

BELGIUM

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY- THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)

BELGIUM

30 April 2004

Introductory note: the Belgian institutional context

Belgium is a Federal State composed of Communities and Regions

Successive governmental reforms have redistributed powers along two principal lines. The first has to do with language and, more broadly, with culture. Belgium has three official languages: Dutch, French and German. Belgium thus consists of three Communities: the Flemish Community, the French Community, and the German-speaking Community, corresponding to those population groups. The powers of the Communities relate to education, culture, and other matters that involve direct services to individuals (certain aspects of health, for example).

The second line of governmental reform has its roots in history and, more particularly, in the aspiration of certain groups for more economic autonomy. The three Regions, which are the result of these aspirations, are the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, and the Walloon Region. The Regions have responsibilities in socioeconomic matters such as land use planning, housing, employment and energy.

The Federal State retains responsibility for, among other things, national defence, justice, finance, social security, and a significant portion of public health and domestic affairs. There are also several areas of responsibility that are shared between the Federal State and the Regions, such as the economy, transportation and the environment.

The Federal State, the Communities and the Regions thus have different responsibilities, which they exercise autonomously. When it comes to foreign affairs, each entity (Federal State, Communities and Regions) is responsible for those aspects that fall within its competence. The Federal State, the Communities and the Regions each have their own government and parliament, except for the Flemish Community and Region, where these have been merged.

The various levels of power in Belgium all have responsibilities within the crosscutting policy for equality of opportunity between women and men. The structure of the present report reflects this fact.

The information presented below does not repeat that already contained in the National Action Plan of Belgium on Implementation of the Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1999), in the Response to the Questionnaire on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1999), and in the document on consideration of the Third and Fourth Reports of Belgium on Implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Response to Questions from the Commission (2002)

Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

Federal State

Since 1992 there has been a minister explicitly responsible for policy on equality of opportunity between men and women at the federal level in Belgium. The priority areas of action were to achieve equality for women and men in employment and balanced participation in decision-making, and to combat violence against women. Since 1999, while these areas of action remain priorities, there has been increasing emphasis on coordinating mechanisms to promote equality of women and men: interministerial conferences of ministers responsible for equality, covering various themes of the Beijing Platform for Action, the national plan for combating violence, and the federal government's strategic plan to achieve equality for women and men through concrete provisions for gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.

As well, during the period under review, an autonomous Institute for Equality of Women and Men was created by law in 2002, and established in June 2003. Its intent is to achieve better coordination among the responsibilities and resources relating to equality of women and men, to strengthen the role of a specific administration by giving it the means to fulfill its duties (in particular by taking legal action), and to raise the profile of issues relating to equality between women and men.

Since 1996, federal law imposes on the government, on the Minister responsible for equality of opportunity, and on the Secretary of State for development cooperation the duty to report annually on progress in achieving the objectives set forth in the Beijing declaration and platform. In the preparation and follow-up of these reports, representatives of federal administrations and ministries have the occasion to reflect on their experience and identify the forms of cooperation necessary in various fields, and to consider the comments and suggestions made by parliamentarians and by nongovernmental organizations during discussion of the report in the federal parliament. This report was issued for the first time in 2000. At the end of 2000, in a move to strengthen the gender mainstreaming strategy, the Minister responsible for equality decided to launch a follow-up process in the various ministerial departments, through an overall government agreement in the form of a strategic plan in which each minister recognized the role that he or she would have to play in the policy for equality of women and men.

Ministers also undertook, in the context of their policies, to set a strategic objective to promote equality between women and men (or example: ensuring that the taxation system is completely neutral with respect to the person receiving income and that person's choice of lifestyle, gender screening with respect to mobility or the public health survey, implementation of a programme focused on women or on gender issues in development cooperation, etc.).

This process was supported in a number of ways. First, two representatives from each ministerial department (from the political and the administrative levels) were given the task of monitoring the project. A group of academic experts was also established to provide coaching during the process. These experts provided initial training to all persons concerned in gender mainstreaming. Subsequently, they worked with each of the departments to implement their

strategic objectives, dividing the departments among themselves in line with their areas of expertise, and using a detailed methodology. The project was subject to ongoing evaluation, as was necessary in a context where collaboration between the academic and the political worlds represented something new for most of the players concerned.

The project was launched in January 2001, and continued in 2002 with a pilot project on gender budgeting, which is an essential component of gender mainstreaming. The project produced a training module, a number of concrete initiatives within certain administrations (Finance and Development Cooperation), a study session, and publication of an awareness brochure distributed within the departments.

The challenge now is to institutionalize these strategies so as to ensure continuity of the effort, and its permanent evaluation.

The major advances in legislation during the decade included the constitutional amendment of February 2002 introducing an article that expressly guarantees the principle of equality of men and women. The Constitution also commits parliament to adopt measures to guarantee this equality, and in particular to promote equal access for men and women to elected or public office. Several laws have subsequently been adopted in favour of parity.

Provisions relating to violence have also been adopted: a 1997 law combating violence between spouses or partners, a 2002 law on protection against violence and moral or sexual harassment in the workplace, a 2003 law awarding the family home to the spouse or legal cohabitant to who has been a victim of physical violence at the hands of her or his partner, to mention only some of the most important developments.

In addition to existing legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sex, the law of 25 February 2003 on discrimination now bans any discrimination, direct or indirect, on the basis of sex (and of other prohibited grounds), in the provision or availability of goods and services; in the distribution, publication or exhibition of any text, notice, sign or other medium implying discrimination; and in access, participation or other exercise of an economic, social, cultural or political activity open to the public. It also allows for more severe punishment of certain existing crimes if they are motivated by hatred or contempt for a person or group of persons on the basis of sex.

The law of 25 May 1999 on international cooperation gave legal force to the principle of equality of rights and of opportunity between men and women. The law makes it a priority objective of Belgium's international cooperation to pursue "sustainable human development by combating poverty, based on the notion of partnership, and in full respect for the relevant criteria for development". In this context, it makes the rebalancing of rights and opportunities for men and women a permanent, crosscutting theme of Belgian cooperation. That law also makes attention to equality between men and women a criterion for evaluating the relevance of development efforts.

The Flemish Community

The first Flemish minister for equality was appointed in 1995. Since 1996, the Flemish administration has supported her work through a unit for "Equality of Opportunity in Flanders" (*Gelijke Kansen in Vlaanderen*, GKV). Although the Unit started out with only one person, it has seven today. Its work is targeted at six groups: women, gays (homosexuals, lesbians and bisexuals), the handicapped, immigrants, the elderly, and children.

As of mid-2004, the Flemish Ministry will be completely overhauled. Responsibility for "Equal Opportunity" will now lie with the Flemish Minister-President, who will conduct a policy that is both horizontal and vertical. This shift is intended to facilitate gender mainstreaming: the Minister-President will in effect have a say in each of the fields of Flemish competence. Under the new structure, moreover, the GKV will work with only two target groups -- women and gays -- and on the "accessibility" issue.

Thanks to these reforms, the structural conditions for gender mainstreaming are improving. In the past, it was often difficult to persuade decision-makers in other policy areas of the need to create a perspective of gender equality in their work. Thus, at the beginning of the current legislature (in 2000) the Unit tried to implement an action plan for gender mainstreaming, but it was abandoned after one year because of the lack of interest shown by partners in various policy fields.

