**strategic objectives**

- Promote women’s economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
- Facilitate women’s equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.
- Provide business services, training and access to markets, information, and technology, particularly to low-income women.
- Strengthen women’s economic capacity and commercial networks.
- Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.

The economic independence of women is crucial to achieving equality between women and men. While the employment rate of women has increased substantially throughout the EU over the last decade, the patterns of women’s work continue to reflect traditional gender roles. The visibility of women in the labour-market has led to the assumption that the dual-income model dominates as opposed to the single male breadwinner model of the past. However, social protection systems continue to be shaped around the male breadwinner model, with the result that women remain on the margins of economic independence and power whether they are workers in the labour-market and/or recipients of social protection benefits, including statutory rights such as pensions. A more cohesive and coherent approach to socio-economic policies is necessary in order to achieve women’s economic independence.
The employment rate for women falls by 12.4 points when they have children under 12, while it rises by 7.3 points for men.
The greatest challenge to female employment in Europe continues to be reconciling family life, particularly as regards the care of children and other dependent family members, with the demands of the labour-market. With the European job-market still reflecting a male-dominated life-cycle model, women’s position in the labour-market suffers significantly and disproportionately when they decide to have children. The employment rate for women falls by 12.4 points when they have children under 12, while it rises by 7.3 points for men. Women in Europe are four times more likely to work part-time than men. In most cases, part-time work stems from a desire to compromise between work and family obligations, and a lack of options. 30% of European women say that they work part-time in order to care for children or other dependants, and would like to work more if care alternatives were available.

The lack of affordable, accessible and quality childcare is still not being adequately addressed, despite the European targets to provide childcare to at least 90% of children between three years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under three by the year 2010. Most Member States will not meet these targets, particularly in the 0-3 age group. Reconciliation measures fail to reflect the reality of women’s disproportionate burden of care for children and dependent family members that shape their participation (or not) in the labour-market and the importance of care especially in the context of an increasingly ageing population. The male take-up rate of reconciliation measures is low, and depends on a number of factors including pay: men are unlikely to take leave for a fixed sum that does not reflect their salaries. Reconciliation thus requires holistic care policies. Currently, the reform of a European Council Directive on maternity leave is becoming a legislative battleground in the European Institutions, particularly in relation to pay, duration of leave and the introduction of a paternity/co-maternity leave clause. The need for care facilities has been identified as a priority for all groups of women, including migrant and Roma workers; however, policies are weak.

Since 2007 flexicurity has emerged as a key policy priority. Flexicurity aims to provide mechanisms to adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment by combining flexibility in work and security when out of work, which Member States are invited to implement. A close look at the concept of flexicurity reveals a policy that tends to favour employers over workers, failing to address the fundamental and persistent obstacles to women’s full participation in economic life. Guaranteed income is crucial for periods out of or between jobs for those for whom activation and flexicurity strategies may prove difficult, especially women, who are invariably the primary carers. Most affected are single parents, 85% of whom are women; and parents with additional caring needs for sick or special-needs children, other family members or dependents.

European women may be entering the labour-market in unprecedented numbers, but they still face serious obstacles in attaining equal treatment in employment. Women’s average hourly salary is 17.4% lower than men’s in the EU. In seven member states, namely Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Slovakia and the UK, women earn 20% less than their male counterparts. This staggering gender pay gap has not been systematically tackled in economic, social and employment policies. Targets and timelines to reduce the gap are lacking and equal pay audits are generally net mandatory. There is a danger that economic recovery measures will deepen the gender pay gap.

Furthermore, elderly women are increasingly recognised as a vulnerable group that will fall victim to a gender pension gap. They are sanctioned financially for the time they spent out of the labour-market on caring tasks and suffer from a failure to guarantee indexing of pensions which leads to a progressive poverty trap in old age. The gender pension gap has yet to be recognised and addressed in the context of the gender pay gap, which demonstrates that the main breadwinner model is still the yardstick against which access to socio-economic rights is measured.

