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EWL Calls for Renewed Commitment to Achieving Gender Equality in the Lisbon Strategy

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Gender equality is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. Current strong EU gender equality legislation is important but it is yet to be fully implemented. Furthermore, legislation alone cannot adequately address the structural and institutional dynamics that continue to generate inequalities between women and men in Europe. Gender equality can only be achieved with a strong and clear commitment at the highest political level.

In 2006, even with the commitments of EU Member States to the Lisbon strategy, the Growth and Jobs agenda and the existence of a binding set of European legislation concerning gender equality in employment, serious gender gaps remain in employment in practice, for example unequal pay (gender pay gap=16%), a lower employment rate (55% for women, 70% for men) and a higher risk of poverty for women, especially women from vulnerable groups.

EWL welcomes and looks forward to the successful implementation of the Commission's *Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010* in helping to achieve the Lisbon goals. Especially since the gender dimension of the Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth must be strengthened. The Roadmap reaffirms the dual approach of gender equality based on gender mainstreaming – the promotion of gender equality in all policy areas and activities – and specific measures.

Women's employment remains key to their economic autonomy and to greater equality between women and men in society as a whole. Addressing women's situation in relation to the labour market in Europe demands a multifaceted approach that counteracts the gender division of work in both the public and private sphere, combats discrimination against women in the labour market and in tax and social security systems, and values the development of sectors where women work.

Women's increased labour market participation is a major factor contributing to the success of the "growth and jobs" strategy goal to increase employment rates overall. Women are also a strength for EU productivity and competitiveness but in order to maximise this potential, the European Union and the Member States must take specific measures to facilitate women to access and remain in the labour market. Furthermore, action must be taken to ensure that high quality and full-time jobs are created in the framework of labour market reforms, as often the problem of newly created jobs is they

are mainly part-time or short-term contracts, which cannot assure a self-sustained existence for women.

EWL therefore values a Lisbon strategy that ensures a cohesive balance between the social, economic and environmental pillars within the strategy and enables the EU to offer a social, as well as an economic vision, with a clear commitment to the European social model. The refocused Growth and Jobs Lisbon strategy threatens this by prioritising an agenda of unfettered competition. This **narrowing of the Lisbon Agenda will have a negative impact upon gender equality, as well as other social objectives.**

EWL urges Governments and the EU to take action as follows:

1. National Reform Programmes must deliver on EU and Member State gender equality and employment commitments

A gender analysis of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) shows that Member State policies to support female employment and to realise gender equality are underdeveloped. For example, there are few commitments to closing employment and unemployment gender gaps. The issue of gender pay gaps is discussed more widely, but only a few propose concrete actions (DK, FR, NL and SE). In the NRPs, measures for the reconciliation of work and private life focus mainly on women and the need to strengthen the role of men in care and parental leave is not stressed. Although all NRPs address female participation in employment, the mainstreaming of gender equality is treated only superficially. Rather than being a cross-cutting issue relevant throughout the NRP, the gender dimension is limited to some specific actions.

In the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008), Part II outlines guidelines for the employment policies for the Member States, under which Guideline 18 states “Promote a life-cycle approach to work” and among other items, calls on Member States to take “*resolute action to increase female participation and reduce gender gaps in employment, unemployment and pay*” and calls for the “*better reconciliation of work and private life and the provision of accessible and affordable childcare facilities and care for dependants*”. Thus Member States have committed to increasing female employment rates and promoting gender equality. However, despite this commitment, in the National Reform Programmes the Member States generally do not explicitly develop an integrated lifecycle approach (LV, NL and the UK do).

