



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from : Working Party on Social Questions
to : Permanent Representatives Committee (Part I) / Council EPSCO

Subject : **Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions
of the Beijing Platform for Action**
- **Indicators in respect of Women and Poverty**
= **Draft Council Conclusions**

In the context of the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted during the United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995, the Portuguese Presidency has chosen to work on the subject of "Women and Poverty" and has produced a report including a set of indicators.

Delegations will find attached in the Annex draft Council Conclusions on which agreement was reached at the level of the Working Party on Social Questions on 12 October 2007. The accompanying report from the Portuguese Presidency will be forwarded separately as Addendum 1 to this document.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

**on the review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the
Beijing Platform for Action**

Women and Poverty

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. RECOGNISING that:

- (a) gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the EC Treaty and one of the objectives and tasks of the Community and that mainstreaming equality between women and men in all its activities represents a specific mission for the Community;
- (b) gender equality policies are essential instruments for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness and thus for the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment;
- (c) poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and gender inequality is one of its key factors, as women are more vulnerable to income poverty than men. In 2005, in the EU-25, nearly 15% of men were at risk of poverty as compared with 17% of women. This gender gap is also found at the national level in most of the Member States and it increases with age due to women's lower participation in the labour market; career interruptions often linked to family reasons; discrimination on the labour market; the gender pay gap; and the incidence of part-time work and low quality employment;

- (d) women are more affected than men by persistent and extreme poverty, and those who belong to groups that face particular barriers or who are subjected to marginalisation, such as women heads of single-parent households, immigrant women, ethnic minorities, older single women, women with disabilities, and long-term-unemployed and inactive women, face a higher poverty risk than their male counterparts, due in particular to gender stereotypes, labour market segregation and multiple discrimination;
- (e) although efforts to address gender equality concerns in the National Action Plans for Inclusion have led to progress in this area in the EU, the link between gender issues and women's poverty is not yet fully understood. The gender perspective can be further developed in the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

2. CONSIDERING that:

Following the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Madrid European Council (15 and 16 December 1995) requested an annual review of the implementation in the Member States of the Beijing Platform for Action, and subsequently:

- (a) on 2 December 1998, the Council agreed that the annual assessment of the implementation of the Platform for Action would include a proposal on a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks;
- (b) since 1999, sets of quantitative and qualitative indicators have been developed by subsequent Presidencies in some of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action, namely: Women in power and decision-making (1999); Women in the economy (reconciliation of work and family life) (2000); Women in the economy (equal pay) (2001); Violence against women (2002); Women and men in economic decision-making (2003); Sexual harassment at the workplace (2004); Women and health, (2006); Institutional mechanisms (2006) and the Education and training of Women (2007). Each year the Council has adopted conclusions on these indicators;

- (c) in line with the European Council of 20 and 21 March 2003, the Commission prepares, in collaboration with the EU Member States, an annual report to the Spring European Council on developments towards gender equality and orientations for the gender mainstreaming of policy areas;
- (d) in the context of the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action, the EU ministers responsible for gender equality and gender mainstreaming, meeting in Luxembourg on 4 February 2005, adopted a common declaration which, *inter alia*, reaffirms their strong support for and commitment to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action;
- (e) in June 2005, the Council invited Member States and the Commission to strengthen institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality and to create a framework to assess the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in order to create a more consistent and systematic monitoring of progress and invited the Commission to include the assessment of relevant indicators, developed for the follow-up of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, in its annual report to the Spring European Council;
- (f) the Beijing Platform for Action presents a holistic definition of poverty among women, highlighting the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the phenomenon, thus stressing that poverty among women and social exclusion cannot be understood solely in economic terms, but must also be seen as the result of a lack of resources in various domains, which deprives women of their basic human rights by denying them “the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations¹”.

¹ Beijing Declaration, paragraph 12. in:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html>.

The Portuguese EU Presidency has prepared a report presenting the following three indicators aimed at monitoring and evaluating progresses achieved in the critical area of “Women and poverty”, as a contribution to an analysis of the gender dimension of poverty and of the situation of women in this critical area:

PW1. At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex

This is a “classical” poverty measure and a Laeken indicator, defined as the percentage of persons below the monetary poverty line, defined as 60% of the median national adult-equivalent household disposable income of each Member State. This is an indicator of poverty of high relevance for analysis, as it provides information on household income scarcity and integrates important elements about the phenomenon of poverty as related to *personal attributes*, such as age (which reflects the lifecycle perspective) and sex (which emphasises the gender dimension).

