

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

National Mechanisms for Gender Equality

in EU Member States and
Candidate Countries and
other Developed Economies
of the UNECE Region

Regional Study



UNITED NATIONS

**STRENGTHENING NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR GENDER
EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

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EU Member States and Candidate Countries and other
Developed Economies of the UNECE Region**

Regional Study

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Abstract

National mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women have increasingly been set up in European Union countries and other western countries in the last decades and their mandates and scope of action have been progressively enlarged, particularly after the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the adoption of the Platform for Action.

International guidelines and calls to action in this regard have had a decisive role for these developments, particularly the ones adopted at UN level, as well as those put forward by European organisations, mainly the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The present study, while taking into account former evaluations regularly undertaken in the framework of European organisations, aims at assessing the main trends of such developments and at drawing a comprehensive picture of the present situation, including diversity, mandates, roles and functions, as well as strategies and processes used in current work.

Beyond a descriptive picture of such evolution, an analytical assessment is also made of the main issues addressed by national mechanisms and of areas of work where some progress is registered. On the other hand, an assessment is also made of those aspects where further and, eventually, long-term action is still needed, namely in view of emerging realities of the present world.

As a matter of fact, it is essential that national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women be fully aware of these emerging realities and alert to their impact on women and on gender equality, in order that, in the context of national policies in all areas, adequate gender-sensitive responses may be found.

Introduction

The year 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and is the occasion for a new review and appraisal of its implementation. In the context of this appraisal, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the five Regional Commissions of the United Nations, decided to implement a project on national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The main objective of the project is a critical analysis of the existing mechanisms established at national level since 1995, in line with the recommendations put forward by the Platform for Action. A critical analysis of their performance, including both areas of success and obstacles faced, as well as of the remaining gaps and challenges for future action. The concept of national mechanisms adopted goes beyond the central national machinery and includes all the bodies and institutions within the different branches of the State (legislative, executive and judicial), as well as independent, accountability and advisory bodies dealing with gender equality matters and aiming at the empowerment of women.

Increased knowledge of the existing national mechanisms, of their mandates, roles and functions and of their priority areas of work, as well as of strategies, processes and instruments used in the pursuit of their objectives will certainly be a valuable asset, not only in the context of the review and appraisal, but also as regards strengthening of collaboration and synergies between such mechanisms, both nationally and internationally.

The present study is part of this global project on “Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women” and refers to the situation in European countries, particularly the twenty-seven European Union countries¹, as well as the accession countries and other western countries of the ECE region with comparable situations regarding gender equality and national mechanisms that pursue this objective.²

National mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women have been regularly assessed in European countries, particularly in the context of Council of Europe studies. The first

¹ Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

² Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey as accession countries and Iceland, Israel, Norway, Switzerland, and Canada.

surveys go back to the 1980s, aiming essentially at a mapping of such structures, their roles and action; however, it is particularly after 1995 that such mechanisms, their status in governments, visibility, power, resources, lines of action and effective functioning received closer attention, expressed in studies undertaken in the context of the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the UNECE.

As for the process of evolution of these mechanisms, it is important to note that the issue of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women was taken up in earlier United Nations Conferences on Women, and guidelines on their roles, functions and requirements for effective functioning have been adopted. However, it was only after Beijing and the inclusion of this matter in the Platform for Action that this subject became significantly visible and legitimised.

In the PFA, a new focus and an enlarged scope were recognized for the effective action of these mechanisms and for a better attainment of their objectives. From a former emphasis on the advancement of women pointing to women's specific issues, the emphasis now placed on achieving gender equality in all areas brings about a new role for national mechanisms and specific requirements for the achievement of equality. Promotion and coordination of gender mainstreaming into all areas and in all policies becomes a central task of their action, as catalysts for political change. This new vision of the mission of institutional mechanisms, as well as of the conditions for their effective functioning, were at the origin of an evolution that can be clearly noticed in the countries under the present scrutiny.

The main sources of information used for this report were the responses to the specific questionnaire sent to Member States, the Beijing+ reports, mainly Beijing+15, and CEDAW reports. An attempt was also made to have the views of civil society organisations through a small questionnaire addressed at the thirty national coordinations of the European Women's Lobby. Other information issued by the same organisation, namely a specific publication on national mechanisms³ was also used, as well as other bibliographical sources and informal requests of information from some individual experts.

³ *Resource Kit on Institutional Mechanisms for the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men* – Brussels, European Women's Lobby, 2008

1. MAIN FEATURES OF THE OVERALL CONTEXT

EU enlargement

The main contextual feature in the European political landscape, in the span of time under consideration, is the progressive enlargement of the European Union, particularly the symbolic year of 2004, which marks the beginning of a common path for western countries and previous eastern block countries.

It is a progressive evolution that has some important landmarks in the decade of the 90s. In 1990 East Germany was welcomed in the EU as part of the Federal Republic of Germany and in 1995 three new countries still from the western side (Austria, Finland and Sweden) joined the previous twelve in an expansion towards the north and the east. But it was in 2004 that the great enlargement took place with ten countries joining the Community, the majority coming from the former eastern block (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia). In 2007 two further countries (Bulgaria and Romania) joined, making today's total of twenty-seven.

It is a process of dynamic evolution with important legal, economic, social and political dimensions, as in the process of integration, all the acceding countries have to adhere to the so-called Copenhagen criteria and fulfil the required conditions imposed by these criteria.

Political criteria which are reflected in institutional stability, a democratic system, the promotion and protection of human rights and the respect of minorities. Economic criteria which are reflected in a functioning market economy and in the facing of competition within the EU common market. And, certainly, the legal requirements or the so-called "acquis criteria", meaning the obligation to integrate into national legislation and to implement the common EU legislation. Assessment of this enlargement has shown that there has been an improvement of living standards in the new member countries, with the modernisation of their economies, with more stable institutions, with increasing trade and competition, etc.

But the entry to the EU also posed requirements in regard to the status of women and to equality of women and men, mainly with a focus on social and economic dimensions. Changes occurred after 1989, particularly in the early years, had some significant negative consequences for women in terms of unemployment and weakening or destruction of social and support services, that affected them in a very specific manner; consequences also in the pronounced drop in women's political representation. The situation, however, progressively developed in terms of stabilisation

and of improving prospects, also for women: a movement of change that was accelerated by EU membership.

As regards gender equality, in particular the Amsterdam Treaty adopted in 1997, which introduced modifications to the existing Treaty of the European Union, conveys a new vision and new provisions that deal with this issue. It is mainly the case of articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty, which dispose that, among the Community's tasks, there is now the task to promote equality between men and women and also that, in the activities it pursues, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between men and women, thus institutionalising the principle of gender mainstreaming.

These principles and the conditions they imply are reflected in community directives of a binding nature, aiming at equal opportunities and equal treatment, mainly in the areas of work and employment, social security and access to goods and services; reflected also in Community resolutions, programs and guidelines. A richness of instruments that has worked as a powerful driving force for new countries to adopt laws and policies and to create institutions aiming at gender equality – to a certain extent for the old EU members as well, as they became challenged by the demands imposed on new ones.

Effects of globalisation

Another broad contextual feature along the years under consideration is the phenomenon of globalisation, both economic and cultural, including through the expansion of new information and communication technologies. Also related to globalisation are demographic changes, mobility and international migration, most EU countries being receiving countries, but with some emigration also from its more peripheral member countries. Together with migration, new realities become visible in a Europe that is more and more diverse; new realities also regarding inequality and the situation of women and new problems of multiple or compounded discrimination, that affect women in specific ways.

Sometimes linked to migration, new forms of violation of women's human rights are reflected in the intensification of trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation, bringing this problem to the attention of European institutions, namely the European Commission and the Council of Europe. A new European Convention adopted in the context of the Council of Europe aims at giving a response to this problem. Also the issue of violence against women seems to acquire new and greater visibility, particularly the issue of domestic violence, leading to the launching of a wide European Campaign to face such phenomenon.

In general, the requirements and guidelines regarding violation of women's and gender equality put forward by European institutions, like the Council of Europe or the European Union and its European Commission, some of them having a binding character, others only a recommendatory one, have functioned as strong incentives for the development of laws, programs and policies on equality of women and men, but also of a view of such equality as a principle of human rights and as an essential element for sustainable development.

An emerging factor – the international crisis

One final word to mention, as a contextual factor, the recent world economic and financial crisis, which is also part of the wide scenery, where developments are taking place; however, the crisis is too recent to enable the drawing of any conclusions in regard to its impact on women and on gender equality. We might expect that, in spite of its terrible negative aspects, it may be an opportunity for change in economic paradigms, which might, eventually, result in a more just and balanced development, thus favouring equality between women and men.

Such developments must be closely followed by national mechanisms, as these must respond to eventually emerging problems and to needs experienced by women and affecting their right to gender equality. On the other hand, national mechanisms themselves may be affected by restrictions and budget cuts that may hamper their capacity to address such needs. Clear views on such developments and, eventually, a re-establishment of priorities may be a requirement for an adjusted action of national mechanisms in incoming years.

2. EVOLUTION TRENDS OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS (1995-2009)

In this exercise of evaluation of trends occurring in the evolution of mechanisms for gender equality and empowerment of women, particular attention was given to two of these evaluations, undertaken in two key occasions of preparation of Beijing+5 and Beijing+10, respectively in 1999 and in 2004. Although not covering exactly the same countries in both rounds, as they refer to studies in the context of UNECE⁴ and the Council of Europe⁵, they do cover very largely the same countries that belong to both organizations, thus allowing for a view of evolution.

The first evaluation, made in preparation for the Beijing +5 assessment, gave an overview of developments in the ECE region, in view of the guidelines put forward by the PFA. Noting the ideological changes introduced - from the advancement of women to gender equality, from special actions addressing women to gender mainstreaming into all sectors, from emphasis on social aspects to an incipient human rights perspective - the evaluation clearly showed how these changes were being reflected in the institutional mechanisms charged with pursuing gender equality and the achievement of women's human rights.

In line with an on-going debate on the new character and responsibilities of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality, there was a clear phase of transition reflected in the nature, status, roles, functions and scope of action. A phase of transition that was even visible in the fluctuation and changes in designations, either focusing on women or on gender or both.

In spite of the differences that were quite visible between western countries with a more stable situation regarding institutional machinery and central and eastern countries where, in most cases, such machinery was just starting, it was, however, possible to identify some major common trends in the evolution of such mechanisms. Such trends would be later strengthened and confirmed, as shown in the stocktaking study undertaken in the context of the Council of Europe, in preparation for the Beijing +10 assessment.

Identifiable in the surveys undertaken in 1999 and in 2004, though in distinct degrees in different areas, and particularly in the still distinct parts of Europe, these common trends of development

⁴ Tavares da Silva, Maria Regina - *Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women: some developments since the Beijing Conference* – background paper for the Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Economic Commission for Europe, Geneva, 19-21 January 2000.

⁵Tavares da Silva, Maria Regina - *Stocktaking Study of effective functioning of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality in Council of Europe member states*. Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2004

are also confirmed and reinforced after 2005. Such reinforcement is clearly demonstrated by recent reports and updated information, particularly the Beijing +15 reports and the answers to the specific questionnaire addressed to governments, as well as elements from CEDAW reports and other sources. An analysis was made in the context of the present study, in order to evaluate whether there was such continuity or whether any new trends were identifiable, both facts being fully confirmed.

As we look into the present situation of national mechanisms, both in terms of form, including status and structure, location and resources, and also in terms of substance, including mandates, areas of focus, strategies and processes, we can see that most of the present trends are in line with the former evolution: on the one hand, with the reinforcement of former aspects; on the other hand, with some distinctive features related to the same trends.

Multiplication and decentralisation of mechanisms

A first trend previously identified was the multiplication and decentralisation of mechanisms, both on a horizontal level, with replicas in different policy sectors - mainly employment and education, sometimes health and civil service sectors - and also on a vertical level, with mechanisms starting to operate at regional, provincial and local/municipal/county levels, particularly in countries with a longer tradition in equality matters.

This trend, undergoing its initial stages at the end of the 1990s, was fully confirmed in the evaluation undertaken in 2004. As stated in the document *“there has been an increasing diversification and multiplication of these mechanisms and their progressive establishment in a great variety of policy areas, both traditional ones like employment or education, and also new ones”*.⁶

It was a diversification and **multiplication** that, in its first stage, found expression in the existence of departments or units in charge of women or equality, sometimes ministries or just ministers, or some interdepartmental structures that became generalised later; reflected also in a few independent mechanisms like ombuds or autonomous commissions or special agencies, as well as in some mechanisms in parliament, although the establishment of these was not a general practice.

⁶ Tavares da Silva, 2004, op.cit. p.16

Five years later, the diversification went further and was expressed in a broader variety of institutions, including an increase in units, working groups, co-ordinators and gender focal points in different departments and thematic commissions; or in new independent institutions comparable to ombuds, like equality tribunal, complaints committee, advocate for equal opportunities, boards or institutes with similar powers or still other mechanisms like observatories or monitoring centres, etc.

On the other hand, the inter-ministerial or interdepartmental structures that apparently had started or been reinforced in response to commitments of the PFA in 1995, namely regarding the elaboration of National Action Plans and the coordination of gender mainstreaming, had become, after a decade, an institutionalised reality, not only at central level but also in decentralised structures. As stated in the respective evaluation: *“there is an increasing existence of inter-ministerial or interdepartmental structures, mainly aiming at gender mainstreaming and involvement of all political and administrative actors.”*⁷

Another aspect of the diversification of institutional mechanisms that is confirmed and reinforced is the existence of mechanisms in parliaments: commissions or committees, sub-committees or working groups. Mentioned particularly in regard to western countries in the first survey (1999), they are increasingly mentioned in the second (2004), both in western and in central and eastern countries; and even more in the most recent information provided under the Beijing+15 assessment.

As for the **decentralisation** that seemed to be starting to develop in the first evaluation, particularly in western countries, reinforcement of this trend is clearly noticeable five years later. Reinforcement both in western countries and in central and eastern countries, where such structures did not generally exist and were progressively created; and again, even more, in the most recent developments.

Actually, in recent years, diversification, multiplication and decentralisation of national mechanisms continues and increases, with both horizontal and vertical developments and both within government and outside government. Not only government departments of different kinds, including interdepartmental structures, and in different rankings of authority, but also consultative bodies, parliamentary structures, local power structures, independent monitoring bodies, specific

⁷ Tavares da Silva, 2004, op.cit. p.16

units in research institutions, in social partners organisations, etc. However, within this diversity some **new aspects** must be pointed out.

Within the trend of **horizontal diversification**, particularly relevant in the area of the executive, there seems to be an increasing number of mechanisms in different areas of governance, with a thematic or specialised character, or addressing specific concerns. Mechanisms on sectoral areas existed before in some countries, particularly western, where there was even a certain tradition regarding mechanisms in the area of work and employment. In some cases, the area of employment or labour had even been the first area where such mechanisms had been created, particularly addressing issues of protection for women workers; more recently they encompass other aspects linked to equality in the labour market and women's empowerment in economic life (ex. Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain).

Nowadays, however, we see other specialised mechanisms - commissions, working groups, task forces - in new areas like violence or domestic violence (ex. Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain); trafficking and sexual exploitation and sometimes illegal migration (ex. Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania); and in some cases addressing needs of special or marginalized groups, like migrants or ethnic minorities, as in the United Kingdom, or of Roma, as in Romania.

Within the trend of **vertical diversification**, also as regards the executive, in both central and decentralised structures, there is also a growing number of mechanisms at various levels and, apparently, an increasing legitimacy and recognition of their action, whether at the level of states or regions, provinces, municipalities or others. It is a development that is occurring both in western countries and in central and eastern countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, or the United Kingdom.

Expansion and upgrading of equality policies

A second trend, identified as progressively developing and becoming reinforced, regards the mandate of these mechanisms that appears to be broadened, in line with what was considered to be an expansion and upgrading of equality policies. As stated in the evaluation of 2004 *“there seems to exist, in a significant number of cases, a certain upgrading of equality policies and an*

enlargement of competencies of equality mechanisms, with a generalised focus on gender equality, although a minority number of countries still tend to focus mainly on women.”⁸

Such mandates tended to embrace new functions, aiming at the coordination and monitoring of gender mainstreaming in different areas, as reflected in National Action Plans, both in regard to traditional areas, formerly attributed to equality mechanisms, as well as newer areas, such as the ones linked to violence, trafficking, access to power and decision-making or to combating poverty.

On the other hand, in substantive terms, there seemed to be a progressive movement of change of focus, reflected both in the policies and in the action of institutional mechanisms, from a traditional social perspective, formerly adopted, to a human rights approach and framework.

