

# Women of Europe

society

## Editorial

On 23 April Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission, exchanged views with the European Parliament on Community policy on equal opportunities between men and women.

He gave a rundown of activities, commented on progress made in the field since last year and stressed that, half way through his mandate, he felt he had respected the commitment undertaken at the time of his investiture to make equal opportunities a guiding principle of Community policy.

He spoke about the first annual report on equal opportunities published by the Commission in March and recalled that the fourth equal opportunities programme was driven by mainstreaming which he recognised as "a somewhat obscure idea for many" but defined in the Communication adopted in February 1996 as the explicit mobilisation of all policies with a view to equality and the introduction of the gender perspective into the design, implementation and follow-up of these policies.

He also underlined - and we welcome this - that equality policy is not limited to a single social sector and how much the participation of women was crucial to achieving the immediate objectives of European construction. Economic and monetary union and the integration of the euro into the daily lives of citizens, the Intergovernmental Conference and the elaboration of the new Treaty were examples mentioned by him of the "capital role" - President Santer's very words - that women have to play.

Concerning the euro, we wish to draw attention to speeches made by Commissioner Emma Bonino at the last round table, which took place in Brussels on 15 May, on the practical aspects of its introduction. She stressed that consumers should be placed at the heart of the process and that the status of protagonists, as users of the single currency, should be accorded them. Emma Bonino dwelt on the major changes, both psychological and practical, this will mean for European citizens. Also, particular attention should be paid, she said, to the majority of those for whom references to macro-economic benefits and transactions will not make them better aware of the single currency which will soon be in their pockets, replacing their national money.

Women are certainly sensitive to these pragmatic, realistic and concrete reflections!



Véronique Houdart-Blazy

Head of Section - Information for Women

## Fair pay for all

**A fair wage is at the heart of a job creation policy that attempts to maintain and improve living standards. In 1993, an Opinion on achieving an equitable wage was issued by the European Commission. Women stand to greatly benefit from such a policy as they are concentrated in many of the EU's low paid jobs. In the progress report published this year, the Commission found few improvements have been made since 1993 and, in some countries, the situation had worsened.**

When the Opinion was issued, most Member States had in place the basic planks of legislation geared towards an equitable wage. The aim of the Opinion was to provide a catalyst for further action. But the last four years continued to see a widening of the wages gap with more people falling into the poverty trap.

If anything, the report found that it was not the fair wage legislation which seems to have had the greatest impact against low wages but equal treatment legislation introduced in the 1970s and 1980s in all Member States to close the wages gap between women and men doing work of equal value.

There are strong links between persistent levels of low pay and increasing poverty in the European Union, said MEP Anne Van Lancker (PSE, Belgium), a member of the

Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs and Employment and the Committee on Women's Rights. "It is not just the unemployed who are poor but, increasingly, people who have jobs and are on low wages, the so-called 'working poor'."

Low pay affects women much more than men, Anne Van Lancker warned. Statistics show that women are concentrated in the poorly paid jobs. It is three times more probable that a woman in work is in a low paid job compared to a man, she explained, mainly because of women's dominance of part-time and precarious jobs.

To halt this trend of women swelling the ranks of the working poor, Anne Van Lancker recommended legislation to protect those working in atypical and precarious jobs. The current negotiations between the social partners were "extremely important" in this respect. She also suggested improvements in the way wages are negotiated. Low-paid and part-time jobs should become more central to collective agreements. Wage negotiators needed "good training" and more women should be involved in pay talks "because women are more sensitive to the issue of low pay than men".

### Low pay and living standards

Member States explained their inaction following the Commission's Opinion because of the link made in it between an equitable wage and the standard of living. Based on the EU's Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, the Opinion defined an equitable wage as "a wage sufficient to enable workers to have a decent standard of living". Governments argued that a "fair wage is only one, albeit important, element in achieving an adequate standard of living". They



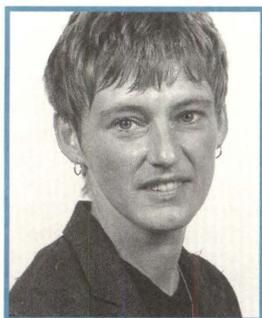
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# commission

## Equal opportunities for women and men in the EU

argued that adjustments to living standards were not the remit of a wages policy but of social policy.

