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EFSI's contribution to the public consultation "Equality between women and men in the EU"

Registered organisation

Register ID number: 57795906755-89

Authorisation given to publish the reply

ABOUT YOU

1. *Are you replying to this consultation in a professional capacity and/or on behalf of an organisation ?

Yes

No

Which organisation?

The European Federation for Services to Individuals (EFSI).

2. *What type of organisation is this?

NGO women's rights organisation

NGO men's organisation

NGO youth organisation

European institution

EU Member State government

Regional/Local authority

- National government outside the EU
- Academic institution
- Media
- International organisation
- Social partner organisation
- Equality body organisation
- Other

Please specify

EFSI represents national federations and associations as well as companies involved in the development of the personal and household services in Europe. It seeks to ensure that the specificity of the sector is recognized and that the provision and access to high quality and affordable personal and household services are granted thanks to adequate economic, social and legal conditions.

Personal and household services (PHS) comprises of a broad range of activities that contribute to the well-being of families and individuals which are: home services (housework, ironing, gardening, small repair work, delivery of food, etc.), child care facilities including all kind of services (nursery, nanny, shared childcare, holiday centres, baby sitting, etc.), tutoring (school help, IT assistance, etc.) and services to enable disabled, dependants and elderly people to continue to live in their own home.

3. What is your function/position within the organisation?

Director

4. Which country do you work in?

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary

- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- Other (please specify)

Through its members, EFSI is present in 22 EU Members' States namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and United-Kingdom.

QUESTIONNAIRE

5. ***The current European Commission Strategy on equality between women and men sets the following priorities:**

Equal economic independence

Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value

Equality in decision-making

Dignity, integrity, and an end to gender-based violence

Gender equality in external relations

Horizontal issues of gender roles and legislation

Do you consider these priorities to still be valid for the Commission's work on equality between women and men after 2015?

- Yes
- No
- Partially
- Other

Don't know

Please specify

These priorities remain valid but EFSI calls for a recast of the equal economic independence priority incl. a work-life balance strategy and actions towards sectors dominated by female undeclared work.

6. Here is a list of inequalities which men or women can face. In your opinion, which of them should be dealt with most urgently?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Facing prejudice because of preconceived ideas about the image and role of women and men
- The unequal sharing of caring and household tasks between men and women
- Harassment faced by women, e.g. on public transport, in the street, and online
- The small number of women in positions of power in politics and businesses
- The low employment rate of women
- Women being paid less than men for the same work or work of equal value
- Women being more likely than men to live in poverty
- Women receiving lower pension benefits than men
- The specific issues faced by women who are single parents
- Gender-based violence
- Men having a lower life expectancy than women
- Boys having a higher school drop-out rate
- Women being more discriminated against than men in the workplace
- Widespread violation of women's rights worldwide
- None
- Don't know
- Other

Please describe briefly

The unequal sharing of caring and household tasks between men and women remains a considerable challenge towards a greater equality between women and men in the EU. Thus, according to Eurofound, women spend 12 hours more per week to unpaid work than men, the most time consuming unpaid activities being cooking and food preparation, cleaning, shopping and childcare. It has a direct impact on women's participation to the labour market as after every child mothers work 12% less (EP report on women and crisis). Furthermore, the 2013 European Labour Force Survey revealed that the main reasons of women's inactivity is caused by personal and family responsibilities in 9.9% of the cases and by caring responsibilities towards children or incapacitated adults in 15% of the cases (compared to respectively 1.9% and 1.2% for men). The same applies for the main reasons of women's part-time employment which is caused by personal and family responsibilities in 15.6% and by caring responsibilities in 27.6% of the cases (compared to respectively 7.3% and 3.9% for men).

Thus, if no action is taken to reverse the trend, it will undoubtedly undermine the European Union's ability to reach the Europe 2020 Strategy's objectives related to employment and poverty reduction. Indeed, unequal sharing of household tasks and unpaid care, as well as the lack of adequate access to affordable child care severely hinders women's participation in the labour market and their ability to earn an adequate and independent income. Over the past years, austerity policies might have transferred the responsibility for care from society to household, thus strengthening the unequal share of care and household tasks.