Such trend of upgrading of equality policies, identified in former evaluations, seems to develop and assume new forms in recent years. They are reflected in new responsibilities of political actors and decision-makers, particularly in the fact that gender equality policies are envisaged, more and more, as a **responsibility of the government as a whole** and not only of a special mechanism, even when this is a ministry. Beyond the national machinery, gender equality seems to have become the concern of all sectors, making all ministries and all agencies responsible for its implementation. This is a trend that is not general, but expressed clearly by a certain number of countries, mainly the ones generally considered as the most advanced in matters of gender equality, like Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway or Sweden.

While being a positive development, will it result in the long run in a lack of coordination and a diminished role of the central national machinery? Or eventually in a dilution of a central and guiding objective, that is still necessary to correct present imbalances in the situation of women, as compared to men? As widely recognised in UN leading documents, including the Platform for Action or the Outcome Document of Beijing +5, the on-going process towards gender equality, at its present stage, still requires a dual approach - both gender mainstreaming and special actions - to counteract gender-based discrimination and promote the advancement of women. This dual approach certainly requires strong and active mechanisms with a coordinating and monitoring capacity with regard to gender equality policies.

Together with this upgrading of equality policies and enlargement of mandates, an **enlargement of the scope of action** of the equality mechanisms seems to be also taking place. On the one hand,

^{8 8} Tavares da Silva, 2004, op.cit. p.17

there is a diversification of audiences or targets, as new groups are specifically addressed, as being the object of actions and plans; on the other, there are new areas that have affirmed themselves along the years, as being worthy of special attention by national mechanisms. They are the ones mentioned above, violence, trafficking and others; but there are also others, namely linked to reconciliation of professional and family life, to sharing of caring responsibilities, to the situation of certain marginalised groups of women, to the role of men, as expressed, among others, by reports of Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway or UK.

On the other hand, a new dimension comes out of this enlargement of scope of action and of the explicit recognition of specific groups, that is the dimension of multiple or compounded discrimination. A discrimination that is based on various factors, beyond sex or gender, affecting women in a specific way, and which mechanisms have to address from a variety of aspects and in a simultaneous way. Countries like Denmark, Finland, Hungary, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Netherlands or the United Kingdom and others include in their explicit concerns the need to address diversity and the situation of marginalised groups of women, that may suffer different forms of discrimination based on their status, whether of migrants, minorities, disabled, Roma, or other factors.

A particularly important new aspect related to this dimension, that was already announced, although in a small scale, in the 2004 assessment, and which we can see as linked to the previous recognition of discrimination on various grounds, is the tendency that seems to prevail in EU countries of **moving from gender-based discrimination** and gender equality, envisaged in an autonomous way, **to general discrimination** on the basis of various factors (sex, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation...) and to general equality or equalities, a denomination that is also used, as in the case of some mechanisms in UK.

It is a trend that is happening, though with different expressions, both in some old EU countries and also in some new ones, namely with the creation of new or enlargement of existing mechanisms or of their mandates (ex. Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and UK or Estonia and Slovakia). This is an enlargement of scope, where gender equality is integrated into a broader view of equality, in some cases keeping a certain degree of differentiation regarding recognition of the different nature of gender-based discrimination, in others apparently loosing some of its specificity and visibility.

Some NGOs have a very critical opinion regarding this change of scope, as bringing no added value to the achievement of gender equality. On the contrary, it is a change of perspective that hides the

nature and character of discrimination against women, as radically stated by one representative: *“the policy field gender equality has no jurisdiction now, the focus is on discrimination on whatever ground, which is situated within integration policies.”*

As a consequence of this approach, equality may appear mainly related to social diversity and to social inclusion or social cohesion, as constituting its ideological framework, eventually moving away from a previous, more promising trend of integration of the objective of equality for women within a broader human rights framework, into a more restrictive framework.

The question, therefore, remains for national mechanisms, on how to reconcile tasks that are of a different nature – gender equality and general equality for all – and for the attainment of which different frameworks seem to be adopted, respectively human rights and social inclusion?

On the other hand, we might wonder whether this movement, that seems to be developing, from a wide social and human rights perspective to a more restrictive one, mainly aiming at social inclusion and integration of diversity, constitutes a positive development as regards achievement of gender equality, in spite of the laudable objectives it carries in general terms. In any case, there is an ambiguity in this approach to gender equality that national mechanisms must, certainly, be aware of.

Adoption of anti-discrimination/equality legislation and of comprehensive policies

A third trend of development that could be clearly identified in previous assessments and which is, to a certain extent, related to the change of focus of equality policies, is the one linked to adoption of **anti-discrimination/equality legislation**, both in western countries, where laws were revised and updated (ex. Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden and others); and in central and eastern countries, where equality laws were extensively adopted (ex. Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia).

As regards European Union countries, such development, particularly for the countries aiming to enter the Union, was a requirement imposed by the equality directives, that were progressively adopted since the seventies and constitute obligatory commitments for accession. In many cases, legislation adopted includes the legal basis for equality mechanisms, giving them increased political legitimacy.

On the other hand, together with new legislation, came the adoption of **comprehensive policies**, usually structured as National Action Plans or National Strategies, which is another feature of this trend of looking for better responses in the search for equality for women and promotion of their human rights.

It is a feature that is general to all countries and not unexpected, as adoption of such plans was a recommendation of the Platform for Action, to which it was possible to witness the countries' progressive response. Practically everywhere, national mechanisms are called upon to perform key roles of promotion, coordination and monitoring of such global policies and plans.

Cooperation with civil society and enlargement of the scope of stakeholders

A fourth trend of development, also identified in the various surveys, concerns the growing awareness of the importance of cooperation with civil society organisations, particularly women's and human rights NGOs, but with other stakeholders too; as a matter of fact, such cooperation now involves academic or research institutions, social partners, media, etc., as reported by countries like Austria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, etc.

Linked to the enlargement of scope of action there is, therefore, this enlargement of scope of stakeholders, that must be partners in working for equality. The involvement of men, though not being an absolutely new perspective, is strongly reinforced in some countries, particularly countries situated to the north, that tend to consider gender equality as meaning to take women's and men's views on comparable terms.

Institutionalisation and development of the gender mainstreaming strategy

As regards developments in strategies and working methods, one very visible trend in European countries, in general, is linked to the institutionalisation and use of the gender mainstreaming strategy and the creation of the related mechanisms and instruments for its functioning – instruments that are particularly necessary for gender analysis, gender impact assessment and gender budgeting. Of course, it is a trend that comes from the past, particularly following 1995 and the PFA, but which nowadays and everywhere in Europe, both east and west, seems to be the main strategy of equality work.

It is a strategy with a longer tradition in western countries in general, but with some central and eastern countries apparently concentrating on starting and developing its functioning, as mentioned by Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia, Slovenia, etc. In some cases, specific laws have been passed establishing a clear legal basis for gender mainstreaming (Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Israel, Norway or Spain are some examples); in others specific plans or projects are in place to foster such strategy, as is the case of the Comprehensive Plan for Gender Mainstreaming adopted by Sweden or of pilot projects undertaken in some countries, like Ireland or Slovenia, among others.

Besides the creation and use of tools and instruments to make it effective, gender mainstreaming requirements also imply a more accurate knowledge of the reality of women's and men's lives, on the basis of research and surveys. Essential for such research are statistical data and indicators, the collection and analysis of which start to be included in mandates of national mechanisms or explicitly assumed in plans and programs, as an important task (ex. Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, etc.)

Fast pace of progress in some central and eastern countries

A final trend that is noticeable in the current evaluation, regards the pace of progress that can be detected in some central and eastern countries, in particular the new members of EU. In former assessments there was a very noticeable difference between western and central/eastern countries, regarding mechanisms established, their scope of action and actual functioning, the first with stronger roots and recognized political legitimacy and the second with new, less stable and more vulnerable structures.

The noticeable fact now is that there has been an apparently accelerated progression in the establishment and functioning of national mechanisms for gender equality in many central and eastern countries, now EU members or aiming at becoming so; a fact that is certainly due to the requirements and guidelines for accession and to the monitoring mechanisms imposed.

This positive view based, mainly, on official reports is, however, not generally acknowledged by all. At a meeting organised by UNIFEM and the Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), that has taken place in Bratislava in 2006, to assess the *de facto* situation of gender equality two years after accession of ten new countries, the general evaluation picture is not so positive.⁹ While recognising that accession had served to promote action towards gender equality and women's

⁹ *Gender Equality in the EU – two years after accession of new Member States: Concluding Statement*. UNIFEM consultation, April 22, 2006, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

rights in the new Member States, it is also said that *“some countries have seen growing stagnation and loss of momentum, and in some instances, backlash”*.

Object of some criticism is the fact that emphasis on labour market issues may leave other areas insufficiently addressed, as well as the *“dilution of gender equality objectives”* in general anti-discrimination legislation and policies. As for national mechanisms, the assessment is that they *“suffer from significant gaps in capacity”*; furthermore, they *“lack stability and independence, as seen in terms of their precarious location within government, inadequate staffing, unclear mandates, and insufficient resources to carry out their work.”*

It is an evaluation that took place in 2006 and changes have occurred after that date; it is, however, a valuable assessment made with the contribution of representatives of gender equality institutional mechanisms, EU integration offices and non-governmental organisations from new member states, acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries.

In the way of conclusion we could say that these trends - multiplication and decentralisation of mechanisms; expansion and upgrading of equality policies; adoption of anti-discrimination/equality legislation and of comprehensive policies; cooperation with civil society and enlargement of the scope of stakeholders; institutionalisation and development of the gender mainstreaming strategy; fast pace of progress in EU newcomers – seem to be permanent and consistent trends of development, linked to the areas and modes of intervention of national mechanisms, as well as to their roles and functions.

3. STATUS OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS

The status of National Mechanisms is characterized by a series of factors, including an increasing diversity, as well as dimensions related both to the substance of their work, namely mandate, roles and functions and to organizational aspects, particularly structure, location and resources.

a) Types and diversity

As documented in the general assessment of trends, there is a continuing diversification of mechanisms, a movement that has been developing since 1995, increasing after 2000 and even more after 2005.

It is a diversity that encompasses mechanisms in government, both at national and at decentralised level, as well as at parliamentary level, but rarely in judicial structures; a diversity that is also starting in universities and research institutions, social partners bodies and even the private sector in some countries.

Government

As regards the central government, there is a preliminary observation to be made. In answers by governments there seems to be a different understanding of what is the main national mechanism in government. In some cases, it is a ministry that is so designated, even when the ministry has a very broad portfolio and does not explicitly mention the area of equality. In other cases, and in similar circumstances, the central mechanism indicated as the central machinery is the department, directorate, division or equivalent, in charge of equality, within a certain ministry. Of course, this question does not arise when the ministry itself includes the dimension of equality in its title, either exclusively (very few cases) or as one of the components of its responsibilities.

In any case, however, there is a **proliferation of structures**, departments, divisions, agencies, commissions, councils, units, bureaux, working groups, taskforces, focal points, coordinators, observatories, etc. Some are at central level, including in ministries, namely focal points, coordinators or units, and also at decentralised level, where they are also varied in nature and tasks, sometimes commissions, units, officers, coordinators, or simply projects of a more fragile nature, but similar objectives.

The diversity is also expressed in the variety of **political areas under which the subject of women and equality is included**. As in the past, there is a majority of cases in which the responsible ministry is the one in charge of employment or labour, welfare, social affairs or social policies,

sometimes also associated with family and solidarity matters (ex. Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Malta, Norway, Romania, Slovakia). But there are also cases in which gender equality is seen under human rights and minorities (Czech Republic), justice and public order (Cyprus), interior (Greece), or education, culture and science (Netherlands).

In the cases where the concepts of women or of equality come explicitly under the title of the ministry, they are associated with family (Poland), children (Norway), family, seniors and youth (Germany), employment (Denmark), public service (Austria), integration (Sweden), or justice and law reform (Ireland). Only in very few cases there is a self-standing ministry or minister or secretary of state, either of women or equal opportunities or of equality (ex. Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom), although, when the designation of equality is adopted, it is usually referring to general equality, not specifically to gender equality.

As regards the **substantive content of the specific departments in charge of equality matters**, also here diversity is increasing, as the content is described in different terms. Gender equality is the main trend, but women, women's rights or the status of women are still common (ex. Austria, Canada, Cyprus, France, Poland, Spain, Turkey), and eventually emancipation (Netherlands); but there is also a growing tendency to adopt the terminology of equal opportunities or equal treatment, either in the central machinery or beyond, namely in commissions and consultative bodies, apparently to characterise equality (ex. Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia). In some cases, designations of different mechanisms seem to follow different directions within the same country; and the case also happens of the central mechanism experiencing successive changes of name, reflecting one or other approach. Are these differences totally neutral or do they reflect some ambiguity in the substantive consideration of the matter of gender equality and women's rights?

We might even wonder whether the trend of focusing on equal opportunities and particularly on equal treatment - a trend linked with EU prevailing concepts - is restricting the scope of the objectives to attain, as equal treatment and even equal opportunities are concepts that do not necessarily encompass the ultimate aim of substantive equality, both *de jure* and *de facto*, in all areas of life.

The trend of diversity is also visible in the increasing **creation of specialised mechanisms within government**, commissions, committees, units or working groups, either addressing a specific theme or addressing the special needs of a specific group or groups of women: both traditional

themes, in which mechanisms have existed for some time, like work and employment, eventually professional training for women, and more recent ones in the same context, namely addressing the question of women's entrepreneurship (Italy) or of positive action in private sector (Luxembourg).

As for the new areas where specific structures have been created, either committees, working groups, task forces or others, the most common and widespread are mechanisms to address the problem of violence, sometimes in general terms, others domestic violence; or, in at least one case, the specific form of violence that is female genital mutilation (Italy); or to address the problem of trafficking in persons for purposes of sexual exploitation, that affects mainly women. Particularly as regards violence and trafficking, there seems to be a general tendency of the majority of countries having specific mechanisms. Other topics dealt with by a special mechanism are, for example, the situation of women in the military service or in the armed forces, although these are rather unique cases (Poland and Spain).

Finally, interesting innovative topics being addressed by governments, with the creation of a specific mechanism, is the area of international affairs, including development cooperation, with the case of a special ambassador for the promotion of gender equality policies, in Spain, of a specific commission in the context of foreign affairs, in Belgium, of a specific mechanism in the development agency (Sweden) or of mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the action plan for application of Security Council Resolution 1325, as in the cases of Spain, Portugal and others.

Still within the sphere of competence of governments, the increasing number of **inter-ministerial or interdepartmental bodies** is another aspect of the trend of diversity that can be found practically in every country. Diverse as regards the level and kind of government representatives, more technical in some cases or more political in others; diverse also as regards the specialisation of matters, that have to be dealt with by a variety of sectors of the administration, as would be the case of violence or trafficking. On the other hand, this type of structure also seems to be growing at decentralised levels, either regional or provincial and even local level.

Diversity is also the rule in the case, more and more common, of **consultative structures** of the government, either councils or commissions, whose composition is very broad in some cases, including representatives of civil society organisations, of women's NGOs, of social partners, of academics and other experts, etc (e.g. Belgium, Cyprus, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey).

Parliament

As for parliament, the increasing existence of national mechanisms is also a trend, but diversity is more limited. There are either formal mechanisms within the parliamentary structure, commissions or committees and sub-committees, (ex. Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Spain, Turkey); or more informal ones, like inter-parliamentary cooperation groups (Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, UK). Although there may be frequent changes, with structures and designations being altered and sometimes removed in different legislatures, we can say that the majority of countries have now created some type of structure.

These deal with the issue of women's rights or gender equality or equal opportunities in an autonomous way, in many cases; in others, such issues come associated with other matters, such as human rights and nationalities, and social affairs and housing (Slovakia), justice and defence (Ireland), family and youth (Luxembourg) youth, family affairs and senior citizens (Germany), or as a subject under areas such as human rights, minority and religious affairs (Hungary).

Judiciary

An interesting development, that is rather new, is the creation of equality mechanisms within other sectors of public bodies, namely in the Judiciary. A few examples are referred in the government report by Spain, including an Observatory against Domestic and Gender-based Violence of the General Council of the Judiciary or a Public Prosecutor's Office to Counter Violence against Women or specialised Gender Violence Courts. It is not a general trend yet, but certainly it is inspiring, as for practical possibilities of including and giving visibility to gender concerns in judiciary structures.

Independent bodies and others

The case of independent bodies is another one where increasing diversity is also a fact. Both in the first and in the second evaluations, respectively of 1999 and 2004, there was indication of **ombuds or equivalent institutions**, like human rights offices, equality tribunals, boards, commissions or commissioners, an equality authority or an equality advocate, although having diverse scope and areas of intervention.

While practically all the previous structures are still in place, they are also being established in countries where they did not exist before. Some differences must, however, be pointed out. Both in the present and in the past, these institutions could be specialised for gender-based

discrimination/gender equality or have a general anti-discrimination nature, covering all kinds of discrimination, the second trend being, however, the most frequent.