Recognizing that there is no longer any legal inequality as such between men and women in the areas of Flemish competence, Flemish policy on equal opportunity has focused on eliminating de facto inequalities. Efforts have consistently focused on raising awareness and promoting a positive and realistic image. The Unit's scope of action has been evolving. During the first legislature (1995-1999), the minister and the GKV pursued concrete initiatives to integrate a gender equality perspective into all areas of Flemish policy. During the second legislature (2000-2004), the focus was narrowed to two issues: 1) women in decision-making, and 2) reconciliation of family and working life. The concrete initiatives and their outcomes are addressed in greater detail in section III of this report. We may point out here, however, that this approach has borne fruit at the legal level as well. Thus, in 1997, 1999 and 2000, decrees were issued to implement the Beijing resolutions and to achieve more balanced representation of men and women in the consultative and management bodies of the Flemish government.

The people responsible for Flemish policy on equal opportunity played a key role in sponsoring the creation of a "velvet triangle", linking policymakers, researchers and women's organizations in close cooperation. The objective is to coordinate efforts and to produce for women a "1+1+1=4" effect. The players in this triangle each have their own task: the women's movement makes radical demands, the researchers provide figures and the arguments supporting those demands, and the policymakers translate those demands and the figures into socially achievable objectives. This informal and intensive channel of collaboration has proven itself very effective, particularly in terms of establishing contact between the scientific and political realms. There is still a great need for statistics for mapping the status of women, and for studies that will shed light on the mechanisms of subordination and propose policy recommendations. Because the resources available for this purpose are limited, it is important to use them to best effect. The

highly integrated nature of the Flemish approach in this respect is critical: policymakers are thoroughly aware of the available data, and they work with the scientists to define the issues that must be given priority study. In terms of the scientific examination of equal opportunity, an important step was taken in 2001, with creation of a Centre for Research on Equal Opportunity, which is conducting both in-depth and short-term studies in support of policies. The in-depth study is looking into the objective fields that were defined when the Centre was created, with joint input from researchers and politicians, and that are to guide its work for five years. As they relate to women, these are: the combination of different lifestyles, the portrayal of women, women and the new information and communication technologies (ICT), and gender mainstreaming. The research centre is also playing an important role in compiling and refining policy indicators.

The GKV unit also has a budget for ad hoc studies, supplementary to those conducted by the research centre.

On 13 May 1997, the federal government approved a degree governing implementation of the resolutions from the Beijing World Conference on Women. That decree calls for an annual report to be submitted to Parliament. The Equal Opportunity Unit, which is responsible for these reports, has found that in several policy areas too little attention is paid to integrating a gender equality perspective. It has noted an increasing number of isolated initiatives each year, which suggests that the climate may be slowly changing. Yet, while real progress can be seen in some policy areas in terms of interest in gender equality issues, it also appears that interest in gender equality has been overshadowed at the political level by issues relating to "diversity".

The French Community

The mandates of the French Community's Directorate for Equality of Opportunity between Women and Men (formerly the Office for the Cultural and Professional Promotion of Women) were defined in 1994:

- To promote and speed movement toward equality of opportunity in areas within the competence of the French Community.
- To serve as a resource that is open to dialogue, thinking and creativity.
- To be an information source and a sounding post for associations, and help them in their research and initiatives.
- To sponsor innovative experiments in support of a specific policy on equality of opportunity, by developing tools for promotion, awareness and training.

These mandates were broadened in 1999 to include equality of opportunity (in the broad sense). At the same time, the Directorate's staff was reinforced to cope with these broader mandates. The budget of the Equal Opportunity Directorate of the Ministry of the French Community has also been increased since 1999. From an annual level of €37,184 prior to 1999, it rose to €18,048 in 2000, €756,000 in 2001 and 2002, €707,000 in 2003, and €724,000 in 2004, allowing the Directorate to play a more active role in promoting equality for women and men in the French Community

In order to monitor policy developments in this area more closely, the Parliament of the French Community adopted a decree, on 19 December 2002, on follow-up to the resolutions of the United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing¹. That decree calls on the government to report each year on the state of progress and on measures taken as part of its policy to implement the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action. The first two reports presented to the Parliament of the French Community (specifically to the Committee on International and European Relations) covered the periods from September 1999 to September 2002, and from September 2002 to September 2003².

It should be noted that the questions of gender equality and empowerment of women are for the French Community an integral part of all policies for achieving the millennium development goals, in particular those relating to goal 3.

¹ See Annex 1

² See Annexes 2 and 3.

Part Two. Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

This section reviews the initiatives deemed to be most interesting, and does not necessarily cover all of the 12 areas of action in the Beijing platform. The initiatives relating to the institutional mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women and their fundamental rights, for example, are dealt with in other sections.

A. Women and poverty

In the context of the national plans for social inclusion for 2001-2003 and 2004-2006, adopted pursuant to decisions of the European Council since 2001, particular attention has been accorded to the gender dimension.

The major thrusts of Flemish policy for combating poverty are set forth in the decree approved by the Flemish government on 12 March 2003. That decree calls for annual updates to the Flemish action plan on poverty reduction, which lists the policy objectives and concrete measures. The target group for Flemish policy is the disadvantaged population as a whole, and it is therefore not specifically focused on women. The decree also establishes a permanent coordination committee on poverty, to oversee implementation of the action plan. The GKV unit ("Equal Opportunity in Flanders") has been a participant since 2003, and is working to integrate the gender dimension into Flemish policy on poverty. Recent studies have shown that the problem of gender equality in this field is still underestimated.

The Adult Education programme of the French Community provides regular subsidies to associations for combating poverty and exclusion, particularly among women.

B. Education and training of women

At the federal level, funding was provided between 2001 and 2003 for women's studies chairs at several universities.

In this area, the Flemish Ministry is devoting primary attention to Beijing B.4, to "develop non-discriminatory education and training". The Flemish Minister of Education and Training notes in his policy report for the period 2000-2004 that teacher training must familiarize future teachers with the gender dimension. In their visits to the schools, inspectors will look for empowering and intercultural content in the textbooks used, and at the ways in which the schools incorporate empowerment and the combating of stereotypes in their teaching.

On the research front, the Flemish Ministry is also working to achieve Beijing objective B.4:

The Education Department conducted the following studies between 2000 and 2003:

1. Performance differentials of boys and girls. Aspect 1: school performance as a function of sex. A multilevel analysis of the reasons why boys lag behind in Flemish secondary education.

2. Performance differentials of boys and girls. Aspect 2: the difference in school performance of boys and girls (review of literature and empirical study).

3. The sex of teachers. A study of the impact of the male-female composition of the teaching body, and the sex of the principal, on the cognitive performance, emotional skills and values of students, as well as various aspects of school operations.

The Centre for Research on Equality of Opportunity published a study in 2003 on "the choice of studies from the gender equality perspective". That publication was part of a larger project of the Centre, to compile statistics and develop policy indicators on education. One of the findings is that girls achieve better results overall than boys, not only in intermediate school but also in higher and university education. The traditional pattern of choices remains unchanged: the majority of girls enrol in training that will provide access to the "soft professions", while boys tend primarily to the "hard" professions. In this context, with the support of the European Social Fund, the Education Department has sponsored several projects on girls in typically male sectors, i.e. the graphic arts and the pulp and paper industry, and on boys in training and employment in nursing and care giving. The VDAB (Flemish Office of Employment and Vocational Training) is also making efforts to encourage women into more technical training, such as ICT courses. The Research Centre's studies have pointed to the need for supplementary efforts to achieve the objective of Beijing B.3 ("Improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education").

