



**UNICE**  
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## FRAMEWORK OF ACTIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY

### I. SOCIAL PARTNERS' APPROACH

1. The European social partners, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC<sup>1</sup> are committed to enhancing gender equality on the labour market and in the workplace. In this context, they have a key role to play. They have adopted the present framework of actions to contribute to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy for economic growth, more and better jobs and social cohesion as well as of the EU legislative framework on equal treatment between women and men.
2. Bearing in mind that the causes of remaining inequalities on labour markets are complex and interlinked, European social partners are convinced that success in tackling them requires integrated strategies to promote gender equality including, in particular, actions to desegregate labour markets and to address gender roles in society. The social partners take as a basic analysis for their joint actions that gender roles and stereotypes have a strong influence on the existing division of labour between men and women, both in the family, the workplace and society at large, producing and reproducing gender gaps. Addressing gender segregation (both horizontal and vertical) in occupations and the labour market on the one hand, and existing barriers for a better compatibility of work and family life for both men and women on the other hand, in an integrated approach, is therefore key.
3. Explicitly addressing gender equality through social partners' actions, at the appropriate levels, in accordance with national industrial relations practice, such as social dialogue, collective bargaining, joint statements, recommendations, etc. helps to create a supportive framework.
4. Embedding gender equality initiatives in broader diversity management policies presents the advantage of responding to increasingly diverse needs of individual women and men in a way which also suits the production requirements of the employer. Such an approach also helps to increase support or involvement of both male and female workers.

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<sup>1</sup> The ETUC delegation includes representatives of the EUROCADRES/CEC Liaison Committee

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UEAPME – EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF CRAFT, SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES - RUE JACQUES LALAING, 4 - 1040 BRUXELLES

CEEP - EUROPEAN CENTRE OF ENTERPRISES WITH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - RUE DE LA CHARITÉ, 15 BTE 12 - 1040 BRUXELLES

5. ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME have studied a rich variety of good practice cases, showing that on all relevant levels and in many different ways social partners are contributing to achieving gender equality on the labour market. They have identified four priorities on which they ask national social partners to take action during the next five years. Under each of these priorities, they have highlighted elements on which social partners, acting and intensifying their dialogue at different levels, can add value. Inspired by current practices in various Member States and companies of different sectors and sizes, they identified examples of tools, which can inspire social partners' actions across Europe. A more detailed description of the case studies from which these examples of tools were extracted is provided in the annex.

## **II. CHALLENGES**

6. Living up to the economic, demographic and social challenges facing Europe requires a new perspective on the role of women and men as economic actors in relation to their roles in society. Demographic changes are putting increasing pressure on economies and societies at large. They may also lead to increased and sometimes contradictory pressures on women in particular. The challenge is to encourage women to become or remain active on the labour market. This can only be achieved by an integrated approach, combining measures to promote labour market participation with measures to ensure equal treatment in employment, and actions to allow men and women, to combine professional and family responsibilities.
7. The need to take measures to improve women's participation on the labour market is an integral part of the Lisbon strategy to turn Europe into the most competitive knowledge based society in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, as illustrated by the following objectives, to be reached by 2010:
  - the objective to reach an employment rate as close as possible to 70 % and to increase the number of women in employment from 51% to more than 60% by 2010 (Lisbon conclusions, 2000);
  - the objective to remove disincentives to women's labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for child care facilities and in line with national patterns of provisions, to provide child care by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three years of age (Council conclusions, Barcelona 2002);
  - the objective to achieve by 2010 a substantial reduction in the gender pay gap in each Member State, through a multi-faceted approach addressing the underlying factors of the gender pay gap, including sectoral and occupational segregation, education and training, job classifications and pay systems, awareness raising and transparency (Council decision of 22 July 2003 on the employment guidelines).
8. Equality between women and men has been one of the fundamental principles of the European Union since the very beginning. Since the 1970's, equal treatment legislation has grown to form a coherent legal framework which has played and will continue to play a crucial role in promoting a more equal participation of women and men in Europe's economies and societies. This has resulted in significant progress

towards gender equality across the EU. The EC report on equality between women and men 2004 clearly points to positive evidence that:

