

Implementation of the Platform For Action by the Polish Government

Alternative report

**Women's Association
for Gender Equality
Beijing 1995**

prepared for
**44th session of Commission
on the Status of Women**

Warsaw, January 2000

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Introduction

Evaluation of the government's report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform by NGOs is an alternative report. Both documents have been developed due to UN, governments and NGOs' preparations for the UN Special Session of the General Assembly entitled „Women 2000: Gender equality, development and Peace for the Twenty-first century”.

The report of the Polish Government prepared in the office of the government's Plenipotentiary for Family has been developed without consultation with women's organizations and had not been available for them, in spite of multiple requests made by Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995 both by mail and phone. The requests had been submitted to the Prime Minister as well as to the Government Plenipotentiary for Family.

NGOs had a chance to get familiar with the governmental report only at the end of November 1999, when the document was presented to the Parliamentary Group of Women.

The government's policy toward women (1995 – 1999)

Since May 1995 to October 1997 it had been the office of the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women who was responsible for the policy for women's advancement and equal status. November 1997 saw a collapse of activities for gender equal status due to results of parliamentary elections when conservative, right wing groups closely related to the Catholic Church took the power. The office for women's issues has been closed down and replaced by the office for family issues. From the very beginning the new office has been strongly influenced by Catholicism which has been manifested in its policy, namely in stopping all women-oriented activities. The present government's focus has been switched to family issues that, according to the ruling politicians, include women's issues as well. In practice it means that the women's status has been reduced to family-related roles. It also means that women's rights have been seriously limited since pro-family policy doesn't support their right to free choice of the way of living, their economic and social independence as well as their equal and balanced participation in public life.

Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995 takes position on two documents developed by the Polish Government which is a part of preparatory work for Beijing + 5:

- the government's response to UN's questionnaire and
- the government's report.

General comments on the governmental documents controversial aspects

The government's response to UN questionnaire (Questionnaire)

1. The content of the *Questionnaire* proves that the government approaches women's issues from traditional and conservative perspective, which is inconsistent with the Platform for Action. The government sees gender equality in its pro-family policy: *"Apart from the National Action Plan (for women) the ruling coalition of Solidarity Election Action (AWS) and Freedom Union (UW) takes steps aimed at improvement of women's situation that can be seen in its pro-family policy program (...) The government's pro-family policy is aimed at, among others, increased independence of families – that means women – as well as decreased number of single mothers through family and marital counseling centers."* However, according to the women's NGOs (opinion based on the responses to the research carried out by the Women's Association in autumn 1998) that not only that any outcome of the National Action Plan can't be seen, but the current governmental policy is not shaped by gender equality perspective.

Pro-family policy, according to the government, results from high social expectations (but no public opinion survey data is included) to increase birth rate (right now the birth rate is negative) as well as Poles' belief (62%) that the Constitutional provision on gender equality is sufficient. So, according to the government, if these are the social expectations, there is no need for it to implement any policy toward women.

2. The government's response to UN questionnaire lacks consistency, sensitivity to gender issues as well as understanding of the Platform for Action's basic intentions. On one hand, there is a statement that the government implements the National Action Plan *"to make rights and opportunities of Polish women and men equal in all respects, to suppress any manifestations of discrimination and to improve the situation of women"*, but on the other hand the government quotes its negative opinion on the gender equal status draft law, that *"assumes temporary privileges for women meaning temporary discrimination of men"* which is allegedly contradictory to Poland's international obligations. The government has not perceived the draft as an attempt to make opportunities of women and men equal.

The present ruling coalition shows lack of understanding of the National Action Plan basic intentions which recommends to ministries and the state institutions to keep gender balance while filling up decision-making and managerial jobs. According to the *Questionnaire*: *"ministries and state institutions seek equal numbers of employed men and women"*. After that the report comes to the following conclusion: *"but some of them mention significant dominance of women among their employees."*

3. The government admits discrimination in very few areas: lower wages, worse access to higher public posts, ill-paid professions with women's dominance. *"Discriminatory nature of differences can be seen in cases of lower women's wages for the work of equal value and promotions. Some ill-paid, budgetary professions, like health-care sector and education, are those where women dominate (up to 90%)."* The government also admits that there is certain discrimination of women due to sex-roles stereotypes, still strong in Polish society: *"opinions about lower intellectual potential of women and resulting discrimination are not uncommon in Poland"*. However, according to the government, there are appropriate mechanisms that protect women against discrimination:

- multiple international conventions signed by Poland,
- the Constitution of the Republic of Poland from 1997,
- labor code that prohibits gender-based discrimination.

Unfortunately, the government in its response to the *Questionnaire* does not mention lack of instruments to implement both Constitutional and provisions included into international conventions.

4. According to the government's response to UN questionnaire, women in Poland enjoy special protection and respect due to maternity: *"until very recently St. Mary's cult, transferred to general respect toward women, played an important role. In Poland, many discriminatory situations don't happen due to (...) very special belief in an exceptional role of woman as a mother and family supporter. Besides, egalitarian tendencies are very strong in Polish society and that's something women also enjoy."* Thus, the role of a mother and a family supporter is appreciated by religious content to convince women that they can gain the highest respect as mothers and that's why their position in the society is the privileged one.
5. The government's response to UN questionnaire should not include any comparisons between the situation of women in Poland and this one in other countries - *the situation of Polish women is much better than that of the women in many countries of the world and Europe*. The government's task was to describe how the situation of women in Poland has improved, comparing to 1995. Similarly, it is not proper to refer to 19th century or women gaining political rights in 1918.

