

Procedure file

Basic information	
INI - Own-initiative procedure	2008/2038(INI)
Procedure completed	
How marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men	
Subject 4.10.04 Gender equality 4.60.02 Consumer information, advertising, labelling	

Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	FEMM Women's Rights and Gender Equality		
European Commission	Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion	Commissioner ŠPIDLA Vladimír	

Key events			
21/02/2008	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
27/05/2008	Vote in committee		Summary
29/05/2008	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0199/2008	
02/09/2008	Debate in Parliament		
03/09/2008	Results of vote in Parliament		
03/09/2008	Decision by Parliament	T6-0401/2008	Summary
03/09/2008	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2008/2038(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Procedure subtype	Initiative
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 54
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	FEMM/6/59437

Documentation gateway			

Committee draft report	PE404.565	27/03/2008	EP	
Amendments tabled in committee	PE405.851	23/04/2008	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading	A6-0199/2008	29/05/2008	EP	
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading	T6-0401/2008	03/09/2008	EP	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2008)6073	17/10/2008	EC	
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2008)6486	17/12/2008	EC	

How marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report drafted by Eva-Britt SVENSSON (GUE/NGL, SE), on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men.

First of all, MEPs note the continued widespread existence of male and female stereotypes despite various Community programmes to promote gender equality. They believe that further research would help elucidate any link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality. They emphasise that gender stereotypes must be eliminated.

The main issues of this report are as follows:

Better respect of legislation: Member States should respect the commitments they undertook through the European Pact for Gender Equality and adhere to the guidelines adopted through various Community programmes and guidelines focussing on gender equality. The Commission is called upon to monitor the implementation of existing provisions in European law on sex discrimination and incitement to hatred on the grounds of sex.

Zero tolerance: MEPs call on the EU institutions and Member States to develop awareness actions on zero tolerance across the EU for sexist insults or degrading images of women in the media. They call on Member States to establish national media monitoring bodies with a specific gender equality branch and expertise in order to receive complaints from the public, to grant gender equality awards to media and advertisement professionals, to study and report on the question of women in the media and to carry out regular, systematic monitoring of gender images in media content. In addition, research may be undertaken by the future European Gender Institute.

Gender stereotyping: MEPs note that stereotyping is utilised in marketing directed at both adults and children. They stress that stereotypes in advertising on children's television programmes are a special problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves, family members and the outside world. To combat gender stereotypes in the media and advertising, MEPs call for efforts to be accompanied by education strategies and measures to cultivate awareness from an early age and develop the critical faculties as from adolescence. They stress the fundamental role which should be played by the school system in developing children's critical faculties with regard to images and the media in general, in order to prevent the disastrous effects of the recurrence of gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising. They believe that there is a need to eliminate messages contrary to human dignity and conveying gender stereotypes from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, Internet and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs), as well as advertising through different types of media.

Media to blame?: noting with extreme concern the advertising of sexual services, which reinforce stereotypes of women as objects, MEPs stress the importance of the role played by the media in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. They call on the EU institutions and Member States to comply with and/or establish ethical codes and/or legal rules applicable to creators and distributors of advertising concerning the concepts of discriminatory advertising and demanding respect for values of human dignity. The report notes the need to conduct continuous training actions for media professionals and, in collaboration with them, awareness training actions for society on the negative effects of gender stereotypes. It highlights that media portrayals of the ideal body image can adversely affect the self-esteem of women, particularly teenagers and those susceptible to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. It recommends that broadcasters, magazine publishers and advertisers adopt a more responsible editorial attitude towards the depiction of extremely thin women as role models and portray a more realistic range of body images.

Codes of good conduct: MEPs call on the Member States to ensure by appropriate means that marketing and advertising guarantee respect for human dignity and the integrity of the person, are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory nor contain any incitement to hatred based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and do not contain material which, judged in its context, sanctions, promotes or glorifies violence against women. They note that the codes of conduct in the mass media and new information and communications technologies (ICTs) rarely include gender considerations, and that this is a problem that needs to be solved. MEPs encourage regulators in all Member States to share best practice with regard to these issues. A 'Code of Conduct' should be developed for advertising in which marketing communications respect the principle of equality between men and women and in which sex stereotyping and any exploitation or demeaning of men and women are avoided.