With respect to Beijing objective B.6 ("Promote lifelong education and training for girls and women"), a number of projects are under way to give disadvantaged women, native-born and immigrant alike, another chance to earn a diploma.

In its mandate decree of 24 July 1997, the French Community reaffirmed its determination to provide equal opportunity for girls and boys in terms of studies and guidance, and it seeks "to assure equal access to all training for girls and boys". Since then, it has conducted a number of studies and campaigns to reduce disparities between the sexes, and to abolish gender stereotypes at all levels of instruction: the advisory opinion issued by the Council on Education and Training on equality in education (Opinion 65: "Is there equality of opportunity between girls and boys in our education system?" March 1999); action research on access for young women to technical and scientific studies at the university level (*Newtonia*, 2000-2004); an awareness campaign for current and future teachers on equality of boys and girls in the education system (2003)³; and an awareness campaign on gender equality among adolescents aged 12 to 15 (2004)⁴. The Equal Opportunity Directorate as well as the Adult Education Office of the French Community provide funding to associations devoted to training and literacy work with women.

C. Women and Health

At the federal level, special efforts have been made to integrate the gender dimension into the public health survey, and into studies of the health of female workers, with a view to improving

³ In collaboration with the associations signing the "Call for Gender Mainstreaming in the Education System".

⁴ In Collaboration with the NGO *Le Monde selon les femmes* ["The World As Women See It"].

statistics on occupational accidents and diseases. It should also be noted that since 2001, an interagency working group on "contraception among young people" has been established, and the "morning-after pill" can now be obtained without a medical prescription.

In order to address gender and age-related aspects of the HIV-AIDS pandemic, the inclusion of information on HIV and AIDS transmission in the French Community's sex education programmes has been recommended, with a view to long-term prevention. As well, the French Community's five-year programme of health promotion recommends integrating the prevention of HIV-AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases into sex education and reproductive health programmes in the schools. Among the large population of sub-Saharan African origin, heterosexual transmission is becoming more frequent, and is affecting women significantly. Specific prevention measures for this group are now being tested.

Pregnant women are the only group for which systematic HIV screening is recommended and applied in a generalized matter. Thanks to proper treatment of infected expectant mothers, and precautions at childbirth, the risk of transmission is close to zero.

To eliminate discrimination against persons infected by HIV and their families, a government circular has reminded all public or subsidized institutions of their obligation to serve children and teenagers in this status. That circular reiterates the professional obligation to respect confidentiality about a person's state of health, and highlights the universal precautionary measures that can avoid any risk of accidental transmission.

D. Violence against women

The Federal Ministry of Equal Opportunity adopted a policy on violence against women prior to 2000, and various efforts are underway at different levels of government. In the wake of the intergovernmental conference of ministers of equality (see below) and under federal coordination, a national action plan on violence against women was approved in May 2001.

The objective of that plan is to recognize the importance of gender-based violence, to bring government actions under a general and coordinated policy that would systematize gender mainstreaming in implementing those measures, to publicize existing resources, and to promote information, evaluation, the exchange of good practices, and the setting of new targets.

This action plan has involved cooperation among the various federal departments concerned (in particular the Equal Opportunity Office, Ministry of the Interior, Justice, and Public Health) and with those responsible at the community and regional levels for equality of opportunity and assistance to victims.

The plan has sponsored programmes in five specific areas: conjugal violence, violence in the workplace, the trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation, asylum policy, international relations, and development cooperation; of these, the first two have been identified as priority areas for action

A first evaluation of this action plan was conducted, as scheduled, in May 2002 on the occasion of an international conference. It is currently the object of an overall evaluation to determine a new action plan for 2004-2006.

One of the key thrusts of the plan was to carry out awareness campaigns.

At the federal level, a wide-ranging awareness campaign on conjugal violence was launched in November 2001. It was conducted under two slogans: "Conjugal violence: break the silence before it breaks you", and "Conjugal violence: you're not alone in fighting it". The campaign was pursued by means of posters and magazine inserts. A telephone hotline (called the "green number") allows victims to be referred to sources of help. A brochure dealing with first aid for victims of conjugal violence has been published and distributed widely. That brochure has also been translated into other languages: English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Lingala, Polish, Portuguese, server Croatian, Swahili and Turkish, recognizing the most important foreign or foreign-origin communities in Belgium. This programme has responded to a real need, and has been conducted with associations of foreign-born women. Each brochure also contains the addresses of volunteers who can lend an attentive ear to victims in their own language.

The French Community has also conducted awareness campaigns. One, using the theme "Strike a woman? I wouldn't. I wish I could say the same for my father", was conducted in two stages: a letter and the poster drawing attention to domestic violence were mailed out, followed by the broadcasting of a series of TV spots (June 2001). Another campaign was conducted from November 2001 to December 2002, targeted at boys and girls aged 15 to 24, and dealing with "violence in love relationships". This campaign will be repeated in late 2004, in response to public demand.

Recognizing that associations and services that specialize in helping female victims of domestic violence have been overburdened with work as a result of these campaigns, federal grants have been offered to bolster their staffing.

An important legislative amendment has been adopted, relating to the protection of victims of conjugal violence and removal of the perpetrator from the conjugal home. The law governing award of the family home to a woman who has been the victim of violence at the hands of her spouse or partner has been in effect since 2003. An information brochure on the subject was given wide distribution in the spring of 2003.

Several decisions have been taken in support of innovative local policies relating to physical and sexual violence, both at the federal level and in cooperation with the regional and local authorities. The provincial coordinators for combating violence have an essential role in the development and coordination of field projects. Specific support has also been provided for pilot projects in the context of urban policies and public safety contracts.

In 2003 and 2004, measures to improve data collection were pursued in order to prepare recommendations for a more effective response to family violence, involving research into a method for recording data on conjugal violence and a test that the social and health services can use to confirm the reliability of those data.

In January 2004 the French Community launched a research project to take stock of forced marriages in the French Community, to identify legal and socio-cultural trends relating to this problem, and to propose ways of preventing it and of assisting the girls concerned, with due distinction between minors and adults. The first results from the study are expected in June 2004.

A ministerial information brochure dealing with the problem of female genital mutilation and its consequences for girls' educational attainment was prepared and distributed to the school system in the French Community.

Three women's shelters for victims of human trafficking received further support, and now have the capacity to pursue cases through the courts. The federal government provided support to the International Organization for Migration for a project to compile and disseminate information on the return and social reintegration of trafficking victims in Belgium.

As part of the review of the national action plan on violence against women, the GKV ("Equal Opportunity in Flanders") unit will play a coordinating role for Flanders.

E. Women and armed conflict

With respect to the role of women in armed conflict and in building peace, Belgian cooperation takes a dual approach: in the first place, the gender dimension has been integrated into all activities relating to conflict prevention. As well, Belgian cooperation is supporting several initiatives for women, recognizing that they are not only the victims of violent conflict but that they can play a role as conciliators in the process of reconstruction and re-establishing peace.

In December 2001, Belgian cooperation supported an international roundtable in Brussels under the auspices of UNIFEM and the Belgian government to foster participation by Afghan women in the process of rebuilding their country. In the wake of that roundtable, the advancement of Afghan women has become a key theme of Belgian cooperation for development in Afghanistan. Financing has been provided, in the context of preventive diplomacy, for a number of projects associating women in peace processes (in the Great Lakes Region of Africa and in Afghanistan).