The government's report

1. Comparing to the response to the *Questionnaire*, the report is **"more politically correct" in relation to the Platform for Action's assumption**. In the report the authors got rid of any religious examples of St. Mary's cult as well as of arguments about exceptional role of woman as a mother and family supporter. The government's negative opinion on the equal status draft law has not been included either. It seems that the government decided this is not something to be proud of in UN so it would be better not to mention it altogether. For similar reasons the government doesn't pride itself with the renewal of abortion ban (1997) due to social reasons and doesn't mention the law.
2. Hiding behind the Platform's provision about taking into consideration *"national and regional specifics, as well as historical, cultural and religious conditions of each country together with the respect of different ethical and philosophical beliefs of individuals and their community"* (the quote is mentioned twice) **the government presents its pro-family policy as the actions aimed at gender equal status**. It seems that this is a Polish-Catholic specific allowing the advancement of women!!!
3. According to the government, the situation of women in Poland is not bad (*"in summary, it should be stressed that the situation of women in Poland is not bad, especially comparing to other Central and Eastern European countries"*). The government admits that women are discriminated when maternity is concerned: *"women are (...) discriminated due to their maternity: an employer often inquires young women about their marital status and plans to have children"*. At the same time the government fails to notice discrimination in *"extra-legal discrepancies between men and women"*, *"cases of non-equal treatment of men and women"*, *"more difficult for women than for men to get promoted in general"*.
4. The government states that the National Action Plan is being implemented according to the schedule. The statement is not correct. In autumn 1998 the Women's Association for Gender Equality - Beijing 1995 carried out a survey¹ concluding that **the National Action Plan is implemented in a very limited scope**.

¹ The results of the survey can be found in the report „Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in Poland 1995-1999" prepared for 43rd UN Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Warsaw 1999. Publisher: Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995, and partly in the chapter on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

5. The government presents directions for the National Action Plan regarding the cooperation with NGOs and is convinced that implements them. The NGOs strongly disagree and in their opinion **not only that such a cooperation does not exist, but that the present office of the Plenipotentiary for Family is arrogant and lacks competency in the area of gender equality.**
6. The government **has not presented its obligations related to future actions and initiatives** (after the year 2000) **for the advancement of women.** According to the letter of the Prime Ministry Chancellery head interim sent to the Parliamentary Group of Women, *“the position to be taken by the Government during the session of the UN General Assembly to be held in the first half of 2000 will be prepared before the session...”*.

Finally, it should be added that the present office is not prepared (and qualified) to assure any support concerning the merits for NGOs (as recommended in the National Action Plan), but uses their work. It can be proved by many sentences taken out from the report prepared by the Women's Association² and included in the governmental *Report* without mentioning the source.

Kinga Lohmann (Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995)

² The report's title to be found in the previous footnote.

1. Women and poverty

1.1. Government commitments

The government *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995) contain two tasks, the implementation of which could help reducing the poverty rate amongst women. They are: establishing clear criteria of evaluating work and respecting the principle of equal pay for equal work, as well as more flexibility regarding the retirement age for women and men through a principle of acquiring rights to retirement, rather than an obligation to retire from work. The National Action Plan reads: elimination of the feminisation of poverty. The following undertakings are meant to alleviate this situation:

- carrying out systematic observations of communities of women who are single parents, elderly women, disabled women and women who are unemployed;
- actively counteract poverty by reducing the rate of unemployment amongst women, modernisation of social benefits, support of the NGOs which run programs reducing the poverty amongst women.

Other goals of the National Action Plan include:

- increasing income generating opportunities for women from rural areas by securing equal access to production resources and through control over resources, land, credit, capital and property;
- elimination of professional segregation;
- opening access to getting and keeping employment as well as access to education and professional training for disabled women;
- preparation of special programs for disabled women, with particular consideration for women from rural areas;
- equal social and retirement rights for women and men, on the grounds of caring for a disabled child.

1.2. Implementation of government commitments – evaluation

It is estimated that due to the transformation process the percentage of people living in poverty increased by 20% in the period of 1988 – 1993. Majority of the people in this group are women (around 57%). They are a predominant majority amongst those who receive social benefits: surveys conducted in Łódź and Katowice, of all those who depended on social benefits, 76% and 66% respectively, were women³.

Unemployment is the most crucial factor in the loom of poverty and at the beginning of transformation there is a predominant number of women amongst the unemployed (chapter „Women and Economy”). Another crucial factor is single parenting (according to the data from the National Statistics Office the number of single mothers is around 1,5 million, while there are only around 200 thousand single fathers), then disability (out of nearly 2,7 million of disabled women, only around 16% have employment – according to unpublished data from the National Statistics Office), finally – older age.

One of the crucial elements of feminisation of poverty is professional segregation at the employment market, lower salaries for women and their early retirement age. For example: in 1997 the percentage of women earning 1500 PLN or more was 11%, while 25% for men

³ W.Warzywoda-Kruszynska, J.Grotowska-Leder, Poverty in Urban Areas During the Transformation, Institute of Sociology, University of Łódź, Łódź 1996

(Annual Statistics 1998). The average salary in all the professional groups is significantly lower for women than for men. The women dominated professions the salaries are generally lower than in the male dominated professions (e.g. nurses and miners). Single mothers are five times as often dependent on social benefits, than single fathers, although the mothers are often working and with relatively higher level of education. The new retirement Act (from January 1999) has not levelled the retirement age for women and men, which means that the pensions of women in this system are going to be lower than those of men by about 40%, assuming the same salaries during their professional activity⁴.

The women who are inhabitants of rural areas are in a particularly disadvantaged situation, both due to the dissolving of the state owned agricultural co-operatives, as well as the difficulties with the poor demand for privately produced (usually very small scale farms) in the market. Therefore, poverty affects as many as nearly 60% of families in rural areas.

The above examples indicate, that after 1995 nothing has been done to reduce the poverty amongst women. On the contrary, certain action have been undertaken which for a long time are going to deepen the problems of feminisation of poverty.

