



ETUC Action Programme on Gender Equality

Adopted at the Executive Committee on 6-7 March 2012

Introduction

The EU has made significant progress over the last 50 years in promoting greater equality between women and men in society and in the labour market. Since its foundation EU equal treatment legislation has contributed and will contribute to equal participation of women and men in Europe's economy and society.

With the new mandate for the period 2010-2014 the Commission adopted different EU instruments to deal with gender equality:

- The **EU Women's Charter** strengthens EU efforts to build a gender perspective into all its policies for the next five years while taking specific measures;
- The **Strategy for Equality between Women and Men** builds on the experience of the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men of 2006 and represents the European Commission's work programme on gender equality for the period 2010-2015 on the basis of six thematic priorities¹ ;
- The **Europe 2020 Strategy** sets a new target of 75% women and men to be employed by 2020 and ambitious objectives on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy.

Undoubtedly, the EU Commission has favoured a political approach that focuses more on awareness rising activities and exchange of good practices instead of improving the existing legislative framework on gender equality.

Probably the most relevant legislative initiative undertaken in the field of gender equality concerns the revision of the Maternity Protection Directive, currently blocked at the level of the Council, following the adoption of the European Parliament report in October 2010. In 2011, Commissioner Reding also announced her intention to take action to improve gender balance in company boards. Other non-legislative initiatives that concern gender equality are also foreseen in the European Commission work programme 2012-2013: a consultation of the European social partners on the review of the Directive on equal pay and a second stage consultation on reconciliation between work, family and private life.

Over the last years, the ETUC has repeatedly called upon the EC to take a more ambitious and better integrated approach towards gender equality. The situation of women in the labour market and in society is still hugely unbalanced and persistent gaps exist between women and men within the EU 27 and candidate countries:

¹ The six areas of action of the EU Strategy for the period 2010 – 2015 are: (i) equal economic independence; (ii) equal pay for equal work or work of equal value; (iii) equality in decision-making; (iv) dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence; (v) gender equality in external actions; (vi) horizontal issues: gender roles, legislation and governance. For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6568&langId=en>

- The **employment rate** for women has increased from 51% in 1997 to 62% in 2011, with large differences remaining between member states (between 39% and 75%);
- Female employment has grown mostly in highly feminised jobs and sectors, such as public and private services. Women **work part-time** more than men (accounting for over 75% of part-timers) and are more often employed on fixed term or temporary agency contracts;
- The impact of **parenthood** on labour market participation is very different for women and men - only 65.6% of women with children under 12 work, as opposed to 90.3% of men;
- The **gender pay gap** between women and men in Europe is around 17% on average, with a variation from 5% to 31%. In many member states the gap has not narrowed over the last ten years and in several is even increasing;
- More than 70% of **low-wage earners** in Europe are women and in most EU member states, 17% of women experience **poverty** compared to 15% of men. Older women are particularly at risk of deprivation;
- Nearly 60% of **EU university graduates** are women, nevertheless they are lagging behind in decision making positions at political and economic level. Women make up 12% of the supervisory boards of the largest publicly listed companies and only 3% of the boards' presidents are women;
- In 2005 34% of men have received **continuous vocational training** in enterprises compared to 31% of women;
- One woman in five in Europe has been subjected to **domestic violence** and one out of two reported some form of **sexual harassment** in the workplace;
- Nearly **45% of ETUC members are women**. This account for roughly 38 million female trade unionists. However, their representation in trade unions' decision making bodies and positions is far from proportionate and progress is very slow.

The current economic crisis risks further undermining these gloomy findings, if inadequate policy action is undertaken to tackle gender gaps.

The effects of the economic downturn on policies related to gender equality are beginning to emerge. Budget cuts have severely affected public expenditure, with public services, such as education, training and social care, suffering mostly, as well as the users of those services, who are in the large majority women. Public sector workers (predominantly female) are hit in quantitative and qualitative terms in various member states. Changes in pension provisions through restrictions on caring credits are promoting further inequalities between women and men.

