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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND
THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Mid-term progress report on the roadmap for equality between women and men
(2006-2010)**

1. INTRODUCTION

Fifty years of Community policy promoting equality have improved the situation for women. However, inequalities persist in a number of areas, and developments, particularly in the context of globalisation and demographic changes, have created new challenges to be faced in order to achieve gender equality.

It is the responsibility of the European Union and the Member States to improve the equality situation in the context of concerted action. The roadmap adopted in March 2006¹ presented the commitments by the Commission to gender equality for the period 2006-2010. Also in March 2006, the European Council, in the European Pact for Gender Equality,² called on the Member States to take more account of equality and to support the roadmap's objectives.

In the roadmap, the Commission announced the actions it intended to take in six policy areas: equal economic independence for women and men, reconciliation of private and professional life, equal representation in decision-making, eradication of all forms of gender-related violence, elimination of gender stereotypes and promotion of gender equality in external and development policies. It also undertakes to monitor and evaluate the roadmap. Two work programmes have been drawn up since its adoption.³ This mid-term report describes how, since March 2006, actions have contributed to achieving the roadmap objectives. A final evaluation of the roadmap is scheduled for 2010.

2. ACHIEVEMENT OF THE ROADMAP OBJECTIVES

2.1. Achieving equal economic independence for women and men

The roadmap reaffirmed that economic equality between women and men would only be achieved through greater participation of women in employment. The rate of employment among women in the Union will very probably reach the target of 60% in 2010. However, the pay gap between women and men remains wide (15%). The communication "**Tackling the pay gap**"⁴ underlined the Commission's commitment to closing this gap and put forward a number of measures. In particular, it undertook to analyse the current legislative framework to determine whether it needed amending in order to make it more effective. Nevertheless, legislation will not be enough to eliminate what is still a complex phenomenon, caused in particular by a higher proportion of women in the less well-paid sectors or less secure jobs. There will also be a need to improve the quality of employment for women, an area highlighted in the 2008 report on equality between women and men.⁵

A number of the initiatives set out in the roadmap have been taken in order to take greater account of equality issues in the new 2008-2010 cycle of the **strategy for growth and employment**. Analysis of national measures to implement equality policy under the Lisbon strategy has shown that insufficient attention has been paid to this policy. In this context, the

¹ COM(2006) 92 final.

² Council of 23/24 March 2006.

³ SEC(2007) 537, SEC(2008) 338.

⁴ COM(2007) 424 final.

⁵ COM(2008) 10 final.

publication of a "Manual for gender mainstreaming of employment policies"⁶ was welcomed by the Member States.

In order to increase participation in employment, the workforce potential of women needs to be fully exploited and all economic operators need to be more committed. The Commission has analysed the difficulties encountered by women in becoming entrepreneurs and, in particular, has supported the network of **female entrepreneurs**. It recently adopted a Regulation which, in principle, extends the granting of state aid in particular to new enterprises created by women.⁷ Practices aimed at encouraging greater equality between women and men have also been supported in the context of corporate social responsibility.

The ageing of the population places a particular strain on the viability of **social protection** systems, requiring a modernisation which takes account of the situation of women and men. With this in mind, the Commission has analysed compliance with the objective of gender equality in national programmes relating to the open method of coordination (OMC) in the field of social protection and social inclusion,⁸ and a manual has been drawn up to increase the ability of operators to promote equality in these policies.⁹

The needs of women and men in the **field of health** and access to care have been taken into consideration in the context of the OMC in the health and long-term care sector. The joint report on social protection and social inclusion¹⁰ pointed out the differences between the sexes in overall improvement in health and in access to care in terms of social groups. The Union's strategy on health (2008-2013)¹¹ called on the Commission to take account of specific aspects of women's and men's health. The action programme on health¹² is intended to improve knowledge of the needs of women and men in the field of public health and to support initiatives to reduce gender inequalities.

Women run a greater risk of finding themselves in poverty than men. Thus they have been identified as a target group for the European Year for Combating Poverty in 2010. Women are a disadvantaged group and are frequently subject to multiple discrimination. Discussion of the future of policies to combat discrimination¹³ used experience acquired through the **European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in 2007** to highlight the need to combat all forms of discrimination. Actions aimed at the Roma community also showed the importance of integrating equality issues into all the instruments used.

Particular inequalities relate to women belonging to ethnic minorities and **immigrant women**, who represent the majority of the migrant population in the Union.¹⁴ The definition of the strategy on migration policy¹⁵ took this situation into account, particularly as regards the participation of women in the labour market and the protection of women who are victims of trafficking. The Commission has paid attention to the situation of women in monitoring the transposal of the Directive on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals,¹⁶ and in

⁶ Manual for gender mainstreaming of employment policies, 2007.