Follow best practices: MEPs consider that all Member States should, like Spain, which has established a prize for 'creating equality', make official the award of a prize by advertisers to members of their own industry, and a prize awarded by the public, to reward advertising which best breaks with gender stereotypes. They underline the need to disseminate the principles of gender equality through the media by means of publications and programmes, designed for different age groups, to popularize best practices and respect for gender differences. Member States are called upon to design and launch educational initiatives, developed in the spirit of tolerance and eschewing all forms of stereotyping, which significantly disparages the relationship between men and women, to promote the culture of gender equality by means of appropriate educational programmes.

How marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men

The European Parliament adopted by 504 votes to 110, with 22 abstentions, a resolution on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men.

The own initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Eva-Britt SVENSSON (GUE/NGL, SE) on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

Above all, the Parliament emphasises the importance of giving women and men the same opportunities to develop as individuals. It then notes the continued widespread existence of male and female stereotypes despite various Community programmes to promote gender equality. To discover more on this issue, the Parliament calls for further research into the matter with the aim of elucidating any link between gender stereotyping in advertising and gender inequality and asks that the results of this research be disseminated as widely as possible.

Better respect of legislation: Member States should respect the commitments they undertook through the European Pact for Gender Equality and adhere to the guidelines focussing on gender equality. The Council and the Commission are called upon to monitor the implementation of existing provisions of Community law on sex discrimination and incitement to hatred on the grounds of sex.

Combating sexist insults: the plenary calls on the Council, the Commission and Member States to develop awareness-raising actions against sexist insults or degrading images of women and men in advertising and marketing. It also calls on the Member States to study and report on the image of women and men in advertising and marketing. A whole series of actions have been proposed to combat gender stereotypes, including through education and awareness-raising. The Parliament stresses that stereotypes in advertising on children's television programmes are a particular problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves, of their family members and of the outside world. It notes that efforts to combat gender stereotypes in the media and advertising should be accompanied by education strategies and measures to cultivate awareness from an early age and to develop critical faculties from adolescence onwards. The Parliament stresses, in particular, the fundamental role which should be played by the education system in developing children's critical faculties with regard to images and the media in general, in order to prevent the unwelcome effects of the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising.

Stereotypes in textbooks and computer games: the Plenary draws particular attention to the need to eliminate from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, the internet and the new information and communications technologies (ICTs), and from advertising through different types of media, messages which are contrary to human dignity and which convey gender stereotypes. It notes with particular concern the advertising of sexual services which reinforces stereotypes of women as objects, in publications which are readily visible and available to children.

Media to blame: the Parliament condemns the major role played by the media in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Beyond that, the Parliament notes the need to challenge traditional gender roles in order to achieve gender equality as well as the need to conduct continuous training for and in collaboration with media professionals, and awareness training for society on the negative effects of gender stereotypes. Given that the use of television and new technologies is increasing among children and adolescents, that such use starts at a very early age and that unsupervised television viewing is on the rise, the Parliament calls on the Member States to ensure, by appropriate means, that marketing and advertising guarantee respect for human dignity and the integrity of the person, are neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory nor contain any incitement to hatred based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, and do not contain material which, judged in its context, sanctions, promotes or glamorises violence against women. The Parliament also notes that marketing and advertising portrayals of the ideal body image can adversely affect the self-esteem of teenagers (and can lead to anorexia and bulimia). The plenary therefore calls on advertisers to consider carefully their use of extremely thin women to advertise products. At the same time, the Parliament reminds the Commission that Council Directive 2004/113/EC, when first proposed by the Commission, also covered discrimination in the media. It therefore calls on the Commission to intensify its efforts against this discrimination.

Set an example: the media are called upon to set an example from a gender perspective to show that change is possible and desirable. The Parliament considers that Member States should formally establish awards given by advertisers to their peers, and by the public for advertising which best breaks with gender stereotypes and presents a positive or affirming image of women and men and of the relations between them.

Best practices: the Parliament emphasises the need to disseminate the principles of gender equality through the media by means of publications and programmes, designed for different age groups, to popularise best practice and respect for gender differences. It emphasises the need for an ongoing debate on marketing and advertising and their role in creating and perpetuating gender stereotypes. It also calls on the Member States to design and launch educational initiatives developed in a spirit of tolerance and eschewing all forms of stereotyping. In conclusion, the Parliament emphasises that gender stereotypes must be eliminated. Note that the plenary did not accept the committee's proposals calling on the Commission and the Member States to establish a code of conduct and more severe ethical and legal rules on this matter.