PW2: At-risk-of-poverty rate by type of household and sex, including at-risk-of-poverty rate of single parents with dependent children

This is another indicator based on the same poverty measure. It emphasizes those *household attributes* that have a particular impact on poverty among women, such as single parenthood and household size.

The number of single parents has been increasing across the EU and they face a particular risk of suffering from poverty. In 2005 the incidence of poverty for single-parent families with dependent children was 32%. EUROSTAT statistics from 2005 show that 85% of single-parent families are headed by women, which cumulatively increases their vulnerability to poverty when taking into account the poverty exposure gap by gender.

PW3. *Inactivity by age and sex*

- a) share of women and men who are inactive by age
- b) share of inactive women and men who are not looking for a job for family care reasons

Employment is a key factor for social inclusion and offers the most important means of escaping the poverty cycle. Being employed and earning wages is crucial for the economic independence of women and men; therefore, those events that may lead women and men of working age to interrupt their working lives or not to participate in the labour market can generate a risk of potential poverty. The responsibility for family care still falls mainly on women, in part due to social stereotypes regarding women's and men's roles in the family and society.

This indicator focuses mainly on the differences between women and men with regard to the interruption of their working lives and inactivity for family care reasons. Inactivity and the interruption of working life may reflect personal preferences. However, due to the above-mentioned gender imbalances, the interruption of working life or inactivity for family care reasons can act as women-specific factors that may generate a loss of economic independence and, later in the lifecycle, a lower level of social protection (lower pensions). This indicator also sheds light on the factors of poverty at an individual level inside the household.

3. RECALLING:

- (a) the commitment of the Member States and the European Commission to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010, considering that building a more inclusive European Union is an essential element in achieving the Union's ten-year strategic goal of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, in the context of the Lisbon Strategy (2000), and also recalling the Council's invitation to the Member States at Barcelona in March 2002 to set targets "for significantly reducing the numbers of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion".

- (b) that the promotion of equality between men and women is an overarching common objective of the Open Method of Coordination for social protection and social inclusion and that a gender perspective should be mainstreamed in all the three strands and thus in all actions and policies presented by Member States in their National Reports on Strategies for social protection and social inclusion;
- (c) the commitment that the Member States made at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, to give special priority to the needs and rights of women and children, who often bear the greatest burden of poverty;
- (d) that promoting gender equality in social protection and in the fight against poverty are priority areas of action set out in the Commission's Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010², as adopted on 1 March 2006, in order to achieve equal economic independence for women and men;
- (e) the list of 18 indicators of social exclusion and poverty endorsed by common agreement at the Laeken European Council of December 2001, revised and expanded by the Member States in 2006, and the potential of these indicators to provide a comprehensive picture of poverty and deprivation;
- (f) that the Member States are committed to generating data disaggregated by sex as well as information for the evaluation of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Member States, and that the Open Method of Coordination for social protection and social inclusion stresses that "the work on indicators should aim to better support the monitoring of policy outcomes, including how they impact on women and men and families. Indicators to monitor deprivation also need to be strengthened"³.

² Doc. 7034/06.

³ Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Working together, working better: A new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union". 3.5. Working arrangements: indicators. Page 9.

4. TAKES NOTE of the report on women and poverty presented by the Portuguese EU Presidency and of the three indicators for the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action regarding this critical area;
5. STRESSES that gender stereotypes persist in education, training, in the labour market, in the media and in culture at large, leading to vertical and horizontal segregation in the labour market, to an unequal share of family responsibilities between women and men, to gender inequality in resource access and disposal, to an unbalanced representation in decision-making and to the curtailment of women's power to defend their interests, increasing the risk of poverty for girls and women;
6. URGES the Commission and the Member States to reinforce the systematic implementation and monitoring of a gender mainstreaming perspective in the Open Method of Coordination for social protection and social inclusion, including in the National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion and the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, identifying the specific needs of women and men respectively in situations of poverty and the consequences of poverty in their own life, the life of children and society as a whole, and to adopt appropriate national and EU policy responses;
7. ENCOURAGES the further identification, adoption and monitoring by the Commission and the Member States of gender-specific indicators in the field of poverty eradication and the promotion of social inclusion, and URGES the Member States and the Commission to further develop statistical capacity within the EU, in the context of the Open Method of Coordination process on social protection and social inclusion focused on the individuals in the household, in order to address the gendered nature of poverty and monitor the impact of policies upon women and men alike;
8. URGES Member States and the Commission to further develop statistics measuring material deprivation in the context of the EU-Survey on Income and Living Conditions and to include a gender perspective to better measure and monitor the material deprivation of women and men, including with the support of the European Institute for Gender Equality;

