

Texts adopted

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Provisional edition

Gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis

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► European Parliament resolution of 17 June 2010 on gender aspects of the economic downturn and financial crisis (2009/2204(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 October 2008 entitled "A better work-life balance: stronger support for reconciling professional, private and family life", (COM(2008)0635),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 26 November 2008 on A European Economic Recovery Plan (COM(2008)0800),
- having regard to the Commission communication for the Spring European Council on Driving European Recovery of 4 March 2009 (COM(2009)0114),
- having regard to the Commission working document on Consultation on the future "EU2020" Strategy of 24 November 2009 (COM(2009)0647),
- having regard to the Commission report of 3 October 2008 entitled "Implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children" (COM(2008)0638),
- having regard to the Commission report of 27 February 2009 on equality between women and men – 2009 (COM(2009)0077),
- having regard to the Commission report of 18 December 2008 on equality between women and men – 2010 (COM(2009)0694),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 7 June 2000 entitled "Towards a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)" (COM(2000)0335) and the Commission's annual reports on equality between women and men in the European Union for 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 (COM(2001)0179, COM(2002)0258, COM(2003)0098, COM(2004)0115, COM(2005)0044, COM(2006)0071, COM(2007)0049 and COM(2008)0010) respectively,
- having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of 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)⁽¹⁾,
- having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Directive 86/613/EEC (COM(2008)0636), presented by the Commission on 3 October 2008,
- having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC 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 (COM(2008)0637), presented by the Commission on 3 October 2008,
- having regard to the state of progress with ratifications of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No 197),
- having regard to the framework of actions on gender equality, adopted by the European social partners on 22 March 2005,
- having regard to the motion for a recommendation of the Council of Europe on the impact of the economic and financial crisis on women, Doc 11891, 4 May 2009,

- having regard to the European Gender Equality Pact adopted by the European Council of 23 and 24 March 2006,
- having regard to the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and its opinion on the gender pay gap adopted on 22 March 2007,
- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2006 on women's immigration: the role and place of immigrant women in the European Union⁽²⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2007 on a roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010)⁽³⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 September 2008 on equality between women and men 2008⁽⁴⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 18 November 2008 with recommendations to the Commission on the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women⁽⁵⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 May 2009 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market⁽⁶⁾,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 October 2009 on the effects of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries and on development cooperation⁽⁷⁾,
- having regard to Eurostat Statistics in Focus 53/2009, "Sharp increase in unemployment in the EU",
- having regard to Eurostat Statistics in Focus 97/2009, "Recession in the EU-27: length and depth of the downturn varies across activities and countries",
- 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 (A7-0155/2010),

A. whereas the world economy is facing the most severe recession since the Great Depression, with social consequences across the EU and beyond; whereas the economic and financial crisis in Europe is having a particularly harmful impact on women – who are more likely to be in insecure jobs, more liable to be made redundant and less likely to have social security cover – a circumstance which has so far not been given the attention it deserves by the Council, the Commission and the Member States,

B. whereas the first wave of the crisis hit mostly the male-dominated financial sector as well as the construction and car industries, this way gaining more attention, however the second wave of the crisis equally negatively affected the mostly female-dominated retailing, general services sector and tourism; therefore it is necessary to address the gender dimension of the impact of and solution to the economic and social crisis in national and European recovery plans,

C. whereas mainstream economists have pointed out that the credit crunch, which started the recession, was quite literally a man-made disaster; whereas responses at state and international level – which were not sufficiently gender-inclusive – have also been decided upon mainly by men; whereas it is important that women, who are generally better qualified than men, be fully included in the decision-making process in the political, economic and financial spheres as well as social partners agreements,

D. whereas recent studies have shown that only 5% of those with decision-making responsibilities in the EU financial institutions are women and all 27 central bank governors in the Member States are men, and whereas gender studies have pointed out that women manage in a different way by avoiding risk and focusing more on a long-term perspective,