- societal patterns have changed over the last twenty years, away from the male breadwinner model to dual-earner families;
  - young women now remain in education and initial vocational training for longer, in the same way as young men do, outnumber men in upper secondary or tertiary education in most Member States and represent the majority of graduates in the EU;
  - employment rates have increased more for women than for men and now stand at 55.6% compared with 50% in the first half of the 1990's;
  - there is a general trend of narrowing gaps between women and men in employment, education and research;
  - participation of women in managerial positions has increased due to the fact that more women entered high level professional and managerial positions in the 1990s.
9. Economic growth and general progress in society have made these developments possible. However, significant gender gaps remain and the economic slowdown experienced since 2001 reveals that women continue to be more vulnerable than men to unemployment and economic inactivity, especially when they have a low level of education. Among the evidence of remaining obstacles to gender equality, the EC report on equality between women and men 2004 highlights the following elements<sup>2</sup>:
- persistent difficulties to reconcile family responsibilities with full time employment illustrated by
    - i. the fact that women with young children have, on average, a lower employment rate by 12.7 percentage points than women without children whereas men with children show 9.5 percentage points higher employment rates than men without children;
    - ii. evidence that women continue to do the majority of work in the home or family, tend to have interrupted patterns of employment, with all potential negative effects for career, wages and pensions, and are over-represented in part-time jobs;
  - statistics on education, which show that despite the fact that women no longer lag behind in level of education
    - i. traditional patterns remain in high education with only 39% of all PhDs awarded to women (compared with 61% to men), and
    - ii. women's and men's educational choices tend to reproduce gender stereotypes with an EU average figure of 36% of women among graduates in science, mathematics and information technology and only 21% in the field of engineering, building and construction;
  - the fact that a high level of occupational and sectoral gender segregation remains in the labour market, with women dominating in low paid and low skilled jobs or in sectors such as health care and social services, education, public administration and retailing while a disproportionate number of men work as technicians, engineers, finance professional and managers;

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<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed in the EC equality report 2005 published in February 2005

- the fact that the EU gender gap in average pay levels is still 16% but that only some countries have taken effective steps towards a significant reduction.
10. The female workforce is a key resource that tends to be under-utilized or under-valued despite the progress made. Further improving the situation of women on labour markets is in the interest of individual women and men, and the economy and society as a whole. Anti-discrimination legislation exists and is necessary but legislation in itself does not bring about gender equality. It requires interaction and cooperation between all relevant actors, in order to address, in an integrated approach, the contradictions and tensions generated at the interface between the household, the community, and employment structures. Social partners are determined to live up to their own responsibilities but public authorities, education institutions and individuals also have a key role to play.
11. Wishing to enhance the overall performance of Europe's labour markets and to contribute to reaching the above mentioned Lisbon objectives through appropriate actions in their own field of responsibility, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC undertake to encourage social partners at all levels and in all EU countries to step up their involvement in devising and implementing integrated strategies in favour of occupational gender equality.

### **III. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION**

12. The four priorities on which CEEP, UNICE/UEAPME and ETUC want national social partners to take action during the next five years are set out below:
- addressing gender roles,
  - promoting women in decision-making,
  - supporting work-life balance,
  - tackling the gender pay gap.
13. These priorities are interconnected and of equal importance. Actions at national, sectoral and/or company levels are most effective if the various aspects of these priorities are tackled in an integrated approach.

#### **1. ADDRESSING GENDER ROLES**

14. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes continue to have a strong influence on the division of labour between men and women at home, in the workplace and in society at large, and tend to continue a vicious circle of obstacles for achieving gender equality. Although the role of the social partners is not to interfere with private life, social partners do have a role to play in addressing gender roles and stereotypes in employment and in the workplace.
15. In the past three decades, women's employment rates have increased significantly and faster than men's, but not equally in all sectors and occupations. Women tend to be overrepresented in specific areas of activity related to traditional gender roles such as care, education, cleaning, retail etc., and to be underrepresented at higher levels of occupation.
16. Breaking down cultural barriers to ensure that women and men follow a more diverse range of careers and to encourage their participation across the labour market is a complex task given the numerous socio-economic factors to be taken into

consideration. It is nevertheless crucial to desegregate labour markets in order to achieve occupational gender equality.