F. Women and the economy

The federal government has sponsored various actions in this area, focused primarily on objective F.5, to "eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination".

The topic of women and new technologies was selected as the theme for an intergovernmental conference of ministers responsible for equal opportunity (see above).

The *Electronica* project, cofinanced by the European Social Fund in the context of the federal programme for 2000-2006, was launched in March 2001 to promote the employment of women in the new technologies (ICT) sector, where they are currently underrepresented.

The longer-term goal of the project is to change mentalities among women, trainers, employers, and all players in the sector.

The project is designed to help employers and trainers not only to integrate the gender dimension but also to set targets for equal opportunity (for example: increasing the number of female candidates taking training and going on to careers in digital technologies, and having trainers, placement agents and employers take account of female candidates in those trades).

The *Electronica* project involved several phases. A general-interest campaign was conducted between September 2001 and September 2002 on the theme, "Women and computers: 100% compatible". A hotline was also activated during the campaign. Sensitization modules have been created, targeted at various groups: women seeking training, employment or guidance in ICT, orientation centres for ICT studies, employment counsellors and interim placement agencies, employers in the ICT sector, and students in higher education. A number of policy recommendations have been prepared on the basis of surveys of employers and IT students to promote structural solutions for achieving equality in this field.

In the same context, the French Community has provided funding, together with the European Social Fund and the 2000-2006 programme, for the project sponsored by the Interface 3 Association, aimed at sensitizing women to the diversity of occupational opportunities in the ICT field.

To combat wage discrimination, another project has been undertaken under the European Social Fund programme. Known as the EVA project ("analytical evaluation"), it is intended to equip workers and employers with the tools for introducing new functional classifications and to encourage the revision of outmoded systems in order to make work classification systems gender-neutral.

Following the updating of a previously-developed training module, the project has proceeded to integrate that module into the social partners' internal training programmes. These programmes are targeted in particular at trainers and at the people who must negotiate job classifications and wage contracts in the various sectors and businesses. Upon conclusion of this training (which is still under way), each social partner will publish the information and circulate it to its membership.

A web site on pay equity (www.equalpaytools.org) was launched in March 2003 as part of the European Community's strategy for equal opportunity between men and women.

Efforts to increase the representation of women in the public service, where they are underrepresented, have continued, as part of the Copernic Reform, and through the "positive action" network of public servants.

Finally, in 2003, the non-profit association Sophia headed up a project to help implement gender mainstreaming in the human resources management of Belgian universities, in an efforts to make the authorities and general personnel aware of the under-representation of women in the academic staff and in certain disciplines. A number of actions have been taken: a call for a policy

of equality for women and men in the universities; a study session on the theme, "When will there be equality between men and women?: towards a different kind of university"; intra-university meetings; training and awareness seminars.

Significant amendments were made in 2002 to legislation on sexual harassment. The law of 11 June 2002 on protection against violence and moral or sexual harassment in the workplace is designed to prevent such occurrences, and to protect workers. Employers are expected to take preventive measures and establish procedures for getting to the roots of acts of violence and of moral or sexual harassment in the workplace, and establishing the means by which the victim can obtain the necessary help and assistance. Employers must also appoint a prevention counsellor specialized in the psychosocial aspects of labour and violence in the workplace. Employers may also appoint confidential advisers. Victims will be able to turn to the confidential adviser or the prevention counsellor at need. They can lay substantiated complaints with these persons, ask for a medical inspection, or refer the matter to a court. The law also reverses the burden of proof and provides that institutions representing victims' interests may bring legal action. As well, once a formal complaint has been filed, victims enjoy special protection against dismissal.

A decree to protect employees against sexual harassment in the workplace was adopted by the government of the French Community on 26 July 2000, and was amended in 2001 to include moral harassment.

Action has also been taken toward objective F.6: "Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men".

Legislation governing parental leave has been amended. A 1997 law gave parents the right to take full or part-time leave for three months. Since 2002, parental leave can be taken at a rate of one day per week for 15 months, which makes it more attractive to men.

Since 1 July 2002, fathers can take 10 working days (i.e. two weeks) of paid paternity leave, within the first 30 days after the birth of the child.

In response to the European Union's call for projects under the equal opportunity strategy, Belgium mounted an awareness campaign on paternity leave, targeted at men and at public and private employers, using theatrical skits and a widely distributed brochure entitled "Paternity Leave: Choose to Be There".

Flemish policy on equal opportunity places the stress on Beijing objective F.6, "Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men". Since 2000, the Minister for Equal Opportunity has made this a political priority in awarding project grants, and the GKV has been conducting annual awareness campaigns aimed at families and at employers. The "Humane Enterprise" competition is another initiative in this area. In addition, various information and awareness brochures have been distributed, including a "Guide to good practice for businesses", and a "Father's booklet" for young parents, designed to encourage fathers to assume an equal role in their children's care and education.

The GKV unit is also behind the development of the "Family and Business Audit", a tool to help businesses determine whether their organization is family-friendly, and how to make it more so. This tool was prepared in cooperation with the Economy, Employment, Internal Affairs and Agriculture Departments, which are also committed to integrating the gender dimension into their operations. They are coordinating Flemish activities under the European initiative "NOW" ("New Opportunities for Women"), which has been promoting independent entrepreneurship. They have also been sponsoring structural employment programmes to create job opportunities for women with little schooling. And they have highlighted the problems of a group of women who are often neglected, by organizing a seminar on female workers in agriculture and horticulture.

With respect to "women and the economy", a number of studies have been conducted. The GKV funded studies on "Distribution of household tasks: policy options for empowerment", "Conceptual basis and operational models for an integrated policy for social equality between men and women", and "Equal opportunity policy and indicators focused on reconciliation of working and family life". The GKV also sponsored a workshop on the topic, "Is the single breadwinner outmoded?", and published a report on the proceedings. It has published a collection of major Belgian and foreign articles on the topic Work and Social Assistance. In 2004, the Centre for Research on Equal Opportunity published the report of the study on "Combining lifestyles throughout life".

Also important is the Flemish initiative on equal opportunity for men and women in the labour market, launched in 2000 under the European Social Fund. This action programme supports projects with a combination of European funds and co-financing from VESOC (Flemish Social and Economic Consultative Council) resources ("Fund for proportional participation in the labour market and diversity").

The Flemish Minister of Employment and Tourism created the Strategic Working Group on Policy Field 5 in 2000 to manage the policy field "Equal Opportunity - the gender gap" under the ESF Single Programming Document (SPD) Objective 3 for 2000-2006.

The strategic working group consists of delegates from the offices and administrations for employment, education and equal opportunity, as well as six representatives of the social partners in Flanders, and a representative of the VESOC. The Europe Employment department of the Employment Administration chairs the group, provides secretarial and logistic services, and carries out the working group's decisions.

The tasks of the strategic working group are to take decisions on applications for grants under the VESOC action plan for initiative addressing male-female issues. Each year this working group makes possible many projects that contribute to achieving the Beijing objectives relating to women and the economy. A number of working methods and tools have already been developed for promoting gender equality, and these projects have generated awareness about women and the economy.

With respect to Beijing objective F.5 ("Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination"), a decree providing for proportional participation in the labour

market was approved in 2002. This decree is intended to combat all forms of gender discrimination in services that relate to job placement, vocational guidance, occupational training, and career development. The decree applies to all organizations and individuals engaged in these activities, as well as Flemish government and teaching personnel, including trainees and apprentices.