E. whereas women's participation in decision making is a decisive indicator of equality between women and men; whereas the presence of female managers in companies and universities remains slight and the number of female politicians and researchers is rising only very slowly,

F. whereas women accounted for 59% of first-degree graduates at universities in 2006; whereas women's share of PhDs decreases to 43% and is lowest at full professor level; whereas only 15% of grade A full professors are women,

G. whereas women outnumber men in business, management and law faculties, but are in the minority in corporate and political positions of responsibility; whereas few women have IT, engineering or physics degrees and women are consequently under-represented in the private sector, which is crucial in economic recovery,

- H. whereas the economic slowdown is likely to affect women more than men; whereas there is a risk that the current recession will delay advances, or even reverse progress, with longer-term consequences for the social protection systems, social inclusion and demography,
- I. whereas gender equality measures have been cancelled or delayed and possible future cuts in public budgets will have a negative effect on female employment and on the promotion of equality; whereas the proper implementation of Directive 2006/54/EC mentioned above becomes increasingly important,
- J. whereas gender equality has a major positive impact on economic productivity and growth and women's participation in the labour market has a host of social and economic benefits,
- K. whereas the gender pay gap across the EU27 has remained very high over the past 35 years since Directive 75/117/EEC⁽⁶⁾ was implemented, rising to 18% on average in 2010 in the EU and in some Member States up to 30%; whereas the gap is greater in the private sector than in the public reflecting ongoing inequalities in the labour market, which in practice mainly affect women,
- L. whereas the economic downturn should not be used to slow down progress on reconciliation policies and to cut budgets allocated to care services and leave arrangements, affecting in particular women's access to the labour market; whereas particular consideration must be given to the need for single-parent families and large families to be able to reconcile family and professional obligations,
- M. whereas, according to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions, women spend three times as much time as men on caring for children, dealing with domestic issues and looking after dependent relatives; whereas the sharing of family and domestic duties between men and women, not least by developing the use of parental leave and paternity leave, is a precondition for promoting and achieving gender equality; and whereas not counting periods of maternity and parental leave towards aggregate working times is discriminatory and places women in a worse situation on the labour market,
- N. whereas the Council conclusions of 30 November 2009⁽⁹⁾ under the Swedish Presidency called on the Member States and the Commission to strengthen the gender dimension in the EU 2020 strategy; whereas the Commission's EU 2020 consultation paper has failed to take this into account, as it lacks a single mention of gender mainstreaming; whereas it is, however, essential to integrate a gender perspective in a new financial and economic architecture and policy and to ensure that recovery plans and structural adjustment programmes undergo a gender-impact assessment and integrate a gender perspective,
- O. whereas there is a need to step up the efforts to mainstream the gender perspective into public policy,
- P. whereas in times of economic recession particularly, people who are already at risk of falling into poverty, the majority of whom are women, become even more vulnerable, especially female migrant workers and those belonging to a minority group; whereas efforts and complete solutions to eradicate poverty as agreed upon by the Lisbon European Council as long ago as 2000 have become a matter of urgency; whereas special attention should be paid to protecting those groups facing multiple disadvantages, especially the Roma, and to ensure their inclusion into society,
- Q. whereas quality full-time employment with rights is a safeguard against poverty and social exclusion as well as a springboard to financial and psychological independence; whereas by addressing universal access to quality public services, it is crucial to design and implement policies, that respond to the needs of women and men respectively, including access to affordable, accessible and quality care services for children, the elderly and other dependents,
- R. whereas, as well as ensuring respect for differences and for cultural diversity, developing policies that facilitate access to the labour market for women belonging to specific cultural or minority groups reduces social exclusion and enhances social cohesion, which in turn stimulates economic growth,
- S. whereas domestic violence, which mainly affects women, is a widespread problem in every country and every social class; whereas studies have shown that violence against women intensifies when men experience displacement and dispossession as a result of the economic crisis; whereas economic stress often leads to more frequent, more violent and more dangerous abuse; whereas the cost of domestic violence to the EU is in the region of EUR 16 million per annum,
- T. whereas employment is a key factor for social inclusion; whereas focused and broad efforts need to be introduced in order to eradicate poverty against the background of rising income inequality, poverty and the economic and financial crisis,
1. Points out that equal treatment of women and men is one of the objectives of the EU and therefore one of the key

principles in any policy response to the economic and financial crisis and the transition towards the post-crisis era;