7. In your opinion, is there any specific group of women and men that requires more focused attention in the Commission's efforts to ensure equality between women and men?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Young women and men
- Elderly women and men
- Women and men with disabilities
- Migrant women and men
- Single parents
- Working parents with young children
- Women and men belonging to minorities (e.g. Roma)
- None of these groups should be targeted specifically
- Don't know
- Other

8. *In your opinion, on what actions should the Commission focus to ensure equality between women and men?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Improving data collection and monitoring
- Enforcing and monitoring existing legislation
- Introducing legislation
- Strengthening cooperation and coordination on gender equality policy at EU level
- Providing funding
- Facilitating European Networks
- Providing fora for mutual exchange of practices
- None
- Don't know
- Other

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

9. One of the EU's objectives is to increase the number of women in the labour market. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to achieve this?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Increasing flexible work arrangements and/or part-time work for women and men
- Making child care more accessible, more affordable, and/or of better quality
- Improving women's access to jobs traditionally held by men
- Improving women's access to better paid jobs
- Making sure women earn the same as men for the same work or work of equal value
- Making sure it is beneficial financially for women to work (by changing rules on taxes and social benefits)
- Making it easier for women and men to combine a job with household and care responsibilities
- Making sure that recruitment procedures do not discriminate against women
- Making employers aware of the benefits of employing and promoting women
- Preventing discrimination of female workers, e.g. dismissals for being pregnant
- Provide for more targeted active labour market measures for specific groups of women (e.g. migrants, women returning from maternity/parental leave, etc.)
- Improving both formal institutional and home-care services (for dependant and elderly people) as well as support to informal carers
- Making jobs in innovative sectors, such as the digital sector, more accessible to women
- None
- Don't know
- Other

Please describe briefly

EFSI considers that effective EU actions towards the increasing of women's participation to the labour market should be twofold.

Firstly, as stated above, women's participation to the labour market is linked to the distribution of families responsibilities. Thus, EFSI calls on Member States to respect their commitment taken in 2002 in Barcelona to ensure that 33% of children under three years of age and 90% of children aged between three and mandatory school age are enrolled in childcare facilities. In addition, EFSI calls for the adoption of a comprehensive work-life balance strategy and to commit that at least 50% of European workers have access to measures ensuring a better balance between professional and private lives by 2020. This strategy should target both men and women be they parents or carers of elderly or dependents, because all workers (regardless the size of the organisation they work for) must be fully integrated. The strategy should promote a reorganization of working time arrangements as well as the development of personal and household services. This includes measures to make the formal provision of PHS (i.e. housework services, child care and home care) more accessible and affordable, and of better quality; as well as direct support of companies to their employees (on-site childcare facilities, support in finding and organizing services, or the award of benefits facilitating access to PHS). In this regard, numerous tools such as vouchers facilitate the access to formal services at an affordable price by increasing users' purchasing power while

guaranteeing to the State or the employers the destination of the allocated funds and fostering the structuration of supply.

These supporting measures have already been successfully implemented in many countries (e.g. Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, Sweden or United-Kingdom) and they have proven their effectiveness. For example, the one introduced in Sweden ("RUT-avdraget") to ensure the affordability of formal domestic services had a positive impact on women's participation on the labour market. A study conducted in 2014 by Halldén & Stenberg revealed that for every purchased hour of household services, married women (aged 25-55) gained 1.8 hours, out of which 60% is used for paid work. Therefore, by increasing women's time spent on paid work, the tax deduction could lead to a decreased gender pay gap, especially for women with middle or high incomes who make up the major share of PHS consumers.

Secondly, EFSI considers that EU actions should target female-dominated sector in which a high level of undeclared work can be observed throughout Europe, such as domestic work in private household. Indeed, this precarious situation is extremely damaging for workers as they do not have access to social protection and equal labour rights. This challenge should be addressed by the future European Platform on undeclared work currently under discussion between the Council and the European Parliament. In this regard, the establishment of a specific working group on PHS would be beneficial. The Platform could carry out several tasks such as developing tools, common concepts and non-binding guidelines, as well as conducting peer reviews and European campaigns. These initiatives would unquestionably make a substantive contribution to the development of legal frameworks and incentives measures by Member States to formalise undeclared work in the PHS sector. Generally speaking, EFSI underlines that fighting undeclared work should go hand in hand with measures improving working conditions and professionalization in order to make formal employment more attractive for both workers and employers and to create a virtuous circle.

