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To: Delegations

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Subject: Women and Poverty
- Council Conclusions (8 December 2016)

Delegations will find in the annex the Council conclusions on Women and Poverty, adopted by the EPSCO Council at its 3507th meeting held on 8 December 2016.

Women and Poverty Council Conclusions¹

RECOGNISING THAT:

1. Equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in Treaties and one of the objectives and tasks of the Union, and that mainstreaming the principle of equality between women and men in all its activities represents a specific mission for the Union. Equality between men and women is also enshrined in Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
2. The Fourth UN World Conference on Women, in 1995, marked an important step in addressing the gender dimension of poverty. 'Women and Poverty' was identified as the first critical area of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Yet two decades later, women continue to be more severely affected by poverty than men due to persisting structural and cultural causes that put women at a disadvantage.
3. "Reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women" is one of the priority areas identified by the European Commission in its Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019.
4. Gender equality policies are essential instruments for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and for greater prosperity, competitiveness and employment as well as for inclusiveness and social cohesion.

¹ Conclusions adopted within the framework of the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with particular reference to critical area of concern "A: Women and Poverty"

5. As part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU committed to reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by 20 million by the year 2020. The progress made in pursuing this target is monitored annually through the European Semester process. Within this framework, policy priorities that can help address poverty have been defined and country-specific recommendations have been issued to those Member States with the greatest challenges in this field.
6. Poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be explained in economic terms only. For example, discrimination can be a cause of poverty. Conversely, poverty can also lead to discrimination as well as to social exclusion, to a lack of participation in decision making, and to a lack of opportunities in civic, social, cultural and political life.
7. Women often face a higher risk of poverty than men. This is particularly true for women facing a greater risk of vulnerability -- for example, long-term unemployed and economically inactive women, women in single-parent households, women with a migrant background,² women belonging to marginalised groups or ethnic or religious minorities, older women living alone, women with disabilities and women who are homeless. The relationship between gender and poverty is a complex one and cannot be fully understood by simply measuring gender gaps.
8. The gender gap in poverty begins to increase at the age of 55–64 years and is highest in the 75+ age group. This is mainly a result of women's lower participation in the labour market, career interruptions linked to an unequal sharing by women and men of the responsibilities for caring for children and other dependants, lower earnings, higher incidence of part time work and low quality and low-paid employment, and shorter careers. The negative impact of lower incomes on the living standards of older women is exacerbated by the high share of older women living alone, linked to higher life expectancy. In addition, pension age differences lead in some cases to lower pension entitlements.

² Migrant background is here defined by reference to country of birth and categorised as either native-born or foreign-born, with the latter subdivided into EU-born and non-EU-born. Country of birth is defined as the country of residence of the person's mother at the time of their birth.

9. This set of Conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments voiced by the European Parliament, the Council, including the Integrated Approach to combating poverty and social exclusion, and on work by the Commission and other relevant stakeholders in this area including the documents listed in Annex II.

WELCOMING:

10. The report on the Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States entitled "Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU"³ prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) at the request of the Slovak Presidency, which provides an analysis of the gender dimension of poverty in the EU, with a particular focus on the situation of women who experience intersecting inequalities, especially in connection with poverty or social exclusion.

NOTING THAT:

11. EIGE's report shows that women across the EU are at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion than men, primarily due to gender inequalities in the labour market, particularly women's lower average employment rate. Women are also four times more likely than men to work part time or on temporary contracts. Moreover, the economic inactivity rate of working-age women is almost twice as high as that of men. A fifth of women living in poverty are not active in the labour market due to caring and domestic responsibilities. This may reflect the lack of affordable childcare facilities as well as the lack of care services for other dependants and of other measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work, family life and private life.

³ See 14295/16 ADD 1.

12. The report shows that living conditions as well as the level of poverty and pathways into and out of poverty vary across the life course. Adult women are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than men in all age groups. In most Member States, the risk of poverty or social exclusion decreases with age for both men and women while gender differences increase in older age groups. Thus the risk of poverty is highest for young women and men and lowest for retired people. However, while poverty decreases with age in the case of men, women's risk of poverty begins to increase prior to retirement.
13. The analysis also shows the direct impact of household structure on the risk of poverty. While the picture varies greatly across the EU, the households of lone parents, of couples with three or more children, of single older women, and of young people are at the highest risk of poverty and hardship in virtually all Member States. Moreover, lone mothers are significantly more disadvantaged as compared with lone fathers. Almost half of lone mothers and a third of lone fathers are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. At the same time, one-parent families headed by women are also twice as likely to be materially deprived (20% versus 9%) or to lack the capacity to face unexpected financial expenses.
14. People with disabilities also face a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion. In 2014, 39% of disabled women and 37% of disabled men and nearly half of all non-EU nationals were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
15. Economic inactivity is pronounced among women with a migrant background, 39% of whom were inactive in 2014, which is almost twice the rate for men with a migrant background (20%). This is one of the reasons why women with a migrant background face a particularly high risk of poverty or social exclusion.