This tendency has been reinforced, with some readjustments made and mandates reviewed, following adoption of new laws of a broader nature and the replacement/merging of previous gender-specialised bodies into global ones, with a general approach to discrimination and equality (ex. Denmark, Estonia or Sweden); or with the creation of independent equal treatment centres or commissions (ex. Luxembourg, Netherlands, UK). It is certainly an evolution in line with the already mentioned trend in EU countries of including various forms of discrimination under the same heading in some mechanisms and in some policies.

Other independent or semi-independent bodies, or just operating on an autonomous basis, although linked to the government machinery, also exist that seem to have an observation and monitoring function, either of general policies or of specific policies in certain areas. It is the case of some **observatories or agencies, institutes or monitoring centres, or policy-oriented research centres**, some of these structures coming from former years, others having been created more recently. Cases like the Parity Observatory in France or observatories on Violence (Greece, Ireland, Spain) or on Equal Opportunities (Spain) or on trafficking (Portugal) or the Gender Competence Centre in Germany are examples of this type of mechanisms having specialised mandates.

Important to note is the creation of specific **mechanisms in universities and research institutions**. They are departments, centres, units or working parties devoted to women's studies or gender studies; or simply informal networks of women's studies. Some of them have already a certain tradition, but the number of such structures has significantly increased (ex. Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey).

Equally important is the existence of equality mechanisms or women's units or departments in some bodies of **social partners**, mainly trade unions or trade union confederations, as indicated, for example, by Lithuania or Slovakia.

On the whole, it can be assessed that the trend towards diversity of mechanisms initiated after 1995, has progressively intensified, in line with a diversification of areas of intervention and of a growing awareness, on the part of governments and other leading structures, of the importance for society and for democracy of the principle of equality of women and men and of the need to have institutional means and instruments to respond, and give effect to the requirements of this principle of human rights.

b) Mandates, roles and functions

Mandates of national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women vary a great deal, both as regards countries and also mechanisms within the same country. They vary according to place of location, whether in government or in parliament, or whether at national or regional or local level. They also vary in line with the scope of action, either meant to be on general equality or specialised on gender equality; in line also with the nature of the mechanisms, either dependent on official bodies or independent. Finally, they also vary according to the approach being used, either emphasis on specific actions or mainly investment in gender mainstreaming.

As for roles and functions attributed to these bodies, diversified pictures are also to be found, according to the level of power where mechanisms are located. In the case of ministers or ministries in charge of equality, there is a certain decision-making power, even if limited in scope; but, quite often, mechanisms have only an advisory or consultative role. In certain cases, they start with a provisional role, namely the elaboration of a national action plan or strategy and are later institutionalised to carry out functions required by such a plan of action.

On the other hand, the roles and functions of national mechanisms are strictly related to mandates, which can be more or less clear in the specification of such roles and functions. Very often, they are entitled to initiate proposals for legal reform or make recommendations; or called upon to review drafts or existing legislation to ensure that a gender-based approach is included therein. In other cases, they have the mandate to consider discrimination complaints and issue opinions, binding or not, on the cases; or the responsibility to devise a coherent strategy for gender equality, involving all areas of governance, and to coordinate or monitor its implementation. Such a responsibility usually includes developing the strategy of gender mainstreaming and monitoring its implementation, including its financial dimension of gender budgeting.

Mandates of national mechanisms generally include specific tasks, namely in areas such as gender training and the elaboration of materials for that purpose; or information, advocacy and awareness-raising of target groups or the public at large; or actions and projects particularly addressed at women or aiming at the realization of gender equality in specific areas. Some mandates also include a service delivery function, namely as regards some critical situations, like the protection of victims of violence. The findings obtained from the different sources utilized actually point into practically all these directions.

Government

In government bodies at central level, mandates are usually quite broad and open-ended, a tendency already visible in former evaluations. **Broad objectives** are expressed as elimination of discrimination and achievement of equality, with the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of policies; or as ensuring that women enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities, or other equally encompassing formulations.

The application, coordination and monitoring of gender mainstreaming is a frequent and fundamental task attributed to national mechanisms; but there are others, like preparing National Action Plans and monitoring their implementation, promotion of studies and research, including analysis of data and other indicators, providing training in gender issues, policy advice, promotion of the use of gender-based analysis, information and awareness-raising on gender equality, support to women's NGOs and cooperation with other stakeholders - these are some of the general formulations used in mandates of national mechanisms in most countries.

A new aspect must be pointed out in recent mandates, one that is in line with the apparently occurring shift from a focus on gender-based discrimination and gender equality, to one of discrimination on the basis of various factors and to general equality. Mandates and functions have, therefore, in some cases been enlarged to encompass **all forms of discrimination and all equalities**, following amendments of legislation in old EU countries and adoption of anti-discrimination laws in new countries.

However, in this move from specific to general, two approaches can be detected that are important to point out. In some cases, the option has been of dealing with gender-based discrimination and **gender equality as one dimension among others**, particularly in the case of independent bodies, like ombuds. As regards the central machinery in government, the focus is generally different; even when the trend is towards having a general mechanism on equality, like a ministry, there is usually a specific department or unit for gender-based discrimination and gender equality, **as a separate area of a different nature that** requires specialised mechanisms, albeit under the same political chapeau (ex. Ireland, Portugal, Spain). It can also happen, however, that the central machinery, previously addressing gender issues is now addressing all forms of discrimination, as seems to be the case in Estonia, Italy or Norway.

The fact is that in some mandates, as in some mechanisms, some ambiguities seem to exist and some fluctuations between the different scopes and approaches. There is a fluctuation between gender equality and equal opportunities or equal treatment for women and men or just general

equality and equal treatment for all, something that we have also witnessed in the designations of mechanisms.

On the other hand, another trend is occurring, also in line with EU focus that influences mandates in another direction – contained in the EU equality directives on equal treatment and non-discrimination, namely to place a particular **emphasis on the areas of work and employment**, including equal pay, equal access and equal working conditions, social security and, more recently, equal access to goods and services, even when mandates encompass also other areas (ex. Austria, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia). The truth is that some mandates, including some of the newcomers to EU, are relying heavily on EU directives and guidelines, as a source of authority.

One important explanation for this trend may lie in the fact that recent EU directives themselves require the creation or existence in member states of National Equality Bodies invested with specific functions. States must *“designate a body or bodies for the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of all persons without discrimination on the grounds of sex”*, both at work (Directive 2002/73/EC) and outside work, regarding goods and services (Directive 2004/113/EC). Such bodies have prescribed mandates, namely as regards providing assistance to victims in pursuing their complaints; conducting independent surveys on discrimination; or publishing independent reports and making recommendations on any issue relating to discrimination.

On the other hand, at EU level, a network of such equality bodies has been constituted, that provides a forum for articulation and discussion or exchange of information and good practices, which might be an element explaining similarities in the evolution in many countries, as for example the already mentioned emphasis on the concept of equal treatment as an overall concept.

Something to point out, however, is the fact, that notwithstanding changes occurring everywhere, in some cases, the political and acting frameworks of national mechanisms are still closely **associated with the traditional areas of family and children** and general social aspects, as demonstrated also by designations of some mechanisms. It is a fact that, although less frequent than in the past, is still there, both in eastern and western countries, both in the traditional equality “champions” of western Europe, like Norway, and in those newly arrived to EU, like Poland, among others.

One important aspect generally present in mandates of national mechanisms is related to the **legal dimension**, reflected in proposing, drafting, revising or monitoring the implementation of equality legislation, as well as in the formulation of opinions or recommendations on provisions in other

areas, that may have a specific impact upon women or equality. In some cases, it is the mandate of the mechanism itself that imposes the obligation that the central equality mechanism be consulted on any drafts or proposals that may be relevant for women or for gender equality, as for instance in the cases of mechanisms of Luxembourg or Portugal.

Particularly in the newly arrived countries to EU, this activity of legal reform has been rather intensive, in line with community requirements of equal opportunities and equal treatment. As for the old members, there is also a regular trend of updating laws and norms, in line with the new trends of the same requirements, namely new directives. This means that, in many cases, the dominant framework for the mechanisms' roles and functions is the specific EU normative framework; however, in some cases a clear and broader human rights framework can also be found as the basis for roles and functions, particularly when issues linked to violations of women's fundamental rights, as violence or trafficking, have a prominent role in the action of national mechanisms.

A new feature in some of the government mechanisms is the **capacity to assist women in cases of discrimination and receive and deal with complaints**, or exercise mediation or issue opinions on such cases; a matter that used to be mainly the competence of independent bodies, like ombuds or similar institutions, but which can now be entrusted to other equality mechanisms, as it happens with the central national mechanism of Malta, Romania, Portugal and others.

As for **strategy dimensions** of mandates of national mechanisms, a distinctive feature is the emphasis placed upon the **strategy of gender mainstreaming**, as being probably the most relevant feature of present mandates. A strategy that was fully legitimised by the PFA and is now generally entrusted to national mechanisms, as being the bodies in government that are mainly responsible for its promotion and coordination, as well as its monitoring and evaluation.

This responsibility is attributed both to the central machinery of government, that has the main coordinating role, and to the interdepartmental structures composed by representatives from the various areas of governance. In fact, these are the essential mechanisms for the functioning of such strategy, as they constitute the broad intermediate platform for the comprehensive action that is the ultimate objective of the gender mainstreaming strategy.

Such attribution is clearly made explicit in mandates or policy plans and a progressively more important role is being attributed to central national mechanisms in regard to the implementation, coordination and monitoring of gender mainstreaming within the context of the interdepartmental structures that have become the rule everywhere (cases of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada,

Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Portugal Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, UK, among others).

In many cases, the evaluation of the success of this strategy and of its results is also entrusted to the central mechanisms, although in a number of cases, such responsibility is also entrusted to outside bodies, like research centres or specific experts. Attached to this responsibility, national mechanisms, either the central machinery or specialized bodies, are generally tasked with the responsibility to create the instruments and materials necessary to put in practice the gender mainstreaming strategy, including all its dimensions of gender analysis, gender budgeting, gender impact assessment or gender audit. Also attached to this the dimension of gender mainstreaming is the function, usually entrusted to national mechanisms, of gender training of targeted audiences, namely focal points and gender coordinators in ministries or at local level.

Even though gender mainstreaming constitutes a relevant dimension of national mechanisms' mandates or assigned functions, the **dual-track approach to equality policies** is also explicitly recognized as essential in many cases (ex. Denmark, France, Hungary, Luxembourg, Slovenia and others). Therefore, **special actions** are also included as a responsibility of national mechanisms in different areas, aiming to respond to specific needs of the situation of women or of equality. The undertaking of special actions can even include positive actions or temporary special measures intended to redress historical inequalities, like marginalisation in political life or structural discrimination in the labour market. Special temporary measures that are intended to accelerate the achievement of equality, as is the case of laws establishing quotas for balanced political participation, exist in a significant number of countries.

National mechanisms have also a particular role in relation to those questions that do not belong specifically to any settled policy area of governance, but have a cross-cutting nature, therefore involving several areas, like violence or access to decision-making or cultural change and combating stereotypes. Such matters are within the scope of action of national mechanisms in practically every country. Besides promoting actions and motivating and monitoring other sectors, national mechanisms have a role of active involvement in specific programs, policies and projects to address these critical issues.

Though not new, some of these functions seem to be reinforced and recognised as essential; it is the case of actions aimed at dissemination of **information, awareness- raising and advocacy,**

namely reflected in the promotion of campaigns on several matters, such as violence, trafficking, political participation and others, that occur in all countries.

The same can be said in regard to the **service delivery function**, that central machineries have been entrusted with since their beginning, including services providing information to women on their own rights or giving support and guidance in cases of discrimination and violence. In this case, such services, namely counselling centres or shelters, are also, and most often, provided by NGOs working in the sector, with the support of national mechanisms.

EU funding for specific lines of action is the main motor for a number of **specific projects** that respond to particular needs of women's situations – not only violence, but also professional training and qualifications for the labour market, or others. In many cases this responsibility is also undertaken by NGOs that can apply to such lines of funding, the national mechanisms being a central agency for the attribution and monitoring of application of such funds.

Some **new aspects**, or at least newly formulated aspects of mandates or functions entrusted to national mechanisms, particularly the central machinery in government, must also be pointed out. The **management of information and the use of new technologies** - including creation of data banks or of specialised websites - constitute one of these aspects. Specific websites have been created and are managed by practically all national machineries that are sometimes formally mandated to do so, as in the case of the Czech Republic.

A second new aspect in mandates and functions of national mechanisms is the **inclusion of the international dimension**. It is expressed, both as responsibility of coordination of international affairs and representation at the international level, in the area of equality, which is a generally assigned task, as well as responsibilities in regard to development cooperation and to the inclusion of a gender dimension therein (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Sweden). As stated in the Belgian report, placing gender equality at the heart of the new paradigm of development aid is one of the challenges ahead.

This international dimension is further reinforced by the regular functioning of equality mechanisms in the two regional organisations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. National mechanisms, particularly the central machineries, are represented in the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men of the Council of Europe and in the Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the European Commission or the High Level Group for Gender Mainstreaming, as well as in thematic and ad hoc commissions and working groups in these organisations.

As for **interdepartmental or inter-ministerial bodies**, some have a more **political role**, namely when they are constituted at ministerial level (ex. Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, UK); others have a more **technical function**, this being the case of the great majority of countries, where they are constituted by representatives designated by offices or departments, of course under political direction, but essentially invested with technical responsibilities and a more technically oriented role.

The case may also be that such bodies exist both at political and at technical level, the political body being entrusted with a broader scope – all forms of discrimination and general equality – and the technical body being entrusted with the specific field of gender-based discrimination and gender equality, as it happens in Spain. In all cases, the main trend of action of these interdepartmental bodies, that are also increasingly present in decentralised levels of political action, is the coherent implementation and monitoring of the strategy of gender mainstreaming and the mutual exchange of information, initiatives, results, good practices, materials, tools and instruments.

On the other hand, the functions of the representatives in these interdepartmental bodies have also a particular incidence in their own departments and fields of action. Whether **focal points or coordinators or units**, all these mechanisms have functions of promotion and oversight of the practice of gender mainstreaming in their own sectors of governance; functions that may have a legal basis or an official status, or be just appointments of a more informal nature.

As regards the **specialised bodies** in government – working groups, task forces, or others - their functions are directed towards specific areas: violence, trafficking, equality in employment and professional life, women's health, positive action or others; and sometimes addressed at specific groups: migrants, minorities, disabled or others. Functions of these bodies are varied, from prevention, information, assistance to victims or provision of services, to the more general elaboration of global plans and strategies to address the problems related to that area or that specific group.

Although these mechanisms have a restricted scope of action, the respective mandate keeps a variety of aspects equivalent to the general mechanisms, that can go from legal aspects to research and training, assistance to victims or protection of the rights of special groups involved, information and awareness-raising, promotion of projects, cooperation with NGOs working in the area, etc.

As for **regional and local government bodies** and institutions that, in growing numbers, have established some form of equality mechanism – commissions, coordinators, equality experts, units or others - the functions attributed to these mechanisms are mainly described in general terms, as promoting the inclusion of a gender dimension in local policies or promoting projects for gender equality at local level.

Apparently, political constraints that may, sometimes, exist at national level, are not so visible at local level, where the proximity to the real persons and their needs and to the NGOs working on the ground seems to bring a touch of reality to the work and concerns of equality mechanisms. Interesting to note is the opinion of NGOs in a few countries that consider that national mechanisms are more effective and their functioning more adequate at local than at national level.

Parliament

As for equality bodies in parliaments, their mandates and functions seem to be very straightforward in the oversight of legislation; not only specific equality legislation, but also general legislation, where they must ensure that a gender dimension is regularly considered. On the other hand, they are also entrusted with the responsibility to monitor government policies, both specific equality policies and general equality policies. It may also happen that a parliamentary body has been created to deal with a specific issue, for example violence, having therefore a restricted mandate, as is the case of a specific sub-committee in Spain.

Finally, in other cases, they also perform different and less frequent functions, like the promotion of debates or of hearings on relevant issues, the dissemination of information on specific topics, etc. (ex. Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia). In the specific case of Finland, mention is made of awards granted by the parliamentary equality body to groups or initiatives promoting gender equality.

Independent bodies and others

Mandates of independent bodies are defined in line with the type of body and the nature of its mission. Mandates of Ombudspersons or other human rights institutions – Higher Authority, Tribunal, Advocate, Commissioner - are essentially linked to the supervision of human rights protection and promotion and, specifically, the compliance with the respective legal acts.

They can assume a quasi-judicial function in promoting investigation or inquiries and providing redress for discrimination cases (ex. Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Slovenia); they also have a function of advice and mediation, of

issuing opinions and recommendations in the attempt to solve such cases; and they generally have specific roles in regard to the elaboration or promotion of studies or surveys regarding human rights situations, in the making of proposals and issuing of recommendations on the same matters or in presenting regular reports of the human rights or gender equality situation to parliament.