In July 2009, the Council adopted new rules for the coordination of social security systems (building on a Directive from 1984) to extend provisions to those covered in one Member State if they move to/live in another Member State. Reference is made to ‘non-active persons’, defined as ‘persons who are in a social security system covering all residents but who do not exercise a paid activity, such as persons taking care of the home’, this reinforces dependency status because it fails to recognise individual rights.

Changes are proposed to the 1986 Council Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment for self-employed men and women, including those working in agriculture and protection of pregnant women and mothers, to provide for automatic access for assisting partners to social security coverage.

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under the same conditions as self-employed workers. This will address inequality inherent in the Directive, which in the case of women and men who share an economic activity relegates the majority of women to secondary status due to their unequal legal status and non-mandatory social security protection. Self-employed women and assisting partners would then be entitled at their own request to avail of existing maternity leave provisions (14 weeks, of which two are mandatory) under the 1992 Directive. The Council has yet to adopt this proposal.

In October 2008, the Commission proposed to amend the 1992 Council Directive on the protection of pregnant workers, those who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding. If adopted, this proposal would extend working time beyond a 48-hour week. If adopted, this Directive would undermine reconciliation of family and professional life measures and reinforce gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work.

**Other initiatives of the EU concerning women and the economy since 2004**

The first European coordinated strategy in the field of employment started in 1998 with the introduction of shared European Employment Guidelines and a yearly National Action Plan for Employment. This is ongoing. Although most social policies remain the legal preserve of Member States, the EU can develop joint policies in the field of social policy via the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Until 2005, the OMC focused solely on social inclusion and social protection, i.e. social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care. Coherence between EU economic, employment and social policies is assessed at the annual Spring Council, which is charged with taking stock of progress made in the different policy fields. The Commission Report on Gender Equality to the Spring Council is a key part of this task. The Council of Ministers developed indicators in relation to women and the economy. Some of these indicators relate to the gender pay gap (Belgian Presidency, 2001) and the reconciliation of private and working life (French Presidency, 2000), during the Italian Presidency (2003), indicators of the number of women in economic decision-making centres were developed. However, the status of these indicators and their application remain vague.

**Common Principles of Flexicurity** were adopted by the Council in December 2007. Member States have been invited to translate the Principles into practice as part of the Lisbon Strategy. One of the Principles (Principle six) states: Flexicurity should support gender equality, by promoting equal access to quality employment for women and men and offering measures to reconcile work, family and private life. This weak formulation confirms that reconciliation measures are here considered more as a strategy to adapt to the labour-market rather than to achieve equality between women and men.

In 2008 a package of 19 initiatives was launched to form the Renewed Social Agenda. Amongst these were proposals for Directives and initiatives across a wide range of issues including the gender pay gap, but no specified action was identified in relation to the gender gap in entrepreneurship. An opportunity was lost to strengthen female entrepreneurship and to recognise that women entrepreneurs are a good investment who should be provided with financial risk-taking guarantees.

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**Gaps and Recommendations**

Since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the specific focus on women in economic policy has been reduced and gender equality has been diluted as a policy outcome. Instead, more neutral terms have emerged, such as ‘promoting a life-cycle approach to work’ and ‘reconciliation of work, private and family life’. This shift in focus has not delivered for women. Women’s full employment rates remain low. The failure to include women’s entrepreneurship provision. If proposals to extend working hours are adopted, this must be in conjunction with reinforced measures for reconciliation of family and professional life. Furthermore, flexicurity practices need to be monitored across all Member States. The inclusion of the gender pay gap in social renewal initiatives is to be welcomed; however, it is important that this egregious discrimination is tackled urgently and aggressively. Moreover, unless there is a gender equality perspective in all economic recovery measures there is a danger that the gender pay gap will be deepened.

Generally, economic policies remain disjointed, lack coherence and fail to deliver a concerted vision on gender equality. The Lisbon Strategy on Growth and Jobs, the Integrated Guidelines covering macro and micro employment issues and flexicurity are juxtaposed with other major restructuring policies, notably reforms in the rules of the internal market. A coordinated, coherent approach is urgently needed that links these to the EU’s gender equality policy and legal framework.
THE EWL CALLS ON THE EU TO:

- Reaffirm the goal of equality between women and men and explicitly aim to achieve gender equality as an outcome in the upcoming post-Lisbon EU 2020 strategy, and undertake to monitor macro and microeconomic policies that undermine women’s labour-market access and economic independence.