Anne Van Lancker was perplexed by this reasoning. "Of course a fair wage is only one element in determining living standards. The quality of life depends on much more than wages alone but does this mean that you don't have to improve or provide fair wages?" she asked. "One element of good living standards is that there should not be too many inequalities between people. Wages policy is crucial to this, as is taxation." Other important factors, particularly for women, are the quality of services and the availability of infrastructures such as child and elderly care.



Anne Van Lancker  
Photo: European Parliament

In most Member States, wages are determined under collective bargaining arrangements. But this is changing according to the report which said that in many Member States traditional practices are breaking down with individual pay negotiations taking over, often linked to performance related pay. The government response, even in countries which have national minimum wage policies, is to move away from intervention in wage setting.

This is a worrying trend according to Anne Van Lancker. "I do not see why Member States should not try to influence wages," to prevent inequalities growing. She would welcome an EU agreement on a minimum wage. "If you look at low-paid work and women, you see that the wages gap between men and women is narrower in countries which have statutory minimum wages. I think the EU should encourage Member States to guarantee this. We need it. It will not solve all the problems but it will stop wages going down".

People earning or living on less than 50% of the national average income are considered poor according to international definitions. Anne Van Lancker would like to see the EU "imposing certain standards of living" by ensuring that every Member State sets "a minimum income which is at least say 60% to 75% of the national average".

In the editorial of *Women of Europe Newsletter No 69*, we announced the publication of the European Commission's first annual report (1996) on equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union. The report is intended as a "monitoring instrument" for equality policy. It reviews progress made in the EU and Member States and aims notably to encourage debate on future strategies. It was published together with a Eurobarometer survey on the attitudes of European women and men to employment and equal opportunities.

The report contains vital information on the increasing diversity in the situations of women as well as on persisting inequalities between women and men.

The European Union has worked hard in this field. A relatively balanced legal framework in the area of equal treatment and equal pay between women and men has been laid down and action programmes implemented by the European Commission and Member States with a view to raising public awareness of the issue and exchanging good practice in the sphere. Nonetheless, there are still a number of outstanding problems to be solved in the application of European law and, if the real concerns of women are to be met, a new and more integrated approach needs to be adopted.

Equality of opportunity for women and men is a subject which has been written about in documents of all kinds. This report is the first to cover the whole body of Community equal opportunities policy.

The report concludes that policy in the field of equal opportunities is in a transitional phase of renewal. A new debate has emerged on the need to go a step further and increase the scope of the people and policies involved. This should lead to a new partnership contract between the sexes and to new forward thinking about the status of women at an international level. This renewal should be seen as the latest phase in the development of the equality heritage in Europe over the past 20 years.

Implementation strategies have not advanced at the same pace as awareness of the need for new methods and approaches to equal opportunities. Mainstreaming gender into all policies and programmes is a long term task which will only gradually yield results.

The report found that the diversity of women's situations is increasing and that new strategies to develop equal opportunities at European level will, in the future, have to take account of the differences between women as well as the disparities between women and men. This latter factor will add to the complexity of the challenges which must be faced in order to develop an effective "gender perspective".

### Attitudes to equality

Nearly half the 21,300 European women and men surveyed in a European poll on equal opportunities, carried out by Eurobarometer, the European Commission's public opinion unit, said that work was an important aspect of their lives. The poll revealed that working women attached as much importance to their jobs, to initiative and independence at work and to training and promotion as men. Also they were seen to suffer equally from unemployment and its financial and psychological consequences.

For some two-thirds of European couples polled, the woman still does most of the household chores. When asked how to iron out persisting inequalities between women and men, nearly one quarter of respondents opted for a greater sharing of household responsibilities. Respect for the "individual", i.e. for female and male identity, came second (22%), followed by "access to positions of responsibility" (15%) and "sharing the upbringing of children" (10%). All in all, 41.6% of those polled thought that both women and men should change to eliminate inequalities.

Some 48% of women and 46% of men said financial assistance or better childcare facilities and services should be provided to help reconcile family life and work.

The annual report on equal opportunities in the EU (ISBN-92-827-8237-9 Luxembourg 97) is available in the 11 Community languages from:

ANIMA

(technical assistance office of the 4th equal opportunities action programme)

Rue de Spa 61

B-1210 Brussels

Tel.: (32.2) 230 90 31

Fax: (32.2) 230 75 11

The results of the Eurobarometer survey will be published in the form of a magazine by the European Commission (DG V) in the near future.

