those who are safe from violence can play a full part in society and achieve something in their lives. Violence against women in its varied forms, ranging from domestic violence and rape through harassment at work to sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, forced participation in pornography, and forced sterilisation, is occurring in the midst of our society every day.

- One in three women in the EU has, after turning 15, suffered physical and/or sexual violence at least once in her life¹.

The rapporteur is therefore calling for the EU to take determined action and points once again to the importance of ratifying the Istanbul Convention and establishing a single legal framework to prevent and combat violence against girls and women. Boys and men must in future be given a greater role in combating violence against women.

The proposed legislative package providing for cross-border protection of victims of crime within the EU can already be considered a great success from the point of view of combating violence. This is another case in which implementation by the Member States must continue to be monitored.

Work and time

In recent years the gender gaps in terms of employment, unemployment, pay, and poverty have narrowed. This, however, is due mainly to the general deterioration in the situation caused by the crisis. The fact that the 75% employment rate called for by the EU 2020 strategy applies to the entire potential workforce in the EU also serves to disguise gender-specific disparities.

- According to Commission figures, 74.2% of men, but only 62.5% of women, currently have a job.

Genuine equality on the labour market has thus still not been achieved. Women are, in addition, employed more frequently in insecure jobs, with fixed-term contracts and low pay. Entrenched practices and stereotypes continue to make for sharply gender-specific horizontal and vertical labour market segregation, and the gender pay gap (currently 16.4%) becomes a 39% gender pension gap in old age. Women often work part time, even though they would like a full-time job. They also still do most of the housework and bear the brunt of caring for others. That leaves them less time to carry on another (gainful) occupation and they also find it very difficult, in many cases, to return to work after parenting leave. Many work-life balance strategies seek to counter this problem by outsourcing housework and caring, which in turn can lead to the exploitation of women (in particular) on the unofficial labour market and to the ethnicisation of care-related work.

The rapporteur is calling on the Commission to consider whether it should lay down specific targets and penalties with a view to reducing the gender pay gap. Furthermore, if a better work-life balance is to be achieved, men will have to devote more time to housework and caring.

Women in power and decision-making

The fact that women are largely excluded from decision-making processes – because of the glass ceiling – greatly restricts their ability to wield influence and bring about change in society.

¹ Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, March 2014.

- According to Commission figures, only 5% of chief executive officers are women.

The EU should endeavour to ensure that the role to be given to women in political, social, religious, cultural, media-related, scientific, and civil-society decision-making is commensurate with the proportion of the population for which they account. Given that the EU institutions are frequently seen as role models, the rapporteur is calling on the Commission to advocate equal gender representation in every institution.

Taking the EU average, women make up only 18.6% of the membership of company supervisory boards: that being the case, it is essential to press ahead with the negotiations on the directive on women in management positions (COM(2012)0614, 2012/0299(COD)) and then take the next step by applying it at board level.

Financial resources

Although female poverty in Europe is now increasingly being discussed, it is, unfortunately, still tolerated in society. Because of misdirected tax incentives, the fact that women tend to be secondary wage earners, segregation, wage inequality, and career breaks, economic poverty in working life turns into poverty in old age, as reflected in the gender pension gap. Single parents are particularly at risk from that point of view, since they also have greater difficulty in obtaining credit and other financial services. The situation has, in addition, been further exacerbated by the crisis. Government austerity policies, wage freezes and cuts and recruitment freezes and redundancies in the public sector, pension reforms, cuts in, and restrictions on, care- and family-related benefits, and higher charges for publicly subsidised services such as crèches are hitting young women in particular harder than men. Women's economic independence – a precondition for actual equality – and their participation in public life are thus being placed in extreme jeopardy.

Health

The current retrograde trends in European society are also having an impact on the health and the related rights of women and men. If women are to have responsible and safe sex lives, however, they must be guaranteed access to information and care, safe, effective, and affordable contraception, safe, legal abortion and sterilisation, and support in connection with adoption.

It is also important to shed light on the reasons why women and men have different life expectancies. Gender-specific research could help to reveal the influence that gender roles have on health and hence to change the pattern.

Knowledge, education, and media

- Looking at news coverage within the EU, only 24% of the people featured in news reports are female.

Roles conveyed through teaching materials and syllabuses in schools and other education establishments not only affect performance proper, but also influence our choice of career after leaving. These stereotypes are, moreover, further reinforced by the stereotypical, not to say sexualised, depiction of women in the media. It is only when traditional gender roles and

structures start to be challenged in the classroom that girls and boys will both have the same chances of living fulfilled lives according to their own free will.

Not only must girls and women be encouraged in all their decisions and chosen paths, but, as has also been noted in Horizon 2000, the high number of male school drop-outs must be lowered further.

The wider world

The strategy to promote equality must not, however, be exclusively inward looking. The EU has a duty to keep emphasising this right in its relations with other countries and to foster its continuing development. A study by UN Women shows that non-sustainable development serves to widen disparities between the sexes, because girls and women are harder hit by the consequences of economic, social, and environmental crises. These specific effects on women accordingly need to be examined in greater depth.

Efforts to outlaw and punish sexual violence in crisis and war situations, ranging from genital mutilation to child and forced marriages, must be intensified. Many women in the world are still being denied access to property, natural resources, and inherited wealth; and access to education cannot yet be taken for granted. The rapporteur believes that equality could be promoted if the EU were to establish a standard to observe in neighbourhood policy and development cooperation and in trading and diplomatic relations. Such a standard must ensure respect for women's rights. The EU must also help women to move towards equal participation in peace negotiations and democratisation processes.

Institutional machinery and gender mainstreaming

Despite the efforts of the Commission and the Member States, gender mainstreaming is not always applied, nor is it being employed across the board. If EU and Member States' policy measures and budgets were to be framed along gender-specific lines, using gender budgeting and gender impact assessment, EU policies could be made fairer, socially more just, and more effective. Binding assessments, in the form of annual progress reports, could help the EU institutions and the Member States to adapt and improve the measures in question.