17. A number of EU enterprises reflect on the influence cultural attitudes and gender roles have at the workplace. They check their internal practices and policies in order to actively encourage particular groups of people to enter and remain in employment. Initiatives have also been taken by social partners at company, sectoral and/or national levels, jointly, separately or in cooperation with public authorities.

18. European social partners believe that the following elements are key to fight stereotyped gender roles on the labour market.

- Promoting non-gender biased education in schools, universities as well as efficient and non-stereotyped careers advice services, for students and those already at work, to enable individuals to make better informed education and career choices. Encouraging pupils, students and parents to consider all the available career options for girls and boys at an early stage. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Organising open days in companies for girls in order to show that pre-conceived ideas about women's compared with men's jobs are not justified in practice and inform them about career options they may not have considered otherwise;
  - Encouraging parents to promote companies as a place for their daughters to pursue careers;
  - Cooperation programmes with public and/or education authorities to raise awareness on labour markets needs;
  - Participation in career fairs.
- Making a special effort to attract girls and young women into technical and scientific professions which can also help address skills and labour shortages hampering economic growth. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Setting targets to increase the number of girls taking up apprenticeships in technical and scientific professions as a way to step up female recruitment in the future;
  - Sending women engaged in technical or scientific occupations as "ambassadors" into schools to inform and raise awareness of girls about opportunities of technical or scientific professions.
- Promoting the recruitment and retention of women and men with adequate skills at the enterprise level in sectors and occupations where they are underrepresented. Acknowledge, and where possible, enrich the skills content of female occupations so as to offer better career paths and opportunities for women in female dominated sectors. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Reviewing the way in which job titles, job descriptions and advertisements are formulated to enhance their attractiveness for women and making managers who recruit aware of the issue;
  - Adapting the workplace to enable a greater gender mix at work (ergonomics, local services);

- Informing about internal job offers and career prospects on intranet;
- Raising awareness of middle managers in companies on ways to promote equal opportunities for all employees throughout the employment relationship. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Using all available communication tools to highlight top managers' commitment to a diverse workforce and its benefits both for the workers and the company;
  - Training managers on the benefits of diversity management and making them accountable for the implementation of the company's diversity policy;
  - Ensuring good information flow between the designated contact persons for staff grievances on equal opportunities issues, and managers, who have the responsibility to take action;
  - Highlighting cases of women breaking new ground;
- Promoting entrepreneurship as a career option for both women and men at sector and/or national level. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Identifying potential female business starters and/or top managers, and train them.
- Encouraging competence development for adults to allow men and women to evolve in their careers throughout life and to address deficits created by the structure of the education system in the past, with particular attention to supporting SMEs in their efforts. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Ensuring transparency and transferability of competences and qualifications;
  - Promoting the participation of low-skilled workers and/or workers in non-standard employment in further education and training and lifelong learning;
  - Setting gender balance objectives at sectoral level for access to vocational training.

## 2. PROMOTING WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

19. The number of women in decision-making positions in all spheres of society is growing, notably as a result of increased participation of women in the labour market and their success in higher education. However, only 30 % of managers are women, only 10 % of members of boards of directors are women, and only 3 % of CEO's or equivalent positions are taken by women<sup>3</sup>. Social partners have a clear responsibility to ensure that the overall working environment supports a more balanced participation of women and men in decision-making.

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<sup>3</sup> EC database on women in decision making: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/women\\_men\\_stats](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/women_men_stats)

20. Companies who have successfully encouraged women's participation at managerial level report that they did so as part of their efforts to achieve a high performance workplace by taking initiatives to release women's untapped potential. Promoting women in decision-making positions is an investment for a more productive, innovative and stimulating working environment and better economic performance. It also contributes to bringing about improvements for women in workplaces and on the labour market in general.