A significant obstacle to women's full participation in the labour market is the burden of child care, a task that, in Flanders as elsewhere, is still widely considered to be the mother's responsibility. While Flemish policy on equal opportunity tries to encourage the community, and fathers in particular, to view child care as a shared responsibility, Flemish welfare policy is focused on providing high-quality care for young children. In this area, a key focus is on developing infant day care centres (for children under three years), and out-of-school nursery facilities. Attention is also given to making these facilities flexible enough that they can accept sick children and children whose parents work unusual hours.

The GKV is also working to achieve Beijing objective F.4, "Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks". It is supporting the "Sofia Management" Project through a mentoring programme and the encouragement of networking among female entrepreneurs and women in management positions.

The French Community is also taking steps to reconcile private and vocational life. An example is the management contract with the Office of Birth and Childhood (*Office de la Naissance et de l'Enfance*, ONE), to prepare a "Parents' record book" (*Carnet des parents*) that will be distributed to all parents beginning in September 2004, as the first phase of a review of the place of parents (father and mother) in the various services that are offered in support of parenthood.

A policy has been implemented to increase the number of infant childcare places available to help reconcile private and working life. In 1999, the French Community covered 23% of the potential demand for childcare facilities; the government's objective is to achieve the 33% coverage recommended by the European Union. To this end, budget funds have been reserved for the ONE's *Plan Cigogne* ("stork plan"), the goal of which is to achieve by 2010 the 33% coverage recommended by the European Union; this will involve an increase of 10,000 places over the next seven years, while observing the principles of diversity, quality, and geographic harmonization of supply. One year into the *Plan Cigogne*, 1631 new childcare places have been created. In addition, forecasts for the number of child caregivers taking children into their homes, and cooperative arrangements with employers, suggest that the targets set for 2004 will be exceeded.

Finally, the French Community financed an action-research project between 2000 and 2002 to shed further light on the impact of childhood diseases and the care facilities available for such children on equality between women and men. This survey confirmed that mothers often work several 24-hour days in a row and are frequently left to cope alone with the many tasks of treating children's illnesses. At the same time, much more often than the father, it is the mother who must put her professional career on hold, cut back on her working time, or take leave to look after her child. This aspect is but part of a much broader issue that has to do with childcare in the

French Community, and the study has served to draw the attention of policymakers to the specific question of childcare.

G. Women in power and decision-making

Since 2000, the Federal State has undertaken reforms to encourage female representation in public life and policymaking. The first move was to amend the Belgian constitution to guarantee the right of men and women to equality, while the second seeks to impose gender parity in electoral lists, and to alternate the first two places on those lists between the sexes.

Since 2002, the principle of equality between men and women has been formally enshrined in the constitution. The constitution also requires the Legislature to adopt measures to guarantee this equality, by promoting equal access for men and women to elective and public office. It also prohibits the establishment of non-mixed executive bodies at all levels of power.

Three laws were adopted in 2002 establishing double parity in electoral lists. They mean that, in each party list, the gap between the number of candidates of each sex may not be greater than one, and the first two candidates on each list must be of different sexes. The legislative elections of 18 May 2003 were the first in which men and women were represented equally in all electoral lists. In January 2004, the Institute for Equality of Women and Men published a brochure showing that, within a proportional electoral system, the combination of the parity law and the expansion of electoral districts has produced a remarkable increase in the percentage of women elected, and that the 30% threshold was now exceeded in the two federal legislative assemblies.

During the last elections, campaigns were conducted to encourage women to stand as candidates, to urge people to vote for them, and to ensure that once elected they got seats. To address some problems of interpretation and application of the law establishing quotas in federal advisory bodies, a new law was adopted in May 2003 amending the law of 20 July 1990, which provides for balanced representation of men and women in advisory bodies. That new law calls for extending the maximum one-third same-sex quota to cover both principal and alternate candidates, and drawing up an official list of bodies subject to the law in order to facilitate oversight and implementation; it holds open the option of increasing the quota by Royal decree; and it creates an ad hoc commission to examine requests for exemption and exclusion.

Special efforts have also been made to increase women's participation in labour organization and collective bargaining. The National Labour Council issued an opinion in June 2002, in response to the Minister of Employment and Equal Opportunity Policy, drawing the attention of the parity commissions to the goal of achieving balanced representation of women in their membership, and declaring that it would review the efforts of the commissions in this respect after two years.

A brochure analyzing the results of the May 2000 workers' council elections, entitled "Women and Workers' Representation in Business: A Gender Analysis of the Company Elections of May 2000", was published in 2002.

As noted in section 1, "decision-making power" is one of the fields on which the Flemish Ministry has focused its equal opportunity policy since 2000. Activists, researchers and

policymakers have together prepared a strategic plan on this issue which, with support from all three groups, has already made progress on a number of fronts. The plan is built around two key pillars: 1) giving women more access to power, and 2) strengthening the power of women in elected positions.

Under Beijing objective G.1 ("Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making"), reference may be made to the decrees of 1997 and 1990 on quotas, imposing balanced representation (at least one-third of members of either sex) for advisory councils created by law, order or decree to advise the competent government or minister, respectively for management and executive bodies, on which the Flemish government must fill at least one seat upon presentation. Since 1 January 2002, the opinions issued by advisory bodies that do not meet these quota conditions no longer have legal force. In order to help the councils meet this obligation, a database ("*Pluspunt*") was created in May 1999 with the names of female experts available for appointment. Development of this tool has however run into some obstacles, in particular a lack of resources. In this area, two scientific studies should be noted. In 2000, a study on "Application of quotas in advisory councils" was initiated, addressing such questions as: Why are advisory councils not properly balanced? How are the members of advisory councils elected? In 2003, a study was launched on "Women in Flemish management bodies and executive boards", addressing these questions: How and by whom are the members of management and executive bodies recruited? Is there specific attention to appointing female members? What policy measures could be taken to promote balanced representation? As part of the Flemish government reform, strategic advisory councils are to be created for each policy area. At all stages of this process, the GKV has sought to ensure that these strategic advisory councils respect the requirement of balanced composition. The advisory bodies that are retained will also be judged on their balanced composition.

In terms of decision-making at the political level, there is the "Balanced Team" (a specially created working group of representatives of women's political groups, women's organizations, female provincial and communal officials responsible for equal opportunity) for the purpose of increasing women's participation in political life. Since October 2000, the Balanced Team has been conducting campaigns to coincide with elections to encourage the party leaders to put more women on their candidate lists and then to give them seats, and urging voters to vote for women. In 2002, a campaign was launched, independent of elections, to draw attention to women's achievements in politics, the advantages of having women in decision-making positions, and the importance of having women involved in everyday political life. The following studies have been conducted in the same context:

- "Barriers to women in political parties".
- "The Flemish parliament, the new political culture, and the potential for taking advantage of women's social capital in policymaking".
- "The position of males and females in local Flemish politics", addressing such questions as: What is it like to be local politician, male or female? Do local politicians move on to higher levels of power? What are the obstacles and levers to this mobility? Why do female politicians give up?

It is not only through government initiatives such as those described above that this policy is pursued. Funding is also provided for field projects that serve the objective of Beijing G.2 (“Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership”), with preference going to projects dealing with the issue of “women and decision-making”. The GKV unit found last year that labour unions have been making greater efforts to involve women more closely in their decision-making.