Therefore, the statement included in the government response to UN questionnaire that *the situation of women has improved in the last few years* is false. Even though it became a social priority to, *monist other things, reduce unemployment amongst women*, the effectiveness of actions of the employment offices is poorly visible. The women themselves also rate the services of employment offices as ineffective (based on a survey conducted in 1999, on a representative national sample of 1608 unemployed). The introduction of a program of „Professional activation of long-term unemployed women from rural areas, particularly those made redundant at PGR – state run agricultural co-operatives”, is based on training for women and then providing them with employment as carers, nurses of the emergency service of the Polish Red Cross. Although this program reduces the numbers of unemployed women, however it does not succeed in reducing poverty rate, as the nurses get very low pay. It is thus hard to accept this as an example of positive action.

The issues of women have also been taken on by the self-governments, which have increased their scope of activity after the administration and self-governing reform, which was been introduced in Poland in January 1999 (Questionnaire) – to our knowledge, self-governments have not undertaken any action focusing on the issues of women in any way.

The situation remains unchanged: *the professions which are poorly paid from the state budget, e.g. health service and education, are very strongly feminised - up to 90% (Questionnaire)* and no efforts are made to change this situation.

Conclusions

- The phenomenon of poverty of women is not a subject of social monitoring. There is no political will or climate to draft a strategy of action for the advancement of women living in poverty.
- In Poland any concerns with poverty are mainly associated with social benefits; the financial means for this sector have in the recent years been reduced by a quarter, while in the developed countries social benefit is the last link in the support system, with decent and well paid employment at the beginning of this chain.

⁴ A. Wiktorow, State social policy towards women”, paper at a conference „Influence of the privatisation process on the situation of women”, 22 of April, 1999

Recommendations

- the government and the self-government ought to care about creating places of work, providing equal employment access for women and men, as well as oppose discrimination against women on the grounds of gender;
- the legislation ought to be modified so that women bound by their married status, but abandoned by their spouse, not knowing the spouse's address or whereabouts, not receiving any financial support from him – could have a right to social benefit for single parents, despite the fact that she has not legally divorced;
- conduct monitoring of poverty according to gender in order to establish which social groups have the largest concentration of poverty, in order to create special programs to alleviate the problems of such group.

Irena Halota (The League of Polish Women)

Ewa Lisowska (International Forum for Women)

2. Education and training of women

2.1. Government commitments

The Government National Action Plan has the following commitments:

- to guarantee to all women and men equal access to education at schools of all levels and types;
- to take into account principles of equal status of women and men in school curriculum and promoting them in educational materials;
- to provide social education regarding equal opportunities for women and men.

The analysis of the government's response to UN questionnaire mentioned no activities regarding education referring to even the opportunities for girls and boys, women and men. The following facts were counted as achievements:

- Admission of women to military training schools. However, this change is a direct result of the standards of the entry requirements set by NATO. Those were obligatory changes that Poland had to introduce when trying to secure the NATO accession.
- Development of Gender Studies at the Warsaw University and research teams focusing on issues related to women. Those research teams have not been established due to the government initiative, but are a result of initiatives of individual women specialists. Their work is in most cases financed by international foundations, or thanks to single grants. Without the government back-up, the continuity of this research is not certain.

The *Questionnaire*, as well as the information given by the Ministry of Education in 1996 and in 1999, an equal access of both sexes to education was reported, as well as lack of interest amongst girls and women in technical fields and science. Neither the people drafting the *Questionnaire*, nor the representative of the Ministry of Education, have any understanding or knowledge of the relationship between this lack of interest and the stereotypes of gender roles perpetuated by schools. The information given by the education department also demonstrated an evident lack of familiarity with international documents regarding equal opportunities for women and men. The issue of access to schools in Poland ought to be considered not at the level of mere statistics, but at the level of affecting motivation, which would help women in getting better paid employment in the future.

The comparison of answers provided by the Ministry of Education in 1996 and in 1999 confirms, that no changes have been introduced at the ministerial level, regarding equal opportunities for women and men in education. In 1996, the Ministry indicated to legal, administrative and financial problems, as the main difficulties in implementing the National Action Plan. However, despite what they called their *statutory duty to prepare the programme principles of the general knowledge subjects and education in individual professions* (1996) - they have not yet proposed any changes, which would show attempts to implement the National Action Plan. The reform of the education system which was introduced earlier this year, could have been a great opportunity for introduction of new elements, recommendations and indications. The actions undertaken in order to disseminate this reform, do not indicate that the school programmes or the teachers ought to take into account the recommendations of the National Action Plan, or the international documents regarding gender equality. The presentation of the new school book on „Knowledge about sexual life of a human-being”

includes no mention that the authors present catholic approach to the issue. This background information is important in the context of possible perpetuation of gender roles and the relationship between them, as accepted so far. The Ministry of Education has not conducted any research regarding the „real needs and expectations of women in Poland”. According to the 1996 report the work of the ministry was to relate their work regarding the National Plan to the results of such research.

In the document „Information regarding the work undertaken in 1998 by the Ministry of Education with reference to the National Action Plan” (*Information*), the ministry does not point out any substantial actions or changes leading to improving the situation of girls and women in the Polish education system.

- The access to schools – no mechanisms motivating girls to pursue science have been created.
- The school advisory service – no efforts to educate a member of staff in this field to the problems of gender-sensitive-education.
- The continuous education system – no motivation systems have been introduced for women burdened with family responsibilities.
- Introducing exercise with music for girls – mentioned in the Information – is not a solution to the problem of access to sports facilities and extracurricular activities for girls.
- The point mentioning experts making decisions about admissibility of school books, there is nothing about: 1) required standard regarding the experts’ knowledge of the issues of gender-sensitive-education, rules of selecting and appointing of such experts, 2) taking gender balance of this group into account.
- The point referring to higher education represents a conceptual chaos – neither a Chemistry department, nor an Institute of Food Technology, nor any of the departments mentioned in the Information have anything in common with Gender Studies or Women Studies.

