

## **What has the EU done for women?**

The European Union continues to defend the rights of women and has done since its inception.

It is often well ahead of the United Kingdom in providing for the rights of women in their working and family lives and leads the way in promoting equality for women both within and outside Europe.

In terms of employment, maternity and parental rights, pension provision and protection from violence and exploitation, the European Union has provided many of the steps forward that we now take for granted.

### **In the workplace:**

- Basic rights – workers must now be supplied with full written terms and conditions, a job description and a right to be consulted about changes at work. Employers also have a duty to protect their employee's health and safety at work – including assessing any risks, minimising them and informing employees about them.
- Paid holidays – EU law now ensures that workers have an automatic right to 28 days (20 days and 8 bank holidays) annual paid leave and a guarantee of at least one day off per week.
- Equal rights for part-time workers – almost half of all female workers in the UK are employed part-time. Many women in the past have lost out on paid leave, pensions, maternity rights and access to training and other benefits. EU legislation now protects all of these rights for all part time workers.
- Improved rights for agency workers - over half of all agency workers are women. The Temporary Agency Worker Directive protects workers with better access to childcare and better pay and holidays after 12 calendar weeks in position.

### **Safeguarding family life:**

- Maternity rights – EU law now requires that women working for 26 weeks for the same employers continuously into the 15<sup>th</sup> week before the baby is due qualify for maternity rights replacing the previously two years timescale.
- Rights during pregnancy - Women can no longer be sacked for being pregnant and pay and conditions will be protected when returning to work after a period of maternity leave. Time off for ante-natal appointments has been protected and special health and safety rules now have to be followed for pregnant women and new and breastfeeding mums.
- Parental leave – Any parent with a child under five now has the right to a minimum of 13 weeks unpaid parental leave to be taken when they choose before the child's fifth birthday.

### **Ending discrimination:**

- Equal rights to a pension – Many women have been excluded from pension schemes because they took breaks to raise children or because they worked part time. EU law now prevents discrimination and guarantees equal rights for all social security benefits.
- Violence against women – The EU is committed to ending all forms of gender based violence against women that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm either in public or private life. It also works with other international organisations outside the EU to promote that message across the world.

## **Opposition Watch:**

UKIP had an MEP on the Gender Equality and Women's Rights Committee, Godfrey Bloom; he told reporters that women don't clean behind the fridge enough. In a Daily Politics debate with on the long-term budget he told Conservative MEP Vicky Ford 'but you don't understand it Mrs Ford, I'm afraid, bless you, do you really'.

In March, MEPs voted on several gender equality reports, following International Women's Day. UKIP MEPs voted against a report on the impact of the economic crisis on women, which called on member states to invest in lifelong training, re-skilling policies, teleworking and new jobs, promote female entrepreneurship and develop child-care facilities. (March 2013)

The annual report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union was voted in December 2012 and called for continued assessment of EU member states' compliance with EU law and fundamental human rights, particularly the rights of national minorities, LGBT people and migrants. However, all UKIP MEPs voted against the report. UKIP MEPs also voted against calling on EU member states to work towards to worldwide abolition of the death penalty. (December 2012)

This year, UKIP MEPs voted against the European Protection Order which protects victims of domestic abuse across EU borders. Under the EPO, women who move abroad to escape a violent partner or a stalker can continue to be protected. (May 2013)

UKIP MEPs voted against ensuring each EU country makes violence against women a criminal offence in national law, by voting against establishing an EU directive on gender-based violence. (April 2011)

UKIP MEPs voted against calling on the EU and its Member States to give immigrant women the right to hold their own passport and residence permit. (December 2010)

UKIP MEPs voted against calls for stricter regulation of medical implants following the PiP breast implant scandal. (June 2012)

## **On international women's day 2011...**

All Conservative MEPs bar one voted against calling on EU member states to guarantee women easy access to methods of contraception.

All Conservative MEPs voted against calling on EU member states to guarantee the right to safe abortion.

Roger Helmer and Godfrey Bloom voted against calling on the EU and the Member States to recognise male violence against women as a public health issue, whatever form it takes.

All Conservative MEPs bar two voted against considering that the EU and the Member States must support civil-society and women's organisations that promote women's human rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights.

Conservative MEPs refused to support both reports on female poverty and gender equality.

Nick Griffin wrote a sexist and homophobic press release saying 'there's an air of hysterical self-congratulation among the leftist/feminist/rug-munching tendency', saying aggressive feminism has turned men into second-class citizens and attacking Islam, referring to "gangs of predatory Muslim paedophiles.

Godfrey Bloom's contribution to the International Women's Day debate was to say "The whole thing is completely crazy and it is a tragedy that none of you have done a real job in your lives. He was questioned by four female MEPs, whose previous jobs include university lecturer, teacher and tv presenter, accountant and Prime Minister of Finland.

The ECR Group tried to get rid of concrete measures in two reports on female poverty and gender equality, by requesting separate votes on several paragraphs:

- Requested votes in order to delete concrete measures to meet the target of reducing the pay gap to 0.5% by 2020, such as collective bargaining and wage transparency.
- Requested a separate vote in order to delete "disabled, elderly, immigrant, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, and minority women and women who have little or no training and are responsible for dependants," from being defined as vulnerable groups.
- Requested a separate vote in order to delete on calling for member states to focus on vulnerable groups suffering from poverty, and to delete calling for measures to eradicate child poverty.
- Requested a split vote in order to delete reference to the importance of high standard public services in terms of childcare provision, older people's day centres and other family support centres.

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