The Flemish Ministry and its public institutions, which are major employers in Flanders (with more than 35,000 employees), are implementing the two strategic objectives by pursuing gender equality goals in their personnel policy: for example, promoting awareness of the gender dimension among management and staff, and working towards balanced representation of women and men within the organization. Following the decree of 8 May 2002, the Flemish government administration has been setting an example in terms of proportional participation in the workforce. Pursuant to that decree, the administration has established an action plan and an evaluation report each year.

On 17 July 2002, the government of the French Community adopted a decree to promote balanced participation by men and women in advisory bodies. Advisory bodies, according to that decree, include councils, commissions, committees and other bodies, whatever their name, that are created by law, by order or by decree, for the principal purpose of providing advice, ex officio or on request, to the Council of the French Community, the Government, or one or more of its members or services.

The new regulations, which came into effect on 17 July 2002, covered two aspects, applicable upon the renewal of membership: at least one man and one woman must be presented as a candidate member or alternate of advisory bodies; and advisory bodies must have at least 35% of members of each sex. If this condition is not met, the opinions rendered by those bodies will have no legal force, although this will not prevent the authority that requested the opinion from taking a decision.

J. Women and the media

As indicated in section 1, the Equal Opportunities Unit for Flanders (GKV) has focused its efforts on creating awareness and promoting a positive and realistic image of women. In this context, it has provided grants to a number of projects and has taken several initiatives of its own.

One particularly useful tool for creating a balanced image (cf. Beijing objectives J.2: “Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media”) is the MEER (Evaluation of the Media Impact on Empowerment), which is now in the process of implementation and which programme designers can use to test the gender neutrality of their programmes. This tool was finalized in 2003, and has been refined and introduced in 2004. It will be used to establish an initial benchmark, and thereafter for tracking progress over the longer term.

Since 1999, the GKV has been providing structural support to ZORRA, an organization that is devoted to detecting and responding to stereotypes in advertisements and other media products in

Flanders and that informs broadcasters and publishers about public reactions to advertising materials they carry that are disrespectful of women, in order to help change unacceptable portrayals. The target group for this action has in fact been more open to the gender dimension for the last 10 years at least.

In contrast to the provisions taken to combat racism, there is no legislation (in the strict sense) in Belgium to ban sexism in advertising or in the media. Convinced of the need for stronger regulations to combat sexist advertising in the French Community, the Equal Opportunities Directorate is working with the Senior Audiovisual Council (CSA) to establish a working group to combat sexist advertising over Francophone television and radio in Belgium.

K. Women and the environment

The federal policy for sustainable development pays particular attention to the gender dimension.

While gender equality is not an obvious feature of environmental policy in Western society, this part of the Flemish administration is very concerned to take the gender dimension into account as far as possible. As a result of the screening of the Minister's policy paper and of the decree on environmental agreements, the gender dimension is now fully integrated into environmental policy at the local level.

Part Three. Institutional Development

Federal State

The Minister responsible for equal opportunity is charged with coordinating federal initiatives in this field. Until 2002, the Minister was assisted by the Equal Opportunities Directorate of the Federal Public Service - Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue. In 2003, that office was transformed into the Institute on Equality for Women and Men. The purpose of that autonomous body is to oversee respect for equality of women and men, to combat all forms of discrimination and inequality based on sex, and to prepare instruments and strategies for an integrated approach to the gender dimension. More precisely, the Institute has the power to support and coordinate research studies, to address recommendations to the Government, and also to private persons and institutions, to organize support for associations working for gender equality, and to establish networking with various stakeholders in the field.

The Institute also has a specific mandate that goes beyond the mission of the former Equal Opportunities Directorate, which is to take legal action in the case of gender-based discrimination. It can also provide assistance to any person seeking advice on his or her rights and obligations, and can consult any competent authority about facts that lead to the presumption of discriminatory treatment, as defined in the laws and regulations on equality of men and women.

The Institute is also responsible for preparing and carrying out government decisions and for monitoring European and international policies relating to gender equality. It conducts these missions under the authority of the Minister responsible for gender equality, but the Minister can issue only positive instructions to the Institute. The Institute may request the opinion of the Communities, the Regions, the provincial and local authorities, as well as any other public agency, if useful in carrying out its duties. Its total budget is slightly more than €4,300,000.

In comparison to the previous authority, then, the Institute has a broader mandate, as reflected in its capacity to take legal action and its greater role in evaluation and coordination, particularly with respect to the gender mainstreaming strategy.

This strategy, and the process of coordinating federal departments, as noted in section 1, also constitutes an instrument for coordinating equality of opportunity throughout the Federal State, and highlights the responsibility that each member of the Government assumes in terms of gender equality policy.

Several initiatives have been taken to make women visible in official statistics: one study was conducted in the context of science policy (Agora), and an international conference was organized on this issue in 2002 in order to bring together the producers and the users of statistics. Closer links with the National Statistics Institute are to be implemented. The initiatives will shed light on the progress achieved under the strategy of gender mainstreaming.

Belgian development cooperation has also reinforced its institutional capacity in the gender domain, thanks to a political commitment at the highest level, a law on international cooperation

that gives legal force to the principle of equality of rights and opportunity between men and women, and a strategy and an action plan to support efforts by development partners through all channels of cooperation, both by integrating the gender dimension into all policies, programmes and projects in a horizontal and longitudinal manner, and by taking positive action to empower women.

Belgian cooperation has also supported the creation of civil society organizations that can play a leading role in the field of gender equality, both in Belgian cooperation policy and in international forums. The Women and Development Commission and the Population and Development Platform are concrete examples. The former is an advisory body that was created in 1994, while the latter is an expert group created in 2000 that monitors the Cairo action programme and focuses its efforts on sexuality and reproductive health rights. Together they play a driving role in promoting gender equality in development cooperation.

Women's associations are also supported by the Federal State (through the equal opportunity budget) and now by the Institute on Equality for Women and Men, which has a specific mandate to do so. The total amount of support in 2004 was €1,000,500. One of the main mandates of the non-profit association "Amazone" is to create conditions for the effective and efficient functioning of women's organizations and groups, and to provide a meeting place for women's associations, as well as to promote the work of the women's movement. The Sophia association promotes equality between men and women by publishing information on feminist studies, research and study courses and on women in Belgium. To help them play their full role in coordinating women's associations for implementing the Beijing Platform of Action, the CFFB and the NVR (the twin Francophone and Dutch-speaking women's organizations) have been given an annual operating subsidy each year since 2001. Occasional grants are also provided to associations for projects relating to gender equality. Finally, the federal level has supported associations sponsoring events linked to the World March of Women.

It is also important to note that there are two parliamentary advisory commissions specifically devoted to equal opportunity between men and women, and that the Council on Equal Opportunity between Men and Women, a federal advisory body that was reformed in 2003, provides advice to ministers on all questions relating to gender equality (employment, social security, combating violence, decision-making etc.).

When it comes to local policies on equality, there is a partnership between the Federal State, the Federated entities (Flemish Community, French Community, Walloon Region, Brussels-Capital Region) and the provinces that has successfully refocused efforts both for combating violence and for promoting gender equality of the local level, on the socioeconomic front, and in social life, and in access to the centres of decision-making. For example, the Brussels-Capital Region has in recent years launched a series of awareness and training initiatives for local female politicians. Funding has also been provided for local projects. There are many local networks: the Flemish Community has established a network of provincial and urban officials responsible for women's empowerment. The provincial coordination network also allows for the exchange of information and the coordination of federal, community and regional policies with local field activities.

