COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION

of 2 December 1996

on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process

(96/694/EC)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 235 thereof,

Having regard to the proposals from the Commission,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament [1],

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee [2],

(1) Whereas the Council has adopted a series of legislative instruments and a number of political commitments in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities for men and women [3] [4] [5] [6];

[1] OJ No C 166, 10. 6. 1996, p. 276.
[2] OJ No C 204, 15. 7. 1996, p. 21.
[3] — Council Directive 75/117/EEC of 10 February 1975 on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women (OJ No L 45, 19. 2. 1975, p. 19).
— Council Directive 76/207/EEC of 9 February 1976 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions (OJ No L 39, 14. 2. 1976, p. 40).
— Council Directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security (OJ No L 6, 10. 1. 1979, p. 24).
— Council Directive 86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes (OJ No L 225, 12. 8. 1986, p. 40).
— Council Directive 86/613/EEC of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood (OJ No L 359, 19. 12. 1986, p. 56).
— Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (OJ No L 348, 28. 11. 1992, p. 1).
[4] — Council Decision 95/593/EC of 22 December 1995 on a medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women (1996-2000) (OJ No L 335, 30. 12. 1995, p. 37).
[5] — Council recommendation 84/635/EEC of 13 December 1984 on the promotion of positive action for women (OJ No L 331, 19. 12. 1984, p. 34).
— Council recommendation 92/241/EEC of 31 March 1992 on child care (OJ No L 123, 8. 5. 1992, p. 16).
[6] — Council resolution of 12 July 1982 on the promotion of equal opportunities for women (OJ No C 186, 21. 7. 1982, p. 3).
— Council resolution of 7 June 1984 on action to combat unemployment amongst women (OJ No C 161, 21. 6. 1984, p. 4).
— Resolution of the Council and the Ministers for Education, meeting within the Council, of 3 June 1985 containing an action programme on equal opportunities for girls and boys in education (OJ No C 166, 5. 7. 1985, p. 1).
— Second Council resolution of 24 July 1986 on the promotion of equal opportunities for women (OJ No C 203, 12. 8. 1986, p. 2).
— Council resolution of 16 December 1988 on the reintegration and late integration of women into working life (OJ No C 333, 28. 12. 1988, p. 1).
— Council resolution of 29 May 1990 on the protection of the dignity of women and men at work (OJ No C 157, 27. 6. 1990, p. 3).
— Council resolution of 21 May 1991 on the third medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1991-1995) (OJ No C 142, 31. 5. 1991, p. 1).
— Council resolution of 22 June 1994 on the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men through action by the European Structural Funds (OJ No C 231, 20. 8. 1994, p. 1).
— Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 6 December 1994 on equal participation by women in an employment-intensive economic growth strategy within the European Union (OJ No C 368, 23. 12. 1994, p. 3).
— Council resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making (OJ No C 168, 4. 7. 1995, p. 3).
— Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 5 October 1995 on the image of women and men portrayed in advertising and the media (OJ No C 296, 10. 11. 1995, p. 15).

(2) Whereas the Heads of State and Government, meeting within the European Council in Essen, Cannes and Madrid, stressed that the fight against unemployment and equal opportunities for women and men were paramount tasks of the European Union and its Member States;

(3) Whereas attention was focused on women's access to decision-making in Council Recommendation 84/635/EEC of 13 December 1984 on the promotion of positive action for women [1], in the second Council Resolution of 24 July 1986 on the promotion of equal opportunities for women [2], in the Council Resolution of 21 May 1991 on the third medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for women and men (1991-1995) [3], in the Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making [4] and in Council Decision 95/593/EC of 22 December 1995 on a medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women (1996-2000) [5];

(4) Whereas the European Parliament in its Resolution of 11 February 1994 on women in decision-making bodies [6] asked the Commission to 'step up implementation of the equal opportunities policy set out in the third Community action programme, to combat individual obstacles which hinder women from taking part in decision-making' and to define 'measures and actions to promote greater participation of women in the decision-making process';

(5) Whereas the Declaration and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4 to 15 September 1995) stressed the need to ensure that responsibilities, powers and rights are shared equally; whereas the Member States are committed to implementing the Platform for Action;

(6) Whereas participation in the decision-making process depends on representation on decision-making bodies at all levels of political, economic, social and cultural life and requires, in particular, presence in posts of responsibility and decision-taking positions;

(7) Whereas women are still under-represented in decision-making bodies, in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres;

(8) Whereas the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies is partly a result of the delay in women attaining equal civic and civil rights, of obstacles to their gaining economic independence and of difficulties in reconciling their working and family life;

(9) Whereas balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is a requirement for democracy;

(10) Whereas the under-representation of women in decision-making posts constitutes a loss for society as a whole and may prevent the interests and needs of the entire population from being catered for in full;

(11) Whereas measures aimed at bringing about a balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process in all sectors should go together with the integration of the dimension of equality of opportunity for women and men in all policies and actions;

(12) Whereas balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is likely to give rise to different ideas, values and behaviour which will result in more justice and equality in the world for both men and women;

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[1] OJ No L 331, 19. 12. 1984, p. 34.
[2] OJ No C 203, 12. 8. 1986, p. 2.
[3] OJ No C 142, 31. 5. 1991, p. 1.
[4] OJ No C 168, 4. 7. 1995, p. 3.
[5] OJ No L 335, 30. 12. 1995, p. 37.
[6] OJ No C 61, 28. 2. 1994, p. 248.