The Ministry of Education admits that it has not created a register of scientists specialising in the equality issues and that it has not organised any conferences on this subject. It is worth stressing, that no such conference has been financially backed up by the Ministry. On the other hand, the Ministry draws attention to the information bank called the Methodology Centre of Psychological and Pedagogical Support. However, none of the programs of this or any other ministerial establishments (such as: The Teachers Continuous Training Centre, the National Centre of Mobile Education) incorporate any of the goals associated with the implementation of the National Action Plan.

Both the *Information* prepared by the Ministry of Education, as well as the government *Questionnaire* mention the NGOs. However, the scope of activity of NGOs in the field of education mostly entails working with adults. Therefore the government cannot expect or rely on those organisations to implement the government’s commitments in this area, particularly that it does not support their work financially. The promotion of research of women’s issues in Poland should also lie in the government’s range of activities. This gap has temporarily been filled (thanks to overseas sponsorship) by the National Information Centre on Women’s Organizations and Initiatives OŚKa, which ran a competition for the best undergraduate and the best PhD thesis in this field.

The current situation is predominantly a direct result of a lack of familiarity with the documents regarding equal opportunities for women and men, as well as the lack of will of the government and the Ministry of Education to remove gender stereotypes from the education system. This contributes to consolidation of the inequalities between men and women, as well as perpetuate discriminating practices in various scopes of life.

Recommendations

- training for government officials, particularly the ministry of education employees, regarding education and the equality issues;
- gender issues training for teachers (short university courses);
- social education programme regarding equality of rights and opportunities; a guarantee of financial support for women in science;
- appointment of spokeswomen for equal status of women at schools and higher education institutions (this would also help the sexual harassment problems);
- establishing criteria of admissibility of school books regarding equality issues; this ought to be based on consultations with men and women specialists in gender issues;
- gender parity in the fund awarding agencies, which grant funding for scientific research.

Bożena Chotulaj (Gender Studies, Warsaw University)

3. Women and health

3.1. The government commitments

The National Action Plan approved in April 1997 contains the government *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995) covering full range of goals and directives related to women's health and included in the Platform for Action. The government's commitments in this area included around 80 specific tasks, from the following topics:

- creating conditions to improve women's health **during all phases of their life** and to provide high-quality medical care that takes into account women's needs, with special focus given to women from rural areas and small towns (through the state-supported services related to prevention, revealing and treatment of women-specific illnesses and through reducing health implication of violence against women;
- supplementing the National Health Program with reproductive health and family planning;
- creation of the network of advisory centers specializing in sexual health (modern family planning and contraception), systematic prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS (also among young people – in schools and outside of schools); systematic approach to sexual education;
- protection of women's rights while using health-care centers (including their right to decide, right to intimacy, privacy, dignity, information) and making health-care personnel gender-sensitive;
- promotion of WHO's definition of health, including sexual health, in the human rights context.

3.2. Implementation of the government commitments - evaluation

According to the government's report and other governmental documents, activities aimed on women's health improvement are consciously limited to mother and child's care. The Ministry of Health and Welfare (in the reporting documents from March 1999) stresses that the ministry's priority in terms of medical care for women is providing them with proper care during pregnancy and childbirth. This supports giving up the implementation of progressive strategies and tasks aimed at the improvement of women's health in all phases of their lives and included into the National Action Plan. What the Ministry considers important is the advancement of medical care over woman-mother, not taking into consideration many others, identified and long-neglected health needs of women in other phases of their life-cycle. The government's policy and medical services that focus on maternity only strengthen stereotypical perception of women's social roles.

The health-care reform introduced in January 1999 visibly destroyed already insufficient access to specialized treatment and diagnostics. It **dramatically worsened women's access to medical services, including specialized ones**. It also resulted in visible drawback in prophylactics.

The current health-care system has not created conditions for equal access of men and women to medical care, since it does not provide an access to medical services and products necessary specifically for women. Equal treatment means equal approach to the needs of both men and women and satisfying of these needs. Lack of respect to this principle is nothing else but discrimination. The situation of women living in rural areas and small towns is much more difficult. One can often hear an opinion that women are healthier because they live longer.

At the same time, the indicator of chronic diseases, or sustained disability is higher for women than for men. These factors strongly affect the quality of older women's life.

During the years 1995-1999 Polish policy on women's health, especially in relation to reproductive health which is a very political and ideologically questioned item, could be described as unstable. Women's health issues are perceived mainly as an element of religious, pro-natal state's policy.

During two years immediately after the Beijing Conference some legal foundations for the improvement of women's reproductive health were laid. The abortion law was liberalized, allowing abortion due to social reasons. The anti-abortion law stipulated the need to subsidize oral contraceptives and obliged the Ministry of Education to introduce classes "sexual life of human being" into curricula. After 1997 elections the situation has changed dramatically. By the end of 1997 the new ruling coalition amended the abortion law banning abortions due to social reasons. The obligation to introduce sexual education into school curricula has been lifted. The Parliament has also adopted the law reducing the access to pre-natal examinations and recently – the law on the Ombudsman for Child's Rights that can result in further restrictions related to abortions.⁵ Restrictive anti-abortion law didn't abolish abortions – just made them illegal. Sustaining high amount of infanticide cases and cases of abandoning newly born children are one of the most visible effects of the anti-abortion law.