2. Emphasises the Commission's findings that the current crisis has raised concerns that the achievements in gender equality are at risk and that the effects of the recession are liable to affect women in particular;
3. Stresses the need to prevent the current financial and economic crisis, and future economic issues, endangering what has been achieved so far in the field of gender equality and to avoid the recession being used, as is already the case in some Member States, as an argument for scaling back gender equality measures;
4. Emphasises that gender equality policies must be viewed as part of the solution to ending the crisis, harnessing and fully exploiting the skills and abilities of all Europeans and, in the future, forging a more competitive economy;
5. Points out that women's integration into the workplace in recent decades means not only a greater direct impact of the crisis on women themselves but also on households, where incomes will be significantly affected by female job losses; calls on the European Union institutions and the Member States to take into account the hidden cost of the crisis, including the different and often unacknowledged gendered consequences;
6. Points out that the experience of previous crises shows that the male employment rate generally recovers more quickly than that for women;
7. Points out that macro-economic policies are predominantly associated with an increase in the gender segregation of labour, destabilisation of women's employment through subcontracting, increases in the gender pay gap, reduction in women's access to health and education, increased inequality in access to credit, land and property, and deepening of the feminisation of poverty;
8. Recalls that wage differentials between women and men persist and are liable to be aggravated by the economic and financial crisis; calls on the European Institutions and the Member States to adopt clear objectives and propose binding measures to combat wage differentials;
9. Urges the Commission to submit a legislative proposal on the revision of the existing legislation relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women (Directive 75/117/EEC mentioned above) as already requested by the Parliament in 2008; welcomes the Commission's recent initiative on improving the provisions on sanctions in case of a breach of the right to equal pay, to ensure that they are dissuasive and proportional (for instance, higher sanctions in cases of repeated offences);
10. Points out that public expenditure in the area of health is the responsibility of individual Member States and their national parliaments and/or local authorities;
11. Regrets that many women have already lost or are expected to lose their jobs, particularly those working in retailing, services, and tourism as well as women in part-time and precarious jobs; underlines the fact that, at the same time, a fall in the supply of micro-credit is expected to result in a decrease in earnings among self-employed women workers, especially those in the agricultural and rural sectors; stresses that female unemployment can be expected to rise disproportionately as public sector budget cuts are announced, since women are disproportionately employed in education, health and social services;
12. Emphasises the positive effect that gender equality has for economic growth; points out in this respect that some studies estimate that if employment, part-time employment and productivity rates for women were similar to those for men, GDP would increase by 30%;
13. Recognises that many women have been empowered by recent job losses to establish their own businesses; calls on the Commission to bring forward legislation specifically aimed at SMEs to fulfil its objective of reducing administrative burdens on business by 25% by 2012 to help foster this entrepreneurial spirit;
14. Welcomes Eurostat's gender-disaggregated statistics; believes, however, that more attention should be paid to part-time unemployment (an area often excluded from unemployment statistics); points out that long-time unemployment, lower wages and lower average working hours are likely to have profound consequences especially for women's earnings, social security allowances and, in the longer run, their pensions;
15. Calls on the Commission to draw up a study at Union level on the relation between the number of women on company boards and companies' financial performance, taking into account the study drawn up by Catalyst Inc. in 2007 which concluded that companies with three or more women on the board have an 83% higher return on shares and a

73% higher return on sales;

16. Emphasises that the crisis will have the worst effect on vulnerable groups of women: disabled women, immigrant women, women from ethnic minorities, women with few qualifications, women who are long-term unemployed, single women without means and women caring for dependents, etc.;