9. ENCOURAGES the Member States and the Commission to undertake research on the poverty of women and men in all relevant contexts, including, where appropriate, migrant or ethnic background and urban/rural location, with a view to drafting policies aimed at promoting social and professional inclusion;
10. WELCOMES the Commission's recent Manual for Gender Mainstreaming of Employment Policies⁴; URGES the preparation of a manual for monitoring and strengthening gender mainstreaming in the streamlined Open Method of Coordination, and CALLS on the Member States to use such guidance in preparing their National Reform Programs as well as the National Reports on Strategies for social protection and social inclusion, and to disseminate such guidance documents as widely as possible among the stakeholders concerned, at both EU and Member State level;
11. WELCOMES the Communication of the Commission on "Tackling the pay gap between women and men"⁵ and URGES the Member States to adopt comprehensive strategies to reduce the gender pay gap, in cooperation with all actors concerned, paying particular attention to the promotion of quality of employment, to the low level of wages in occupations and sectors which tend to employ more women and to the reasons which lead to reduced average earnings in such occupations and sectors;
12. ENCOURAGES the Member States to analyse the gender impact of their social protection systems, in particular when undergoing reforms, in order to ensure that they are not discriminatory, and that they are transparent and well adapted to the needs and aspirations of women and men;
13. STRESSES that women with disabilities face a higher poverty risk than their male counterparts or women without disabilities;

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/docs/2007/manual_gend_mainstr_en.pdf

⁵ Doc. 12169/07.

14. URGES the European Institute for Gender Equality and INVITES the Member States to promote in-depth analysis of existing data from a gender perspective, as well as research, indicators and methodology on the issue of gender and poverty, thus ensuring that policies aimed at addressing poverty and social inclusion take gender equality into account;
15. URGES the Commission and the Member States to promote activities addressing the issue of women's poverty and the participation of women's associations, and to ensure gender mainstreaming in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2010 European Year of Combating Exclusion and Poverty;
16. INVITES the Member States to take targeted action to ensure equal access for all women and men, including disadvantaged women, to affordable health care services, reproductive health care, decent housing, access to legal protection, education, training, life-long learning, sport and culture, and in particular URGES the Member States to take action to prevent the premature abandonment of schooling and to facilitate a smooth transition from school to the labour market;
17. WELCOMES the fact that one of the issues tackled at the Sixth Round Table on Poverty⁶ was women's poverty, ENCOURAGES the Member States to involve the social partners, NGOs and in particular women's NGOs and associations at a national, regional and local level, in policy development and implementation in the area of poverty and social inclusion, and to increase research on the risk of poverty among older women and women responsible for the care of sick, elderly and disabled members of the family;

⁶ The Sixth European Round Table on Poverty. "Minimum Social Standards: A Strategy for Protection and Empowerment." Ponta Delgada - São Miguel, Azores, Portugal, 16-17 October 2007.

18. URGES the Member States to adopt appropriate policies to reconcile work, family and private life and to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the targets of the Barcelona European Council 2002 in the field of childcare facilities; and ENCOURAGES the Member States to take the conditions of both single parents and two-parent families into consideration when outlining childcare services and flexible forms of employment, with the purpose of facilitating the reconciliation of work, family and private life for women and men;
19. ENCOURAGES the monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on “The girl child” and “Women and armed conflicts”;
20. URGES the Member States and the Commission to take into account the issues discussed in the context of the follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action, for which indicators have already been adopted, in other Community processes, where appropriate, and INVITES the Member States and the Commission to regularly review progress on those issues, through the annual Report on equality between women and men, where appropriate, and through thematic reviews starting with “Women and decision making” and “The reconciliation of work, family and private life”.