The ETUC strongly believes that there is an urgent need to address gender gaps in the labour market and avoid erosion of recent measures enacted to support gender equality. Investments to re-launch growth are required and they should bring resources in highly feminized sectors.

Gender Equality continues to be a priority for the ETUC

At the 2011 Athens Congress, the ETUC committed itself to continue to place the gender dimension high on its agenda and to pursue the objectives set in the Gender Mainstreaming Charter adopted at the Congress in Seville.

The ETUC completely shares ITUC statement made at their 2nd World Congress in Vancouver in June 2010: *“Cultural, economic, social and religious barriers must be identified, condemned and overcome in order for women’s human rights to be respected and fully implemented everywhere. As gender discrimination frequently interacts with other forms of discrimination such as age and gender identity, policies and programmes should be put in place to address the multiple forms of discrimination against women and a cross-cutting approach on gender should be adopted.”*

Trade unions can make gender equality a reality. We are key players in promoting social justice and combat discriminatory and unlawful behaviors at work. We also have a unique role in promoting social and sustainable change, not only at work but also in the society. We know that trade unions’ commitment to fight against discrimination between women and men requires a strong political will which implies the realization of both strategic and organisational actions. We are also aware that this investment is indisputable if we want to counteract the dangerous trends that Europe is facing, with the rise of inequalities at all levels, the mounting of precarious work and the risk of declining working conditions for women and men.

ETUC therefore believes that more needs to be done to achieve EU2020 objectives and integrated strategies are required to promote gender equality in the labour market and in trade unions.

In order to achieve greater gender equality the ETUC follows a dual approach by both implementing gender mainstreaming and initiating specific measures (policy action, projects, awareness-raising activities, etc.) in the field of gender.

Besides the Charter on Gender mainstreaming, the ETUC adopted two equality plans in the past (in 1999 and 2003) as well as various positions and resolutions in order to: foster reconciliation of work, family and private life (2007); reduce the gender pay gap (2008); improve maternity protection at EU level (2009); ensure equal treatment between men and women engaged in a self employed activity (2009); enhance gender balance in trade unions (2011)².

Gender equality was addressed by the ETUC in the context of the cross-industry EU social dialogue. A Framework of Actions on gender equality was negotiated in 2005 in which social partners advocated on occupational segregation, women in decision-making, work-life balance and equal pay, and an evaluation report was adopted in 2009. In their last work programme, covering 2012 – 2014, the EU social partners also reaffirmed their willingness to continue to act on the Framework of Actions priorities and agreed that further joint action is needed to address remaining inequalities.

² See ETUC website: <http://www.etuc.org/r/48>

Achieving gender equality in the labour market and society remains an imperative for the ETUC. Concrete measures are required to bring change and this Action Programme is intended to set ETUC priorities in the area of gender equality with a view of an evaluation at the mid-term mandate Conference. It is addressed to all national confederations, European trade unions' federation and to ETUC itself and it aims at pursuing the following, inter-linked, goals where trade union action is needed:

- 1. Implementing gender mainstreaming into all ETUC policies**
- 2. Achieving equal pay between women and men**
- 3. Eliminating gender representation gap in decision making bodies**
- 4. Promoting the combination of work, family and private life**
- 5. Addressing the link between domestic violence and workplace rights**

The Action Programme sets out ways in which the objectives can be met, measurable and time-framed targets, follow-up procedures and an evaluation process.

Objective 1: Implementing gender mainstreaming into all ETUC policies

Gender mainstreaming is a strong equality principle that concerns both women and men. It involves structural change, it impacts women's and men's role in public and private life, in the workplace, in the private sphere and in the society. It means assessing how policies impact on women and men, and taking steps to change policies if necessary.

Since 1999 the ETUC and its member organisations have adopted a clear commitment to incorporate the dimension of equal opportunities and of the gender perspective in all fields of policy planning and activity. ETUC members recognized that this requires the development and adoption of tools, mechanisms and guidelines and have committed themselves to put in place adequate measures to achieve this aim.