# parliament

## End in view for burden of proof

**A series of amendments to strengthen the proposed directive on sharing the burden of proof in cases of alleged sex discrimination (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 64*) were adopted by the European Parliament during its April plenary session.**

The final decision to adopt the proposed directive falls on the Social Affairs Council. The Commission has already said that it will try and take on board a number of the Parliament's amendments. Over 100 were tabled by the rapporteur, Fiorella Ghilardotti (PSE, Italy), and other Parliamentarians at the March meeting of the Committee on Women's Rights. This followed the Committee's public hearing in February on this topic, where fears were expressed that Member States were trying to substantially water down the draft directive.

Parliament wants the proposed directive to include a more precise and strongly worded definition of indirect discrimination which, it said, is not always well understood or legally recognised in Member States. It also wants the directive to cover all EU equality and social security legislation as well as measures introduced through framework agreements between the social partners.

### Violence violates human rights

A report by Marianne Eriksson (PSE, Sweden) calling for an EU-wide campaign of zero tolerance of violence against women was debated by the Committee on Women's Rights during its March and April meetings. Among the recommendations urged by the Committee was the designation of 1999 as the Year Against Violence Against Women, the introduction of an EU-wide legal instrument to fight violence against women, the launch of campaigns in schools on the effects of gender-based violence, research on the links between prostitution and violence, financial support for organisations supporting women victims and appropriate training for the police and judiciary.



Marianne Eriksson  
Photo: European Parliament

Tough legislation was urged by the Committee to ensure that the perpetrators of child exploitation and child sexual abuse were brought to justice in a discussion on a draft opinion on this topic by Francisca Bannasar Tous (PPE, Spain).

During the April plenary session, violence in all its forms was condemned by the full Parliament as a "serious and unjustifiable violation" of citizens' fundamental rights. In a resolution based on a report by Claudia

Roth (PSE, Germany) on the situation of human rights in the EU, Parliament called for a European Declaration of Fundamental Rights to be included in the revised Treaty setting out the economic, social, cultural and ecological rights of individuals.

The resolution also recommended action to tackle gender based violence and other abuses of women's human rights. A code of conduct against trafficking in women and the appointment of national rapporteurs on violence against women were recommended. Member States also asked to grant migrant women "specific rights" and to regard sexual violence as a form of torture when considering applications from women refugees. They were urged to implement the agreements on women's human rights reached in Beijing and "guarantee effective participation on equal terms in public life for women".

### Spouses of the self-employed

Since the 1986 directive on equal treatment for women and men in self-employment, little progress has been made to ensure the work of spouses assisting self-employed workers is recognised in terms of pay, social security and legal status. A resolution by the Parliament based on a report by Astrid Lulling (PPE, Luxembourg) welcomed the Commission's move to amend this directive and said it should be extended to include assisting "live-in" or cohabitating partners.

Parliament wants Member States to be able to establish a legal status for "assisting spouses" giving them a choice to take on the status of a salaried, associate or self-employed person. Even if their work is unpaid, they will then be able to register and be covered for health care, retirement pensions, maternity or invalidity benefit and have the same conditions of access to vocational training as self-employed workers.

### Equal pay for work of equal value

The Commission's code of practice on equal pay for work of equal value (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 64*) was discussed at the February, March and April meetings. Although she welcomed the Code, rapporteur Maria Paola Colombo Svevo (PPE, Italy)

said it needed strengthening. The Committee called for further measures to assess pay levels, information campaigns to raise awareness about equal pay and the inclusion in the new Treaty of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

### Gender and development

Increased financial and human resources as well as a strong dose of political will is needed if gender issues are to be successfully integrated into all EU development co-operation policies, according to Lissy Gröner (PSE, Germany). She was reporting to the Committee on Women's Rights on the Commission's Communication and Council Resolution (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 61*) on this issue. The Committee agreed that mainstreaming should be applied to all policy areas involving EU relations with developing countries, particularly trade, agriculture, water and environment policies.

### Keeping women informed

Addressing the Committee on Women's Rights in April for the first time since his appointment as Director General of DG X, Spyros Pappas said he wanted to maintain the existing good relations with Members of Parliament and to reinforce cooperation with the Committee.

He explained his objectives, especially in the framework of the Citizens First, Euro and Building Europe Together information campaigns. Attention to women as targets of these campaigns and other activities within DG X would be strengthened and a strategy put in place to promote collaboration with Member States, parliamentarians and the civil society with a view to keeping women better informed. ●

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## Women at work

Some 45% of women and 66% of men are economically active in the European Union in 1995 as a whole, according to recent statistics by Eurostat, the EU statistics office. Activity rates are calculated as the percentage of people who either have a job or are unemployed out of a population aged over 15 years.

