

# Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

## Ad-hoc opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

30 October 2014

On 19 June 2014, under the Hellenic Presidency, the Council of Employment, Social Policy and Health Ministers (EPSCO) adopted Conclusions on "Women and the economy: Economic independence from the perspective of part-time work and self-employment". These Conclusions call upon the Commission and the Member States to provide for a "pillar" on gender equality within the Europe 2020 governance framework and list factual elements on which it shall be based, such as the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and the Joint Employment Report (JER).

On July 2014, 21 ministers responsible for gender equality (supported by the Italian Presidency) sent a letter to President José Manuel Barroso urging the Commission to put a stronger emphasis on gender equality within the Europe 2020 Strategy. The ministers call for a reinforced gender perspective into all policy areas of the Strategy and in existing tools of the European Semester.

The Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) delivered a joint opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy on October 3, 2014, presented with a view to the session of the EPSCO Council on 16 October 2014. It also states that gender equality deserves more prominence in a revised Europe 2020 Strategy.

The Social Protection Committee (SPC) in particular points out that women and men should benefit equally from the Member States' investments in all relevant policy fields in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Based on the wording of the Council conclusions and the ministers' letter, as well as on the joint EMCO-SPC opinion, **this ad-hoc opinion aims to respond to the public consultation carried out by the Commission on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy.**

It should also be noted that in the previous public consultation opened by the Commission on the "future Europe 2020 strategy" in 2009, specific and documented references to gender equality were given by 16 member states. The Advisory Committee also answered to the consultation, by giving an ad-hoc opinion.

The Advisory Committee thus urges the Commission, during this consultation, to better take into consideration the opinions from the Member States and the Advisory Committee.

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***Do you think that the Europe 2020 Strategy has made a difference? What are the most important and relevant areas to be addressed in order to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth?***

The results of Europe 2020 Strategy are mixed. A stronger gender equality focus is especially required for the employment target and the poverty-reduction target.

The target of an employment rate of 75% of all 20-64 year-old men and women cannot be reached without a substantial effort on female employment. The average employment rate for women aged 20-64 in the EU 28 is currently 63% and only slowly progressing.<sup>1</sup> These data also mask the lower levels of attachment of women to the labour market, due to part time employment. Adjusted to whole time equivalents (WTE), employment rate is 71.9% for

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<sup>1</sup> Report on Progress on equality between women and men 2013; SWD(2014)142

men and 53.6% for women (Eurostat, 2013)<sup>2</sup>. Women are still at a disadvantage as they tend to be more often employed with atypical forms of contracts and in low-paid jobs; they continue to bear the burden of unpaid work in the home.

Apart from reaching the pure numeric target, a high employment rate for women and a strong attachment of women to the labour market is desirable not only from a gender equality point of view but also as an important condition for smart and sustainable growth and the well-being of individuals and of the society as a whole. The growth of the European economy is built and dependent on smart and balanced innovation. Over 50% of all university students are women. A smart European economy cannot afford to lose the creative and productive potential of a big share of its highly educated population.

Furthermore, being in better employment is a precondition for economic independence during the life-course. More women in employment means, in turn, more women being able to provide for themselves and for their families and less people at risk of poverty or solely depending on social benefits. A higher female employment rate and more women in better employment are not only beneficial for reaching the poverty-reduction target of the Europe 2020 strategy but are also crucial for the long-term sustainability of social security systems that need the contributions of a broad working population of men and women alike.

A higher female employment rate and greater gender equality focus are thus driving forces for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and for reaching the targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

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***Are targets useful? Do you find it useful that EU-level targets are broken down into national targets?***

Despite the concept of gender mainstreaming, the equality between women and men has not been included in the Europe 2020 Strategy as a goal per se. It is not an explicit objective of the Strategy, nor is it of the European Semester. Yet, the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020, adopted by the EPSCO council in 2011, simultaneously encourages Member States to apply a gender equality perspective and to promote gender equality policies when developing and implementing their national reform programmes (NRPs). The European Pact also invites the Commission and the Council to incorporate a gender equality perspective in the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs).

The EU2020 targets play their role as policy anchors. Member States translated EU targets into their own targets at national level. Their existence allows for a transparent cross comparison, across themes and countries, although the degree of visibility given to them and levels of ambition vary between countries. For instance, in addition to the general employment target, some Member States (Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Lithuania) have chosen to set national targets broken down by gender, thus providing employment rate targets for women. Such gender disaggregated national employment rate targets are useful in maintaining a constant policy focus on female labour market participation with a view to reach EU targets.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission : Female Labour Market Participation based on Eurostat Labour Force Survey and other sources, 2014

The fact that the EU headline target on fighting poverty and social exclusion is not broken down by gender mutes the gender dimension of poverty and social exclusion.

The Advisory Committee recommends:

- To maintain the overall objective of an employment rate of 75% for both men and women.
- To invite more Member States to consider introducing national targets broken down by gender; these national targets could be supplemented by intermediate targets.
- To make full use of sex-disaggregated data, where available, to monitor progress towards the EU headline target on fighting poverty and social exclusion, towards national targets and in the design of national policies in this area.

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### ***How could the EU2020 Strategy best be linked to other EU policies?***

The June 2014 Council Conclusions on "Women in the economy: economic independence from the perspective of part-time work and self-employment"<sup>3</sup> call for a pillar on gender equality within the Europe 2020 governance framework and list elements on which such a gender equality pillar could be based:

- a) a section to be included in each draft Joint Employment Report providing information on the efforts and progress made by Member States to reduce the gender employment gap (quantitative and qualitative), which is henceforth to be taken into consideration in the key growth and employment messages of the Annual Growth Survey;
- b) measuring the progress made by Member States in achieving gender equality and encouraging further progress as necessary by making systematic use of instruments of the European Semester, including the Country Specific Recommendations; and
- c) a regular exchange with the European social partners in the context of the tripartite dialogue on these issues.

In order to put this renewed focus on gender equality into practice, the Advisory Committee recommends the following:

- A better use of existing tools, rather than creating new ones.
- Informing the High-level Group on gender mainstreaming and the Advisory Committee in the multilateral review of country-specific recommendations in the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee.
- The Annual Growth Survey and the Joint Employment Report should better reflect the progress and obstacles encountered by Member States in the area of women's employment and economic independence. They also should give more visibility to gender differences in poverty and social exclusion.
- The Joint Employment Report should include a section dedicated to gender equality providing an analysis of gender gaps in employment, hours worked, marginal

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/143269.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/143269.pdf)

employment rates, employment interruptions due to family reasons, pay, overall earnings, pensions, poverty and social exclusion. Based on this analysis, the Annual Growth Survey and the Employment Guidelines should provide for guidance to Member States and priority-setting.

- Setting up a specific informal working group, on a voluntary basis, within the High-Level Group on gender mainstreaming, for monitoring existing indicators of the Joint Assessment Framework (JAF), in conjunction with the indicators of EMCO and SPC.
- Disaggregating data by gender in the new social and employment Scoreboard.
- To continue to involve social partners and representatives of civil society more in the EU2020 process.
- To reinforce the importance of mainstreaming the gender dimension in actions of each of the seven Flagship Initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.<sup>4</sup>
- To set a strong link between the revised EU2020 Strategy and the new Strategy for equality between women and men that will follow after 2015.
- To reinforce synergies with other strategies, i.e. in the fields of health and safety at work and education and training.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on “The gender dimension in the Europe 2020 Strategy” (17, January 2013), 1.2, 1.7, 3.1, 4.4.

<sup>5</sup> Joint EMCO-SPC opinion on the mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy (October 3,2014), paragraph 11.