

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(82) 796 final

Brussels, 6 December 1982

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

concerning participation by the Community in the United Nations World Conference in Nairobi to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women and in the preparations for the Conference

COM(82) 796 final

Com First

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

concerning participation by the Community in the United Nations World Conference in Nairobi to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women and in the preparations for the Conference

I. INTRODUCTION

The General Assembly of the United Nations, in its resolution 35/136 of 11 December 1980, decided to convene in 1985, at the conclusion of the United Nations Decade for Women, a world Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the Decade.

Preparations for the Conference have already begun and should on the whole continue within the framework of the UN Commission on the status of women. (1)

The Commission is to meet in extraordinary session at Vienna in February 1983 and again in 1985 with Conference preparations as the sole item on the agenda. Its regular session in 1984 should also be extended for the same purpose.

In addition, regional meetings (in our case the Economic Commission for Europe) are to be held up until 1985.

II. INTEREST AND ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE CONFERENCE

1. The underlying themes of the Conference should in principle be the same as those discussed at the Copenhagen Conference (2), i.e. employment, education and health.

Particular emphasis should also be placed on the problem of women and development.

2. In this context, the competence and interests of the Community are evident.

This is clearest where employment is concerned, but it also applies to vocational training and certain aspects of health.

It would be useful to note Community measures in this field.

(1) See Resolution 1982/26 of UN Economic and Social Council.

(2) held in 1980, part of the Decade.

2.1. First, as regards the Directives on equal treatment, access to employment, training, advancement and working conditions (Directive 76/207) and on social security (79/7), the positions adopted at the Conference by the Community and its Member States should conform to their provisions.

2.2. Furthermore, the new Community action programme on the promotion of equal opportunities for women 1982-1985 proposed by the Commission in December 1981 and which formed the subject of a Council Resolution of 12 July 1982 covers a very wide area in the fields in question.

In addition, the above-mentioned Council Resolution comprises general commitments by the Community concerning both the promotion of equal opportunities in general by positive action and by implementing appropriate measures, and more specific aspects of the general context. The more specific aspects are those dealt with by the Conference in question.

It should also be pointed out that the timetable of the above-mentioned Action Programme coincides with the end of the United Nations Decade for Women.

2.3. The taking-into-account of the "Equal opportunities" dimension in Community policies likely to affect it, which is referred to in the above-mentioned Council Resolution, is also very relevant with regard to the Conference.

A number of fields are involved, including vocational training, the impact of new technologies on training and employment, strategies for the fight against unemployment, the problem of worksharing, part-time work, etc.

2.4. The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of women, especially in employment, will underlie all the work of the Conference and has, moreover, been dealt with more generally in the preparatory work.

It is also a priority problem referred to by the Council in its above-mentioned Resolution of 12 July.

2.5. Lastly, the item "Women and Development policy(ies)" which should form a priority for discussion by the Conference, is the subject of a considerable amount of work by the Community with a view to the definition of a Community policy in that field.

III. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE CONFERENCE AND THE PREPARATORY WORK

1. Thus the Conference in question covers a number of fields in which the Community is competent or has an interest.

In this context, the Community as such should participate in the Conference (as at the Copenhagen Conference in 1980) and in the preparations.

2. Prior coordination in order to define a Community position should be established so as to have a common position on all subjects for which the Community is competent or in which it has an interest.

3. The Community positions should be presented by the person representing the Commission and the Presidency. Problems of Community competence should be presented by the Commission.

4. These arrangements should apply throughout the Conference and the preparatory work, both as regards the official debates and discussions and as regards the informal groups and negotiations.

5. Coordination should therefore take place as soon as possible, at the latest before the preparatory meeting to be held in February 1983.

IV. COMMUNITY POSITION (1)

1. The Community position should principally be based on the new Community Action Programme on equal opportunities and the Resolution adopted by the Council on this subject on 12 July. It should of course be in line with the Directives adopted by the Council as regards equal pay and treatment and in the field of social security.