Other bodies, like observatories or special commissions or councils and, in some cases, institutes with a varying degree of independence or autonomy, also carry out a variety of functions. Some mandates have a general character and others have a special incidence on a specific aspect, like parity in political life, equality in employment, violence, or image in the media. Besides surveys, studies, opinions or recommendations, often they have also a monitoring and evaluating responsibility in regard to their specific areas of competence.

c) Structure and location

Structure and location of national mechanisms vary a great deal, in line with the increasing diversity of these mechanisms, particularly in government. The situation is different in parliament where the pattern has remained basically the same throughout. As for independent bodies, the situation also varies according to the type of body, whether the more classical type of ombuds or equivalent structures, or the more flexible and less formal ones, like the observatories, or specific commissions, centres or others.

Government

The Platform for Action required that the central unit in government for the advancement of women be located at the highest level. The situation has changed with the increasing number and variety of national mechanisms at various levels, but the principle remains the same; that the placement at the highest level of government should be the rule for governmental mechanisms, whether it is the national, regional or local government.

However, even now, as regards the central machinery, the prevalent structure in the majority of countries seems to be that of a specific department, whether it receives the designation of division, directorate, commission, agency or other. As for the location, this department is usually placed under a minister, but sometimes under the prime minister or the office of the presidency or of the government (Czech Republic, Israel, Portugal, Turkey), using the argument that this is a privileged position for the implementation of gender mainstreaming.

With the present variety of national mechanisms, their location and the related power are linked to the type of structure that is established. The situation is quite different if the mechanism is

actually headed by a minister, thus having a voice in the Council of Ministers; or if it is headed by a high official or somebody at technical level, even under a minister, but with no political decision-making power.

On the other hand, structure and location of national mechanisms are also linked to the main focus adopted: whether gender equality is viewed as an autonomous sector or whether it is linked to specific areas of government, namely labour and social affairs, which is still the prevalent situation, or to other areas.

Finally, location is also strictly linked to mandates, roles and resources, that tend to be more significant as the mechanisms are placed higher and closer to political power and with greater capacity to influence laws and policies.

In **local power structures**, and notwithstanding the different forms they can take, national mechanisms are usually close to the central bodies in local government; however, at this level, there seems to be a significant openness to civil society and a particularly active involvement of NGOs in projects undertaken in partnership with the official bodies, that in many cases seem to take good advantage of the close proximity of these organisations to the community.

Parliament

As for the structure and location of equality mechanisms in parliament, there is the older formula of the inter-party women's groups or networks and the apparently more recent and more formal one, therefore with greater legitimacy, of full-fledged commissions or committees or sub-committees; in some cases functioning as autonomous bodies, in others equality matters being integrated into a chapeau commission dealing with what are considered related subjects (family, children, youth, human rights).

Independent bodies

As for independent bodies, mainly ombuds or similar institutions, they seem generally to enjoy a high-level status, reflected primarily in appointments by parliament and accountability to this body. A situation that brings to their mandate and functioning an added political legitimacy, particularly as regards dealing with complaints. In the case of other independent bodies, like observatories, research centres or specific agencies, there is no established pattern regarding structure or linkage to political power.

As a final note, it should be added that, beyond structure and location and the official support these can imply, equally important, or even more important, is the personal commitment and the

effective power of the politician invested with the responsibility of the area of gender equality, and his/her capacity to mobilize people and bring about change. Actually, there are cases where greater success is achieved with an apparently less powerful mechanism, as compared with others, where a higher status did not automatically result in such great progress. Political will is certainly the essential element to guarantee effective progress.

d) Support and resources

In information provided by governments, the idea is frequently conveyed that the proof of political support to gender equality and to national mechanisms is the existence of equality or anti-discrimination laws and of policies and programs adopted by the government. Many responses also refer specifically to the existence of a global National Action Plan or National Strategies or of specific thematic plans, as demonstrations of political support and commitment of the government.

The strengthening of equality mechanisms, and particularly the existence of a central machinery at ministerial level with adequate responsibilities and means of action, is also, and rightly so, envisaged as a manifestation of such support; or other organisational aspects like the affiliation of the central machinery to the Prime Minister's Office, etc. The same type of argumentation is also used in regard to the attribution to national mechanisms of financial and logistic support, reflected in staff, budget, financing of projects, and all the necessary means to achieve their objectives.

Other opinions register, as evidence of support by government, the possibility and obligation of undertaking regular gender analysis of policy decisions in all sectors and levels; or the possibility available to members of such mechanisms of integrating task forces or working groups or committees in several areas of governance, where they can bring to the fore the issues concerning gender equality or the impact of measures taken or foreseen upon women and men; or the increasing trend of integration of gender concerns in departmental plans.

Questions regarding resources include both human and financial aspects. On the one hand, the number of persons involved in equality work, but also their level of capacity, training, experience and expertise; on the other hand, the financial dimension, including whether mechanisms have a specific budget out of the state budget and/or from other sources.

Information on resources is rather scarce, both in reports and in answers to the questionnaire. On the other hand, there are very different situations with small countries and big ones, with more or fewer structures and mechanisms, according to levels of development of equality issues; however,

a common concern often exists that resources are not usually commensurate to the task. Opinions are registered, including on the part of NGO's, on scarcity of resources, both human and financial, particularly in countries where national mechanisms have been set up more recently.

However, when numbers of financial resources are provided, we can see there is a certain positive evolution with some cases of significant increase (ex. Cyprus, Portugal, Romania). Does this mean that when no quantitative indication is given there is not such a positive trend? It is not a legitimate conclusion to draw, but the question may be raised. On the other hand, it is clear that, in certain cases of upgrading of the equality mechanism, new resources were certainly granted for its functioning, as in Spain, where a new ministry was created.

As for human resources, situations are also not comparable between countries, but there seems to be a positive evolution in many cases, particularly with growing numbers of personnel involved in regional and local structures, a number that can be very significant, particularly in some western European countries. As for eastern and central ones, where, in spite of positive developments, mechanisms are usually more recent and more fragile, in many of them there is an insufficient number of persons involved in equality work, too low to give adequate answers to diversified actions (ex. Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Poland, etc.).

One problem that subsists regards the case of countries where a very substantial part of the budget of the national mechanisms comes from foreign donors, EU funds or others. Some lines of funding, namely from EU, are to be applied in specifically determined projects and areas of action, rather than on core expenses of the mechanisms themselves, which is not always the case with others, that can finance regular functioning of the mechanisms, particularly in the eastern countries.

The question can be raised, as has been done before, of the sustainability of these mechanisms, once such lines of funding end. Will they be sustainable? The question can also be raised on the government's commitment, political will and interest in the attainment of gender equality, when the funds granted to national mechanisms are essentially from donors with a very small contribution from the state budget.

4. MAIN AREAS OF FOCUS

The main areas of focus of equality work in European countries, both as regards content of actions and strategies used, have been regularly assessed in the former evaluations, of 1999 and of 2004.

As for areas included as priorities of national mechanisms, these related mainly to work and employment and equal treatment therein, reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities, promotion of gender-sensitive education and combating stereotypes, violence against women in various forms, trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, and access to political participation and exercise of decision-making.

As for strategies used, these included information and awareness-raising activities, gender mainstreaming and gender training of political and social actors, cooperation with the media, promotion and coordination of research, including analysis of statistical data and other indicators, studies, surveys and publications, creation of tools for gender analysis and gender impact assessment, etc.

For purposes of the present report, therefore, a further evaluation was undertaken of current trends of action and current priorities and strategies, as regards processes, instruments and issues, as well as the collaboration/cooperation between mechanisms and with other stakeholders.

a) Processes and instruments

Processes, especially establishment of priorities and strategies to pursue them, are related to roles and functions and to a certain extent, linked to the type of mandates given to national mechanisms. These often place a special emphasis on the process of gender mainstreaming, as the main strategy to be used; but also on specific strategies to address specific problems, as in the case of violence against women or trafficking. The emphasis, in certain cases, is mainly on equality in the labour market, a complex area where progress seems particularly difficult to achieve; or on the process of law reform, as has been the case for the newer member countries of the EU, and of subsequent monitoring of implementation; or on general awareness-raising, involving educational structures and the world of the media and other social actors. According to the information gathered, processes used encompass all these aspects.

Gender mainstreaming

While keeping, as a rule, the dual-track approach, with gender mainstreaming on the one hand and special actions, on the other, there is generally an increasing **emphasis on gender mainstreaming**.

This is envisaged as the privileged process and strategy to adopt, thus showing a visible evolution from a previous approach of specific actions mainly centred on women, to the integration of gender concerns in overall policies. A process that is often legitimised by a **legal basis**, either included in a constitutional provision or in special equality acts; and its development seems to be a strong concern in most countries, both the ones considered as having the most advanced gender equality policies, as well as others, including new democracies.

Another process that seems to register developments is that of **gender impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation** and the related methods and mechanisms. The creation of instruments and methods for gender analysis and gender impact assessment has been constantly recommended, starting with the Platform for Action, but particularly in the Outcome Document of 2000, which states that for the strategy of gender mainstreaming to be fully operative, Member states must *“Develop and use frameworks, guidelines and other practical tools and indicators to accelerate gender mainstreaming, including gender-based research, analytical tools and methodologies, training, case studies, statistics and information” (para.80).*

Such tools and instruments, guidelines and methodologies can assume different and complementary forms – guides, handbooks, manuals, checklists or others. Information now provided seems to show some progress in the creation of such instruments; either produced within the countries by the national mechanisms or translated from EU texts or others, these instruments are regularly cited as being under preparation or in use in most national contexts, although it is not always clear what form they take. In any case, reference is made by some countries to regular gender analysis of laws and policies, as being a priority, an important focus or a systematic policy action conducted by the respective governments. Canada, for example, refers to gender-based analysis as being the main overall approach to gender equality policies.

At the same time, and in spite of the advancements that seem to occur, there are still visible resistances to the strategy of gender mainstreaming, acknowledged both by governments and by non-governmental actors, some of which even hold the view that, in some cases, it is just an “empty term”. However, it is fair to say that conditions to institutionalise gender mainstreaming have progressively become more effective and operational, including greater awareness of the importance of this strategy and the creation of an increasing number of structures at various levels that aim to function as platforms for common action and for sharing of information and practices.

The importance of this process is, therefore, reflected in the existence of **national mechanisms to implement or monitor this strategy**, like inter-ministerial groups or task forces, both in western

and in eastern countries. This is also reflected in the existence of specific plans, programs or projects for gender mainstreaming, as is the case in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and others.

Another visible aspect of this strategy is the increasing **integration of gender concerns in policies and plans** in several areas of governance, which seems to be happening in various countries. Information provided refers to plans in several areas, namely population, social inclusion, poverty, health, integration of immigrants, innovation, sustainable development, urban planning and others, beside the traditional area of employment. Actually, one of the pillars of the National Employment Plans, in EU terms, is exactly the issue of gender equality, a topic that is, therefore, present in employment plans of all EU countries.

In most of the cases, however, information is not clear on the responsibility of national mechanisms in regard to this integration. Of course, they do not have to be associated in a direct way, as these plans are carried out in specific areas, by specific departments or other bodies; but they might be associated in an indirect way, namely in the evaluation of the success of such integration and the respective results, an evaluation that should happen in the interdepartmental structures created for exchange of information and monitoring of gender mainstreaming.

The growing importance of gender mainstreaming is also reflected in the growing number of countries, that are creating mechanisms for its financial implementation, that is the process of **gender budgeting**.

A recent report published by the Council of Europe¹⁰ gives an overview of developments in several countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Slovenia, UK and others). Many of these developments have been induced and pushed by civil society organisations that apparently exercised pressure upon governments to advance them. Interesting to note are the attempts, though still at an early stage, to introduce the strategy of gender budgeting in some central and eastern European countries, that have recently started the process of institutionalising gender equality mechanisms and procedures, often through the means of pilot projects with international support (ex. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

Connected with the development of the process of gender mainstreaming is the increasing emphasis on **effective gender training** for different levels of actors involved, from decision-makers

¹⁰ Quinn, Sheila - *Gender budgeting: practical implementation - handbook*. Strasbourg, Council of Europe, 2009

to officials in public administration, as well as regional and local level actors and groups; and, of course, the development of instruments, materials and modules for this training, including methodologies for an accurate knowledge of the situation of women and men, through regular research and analysis of data and information, both quantitative and qualitative.

Actually, it must be pointed out that gender training is becoming more and more a professionalised process, both for public officials and also for civil society actors. In a few cases, national mechanisms have even contributed to the inclusion of a training module or of some dimension on gender equality within the general training structure of Public Administration of the respective country (ex. Bulgaria, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Portugal).

An area of focus linked to training for women's rights and for gender equality, that is not new, but seems to be reinforced, is the area of training of judges and lawyers (ex. Luxembourg, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and others) as well of target groups and actors involved in responses to situations of special vulnerability of women, like police forces, social workers, etc.

We could rightly say that the process of gender mainstreaming is being placed in motion from a variety of angles, including legal provisions, special programs and special mechanisms, as well as specific methods and instruments, both for gender analysis, gender impact assessment, gender budgeting and gender training.

Special actions

Although the process of gender mainstreaming seems to be the more prevalent process in working for gender equality, the fact is that special actions, that constituted the traditional task of institutional mechanisms, continue to be necessary to respond to specific problems and needs of women. As registered in previous evaluations, such areas have been mainly related to the still disadvantaged situation of women in the labour market or their still existing marginal position in political life and in decision-making; but also in others, like violence or trafficking, that require specific responses; or still another very broad and structural area, that of cultural change and questioning of the prevalent stereotyped views of women's roles and image.

In all these areas, national mechanisms have generally used different processes and strategies, that go from the adoption of temporary special measures to the promotion of campaigns for the general public or the provision of advice to women in specific information bureaux or the creation of support centres for critical situations or the promotion/support of specific projects, or others.

All these processes continue to be present in the functioning of national mechanisms, on a larger or smaller scale, in line with the dimension already achieved of integration of gender concerns in all areas. Actually these two processes/strategies - gender mainstreaming and special actions - are not independent from each other. They remain complementary in the functioning of national mechanisms and are generally acknowledged as such.

Some innovations can also be found in the processes of national mechanisms, such as the creation of key concepts that catch attention – the “Gender Duty” in UK is an example. Changed into “Equality Duty”, it will transfer some focus from gender equality to general equality, in line with the new trend already mentioned. Other visibility measures are the creation of equality awards granted by national mechanisms, in various countries, for different purposes, including for research with a gender dimension, or for best equality practices in the private sector or at local level, or for the best work-life balance in the work place, or for fair media portrayal of women and men, etc. (ex. Finland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, among others).

Action Plans

As for the **instruments** utilized by national mechanisms in the pursuit of their objectives, we could say that, particularly after 1995, **national action plans** have been the main policy instruments at the disposal of national mechanisms to pursue gender equality. Not plans of the national mechanisms themselves, which may also exist for specific aims, but national plans of a global and comprehensive character, covering actions and concerns in a large spectrum of areas of governance. Equality mechanisms have been charged with different and cumulative responsibilities in regard to these national plans, namely their drafting or the coordination of such drafting in cooperation with different sectors, as well as coordination of their implementation and related monitoring and evaluation.

On the other hand, there is an increasing and significant number of **specific thematic action plans** in critical areas. These are generally entrusted to national mechanisms or to specific structures created for such purpose, but in which, very often, national mechanisms have an important role to play. The majority of these plans deal with subjects like gender-based violence and also trafficking, and have been adopted by most countries; others address situations of specific vulnerable groups of women that need special planning and special measures; or the implementation of specific obligations, like the ones resulting from Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), or others.

In addition to thematic plans that often involve several sectors of government, there are also examples of specific plans or projects in sectoral policy areas, both at national and decentralised

level, in some regions and some local bodies. We can not say that the adoption of equality plans or projects at different levels and in different sectors is a general practice, but it seems to be a growing trend and, in some cases, this trend also extends to private enterprises, universities and other institutions.

Statistical data

One specific instrument that is decisive for the elaboration of plans and policies, anchored on accurate knowledge of reality, is the development of sex-disaggregated statistical data, their analysis and the establishment of related databases; in addition, the establishment of targets and indicators in the action plans to evaluate progress and measure developments is another decisive instrument.

Particularly as regards the gathering, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated statistics there seems to be real progress, with many countries including this subject in their methodological priorities. Information provided by governments often refers to a close cooperation of national mechanisms with national statistical offices or similar institutions and to the regular gathering and publication of the statistical picture of the situation of women and men in different areas (ex. Finland, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Sweden and others). The establishment of common indicators at EU level, to follow developments regarding the critical areas of the PFA, has also functioned as an incentive for member countries and others to develop and use such indicators.