16. Among the specific vulnerable groups, the Roma minority faces, in many Member States, particularly severe disadvantages and integration challenges which the Member States address in their National Roma Integration Strategies or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion measures. Approximately six million EU citizens are Roma, which makes them the largest ethnic minority group within the Union. Nine in ten Roma women and men live in poverty. Moreover, the role of Roma women as the primary homemakers particularly exposes them to the adverse effects of the materially deprived conditions in which many Roma live.
17. Homelessness among women has been increasing. It exposes women to poverty and social exclusion and severely limits their economic opportunities. Employment rates among homeless women are extremely low, with many having only "scattered" or temporary employment. Their chances of finding a job are hindered by a lack of a safe home and the exposure to health hazards as well as violence and exploitation.
18. EIGE's report builds on the existing three indicators endorsed by the Council in 2007. These indicators focus on the at-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex, on the at-risk-of-poverty rate by type of household and sex, including at-risk-of-poverty of single parents with dependent children and on economic inactivity by age and sex. On the basis of its analysis of the progress made between 2007 and 2014 in the reduction of poverty among women and men in general, as well as for those belonging to specific at-risk groups, the EIGE proposed two additional indicators looking the at-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and migrant background and at the share of women and men who are economically inactive by age and migrant background.

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19. TAKES NOTE of the following *two new indicators* developed by EIGE for measuring poverty among women and men:

Indicator 4: At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and migrant background (18+ population).

Indicator 5: Share of women and men who are inactive by age and migrant background.

CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, in accordance with their respective competences, to:

20. Step up efforts to address the gender dimension of poverty in all policies and measures to reduce poverty and in their social inclusion strategies, including the European Semester, through gender mainstreaming in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of impacts of policies on women and men. The gender dimension should also be an integral part of all future initiatives of the EU in the social policy field.
21. Take measures to eliminate gender stereotypes and to challenge stereotypical assumptions about traditional gender roles, including with a view to combating segregation in education and employment and to promoting a more equal sharing of care responsibilities by men and women.
22. Prevent and fight poverty by ensuring non-discriminatory access for all to lifelong high-quality and inclusive education and training, as well as vocational training, and by encouraging girls and boys/women and men to choose educational fields and occupations freely, not based on gender stereotypes, but in accordance with their abilities and skills, and in particular by promoting women's and girls' access to educational fields and occupations *inter alia* in science, technology, engineering and mathematics ("STEM").
23. Promote gender equality in employment, particularly for those facing intersecting inequalities, with a view to achieving equal economic independence for women and men. Women's limited economic independence over the life course leads to a gender gap in pensions and a higher risk of poverty. Anti-poverty policies and measures to prevent gender gaps in pensions should thus, *inter alia*, focus on inequality in careers, labour force participation⁴ and earnings, including the gender pay gap, on facilitating access to pension entitlements, and on improving the quality and stability of jobs. Such policies should also support targeted measures for the reintegration into the labour market of those whose careers have been temporarily interrupted due to care responsibilities. Social inclusion measures should also improve employment opportunities for those at greatest risk.

⁴ This term refers, *inter alia*, to the number of hours worked per week.

24. Adopt specific measures for ensuring a better work-life balance for men and women. Work-life balance measures play a prominent role in encouraging and supporting women's labour market participation, thus reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Work-life balance should be supported through a combination of different measures, such as the provision of accessible and affordable quality care services, paid or unpaid care leaves, and flexible working arrangements for women and men, especially for carers of children and other dependent relatives such as parents and grandparents. The social partners can play a vital role in the design and implementation of such measures. An equal sharing of care and household responsibilities should be made possible and could be encouraged through incentives for fathers to take up parental leave and use flexible work arrangements. There is also a need to promote organisational and workplace cultures conducive to meeting the work-life balance needs of women and men. In particular, all relevant measures needed to achieve the Barcelona objectives on childcare facilities should be implemented, in line with the commitments confirmed in the Europe 2020 Strategy.
25. Ensure adequate and comprehensive social protection in order to prevent and fight women's poverty, including in old age. Policies in this field should be cross-cutting throughout the life course and combine adequate income support and enabling services that support social and labour market participation. Coverage of social protection should also be ensured for women in non-standard employment, such as part-time or temporary jobs, in which women are over-represented, partly due to care responsibilities. Pensions systems, including the pensionable age, should be designed to enable men and women to earn adequate pension entitlements before they retire and should also ensure appropriate compensation for those whose care responsibilities have caused career interruptions. Finally, social protection systems should also be adapted to new challenges such as the ageing of the population, changing family structures, new migration flows, increased demand for affordable housing options, and the diversification of forms and conditions of employment.

