



THE GENDER DIMENSION OF THE PES MANIFESTO

Contribution to the position papers of the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions on the four consultation themes for the elaboration of a PES Manifesto for the 2009 European elections

While bringing the local and regional perspective into the four PES Manifesto themes has been the main concern of Socialists and Social Democrats in the Committee of the Regions, we have also felt the need to highlight the gender dimension of the issues addressed by the Manifesto, and this at sub-national level. For those levels of government closest to the citizens, being aware of how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men at grassroots level and undertaking to re-address them if and where their competencies permit it, is a key issue.

The aim of our contribution is to present convincing arguments for mainstreaming this dual specificity into the PES Manifesto, a unique political tool that should provide Europe's citizens with progressive political choices. After all, making gender equality a concrete reality in the lives of women and men across the EU is for Socialists and Social Democrats a core priority and as such, a basic human rights obligation and a matter of democracy.

This is why we welcome the fact that the Lisbon Treaty lists equality between women and men amongst the universal values of the European Union.

√ **New Social Europe**

How can local and regional authorities ensure equality of opportunities for those wishing to enter and stay in the labour market?

We Socialists and Social Democrats in the Committee of the Regions are fully committed to improving governance for gender equality. We believe that local and regional authorities should act as catalysts and play to the full their role as supporting and facilitating bodies.

Without improving the position of women in the labour market, it is hard to create a socially coherent Europe. Gender equality is inextricably linked with employment and social inclusion, two objectives actively pursued through the Lisbon Strategy.

To this effect, we recommend that the Strategy for Growth and Jobs should be gender mainstreamed in relation not only to its Jobs and Social Inclusion part as it is currently the case, but also to the Growth element. More specifically, we call for a clear reference to equal opportunities in all 24 Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Jobs, which cover the macro-economic, micro-economic and employment dimensions.

Insofar as job creation is concerned, we point out that there is an urgent need to monitor the quantitative progress of women on the labour market, which is still insufficient, and admittedly still leaves them disadvantaged in relation to men since they continue to be both under-employed and under-paid. We therefore reiterate our call for a decentralised and gender-sensitive implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. Local and regional authorities are generally in a position to provide an accurate mapping of the labour market and unemployment situation in their area, reflecting the specificities - including gender - of both job holders and job seekers. We also highlight their key role in improving women's employability through the provision of education and lifelong learning opportunities.

Concerning the formulation and implementation of flexicurity measures that will be reflected in Member States' National Reform Programmes, we strongly recommend taking the gender dimension seriously into consideration in order to avoid further discrimination of women in the labour market and the widening of the gender pay gap. While flexibility is an important aspect for job creation, security and monitoring of working conditions are of paramount importance to prevent further discrimination towards those classes of employees likely to be employed in flexible work. Flexibility should be promoted as being necessary both on the part of the employee and more importantly on the part of the employer to increase female employment and for job retention.

Moreover, we insist on the importance of empowering local and regional authorities to attain the Barcelona targets for childcare by 2010. National governments should enable local and regional authorities to provide childcare facilities that are of high quality, affordable and accessible to all in order to reach the Lisbon targets of female employment. This is a key issue if we wish to encourage women to enter, re-enter or stay in the labour market.

Furthermore, all levels of governance should facilitate domestic and family burden sharing between men and women in order to redress gender imbalances in access to the labour market.

We Socialists and Social Democrats of the CoR are concerned about the fact that women are often forced to choose between family life and work, a choice that men do not usually have to make. From a European perspective, it is unacceptable that so many citizens of the Union are faced with such a dilemma as this tends to perpetuate structural inequalities between women and men. What is more, it constitutes a regression in the functioning of democracy in Europe.

We particularly call for a gender-based assessment of national budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality. Local and regional authorities should be

fully consulted in the gender budgeting exercise, which should be balanced and transparent. Relevant tools should be adapted also to the local and regional context.

Finally, Socialists and Social Democrats in the Committee of the Regions feel there is an urgent need for gender disaggregated statistics and data, providing information on women's entrepreneurship, which has been stagnant for several years. Such data should also reflect divergences between the national and local/regional levels. On the basis of the findings, facilitation measures should be put into place at grassroots level.

√ **Save our Planet**

Whether at work or at home, women, who usually have additional domestic and family responsibilities, tend to bring their own gender-oriented perspective into the day-to-day management of the environment and the natural resources of the area where they live. How can it be ensured that women's voices are heard in the formulation, planning and execution of environmental policies at local and regional level? How can women contribute towards the development of a sustainable environment culture?

The PES Group in the Committee of the Regions recalls Principle 20 of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, according to which "Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development".

Women play a pivotal role in stimulating changes in attitudes and encouraging the adoption of greener lifestyles by children, since they are the primary carers and educators of the next generation. At the same time, women are, in many parts of the world, likely to be the most affected if we fail in combating climate change, and many women are conscious of that.

