



*European Communities
Commission
Background Report*

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ISEC/B53/78

July 21, 1978

ENCOURAGING EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

The Community Record

Summary

About one out of every three women in the Community believes that politics is better left to men, and have more confidence in a man as their representative in Parliament. Yet in the Community as a whole women form over half (51.6 per cent) of the total population and, of the 38 million working outside the home, the overwhelming majority are concentrated in low-pay industries, with limited prospects of promotion or training.

Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome laid down the principle of equal pay for equal work as far back as 1957. It was included for economic, not altruistic reasons, to ensure that free competition was not distorted by the employment of women at lower rates than men for the same work.

In the 1970's, however, influenced by women's militant demands, the Community has taken a more positive and enlightened attitude to women. It is now illegal throughout the Community not to apply the principle of equal pay for equal work, or to discriminate against women where training or promotion prospects are concerned.

But practice tends to lag behind good intention, partly perhaps because of society's attitudes, partly because of the attitude of women themselves. A Commission survey in 1975 showed that despite everything, 59 per cent of women considered that women had as much or more opportunity in life than men.

Facts and Figures

In 1975, of the 38 million women employed or seeking employment in the Community, (i.e. 37 per cent of women over 14), more than two out of three (68 per cent) were employed full time; about one-fifth (21 per cent) were engaged part-time, (mostly in Denmark and the UK); 4 per cent were employed on an occasional basis, and 7 per cent were looking for work.* The share of women in total employment as a percentage of the total working population is as follows:

Germany	37.7%	Italy	28.1%
Belgium	34.4%	Luxembourg	28.4%
Denmark	41.6%	Netherlands	24.3%
France	37.2%	United Kingdom	33.8%
Ireland	26.6%	Europe of the Nine	35.9%

(Source: Report on the Development of the Social Situation
in the Communities in 1976)

*Labour Force Sample Survey, 1975 - SOEC, Luxembourg

*** Note: Background reports are intended as non-copyright ready-reference material on topics of current interest concerning the European Community. An index will be provided periodically so anyone receiving the reports can refer to each number more easily.

On average six to seven women out of 10 are employed in the service industries, rising to over eight out of 10 in Holland. Though the situation varies from country to country, on average, fewer than three women out of 10 (28.1 per cent) are engaged in industry, and fewer than one in 10 (7.1 per cent) in agriculture. Italy has the highest number of women working in agriculture (14.5 per cent) and the United Kingdom the least (1.1 per cent).

According to a 1975 Commission survey* the majority of women (60 per cent) would prefer to work outside the home, including 56 per cent of those who are not already doing so. Asked what social reforms they thought the most important to improve women's status, one in three opted for a wage for work done in the home; two out of five wanted a more flexible working week and better child-minding services; others wanted it made easier for mothers to return to work and a better distribution of household tasks. Over 40 per cent considered that family commitments hampered work opportunities for women; a third thought that men's attitudes were a stumbling block.

There were sharp national differences among those interviewed on the political role of women. Danish (78 per cent) and British (68 per cent) women led the field in believing that women and men should play the same role in politics compared with their Luxembourg (47 per cent) and Belgian (45 per cent) sisters. On average, 38 per cent of women had more confidence in a man than a woman as political representative, but again there were wide national variations, only 17 per cent of Danish women holding this view compared with 44 per cent in Italy and Germany and 34 per cent in the UK. Only 32 per cent of women (37 per cent of men) thought that the development of the Community could change women's condition for the better.

Community aims and legislation

Despite Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome there was little advance on matters of equal pay or women's promotion prospects until the 1970's. On February 10, 1975, however, the Council of Ministers decided to reinforce the general legal provision of Article 119 by a specific directive⁽¹⁾ on equal pay which expressly excluded discrimination based on sex (in particular in job classification); provided for legal appeal for those who felt themselves discriminated against and gave protection against dismissal to workers who complained.

This legislation was followed on February 12, 1976, by a second directive⁽²⁾ concerning equal treatment and non-discrimination on any grounds for men and women regarding employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions, due to come into force on August 12, 1978.