Use of new information technologies

As regards instruments used by national mechanisms, the point must also be made on the use of the new information technologies by national mechanisms. As a matter of fact, websites with information on rights, laws, policies, programs, projects, resources for action, databases, etc are now available almost everywhere. E-learning tools, electronic networks, an Internet-based centre of expertise are some of the developments mentioned in reports. A final observation is necessary to point out that developments in this area are rather uneven, with some countries at a more advanced stage and others at a tentative one in the creation and adoption of such instruments.

Monitoring and evaluation

As for the processes of monitoring and evaluation, these are undertaken and apparently given increasing importance, both as regards national and international accountability. Evaluation of action plans and strategies, undertaken by national mechanisms and presented to the government, is one formula; but there is also independent and external evaluation undertaken by academic or

research institutions, sometimes national, others international, particularly in the case of technical and financial outside assistance. As regards international commitments and accountability, responses suggest that this area is acquiring growing importance, in particular as regards EU commitments, but also CEDAW reporting.

Effectiveness of processes and instruments

As a complementary observation, we could raise the question of effectiveness of these processes. Do national mechanisms effectively influence policy-making? When the question is asked about the capacity to effectively influence policy decisions, responses usually suggest an assumption that the presence of the minister in charge of equality in cabinet meetings; or the existence of interdepartmental structures with qualified representatives of different ministries; or the opinions by national mechanisms on legal or policy proposals; or the participation of equality experts in committees or working groups in various areas; or other similar factors are effective means for such integration. This evaluation is mainly made on the basis of methods and procedures, rather than on results achieved; and an effectiveness on which some NGOs express doubts.

Another doubt that remains in regard to the effective functioning of central units of national mechanisms, which is also based on some NGOs' comments, is whether all the programs and policies are really based upon a strategy of proximity to the people and of listening to their interests and needs and of true knowledge of reality; or whether the functioning of these mechanisms is essentially top-down, a fact that would be contrary to the philosophy of gender mainstreaming, that presupposes a close knowledge of reality.

In the evaluation made in 2004¹¹, in view of the Beijing+10 celebration, in regard to the process of gender mainstreaming, it was mentioned: *"there is evidence of a process that is taking place practically everywhere, although under different forms and to a different extent in the various countries. In some cases, it is only a preliminary phase of understanding of the concept; in others it is a phase of establishment of basic conditions for its effective functioning; and, in just a few countries, the process is apparently functioning and starting to be monitored and evaluated."*

This was the state of affairs five years ago. As for the present, the process is still continuing, but there seems to exist, in regard to most countries, a **clear sense of development**, both in those where it was just an incipient feature and in the more advanced ones. This is a development that is reflected, both in a better understanding of the concept of gender mainstreaming and in the

¹¹ Tavares da Silva, 2004, op.cit. p.27

practical establishment of mechanisms and instruments for its effective functioning, a process that is occurring everywhere.

In a few cases, particularly those countries with a longer tradition of equality work, but also a few of the new members of EU, it is even acknowledged by the government that gender mainstreaming is “the strategy” to go forward and the basis for all plans and programs. Others, in particular some of the new democracies of the central and eastern part of Europe, are still in a tentative organisational phase of setting up the main prerequisites for its functioning, after the incipient stage previously recorded; however, also in these countries the strategy of gender mainstreaming seems to be developing at a good pace, with a legal basis and regulations for the inclusion of criteria for gender impact assessment. At the same time, however, very few countries seem to still remain at the same incipient stage, apparently with no visible translation of the concept into real functioning or, at least, with no substantive information on such matters.

On the whole, we could say that, even though progress is visible and the strategy of gender mainstreaming is generally welcomed and accepted, the optimal output that will bring about change has not yet been reached. Therefore, special actions and mechanisms addressing women’s rights, as well as the reinforcement of gender mainstreaming mechanisms, must remain as important issues on the political agenda.

b) Issues

Issues taken up by national mechanisms in their work are of a multifaceted character, as gender-based discrimination and gender equality encompass all the areas of insertion of women and men in social life. The traditional areas of education, employment and health, present from the very beginning of institutionalisation of equality concerns at world level, particularly in the context of the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), have been followed by other less traditional areas and particularly expanded in the Platform for Action in 1995. To different degrees, all the critical areas included in the PFA have been the object of attention by national mechanisms.

As is widely known, the situation of women in the labour market and their participation in economic life, in general, have been topical themes for national mechanisms in practically all the countries in Europe. Segregation in the labour market, both horizontal and vertical, equal access to employment and equal treatment in employment, the gender pay gap, access to economic decision-making – all of these issues have been regularly on the agenda of national mechanisms. Related to these, the issues of social security and social protection have also been considered, including aspects of pension-related poverty affecting mainly women.

More recently, and partly linked to these topics, the issue of reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities has become a particularly important topic and a challenge for many governments (ex. Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain). Even more recently, the issues of female entrepreneurship or of women's participation in private and public management and in administrative boards have also come to the fore in certain countries.

Matters related to women's health, particularly sexual and reproductive health have also been dealt with at length by national mechanisms in the 1980s and 1990s and still are, including specific aspects of family planning, such as among immigrant groups, teenage pregnancies or sex education, as is the case in France, Germany, Luxembourg, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, UK, among others.

The same may be said about equality and educational issues – not primarily the issue of equal access, which is not a significant problem in European countries in general, but rather the question of gender-responsive education and education for equality; also the issue of the so-called “hidden” curricula and the inclusion of an equality perspective in curricula and materials, text books and others, as well as the sensitisation of teachers and other educators to the value of gender equality. All these aspects are, generally, concerns of national mechanisms and the object of cooperation with educational authorities.

The questioning and elimination of sexist stereotypes have also been a regular matter of concern for all national mechanisms and a permanent challenge for all countries. Besides immediate actions and campaigns, this issue implies long-term efforts to achieve cultural and attitudinal change in relation to women's and men's roles and responsibilities. Such efforts remain a strong concern in the action of national mechanisms and this area is still considered as a priority area by all countries.

The issue of equal participation of women in political and social life, also formulated as parity or equal access to power and decision-making, have also been fundamental issues for national mechanisms, particularly the central machinery in government in practically every country – a matter often addressed in relation to electoral systems and appointment rules, as well as to awareness-raising and capacity-building. A concern that has been regularly expressed in regard to the national level of political life and which seems to have an apparently new development, with emphasis being placed also on participation in local politics.

Other issues became particularly visible and urgent at the beginning of the 1990s, to which the PFA brought political legitimacy and which moved to the top of the agenda of national mechanisms in most countries, if not all. These include the issue of violence against women, mainly domestic violence, but also other forms of physical and sexual violence or sexual harassment; the issue of trafficking; and in a number of countries the issue of women in conflict situations. All of these are examples of new concerns.

More recently, additional new issues have emerged to which the Outcome Document of Beijing+5 refers, and which have enlarged the agenda of national mechanisms. Globalisation and international migration have brought to the equality agenda the situation of migrant women, some from ethnic minorities, mainly immigrants in the western countries and emigrants in the eastern countries; and also the issue of traditional discriminatory and harmful practices, as well as the question of multiple or compounded discrimination, that may affect these women.

In some central and eastern European countries the issue of women from national minorities has also emerged, although not yet in a very prominent manner. Other vulnerable groups, such as elderly women, rural women, women from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities are also mentioned as concerns in some reports from different regions of Europe (ex. Cyprus, Denmark, Netherlands, Romania, UK and others).

Other issues mentioned in reports and responses of member states and which are in one way or another related to the main areas already identified are, for example: family policy, maternity and paternity protection, divorce regimes and pensions, poverty, media, environment, etc.

It is interesting, although not surprising to note that, in most EU countries, the so-called Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women (2006-2019), is the main inspiration for the issue's inclusion in policies and action plans. EU priorities are concentrated on the following topics: economic independence of men and women, reconciliation of work and private and family life, equal participation of men and women in decision-making, eradication of gender-based violence and of trafficking in human beings, elimination of gender-based stereotypes and promotion of equality of men and women outside the EU, namely in development cooperation. These topics of the Roadmap are closely related to the above mentioned issues that are generally taken up by national mechanisms.

Finally, one aspect that must be pointed out also in the context of issues addressed by national mechanisms in some countries, is the question of gender in development cooperation. Sometimes there is only a general formulation, such as the inclusion of gender equality as a priority in

development cooperation or the taking into account of women's rights, empowerment and resource distribution in the programs included therein.

In some cases, specific issues are also mentioned as being part of that concern, for example: the economic empowerment of women and women and armed conflict; women's role in conflict management and the situation of marginalised women and adolescents; gender specific challenges and answers to climate change; sexual and reproductive health and rights; secondary education for girls; time-saving infra-structures for women; well-regulated property and inheritance rights for women; formal employment and equal opportunities in the employment market; participation and representation of women in politics and administration; combating violence against women – there is a long list of themes mentioned as priorities in development cooperation with a gender perspective.

It should be noted that the inclusion of a gender dimension in development cooperation has been fostered by EU guidelines, namely the adoption by the European Commission of a Communication on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, in 2007.

c) Coordination/Collaboration

...between mechanisms

Coordination/collaboration between national mechanisms sometimes takes an institutionalised form, namely in interdepartmental bodies; in others, it assumes a more informal, regular or irregular type of contact and exchange. Such coordination/collaboration may have a legal basis in equality acts or regulations or just be carried out on an informal basis; and it takes different forms in regard both to content and strategies used.

Information available from governments has mainly a positive, but often rather vague, tone to describe it. Dialogue between institutions, successful cooperation, mutual support and exchange of information are some aspects of coordination/collaboration conveyed in responses (e.g.. Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Switzerland). In the case of federal states reference is made to cooperation and partnerships between the federal state and the communities (e.g. Belgium, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland) which, in some cases, is formally expressed in inter-ministerial conferences.

Other aspects that are indicative of or seen as a guarantee for such coordination/collaboration are, for example: the presence of representatives in interdepartmental or inter-ministerial bodies that exist in most countries; or the existence of equality councils with a broad composition and a

comprehensive mandate (e.g. Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary and others); or the establishment of cooperation agreements between different institutions, including at regional and local level, for regular cooperation (e.g. Belgium, Portugal, Spain and others); or of working groups for monitoring of national action plans or specific projects, as is the case in most countries; or the monitoring function entrusted to the central mechanism as being the privileged means to achieve that cooperation, as reported by Canada, etc.

At the same time, there are also clear views and a recognition in many cases, of the difficulties encountered regarding the coordination within government structures, both horizontally and vertically. It is true that most countries have horizontal interdepartmental bodies composed by representatives from different ministries and sectors and, in certain cases, from civil society, including women's NGOs, the academy, research institutions and individual experts. Apparently, this would be the ideal forum for an enlarged cooperation, particularly as regards a coherent implementation of national action plans; but the fact is that, in many cases, there is no real coordination and no structured collaboration between the different departments.

Reasons given in explanation of the situation mention include, among others, unclear mandates of these bodies; inadequate level of representation and no officially recognised status and powers of the representatives, lack of interest, training and knowledge on the part of appointed representatives, as well as lack of effective power to pursue the functions due to the fact that they do not enjoy adequate support from their superiors; time constraints imposed upon them, as their gender equality responsibilities are usually an extra responsibility on top of other "more important" ones and for which they are accountable. In some cases, a legally based status given to these representatives has been a positive feature in trying to overcome these difficulties.

These considerations are mostly applied to interdepartmental bodies at central level, but they can also be applied to a certain extent to similar bodies, now being increasingly created, at decentralised level. Indeed, some responses refer to the insufficiency of mechanisms and rules for coordination between central and local levels, and in many of them this vertical dimension is not even considered.

As for collaboration with bodies outside government, there are some examples of cooperation between mechanisms in government and in parliament, expressed in mutual exchange of views, organisation of debates and thematic sessions on relevant issues, with the participation of both sides and also of civil society organisations. Croatia, Hungary and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia present some examples of this collaboration. In other cases, the parliamentary

mechanisms themselves also promote regular collaboration with different stakeholders of civil society, as reported, for example, by Finland or Luxembourg.

Situations are different in the case of cooperation with independent bodies, as possibilities of cooperation depend on the status and function of the bodies in question. As for ombuds or similar bodies, some cases of good cooperation exist, such as the promotion of joint activities and other means, as for example in Croatia; however, information provided regarding most independent bodies is not explicit enough to allow for a solid assessment.

Also interesting to note in terms of cooperation is the international dimension it can assume, namely in the context of the EU or the Council of Europe and other organisations; actually, there is a long established practice of cooperation that can take different forms: intergovernmental committees made up of representatives of national mechanisms or equality agencies; or expert bodies and networks addressing specific matters.

The recently created European Institute for Gender Equality, with representatives from Member States, the European Commission, as well as NGOs and social partners, at European level, is a promising forum for exchange and coordination, namely through the gathering, analysis and dissemination of comparable research data and information on gender equality and sex-based discrimination, aiming at a better foundation of equality policies to be pursued.

...with other stakeholders

In regard to other stakeholders the question to be posed is not one of coordination but of collaboration or cooperation, either formal or informal, with the possibility of such cooperation taking place on a regular and systematic basis, or irregular and dependent on circumstances, or just on the basis of the good will of the stakeholders concerned.

According to the information provided, the first point to note is that there have been developments regarding greater formal involvement of all kinds of social actors in actions and policies for gender equality. There was an effective enlargement of the sphere of gender equality stakeholders, a fact that reflects a greater understanding and openness to gender equality issues. In all reports and answers, the question of cooperation, particularly with women's NGOs, but also with others, such as social partners, is referred to as an on-going practice.

An interesting development in this regard is the relationship of national mechanisms with universities and research institutions, that sometimes have equality mechanisms themselves, as well as with academic experts. While not new, such cooperation seems to be intensifying, with the

creation and development of some support centres for research on general or specific topics related to gender equality (ex. Germany, Greece).

Such structures may have various roles, including studies and research, evaluation of implementation of plans and policies, provision of advice and development of materials for gender impact assessment, etc. As for areas mentioned as the focus of research already undertaken, they concern, for example, family violence, conditions in employment, women's access to decision-making, fertility, etc.

Within this broad cooperation with civil society stakeholders, the relationship with women's organisations naturally deserves special attention. It is, very often, a formal and institutionalised cooperation, with the inclusion of representatives of these organisations in official consultative bodies that function in close relationship with the structure of the national machinery or under the minister in charge of equality (ex. Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden and others) or even in Parliament, as in Finland.

Other frequent forms of collaboration, more informal and non-institutionalised, are the consultation on legal proposals and initiatives relevant for the status of women or for gender equality (ex. Germany, Slovakia); the organisation of debates or hearings for discussion of topical issues, or even joint activities in some cases (ex. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia); or the involvement in international reporting, namely to CEDAW, by providing opinions and suggestions on the government report, or through participation in official delegations, mostly in the case of Nordic countries, but also of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and others.

But, probably, the most frequent area of collaboration regards the financing of projects, including for the establishment of support services, counselling centres or shelters, mainly in the area of violence (ex. Austria, Denmark, France); but also services and projects in other areas, including vocational training or information and legal advice (ex. France, Luxembourg and others); health and social services, etc. In some cases, the indication is given that a substantial part of the central mechanism's budget is being allocated to NGOs for such projects, dealing with different aspects of women's rights (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, and Spain).

One aspect that is important to note is the mediator role that central mechanisms play in regard to projects financed by EU lines of funding. Such lines of funding are to be applied to projects in specific areas and have specific criteria. Some complaints have been expressed in some cases about changes in NGO funding, apparently from operational costs and services to project funding

which has resulted, in the views of those NGOs, in greater control of the activity by national mechanisms.

Collaboration with women's NGOs seems to be an established practice almost everywhere, though not always with the same involvement and results. It is a collaboration that is, apparently, also dependent on the more or less active involvement and dynamism of NGOs themselves, as some reports and answers seem to demonstrate. Sometimes, NGOs themselves initiate processes that are later taken up by governments following pressure by civil society, as demonstrated by the example of gender budgeting.

Regarding the opinion expressed by NGOs, in certain countries, of the better cooperation between government and NGOs at local than at national level, a question may be raised: is it because such cooperation is more influenced by politics at the national level and more service-oriented at local level? It is a possible answer, but other reasons may eventually be found to explain this view.

Interesting to note also is the very divergent views of NGOs in regard to the cooperation established with national mechanisms, from an almost enthusiastic approval in a few situations to a very negative opinion on difficult relations in a few others; however, the majority of those that expressed their views is moderate in terms of positive appreciation of that cooperation.

One final aspect to note is the scarce information that is provided in government's information about cooperation with the media, which seemed to be a stronger concern of central mechanisms in past years. Is this cooperation subject to a declining trend? Or is there a diminished interest on the part of the media in equality issues? Or is it just lack of information?

5. KEY AREAS OF SUCCESS

Instead of speaking of areas of success, it would seem more appropriate to speak of areas where some progress exists, because as regards the issues at stake – gender equality and women’s empowerment – everywhere we are still far from success and the work of national mechanisms still faces many challenges.