26. Step up actions to fight violence against women and human trafficking. The combined effects of economic dependence, poverty and violence create a barrier to women's equality and full participation in society. In their actions the European Commission and Member States should particularly consider the situation of women who face systemic barriers that further compound their victimisation -- for example, stereotyping, ethnic, racial or other discrimination, disability, social isolation, marginalisation, and limited access to services, safe shelters and housing.
27. Foster synergies between anti-poverty strategies and other economic and social policies such as employment, taxation, family, health care and elderly care and housing policies. The multifaceted reality of poverty requires complementarity between different policies.
28. Ensure systematic gender mainstreaming in the implementation and monitoring of the European Agenda on Migration, through specific measures addressing the vulnerable situations that migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee women and girls may face before and upon their arrival and in the course of their integration in the EU Member States.
29. Integrate positive actions and targeted measures into anti-poverty and social inclusion policies aimed at those groups of women living in poverty and at risk of social exclusion and who experience multiple intersecting inequalities or discrimination, such as lone parents, Roma, migrants, women with disabilities, young and older women, women who are neither in employment nor in education or in training (NEETs), and women who are homeless. It is necessary to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups in society are reached by targeted measures which respond to their specific needs. The collection of data, disaggregated by sex and age, should be adjusted in the light of the evolving challenges, including the sharp increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers.
30. Address the gender dimension of poverty in the use of European funds, including the European Structural and Investment Funds, particularly the European Social Fund, the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Ensure mutual synergies and co-ordination of these funds in their actions addressing poverty of women.

31. Strengthen the gender equality perspective in the measurement of poverty and social exclusion, including by continuing to monitor the critical area of concern "Women and Poverty" as identified in the Beijing Platform for Action by using the indicators set out in Annex I, making full use of the work of EIGE and Eurostat.
32. Support the monitoring of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Member States and beyond, notably by contributing to the in-depth reviews of SDG 5 through the Annual report on equality between women and men and by participating in the annual thematic reviews and in-depth review process, using in particular existing data based on the indicators established during the course of the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.
33. Improve the effective implementation of the equal treatment Directives with a view to ensuring the inclusiveness of European society and equal treatment between men and women in all areas covered by the directives.

CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to:

34. Continue to promote equal economic independence for women and men, as well as the other priorities identified in its "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016- 2019", enhance its status by adopting it as a communication, in line with the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, thus reaffirming the Commission's commitment to the promotion of equality between women and men and increasing visibility and awareness of gender equality in all policy areas.
35. Continue to place the prevention and fight against poverty and social exclusion high on the agenda and support Member States in gender mainstreaming as they pursue their national poverty reduction targets. Address the situation of women in poverty as part of the European Semester and, where relevant, in all the future initiatives of the EU in the social policy field, including the European Pillar of Social Rights announced in the Commission's Work Programme for 2017.

36. With a view to increasing the labour market participation of women, put in place the initiative to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families announced in the Commission's Work Programme for 2017.

 37. Continue to monitor the situation in the field of poverty and social exclusion, in close cooperation with Member States and the Social Protection Committee, and improve the data available on the gender equality aspects and on the interplay between gender equality and other factors.

 38. Continue to promote gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in external policies through the implementation of the results-oriented measures set out in the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020: Gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations.
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List of Indicators

Existing indicators:⁵

Indicator 1:

At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex

Indicator 2:

At-risk-of-poverty rate by type of household and sex, including at-risk-of-poverty rate of single parents with dependent children

Indicator 3:

Inactivity by age and sex

- a) share of women and men who are inactive by age
- b) share of inactive women and men who are not looking for a job for family care reasons

Proposed new indicators:

Indicator 4:

Title: *At-risk-of-poverty rate by sex and migrant background (18+ population)*

Concept: the at-risk-of-poverty-rate is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. This indicator does not measure wealth or poverty, but relative level of income in comparison to other residents in each country, which does not necessarily imply a low standard of living.

⁵ See 13947/07.

Due to data availability at Member State level, only the adult population (18+) is taken into account and data are not presented by smaller age groups even if experience of poverty might be different in the younger and older population.

