

Equality between women and men in the European Union in 2018-2020

2021/2020(INI) - 08/11/2021 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Womens Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Sandra PEREIRA (GUE/NGL, PT) on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2018-2020.

Womens rights are human rights and thus universal and indivisible, as enshrined in the Treaty on European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The struggle for gender equality and the promotion and protection of womens rights is a truly collective responsibility that requires faster progress and efforts by EU institutions and Member States.

The EU and its Member States must aim to combat inequalities and discrimination based on gender and sex, promote gender equality, and guarantee equal rights and treatment for women and men in all their diversity, as well as ensure that they have equal power and opportunities to shape society and their own lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly affected womens lives and exacerbated existing gender inequalities in almost every respect.

A gender-equal economy

Members stressed that respect for the right to work, as well as equal pay and equal treatment, is an essential precondition for womens equal rights, economic independence and career fulfilment. They called on the Commission and the Member States to promote policies that aim to eliminate precarious work and involuntary part-time work in order to improve the situation for women in the labour market. Member States should tackle inequalities between men and women through policies that enhance the value of work, wages, labour conditions, and the living conditions of all workers and their families.

Moreover, the report stressed the importance for Member States to impose firm measures, including sanctions, when businesses fail to comply with labour legislation against gender discrimination and gender bias. The Commission and the Council are called on to ensure that all budget appropriations under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework respect the principle of equality between men and women and promote gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in all EU policies.

The eradication of gender-based violence

The report underlined the need to combat the exploitation, inequalities, discrimination and violence affecting women, noting that harassment in the workplace leads to women being excluded from their chosen careers and sectors and constitutes a serious assault on their psychological and physical health. Members urged the EU and its Member States to devise Me Too legislation to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

Members also noted that inequalities and economic and social pressures caused by COVID-19 lockdown measures, which entailed restrictions on movement and social isolation, led to an increase in violence against women with domestic violence increasing by as much as 30 % in some Member States during the first lockdown.

Stressing that sexual exploitation constitutes a serious form of violence affecting mostly women and children, Members highlighted the need for Member States to ensure adequate funding for social and psychological support and access to public services for victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation and specialised services dedicated to the social inclusion of vulnerable women and girls. Member States are urged to implement the Anti-Trafficking Directive in full and to desist from imprisoning or deporting potential victims as a matter of urgency.

Health, education, inclusion and poverty

The report noted that access to sexual, reproductive and other forms of healthcare for women is a fundamental right. Sexual and reproductive health and rights services are essential healthcare services that should be available to all, including migrant and refugee women. Member States are called on to tackle sexism and harmful gender stereotypes in their education systems and to combat gendered labour market segmentation in careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Female participation in sporting activities should also be promoted.

Lastly, Members called for gender equality to be mainstreamed into all policymaking and to carry out gender impact assessments when setting up any new policy to help ensure a more coherent and evidence-based EU policy response to gender equality challenges.