In order to re-boost trade unions' commitment to implement gender mainstreaming, the ETUC adopted a Charter on Gender Mainstreaming at its Seville Congress in 2007, where it is stated that "*Gender equality is an essential element of democracy in the workplace and in society. ETUC and its affiliates confirm their commitment to pursue gender equality as part of their broader agenda for social justice, social progress and sustainability in Europe, and therefore adopt a gender mainstreaming approach as an indispensable and integral element of all their actions and activities*". Three broad definitions of gender mainstreaming were identified and they are still valid.

Gender mainstreaming seems to be a difficult concept to implement. It needs political will, the collection of adequate gender-based statistics, adequate funds and resources and a balanced participation of women and men in decision making. Many trade unions still do not incorporate the gender dimension into their policies and actions and therefore new efforts need to be deployed to achieve this aim.

Mainstreaming gender equality in collective bargaining remains a major challenge, and demands stronger cooperation with and commitment of the industry federations especially, and sectoral and branch unions at all levels.

Integrating gender mainstreaming in employment issues is key to fighting discrimination in the labour market. However, in order to achieve equal rights it is essential to fully integrate the gender dimension also in all policy issues that are high in the EU and ETUC agenda, such as: impact of austerity measures and recovery from the crisis, economic governance, sustainable development and green jobs, vocational education and training, migration, cooperation and development, health and safety.

1. Implementing gender mainstreaming into all ETUC policies

Key actions:

- As indicated in the GM Charter, the ETUC will set the policy that every document presented to its Executive Committee must contain a gender impact assessment, and at least indicate with a short motivation if and how the gender perspective has been included.
- A set of draft guidelines to implement gender mainstreaming in trade unions leading to the publication of a brochure will be realized.
- All ETUC working groups and committees should gender-mainstream their work as well as supporting documents according to these guidelines.
- It is essential to understand the impact of the economic and financial crisis on policies that are (directly or indirectly) related to gender equality. The ETUC, with the support of the ETUI, will draw up a comparative study analysing the impact of the crisis on the differential situation of women and men in the labour market, in relation with the austerity measures undertaken, their impact in the public services and in care facilities provisions, etc.
- ETUC and its affiliates will continue to:
 - explicitly invite, support and train women to participate in collective bargaining committees and negotiating teams, including in EWC's;
 - invest in training of collective bargaining negotiators, men and women, at all relevant levels in gender equality issues;
 - include gender perspective during negotiations (pay systems and wage increases mechanisms that improve men and women, lifelong learning, leaves facilities).
- A specific gender approach will be integrated into ETUC migration policies and with regard to decent work for domestic workers. The ETUC will continue to lobby for a EU legislative framework for the protection and non-discrimination of domestic workers.

Objective 2: Achieving equal pay between women and men

The European Union from its very beginning has pursued the goal of equal pay for women and men for work of equal value. European legislation on equal pay has contributed to tackle direct discrimination between women and men as regards pay, but barriers persist to ensure that work of equal value performed by men and women is paid at the same rate. Progress in closing the gender pay gap appears to be very slow, and notwithstanding all efforts to achieve the aim of equal pay, statistics show the existence of a gender pay gap in all EU Member States; in some countries the gap is even widening. Taking into account the fact that the European Union has been taking action in this field for more than 50 years, this is a disappointing result.

The ETUC is aware that legal action alone has proved to be insufficient to tackle pay differentials between women and men and that a combined approach at different levels is needed to eliminate this persisting and complex form of discrimination.

The Action Programme adopted at the Athens Congress identified the pay gap between women and men as one of the priorities of its work for the period 2011 – 2015 and the ETUC has committed to *“support members’ initiatives to tackle the structural problems of pay inequality and the tendency for pay (for both men and women) to be lower in sectors dominated by women than in sectors dominated by men. Many occupations that are mainly carried out by women need to be revalued and the ETUC intends to assist affiliates in exchanging information on achieving this through collective bargaining and/or through using legislation”*.