The analysis to undertake, therefore, is rather one of looking at the identified critical areas and assess whether improvements are found, namely as regards: legal reform and implementation of laws; public awareness of the values and requirements of gender equality; changes in discriminatory situations affecting women, etc. On the other hand, it is an analysis centred on the role of national mechanisms in this process – how successful has the machinery been? In what way, and to what degree, has it been successful?

The analysis undertaken took into account both specific substantive areas, as well as strategies and processes used by national mechanisms to address the problems identified; and also took into account the visibility and political legitimacy that the question of gender equality has progressively gained.

Political legitimacy of the issue of gender equality

A first aspect is that there is an undeniable sense of progress in that gender equality has generally become a stronger political subject and a political concern, even if sometimes only for reasons of political correctness; in any case, it is an unquestionable topic for governments at different levels and in different areas, as is shown by the proliferation of mechanisms and of policies and programs.

In parliaments this assessment is not so clear, although along the years under consideration more and more countries have created specific mechanisms, but their functions and success are not always indicated or sufficiently detailed or evaluated.

As for independent mechanisms, only a few countries provide some sort of evaluation of the success of these mechanisms and only in very few cases the mechanisms themselves provided such information. Whenever some form of assessment is possible, there seems to be an increasingly attentive approach to the responsibilities in the area of gender equality, particularly as regards dealing with complaints, as well as in awareness-raising and information activities.

On the whole, it must be acknowledged that the matter of gender equality has been legitimised in political terms, which is in itself an achievement. Of course, resistance to the subject, lack of understanding of what is at stake, lack of interest or of commitment are still present in many sectors and have their visible effects in success or failure, regarding application of laws or full implementation of programs; but the fact is that the view of gender equality as a requirement of democracy and human rights and as a basic factor for human development is certainly making its way into the political discourse.

Substantive areas of progress

As for substantive areas of action where progress seems to occur, information from national reports and responses to the specific questionnaire addressed to member states gives us a rather comprehensive view on this matter. Of course, some of these areas of progress are related to the issues identified as being the main areas of focus of national mechanisms, thus rendering inevitable a repetition of some of these areas.

A first aspect that can be considered as an area of progress concerns legal reform. Many countries have adopted laws addressing non-discrimination and/or gender equality, both general and comprehensive laws as well as specific legislation, particularly in the areas covered by EU equality directives. Others have updated their pre-existing laws and provisions, although sometimes in the sense of addressing general equality, not just gender equality. Taking into account that legal reform is often an essential aspect of mandates of national mechanisms, this is certainly an area where some success must be registered.

As for the critical areas of the situation of women that have been addressed with some success by national mechanisms in the context of national policies, a large majority of countries points to the area of violence against women, as one where effective work has been developed with positive results. Mainly domestic or family violence, but also other forms are mentioned as being addressed: honour crimes, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment.

The Council of Europe Campaign on Violence against Women is mentioned as one of the incentives for such work that, in many cases, led to the creation of specific laws, specific mechanisms and specific policy action plans, with comprehensive measures, including prevention, legal reform, assistance to victims, punishment of perpetrators, education and sensitisation at various levels, both in the school system and in the media, awareness-raising for the violation of fundamental rights that violence implies, etc. It is also one of the areas where cooperation with women's NGOs

seems to be more consistent and effective, with the creation of support services and specific programs for victims.

Another area where effective action has been developed, as considered by many countries, is the area of trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation. An increasingly critical problem in Europe that led to the adoption of a Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and to the creation of specific mechanisms and many national action plans to address this problem. Such plans have aimed at prevention of cases of trafficking, through information and awareness-raising in regard to this phenomenon, as well as measures of support to victims and punishment of perpetrators of such crimes. National mechanisms are often initiators of action in this area and partners in programs and projects undertaken.

While these two areas are mentioned by most countries, as areas of positive development in laws, policies and programs, there are also others that although not being systematically mentioned in national evaluations, are still present a number of times. The first regards combating gender stereotypes based on traditional sex roles and discriminatory attitudes against women. An area that is recognised by all countries as one where progress can be achieved only in the long-term, requiring action at different levels: educational curricula, materials and children's books, media, etc. In spite of that long-term dimension, the evaluation made by different countries leads to the conclusion that some actions are being developed in an effective way; an evaluation that is not contradictory to the fact that work in this field still remains a challenge, may be the most substantial challenge of the work ahead.

Other, less mentioned, areas of progress are related to the position of women in the world of work, although this is at the same time one of the persisting critical areas for women in many countries. Mentioned as positive developments, in some cases, are: the promotion of positive actions in companies, actions for increasing women in management and in research; actions for enhancing work-life balance; and reduction of the gender pay-gap. These actions are described by national mechanisms as being on-going, but there are no sufficient and clear data on their real effectiveness, particularly when it is well known that the general picture of the situation of women in the labour market and economic life in European countries, in general, has not suffered any radical change in terms of improvement of imbalances and of some discriminatory practices.

In a few cases the area of women and decision-making, particularly in political life, is also mentioned for positive developments, namely in situations where laws or regulations have been

adopted for gender balance in elected positions, which have generally led into an increase in the number of women in such positions, as well as in regard to appointed posts.

The question, however, remains whether such increase is evolving in fully satisfactory democratic terms or whether it is mainly a symbolic development, still far away from a balanced participation of women and men. Even when statistical data provide a quantitative answer of progress, it would be necessary to proceed to a qualitative evaluation of such developments. In any case, it is an inescapable subject both at national and international level, as clearly demonstrated by the recent demand expressed by high level personalities, namely of the European Parliament, that one of the two leading posts of the European Union be attributed to a woman, as it came to be.

Successful strategies and processes

As for strategies and processes developed or promoted by national mechanisms, that may be considered as successful, according to the evaluations made by the member states themselves, the ones mainly considered as such are linked to the gender mainstreaming process; and in a smaller degree to gender budgeting, a more recent strategy and still in its early stages in most countries. Of course, such strategies require the indispensable instruments and tools necessary to make them work and the creation of such instruments documents a line of progress that must be acknowledged.

Other apparently successful strategies and processes have been the capacity-building, and increasing mobilisation of, various social actors involved in the achievement of gender equality, namely at decentralised level, of municipalities, counties, districts or regions. For this mobilisation, where national mechanisms have an important role, campaigns, advocacy and other awareness-raising activities have been central. We must, however, note that the great emphasis of such actions has been in regard to the above mentioned topics, of violence and trafficking and, in certain cases, of access to power and decision-making.

Some elements and reasons for success

A final question that could be raised regards the reasons why work in certain areas is evaluated as being more positive than in others. Although this is an answer that has no support in countries' reports or responses, there is no doubt that one first element of success is the visibility that the issues underlying certain actions have experienced. Gender-based violence or trafficking have been acknowledged as gross violations of women's human rights and this acknowledgement has been

translated into effective action being taken – passing of laws, setting up of mechanisms, adoption of policies and programs, often of a comprehensive nature, etc.

On the other hand, why has there been progress in these areas and on these topics, while others seem to be lagging behind and experiencing greater difficulties in becoming priority issues? The answer can only be guessed, but it is evident that issues linked to the defence and promotion of fundamental rights – to life or physical integrity or to human dignity – have become priorities for governments. Other matters, equally linked to basic rights, such as equal access to power and decision-making or equality in economic life, although politically legitimised and object of attention, apparently tend to be less compelling and subject to greater resistances, rooted in stereotypical views of women's and men's roles. They are probably rooted in some fear of loss of power by traditional sectors, if women's access to power, either political or economic, were to happen in absolutely equal terms with men.

As a final note, regarding criteria for success, we might recall the statement made, when assessing structure and location of national mechanisms and the official support these convey. Political will and personal commitment of politicians in charge of gender equality policies is a number one criterion for effective success of such policies. On the other hand, it may also be stated that active involvement of all interested stakeholders, mainly women's and human rights organisations is also a factor leading to change, well documented in many national situations.

6. GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Gaps and challenges are of different kinds and importance: related to lack of power, visibility, and political legitimacy of national mechanisms, related to political will and support from institutional power structures and their leaders, to non-effective functioning due to staff, capacity or resource limitations, to ineffective or lacking cooperation between mechanisms or institutions, etc.

From the information provided and analysis made, it is clear that, in spite of positive developments since 1995, there are gaps and challenges regarding all these aspects. There are no perfect mandates, no perfect functioning, not enough resources in general. There is always room for improvement in processes, strategies and methods used, and for better coordination of national mechanisms. Better dialogue with other sectors and with civil society is also possible and desirable.

Challenges regarding substantive and organisational work of national mechanisms

As for substantive aspects of work for gender equality, gaps and challenges regarding political will and determination are reflected in many ways and levels, such as: weak and inconsistent implementation of laws and policies; inadequate resources and power of the central mechanism, often just a department, not being always clear whether there is a strong voice in the cabinet; lack of interest, knowledge and expertise of many government officials, particularly of senior officials, whose involvement is imperative; lack of interest on the part of many parliamentarians and other high-level decision-makers, etc.

As mentioned in reports and in NGOs' opinions, there is still a general lack of understanding of what gender equality really means, as a cross-cutting political issue, or of what it implies and requires, thus leaving the realisation of gender equality plans and objectives dependent on the interest and commitment of individual experts and officials, often struggling in a non gender-sensitive government environment.

Acknowledgement of gender equality as a principle of human rights and commitment to its realisation is, therefore, a major challenge for national mechanisms, for governments and for society at large. Consequences of this assumption and challenges also are the power and visibility given to national mechanisms with clear mandates and resources commensurate to the task. Specific challenges exist in relation to those countries where gender equality policies and projects are not yet well consolidated and depend heavily on external donors for financing and technical

support. Will the present trends continue smoothly once this outside support is weakened or withdrawn?

A situation that may raise questions concerns the sustainability of national mechanisms. This is a challenge that can be viewed from different perspectives. Sustainability at risk because of lack of funding when international support ends; sustainability at risk because officials that are not interested in the subject will tend to move away from such responsibilities; sustainability at risk because leaders that do not understand or accept the issue of gender equality as a serious human rights issue will tend not to give the required status and means, both human and financial, to national mechanisms and even, as noticed in some cases, make frequent shifts of location and scope.

An important challenge is the one that results from considering gender-based discrimination as one form of discrimination similar or comparable to others, thus running the risk of invisibility of its specificity and different nature; indeed, gender-based discrimination is the only form of discrimination that is horizontal in all societies and cultures, in all sectors and levels, in all communities and groups. On the other hand, in all groups that experience discrimination on the basis of other factors there are also men and women, who may be at risk of a double discrimination, based simultaneously on those factors and on their sex and gender.

Gaps and challenges also exist in coordination/collaboration of mechanisms at government level, both horizontally and vertically, that should be addressed, namely by improving those aspects that are at the origin of such situation; among them, clear mandates of interdepartmental structures and of their central coordinating unit, officially recognised status of representatives, whether focal points, coordinators or any other designation, both as regards their participation as representatives and their role within the ministry, agency or any other body of origin.

This coordination/collaboration is further challenged by the current development of new administrative divisions or units; a proliferation that requires new forms of coordination and collaboration and a flexibility and means that do not always exist. Some reports include as a priority the improvement of the status and situation of national mechanisms in the structure of public administration, particularly as regards their extension to regional and local level.

Linked with the trend of proliferation of national mechanisms and of their effective functioning is the need of gender equality expertise and professionalised gender training. Needed before, such training is urgent now at a much bigger scale, as it involves a much greater number of social actors and of areas of intervention.

This challenge includes the further establishment and consolidation of methods and instruments of analysis and evaluation to assess the effective functioning of the gender mainstreaming process in all its phases; from planning to implementation and evaluation of policies and plans, aspects in which national mechanisms have a fundamental role to play. Research, data collection, statistical analysis and the establishment of adequate indicators are basic instruments for this exercise and important challenges for the work of national mechanisms.

Challenges regarding traditional substantive areas of the situation of women

As for areas where gaps and challenges exist and must be addressed, the situation of women in the labour market is an extremely important one; even though women's participation rate has considerably increased, sex-based discrimination still remains, particularly reflected in the gender pay gap, that has changed very little in the years under consideration; reflected also in the difficult access to decision-making in economic life and in difficulties to reconcile work and family that, although existing for men and women, particularly affect women and their career prospects.

Indeed, the area of reconciliation of professional and public responsibilities with private and family responsibilities is an extremely challenging area for national mechanisms. It is not a sectoral issue, as it involves changes in several policy areas, but it is essential for the achievement of gender equality, not to speak of the dimension of quality of life for all that it also entails.

Participation of women in decision-making, both political and economic, is another substantive area that most reports indicate as problematic. It is a particularly challenging task for national mechanisms; a task not belonging to any sector of governance, but rather a cross-cutting concern, therefore leaving them the space and responsibility to act through all the available means. These include legal and policy proposals, capacity-building of women, awareness-raising of all social actors, particularly political decision-makers and, on the whole, the responsibility of promoting a political environment that is conducive to women's empowerment and to the acceptance of parity of women and men in decision-making, as a democratic requirement.

Challenges also seem to arise from critical aspects of the situation of women that have been recognised and given visibility in the last decades. Violence against women is, of course, one of them. On the one hand, it is an area that reports from governments see as one where achievements have been made, but on the other hand, where strong efforts must still be made, because it is an unsolved problem taking many forms; from domestic violence to physical, sexual and psychological violence, sexual harassment, negative and harmful practices and so many other

forms of gender-based violence, that have to be addressed from many angles, and especially also to strengthen prevention.

Trafficking in human beings is also one of the areas mentioned in reports as registering some positive developments and, simultaneously, as a present day problem affecting all European countries. The fact is that, even when laws and policies have been adopted in these critical areas for women's safety and enjoyment of fundamental rights, full and effective implementation is still a problem; beyond that, the required structural change of attitude and behaviour to fully address problems that are rooted in traditional sexist views, is a slow-moving process.

Challenges posed by new and emerging realities

Challenges are also posed by the new and emerging realities of nowadays. Referred in the first review and appraisal of the PFA, they remain valid and still constitute challenges for governments and specifically for national mechanisms. Issues of migration, minorities and refugees linked to globalisation, demographic movements and conflict situations, the degradation of environmental conditions and the specific gender aspects of all these situations are some of these new issues. Other new issues are linked to the ageing population of European countries, to women's greater life expectancy and the related problems of old age and poverty, that often go together.

From responses provided, we can see that, in some countries, these concerns are entering the political agenda and specialised plans of action are being created to face some of the issues at stake. But the question may still be posed: are all national mechanisms aware and capable of facing the implications of these emerging issues on women and gender equality?

The recent economic and financial crisis at global scale is also an important factor to take into account. Will it pose new challenges, even new threats to gender equality and to the process of women's empowerment? Will it also pose new difficulties to national mechanisms to fully discharge their functions?

Iceland referred to the creation of a specific mechanism – Gender Equality Watch – for monitoring the impact of the crisis from a gender perspective. A recent report issued by this body mentions the specific effects of unemployment on women that might imply an increased danger of gender-based violence, prostitution or trafficking. However, this issue is not generally developed by governments' reports and responses, although in a few cases the question is briefly raised. Not so much in terms of its specific impact on women, still difficult to assess, or on the work of national mechanisms, but rather in terms of new concerns and eventually new opportunities.

Structural and cultural change as a fundamental challenge

Finally, the most fundamental gaps and challenges to address, as they are root causes of many of the problems and situations listed, are the still existing stereotyped views on women's and men's roles, that prevail in different degrees and ways in European societies. Practically all reports and responses refer to this question as the basic question underlying all the problems women face and all the obstacles to a further and faster development towards gender equality. The questioning and elimination of stereotypes constitute the biggest challenge for governments, for national mechanisms and for society at large.

7. THE WAY FORWARD - SOME CONCLUSIONS ON POTENTIAL AND OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD

All the existing gaps and challenges can also be an occasion for renewed efforts and for new responses. Both the old gaps, resulting from historical circumstances and the traditional European context and also the new ones, brought about by the new European context. Challenges resulting from, among other factors, effects of demographic changes and international migration, of technological development, of economic, social and cultural change, even of the present economic and financial crisis, all of these challenges must be taken into account by national mechanisms in their action, particularly in the assessment of their gender equality implications.

Many national mechanisms are certainly aware of such implications and many of them are already planning responses to some of these issues. Most of them are taking advantage of new instruments in the area of the new information and communication technologies – in projects addressed at women, in websites for dissemination of information, in training materials, etc. New technologies have a potential power for greater coordination and collaboration at all levels.

As we think of opportunities and potential ahead, the diversity of national situations is the first element to consider, when aiming at effective and adequate responses. The capacity of national mechanisms to listen to reality and to capture and understand all its demands and challenges is the first requirement for their action, whether these challenges are of a political, social, economic or cultural nature.