Data source: The calculation of the indicator is based on the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/overview>)

Published: Data are available in the Eurostat online database: ilc_li32: 'At-risk-of-poverty rate by broad group of country of birth (population aged 18 and over).

Indicator 5:

Title: *Share of women and men who are inactive by age and migrant background*

Concept: A person aged 15 and over is economically inactive if he or she is not part of the labour force, being neither employed nor unemployed. The inactive population can include school children, students, pensioners and homemakers, provided that they are neither working nor available or looking for work.

Data source: The calculation of the indicator is based on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/lfs/overview>)

Published: Data are available in the Eurostat online database: lfsa_argacob: 'Activity rates by sex, age and country of birth (%)'.

References**1. EU Legislation:**

- 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 L 6, 10.1.1979, p. 24-25)
- 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 (O.J. L 348 , 28/11/1992 P. 0001)
- Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin (O.J. L 180, 19.7.2000, p. 22)
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation (OJ L 303, 2.12.2000, p. 16)
- Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services (OJ L 373, 21.12.2004 p. 37)
- Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast). (OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23)
- Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC (OJ L 180, 15.7.2010, p.1)

2. Council:

All Council Conclusions adopted on the review of the Beijing Platform for Action⁶, and especially those cited below:

- Council Conclusions on the Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/tools/statistics-indicators/platform-action/index_en.htm

- Indicators in respect of Women and Poverty (13947/07).
- Council Conclusions on the review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action - Women and the Economy: Reconciliation of work and family life (17474/08).
- Council Conclusions on Strengthening the commitment and stepping up action to close the gender pay gap, and the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (18121/10).
- Council Conclusions on the Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action - Women and the Economy: Reconciliation of work and family life as a precondition for equal participation in the labour market (17816/11).
- Council Conclusions on Women and the economy: Economic independence from the perspective of part-time work and self-employment (11050/14).
- Council Conclusions of 7 March 2011 on the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020) (OJ C 155, 25.5.2011, p. 10).
- Council conclusions adopted on 7 March 2011 on The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (6917/11).
- Council Conclusions adopted on "Equal income opportunities for women and men: Closing the gender gap in pensions" adopted on 18 June 2015 (10081/15).
- Council Conclusions entitled "Towards social investment for growth and cohesion" adopted on 20 June 2013 (11487/13).
- Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States. (OJ C 378, 24.12.2013, p. 1.)
- Council conclusions on Moving towards more inclusive labour markets adopted on 9 March 2015 (7017/15).
- Council Decision (EU) 2015/1848 of 5 October 2015 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015 (*OJ L 268, 15.10.2015, p. 28–32*)
- Council conclusions on Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 of 26 October 2015 (13201/15)
- Council Conclusions adopted on 16 June 2016 on 'Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: an Integrated Approach (9273/16)

3. European Commission:

- Communication from the Commission of 3 March 2010: "Europe 2020: the European Union's Strategy for jobs and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (COM(2010) 2020 final).
- Commission Recommendation of 7.3.2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency (COM(2014) 1405 final).
- Communication on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: a European framework for social and territorial cohesion (COM(2010) 0758).
- Communication "Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion – including implementing the European Social Fund 2014-2020" (COM(2013) 83 final).
- Commission Staff Working Document "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019" (SWD(2015) 278 final).
- Roadmap "New start to address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families."
http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_just_012_new_initiative_replacing_maternity_leave_directive_en.pdf
- Commission Staff Work Document "2015 Report on equality between women and men in the European Union" (SWD(2016) 54 final)
- Commission Communication "Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States — 2016" (SWD(2016) 209 final).

4. European Parliament:

- Resolution of 20 October 2010 on the role of minimum income in combating poverty and promoting an inclusive society in Europe (2010/2039(INI), OJ C 70E, 8.3.2012).
- Resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union (2010/2162(INI)).
- Resolution of 15 November 2011 on the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion (2011/2052(INI)).
- Opinion on gender aspects of the European Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies. (2013/2066(INI)).
- Resolution of 26 May 2016 on poverty: a gender perspective (2015/2228(INI))

5. Other:

- Trio Presidency Declaration on Gender Equality (the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta), Brussels, 7 December 2015
<https://english.eu2016.nl/documents/publications/2016/01/05/declaration-on-gender-equality>
 - EIGE's report "Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU: Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States" (14295/16 ADD 1)
 - The Share of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU back to its pre-crisis level, Eurostat NewsRelease 199/2016
<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7695750/3-17102016-BP-EN.pdf/30c2ca2d-f7eb-4849-b1e1-b329f48338dc>
 - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>
 - Integrated approaches to combating poverty and social exclusion. Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Netherlands, 2016.
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