(13) Whereas the Member States, the social partners, political parties and organizations, non-governmental organizations and the media play a key role in creating a society where there is a gender balance in the exercise of responsibilities in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres;

(14) Whereas it is appropriate to adopt guidelines to promote balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process with the aim of bringing about equality of opportunity for women and men and whereas it is appropriate, within the framework of the medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women (1996-2000), to make those guidelines more effective through the exchange of information on good practice;

(15) Whereas the provisions of this Recommendation apply solely within the limits of Community competence; whereas equal treatment for male and female workers constitutes one of the objectives of the Community, insofar as the harmonization of living and working conditions while maintaining their improvement are, *inter alia*, to be furthered;

(16) Whereas the Treaty does not confer, for the adoption of this Recommendation, any other powers than those referred to in Article 235,

I. RECOMMENDS THAT THE MEMBER STATES:

1. adopt a comprehensive, integrated strategy designed to promote balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process and develop or introduce the appropriate measures to achieve this, such as, where necessary, legislative and/or regulatory measures and/or incentives;

2. (a) alert those involved in education and training at all levels, including those responsible for teaching materials, to the importance of:

— a realistic and complete image of the roles and abilities of women and men in society, free of prejudice and discriminatory stereotypes,

— a more balanced sharing of professional, domestic and social responsibilities between women and men, and

— balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process at all levels;

(b) at all levels of education and training, encourage girls and women to take part and express themselves in education and training activities as actively and fully as boys and men, so as to prepare them for an active role in society, including political, economic, social and cultural life, and in particular in decision-making processes;

(c) make public opinion aware of the importance of disseminating an image of women and men that neither reinforces nor consolidates discriminatory stereotyping of women's and men's responsibilities;

(d) without encroaching on their autonomy, encourage and support efforts of associations and organizations in all areas of society to promote women's access to the decision-making process and balanced participation by women and men in decision-making bodies;

(e) without prejudice to their autonomy, encourage and support the efforts of the social partners to promote balanced participation of women and men in their activities and highlight the social partners' responsibility for promoting and proposing women candidates for nomination to various assignments on public commissions and committees in the Member States and at Community level;

(f) devise, launch and promote public campaigns to alert public opinion to the usefulness and advantages for society as a whole of balanced participation by women and men in decision-making;

3. (a) promote or improve the collection and publication of statistics to provide a clearer picture of how women and men are represented at all levels of the decision-making process in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres;

(b) support, develop and encourage quantitative and qualitative studies on the participation of women and men in the decision-making process, and especially:

— on the legal, social or cultural obstacles impeding access to and participation in the decision-making process for persons of either sex,

— on strategies for overcoming such obstacles, and

— on the utility and advantages for society and for the operation of democracy of a better balance between the sexes in the decision-making process;

(c) promote, support and encourage initiatives creating examples of good practice in the various areas of the decision-making process and develop programmes for the dissemination and exchange of experience with a view to propagating activities;

4. (a) promote balanced participation by women and men at all levels in governmental bodies and committees;

(b) raise the awareness of those involved of the importance of taking initiatives to achieve balanced participation of women and men in public positions at all levels, paying particular attention to the promotion of a balanced composition in committees, commissions and working parties at national as well as Community level;

(c) provide for, implement or develop a coherent set of measures encouraging equal opportunities in the public sector and respecting the concept of balanced participation in the decision-making process, and ensure, when recruitment competitions take place, that women and men are, as far as possible, represented equally in the committees responsible for preparing competitions and in the selection boards;

(d) encourage the private sector to increase the presence of women at all levels of decision-making, notably by the adoption of, or within the framework of, equality plans and positive action programmes;

II. CALLS ON THE INSTITUTIONS, SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND DECENTRALIZED BODIES OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES TO:

design a strategy for achieving balanced participation by women and men in the decision-making process in each institution, subsidiary body and decentralized body of the European Communities;

III. CALLS ON THE COMMISSION TO:

1. encourage and organize, within the framework of Council Decision 95/593/EC of 22 December 1995 on a medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities for men and women (1996-2000), systematic pooling of information and experience between Member States on good practice and the assessment of the impact of measures taken to achieve a better balance between women and men in the decision-making process;

2. to this end, and within that framework, step up its efforts to provide information, alert public opinion, encourage research and promote schemes aimed at achieving balanced participation by women and men in the decision-making process;

3. submit a report to the European Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee, for the first time three years after adoption of this Recommendation and thereafter annually, on its implementation, on the basis of the information provided by the Member States and the institutions, subsidiary bodies and decentralized bodies of the European Communities.

Done at Brussels, 2 December 1996.

For the Council

The President

E. FITZGERALD