CARING ACTIVITIES

10. What should be done to encourage a more equal sharing of caring activities (housework, caring for children and/or dependents) between women and men? at most 2 choice(s)

- Introducing compulsory paternity leave
- Improving the pay of parental leave
- Making sure men are not discriminated against if they take leave to care for dependents and/or children
- Improving the quality and pay of part-time work to make it a valid career option for both women and men
- Promoting jobs in the care sectors as a valid career option for men
- Changing men's and boys' attitudes towards caring activities (housework, caring for children and/or dependents)
- Support the involvement of men in pro-feminist movements and support male organisations promoting gender equality
- None
- Don't know
- Other

11. In your opinion, which of the following actions would add most value in addressing the growing needs in terms of elderly and dependent care which impact the work-life balance of women and men?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Introducing carer's leave
- Making institutional care more accessible, more affordable and better quality
- Making formal care at home more accessible
- Improving support to informal carers
- Promoting innovative, less labour-intensive solutions in elderly and dependent care
- Improving working and pay conditions in the care sector
- None
- Don't know
- Other

Providing access to affordable and high quality home care services for the elderly and other dependents is essential for ensuring women and men's ability to choose the solution that fits the best their needs. Indeed, the need of a better balance between professional and personal duties of informal carers is often underestimated despite their high taking (80%) among the overall caring time provided. In this regard, due to population ageing, the overall EU workforce is going to shrink and workers' caring obligations are going to increase thus reducing the number of available informal carers while at the same time retirement age is postponed. This may lead to an unsustainable situation if Member States keep reducing their investment in long-term care. Thus, EFSI calls for more public investment targeting the demand of home care services along with the improvement of working conditions and a better recognition of the professionalization of home care jobs. EFSI considers it essential to support the demand (by increasing the purchasing power of users) rather than the supply, as it ensures public intervention's neutrality towards providers as well as users' freedom of choice and access to the formal market at an affordable price. In addition, support to informal carers should be increased (such as access to respite care or domestic services, workplace policies, etc.) so that they are able to take care of their relative without being forced to quit their jobs.

VIOLENCE

12. *Which of the following policy actions should the Commission prioritise in combating gender-based violence in the EU?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Data collection and research on root causes, consequences and costs
- Training police officers and others coming into contact with women at risk
- EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)
- Funding grassroots projects by civil society organisations
- Supporting EU wide networks
- Awareness-raising campaigns

- Exchanges of good practice among Member States
- None – Member States should address gender-based violence by themselves
- Don't know
- Other

EU POLICY-MAKING

13. *In which of the following EU policy areas do you think a gender perspective should be better integrated?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Asylum & migration
- Cohesion
- Development cooperation & external relations
- Digital agenda
- Economic and financial
- Education
- Employment and social
- Health
- Research
- None
- Don't know
- Other

14. What, based on your experience, are the measures that have the most impact on improving gender mainstreaming within large public administrations, including the European Commission?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Gender budgeting
- Mandatory training on gender equality for Commission staff
- Mandatory training on gender equality for high-level EU decision makers
- Integrating the gender perspective better into impact assessments
- Setting targets for each policy area and monitor results
- More role models amongst EU managers showing that a better work-life balance is possible
- None
- Don't know
- Other

15. Good partnership with all stakeholders is key to ensure equality between women and men. Which stakeholders do you believe are most important to ensure equality between women and men?

at most 2 choice(s)

- Social partners
- Governments of the EU countries
- EU institutions
- Women's rights organisations
- Men's organisations
- Youth organisations
- International organisations
- None
- Don't know
- Other

Please describe briefly

EFSI believes that any EU strategy on gender equality should be implemented side by side with EU Member States. Furthermore, a whole range of stakeholders (social partners, PHS providers, civil society representatives, etc.) should be involved in order to ensure that - beyond the general objectives of such strategies - the solutions put forward are efficient and suitable to EU citizens' needs.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS

16. If you have any additional comments and/or suggestions to improve equality between women and men in the EU, feel free to use the open box below.

EFSI welcomes this public consultation's focus on the issue of "women in the labour market" and "caring activities". PHS' sector contribution to gender equality is fundamental in both providing jobs for women and in enabling a better work-life balance. An EU action tackling the prevalence of undeclared work in female-dominated sector such as work in private households is more than desirable and would bring many benefits in terms of gender equality in the labour market and fighting women's poverty and social exclusion. In addition a comprehensive EU work-life balance strategy is necessary as change in family structures, an increased employment rate of women, an ageing population and a higher number of single parent families have been witnessed in the last decade. It has resulted in greater difficulties for EU citizens to cope with everyday life tasks and family responsibilities. These two challenges are all interconnected and related and EFSI believes that the EU can be a driving force towards measures promoting a wide and fair solvency of the demand among providers, guarantying users' freedom of choice, and structuring a quality supply of services. They can take the form of in-cash benefits, tax deduction and exemption schemes, VAT reduced rates or services vouchers. EFSI invites the Commission to refer to its booklet entitled "PHS: key tools for work-life balance" to get a better insight of the various PHS support mechanisms that could be implemented.