The equal pay principle is now part of the legislation of nearly all member countries; but, as with the principle of non-discrimination, implementation is a slow process. In April 1978 the European Parliament called on the Commission to provide statistical material in order to judge progress.

Training and family life

Sex discrimination, however, starts long before women enter the field of work. It is found, usually influenced by tradition rather than intent, in the schools and in opportunities for vocational training. A Commission Memorandum

* European Men and Women - a comparison of their attitudes to some of the problems facing society. December 1975, Brussels.

(1) Directive 75/117/EEC - OJ No. L 45 of 19 February 1975

(2) Directive 76/207/EEC - OJ No. L 39 of 14 February 1976

on Equality of Treatment between Men and Women Workers⁽¹⁾ lays special emphasis on the need for change in educational attitudes, in particular on non-discriminatory educational guidance in the choice of careers, and for teachers to be made aware of this.

There must also be greater opportunity for girls to take up apprenticeship courses or vocational training schemes leading to well qualified posts, and the provision of special opportunities for education and training, enabling women to re-enter employment after a period of interruption. A resolution adopted by the Council on 13 December 1976⁽²⁾ called for the implementation, before 1980, of special actions 'to ensure equal educational opportunity for girls'.

The memorandum noted the key role women play in family affairs, but insisted that this must not be allowed to hinder, but must be reconciled with, their job aspirations. This requires, it said, more and improved nursery or other appropriate facilities where children can be safely left while the mother is at work, and provision for proper supervision of children after school hours. There should be paid leave available for either the father or mother when a child is ill, and extension of arrangements for workers responsible for sick or elderly dependents.

Social security and the Social Fund

The 1976 directive on equal treatment for men and women provides, eventually, for equal treatment in the field of social security. The Commission has undertaken a study on differences that exist here in the member countries, based mainly on the traditional idea that the father must be the breadwinner while the mother keeps house.

At the beginning of 1977, the Commission sent the Council a proposal for a Directive⁽³⁾ on the gradual implementation of the principle of equal treatment for women and men regarding social security in all statutory and other schemes, but so far it has not been adopted.

The European Social Fund, created by the Treaty of Rome, is used to further Community social policies, particularly today in the field of employment and training, and for helping special groups of workers such as those made redundant, migrants, the handicapped and young people.

Since January 1, 1978, the Fund has been operating under revised regulations, and one of the new priorities for assistance covers women over the age of 25, particularly the unskilled or semi-skilled who have either lost their jobs, are seeking work for the first time, or are coming back to seek a job after a long period of domestic responsibilities. Due to economic recession, unemployment among women is high at the present time, and many are handicapped by lack of earlier educational or vocational opportunity. Money from the Fund is available for approved training projects that seek to overcome these handicaps.

Women's Bureau

In November 1976 the Commission set up a Bureau for Questions affecting Women's Employment - an indication of the Community's desire to respond to needs in this area. The office is not intended to solve individual problems, but to work at Community level to achieve equal treatment for men and women at work.

(1) Document COM(75)36 of 12 February 1975
(2) OJ No. C 308 of 30 December, 1976
(3) COM(76)650 of 3 January 1977

With this in mind, the Commission made a film⁽¹⁾ in 1976, 'Equal Chances, Equal Opportunities' to illustrate the Directives on equal treatment in the working world, and stressing the importance of wider choice of occupation for girls and women.

Within the Commission Directorate-General for Information, the Information Service for Women's Organizations and Press also seeks to keep women better informed about Community activity. It publishes (since January 1978) a journal, Women of Europe, in the 6 Community languages, designed to broadcast women's activities in the member countries and current news about the Community.

In 1977 the Information Service organized a questionnaire carried out by a popular woman's magazine in each of the member countries (except Denmark). In Britain the results were published in Woman's Own on April 22, 1978.

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(1) The Film is obtainable on loan from Guild Sound and Vision Ltd., Woodston House, Oundle Rd, Peterborough PE2 9PZ or National Audio-Visual Aids Library, Paxton Place, Gipsy Road, London SE27.