17. Points out that migrant workers are likewise affected by the crisis, as are their families back home; refers to the fact that the scale of female migration is often under-reported and with it the impact on families dependent on their wages for survival, as a result of which women may find themselves in an even more vulnerable position when they return home, rejected by their communities and families;

18. Underlines and welcomes the fact that interventions and solutions require a contextual understanding of the crisis and recognition that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" response; stresses that, at the same time, the recession can be used as a unique opportunity to make economic and social policies more gender-inclusive and to move towards creating a more gender-equal society;

19. Stresses the need to combat stereotypes in all walks and at all stages of life, since these are one of the most persistent causes of inequality between men and women in affecting their choices in the field of education, training and employment, the distribution of domestic and family responsibilities, participation in public life and participation and representation in decision-making positions, and in their choices regarding the labour market;

20. Notes with regret the fact that policy responses to the crisis, including recovery packages, have failed to acknowledge, analyse and rectify the gender impact of the crisis; regrets the fact that gender mainstreaming in the post-Lisbon strategy is basically non-existent; calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to integrate gender equality with specific targets into the employment and macro-economic guidelines and the EU 2020 Strategy, and to introduce gender budgeting in all policies;

21. Considers that although women's employment in the EU is close to meeting the target of 60% in 2010, there is a need to set a more ambitious target of 75% by 2020; also emphasises the need to reduce the pay gap;

22. Calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to take the necessary steps to mainstream the gender perspective into all EU policies and to review the existing legislation so as to ensure that gender equality is correctly applied and that positive discrimination measures can be applied where these are necessary;

23. Calls on the Council, the Commission, the Member States and especially Parliament's Special Committee on Financial, Economic and Social Crisis (CRIS) to ensure that recovery plans and structural adjustment programmes undergo a gender-impact assessment (ex-post assessment in cases where it has not been done ex-ante) and integrate a gender perspective including gender-disaggregated data and statistics;

24. Urges the Council, the Commission and the Member States to ensure that regression and financial cuts do not affect the policies and the functioning of the structures aimed at achieving equality between women and men at all levels in the governmental and non-governmental sector; regrets that such financial cuts have already taken place in some countries;

25. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to analyse and counteract the negative effects of reductions in public spending and social benefits, especially in the context of cuts in public spending at local level, in order to ensure that women are not left with a disproportionate burden of care (children, the elderly, and dependent persons);

26. Points out that the lack of care policies and infrastructure has led to an increase in female migrant domestic workers filling these gaps in private homes without access to social and work-related protection and benefits; calls on the Member States to urgently combat illegal employment and integrate legal migrant workers into social security and healthcare schemes;

27. Calls on the Member States to develop affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependants, in line with the European targets, and to ensure that the availability of those services is compatible with women and men's full-time working schedules; urges the Commission and the Member States to fully capitalise on the potential of the Structural Funds and of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and to facilitate access to the financing of quality services; urges the Commission to propose a directive on paternity, adoption and filial leave;

28. Points out that violence against women and men increases in times of economic upheaval; therefore encourages the Member States to use national legislation to address all forms of gender-based violence and welcomes the Spanish Presidency's initiative to set up an Observatory on Violence against Women; likewise welcomes the initiative by a group

of Member States regarding the overarching instrument on the protection of victims (European Protection Order);

29. Calls on Member States to promote collective awareness of the phenomenon of violence against women, particularly by means of public information campaigns; recalls that education and measures to raise young people's awareness are essential in order to combat this type of phenomenon;

30. Asks the European institutions, the Member States and the local and regional authorities to take effective steps, notably through legislation, to encourage gender balance in corporate and political positions of responsibility, including on boards of directors, and in local, regional, national and European public institutions, administrations and organisations which should set an example; therefore calls for binding targets to ensure the equal representation of women and men;