21. European social partners believe that the following elements are key to improve women participation at all levels within enterprises.

- Promoting competence-based gender neutral recruitment in enterprises. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Putting in place transparent and gender neutral recruitment, selection and promotion criteria;
  - Checking that the recruitment of women is proportionate to the number of female applications for the job and review results on a regular basis.
- Retaining women in enterprises, to avoid loss of competence. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Discussing at an early stage with employees their career expectations as well as work-life balance needs of both women and men and how to combine them with company's needs;
  - Conducting interviews with women leaving the company to understand the reasons for doing so in order to further refine the company's human resources policy;
  - Conducting regular staff surveys to check employees satisfaction.
- Encouraging career development of both women and men. Top-management's commitment for initiatives promoting women in decision-making positions is key in this respect. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Developing networks, mentoring or self confidence building schemes across enterprises to address the issue of self-deselection;
  - Setting targets for the promotion of women in proportion to the number of women in the relevant occupational level and review results on a regular basis;
  - Identifying possibilities for non linear career development paths alternating periods of higher professional involvement and periods of greater family responsibility as an alternative to a culture of unnecessarily long working hours;
  - Facilitating geographical mobility of managers by helping the worker's partner to find a job in the new region of occupation.

- Promoting female entrepreneurship as a complementary way of increasing women in decision-making and raising women's participation in the labour market. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Putting in place regional programmes for women willing to start their own business;
  - Supporting projects to ease generational handover to women in SMEs.
- Promoting women's role in the social dialogue at all levels, both on the employers' side and the trade union side, is important, notably in collective bargaining committees and units. Special attention should be paid to the possibility for women to take up responsibilities in worker representation, both in terms of scheduling of meetings and availability of facilities.

### 3. SUPPORTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE

22. Work life balance arrangements can enhance employee satisfaction, promote workplace equality, contribute to an organisation's reputation as an employer of choice, and benefit employers as well as workers. Successful policies to support work-life balance need to be tailored to the needs of individual women and men, bearing in mind that these can vary throughout the life course and taking into account that long and/or irregular working hours can be an obstacle to reconcile work and family life for both men and women. However, it is equally important that account is taken of different companies needs, bearing in mind that these can vary too depending on the production cycle or customers needs. Although workers' and company's needs do not necessarily coincide, the best results are achieved through dialogue in the framework of a win-win approach.
23. While the responsibility of dealing with work-life balance issues arising at the workplace undoubtedly lies with employers and workers, public authorities have a crucial role to play in addressing the wider societal aspects. This applies in particular to ensuring the availability and affordability of quality care facilities, for children, elderly and/or other dependents, to allow men and women to join the labour market. Where appropriate, partnerships between public authorities and social partners can help in devising innovative solutions.
24. Social partners and enterprises across the EU have found numerous ways of supporting workers' efforts to find a good work-life balance. The tools used have varied greatly from enterprise to enterprise and from individual to individual. These policies are often reviewed and adapted to respond effectively to changing workers and companies needs.
25. European social partners believe that the following elements are key to support a good work-life balance.
- Considering flexible working arrangements that can be taken up on a voluntary basis by both women and men, including leave arrangements, designed in a way that does not undermine their long term participation and position on the labour market. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
    - Making available a mix of various working arrangements that allow for flexibility in working time or the organisation of work, such as part-time work, job-sharing, reduced hours, compressed working

week, school term-time working, staggered or gliding hours, time-off and ad hoc home working etc.;

- career breaks and parental leave arrangements.
- Promoting a more balanced take-up of possibilities to ease work-life balance. Examples of practical tools to do so include:
  - Company internal awareness raising schemes to promote take-up of flexible work options, especially by men, including in male dominated professions;
  - Information campaigns about leave possibilities available to both women and men and encouraging parents to share leave periods more equally.
- Jointly approaching public authorities to develop instruments that help increase the availability of accessible and affordable child care facilities of good quality and seeking innovative ways of providing essential private household or caring services. Examples of practical tools to do so include
  - Attracting on site services such as travel office, shops, bank and insurance offices etc;
  - Sponsoring child care centers or providing an allowance covering part of the nursery costs to parents;
  - Creating funds by collective agreements or other means to “mutualise” the costs of maternity or parental leave allowances helps to ensure that women no longer represent a more costly source of labour than men. Similar measures can be useful to support childcare projects addressing specific needs of working parents such as care for sick children, care outside regular opening hours, etc. This can help in particular SMEs.