In 1999, the federal Minister for equality invited her colleagues from the Communities and Regions to establish an intergovernmental conference on equality for women and men. That conference had two objectives. It was intended to define joint action plans among the different levels of power which, once adopted, were to be implemented with the administrations concerned. These efforts have focused on combating violence against women, promoting equality in the taking of policy decisions, and promoting women's involvement in new technologies (see above).

The Flemish Community

Compared to the situation of five years ago, the staff of the GKV Unit has grown from 2 to 7 (although in fact they must manage an equal opportunity policy targeted at six separate groups). There are three structural entities within the Flemish government involved in gender equity policy: the Unit for Equal Opportunity in Flanders (GKV) which coordinates overall policy and takes initiatives targeted at the "citizens"; the "Office for empowerment affairs", which works internally on personnel policy; and a unit within the "Europe Employment" department that monitors projects co-financed under the European Social Fund for promoting gender equality in employment. The staff of these three units know each other and work together effectively, through ad hoc working groups and the exchange of information.

As indicated in section 1, in terms of central policy on equality of opportunity, the GKV has focused primarily on two areas during this legislative period, while not ignoring the policy of gender mainstreaming. Although the common action plan has not been a resounding success, these last five years have seen many more initiatives to integrate the gender dimension into various areas of policy where the GKV could play a supporting role. Thus, policy proposals have been subjected to screening from a gender focus. The emphasis has shifted from imposing the gender dimension in policy areas towards formulating opinions upon request. The advantage of the strategy has been to create more room than previously existed in these fields for implementing gender equality opinions.

The launching of gender equality initiatives has been sparked by heightened awareness through various projects, as described in other sections.

Over the last five years, the GKV has prepared a strategic plan describing its long-term mission and its short and long-term objectives. That document also addressed the strategic partners with whom we are working to achieve the objectives (the "velvet triangle"). Some projects have been implemented with great success: these include the LEER project for evaluating the gender impact of policies at the local level, which was carried out in cooperation with the VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Communes) and Impuls (an institute that provides training in gender equality). Several cities and communes have launched LEER applications: the farthest advanced is no doubt the initiative of the city of Ghent, where the LEER tool was applied to the new policies prepared at the beginning of the legislative session. Introduction of this tool revealed the pressing need for training in gender equality, a need that was met through a series of supplementary courses. As a result, the number of gender equality experts in Flanders is considerably higher than it was four years ago.

Most importantly, application of the LEER tool revealed that the lack of proper statistics was a major obstacle. While gender-differentiated statistics do exist for Flanders as a Region, this is generally not the case at the local level, which makes it difficult to apply a gender equality policy at the level closest to the citizens. Joint efforts to produce better statistics, and above all to introduce gender equity indicators, have therefore been stepped up. One very important measure has been the creation of a Flemish research centre on equal opportunity policy (section 1): in each policy field, systematic gender dimension indicators will be developed, from which benchmarks will be established for measuring subsequent progress. The Planning and Statistics Administration addresses the gender dimension every two years in its publication VRIND (Flemish Regional Indicators), and in future the multiyear statistical programme will focus specifically on closing gender opportunity gaps.

In structural terms, then, we may say that there has been an increase in the tools available to the entire field of gender equality policy, but the resources devoted to them are still limited.

The French Community

When it comes to the policy-making level in the French Community, the Minister-President of the Government of the French Community is responsible for equal opportunity policy. The Equal Opportunity Directorate of the French Community Ministry has the following mandates:

- To promote a climate of equal opportunity in matters that fall within the competence of the French Community.
- To serve as a resource that is open to dialogue, thinking and creativity.
- To be an information source and a sounding post for associations, and help them in their research and initiatives.
- To sponsor innovative experiments in support of a specific policy on equality of opportunity, by developing tools for promotion, awareness and training.
- To field expert missions and representatives at the European and international levels, and within the Francophonie, on matters within its competence.

Since July 1998, the French Community Parliament has had an advisory committee to examine issues relating to equal opportunity between men and women.

On 18 April 2002, the Government of the French Community issued a decree instituting an Office of coordination for equal opportunity. That office, consisting of representatives of the Ministry and of nonprofit organizations, is supposed to provide opinions on all questions relating to equal opportunity, either at its own initiative or at the request of the Minister responsible for equal opportunity. The coordination office is also supposed to prepare a voluntary plan to promote equal opportunity, in two stages: the first involves preparing a status report for each of the areas of competence that have been devolved to the French Community, and the second, a list of proposed actions for promoting equal opportunity within each of those areas of competence.

The coordination office, which is chaired and provided with secretarial support by the Equal Opportunities Directorate, was established in February 2003, and it submitted its promotion plan to the responsible Minister on 25 February 2004.

In terms of monitoring and the development of indicators, a Resolution on equality between men and women in the French Community was adopted by the French Community Parliament on 14 January 2002. That resolution recommends that the Community Government encourage the production of data broken down by sex for all agencies of the French Community, and that it should see to the development and coordination of statistical databases.

The Walloon Region

For some years the Walloon government has had a policy for equality between men and women. In addition to legislative measures, such as the decree of 15 May 2003 promoting balanced representation of men and women in advisory bodies, and the effort to coordinate local policy with other levels of government and within the intergovernmental conference, the Walloon government has decided to institute a Walloon Council on equality between men and women, as a means of providing further input into government thinking in this area. The council is to work to eliminate all direct and indirect discrimination between men and women. Specifically, it is to provide opinions and recommendations on any question relating to gender equality; to propose measures for accomplishing its role; to issue opinions on regulatory measures; and to monitor the issue of gender equality at other levels of government.

The council submits an annual report to the government on its activities.

The Brussels-Capital Region

The Brussels-Capital Region in 2000 appointed a Minister for equal opportunity in the broad sense, including equality between men and women. An Equal Opportunity unit was created in cooperation with the Federal Directorate for Equal Opportunity in 2001, at the initiative of the Minister-President of the Brussels-Capital Region. It has been given the task of gender mainstreaming in local government, and is working primarily on local policy for equality. In 2003, the Region created an "antidiscrimination window" within the Orbem (Brussels Regional Employment Office), to receive complaints about discrimination in hiring for reasons prohibited by the law of 25 February 2003 (including sex).

In 2001, the Brussels-Capital Region reinforced its legislative arsenal for achieving balanced representation of men and women in advisory bodies: they must now have at least one-third of their members from each sex. Opinions rendered by commissions that do not observe this rule will be legally invalid, unless the Council of Ministers has agreed previously to a substantiated request for exemption. An annual report must be prepared on compliance with this order.

In June 2001, the Brussels Regional Council and the Assembly of the Joint Community Commission created an advisory committee on equality of opportunity between men and women, to examine inequalities between men and women in the Brussels-Capital Region in the context of follow-up to the Beijing conference.

Part Four. Main challenges and actions to address them

The Federal State

One of the major objectives of the federal government that took office in July 2003 is to combat all forms of discrimination, including sexism. By virtue of the law against discrimination, establishment of a full legal service within the Institute for Equality of Women and Men will be a priority. The ability to take legal action must be given effect by forging new partnerships with the judicial system, magistrates, lawyers, associations and all those agencies that have long been concerned with gender equality. At the same time, information on the new legal possibilities open to victims of discrimination must be publicized (through brochures, awareness campaigns, publication of the "equality" code).