⁷ Regulation (EC) No 800/2008.

⁸ COM(2005) 706 final.

⁹ Manual for gender mainstreaming of social inclusion and social protection policies, 2008.

¹⁰ COM(2008) 42 final.

¹¹ COM(2007) 630 final.

¹² Decision No 1786/2002/EC.

¹³ COM(2008) 420 final.

¹⁴ Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the situation of migrant women in the European Union, 15.12.2007.

¹⁵ COM(2008) 359 final.

¹⁶ Directive 2004/81/EC.

its drawing up of the framework Directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment.¹⁷

Promoting gender equality involves mobilising all resources. The **European Funds 2007-2013** for cohesion policy,^{18 19 20} rural development²¹ and fisheries²² are essential levers for equality policy in a number of fields. In negotiating the programmes, the Commission called on the Member States to integrate equality objectives to facilitate access to employment, education and training, promote participation in decision-making and strengthen the reconciliation of working and family life.

2.2. Enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life

Despite a more balanced participation in employment, women continue to take on the majority of family and domestic responsibilities. Achieving the objectives in relation to employment involves strengthening policies aimed at **reconciling work, private and family life** in order to make full use of the Union's potential workforce. The Commission has proposed common "flexicurity" principles²³ in order to promote more open and flexible labour markets accessible to all, including equal access to high-quality jobs for women and men and offering opportunities to reconcile working and family life.

Discussion of new demographic challenges centred on the need for greater gender equality and for a modernisation of family policies in order to promote solidarity between generations.²⁴ The Commission also encouraged the exchange process implemented by the European Alliance for Families.²⁵

Finally, the Commission presented a new policy framework in order to provide "**stronger support for reconciling professional, private and family life**"²⁶ and achieve the Union's growth and employment objectives.

Legislative proposals²⁷ have been adopted in order on the one hand to reinforce the right of female workers to maternity leave²⁸ and, on the other, to ensure equal treatment for self-employed workers and assisting spouses.²⁹ The Commission has noted the progress made by the Member States in improving the availability of childcare facilities (for 90% of children between the age of three and school age and for 33% of children aged under three).³⁰ It noted in its report that only a minority of Member States has achieved this objective.³¹ Measures for developing childcare structures have been recommended, and have been included in the cohesion policy in particular. In addition, the social partners have been consulted on the need

¹⁷ COM(2007) 637 final.

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 on the European Social Fund.

²⁰ Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund.

²¹ Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

²² Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006.

²³ COM(2007) 359 final.

²⁴ COM(2007) 244 final.

²⁵ Council of 8/9 March 2007.

²⁶ COM(2008) 635 final.

²⁷ COM (2008) 636 and 637.

²⁸ Directive 92/85/EC.

²⁹ Directive 86/613/EC.

³⁰ Council of 15/16 March 2002.

³¹ COM(2008) 638 final.

to improve legislation concerning various forms of leave, and have begun negotiations on parental leave.

2.3. Gender-balanced participation in decision-making

The participation of all citizens in political and decision-making processes is a democratic and economic necessity, and a priority criterion for membership of the Union. Greater involvement of women in **democratic processes** is one of the priorities of a Europe for citizens.³² Initiatives have been taken³³ in support of debates on European issues and the participation of young people and women in order to pass on their aspirations with regard to Europe.

Based on the most recent data, the report on "women and men in decision-making in 2007" showed that, while there has been undeniable progress, women are still under-represented in all spheres of power in the majority of Member States, as well as within the EU institutions. The Commission has supported action by the Member States in this field; it has collected, analysed and disseminated comparable data and encouraged networking among stakeholders. To this end, a **European network to promote women in decision-making posts** in politics and economics has been established. For the first time, the network has brought together representatives of European networks in the field with the aim of acting in harmony.

In the **public research** sector, the Union has set a target of 25% for women in leading positions.³⁴ This target has been translated into a series of actions. **Education and training** programmes³⁵ contain measures to reduce imbalances in education and in scientific and technical careers. The Seventh Framework Programme for research³⁶ takes gender equality into account. Women's career trends have been analysed in order to promote women's role in public research institutions, in particular through work by experts on decision-making in the research field.³⁷

The preponderance of men among workers in the **new communication technologies (NCT)** sector has been highlighted,³⁸ and a strategy has been proposed for encouraging women to commit to careers linked to NTC. The Commission has also cooperated with national players in a campaign aimed at encouraging young women to choose scientific or engineering careers.