It should be stated that the tasks related to the reproductive health area and included into the National Action Plan in major part are not implemented both by the current government and local health-care authorities. So far, no initiative to expand the National Health Program by reproductive health and family planning issues has been taken. **Contrary to the statements included into the government's report, activities taken by the Ministry are not in line both with the guidelines of the National Action Plan and the Beijing Platform for Action. Current practices and the government documents serve as a proof.**

1. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, its priority is to provide women with "medical care during pregnancy and child-birth". But although last years saw certain improvement of birth-giving conditions in public hospitals (due to media-supported action), cases of ill-treatment of women are still common, like forcing them to nursing in spite of the situation, forcing to natural child-birth, refusal of cesarean section even when natural birth threatens woman's and child's life (mother's eyesight is threatened, cases of mother's death and child's disability due to natural birth). In spite of the fact that part of public hospitals openly declares they perform only natural childbirths⁶, it doesn't cause any reaction from the Ministry of Health.
2. The Ministry also states that it has started activities of *systematic nature, aimed at the reproductive health improvement, including services and counseling on family planning*. According to the Ministry, this is being one by implementation of the project "Mother and child health promotion, with particular emphasis on family planning" co-financed by UNFPA. This is a pilot project, of limited scope. One of its goals is to reduce *frequency of unplanned pregnancies by the improvement of health-care quality in the area of reproductive health and family planning services*. But according to the government's documents⁷ the project has not covered any modern contraception related activities. However, it states the need to *widespread in the society the knowledge on natural family planning methods*. Within this activity, 15 family planning centers have been started, employing natural family planning *instructors*. At the same time, in April 1997 the

⁵ The law introduces the definition of a child as „human being since conception to majority”.

⁶ There was no reaction from the authorities and medical society to the public statement of a well-known physician *hadn't natural child-birth been the best for women, they would be born with zips on their stomachs*.

⁷ The Council of Ministers report on implementation of the law of Jan. 7, 1993 on „Family planning, human fetus protection and conditions for performing abortions”, 1998.

government cancelled subsidies for five out of eight available oral contraceptives. The three remaining subsidized contraceptives are the cheapest ones, all with the same content and belong to old-generation pharmaceuticals. Such a policy reduces for significant number of women a possibility to choose the right contraceptive. **Access to modern contraception is even more difficult due to physicians' attitude, supported by the authorities**, which very often, due to ideological reasons, refuse women a prescription for oral contraceptives (which are sold only on prescription). Women and men, who don't want to have more children, **can't be sterilized**, because this contraceptive method is not legal in Poland.

3. The Ministry of Health states that women in Poland have possibility to safely terminate pregnancy in *necessary cases allowed by the law*. But according to the information obtained by the Federation for Women and Family Planning, this is not the case. Based on the answers given by regional health authorities, there are whole regions in Poland where public health-care centers do not perform abortions at all.⁸ Women's rights are violated and ignored. The authorities do nothing to change this situation. The number of abortions performed in 1998 – 310 in total – **proves limited access to legal abortion**. For comparison, in 1992, last year before the abortion law was tightened, the number of abortion due to health reasons was 1,504.

According to the information obtained by the Federation for Women and Family Planning, in practice no women from “eligible” groups, even those with a very poor health, don't have an access to legal abortion. It should be added that the government doesn't take any steps to evaluate the effect of the abortion ban on women's health and situation.

- In its report the government avoids the answer to what level women's needs in terms of prenatal examinations are met. Due to long campaign against these examinations, their accessibility is not satisfactory. It is estimated that only about 8% of women, including the group with high-risk pregnancy, use this type of examination. In the middle of 1999 the law leading to further reduction of access to prenatal examinations was adopted. It's typical, that the government's report on the implementation of the anti-abortion law of 1998, while describing an access to prenatal diagnostics, focused mainly on the negative impact of the examination on women's decision to have an abortion.
- According to the National Action Plan, both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education are responsible for sexual education and sexually transmitted diseases prevention. The current program introduced by the Ministry of Education “education for family life” promotes Roman-Catholic Church's views on human sexuality, contraception, family and social roles of men and women. The program doesn't provide young people with objective, credible and ideology-free information, and the Ministry openly admits that the contents given by a teacher should depend on his/her ideological positions.
- The Ministry of Health states that women enjoy equal with men rights in terms of an access to health services. At the same time it mentions that no signals about inequalities in access to health care services due to gender differences have been received. The interventions of an ombudsman prove otherwise. In 1998 the ombudsman, on the Federation for Women and Family Planning request, addressed the Ministry of Health to explain the government's decision to waive subsidies for contraceptives which the ombudsman found discriminatory. No explanations have been given.

⁸ Answers given to the Federation for Women and Family Planning by Regional Health Authorities.

Recommendations

- the health-care reform should be reviewed to provide full (economic and territorial) access to health-care services for women in all phases of their life-cycle as well as real and full implementation of the government's obligations covered by the National Action Plan;
- all women, regardless their place of living and financial situation, should enjoy equal access to the information in terms of their right to protect their health as well as the right to high-quality specialized medical services in all phases of their life cycle;
- all women should have an access to legal abortion; legal regulations reducing a possibility to enjoy reproductive rights should be abolished;
- family planning counseling and services should become an integral part of the basic health-care system. The network of family planning centers that guarantees an access to modern and inexpensive contraception should be created, as well as legal possibility to use sterilization as a voluntary contraceptive method;
- WHO's health definition as well as respect for patient's right (with an emphasis given to reproductive rights) should be included into health education system and applied while providing daily health-care services.