A multifaceted approach to women’s employment is needed to reach the Lisbon strategy employment rate target for women of 60% employment by 2010. There are a number of issues that must be addressed to reach this target including the unequal sharing of unpaid work and caring responsibilities between women and men which creates unequal opportunities for women and men in paid employment; segregation of occupations and sectors of work for women and men; differences in education and training; and the way in which jobs are classified and valued. Therefore, equality between women and men in employment can only be achieved if targeted measures are undertaken **concurrently in ALL of the following areas:**

- Eliminate the gender pay gap
- Fully address gender segregation of the EU labour market
- Improve women’s job access and career progress

- Ensure policies to reconcile work and private life for women and men
- Provide care services for children/elderly and other dependant persons
- Eliminate gender stereotypes in education
- Promote equal access to education and life long learning

2. A successful streamlining of the OMC process must include a strong commitment to gender equality

EWL calls on all Member States to ensure gender mainstreaming in the new streamlining of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that covers pensions, social inclusion, health and long-term care to ensure the specific concerns of women are being taken into consideration in all aspects of the new OMC process.

Pensions

Many pension schemes in the EU Member States still leave many women with only “derived rights” based on their husband’s employment record, with the consequence that the majority of older people living in poverty are women. Ensuring a better life for older women requires addressing the structural factors contributing to inequality in pension schemes, including the organisation of care and combining family and work life, inequalities in the labour market, the gender pay gap and direct discrimination in second and third pillar pensions.

- In the context of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on pensions, EWL calls on Member States to undertake a **full study on the impact of pension reforms on women’s lives** in the EU with the following objectives in mind:
 - The individualisation of pension rights (and social security and taxation systems overall) to encourage women and men to engage in paid work, and thus earn individual economic security;
 - The development of mechanisms accommodating the employment patterns linked to society's need for the care of children and other dependant persons so that career-breaks or part-time work are considered as full-time work in the calculation of pension benefits.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

Women’s poverty and social exclusion in Europe requires specific, multiple and gendered policy responses. The persistent trend of the feminisation of poverty in European societies today demonstrates that the current framework of social protection systems, and the wide range of EU social, economic, and employment policies are not designed to meet women’s needs and differences in women’s work and life choices/opportunities as compared to men’s. Furthermore, social protection systems are oftentimes not structured to provide women with individual access to social security.

- **EWL calls on Member States to develop specific gender equality objectives and targets within the EU Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion**, including a set of policy actions to support non-traditional and one-parent families, and specific policy actions in support of groups of women which face higher risk of poverty and social exclusion such as migrant, refugee, and ethnic minority women, older women, disabled women, and lesbians.

- **EWL calls on the EU and Member States to develop EU guidelines to reform social protection systems from a gender equality perspective** in order to ensure that social protection systems better counteract women's precarious situation and meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women.

Health and Long-term Care

Although **women's health** in the EU has improved significantly over the past decade, **there are still many factors hindering gender equality in relation to health**. Gender roles and unequal gender relations interact with other social and economic variables, resulting in different and often inequitable patterns of exposure to health risk, and in differential access to and utilisation of health information, care and services.

- **EWL calls on Member States to incorporate specific EU gender equality objectives within the Open Method of Coordination in the field of health care**, including strengthening preventive programmes that promote women's health, carrying out more research on health and ill health of women, financing for equal access to healthcare services, and developing the capacity for health professionals to properly respond to women's health care needs and illnesses.

Further Development of OMC

In order to reach economic and social goals, EWL emphasizes that the EU needs a successful **European Care Strategy**, which recognises that care duties are the responsibility of women and men and which focuses on providing affordable, accessible and high quality care services, available to all women and men whatever their financial situation. A European Care Strategy will play an essential role in promoting true equality between women and men and in enabling them to reconcile their work and private lives. The EU has recognised on several occasions the importance of achieving a balance in private and working life for women and men¹. However, much remains to be done in order to change the gendered division of tasks in the home and to achieve an equal sharing of domestic and care work. This work is still carried out mostly by women due to the absence of affordable and good quality care services for dependent persons. Evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between the public expenditure allocated to social benefits (linked to the care of children and other dependent people) and women's participation in paid work.