2.4. Eradicating gender-based violence and trafficking in human beings

The Commission is very concerned at the number of women who are victims of domestic violence, the scale of trafficking and prostitution, and the persistence of acts of violence committed under the cloak of traditions and religion.

Actions to **prevent and combat all forms of violence**, particularly against women, will be pursued under the Daphne III programme,³⁹ which supports the efforts of Member States and NGOs to address the victims and the authors of acts of violence. The large number of acts of

³² Decision No 1904/2006/EC.

³³ COM(2005) 494 and COM(2008) 158.

³⁴ Council of 18.4.2005.

³⁵ Decision No 1720/2006/EC.

³⁶ Decision No 1982/2006/EC.

³⁷ Mapping the maze: getting more women to the top in research, 2008.

³⁸ Women in ICT, status and the way ahead, 2008.

³⁹ Decision No 779/2007/EC.

violence among young people has also led the Commission to include the combating of violence against women among projects under the "Youth in action" programme.⁴⁰

The Union's action plan to combat **trafficking in human beings** encourages the use of all instruments. A common framework for defining indicators and collecting data on trafficking in human beings has been drawn up in order to gain a better understanding of its scope.⁴¹ In addition, the Commission has presented recommendations on identifying and assisting victims of trafficking and supported the principal players and actions such as the Anti-Trafficking Day.

2.5. Eliminating gender stereotypes

In identifying the combating of stereotypes as a priority, the roadmap pointed out that **feminine and masculine stereotypes** give rise to many inequalities. The Commission recently reaffirmed that it is important to integrate gender equality into youth policies.⁴² The school education programme aimed at cooperation between schools has included the reduction of gender inequalities among its objectives.

Sexist stereotypes influence the choice of **education pathways** and, as the Commission has stressed,⁴³ result in women frequently being more represented in lower-paid professions. The objectives set by the European Council aim to increase by 15% the number of graduates in mathematics, sciences and technology while at the same time reducing the imbalance between women and men.⁴⁴ In order to achieve these objectives and reduce stereotypes in general, gender equality has been integrated as a priority into Community education and training programmes.⁴⁵

Stereotyped perceptions, particularly regarding women's ability to carry out certain tasks within undertakings, have led the Commission to launch awareness-raising actions in the business sector.

2.6. Promoting gender equality outside the EU

The roadmap reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to the principles of gender equality recognised internationally in the **Millennium Development Declaration** and the **Beijing Platform for Action**.

In particular, the Union's strategy for gender equality in **development policy**,⁴⁶ to be followed by an action plan, has led to greater account being taken of gender equality in development cooperation and the EU's external relations. Promoting equality in individual country strategies drawn up under the **10th European Development Fund**⁴⁷ was supported by the drawing up of programming guidelines and the monitoring of equality issues in national plans.

⁴⁰ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

⁴¹ COM(2006) 437 final.

⁴² Investing in youth: an empowerment strategy, 2007.

⁴³ COM(2007) 498 final.

⁴⁴ Council of 5/6 May 2003.

⁴⁵ Decision No 1720/2006/EC.

⁴⁶ COM(2007) 100 final.

⁴⁷ Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006.

Gender equality was also reinforced under the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**, and the Istanbul Framework of Action led to a series of commitments and the mobilisation of resources in favour of women's rights and of their full participation in the civil, political, social, economic and cultural fields.

The new **European instrument for democracy and human rights**⁴⁸ provides for support for equality and women's rights in a number of fields, particularly the participation of women in politics and combating domestic violence and genital mutilation.

The "**Initiatives for the construction of peace**" and the EC/UN Partnership for Development and Peace have made it possible to support a range of actions concerning the situation and role of women in armed conflicts and their aftermath and the application of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. In particular, the organisation by the Commission of the international conference on "Women: Stabilising an Insecure World" led to concrete political support being provided in these fields.

One pillar of the thematic programme "**Investing in people**"⁴⁹ is devoted to equality, for example in carrying out projects concerning women's participation in decision-making or the integration of gender equality. Cooperation programmes with third countries have also supported the role of women in society or mobility projects for young people.⁵⁰

The EU has reaffirmed the principles relating to gender equality in the European consensus on **humanitarian aid**⁵¹ and undertaken, as part of its action plan,⁵² to promote participation by women and protection against sexual and sexist violence in emergency aid.

Gender equality in EU **trade policy** forms part of the wider framework of sustainable development and encourages the application of fundamental labour standards in trade negotiations and cooperation with the ILO on decent work in developing countries.

Enlargement policy has led candidate countries and potential candidate countries to align themselves with the *acquis communautaire* and European standards on equality and to create appropriate institutional and administrative structures.