Moreover, women make the majority of consumer purchasing decisions for households and it has been proven that they tend to have more sustainable consumption patterns and make more ethical consumer choices considering also the dimension of sustainable production, thus affirming their concern over the longer-term well-being of families and children¹.

¹ Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximising the economic, social and environmental role of women, OECD 2008.

We therefore strongly advocate the strengthening of women's presence in climate decision-making since gender is an important aspect that should be taken into account when designing policies both to mitigate and adapt to climate change. In particular, we urge for gender balance in the composition of teams negotiating environment and energy measures at all levels of governance, from international and European, to national, regional and local.

Given the distinct role of women in minimising environmental impacts, we stress the importance of supporting them in their more sustainable consumer preferences. This means for example that local and regional authorities must be able to provide adequate public transport to improve women's mobility (as they tend to favour public transport and drive less than men), alternative energy choices and comprehensive waste management solutions. Strengthening female consumption patterns can benefit the environment, the economy and the society.

√ **European Democracy and Diversity**

How can women's representation be best ensured at local and regional level and which role does the gender dimension play in the debate on integration and diversity?

Stereotypes about women's leadership and capabilities still persist across the world, with the EU not being an exception. Although a lot remains to be done, significant steps have been taken at European level to fight such prejudices.

Women's participation in political life cannot be treated in a vacuum. Instead, we strongly believe that it is linked, to a considerable extent, with their participation in the economy. Local and regional authorities can contribute significantly towards improving the political gender balance at all levels of governance. We insist on the need to empower women to enter and stay in the labour market. We also urge for a response to stagnant figures for women managers through the provision of effective measures for the reconciliation of professional and family/private life. Last but not least, as part of women's active participation in economic life, we underline the significance of female entrepreneurship and the urgent need for measures to reduce red-tape for start-up businesses and facilitate women's access to credit. All this requires concrete quantitative targets and an efficient system for monitoring their attainment.

Moreover, we call for greater transparency and more open participation in political processes. We firmly believe that local and regional administrations that are accessible and public-friendly can provide invaluable assistance to women wishing to be involved in governance. Special training and information programmes explaining complex legal processes as well as schemes to assist working mothers are also vitally important and

should be provided at the level closest to the citizens. As in the case of women's economic participation, quantitative targets can be applied in terms of their representation in political life, in full respect of the subsidiarity principle. The effectiveness of such targets is of course strengthened if they are not applied in isolation but are accompanied by concrete empowering measures.

We Socialists and Social Democrats of the Committee of the Regions are convinced that greater participation of women in all levels of governance is a sine qua non if we want decision-making bodies that are sufficiently effective, accountable and participatory.

Specific measures should be adopted regarding conciliation of work and family life as well as co-responsibility, in order to increase men's effective involvement in family tasks. This is needed in order to empower women to fully participate in decision-making processes, thus ensuring gender balance in power sharing.

Considering that women make up more than 50% of all new immigrants to OECD countries², greater gender awareness vis-à-vis migration flows is essential because migration patterns and effects on home and host countries differ between male and female migrants. Moreover, as carers and educators women play a key role in preparing the next generation for life in a new society. Women with a migration background need special support in education to allow them to make informed and independent choices about how to integrate into a host society, and to strengthen their role in bringing different cultures together.

In the light of the above, we consider that women play a decisive role in the debate on integration and diversity because some of the issues of discrimination that migrant women are confronted with are common to all women. Gender-sensitive integration and diversity policies presuppose a gender balance in the bodies that elaborate and implement them.

√ **Europe in the World**

Gender equality is a core issue in development policies and peace building strategies because it strengthens a country's ability to grow, to reduce poverty and to be governed democratically and effectively. How can EU local and regional authorities contribute towards the attainment of this goal?

We consider it crucial that development assistance policies promote the economic role of women.

² OECD Migration Database.

We urge for local and regional authorities of developing countries to be given an explicitly important role in development cooperation efforts. This is a key issue because it is a fact that the attainment of the UN Millennium Goals requires sound governance and a decentralised approach that delivers results on the ground.

We support decentralised cooperation, that is, the international cooperation led by European local authorities under the direction of their democratically elected executives and involving local stakeholders distinct from both central and state government.

It is within the framework of such cooperation that EU local and regional authorities should propose gender-sensitive cooperation measures, raising awareness about the gender issue amongst their counterparts outside the EU.

Furthermore, peace, stability and security issues cannot be effectively addressed without the involvement of women at grassroots level. Women can contribute towards conflict resolution and are key players when it comes to managing human security issues such as health epidemics, psychological problems emerging during or after conflicts, or health threats caused by environmental degradation.

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