- EWL calls on Member States to develop an Open Method of Coordination in the field of care services in order to formulate recommendations on how to meet the need for provision of care services in Europe (i.e. the organizing and financing of care for children and other dependent persons), including setting precise targets and indicators with the aim of providing childcare facilities for 90% of children from birth until mandatory school age across the EU and a sufficient level of care provision for other dependent persons by 2015. All services should meet the criteria of affordability, accessibility and good quality.

¹ For example in Council Resolution 2000/C 218/02 on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life

3. Civil Society: an active partner in achieving the Lisbon strategy goals

A renewed commitment to civil society participation and partnership is vital to achieving the Lisbon targets especially considering the enormous gap in terms of involvement of stakeholders in the adoption of the integrated guidelines, the National Reform Programmes, the Community programme and the progress report. EWL calls on Member States to support greater participation by the social partners, including NGOs, at local, national and regional level, in the development and implementation of gender equality policies, particularly in the areas of education, employment and pensions.

- EWL calls for the full implementation of the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality adopted by the European social partners, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC in March 2005.

4. Specific Gender Equality reporting mechanisms are essential to realise gender equality commitments at EU and Member State level

To **enhance the Lisbon strategy reporting mechanisms in order to ensure advancement and implementation of gender equality measures**, EWL calls on the Spring Council to implement a reporting mechanism for gender equality that includes:

- When reporting on the implementation of their National Reform Programmes for Growth and Jobs, Member States must include a section outlining the specific measures that have been taken to advance gender equality, especially concerning Guideline 18;
- The Commission and the Council must also include a section on gender equality in the Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon strategy; and
- A strengthened role of the Annual Report on Equality between Women and Men in the follow up to the implementation of the Lisbon Process.

To supplement reporting mechanisms of the Lisbon strategy, EWL calls on the Member States to **continue developing key indicators to assess the progress** of equality between women and men in all areas and, to this end, to collect adequate, consistent and comparable statistics on a regular basis, broken down by gender and age, and conduct a detailed analysis thereof.

5. Promote Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making

Women are still under-represented in all European Union decision-making bodies, in political decision-making in EU Member States and in economic and social decision-making. Women's persistent under-representation in political, economic and social decision-making is a democratic deficit. Women's active citizenship and participation in politics and senior management public administration at all levels (local, regional, national, European) should be further promoted.

- EWL calls on Member States to promote an equal participation of women and men in decision-making in the economic and social sector.

- EWL calls on Member States to promote the active participation of women in politics through public campaigns that encourage political parties to place women candidates in winnable seats on the electoral lists.

6. European Pact for Gender Equality: A Tool for Achieving Gender Equality in the Lisbon strategy

The European Women's Lobby strongly supports the initiative of the Swedish, French, Spanish, Finnish, Czech and Danish governments for the **European Pact for Gender Equality**. EWL believes that such an initiative will enhance the political will to fully achieve the Growth and Jobs agenda as higher female employment will lead to greater gender equality but it will also increase economic output and help to meet the economic and financial challenges of an ageing population. Considering that commitments to support female employment and to realise gender equality are underdeveloped in the National Reform Programmes, the European Pact for Gender Equality is urgently needed to ensure that women and men can participate equally and fully in the labour market and contribute equally to society at large.

- EWL expects **all European Union Member State governments to endorse the European Pact for Gender Equality**.

It is essential that Member State governments remain accountable to uphold their commitments to equality between women and men. EWL calls on all Member States to uphold their strong commitments to increasing the female labour participation rates and to gender equality by renewing efforts to fully implement current EU and Member State policies on gender equality in employment and in particular fully implementing the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs (2005-2008), Guideline 18 to "Promote a life-cycle approach to work". As part of the Member State commitment to these measures, the European Women's Lobby expects the governments of Europe to sign the European Gender Equality Pact and to include this Pact as an annex to the Spring Council Conclusions. This document highlights the importance of particular measures that must be taken in order to reach the Lisbon strategy target of 70% employment rates for women by 2010. EWL strongly believes that bold and concerted effort and actions in the area of women and employment will make a serious impact on improving EU employment rates and the EU economy and will make a better and more equal life for women and men in Europe.