

JOINT DECLARATION
of the Union of the Electricity Industry-EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF
on EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES / DIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The Social Partners in the electricity industry - the Union of the Electricity Industry-EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF, representing the employers and trade unions respectively - state their commitment to the construction of a democratic, pluralist, tolerant and open Europe which respects the dignity and integrity of all human beings.

EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF reaffirm that equal opportunities and diversity in working life is one of the main goals in the work of the sectoral social dialogue committee of electricity sector.

The Social Partners recognise that the industry shall not practice discrimination against employees on the basis of age, health, national or ethnic origin, sex, sexual preference, language, religion, opinion, family ties, trade union activity, political activity or any other comparable circumstance.

Employers in the electricity sector uphold the principle of non-discrimination regarding advertising, recruitment and selection. Equally they will uphold the non-discrimination principle in regard to fixed-term and part-time workers.

Diversity in the workforce should be seen as an asset that brings new ideas and perspectives and different behaviour and ways of working. Employee-diversity reflects customer-diversity. To gather together different competences and lifestyles should be seen as a strategic asset to the business development of the sector. Differences create opportunities and should not be considered as a threat.

We recognise that discrimination extends to all spheres of social life and is not limited to the world of work. Combatting discrimination helps to build a more prosperous and healthy society, a necessary prerequisite for the development of a good business environment. The fight against discrimination is therefore a “win-win” strategy that may promote both equity and economic efficiency.

Among the several types of discrimination, equality between sexes and demographic ageing of population are perhaps the most severe problems that our sector will face in the future.

The Social Partners welcome the fact that the European Union has set itself the task of promoting equality between women and men and combatting discrimination. This statement and a follow-up study on diversity are intended to contribute to the promotion of equality between women and men at work.

BACKGROUND

This statement has been drawn up in the context of earlier statements and studies of EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF such as the 1998 EcoTec study on the impact of restructuring on women; the employment study and joint statement; and ongoing work on life-long learning.

Equal opportunity between women and men at work is a fundamental principle of the European Community. The EU Treaties and equality directives have had an important and innovative role in the development of equality principles for workers. These include the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and equal treatment in terms of working conditions in employment, career prospects, education, access, and rights at dismissal or conclusion of employment. The European Commission's Annual Equality Reports have highlighted the fact that the equality agenda continues to change.

The Social Partners in the electricity sector welcome the inclusion of equality issues in the European Employment Guidelines. These stress that special measures need to be taken to ensure equality in considering employment. Gender segregation needs to be broken down.

PRINCIPLES

The goal of the Social Partners is to contribute to the achievement of equality of opportunity between women and men. They understand by this that equality of opportunity between women and men in working life exists when women and men have the same formal and practical rights and the same practical opportunities to:

- gain and keep employment;
- be educated so as to develop and be promoted in their work;
- be found in approximately the same proportions in different occupations and level of hierarchy;
- enjoy the same conditions of employment, e.g. equal pay for work of equal value;
- combine employment, family life and civic activities;
- ensure that workplaces, methods of organisation and working conditions in general are adapted to both women and men.

The Social Partners agree that equality is also a matter of democracy at the place of work. Women and men should have the same formal and practical opportunities to take part in and have responsibility for decisions at work. The Social Partners therefore;

- recognise the responsibilities all social partners have to apply and give effect to rights under EU law
- agree that equal opportunities are a vital issue - as such equality of opportunity should be an integral part of the general human resources management of the workforce
- would emphasise the role that access to appropriate child-care provision plays in promoting full participation for both women and men within the work-place. The Social Partners take note of the 1992 EU Child Care Recommendation that Member States act to ensure availability of adequate good quality childcare provisions at affordable prices.

Positions

The Social Partners are committed to a co-operative approach, recognising the complex nature of questions and issues that arise. The following points need to be addressed, not necessarily in any order of priority.

Promoting positive action

- Supporting and encouraging the development of women and men into non-traditional roles, including the development of a more representative workforce at all levels, by promoting positive action.

Training and development

- In the electricity sector one of the major reasons for the persistence of discrepancies between the situation of women and men is vocational segregation on the labour market. The answer to vocational segregation should lie in measures to diversify women's educational and professional choices, in particular through vocational guidance to improve women's access to new occupations; raising awareness; and providing information and images of women engaged in non-traditional activities, particularly those related to occupations in the energy sector.
- Encouraging and supporting development of flexible training and development to accommodate and maximise the potential of all employees regardless of mode of employment or family responsibilities. In this regard the development of programmes for vocational education and training would have an important role.