More women are economically active in northern EU Member States such as Sweden (58.5%), Denmark (57.5%) and Finland (56.2%) than in southern states such as Italy (33.9%), Spain (35.4%) and Greece (35.5%). Eurostat suggests this is because of the greater number of part-time jobs in the northern countries. Such jobs are filled predominantly by women.

There is a clear link between women's activity rates and their educational level. The difference in activity rates for women and men aged 25 to 59 who have received higher education is only 10 percentage points (85% for women and 95% for men) while it is 34 points (52% against 86%) for the less educated. ●

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## Road safety improved

Road accidents kill an estimated 45,000 and injure some 1.6 million people each year in the EU. Young people aged between 15 and 24 are particularly vulnerable with a mortality rate of 50% to 90% higher than the general population. Pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists, who accounted for 19%, 15% and 6% respectively of road accident fatalities in 1994, are also at risk. In addition to the human suffering and social consequences, the financial cost of road accidents is enormous, with medical care, emergency services and lost output estimated at 45 billion ECU a year, or 1 million ECU for every person killed.

In an attempt to curb this, the European Commission unveiled a new programme (1997-2001) to encourage investment in road safety. It is proposing an integrated approach combining information, prevention and the treatment and reduction of the consequences of accidents. These include monitoring road safety developments in the EU, promoting better information on vehicle safety, developing traffic management computer tools and initiating campaigns warning of the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol, drugs and medicine. ●

For further information:

<http://www.europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg07/index>  
(homepage of DG VII, responsible for transport)

## 5th framework programme on research and technological development

Adopting the draft 5th framework programme for research and technological development, the European Commission made a break with the past. It wants to concentrate the EU's research drive on growth areas likely to create jobs, increase the competitiveness of European industry and improve the quality of life. Three "thematic" programmes have been selected covering the living world and the ecosystem, developing a user-friendly Information Society and promoting competitive and sustainable growth. Running across each of the thematic programmes are three horizontal programmes, aiming to promote the international role of European research, to innovate and involve SMEs in research, and to improve human potential (the quality of researchers, engineers and technicians, for example). Flexibility will be the keyword in the framework programme's management with funds set aside to respond quickly to emergencies. ●

For further information:

In CORDIS, the EU database on research and development, there is a 5th framework update:  
<http://www.cordis.lu/fifth/src/anrt.htm>

## Fresh negotiations on sexual harassment

The Social Partners are being urged by the European Commission to negotiate an EU-wide collective agreement to fight sexual harassment in the workplace. Launching the second round of negotiations, the Commission said that it would not hesitate to take further action if no progress was made at the talks to reach a negotiated agreement. The Commission asked the Partners to agree on a definition of sexual harassment, how it should be prevented and forbidden and how a system of confidential counselling could be introduced. According to the Commission, at least 30% of working women in the EU are subjected to sexual harassment and 4% of men. Only Belgium and the Netherlands have introduced comprehensive prevention measures. ●

For further information:

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## Partnership for work

How can employment and competitiveness be improved through a better organisation of work based on "high skill, high trust and high quality?" This is the central question the Commission poses to private and public sector employers and trade unions in its Green Paper "Partnership for a new organisation of work". Designed as a follow-up to Commission President Jacques Santer's Confidence Pact for Employment (see *Women of Europe Newsletter No 65*), the paper focuses on three questions: Why is there a need for a new organisation of work and how to achieve it? What policy challenges arise from this in terms of flexibility for employers and security for workers? What are the possibilities of a new partnership between all players to develop a new contractual framework for a more productive, participative and learning organisation of work? ●

For further information:

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Comments are invited by 30 November to the above address or by e-mail to [dg5-partnership@bxl.dg5.cec.be](mailto:dg5-partnership@bxl.dg5.cec.be)

## Social protection in the EU

EU Member States can and must maintain their social protection systems although these need to be improved and modernised to meet current social and economic needs. These are the conclusions of a debate launched by the Commission in October 1995 and published in a Communication "Modernising and Improving Social Protection in the EU." Certain factors have contributed to the urgent need to adapt social protection systems: the changing nature of work and employment, the ageing population and a more equal gender balance on the labour market and the changing roles of women and men. In the Communication, the Commission said Member States had no other choice but to work together to bring about the necessary changes. ●

For further information:

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