31. Stresses that women are under-represented in financial decision-making - in fact women are one of the groups currently excluded from financial decision-making that are adversely affected by financial risk; calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to improve women's participation at all levels of decision-making, especially in the areas of budgeting and of governance arrangements for European financial systems, including the European Central Bank; in this context, stresses the need to promote financial literacy for girls and women;

32. Welcomes the Norwegian Government's decision to increase the number of women on the boards of public limited companies to at least 40 %, which has made it possible to raise the proportion of women on boards to the current figure of 41%; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take the Norwegian initiative as a positive example and move in the same direction for listed companies;

33. Welcomes the need for increasing the number of women on boards of public limited companies, but stresses that national governments should take action which is appropriate to their own needs;

34. Points out that investment in social infrastructure is an opportunity to modernise Europe and promote equality and can be seen as a parallel strategy to investment in green technologies modernising the physical infrastructure; considers that gender equality should therefore be a policy priority and an essential tool;

35. Notes that, in the light of the EU 2020 Strategy, the 'green economy' is crucial; underlines the fact that "green jobs" have the potential to become a key growth segment of the future European labour market, that today more than 20 million jobs in the European Union can be considered as "green" and that recent evidence shows that jobs in the renewable energy sector alone have a potential to double to 2.8 million by 2020;

36. Points out that the ecological conversion of the economy and the transition to a low-carbon economy will create a huge demand for skilled workers; refers to the fact that female workers are strongly under-represented in the renewables sector and especially in science and technology-intensive jobs; asks the Council, the Commission and the Member States to make sure that female workers are included more in training projects and programmes on ecological transformation, i.e. in the renewable sector, science and technology-intensive jobs; calls on the Member States to encourage women in local entrepreneurial initiatives in these fields by facilitating access, through dissemination of data and training workshops, to available European Structural Funds;

37. Encourages employers in the Member States to create more opportunities for female workers in new technologies in order to strengthen the high-tech sector in accordance with the EU 2020 objectives;

38. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to promote full implementation at national level of European Structural Funds to address the effects of recession through retraining and upskilling initiatives on the basis of Article 16 of the General Regulation⁽¹⁰⁾ and Article 6 of both Regulations on the European Social Fund⁽¹¹⁾ and on the European Regional Development Fund⁽¹²⁾ ;

39. Calls for the EAFRD Regulation to be amended to enable proactive measures to be taken in support of women in the 2014-2020 programming period, which was possible in previous periods but not in the current one, and which will have very beneficial effects on women's employment in rural areas;

40. Calls on the Member States to develop mechanisms for equality governance to include gender expertise within governmental departments and other agencies that implement measures under the Cohesion and Structural Funds and promote women's organisations and networks;

41. Encourages the European Institute for Gender Equality to undertake a gender impact analysis of the economic and financial crisis; considers that this impact assessment should be performed with the aid of precise indicators taking account of the specific context of the crisis; calls on the other European institutions, such as the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, to propose responses to gender issues in their ongoing work;

42. Stresses the need to develop programmes and financial incentives to encourage and promote the participation of women in small and medium-sized enterprises;

43. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to recognise and provide support for the contribution that civil society can make in addressing the financial and economic crisis, particularly in the light of the European Year on Poverty and Social Exclusion;

44. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the social partners and the relevant NGOs.

(1) OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

(2) OJ C 313 E, 20.12.2006, p. 118.

(3) OJ C 301 E, 13.12.2007, p. 56.

(4) OJ C 295 E, 4.12.2009, p. 35.

(5) OJ C 16 E, 22.1.2010, p. 21.

(6) Texts adopted, [P6_TA\(2009\)0371](#).

(7) Texts adopted, [P7_TA\(2009\)0029](#)

(8) Council Directive 75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women (OJ L045, 19.02.1975, p.19).

(9) Council Conclusions on Gender equality: strengthening growth and employment -input to the post-2010 Lisbon Strategy, Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 30 November 2009.

(10) Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 25).

(11) Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Social Fund (OJ L 210, 31.07.2006, p. 12).

(12) Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund (OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 1).