Jolanta Łozińska (Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995)

Aleksandra Solik (Federation for Women and Family Planing)

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4. Violence against women

4.1. Government commitments

The government *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995) and the National Action Plan show the commitment of the government to achieve the following:

- create a system of protection and assistance for women victims of violence;
- introduce an education program against violence for schools as well as society at large;
- create a counselling and resocialisation program for perpetrators of violence.
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4.2. Implementation of the government commitments - evaluation

It was stated in the *Questionnaire: A battle against all forms of violence against women and men, particularly domestic violence, has become a social priority. (...) Since 1997, the consecutive governments, with the assistance of UNDP, have been implementing Program against Violence, which was initiated back in 1994. A number of departments and government agencies are involved in the Program. Since October the 1st 1998, a new domestic intervention procedure was introduced under the name of „blue card”. The self-government system established centres for crisis intervention.(...) The NGOs dealing with women's issues participate in the programs against violence.*

The means of social assistance available prior to 1995 and today (hostels, single mothers' homes, hostels for the homeless, shelters for women and children) financed from the state budget or from the local selfgovernments, only sporadically (8 out of 120 in 1996) have been equipped to offer specialist service (e.g. medical, legal, psychological help) for victims of domestic violence. None of the institutions offered complex assistance, inclusive of financial assistance – offering a better chance to reach independence by a woman and a freedom from the violent partner.

During 1996-97 the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women prepared a Program Against Violence – Equal Chances (*Program*), approved by the government for implementation during the 1997-1999 period, with co-operation and financial assistance of UNDP. According to the agreement signed in September 1997 between the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women and UNDP, both sides committed to contribute financially to the implementation of the *Program* during the 1997-1999 period. The *Program* included establishment of nine centres for women and children – victims of domestic violence – where a complex set of services was supposed to be on offer (medical, legal, psychological and economic). The clients of those centres were amongst other things supposed to receive loans to enable them having a degree of independence. The *Program* corresponded with the National Action Plan and was an **attempt to create in Poland a base for institutional system of assistance for women, who are in particularly difficult circumstances in life**. The essence of the *Program* was to create a possibility for women – victims of violence, a chance to regain full social and economic rights. It was to be implemented from October 1997 by the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women and the *Program* office appointed by the Plenipotentiary. A direct help activity in the newly established centres was to be run by the NGOs named in the process of openly run competition.

Unfortunately, the appointment by the new government of the Plenipotentiary for Family in November 1997, put a stop to the implementation of this *Program*. They quoted ideological reasons as well as an accusation that *offering help to women and children outside their family home contributes to a break up of that family*. Already in September 1998 the concept of the

Program was given a different angle so that it would focus on the principle of not undermining unity of the family, as well as its patriarchal model (domination of man over woman, husband over wife, parents over children). The idea of establishing centres offering assistance to women and children was changed into giving help to so called problem families, by offering them mainly mediation and reconciling families. There is no longer any talk of either the right to independence of an abused women, or the right to change their situation, e.g. through getting divorce. This is happening in a situation when one in every five women in Poland admits to being beaten by a husband, the figures are reported in research conducted by the Centre of Women's Rights.

Under the same name (a deliberate step in order to maintain the financial support guaranteed by UNDP in the agreement concerning implementation of the *Program*), a completely different program is being implemented, totally negating the principles behind the original one. As a consequence, the right to get involved in those centres will only be given to those organisations, which have a similar approach to the issues of domestic violence – maintaining the stability of a family, regardless of the well-being and the rights of every one of its members.

In the *Questionnaire* the government states: *The Ministry of Justice conducts monitoring of crimes against family and women, offers training for regional family guardians (appointed by the courts).*

The lack of implementation of the government's commitments is also evident in a lack of statistic categories indicating to the gender of the victim and the perpetrator of so called crimes against families. Such categories were not created by the previous or the current government. What is more, the crimes related to abuse, where traditionally women are victims, are in general neglected in the statistics of the Ministry of Justice. Changes in the criminal law confirm that the 'private' sphere of violence is pushed to the margins. The crime of a group rape or where an element of particular cruelty appears was earlier recognised as crime. At present it is often categorised as an offence because of the lenient sentences that are being passed for such crimes. A marital rape has hardly any chance to be recognised as a crime, despite lack of formal restrictions to call it by name and demand that the offender should take responsibility for his actions. The stereotype, which is still prevalent is that of a woman bearing the blame of what happened to her – it does not help recognition of the crime. Repeated victimisation for which a victim has to be prepared, successfully puts off women from reporting cases of either rape, or violence suffered from their partners. It seems that not recognising this situation as well as belittling the real scale of domestic violence are both elements of a consistently implemented *Program* of the current government. It is also beyond any doubt that it is a blatant contradiction to the commitments based on the conclusions of Platform for Action, which were undertaken by the same government.

It is possible that individual examples of educational activities against violence can be found and quoted, however there is evident lack of an initiative of the authorities to introduce education against violence. The same applies to resocialisation and counselling services offered to the offenders – a lack of initiative is sometimes blamed on lack of funds. The claim not to see the connection between domestic violence and social pathology is a characteristic statement.

Information materials, training and educational activity are most often undertaken as part of the activities of specialised NGOs, which financed their activities from grants received from overseas sponsors. There is one exception to this rule: a free of charge telephone help line for victims of violence "Blue line" operating since the 3rd of July 1995, sponsored by the National Agency of Solving Alcohol Problems.

So called "the blue card" is designed for patrol services, who during the year get called out to around one million interventions (1996 – 947 000 interventions, first 3 quarters of 1997 – over 600 000 interventions). It is designed to draw an exact register of each case and to give the victim of violence access to information regarding their rights and actions which can be taken. It

is characteristic that the training of Police falls yet again on NGOs. It is also typical that where there is a clear lack of social policy, a conviction still prevails amongst the public order agencies, that violence against women and children falls under so called sphere of private life. This lead to situations where women find themselves in life threatening situations, they do not receive any help despite calling for and arrival of Police to the scene of the crime. In a recent case the police got a sentence, when despite a call out they did not intervene, and thus were pronounced indirectly responsible for a woman beaten to death by her husband. It is perhaps a sign, that at least in a court situation there is no condoning for notorious neglect by the police of their statutory duty to protect the citizens from danger.

