Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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The wage gap between women and men

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Discrimination against women in the labour market has a long history – and so have efforts to fight this discrimination. One of the key principles in this domain, the right to equal pay for equal work, was already enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which founded the European Economic Community. Subsequently, this right was enlarged and the right to equal pay for work of equal value was enshrined in the Council of Europe's 1961 European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) (as well as in the 1996 revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163)) and in the 1975 European Community Directive 75/117/EEC devoted to the subject.

2. Despite the recognition of this fundamental right, the wage gap between women and men, measured as the "relative difference in average gross hourly earnings between women and men", is estimated to be 17.4% in the European Union at the moment – and even higher worldwide. Measured over a lifetime rather than on the basis of hourly earnings, the wage gap grows wider still, which explains the feminisation of poverty (in particular for single mothers and elderly women).

3. Several factors are put forward to explain the wage gap between women and men: horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market (commonly referred to as "glass walls" and "glass ceilings"), women's supposedly lower qualifications and lesser experience, and their atypical working hours and career structures due to childbirth and care responsibilities. However, over half of the typical gender wage gap cannot be objectively explained through such "structural" factors and is, in reality, due to the persistence of old-fashioned discrimination against women: differences in access to education, training and the labour market itself; biased evaluation, pay and promotion systems, as well as nefarious gender stereotypes and outdated gender roles.

4. It is unacceptable that, over sixty years after the right to equal pay was first proclaimed, this right remains so widely and systematically violated, without even receiving much attention. The elimination of the wage gap between women and men should be considered as a priority, in both the public and private sectors. This would not only remedy a deep-seated social injustice, but would also significantly boost productivity, competitiveness and national income throughout the European economies, as well as reduce governments' social expenditure.

5. The Parliamentary Assembly believes that there is a link between the gender wage gap and gender equality in other spheres – such as equal rights and opportunities for girls and boys; equal participation of women and men in political, public and economic decision making and a fairer sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men – and that progress in one sphere has the power to influence progress in the other sphere and vice versa. The Assembly refers to a number of resolutions and recommendations it has recently adopted on these subjects (in particular Resolution 1669 (2009) and Recommendation 1872 (2009) on the rights of today's girls: the rights of tomorrow's women), stresses their continued validity and calls for their full implementation.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee,* acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 12 March 2010 (see Doc. 12140, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mr Wille; and Doc. 12151, opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Konečný). See also Recommendation 1907 (2010).

6. The Assembly recommends that member states:

6.1. ensure that the right to equal pay for work of equal value is enshrined in their domestic legislation, if this is not already the case; that employers are obliged to respect this right (and incur penalties if they do not) and that employees can have recourse to the judicial process to pursue their claims with regard to this right, without incurring risks to their employment;

6.2. collect reliable and standardised statistics on women's and men's wages, not only on the basis of gross hourly earnings, but also over the lifecycle;

6.3. promote fair job classification and remuneration systems, including in the private sector, by:

6.3.1. opening discussions with the social partners to eliminate discrimination in job value and job classification between men and women;

6.3.2. starting discussions with the social partners to raise the status of "women's" sectors;

6.4. aim to increase women's labour market participation rate and work against the pitfall of part-time work by encouraging all measures seeking to improve the care of children and the elderly outside the home, and a more equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men;

6.5. follow the Norwegian and Icelandic models, and a recent French initiative, which require that a minimum of 40% of members of certain companies' boards be female, as an enabling factor;

6.6. file an annual progress report with their parliaments on 8 March, International Women's Day, indicating the progress of consultations with the social partners and the reduction of the gender wage gap and of segregation in the labour market, until such time as discrimination in job value and job classification and the gender wage gap and segregation in the labour market have been eliminated.

7. The Assembly calls on the social partners, employers' associations and trade unions, to respect and defend the right to equal pay for work of equal value, *inter alia* by promoting and adopting fair and transparent job classification systems and wage scales.