

Regulatory framework for measures to reconcile family life and a period of study for young women in the European Union

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an initiative the report by Marie **PANAYOTOPOULOS-CASSIOTOU** (EPP-ED, EL) on a regulatory framework for measures enabling young women in the European Union to combine family life with a period of studies. In doing so, it points out that education and training for girls and women is a human right and an essential element of the full enjoyment of all other social, economic, cultural and political rights.

In education and research, women outnumber men as graduates (59%), yet their presence decreases consistently as they progress up the career ladder, from 43% of PhD candidates down to only 15% of professors. Bearing this in mind, the committee encourages the Commission and the Member States to promote policies which make it easier to combine studying, training and family life, which support the balanced assumption of family responsibilities by young people without any form of discrimination.

Amongst other recommendations, the Parliamentary committee invites the Member States to:

- to be more aware of the situation of young men and women who have family responsibilities in addition to being in education or training, and particularly to make resources available to them that suit to their needs;
- to set up social services to promote for promoting personal independence and to provide care for people who are dependent upon others;
- to offer affordable 'student insurance', and in particular social and medical cover, which could be extended to the student's dependents;
- to simplify and facilitate the provision of loans on beneficial terms to young men and women who are combining family responsibilities with a period of study or training;
- to reduce or put an end to the taxation of young men and women who both study and work and who have family responsibilities or responsibilities towards dependants;
- to adopt, in partnership with local authorities and higher education and vocational training institutions, the necessary measures to enable students who are also parents to live in housing that is suited to their needs and to have access to sufficient and adequate childcare under the same eligibility criteria as working parents; calls on the Member States to make full use of the possibilities provided by Community funds and in particular the ESF in this area;
- to ensure that all students with children have access to, and can afford to use, quality local authority /State nursery schools;
- to ensure that all students with older children have access to and can afford to use qualitative after-school facilities;
- to relieve young people, particularly women, of the main responsibility for caring for dependents so that those women have the opportunity to study;
- in association with higher education and vocational training establishments, to propose more flexible ways of organising study courses, for example by increasing the provision of distance learning and the possibilities for part-time study;

The **higher education and vocational training establishments** are encouraged to:

- to ensure that pregnant students and mothers of young children enjoy equal treatment and non-discrimination in terms of access to, the continuation of and the return to education, and to take particular account of their needs;
- to make more use of flexible learning techniques enabled by new technology and to make these available to all young people in education or training, particularly those with family responsibilities and persons with disabilities;
- to set up childcare services on their premises and calls on the Member States to support initiatives of this kind;
- to make their teaching and other staff aware of the particular needs of students with responsibility for others, and if necessary to set up support and advisory services to make it easy for them to start, continue or return to a course of higher education or vocational training;
- to take account of the financial situation of young men and women who have family responsibilities when calculating course fees, and encourages them to provide appropriate assistance.

The committee calls on the **Member States, the Council and the Commission**, in the Open Coordination Method and meetings of education ministers and social services ministers, that they exchange best practice with regard to support for students with family responsibilities and to take account of innovative arrangements in this area which some European countries have introduced.

Lastly, it calls on the Member States to continue to seek to expand and promote professional training for persons with family responsibilities and those from marginalised or minority groups, so as to enable them to avoid long-term unemployment and to ensure that they have equal access to the labour market.