The government decided to regulate with precision this question of preventing sexual abuse at work and impose on the employer an obligation to provide abuse free work environment. (Questionnaire)

Despite the fact that there are legal provisions regarding sexual abuse (in the civil law it is art.11 about untouchability of private goods, in the criminal law –article about abusing position of subordination at work for sexual gains), it is very difficult to make use of them. There is no office making it easier for women to file a complaint on grounds of sexual molestation. Lack of clear information regarding possibilities to use legal provisions to claim ones rights is also a serious deterrent for victims. This problem will remain unsolved until those conditions are not going to be fulfilled.

The Plenipotentiary for Family stated in the *Questionnaire*: *It is necessary to name amongst the important achievements the change in habitual directing of the unemployed women to the legally operating escort/call-girl agencies as possible workplaces; this exposed them to the risks of sexual exploitation.* This achievement is best left without a comment.

Recommendations

- implement the National Action Plan on issues concerning prevention of violence against women;
- review the legal regulations concerning violence against women and examine their application in practise, especially regarding the effectiveness of prevention measures and combating violence;
- undertake action towards changing the damaging stereotypes concerning domestic violence and other forms of violence against women and children;
- create the basis of an institutional system enabling women-victims of violence getting independence and regaining their full social and economic rights, as well as return to the previous version of the program “against violence – equal chances”;
- create effective mechanisms of protection against sexual abuse;
- create a system of protection and help to victims of domestic violence as well as any other violence, compatible with standards outlined in international documents;
- create mechanisms protecting a victim of violence against secondary victimisation during the investigation and proceeding (administrative or judicial);
- conduct educational activities counteracting violence against women and disseminating knowledge of the rights of women;
- guarantee free medical, psychological, social and legal help to victims of violence;
- introduce a system of gathering statistic data and conducting quality analyses regarding phenomenon of violence against women; in the statistics concerning crime rate it is compulsory to take into account gender balance, both with reference to the victim and the offender (e.g. relationship);

- it is necessary to increase the effectiveness of prevention of crime of women trafficking and guarantee help to the victims, e.g. through supporting NGOs in providing care services, education programs, legal and counselling services;
- it is necessary to undertake concrete actions towards resocialisation and counselling for the perpetrators of violence.

Katarzyna Kądziela

Monika Płatek (Polish Association for Legal Education)

5. Women and economy

5.1. Government commitments

According to *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995), in order to reduce unemployment among women and to equalize chances in a labor market, one should promote a development of small business as potential jobs for women.

The National Action Plan contains goals aimed at eliminating discrimination of women in the labor market, specifically:

- to set up legal standards ordering equal treatment in terms of job accessibility, promotions, training etc.;
- to set up legal sanctions against those responsible for gender discrimination;
- to equalise differences between women's and men's wages;
- to support various forms of entrepreneurship among women, both in cities and in rural areas;
- to introduce instruments encouraging women to take Labour Fund loans to start economic activity;
- to create local programs for employment and prevention of unemployment among women.

5.2. Implementation of the government commitments - evaluation

In our opinion, the above mentioned tasks included into the National Action Plan are not being implemented both by governmental and self-governmental institutions, mainly because of lack of good will.

In result, the situation of women on the labor market is getting worse. This could be confirmed by high contribution of women among unemployed (55.1% in 1995; 60.4% in 1997; 58.5% in 1998 and 57.7% in 1999) as well as long average period of unemployment for women: in 1999 unemployed women who couldn't find a job for a period longer than 12 months amounted for almost half of total amount of unemployed women, while men – 27%. For women, an average unemployment period was as long as 23 months (based on the researched on unemployed women carried out by the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH). What's the most worrisome is the fact that very often young women face unemployment: 30% of unemployed women is below 24 years of age and 31% - between 25 to 34. According to national survey on unemployed women carried out in 1999 on the National Labor Office request, women very seldom participate in programs offered by labor offices, like intervention and public works (10% out of 1,600 respondents participated), training (7%), job clubs (4%). Only half percent of women got a loan from the labor office to start up their own economic activity. At the same time 16% stated they had never heard about such loans. In terms of the governmental programs, unemployed women were familiar with the program for disabled (45%), while only 7% were familiar with the program for women.

The tendency to pay women lower wages maintains (relatively highest discrepancy between women's and men's wages can be found in the university education group) as well as lower wages in "womanized" professions. In spite the fact that working women usually are better educated than working men (43% of women and 25% of men has high and university education), women very seldom hold managerial positions. According to the survey of Public Opinion Survey Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej – CBOS) of 1999, 37% of women said they are discriminated on the labor market.

Many women tries self-employment, but according to the surveys the government does not visibly support individual economic activity in general and this one of women in particular. The Ministry of Economy has developed the guidelines for small and medium-sized enterprises until the year 2002 (approved by the government on May 11, 1999), but the program does not include any actions aimed at women. Similarly, the Ministry report on the situation of small and medium-sized businesses in 1997 does not take into account the recommendations of the Platform for Action and National Action Plan regarding the request to break down statistical data into men and women. Growing amount of self-employed women is rather a result of their determination in pursuing self-fulfillment and reasonable income that the effect of the governmental or self-governmental activities. It also shows that many women want to have professional career and can't accept unemployment.

The Central Statistical Office (GUS) uses gender break-down in its quarterly Survey on Economic Activity and published results of this survey, but data on employed received from reports distinguish women only in relation to very general topics and don't apply such a break-down in more detailed information.