- Develop an all-encompassing coherent socio-economic strategy which links gender equality, social inclusion, growth and jobs, including in environmental sustainability sectors; and apply systematic gender mainstreaming to all social, environmental, macroeconomic, microeconomic and employment dimensions of the post-Lisbon EU 2020 strategy.

- Ensure the Gender Institute compiles and widely disseminates data on how women’s skills benefit the labour-market and economic growth, including links between fertility rates and women’s employment rates.

- Develop an indicator on women’s entrepreneurship in the EU 2020 strategy, and strengthen female entrepreneurship through support strategies, facilitating access to credit (including microcredit), including for ethnic minority women; and ensure rigorous monitoring of progress.

- Tackle inadequate paid leave provisions as part of the gender pay gap, including requiring that care leave payments should be a percentage of salary rather than a fixed sum.

- Use the Framework Agreement between the Social Partners on Parental Leave to establish fully paid leave, and entitle single parents to a longer parental leave or the right to transfer parts of the parental leave to someone with a close connection to the child.

- Entitle women to 24 weeks maternity leave with income equivalent to full salary throughout, guarantee the inclusion of maternity leave in the calculation of pensions and insurance; and ensure that women are protected from dismissal for up to one year on returning to work.

- Adopt a Directive to provide fully paid paternity leave of at least one month to be taken immediately or shortly after the birth or adoption of a child.

- Adopt a Directive on other forms of paid leave, including adoption leave, leave during artificial insemination processes, education leave to meet lifelong learning requirements, leave for the care of sick and terminally ill family members taking into consideration the diversity and changing nature of family structures.

- Ensure that self-employed parents and parents with temporary working contracts have the same rights to paid maternity, paternity, parental leave and other forms of paid leave. Reach urgent agreement in the Council to adopt the changes to Council Directive 86/613. 26

- Develop a set of core employment and social protection rights in which periods of unpaid work are counted as productive time in calculations for full pension rights and other employment-related social security benefits; and limit monetary payments in kind (vouchers).

- Make visible the contribution of women’s unpaid work (in the home and in family businesses) to the economy, through the development of satellite accounts and systematic recording therein.

- Guarantee a minimum adequate income through a European Directive.

- Designate a European Equal Pay Day.

- Mainstream the gender pay gap issue into all economic, social and employment policies, including policies related to care services and care leave arrangements, and integrate a gender equality perspective into all economic recovery measures; introduce concrete targets and timelines to reduce the pay gap, and adopt mandatory equal pay audits.

- Introduce indexation to meet inflation/increases in costs of living as one means of addressing the ‘working poor’.

- Renew commitments to European targets on childcare provision addressing: accessibility, quality, affordability and valuing the status of childcare workers (predominantly women); and extend targets to include quality, affordable care services for all dependants, including elderly care.

- Develop quality job creation in the care sector, including childcare and care of all family members taking into consideration the diversity and changing nature of family structures.

- Develop programmes, including positive action measures and self-esteem trainings, to ensure the access to quality employment for women facing intersectional discrimination such as those with disabilities or of ethnic minority origin.

- Adopt the changes to Council Directive 86/613. 27

- Develop and strengthen gender mainstreaming in the area of flexicurity and consult with women’s NGOs as well as the social partners, given that Member States are invited to develop national flexicurity pathways on the basis of the flexicurity common principles, and monitor these effectively in National Reform Programmes. 28

- Ensure that all women are entitled to full pension rights, including for their time spent out of the labour-market (in caring, lifelong learning, etc.), apply gender equality to existing pension schemes; guarantee transferable occupational pension schemes between different employments; and index pensions.

- Guarantee lifelong learning as a prerequisite for continuous employability and widen the definition of employability skills to include pre-employability skills and those acquired in informal settings (such as care).

- Recognise the qualifications of migrant women obtained in third countries.

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