Combatting sexual harassment

- Developing comprehensive programmes to prevent sexual harassment at or in relation to work based on the EC Recommendation and Code of Practice on the protection of the dignity of women and men at work; developing appropriate remedies for handling complaints and disputes which arise.

Work-Life balance: employment policies and practices

- Retaining the skills and experience of workers as their family and career commitments develop, by implementing supportive policies and practices which reflect the reality of workers lives. Equal opportunity policy should have the objective of supporting a good balance between working life and family life for both men and women and should also aim to develop the attractiveness of our sector within the society.
- Division of family responsibilities is a key element for the integration of women into the labour market. A key factor for success also lies in the gradual elimination of cultural stereotypes through awareness campaigns to encourage men to carry out more family tasks.
- Encouraging the voluntary adoption of equal opportunity policies

Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value

- Endorsing the principle of equal pay, the social partners will endeavour to ensure application of the principle by electricity companies. Reducing the pay gap

between men and women is considered a crucial issue for discussion between the social partners.

Reorganisation

- Initiating the development of methods for creating and applying a gender perspective throughout the process of modernising and restructuring electricity companies.
- Companies and their employees should reflect customers' diversity and the open society surrounding them. To achieve this is essential.
- To promote exchange of information and good practice at electricity company level and raise awareness of discriminatory phenomena among all. The approach to this should be based on trans-national co-operation.
- To encourage the voluntary adoption of diversity and equal opportunities policies.

Ageing

Ageing is a particularly acute problem for the electricity sector. Two factors impact on the issue of ageing of employees. Firstly, the average age of the sector's employees is already higher than in the society in general and in other business sectors, and secondly the evolution of the age pyramid in the European population will make this problem more severe. This trend, coupled with the transformations that the sector is facing, threaten to create a gap between the "required" skills and "acquired" skills of older employees and efforts must be made to avoid this happening.

- To develop training programmes that will increase the "employability" of older employees.
- To encourage employees to develop employment paths based on the recognition of acquired skills and learning.
- To develop practical strategies to make the sector more attractive to younger people.

Work organisation

The Social Partners emphasize that equal opportunities strategies must be developed within the context of new ways of work organisation which:

- use resources efficiently and effectively to deliver quality services;
- maximise the quality, motivation and performance of staff;
- nurture co-operation and break down dysfunctional barriers.

The social partners equally recognise that workers' social needs and responsibilities as well as their need for employment security form part of the context within which new ways of work organisation are developed.

The Social Partners are committed to co-operating in developing greater awareness and understanding of the diversity of the workforce, especially in relation to areas where skills, qualifications and experience may be underdeveloped.

CONCLUSIONS and Recommendations

It is clear from the Commission's reports into equality issues and our own experience that this must be considered as a long-term issue. EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF recommend that the social partners at the appropriate level assign a high priority to the issues raised in this declaration.

In order to address the complex issues facing women in the electricity industry, a strategy needs to be adopted at national, regional, sector and company level. The EcoTec report contained a number of recommendations, which formed the basis for the objectives of this joint statement. These objectives and outlined actions can be developed in more detail at sector and company level to form a strategy for achieving gender equality. These actions could comprise networking activities (seminars, conferences etc.), benchmarking, awareness-raising campaigns, partnerships between economic, political and social actors, etc.

A strategy can be implemented as a series of programmes of action with target/completion dates, following consultation and agreement with the relevant Trade Unions and workplace representatives, including, where existing, European works councils.

The new Equal Treatment Directive provides a framework for data-collecting which would allow the social partners to address inequalities. Equality audits are recommended as a particular fruitful way forward, to be discussed between the social partners concerned. They can result in equal opportunity and diversity policies for the company, ensuring they become part of the mission of the company.

EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF should encourage programmes aiming to increase equal opportunities and diversity. Collective agreements and other initiatives could be among the instruments in this regard. Such considerations include the development of tools and methods necessary to achieve equality

2003 Actions

- EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF have decided to continue to work on addressing the issues raised in this statement. A study into diversity issues will be undertaken in 2003.
- The Social Partners will work together to contribute to redressing any gender pay gap.
- EURELECTRIC and EPSU/EMCEF further recommend that the statement be taken as a basis for measures to address equality, diversity and ageing challenges at national and company level.
- Future evaluations are recommended within a time-frame to be decided on by the Social Partners.