A key means of tackling the gender pay gap is collective bargaining. It is also essential that trade unions raise awareness and share good practices that have been successful in reducing pay differentials between women and men in sectors and professions.

The gender pay gap is an area where action is urgently needed as there are pervasive implications on pensions and poverty levels for women.

2. Achieving equal pay between women and men

Key actions:

- The ETUC will continue to campaign for stronger EU legislation to close the gender pay gap and promote collective bargaining in this area.
- ETUC will implement a EU project to explore trade unions’ successful initiatives and barriers to tackle the gender pay gap. The project will include the following actions:
 - Compilation of initiatives adopted by ETUC member organisations to achieve equal pay, including revision of job classifications and systems of job evaluation, pay audits, successful collective agreements;
 - Assess wage penalty linked to part-time working and other forms of precarious employment patterns;

- Awareness raising activities (regional workshops and EU Conference);
 - Publication of a TU manual and brochure.
- The ETUC Women’s Committee and the Committee for the coordination of collective bargaining will work together to tackle the gender pay gap. As a start ETUC member organisations of these two groups will explore together quantitative targets for the reduction of pay inequalities between women and men.
 - The ETUC and its members will contribute to the European Commission’s White Paper on pensions. The link between social and employment policies will be addressed and recommendations to achieve equality between women and men in social security and pensions provisions will be put forward.
 - ETUC and its member organizations will continue to implement the recommendations addressed in the ETUC Resolution “Reducing the gender pay gap”, and in particular:
 - put in place campaigns, tools, etc. in order to raise awareness on the gender pay gap at national level and in the different sectors. The EU day on equal pay could be used as a reference to mobilize members and put in place specific awareness raising activities;
 - put the gender pay gap on the agendas of the collective bargaining;
 - put in place training of negotiators, equal access to vocational training and guidelines to tackle the gender pay gap.

Objective 3: Eliminating gender representation gap in decision making bodies

The under-representation of women in leadership positions and decision making structures has been a matter of concern for the ETUC for many years. A strong case for a strategic approach to achieving gender balance in trade unions' decision-making and leadership structures as a basis for union democracy and for realising gender equality at societal, economic and political levels was through the adoption of the resolution for improving gender balance in trade unions in March 2011. The ETUC’s Athens Action Programme also addresses the female representation gap in decision making bodies and commits the ETUC to build up its action to guarantee a balanced composition between men and women by the 2015 Congress in particular through quantifiable targets such as an anti-discrimination provision, stipulating that each gender should be represented between 40% to 60% in the statutory bodies of the ETUC.

Since 2007, gender disaggregated data on affiliates' membership and decision making positions have been collected by the Secretariat through the “8th of March Survey” and its outcomes are presented and regularly discussed by the Women's Committee and the Executive Committee.

According to the last 8th March Survey, women represent about 45% of the ETUC membership and they have been crucial to sustaining trade union membership levels even in times where trade unions' overall membership has been shrinking. Despite this encouraging trend, there is a persistent low level of women in trade union leadership positions and little progress has been made over the last 4 years. Women are more likely to be in 'deputy' positions. Gender balance has been taken into account within the ETUC Secretariat, but still has not been achieved in ETUC standing committees.

Vertical segregation of women is a matter of concern for the ETUC not only within trade unions' bodies but also in society. Despite the fact that women outnumber men in upper secondary or tertiary education and represent the majority of graduates in most member states, they are still lagging behind in positions of responsibility in politics and business, as well as in other fields. The situation is particularly worrying in the corporate sector with, on average, one out of ten women members of boards in Europe's largest publicly quoted companies and only 3% of board chairpersons.

Trade unions can play a key role to ensure that the overall working environment supports a more balanced participation of women and men. A combination of measures is needed to address the persistent lack of women in positions of decision making in trade unions and in the labour market.