As noted in section 1, during the legislative period 1999-2003 the federal government adopted a strategic plan for optimal follow-through on its commitments under the Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The process of introducing gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting strategies will of course take a long time, and will require great efforts at sensitization and education. While the tangible results in terms of impact on the life of men and women in Belgian society as a whole are fairly modest, mentalities are beginning to change within the federal government, and small steps have been taken in a number of departments to promote gender equality. In cooperation with the Institute for Equality of Women and Men, the Minister responsible for gender equality will pursue efforts begun during the preceding legislative mandate. A new plan will be adopted for the duration of this legislature, reflecting the strategic objectives for gender equality set by each ministerial department. The idea is to institutionalize this process within the federal administration, through specific legislation. In this context, particular stress will be placed on the development of indicators, statistics and evaluation tools.

The Department of Development Cooperation will also stress integration of gender into methodologies and new tools for management-by-results (for example: gender-specific indicators for evaluating the results and impact of interventions in the field).

The status of immigrant women will receive special attention in coming years from the federal Minister responsible for equal opportunity. Achieving equal rights and empowerment for these women is fundamental for a society that is open to the world, multicultural, and founded on values of liberty, equality and solidarity. The idea is to work in partnership with immigrant women and to give them the tools they need to assert their identity, whether through literacy training, vocational education, access to mixed meeting places, welcoming mothers to their children's schools, networking to exchange knowhow between native and foreign-born women, legal support when their rights are disregarded, etc. The fact that foreign-born women's labour force participation rate is lower than the average will also be taken into account.

When it comes to employment, combating inequality of wages but also of status will receive particular attention. Pursuing the federal two-year plan for combating violence against women, a coordinated policy will be followed to produce concrete actions for prevention and for helping victims, and also for treating the perpetrators. A new plan for combating violence against women

2004-2006 is now being finalized. Efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making will be pursued, not only at the political level but also within the public service, in the advisory bodies, and at the socioeconomic level. In addition, awareness campaigns will be conducted, targeted at men and designed to combat stereotyped or degrading portrayals of women, and to bring about a change of mentality.

A better-coordinated policy for equality between women and men will be implemented both at the political level (through intergovernmental conferences of equality ministers) and at the administrative level (through the new mandates of the Institute), by developing interfaces between the various stakeholders: politicians, institutions, associations, academics, etc.

The Flemish Community

As indicated in section 1, the structural reforms announced within the Flemish Ministry offer a good starting point for gender mainstreaming. The Unit for Equal Opportunity in Flanders is working on a new strategic plan in this area. Starting with the list of critical areas of concern in the Beijing report, we must also take account of the political and social realities of the Flemish situation. Specifically, Flemish policy on equal opportunity will focus primarily on seven areas.

"Image portrayal", the issue of "women in decision-making" and "reconciliation of work and family life", the priority action areas in existing legislation, will now be joined by "education", "sustainable development", "poverty" and "violence". The idea of working with strategic plans is producing results, and will again be pursued in some of these fields. For example, for the issue "women and violence", which was already a priority concern of the federal government, a distinct Flemish action plan will be prepared, drawing upon all the possibilities offered by the Flemish areas of competence. In the fields that are not horizontally within our competence to initiate or coordinate, such as poverty policy, the emphasis will remain on providing opinions on gender equality within existing policy. Until now, Flemish policy on poverty was targeted at disadvantaged people as a whole, and not specifically at women. The March 2003 decree governing the antipoverty campaign, however, calls for a permanent coordination committee on poverty, on which the Equal Opportunity unit will have a seat. This membership in an institutional body opens new prospects for monitoring and meeting the specific needs of women as they relate to poverty.

The unit for Equal Opportunity in Flanders will also take an active part in developing and monitoring new methodologies to facilitate gender mainstreaming. Cooperation with existing entities will be reinforced. Of course, the unit will track developments in gender mainstreaming very closely. It is currently studying the possibility and appropriateness of introducing the "gender budgeting" technique in Flanders.

With respect to Flemish policy on equal opportunity, the "velvet triangle" remains the basis on which we will proceed. The "Flemish model" will be pursued intensively. Only by maintaining and intensifying collaboration among policymakers, researchers and the women's movement will a policy on equal opportunity for women have a real chance of succeeding.

The lack of reliable statistics has often been a problem in implementing an equal opportunity policy. The situation is gradually changing. The Centre for Research on Equal Opportunity, created in 2001, has played an important role in this respect, as has the explicit mandate from the statistics minister to integrate gender statistics into the multiyear statistical programme of the Planning and Statistics Administration. The availability of relevant statistics opens new perspectives for formulating policy indicators. The great challenge here will be to establish links among various statistics. As a case in point, a superficial examination of gender-differentiated statistics suggests that the status of women has progressed (for example, the number of girls graduating from secondary or university education); yet the measurements we have made using indicators already developed show that on some fronts the situation of women has not advanced and has even retreated (for example, girls generally continue to select courses of study that offer few career possibilities). There is some evident fallout here, for example, from the policy on diversity, which many people promote and which distracts attention from gender equality.

It is clear that the momentum from Beijing has long since dissipated, and that heads of government will have to make new commitments in this area. This is one of the major challenges for the Beijing + 10 meeting scheduled for 2005.

More detailed information on Flemish policy relating to equal opportunity can be found at the web site www.gelijkekansen.be.

The French Community

It must be noted that there is no official regulation defining "equal opportunity". While this term today includes efforts to combat discrimination between women and men, it also embraces other forms of discrimination such as those based on race, colour, parentage, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, civil status, birth, wealth, age, religious or philosophic conviction, current or future state of health, a disability, or a physical characteristic. This diverse field of application tends to dilute the ability of institutional mechanisms working for equality to take action.

Thanks to the new instrument adopted by the French Community - the Coordination Office for Equal Opportunity - the integration of a gender perspective into policies will be pursued. We will be examining how to implement, in whole or in part, the measures proposed to the government by that office. Those measures concern in particular the production of statistics broken down by sex and of indicators that can be used for gender studies, the "feminization" of certain positions, and better representation for women in the advisory bodies.

Education offers an ideal field for the permanent prevention of sexist behaviour and attitudes, and for promoting equality, and it will continue to be the object of studies and awareness campaigns. Efforts to combat illiteracy and to reduce social and cultural inequalities will be pursued. The government will strive to encourage girls into scientific and technical fields where they are still underrepresented. Efforts are needed in the area of emotional and sex education in the schools, while continuing to stress the prevention of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

Generally speaking, we will have to enlist men more actively in promoting gender equality, and to make this a priority target of awareness campaigns, particularly those for combating conjugal

violence. Combating all forms of violence against women, as a fundamental obstacle to gender equality, will remain a priority. Studies will be pursued to identify the best ways to prevent cultural practices and behaviour that are harmful to girls, such as genital mutilation and forced marriages.

The family in all its forms will remain at the centre of equal opportunity policy, because it is the scene of many types of discrimination. The many questions related to reconciling family and working life, making training and careers that were traditionally reserved to men open to women, and the consequences for the family, the trends that are changing the family structure (single parenting, same-sex parenting), will all be subjected to further study, prior to a series of actions and campaigns. As part of efforts to reconcile family and working life, daycare places for young children will be created by 2010.

Special attention will be devoted to projects sponsored by associations on behalf of immigrant communities, aimed generally at encouraging the different components of these communities to express themselves, and in particular at empowering younger women.

When it comes to the media, the French Community intends to pursue efforts to sensitize the public. It will support projects to overcome gender stereotypes that tend to trivialize and even to legitimize violent behaviour.

Finally, the French Community will make every effort to integrate these different concerns into its cooperation with partner countries.