3. IMPROVED GOVERNANCE

Equality objectives cannot be achieved without the **commitment of all stakeholders**. The Commission has collaborated with the Member States within the high-level group of representatives on equality issues, in the context of work by the Council (particularly the "trios" of Presidencies), in organising Presidency conferences and within the advisory committee. The social partners at European level have reported on the implementation of their framework for action on gender equality.⁵³ Organisations representing civil society have been funded with a view to maintaining dialogue and supporting their action in promoting gender equality.

⁴⁸ Regulation (EC) No 1889/2006.

⁴⁹ COM(2006) 18 final.

⁵⁰ Decision No 1719/2006/EC.

⁵¹ OJ C 25, 30.1.2008, p. 1.

⁵² SEC (2008) 1991.

⁵³ Framework of actions on gender equality; second follow-up report 2007.

A number of activities have been carried out to strengthen pro-equality instruments. A Community network of bodies responsible for gender equality⁵⁴ has been established to ensure uniform application of European law in this field. Each year, legal experts have analysed progress in Community law and the effectiveness of **legislation**, particularly in the field of equal treatment.⁵⁵ In addition, citizens are given information and advice on their rights in equality issues.

The Commission has made progress in improving the integration of gender equality into all Union policies and programmes, taking into consideration the **impact on women and men** and exploring the possibilities of integrating gender equality into the **budget process**.

It has also ensured the promotion of gender equality within its own administration under its 4th action programme on gender equality.⁵⁶

In general, work on **indicators** has met the international commitments of Member States. The Commission has cooperated with the latter to develop indicators relating to the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action.

In order to increase the availability of harmonised data at European level and complement existing indicators,⁵⁷ work has focused in particular on time use, the pay gap and drawing up a European equality index.

A number of roadmap actions have been funded by the **PROGRESS** programme,⁵⁸ particularly actions for the coordination and transversal implementation of the equality objectives, including the reinforcing of communication in relation to equality policy.

Finally, a **European Institute for Gender Equality**⁵⁹ has now been established.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The roadmap provides an ambitious political framework for promoting gender equality in all the Union's policies and activities. It has helped to ensure coherence and visibility in the actions carried out by the Commission and also provided a reference for the Member States, which have carried out their own work in relation to the common objectives defined in the roadmap, the Pact for Gender Equality and the Beijing platform's international commitments.

There has been significant progress, and much more specific account has been taken of equality objectives in all policies recorded in the roadmap. The most significant advances appear to be linked to the Union's political commitments, where quantified common objectives guide Community action.

Monitoring of the roadmap has shown progress in almost all the actions set out therein. However, that progress is uneven and highlights the need to continue to act until 2010. A particular difficulty encountered in implementing equality policy is that of providing a clear idea of the challenges it raises. Awareness-raising and adherence to the social and political

⁵⁴ Directive 2002/73/EC.

⁵⁵ Directive 2004/113/EC.

⁵⁶ SEC(2007) 1506/2.

⁵⁷ COM(2006) 92.

⁵⁸ Decision No 1672/2006/EC.

⁵⁹ Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006.

challenges of the equality objectives should be strengthened, which requires a strong political will.

For example, there will be a case for supporting the integration of gender equality, and in particular reconciliation policy, into the 2008-2010 cycle of the Lisbon strategy and the OMC in the field of social protection and social inclusion, and assessing whether the commitments to equality in the social cohesion, education and research programmes are respected. Significant progress with regard to equality in external policies will need to be pursued. Balanced participation of women in all decision-making bodies, both economic and political, must be promoted at Union level and within structures managed by the Commission. Vigilance against sexist stereotypes must also be stepped up, particularly through dialogue with the media and with citizens. The European Institute for Gender Equality must become operational as soon as possible. Finally, additional efforts in the field of communication should also provide a better understanding of the challenges of equality policy. Prior to the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009, communication activities will target women in particular.

The Commission wished to give new impetus to the European Union's social dimension with a renewed social agenda,⁶⁰ of which gender equality policy is an integral part. In particular, the renewed social agenda provides for the Commission to strengthen the integration of gender equality into its policies and activities.

Policies always have an impact on women and men where they involve the citizen, the economy and society. Nevertheless, insufficient account is often taken of such impacts in some fields covered by Community policies. It is in those fields where less attention has traditionally been paid to equality issues that particular vigilance is required and the awareness of stakeholders must be raised. Political and budget decisions must take account of gender requirements, with more systematic consideration of their effects on all individuals.

In 2010 the Commission will evaluate the results achieved and prepare a strategy for following up the roadmap. A conference will be organised in the spring of 2009 to assess the implementation of the roadmap, mobilise policies and raise awareness among players of the challenges of gender equality.

⁶⁰ COM(2008) 412 final.