3. Eliminating gender representation gap in decision making bodies

Key actions:

- Affiliated organisations will step up their efforts to achieve gender balance in their decision-making level bodies. Gender audits, mentoring programmes, gender-based membership trends, quantified targets and training to support women to take up leadership roles will be promoted.
- Affiliates will continue to take the need for gender parity into account when nominating representatives in ETUC standing bodies and working groups. ETUC confirms its commitment to achieve a representation of each gender in standing committees that is in line with the proportion of women in the overall membership rate.
- The ETUC will run the 8th March survey which shows the gender distribution in the decision making structures of the ETUC and its affiliated organisations. Results will be presented to and discussed in the Executive and Women's Committee. On the basis of the results achieved, further action will be considered to mobilize ETUC affiliates in view of the ETUC Congress 2015.
- As a start, the ETUC will draft a template for gender disaggregated data collection that can be used by national and EU affiliates and work together with members that do not collect disaggregated data.

- A study to improve gender equality in trade unions will be produced by the ETUI for the ETUC mid-term conference in 2013 with a view to reach the targets adopted by the Congress.
- ETUC will provide for specific recommendations to the EC to enhance women's presence in company boards in view of the EC initiative foreseen in June 2012.

Objective 4: Promoting the combination of work, family and private life

Care work is still unequally divided between women and men. Women are still taking on most of the care work and, at the same time, many women are in paid employment. The double burden of paid work and unpaid work within the family, together with a persistent lack and adequacy of support care services, are some of the reasons behind the declining fertility rate in Europe and can be identified as one of the main barriers to women's full participation in the labour market and decision making at all levels. This problem is a growing one, especially for the so-called "sandwich generation": those who have to combine caring for their children and their elderly parents, with holding down some form of paid employment.

The ETUC has made several proposals in the area of reconciliation, following the consultation launched some years ago by the EC. We emphasized in particular the need for an integrated approach that offers a balanced mix to all workers, men and women, on the organization of working time, employment and working conditions.

Family-related leaves (such as maternity, paternity, parental, filial, carers) are effective measures, amongst others, to encourage the sharing of family caring responsibilities between women and men or partners of the same sex. However, barriers still exist which discourage their use especially by men.

Maternity protection is still not fully guaranteed and female workers often face discrimination and layoffs in case of pregnancy. In some member states, these discriminatory acts are being exacerbated by the crisis and young and precarious female workers are particularly at risk. ETUC fully supports for the need to review and strengthen the existing Pregnant Workers Directive (92/85/EEC) by introducing full payment, stricter rules against dismissal and increasing the length at least up to 18 weeks

There is a need for a coherent policy with regard to reconciliation that should offer: good quality, available and affordable child and elderly care facilities; a variety of paid leave options that should be taken by both parents; recognition of the role of fathers with regard to childrearing; flexible working time arrangements and possibility to reduce or extend one's working time (reversible part time work) and sound investments on services of public interest.

Once again, collective bargaining to enhance the balance between work, family and the private is an essential tool in the hands of trade unions. In March 2012 the Directive 2010/18 implementing the EU social partners' framework agreement on parental leave will have to be transposed in all EU member states.

ETUC considers reconciliation as an essential policy to address the gender pay gap and the lack of women in decision making, and action is needed to consolidate existing measures and address shortcomings.

4. Promoting the combination of work, family and private life

Key actions:

- ETUC will put forward recommendations to the EU on carers' leave as a contribution to the EU Year on Active Aging.
- ETUC will continue to lobby for the revision of the Maternity Directive and engage in constructive dialogue with the EU Council, Commission and Parliament to overcome the current impasse;
- ETUC will ensure that negotiations on the revision of working time Directive will include provisions to facilitate work-life balance.
- ETUC will continue to lobby to adopt a paternity leave entitlement at EU level.
- ETUC will follow the implementation of Directive 2010/18 implementing the EU social partners' framework agreement on parental leave. An implementation report will be prepared by the ETUI.
- ETUC affiliates will seek to improve existing legislation on reconciliation via the collective bargaining at different levels: sectorial, national, regional and territorial. Measures should address both male and female workers and include for instance: the promotion of professional breaks, paid parental, paternity and family leave, flexible working time arrangements, company and inter-company kindergartens, etc.
- ETUC affiliates will continue to promote the exchange of good practices in the area of reconciliation, such as campaign to encourage men to use family-related leaves. They will disseminate information with regards to EU legislation and policies on gender equality at workplace. Adequate visibility of these practices will be given on the ETUC website.
- ETUC affiliates will also pay attention to the organization of trade union life (meetings, travels, activities) responds to work-life balance needs of both men and women.

