



Confédération des Organisations Familiales de l'Union européenne
Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union

COFACE Response to the European Commission's Consultation on the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010 and follow-up strategy

16 October 2009

1. Overall assessment of the performance of the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010.

Do you think the Roadmap 2006-2010 has made a difference and contributed to more equality between women and men?

As outlined by the mid-term progress report and the yearly reports on equality between women and men, the Roadmap has been a useful framework for progress both in terms of policy initiatives and governance, but overall progress is still too slow in most areas and gender equality is far from being achieved.

Let's take the example of reconciliation of family, private and professional life, which is a key area of work for COFACE.

In this field, there has been progress with the publication of a progress report towards the Barcelona objectives, the revision of the parental leave directive and two directive proposals (directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Directive 86/613/EEC, and directive amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding).

However these initiatives fall short from addressing one key challenge for the issue of work/life balance and more widely gender equality: encouraging equal sharing of private and family responsibilities between women and men. The absence of progress on paternity leave and on the remuneration of parental leave are major obstacles in the way of such equal sharing. The lack of progress on a leave to care for dependent relatives (so-called 'filial leave') is also disappointing.

Looking at the whole working time directive debate, one can also clearly see that much more remain to be done in terms of gender mainstreaming, when so little attention was paid to the impact of long working hours on work/life balance.

2. Future challenges for gender equality

What are in your view the main medium and long term challenges that a new strategy for gender equality should address?

Quality employment for women should be a focus of attention for the new strategy. The Lisbon Strategy failed in creating better jobs, with a rise in precarious, atypical employment which is affecting women first.

This is a challenge for gender equality in many ways:

- no upgrading of the profile of women employment, persistence of labour market segregation, and gender pay gap;
- higher risk of poverty and social exclusion for women (lower social protection and pay, more regular periods of unemployment, ...) and thus for children as well (especially in lone parents families);
- pre-condition to reconciliation of work-life and family life is not met (quality employment means make work pay when one has family responsibilities, and implies working conditions which must be respectful of family life and private life);
- low attractiveness of jobs in health and social services, services which are key for women support.

The issue of family carers should also be addressed seriously by the future strategy. In the context of the ageing population, there will be more and more women having to care for elderly relatives, with risk of disrupted employment, loss of income and social protection rights, health and psychological issues Initiatives in the field of work/life balance should therefore not only look at women and men with children, but also at those with dependent family relatives (leave, development of long-term care services and respite services, mainstreaming of the issue in health policy, ...).

3. Main policy priorities for gender equality

- Are the six priority areas defined in the Roadmap still relevant (see point 2.1)? Which new priorities should be considered?

The six priority areas are still relevant as progress was too slow.

Concerning the first priority area, achieving equal economic independence for women and men, a strong emphasis should be put on gender equality in employment, including:

- equal pay ;
- equal employment status ;
- equal conditions of employment (including through the upgrading of part-time work in terms of remuneration and social protection);
- desegregation of the labour market.

The European Commission should set up quantified targets for equal pay. It should also address a Recommendation to Member States on strategies to implement the principle of gender equality in employment in the work place.

Concerning the second priority area, enhancing reconciliation of work, private and family life, the key aspects of work/life balance (leave schemes, flexible working time arrangements and services) should be addressed through a EU framework directive which would usefully replace the current unproductive piecemeal approach (see the current attempt of the European Parliament to introduce provision on paternity leave in the maternity leave directive because of failure by social partners to include it in the parental leave directive ...).

Leave schemes should give an incentive to men to share family responsibilities, and they should encompass adequate remuneration and strong social protection rights. They should also be directed at people caring for dependent relatives (so-called 'filial leave').

A strong emphasis should be put on the development of quality services:

- childcare services: revise the Barcelona targets with more ambitious objectives, especially for 0-3 years old, and set new targets for out-of-school childcare for children 6-12 years old;
- develop targets concerning community-based and home-based long-term care services.

Exchanges of good practices should be developed in the field of coordination of public times.

Concerning the fifth priority area, eliminating gender stereotypes in society, it should include fighting stereotypes on gender roles in the family. Measures should include:

- inclusion of gender equality in learning activities and curriculum as early as pre-school;
- promotion of training for health workers and educators on dealing with all issues concerning children equally with father or mother;
- promotion of best practices such as the setting of advisory or training services for men to help them understand the value of being at home with their children and the need to take their share of domestic and family responsibilities as essential to their well-being and self-fulfilment;
- support to company and public information campaigns.

It should not only concern family responsibilities towards children but also family responsibilities towards elderly and other dependent relatives.

- How can gender mainstreaming and specific actions be made more effective?

Full use should be made of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on gender equality (including the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the European Union) for multiplying effect.

The analytical capacity of the European Commission should be reinforced in relation to gender mainstreaming, with the support of the European Institute for Gender Equality.

Systematic training of civil servants at EU, national, regional and local level should be organised in the field of gender equality.

- In what policy areas could new gender targets be defined? Which targets should be quantified?

New quantified gender targets should be defined in the field of:

- equal pay;
- out-of-school childcare for children 6-12 years old;

- community-based and home-based long-term care services

The Barcelona targets on childcare should be revised (see above).

- How can complementarities and synergies between the Commission's initiatives, the actions by the Member States, the actions by Social Partners and organisations representing civil society, both at European and national level, be achieved?

In the field of gender equality, directives have proven to be an effective way of triggering Member States' action, legislation being the only tool to force Member States to take action.

When there is no legal basis for legislation, the Commission should seriously consider adopting Recommendations, which are the strongest among soft law instruments. Recommendations should be accompanied by strong publicity and real efforts to make it known by stakeholders at national level (otherwise no sustainable political commitment at national level), and by regular monitoring based when possible on targets and benchmarks.

Exchange of national good practices should be further promoted.

Social partners actions have a key role to play at national level for negotiating on gender equality in the work place, supporting the implementation of policies, and raising awareness. At European level however there is concern that negotiations by Social Partners can only lead to small results, as experienced with the revision of the parental leave directive. Besides this a process behind close doors which is not satisfactory in terms of civil society participation.

Civil society should be consulted on all initiatives and its view duly taken into account. Funding should be devoted to its projects, and there should be better mechanisms for the findings of these projects to find their way in political commitment.

- What types of improvements should be aimed at concerning the monitoring and the reporting on progress made?

The yearly monitoring is quite satisfactory. However, more publicity should accompany this monitoring and reporting exercise in order to increase accountability, and the European Commission should seek the views of civil society on its findings and take them into account before publication.

For more information:

- COFACE Recommendations concluding the project 'Men and Families – Men's changing family roles in Europe. Recommendations' (with the support of the European Commission):

<http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/docs/PERES/brochureEN.pdf>

- COFACE position on reconciling family life, private life and professional life to prevent poverty and social exclusion :

<http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/WG%20SOCIAL/WG1-2008-PositionCOFACE-reconciliation-EN.pdf>

Or contact the COFACE Secretariat:

+ 32 2 511 41 79

secretariat@coface-eu.org



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities

COFACE is supported under the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS (2007-2013). The views expressed herein are those of the authors and the Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=327&langId=en>