#### **4. TACKLING THE GENDER PAY GAP**

26. Within the EU there is a strong legal framework, based on article 141 of the EU-Treaty, providing women and men with the right to equal pay for equal work and work of equal value. The wages of individual employees are influenced by many different factors. Social partners of all Member States have a clear obligation to ensure that the pay systems they put in place do not lead to pay discrimination between women and men.

27. Social partners are struck by the persistence of a gender pay gap across Europe. It may, among other things signal labour market dysfunction. They are also concerned by the fact that the reasons lying behind this gap are not always well understood. They therefore believe that it is very important to seek to better understand the numerous and complex factors explaining wage differences between women and men and take action accordingly.

28. Recognising the link between labour market segregation and the gender pay gap, social partners at different levels have used or developed a variety of instruments to act on the underlying causes of gender pay differences, such as equal pay reviews, equality plans, benchmarking, etc. Practice also shows that using modernisation of

pay systems as an opportunity for gender mainstreaming can be extremely effective. In the case of a significant overhaul of pay systems, it is essential to plan and spread the implementation of the pay system modification over a sufficiently long period to ensure the financial sustainability of the approach and to avoid jeopardising the competitiveness of companies.

29. European social partners believe that the joint commitment of social partners at all relevant levels and the following elements are key to tackle the gender pay gap.

- Informing about existing legislation on equal pay and giving guidance on how to help closing the gender pay gap at different levels. Examples of practical tools used to do so include:
  - Practical guide, especially for SMEs, on how to live up to their legal obligations;
  - National or sectoral collective agreements or framework agreements.
- Developing clear up to date statistics at sector and/or national level to enable social partners to analyse and understand the complex causes of pay differentials. Promoting the availability of gender specific information at the appropriate levels (national, sectoral and/or company level). Examples of practical tools used to do so include:
  - Develop a joint method, taking into account as wide a range of variables as possible, in order to have a detailed and analytical picture of the underlying causes of wage differences between women and men.
- Ensuring that pay systems, including job evaluation schemes, are transparent and gender neutral and paying attention to the possible discriminatory effects of secondary elements of pay. Using or developing methods and instruments to address the gender pay gap in a systematic way, that allows for monitoring and evaluation as part of a wider strategy. Examples of practical tools used to do so include:
  - Screening job descriptions to check that they don't contain discriminatory elements;
  - Reviewing pay criteria to check that they are not discriminatory;
  - Developing tool kits comprising different elements in order to give background information to negotiators dealing with gender equality issues and to offer practical advice on what employers and workers can do in enterprises;
  - Use existing on-line tools providing information on wage formation and enabling individuals to compare their salaries with that of other employees.

#### **IV. ACTIONS AND FOLLOW-UP**

30. The member organisations of UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC) will promote this framework of actions in Member States at all appropriate levels taking account of national practices, through joint and separate actions, as appropriate. Given the interest of the matter under consideration, the social partners have also decided to transmit this document to all relevant players at European and national levels, including EU sectoral social partners, EU and national public authorities etc.
31. The national social partners will draw up an annual report on the actions carried out in Member States on the four priorities identified. The members of EUROCADRES/CEC have a particular role to play with regard to the priority “promoting women in decision-making”.
32. The European Social Dialogue Committee will be entrusted with the preparation of the overall European report.
33. After four annual reports, the European social partners will evaluate the impact on both companies and workers. This evaluation can lead to an update of the priorities identified and/or an assessment on whether or not additional action is required in one or more of the priority areas.
34. When preparing the next EU social dialogue work programme, the social partners will take account of this framework of actions.

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