2. It should be defined gradually as the work progresses and, as regards the Conference itself, on the basis of the results of the preparatory work.

The reports and draft perspective that the Commission is to provide for 1984 and 1985 in accordance with the Council Resolution of 12 July, should serve as a general basis for the Community position.

./.

(1) See also point II.

3. A very general sketch can be given at this stage of the following guidelines, in the light of preparatory work already done and the documents prepared by the UN Secretariat.

3.1. The Nairobi Conference should, like the one held in the middle of the decade 1980 in Copenhagen, focus on the sub-themes of employment, health and education.

- As regards employment, reference should first be made to the principles and provisions contained in Directive 76/207. Moreover, in the light of the Council Resolution of 12 July 1982, equal treatment for men and women in employment is to serve as a guide for relevant policies regardless of the economic situation. It should be noted that, according to the Resolution, "in a period of economic crisis, the action undertaken at Community and national level should not only be continued but also intensified, in particular in order to promote the achievement of equal opportunities in practice through the implementation of, inter alia, positive measures," and that "with due regard to the courses of action proposed, these objectives should guide the Community and the Member States in their efforts to apply on a broader basis and to realize in practice, the principle of equal opportunities without discriminating against women whatever the economic situation".

As a result, the situation of women's employment should be given priority in the present economic climate. It is also necessary to develop new strategies in order to ensure that women have a place in the labour market, even in an unstable economic situation. Young women are especially affected as their position on the labour market is particularly serious. In addition, priority should be given in the same context to the problem of women's integration into working life, in particular in connection with the new technologies.

This should also form part of Community policy on the fight against unemployment.

- In the field of health, priority should be given to the protection of workers, whilst safeguarding the principle of equal treatment for men and women workers. It would therefore be advisable to avoid special rules for the protection of women on the labour market and to eliminate such rules in cases where originally well-founded concern for their protection is no longer justified. This also includes adequate protection for pregnancy and childbirth. The ultimate objective must be the best possible protection for workers against all the risks to which they may be exposed at the place of work and in their usual environment.

- In the field of education, emphasis should be placed on the importance of better vocational training for women. It should enable women to obtain employment in areas where they have been traditionally under-represented, in particular as regards new technologies, and to prevent their concentration in "vulnerable" jobs. Neither should the question of special basic refresher training for women be omitted, including the psycho-sociological aspects. The Community's position on this point should also be developed in the light of the Commission's communications on vocational training (2).

3.2. Furthermore, women's position in society in general must be improved. Here the civil services can set the example by improving the working conditions and status of its female staff, especially as regards their careers. Proposals on this subject made by the UN Secretariat deserve total and unequivocal support; they are in line with the Action Programme and the Council Resolution of 12 July 1982. This means that urgent action should be taken to enable women better to reconcile their family duties and work duties by improving the distribution of family responsibilities and duties.

3.3. The problem of women in developing countries and its connection with development policies and the North-South dialogue in general should also be given special attention.

The Community should in this respect take stock of its activities and positions in the context of the North-South dialogue and its development policy, including at the regional level.

3.4. On the whole, the Conference should, by means of the report that it will produce, result in guidelines likely to improve the situation of women, regardless of their position in society, and despite the context of a society in full transformation at the economic and social level.

3.5. The Community should also take steps at the next meeting of the Economic Commission for Europe (April 1983) to ensure that provision is made for preparatory work, as was the case for the Copenhagen Conference.

./.

(1) COM(82) 296 final

(2) COM(82) 637 final

V. CONCLUSIONS

1. The Council should decide on the procedures for Community participation in the World Conference of the United Nations to review and appraise the achievements of the UN Decade for Women and in the preparations in accordance with the terms set out in point III of this communication.

2. The position of the Community will be defined as the work progresses and in particular in the light of the preparatory work in the context of the Action Programme and the Council Resolution of 12 July and in conformity with existing Directives.

The guidelines given in point IV form the basis of the Community position at the present stage of preparations for the Conference.