Within this diversity, however, there are some common issues that must be addressed in all cases and in all situations; there are also some overarching challenges that can be turned into windows of opportunity, and which are relevant for each and every country; even more so at a time of interchange and communication, that globalisation has induced.

A **first opportunity** comes from the fact that equality of women and men or gender equality is, whether one agrees with it or not, a topic in the public and institutional agenda, both national and international. Of course, not on the top of the agenda for most politicians and decision-makers, but no one denies its significance any more. Personally, and having worked in this area for some decades, I can witness to that, witness to the visible change that has occurred in this regard.

Gender equality has gained a status and a political visibility which, at international level, was particularly affirmed during the 1990s. The contribution of the United Nations World Conferences on Women was decisive in this regard. The great problems of the world – environment, human

rights, population, social development – discussed in Rio, Vienna, Cairo or Copenhagen were seen as problems affecting women and men and the solutions to be found as having to take into account the gender dimension.

The awareness by all that solutions to be found can not be neutral, but have to take into account the existence of women and men was a fundamental aspect reflected in all the plans and programs adopted by the international community. The Beijing Conference, on the other hand, was an institutional manifestation of a much wider and deeper understanding of the issue of gender equality as a human rights issue and paved the way for that political legitimacy that is an asset today and an opportunity for national mechanisms to go forward.

This awareness was also reflected in the Millennium Declaration, and subsequently the Millennium Development Goals in a visible way, not only because gender equality is one of the goals, but because it is a cross-cutting dimension to all of them and an asset for development and is recognised as an essential factor for the success or failure of all the goals.

All this background constitutes a strong framework for equality policies and for the recognition of the work of national mechanisms for gender equality. It is a social and political legitimacy that has expanded to other areas, namely to academic research, now regularly pursued in many directions. A recognition that brings with it new advantages and opportunities for national mechanisms: the advantage of research, that is being pursued and progressively recognised by the wider community, and which can bring a solid basis to policies and priorities, rooted in a serious knowledge of reality, its historical background, constraints and developments. The advantage also of having pools of expertise, that may bring their contribution to a better professional performance of national mechanisms, namely by making assessments and evaluations, devising methods, tools and instruments for gender analysis, gender impact assessment or gender budgeting, etc.

A **second opportunity** arises from the present trend of globalisation, that is also present in the international dimension, that the issue of equality of women and men has acquired in our world; present as well in the global international cooperation, that exists nowadays in this area. This is reflected, not only at formal institutional level and in official fora, but also in growing networking and interchange at various levels of civil society, in groups and organisations of different kinds.

As regards Europe, mention should be made of the role played by the two main regional organisations, the Council of Europe (the “bigger” Europe) and the European Union (the “smaller” Europe). They carry two complementary views and lines of action.

The Council of Europe, an organisation based on the principles of human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of the law, has put a strong emphasis on issues linked to civil and political rights, namely political participation and representation and access to decision-making; and emphasis also on combating violations of fundamental rights, expressed namely in violence against women or trafficking.

The European Union has put particular emphasis on economic and social rights, mainly concerning equal treatment and equal opportunities in labour and economic life, but also including issues regarding reconciliation of professional and family responsibilities and balanced access to decision-making. But, in both cases of the European organisations there is a broader view beyond these essential themes and an established interchange and cooperation of national mechanisms in those frameworks.

This international dimension of equality concerns and actions exists also at the level of civil society. Not only is civil society in general much more alert to the value and requirements of gender equality, but it has organised itself in different ways to put pressure on governments and international organisations to make them advance the equality agenda in a regular and systematic way.

At European Union level, the European Women's Lobby, an umbrella NGO composed of national platforms and organisations from member and acceding countries, as well as European organisations, is a privileged forum that brings to the fore the concerns of women in Europe, in a regular and systematic way and in a recognised dialogue with the European Commission.

Also at national level, national mechanisms can find a source of inspiration and support in this international dimension and in all the possibilities of networking, exchange and dialogue that it entails.

A **third opportunity** may eventually and hopefully come from the present world wide developments, including the international economic and financial crisis, that is also becoming a social crisis everywhere. Responses to the crisis and its impact on employment, health care, pensions or poverty will have to be gender-sensitive and national mechanisms must be alert in this regard, in order to guarantee that a specific gender dimension is actually included in such responses.

On the other hand, the response to the crisis may also lead into a new opportunity to change and modernise the labour market, to invest in social infrastructures and to create basic working

conditions that may help women and men to have better working lives and better means to reconcile professional and family responsibilities and live more rewarding and fulfilled lives.

Still as regards the impact of the present crisis, and while recognising that not only women, but national mechanisms themselves may also be affected, namely through budget cuts and ensuing effects on staff, programs, projects or services, a positive approach may also be envisaged. Indeed, the crisis may become an opportunity, if policy-makers come to recognise that strengthening gender equality mechanisms and supporting their action will also have positive effects for economic recovery and sustainable development. In fact, it is becoming more and more of an evidence that gender equality and the empowerment of women are assets for a more balanced and just society and promises for a better future for all, women and men.

It is, however, significant that only very few countries mention the challenges arising from the global crisis, and mainly in terms of a new menace for women, who are potentially and *de facto* the most vulnerable. A systematic gender analysis of the situation would need to be undertaken by national mechanisms to assess the gender impact of the crisis.

Eventually, a new regard on economic issues will bring about changes in the still persisting paradigm of economic development and will be the occasion for new gender-sensitive economic and social policies. Such policies will require partnerships and alliances between political decision-makers and economic stakeholders, between governments and social partners, and civil society in general. National mechanisms must be part of these changes to guarantee that women and men, their needs and interests, are effectively at the heart of a process, where human values may become essential elements. It is certainly a challenge and an opportunity for national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As a last conclusion, we could rightly consider that **the greatest challenge** for national mechanisms for equality and for women's empowerment lies in their own capacity or incapacity to be alert to today's realities affecting women and gender equality; both the ones that are historically and culturally-based and the ones resulting from emerging circumstances, in order to identify the constraints faced by women in their everyday lives and to effectively respond to those realities in the framework of national policies.

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Annex I: Table of National Mechanisms for Gender Equality

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
AUSTRIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Women and Public Service • Equal Treatment Officers and Working Parties for Equality Issues in ministries • Inter-Ministerial Working Party for Gender Mainstreaming • Inter-Ministerial Working Party for Gender Budgeting • Equal Treatment Commission for the Private sector – 3 senates • Federal Equal Treatment Commission - 2 senates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal Treatment Officers in Provinces • Equal Treatment Commissions in Provinces 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ombudsman for Equal Treatment - 3 sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal Treatment of Women and Men in the world of work - Equal Treatment in the workplace irrespective of ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation - Equal Treatment irrespective of ethnic origin in other spheres and equal treatment of women and men in access to, and supply with, goods and services • Working Party for Equality Issues in Universities
BELGIUM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men • Institute for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men - public autonomous body under the aegis of the ministry • Intergovernmental Conference on Equality of Women and Men • Council for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women – advisory body • Interdepartmental Coordination Group for Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming Act 2007 • Interdepartmental Coordination Unit to combat against Trafficking in Human Beings • Commission Women and Development in foreign affairs administration – advisory body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministers for Equal Opportunities in communities • Flemish community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal Opportunities Unit - Equal Opportunities Commission: interdepartmental body - 13 Complaints Centres • French community - Wallonia and Brussels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directorate for Equal Opportunities - Brussels – Anti-discrimination bureau - Wallonia – Walloon Council on Equality between Women and Men • German community • Council for Development Cooperation, Solidarity and Integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultative Commissions in Senate and Chamber of Representatives 	

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
BULGARIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demographic and Family Policy and Equal Opportunities Directorate - Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Department • National Gender Equality Council – coordination and consultative body • Coordinators and focal points in ministries • National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings • Consultative Commission on Gender Equality and Disadvantaged Groups in the Labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinators and focal points in local self-government 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission for Protection Against Discrimination • Ombudsman
CANADA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status of Women Canada - main co-ordinating agency • Focal points in key departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial and territorial women’s bureaux reporting to provincial/territorial Ministers responsible for the Status of Women 		
CROATIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Office for Gender Equality • Coordinators for Gender Equality in state administration bodies • Commission for the Improvement of Protection of Family Violence Victims – counselling body • Department for the Improvement of Protection of Family Violence Victims within Department for the Family of Ministry of the Family, Veterans’ Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality Commissions / Boards at county, town and municipal levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality Ombudswoman

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
CYPRUS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Machinery for Women’s Rights under Ministry of Justice and Public Order comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality Unit - Council of NMWR - National Committee • Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Combating Domestic Violence • Gender Equality Committee in Employment & Vocational Training • Coordinating Multidisciplinary Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioner for Administration / Cyprus Equality Body - 2 separate bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-Discrimination Body - Equality Authority • National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights
CZECH REPUBLIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities • Gender Equality Unit (Office of the Government) • Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men chaired by Minister with 2 Committees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committee for Prevention of Domestic Violence - Committee for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Family and Working Life • Council for Human Rights • Gender focal points in all ministries 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent Commission for Equal Opportunities - Chamber of Deputies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsperson)
DENMARK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Gender Equality (also Minister of Employment) - Department of Gender Equality • Inter-ministerial working groups : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trafficking - gender mainstreaming - domestic violence • Working groups on gender equality in ministries 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Board – independent complaints board for all forms of discrimination

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
ESTONIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Equality Department - under Deputy Secretary General of Family and Social Policy of Ministry of Social Affairs - Family Policy Unit within Gender Equality Department Interdepartmental Working Group for Promoting Gender Equality 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner Chancellor of Justice
FINLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Social Affairs and Health - Gender Equality Unit 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council for Gender Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ombudsman for Gender Equality Units of women's and gender studies in Universities University Network for Women's Studies
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Rights and Equality Service under the Minister of Labour, Social Relations, Family, Solidarity and of the Secretary of State for Solidarity Specialised bodies - partners to the central machinery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parity Observatory Higher Council of professional equality between women and men Higher Council for Sexual Information, family planning and family education National Commission for action on violence against women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 26 regional delegates and 75 at community level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliamentary delegations on women's rights and equal opportunities in Senate and National Assembly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High authority for combating discrimination and for equality with 2 bodies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive bureau Advisory committee Delegation on women's rights and equal opportunities in the Economic and Social Council
GERMANY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality Policy Units in ministries of governments of all States Equal Opportunities and Women's representatives at municipal level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bundestag Committee for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth Bundesrat Committee on Women and Youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Competence Centre – government-funded centre at Humboldt University, Berlin, supporting implementation of gender mainstreaming within Federal administration

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
GREECE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Secretariat for Gender Equality at Ministry of the Interior • National Committee for Equality of Women and Men – chaired by the Minister of Interior- consultative body • Equality Offices in ministries • Special Division in Ministry of Employment and Social Protection • Research Centre on Gender Equality Issues supervised by Ministry of the Interior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Committees on Gender Equality in the 13 Administrative Regions • Regional Offices of the Research Centre on Gender Equality Issues • Equality Offices at municipal level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Committee on Human Rights and Gender Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Committee on Human Rights • Ombudsman – Gender Equality Division
HUNGARY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Division of Equality of Women and Men in Society – section of the Department of Equal Opportunity of the State Secretariat for Equal Opportunity within Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour • Council for Equality of Women and Men in Society – advisory body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional crisis service network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sub-committee on Gender Equality of the Committee for Human Rights, Minorities, Civil and Religious Affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal Treatment Authority • Equal Treatment Advisory Board
ICELAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security - Centre for Gender Equality • Gender Equality Complaints Committee • Gender Equality Council – advisory body • Gender Equality representatives in ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality Committees in municipalities 		
IRELAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform with support of Minister of State with responsibility for Equality, Disability Issues and Mental Health for Justice, Equality and Law Reform Gender Equality Division in Ministry • Units for coordination of national efforts to deal with violence against women and human trafficking in Department for Justice, Equality and Law Reform 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women’s Rights and its Select Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Authority – independent state body • Equality Tribunal – independent statutory office

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
IRELAND (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal points for gender equality in ministries • Interdepartmental Committee for coordination of implementation of the National Women’s Strategy chaired by Gender Equality Division • National Women’s Strategy Monitoring Committee chaired by Minister of State with responsibility for Equality • National Development Plan Gender Equality Unit 			
ISRAEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority for the Advancement of Women – Prime Minister’s Office • Ministerial Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women in Israeli Society • Equal Employment Opportunity Commission • Council for Advancing Women in Science and Technology • Department for the Integration and Advancement of Women in the Civil Service • National Council for Women’s Health - Ministry of Health • National Council for Women’s Medicine, Neonatology and Genetics - Ministry of Health • Public Council for Advancing Women Sports in Israel • Department for the Advancement of Women Sports – Ministry of Science, Culture and Sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator of the Advancement of the Status of Women in the Union of Local Authorities • Women Advisors for the Advancement of the Status of Women in municipal authorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee on the Status of Women - Sub-committee on Trafficking in Women 	

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister for Equal Opportunities Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers – 3 offices: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office for interventions in the economic and social field Office for intervention for equality and equal opportunities National Office against racial discrimination National Commission for equal opportunities between women and men – advisory body Inter-ministerial Commission to support victims of trafficking, violence and severe exploitation Observatory against children’s sexual abuse and child pornography Commission for preventing and opposing female genital mutilation Committee for female entrepreneurship National Equality Advisors (employment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provincial and regional network of Equality Women Advisors in Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies of regional and provincial governments 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group on gender equality of the National Council of Economics and Labour - advisory body for Parliament, Government and Regions in economic and labour matters
LATVIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Welfare - Gender Equality Unit under Department for Social Policy Inclusion of the Ministry High level Person responsible for Gender Equality in ministries (understate secretary level) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women’s Inter-parliamentary Cooperation Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ombudsman Office - Department of Discrimination Prevention
LITHUANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Social Security and Labour <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender Equality Division Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men – inter-ministerial body Appointed representatives in ministries 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Rights Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson Gender Studies Centres in Universities Women’s Centres in Trade Unions

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
LUXEMBOURG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Equal Opportunities • Inter-ministerial Committee for Equality of Women and Men • Gender Units in ministries • Positive Action Committee for private sector enterprises • Female Labour Committee • Coordination Committee for professionals working in the area of violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services for Equality of Women and Men at local level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission on Family, Equal Opportunities and Youth in Chamber of Deputies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centre for Equal Treatment – all forms of discrimination
THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour and Social Policy: Sector for Equal Opportunities – 2 units: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unit for Gender Equality - Unit for Prevention and Protection of All Forms of Discrimination • Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for women and men in ministries – focal points • Office of National Referral Mechanism for the victims of trafficking in human beings, especially women and children • Special unit in State Statistical Office responsible for gender statistics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissions for Equal Opportunities for women and men in 79 self government units • Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for women and men in local self-government units 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men • Women’s sections in political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s sections in trade unions
MALTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Commission for the Promotion of Equality under Ministry for Family and National Solidarity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complaints Section in the Commission and Complaints sub-Committee • Equality Committees in Ministries • Department of Employment and Industrial Relations – discrimination in the workplace • Employment and Training Corporation – Gender Equality Unit 			

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
NETHERLANDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minister of Emancipation - Minister of Education, Culture and Science - Department for the Coordination of Emancipation Policy / Directorate on Gender Equality Interdepartmental Committee for Emancipation policy Focal points in ministries 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equal Treatment Commission
NORWAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Children and Equality - Department of Family and Equality Inter-ministerial High-level Committee chaired by Minister 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Centres for equality and diversity – 3 pilot centres 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud The Equality and Anti-discrimination Tribunal
POLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - Department for Women, Family and Counteracting Discrimination Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister Plenipotentiary of the Minister of National Defence for Women’s Military Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network of Voivodeship Plenipotentiaries for Women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parliamentary Group of Women Commission for Social Policy and Family - Permanent Sub-commission for Family and Women’s Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioner for Citizens’ Rights
PORTUGAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secretary of State for Equality Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultative Council – 2 sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inter-ministerial section with Equality Advisers of ministries NGOs Section Technical and Scientific Advisory Group Commission for Equality in Work and Employment - tripartite body with representatives of government and social partners Gender Equality Advisors in ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional delegation of the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality in the North of the country Local Advisers for Gender Equality in municipalities 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Observatory on Gender Issues National Observatory on Trafficking

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
ROMANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men under the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection • National Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men – inter-ministerial coordination body • National Agency for Family Protection - for preventing and combating domestic violence • National Agency for Fighting against Human Trafficking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissions for Equal Opportunities between women and men in 42 counties and Bucharest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanent Commissions on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Senate and Chamber of Deputies • National Council for Combating Discrimination - in subordination of the Parliament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ombudsman – all forms of discrimination • Commission for equal opportunities and treatment in the Social and Economic Council
SLOVAKIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family - Department of Gender Equality and Equality of Opportunities with Equality of Opportunities Supportive Centre 			
SLOVAKIA (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Prime Minister for the Knowledge-based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities • Council of the Slovak Republic Government for Gender Equality with 2 committees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Executive Committee - Consultative Committee • Focal points in ministries • Expert group for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and in Families at the Government Council for the Prevention of Crime under management of Ministry of Interior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focal points in regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee for Human Rights, Nationalities and Status of Women • Permanent Commission for Gender Equality and Equality of Opportunities under the Committee for Social Affairs and Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Centre for Human Rights • Public Protector of Rights/ Ombudsman • Commission for Equality of Women and Men at the Confederation of Trade Unions

