

Brussels, 3 March 2009

## EU launches campaign to tackle gender pay gap

***The European Commission has today launched an EU-wide campaign to help tackle the gender pay gap. Across the EU economy, women earn on average 17.4% less than men. The simple concept of 'equal pay for work of equal value' is at the heart of the campaign being launched in the context of International Women's Day on 8 March to raise awareness of the pay gap, its causes, and how to tackle it.***

"The gender pay gap has multiple causes and needs multiple solutions. Tackling it requires action at all levels and a commitment from everyone concerned, from employers and trade unions to national authorities and every citizen. Our campaign will make people more aware of why women in Europe still earn so much less than men and what we can do about it," said EU Equal Opportunities Commissioner Vladimír Špidla. "In today's economic climate, equality between women and men is more important than ever. Only by reaping the potential of all our talents can we face up to the crisis," he added.

Equal pay for equal work is one of the European Union's founding principles. Enshrined in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, it was already the subject of a 1975 directive which prohibits all discrimination in all aspects of pay between women and men for the same work or for work of equal value. As a result, "simple and visible" cases of direct discrimination – differences in pay when a man and a woman are doing exactly the same job, with the same experience and skills, and same performance – have fallen a lot thanks to the effectiveness of European and national legislation on equal pay. But why then is there still a gender pay gap of 17.4% across the EU?

The gender pay gap represents the difference between average hourly pay for women and men before tax across the economy as a whole. It reflects ongoing discrimination and inequality in the labour market which, in practice, mainly affects women. For example, women's work is still often seen as less valuable than the work that men do and women often work in sectors where wages are, on average lower than those dominated by men, for example in a supermarket female cashiers usually earn less than the store men.

The pay gap also reduces women's lifetime earnings and pensions causing poverty in later life. 21% of women aged 65 and over are at risk of poverty compared to 16% of men.

The campaign aims to raise awareness of the pay gap and how it can be tackled. To reach out to citizens, employers and workers, the campaign will promote good practices on the pay gap from around Europe and distribute a campaign toolbox for employers and trade unions at European and at national level. Other activities include the campaign website, advertising in European press and a poster campaign.

It comes as a follow-up to the Commission's 2007 policy communication on the pay gap, which analysed the causes of the gap and identified courses of action at EU level. The Communication underlined the need to raise awareness of the pay gap and how it can be tackled by acting at all levels, involving all stakeholders and focusing on all contributing factors.

### **Annual report on equality**

The 2009 report on equality between women and men – also presented by the European Commission today – confirms that despite some progress on gender equality, significant gaps still remain in several areas. While the employment rate of women has been steadily rising over the last years (now 58.3% for women against 72.5% for men), women still work part-time more often than men (31.2% for women and 7.7% for men) and they predominate in sectors where wages are lower (more than 40% of women work in health, education and public administration – twice as many as men). However, women represent 59% of all new university graduates.

### **Women and men in decision-making**

Meanwhile, a new expert report prepared for the Commission confirms that women are also highly under-represented in economic decision-making and in European politics. The central banks of all 27 EU Member States are led by a male governor. The under-representation of women at the top level is heightened in big business where men account for nearly 90% of the board members in leading companies (constituents of the blue-chip index in each country) - a figure which has barely improved in recent years.

The proportion of women members of national parliaments (single/lower house) has risen by around half over the last decade, from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2008. The European Parliament is just above this figure (31% women). On average, men outnumber women among ministers in national governments by around three to one (25% women, 75% men).

[MEMO/09/91](#)

Further information:

Pay gap campaign website

<http://ec.europa.eu/equalpay>

2009 annual report on equality between women and men

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=418&langId=en>

Women in European Politics - time for action

[http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/publications/booklets/equality/pdf/ke8109543\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/booklets/equality/pdf/ke8109543_en.pdf)

Video News Releases on the gender pay gap and women and men in decision-making

<http://www.tvlink.org>