



16 October 2009

WHAT DOES GENDER EQUALITY MEAN FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT?

Plenary session on 16 October: “The economic recession and its impact on gender equality, and on employment and self-employment among women”

The economic crisis has hit the labour markets differently in different countries. Even though there are signs of recovery, the worst is yet to come with regard to the labour markets.

The gender effects of the crisis vary to a great extent among the EU Member States. In some countries the female workforce has taken the blow, in others it is the male workforce that has been hit hardest. Therefore no one-size-fits-all response at European level would be appropriate or efficient. We do not need new legislation to tackle the gender aspects of the recession or to promote gender equality – what we need is right mix of policy actions taking into account the varying national circumstances and practices. Actions need to be targeted to both men and women, based on their respective needs.

Women are very much part of the solution in exiting the crisis. Women are in a perfect position to drive the post-recession world economy – according to the education statistics and employment outlooks, the future seems to lie increasingly in female hands.

The skills women bring to the labour market will increasingly be a key resource. Employers regard the promotion of women in decision-making positions as an investment for future. Many companies are actively setting strategic objectives and targets to achieve a better gender balance.

In many countries labour markets are still strongly segregated. Future policy and actions have to be based on better understanding of the reasons for horizontal and vertical segmentation. In order to improve the functioning of the labour markets we must work towards dismantling occupational segregation and attracting more women to traditionally male-dominated professions.

Managers and decision-makers in companies rise from the ranks. Career progression must always be based on merit and competence – not on quotas. To promote equal opportunities for women and men, we need to promote gender-sensitive education in schools and universities, offer non-stereotyped career advice and provide young people with real examples of possible career paths by increasing cooperation between schools and enterprises.

The European social partners adopted in 2005 a Framework of Actions on Gender Equality. The final evaluation report of national social partners’ actions in four priority areas will be adopted later this month. The report will highlight the best examples in addressing gender roles, promoting women in decision-making, supporting work-life balance and tackling the gender pay gap. The report shows for instance that employers are increasingly implementing equality programmes which demonstrate a growing recognition of women’s potential and that there is a wide variety of initiatives, actions, events and innovative approaches in tackling gender equality at different levels. These transferrable best practices should be disseminated and encouraged by all European operators.