Objective 5: Addressing the link between domestic violence and workplace rights

Domestic violence is a complex issue consisting in a different mix of different types of abusive behaviors (psychological, physical, sexual, material, financial) and it is randomly regulated across the European union.

Both men and women can be either perpetrators or victims of domestic violence. In Europe today, one in four women may be or may have been a victim of violence. Violence against women takes different forms and cuts across all countries and social classes. It is an obstacle to the realisation of equality between women and men. The recession is likely to increase the risks of domestic violence and of violence against vulnerable groups of workers. Investment in prevention will therefore be very important.

The effects of domestic violence for the society are enormous and it is widely acknowledged that domestic violence has also an impact on work. Domestic violence can affect workers' capacity to get to work, violence can also continue at the workplace (via abusive phone calls, emails or physical abuse at the workplace by the partner). All these pervasive behaviours can negatively impact on workers' performance and well being and it puts at risk workplace safety.

Better workplace policies and practices can reduce the impact of domestic violence on work performance and security as various study demonstrate. Trade unions' action is therefore crucial in order to put in place adequate measures.

In its Athens Action Programme the ETUC has reaffirmed the need for Europe to issue a generally binding instrument on the protection of women against gender-based violence as such. The ETUC has also committed itself to continue mobilising to combat all forms of violence and to continue to monitor the implementation of the EU social partners agreement on preventing, combating and eliminating harassment and violence at work . The actions below intend to pursue this specific objective.

5. Addressing the link between domestic violence and workplace rights

Key actions:

- ETUC will implement a project on good practices aimed at reducing the impact of domestic violence on working people by achieving better workplaces rights that support them to stay safely in their jobs and in their homes. The project will be intended to:
 - Raising knowledge about domestic violence and why and how it affects workplace;
 - Share trade unions' practices to prevent and deal with domestic violence.
 - Develop strategies of how to handle violence and harassment in the workplace
 - Adopt recommendations to ETUC affiliates.

- ETUC will continue to lobby for a legislative framework at European level, on the basis of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- The ETUC affiliates will commit to:
 - assess the impact and scale of domestic violence abuse in the workplace;
 - develop model policies with employers to protect and respect the dignity of workers experiencing domestic abuse;
 - share examples of good practice adopted;
 - work to lobby national governments to take effective action on domestic abuse.

Implementation, reporting and evaluation of the Action Programme

In order to successfully meet the objectives that have been identified in the Action Programme on gender equality, ETUC member organizations have committed themselves to promoting a sense of ownership, shared responsibilities and actions at all different levels.

As a first step, affiliated organizations will give adequate visibility to this Action Programme. It is therefore recommended to: translate the Action Programme into national languages, send a copy of the translation to the ETUC so that EU-wide visibility could be given through ETUC's channels, and disseminate and discuss it with trade unions' representatives.

The ETUC secretariat will be responsible for leading some specific key activities to meet the objectives of the Action Programme and recourse to EU funding, if necessary.

An evaluation of progress to achieve the Action Programme will be put forward to the Executive Committee at the beginning of 2013 and a more consistent review of this instrument will be assessed on the eve of the ETUC Mid-Term Conference in 2013. The women's committee will have a strategic oversight of the implementation of the key actions identified.

ETUC and its member organizations will make available sufficient resources for the accomplishment of the key actions of the Action Programme on gender equality.