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
SLOVENIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Office for Equal Opportunities • Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in all ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinators for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in local self-government 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate of the Equality Principle
SPAIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy Committee for Equality Policies • Ministry of Equality with the following executive bodies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) General Secretariat for Equality Policies with Under secretariat status comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government's Representation for Gender Violence with coordination units in government delegations & units in government sub-delegations; and Nation-wide Watch on Violence against Women - Directorate General for Job Equality - Directorate General against Discrimination - International Relations Bureau 2) Women's Institute: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governing Council - Observatory on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men • Women's Participation Council – advisory body • Inter-ministerial Committee on Equality for Women and Men • Equality Units in ministries • Sectoral Conference on Equality - exchange forum with Autonomous Communities • Inter-ministerial Coordination Group for the Comprehensive Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Institutes, General Directorates/Departments or Services on Women/Equality in autonomous communities and cities • Spanish Federation of municipalities and provinces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality Committee – political body - Equality Area – technical body • Equality Departments in local corporations, town councils, provincial councils, islands councils, commonwealths and others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congress of Deputies' Equality Commission • Sub-committee on the Comprehensive Act on Gender Violence • Senate Equality Commission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Judiciary</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Council of the Judiciary's Equality Commission - Domestic and Gender Violence Observatory chaired by the General Council of the Judiciary - Courts for Violence against Women - 92 courts - Gender Violence Prosecutor • <u>Other Bodies</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equality Units, departments or similar bodies in all universities

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
SPAIN (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-ministerial Group to monitor the Spanish Government National Action Plan for the Application of the Resolution 1325 • Women’s Health Observatory, Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs Observatory for Women, Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence • Special Ambassador for the Promotion of Gender Equality Policies in Foreign Affairs and Cooperation • Department for Sectoral and Gender Cooperation, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation 			
SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality - Division for Gender Equality • Inter-ministerial group for gender mainstreaming • Gender Equality Coordinators in ministries • Gender Equality Council headed by Minister • Gender Equality Team and Gender Help Desk in Swedish International Development Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County experts for gender equality at the 21 county administrative boards 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality Ombudsman – all forms of discrimination • Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research at the University of Gothenburg

Countries	Central/Federal Government	Decentralized Government -states, provinces, local level	Parliament	Independent + Other Bodies
SWITZERLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal Bureau for equality between women and men under Federal Department of Interior • Federal Commission for women’s affairs – advisory body • Delegates or specialized services in Federal departments • Posts for gender mainstreaming in technical cooperation within Foreign Affairs • Conference of delegates for equality between women and men - bureaux at all levels (federal, cantonal and communal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegates in cantons and certain municipalities 		
TURKEY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Directorate on the Status of Women under the State Ministry in charge of Family and Women Affairs as a central unit affiliated to the Prime Minister • Advisory Board on the Status of Women - chaired by State Minister • Specialized Units in Ministries – areas of planning, agriculture, education, health, statistics, social services • Commission on Equality of Opportunities proposed by Government and approved by the National Assembly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 women assemblies within city councils • Services provided by local administration such as: women shelters, family life centres, women’s clubs, vocational art courses, family counselling centres 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission “Women and Men Equal Opportunities” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women Problems Research and Implementation Centres in 15 Universities • Departments of Women Studies in 4 universities
UNITED KINGDOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minister for Women and Equality and Deputy Minister for Women and Equality • Government Equalities Office under the minister with Ethnic Minority Women Councillors’ Taskforce - BAME 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Ireland - Equality Directorate of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister • Scotland - Equality Unit • Wales - Equality and Human Rights Division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK - All-party Associate Parliamentary Group for Sex Equality • Scotland - Cross-party Equal Opportunities Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s National Commission • Scottish Women’s Convention • Equalities and Human Rights Commission England and Wales • Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and Northern Ireland Commission for Human Rights • Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland

Annex II: Case Study on Gender Budgeting

Development of gender budgeting - an essential dimension of gender mainstreaming

A widely recognized definition of gender budgeting has been formulated in the context of the Council of Europe and reads: “Gender budgeting is an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It means a gender assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality.”

In other words, it is a tool for gender mainstreaming in resource allocation to guarantee that women’s and men’s needs and interests are equally considered and taken into account in policy-making and policy evaluation in all areas. Its ultimate objective, therefore, is the promotion of gender equality and its application requires a gender expertise beyond the technical financial expertise it also entails.

Initiated in Australia and being pursued in countries of all continents, the first visible developments of this strategy in European countries go back to the end of the 1990s, mainly on the basis of pilot projects. But it was in the first decade of the new millennium that significant developments have taken place in the region, both as regards theoretical elaboration and understanding of the concept and practical implementation of the strategy.

As a matter of fact, the value of gender budgeting as a gender mainstreaming strategy is being progressively realised in an increasing number of countries, western countries in a first moment and, more recently, central and eastern countries as well. A realisation that also includes the symbolic meaning of a qualitative shift from a ‘softer’ area of policy-making, traditionally linked to social issues, to a ‘harder’ one, linked to finance and economics.

A relevant moment in this process includes initiatives taken during the Belgian presidency of the EU in 2001, namely a technical seminar on gender mainstreaming in the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines and a high-level international conference on “Strengthening economical and financial governance through gender responsive budgeting”, aiming at the effective implementation of gender budgeting in all countries of the region by 2015.

This high-level conference, which was sponsored by OECD, in co-operation with UNIFEM and the Nordic Council of Ministers, gave a clear message urging the governments and other

actors to integrate gender-based analysis in the budgetary process, at all its stages and levels, to promote transparency and accountability, and to report on the impact of the budget on gender equality. This high-level conference gave rise to a number of initiatives aiming at adopting and developing gender budgeting in several countries throughout Europe.

Nordic countries were particularly active in furthering this process and a working group composed of members of finance ministries and gender equality institutions was entrusted with the responsibility of exploring both, the concept as well as methods and tools for its effective functioning. A joint Nordic gender budget initiative followed and the outcomes of this work are reflected in the report “Gender Budget – Integration of a gender perspective in the budget process”, dated from 2006.

The effort undertaken at Nordic joint level was also reflected in initiatives taken at national level. For example, in Norway, a gender-based analysis of budget proposals for 2003, 2004 and 2005 was pursued, focusing on a broad variety of policy areas; and since 2005, the Ministry of Finance issues guidelines to all ministries for a gender sensitive analysis of the respective budgets. A high level committee has also been established to oversee the process of gender budgeting in general.

Sweden also promoted various initiatives, including a gender budgeting project called “An equal share”, as well as studies on the gender impact of economic and social policies and on women’s contribution to the GNP. Projects and studies that led to the adoption of a comprehensive plan for gender mainstreaming, with a special focus on the budgetary and legislative processes.

Also Finland made considerable efforts to develop gender-conscious budgeting, within a global approach of gender mainstreaming applied to law-making, to budget procedures and major projects.

Other countries, too, became aware of the concept of gender budgeting and of the need to put it into practice. Here are some examples:

In Austria gender budgeting initiatives, following incentives of civil society, go back to the beginning of the decade. A gender budgeting network, several conferences, the realisation of studies, the implementation of projects at several levels, the adoption of guidelines for

the Public Administration and the regular functioning of an inter-ministerial group on gender budgeting are some of the actions taken.

In Belgium a Gender Budgeting Project, under the Federal Minister for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, was started following the Brussels High-level International Conference; and training, research and dissemination of information were the main dimensions explored, with reflections at regional level.

In France, since the year 2000, a budget document (le jaune budgétaire) was attached to the national budget identifying the expenditure on programs for the promotion of women's rights and of gender equality and with indicators of the gender equality implications of general expenditure. More recently, the 2009 finance law foresees a horizontal policy document on equality of women and men that will become operational in the 2010 State Budget.

In Germany, under the inter-ministerial working group on gender mainstreaming a sub-group on gender budgeting was created in 2003. Composed of gender and budget experts, it made a feasibility study on the matter, while gender-based analysis was pursued in specific areas, including also in some Länder.

In the Netherlands, as early as 2002, a study was undertaken regarding the budgets of three ministries, focussing on specific areas, including the tax system, housing benefits and social assistance. The topic of gender budgeting was also introduced in various sectors of development assistance, particularly aiming at poverty reduction.

Ireland incorporated a gender mainstreaming requirement in the National Development Plan, implying that each project proposal must include an assessment of the extent to which women and men may be affected by the project and respective expenditure and on how this dimension can be improved.

The United Kingdom conducts a regular gender analysis of government expenditure in various sectors, including tax and benefit policy. This effort is the outcome of a pioneering action taken by the Women's Budget Group. Also pushed by a non-governmental organisation, the Engender Women's Budget Group, the Scottish Executive has shown its commitment to equality proofing of the budget.

Far away from these countries, a further example of the use of the strategy is Canada, where gender-based analysis, including in Finance, is considered as the basic strategy for gender equality.

The interest and involvement of regional organisations like the European Union and the Council of Europe also provided incentives for the advancement of this process. At European Union level, the European Parliament, in 2003, adopted a Resolution with recommendations on gender budgeting and the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the European Commission adopted an Opinion on the matter with proposals for action. Recently, under the German presidency of the EU, in 2007, a new common initiative was taken with an European conference entitled “Let’s share the benefit – with gender budgeting towards social justice and equal opportunities.”

The Council of Europe also developed valuable work, following the establishment of a Group of Specialists on Gender Budgeting, which, in its final report, published in 2005, provided further guidelines for its development. A technical exercise that was followed by political commitment, as the topic was included in the discussions and outcomes of the 6th Ministerial Conference on Equality of Women and Men that took place in 2006. This effort was pursued even further with the publication in 2009 of a handbook - “Gender budgeting: practical implementation”.

The progressive understanding of the meaning and implications of gender budgeting and of its importance for the effective achievement of gender equality has also given visibility to the various dimensions that this process implies, from the more immediate and simpler ones to the more substantive and deeper ones. It starts with a first approach reflected in the analysis of the budget from a gender perspective; it moves forward to a second phase of revisiting and restructuring the budget, in view of the results of that analysis; finally, it develops into a third and deeper dimension of a regular and systematic gender mainstreaming in budgetary processes.

The first stage takes place after the budget is drafted; the second tries to amend any imbalances it may contain from a gender perspective; the third tries to make it fair and gender sensitive from the very beginning of the process. Indeed, envisaged in this final perspective, the real gender budgeting strategy is no more than the gender mainstreaming strategy fully applied to macro economic policies; and if taken as such, it finds its most

meaningful roots in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, in 1995.

Although this process was first started in some western European countries that had a pioneering role in this regard, gender budgeting has also progressively become a subject of attention in some central and eastern European countries, though in a more incipient manner. The support of UNIFEM has been an important factor, namely under the sub-regional program "Gender responsive budgeting in South East Europe: advancing gender equality and democratic governance through increased transparency and accountability".

As examples of developments in this region, several countries may be mentioned, even if in most of them the process has only started rather recently. Here are some examples:

Bulgaria has included the introduction of gender budgeting in its National Strategy for Gender Equality and is pursuing a project, "Gender Budgeting in Practice", in this direction.

Croatia introduced the subject of gender budgeting by translating and disseminating the study of the European Women's Lobby and promoting discussion on the matter. Following such debate, the Ministry of Finance initiated a gender analysis of the execution of the state budget in 2008.

The Czech Republic has included gender budgeting as one of the challenges in the current action plan. It follows former initiatives, namely a project launched in 2006 "Budgeting for equality between women and men in practice" and some research undertaken on gender aspects of specific policies.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is, apparently, assuming a pioneering role in the region, as not only the strategy of gender budgeting figures as a priority issue in the framework of gender equality policies, but also some significant projects are being undertaken. At national level these projects have mainly centred in the gender budget analysis of active employment policies and social protection, while at local level specific projects are also being implemented in some pilot municipalities. A public hearing on gender responsive budgeting also took place in the National Assembly, organized by the Parliamentary Committee for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. Significantly, as regards the budget proposal for 2010, a gender-responsive focus has been included in the budget circular issued by the Ministry of Finance.

In some countries gender budgeting has been given a legal basis or appears linked with budget reform processes; in others it is adopted in a programmatic context of plans and policies; but in all of them gender budget initiatives and projects are in progress, trying to find the way to be fully institutionalised, both in theory and in practice, and many significant initiatives have been undertaken in ECE region countries in recent years.

When, in the process of institutionalisation of gender budgeting, a legal basis is established as is the case, for example, in Austria, Belgium or Spain, this fact gives an obligatory character to the use of the strategy and an added political legitimacy to the process and the work being undertaken.

In the case of Austria, a recent amendment to the Federal Constitution (Article 13(3), January 2008) requires that government bodies at all levels aim at gender equality within the context of budgetary management. An obligation was introduced in the context of reform of budgetary law and required that the 2009 federal budget include a gender component.

In the case of Belgium, it was the Gender Mainstreaming Act of 2007 that imposed that each government department gave details of spending on actions targeted at gender equality, such indication being attached to the draft budget presented to the finance department for consideration in the elaboration of the Federal budget.

In the case of Spain, and following a general provision of the Constitutional Act 3/2007, the order that indicates the regulations for the preparation of the State Budget for 2008 includes the obligation of Programme Analysis Committees to analyse “the impact of expenditure programmes in the area of gender equality”. However, even before this provision, when the Plan for Gender Equality was adopted in 2005, among the measures foreseen, some relating to statistical and information systems to assist with the application of gender equality policies in the area of fiscal and budgetary policy were already included.

Developments have taken place not only at national level, but also at regional/local level in various countries across Europe. Regions, provinces and cities launched initiatives and conducted projects on the gender impact of different aspects of expenditure and benefits of specific policies and their consequences for women’s lives. The Basque Country or Andalusia in Spain, Genoa, Modena and Siena in Italy, Berlin and Munich in Germany, Salzburg and Vienna in Austria, Basel in Switzerland, Gdansk in Poland are some examples of those developments.

A specific dimension that has been considered in most countries is the training of the various actors involved in this process; not just the budget specialists, but politicians and decision-makers both in governments and in parliaments; or even larger audiences through the means of seminars, conferences and training sessions that have been organised in practically all countries.

Other methods to make this strategy operational have included, among other initiatives, research, namely feasibility and assessment studies, the establishment of inter-ministerial working groups or other mechanisms and the elaboration of specific tools and instruments of analysis, the systematic gathering of gender disaggregated data and the establishment of indicators, etc.

Although the role of national mechanisms in furthering and monitoring this process is a fundamental one, it is important to point out the influence that civil society organisations and academics have had in promoting gender budgeting and putting pressure upon, and cooperating with, governments for its establishment and implementation. They were, in several cases, the first to promote research and raise awareness of the need to implement this strategy.

A living proof of this action is reflected in the existence of an active European Gender Budget Network, as well as national organisations like the Watchgroup: Gender and Public Finance in Austria; Federal Gender Budget Initiative in Germany; La Plataforma Impacto de Género Ya in Spain; the UK Women's Budget Network; the regional Engender Women's Budget Group in Scotland, and others. Also important were the study and recommendations of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), as well as activities of Women in Development Europe (WIDE), the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) and other non-governmental organisations and associations.

As a conclusion, we could assume that gender budgeting, envisaged as an essential dimension of gender mainstreaming, is making its way throughout Europe and the ECE region in general. Of course, nothing in this progression has happened or is happening in a linear and straightforward way; on the contrary, things are happening at different speeds and in different phases in the various countries, but we can see that all across the region the concept and the practice are becoming legitimised.

Further developments are still to be achieved, particularly as regards the in-depth application of this strategy that must be reflected in the consideration of gender as a regular

category of analysis in budgetary processes. This is something that is to be done in a systematic way, going much beyond the initial approach of gender-based analysis of the budget or the provision of specific resources for gender equality initiatives.

For such purpose there are some requirements that are usually considered as essential. Political commitment is a number one requirement, which must also be reflected in bureaucratic commitment and in the effective action of bringing together the realities of gender equality policies and economic and financial policies; an encounter that will ensure that common resources benefit equally women and men, and that women and men influence policy options in equivalent terms.

Transparency, participation and accountability are also essential requirements for an effective application of gender mainstreaming and of its specific aspect of gender budgeting. If fully understood and implemented, gender budgeting may become a guarantee of good and democratic governance, as it will be centred on the attention to human rights and needs of the entire people, women and men alike, and on equal terms for both of them.