



## EU SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE ON PORTS

### Recommendations on Women's Employment in the Port Sector

1. Promotion of female employment in the port sector was included by social partners in the work programme for the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Ports (SSDCP). Although ports, and in particular dock labour, are traditionally male-dominated, the changing features of dock labour could contribute to change this general trend and allow more women to join the sector.
2. The SSDCP held a preliminary discussion on this topic at its meeting in October 2013. On this occasion the workers' delegation presented the results of a survey carried out amongst the unions, which showed that, although the situation is quite diverse across the different countries, there is a general trend towards an increase of women employed in port work professions. The investigation also fostered understanding for the specific problems encountered by women working in the sector. It appears that women working in ports do not mention the dominating male culture as a problem, but rather the lack of adequate facilities and safety clothes of suitable sizes as the main issues to be tackled.
3. During the meeting some best practices were mentioned, notably in the port of Antwerp, which saw a significant increase in women working as port workers<sup>1</sup> over the last years, and where unions and management took some initiatives to tackle issues specifically related to women (safety clothes/shoes, sanitary facilities, etc.).
4. Following this preliminary discussion, the employers' group sent out a short questionnaire to members, gathering answers from 14 EU member states for a total of 42 ports. According to the answers received by the employers, none of the ports included in the survey presents a proportion of women over 10%, the average being around 3%. The survey also showed that most of the employers answering the questionnaire have not put in place any system to attract more women in the sector. This was often due to national legal restraints ensuring there is not preferential treatment of genders. According to the answers gathered by the employers, the dominant male culture and the nature of work are the main barriers to women joining the sector. Just over 10% of respondents stated that some practices in place in some European ports can limit the possibilities of women entering the work force.
5. According to the results of the two above-mentioned investigations there are two main issues to be dealt with:

---

<sup>1</sup> The definition of a port worker is a worker carrying out operational duties. The use of this term was intended to exclude staff that carry out administrative task solely.

- a. The traditional image of the port sector as male-dominated and the view that the nature of the job is not suitable for women would make the sector less attractive for women. However, for the women working in the sector, this does not actually represent a problem, as showed by the port workers interviewed by the unions. The work within ports has become less physical, and even in port operations that require more physical jobs, women can perform equally well as men.
  - b. The problems sometimes encountered by women working in the sector relate to issues such as the size of safety clothes and shoes, which are traditionally designed for men and the lack of proper facilities, primarily in the oldest terminals.
6. Social partners consider that the low levels of females employed as port workers is a real concern, especially taking into consideration the evolution of the nature of port work. Social partners should therefore intervene to take concrete actions in these two areas by promoting:
  - a. **Recruitment policies that ensure that all candidates, regardless of gender, receive equal opportunities and treatment whilst requesting justification for systems where this is not the case;**
  - b. **Improving the sector's image in terms of female integration and;**
  - c. **The evolution of recruitment policies that are aimed at attracting female candidates to the sector.**
7. **Actions should be taken to improve working conditions for female workers that operate in the sector whenever there are issues specific for women** (as mentioned above).
8. During the SSDCP meeting held in December 2013, it was suggested by the European Commission to use EU funds to carry out an action on promotion of female employment as it was already done in other transport sectors (i.e. railways). However, following discussions amongst social partners, it was agreed that at this stage it would be premature to apply for EU funds since there is not enough materials on which to build an action. It was also discussed that it would be preferable not to link the promotion of female employment to attractiveness of the sector to young workers (the sector is not unattractive to young people) and to the general promotion of the image of sector (this could be dealt with separately).
9. Against the background presented above, social partners could start discussions over a set of guidelines/recommendations to be applied at national/port/terminal level and which could help reaching the objective of more women joining the sector. Below are some preliminary suggestions that could be included in the guidelines/recommendations.

Promotion of equal opportunities and support to the female employment are long-lasting objectives of the EU social and employment policies. To achieve these goals it is necessary that joint efforts are taken by policy-makers, trade unions and employers. For this reason, social partners in the port sector have drafted the following recommendations, which are addressed to their affiliated members, who should implement them at national, port and company level.

Social partners will cooperate to:

- Create a corporate and workplace culture characterised by mutual respect and in which men and women will work together and enjoy equal rights and opportunities;
- Integrate the principles of equal opportunities and mainstreaming of gender issues in the work organisation and employment policy in the company;
- Recruitment and human resource policies and processes should be designed so as to make sure that women will not be denied or hindered access to employment opportunities or leadership positions because of their gender;
- Identify recruitment best practices existing in European ports and disseminate them;
- Request justification for systems which could be seen to have restrictions on females entering the work force and propose possible workable solutions;
- Identify best practices that exist in other sectors in terms of professional and personal life balance and which are beneficial for both men and women;
- Ensure that men and women receive equal remuneration for equal work;
- Eliminate discriminations and harassment at work place between men and women;
- Promote ports as a sector presenting employment opportunities for men and women;
- Educate general public on existing careers in ports and tasks involved in such a career;
- Educate general public on misconceptions of nature of port work;
- Ensure that protection and safety equipment are adapted to both men and women;
- Ensure that sanitary and rest facilities are available for both men and women;
- Offer women employees the same training and professional development opportunities that are given to men.

Signed:

**Lamia Kerdjoudj-Belkaid**



FEPOR Secretary General

**Isabelle Ryckbost**



ESPO Secretary General

**Livia Spera**



ETF Political Secretary for Ports

**Anthony Tétard**



IDC European Zone Coordinator

**Brussels, 23 October 2014**