Conclusions

- Unemployment among women in Poland is still high and does not decrease, thus the current governmental and self-governmental activities against unemployment are not effective.
- Unemployed women are not encouraged to start their own companies and very often nobody provides them with information about existing possibilities in this area.
- There is a shortage of special training programs for women who want to set up their own company as well as consultancy and credit programs for small businesses.
- Labor market is characterized by high level of professional segregation, unfavorable for women.

Recommendations

- focus on local opportunities to create jobs and programs that activate unemployed women, taking into account self-employment possibilities;
- individual approach to job-seeking women that takes into consideration their family situation; alternative forms of employment (part-time, work at home, flexible working hours etc.);
- promote the development of social services as potential jobs for women;
- increase funds for active forms to fight unemployment to cover more women that until now;
- implement the goals included into National Action Plan in the chapter "Women and Economy".

Zdzisława Janowska (International Women's Foundation)

Ewa Lisowska (International Forum for Women)

6. Women in power and decision-making

6.1. The government commitments

The National Action Plan, in a chapter on women participation in decision-making bodies, assumes facilitating equal access and fuller participation of women in the power structure and decision-making process. The government has obliged itself to seek equal status in:

- filling managerial positions in public administration, government and judicatory structure;
- electing women to representative organs, political parties and trade unions.

6.2. Implementation of the government commitments - evaluation

The government response to the UN questionnaire states: *women in Poland, on average, are better educated than men, less often can be met on high state functions and cases of promotions to high posts reveal their discriminating nature.* However, the statements are left without any explanation why the government has not done anything to promote fuller participation of women in the state bodies. What's more, the government has issued a negative opinion on a parliamentary draft law on equal status, particularly due to mechanisms promoting higher participation of women in public life the draft contained. *(The draft mentioned new institutions protecting implementation of equal status principle, for instance mandatory, at least 40% participation of each sex in the public bodies [so called parity], or [...] temporary discrimination of men which violates international obligations signed by Poland).*

Women in the Parliament

Analysis of Polish political scene shows very clearly that women's representation in political institutions, such as the Parliament, the government, local self-governments and other important public life institutions, is clearly insufficient and below average in the European Union countries. After 1997 elections, women make up only 13% of the MPs. In Sejm, the Lower Chamber, there are only 60 female deputies out of the total number of 460; in the Senate (the Upper Chamber), there are 12 female out of 100 senators. A woman who chairs the Senate is a strong supporter of so-called traditional family model that deprives women of the right to choose and to make decisions about their own life. The lower chamber is chaired by a man and all his six deputies are men as well.

Considering the fact that the female MPs are relatively better educated than male ones, one can state that the women's road to the Parliament is longer and more difficult than for men, and a condition to success to have larger political clout.

Women in the government

There are very few women in the present government. Both the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health and Welfare are headed by women. Few women govern some central institutions, like the National Bank of Poland, the National Labor Office, the Head Office of the National Archives, the National Office of Health Insurance Supervision. The remaining 31 ministries and central offices are headed by men. A woman also takes a position of the Main Inspector of Personal Data Protection (current statistical data on women, the Parliamentary Studies and Expertise Office, April 1999).

Women in political parties

So far, Polish political parties have done little to guarantee a certain number of places on the election lists for women, and all projects promoting higher participation of women in decision-making bodies have been aggressively ridiculed.

To pass through the party selective mechanisms is much higher barrier for women than for men. A coincidental nomination happens much often among men than among women. As principle, women work for a party or political group much longer than men do.

Recently, some political parties, especially under their internal women's lobbies, take attempts to create mechanisms to promote and to empower women both in the parties themselves and in the Parliament. In 1994, the Labor Union (UP) adopted the resolution under which women should make at least 33% of the party's decision-making bodies of all levels. In 1999, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) approved the stipulation on balanced representation of women in the party's authorities. Recently, the Freedom Union (UW) proposed the draft law to the Parliament proposing that at least one third of places on circuit election lists should be designed for women. So far, these attempts haven't brought any visible results.

Surveys on women's participation in public life

The government's questionnaire quotes public opinion surveys showing that 62% of Poles thinks that the way to public positions is open for everybody with high qualifications, regardless the sex. While quoting the data (the year is not mentioned), the governments tries to show that by not implementing the policy aimed at increasing women's participation in public life it only meets social expectations. However, the survey systematically carried out since early 90s have shown that the public opinion is divided by half, and some switch toward higher acceptance of non-traditional model of woman can be noticed. This acceptance also means acceptance for women right to participate in politics and was accepted by 39.4% in 1992, 46.6% in 1994.

Recommendations

- start up mechanisms promoting women by political parties, for instance higher reimbursement of the election campaign costs in case a woman becomes a member of the Parliament;
- pass the equal status law introducing parity mechanism (at least 40% representation of each sex) in public bodies;
- according to the General Assembly of the Council of Europe, to create Parliamentary Commission on Equal Status;
- public opinion research centers should survey popularity of female politicians and social evaluation of their work;
- media, including women's magazines, should present women's point of view on important, current problems of the country.

Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka (The League of Polish Women)

7. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

7.1. Government office for the advancement of women

The government *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995) as well as the National Action Plan (1997) put stress on the necessity to introduce mechanisms and institutional forms to carry out the program for the advancement of women. The National Action Plan foresees: *increasing the standing of the office of the Plenipotentiary for the Family and Women, by enlarging the competence and means of action.* This office, however (Plenipotentiary for Family and Women, March 1995) did not satisfy the NGOs, both due to its low rank in the government hierarchy (equivalent to the under-secretary of state), as well as due to the joint treatment of status of women and family issues. In the recommendations included in the report on "Situation of women in Poland", the NGOs state, that it is necessary to: 1) *replace the office of the plenipotentiary for women issues and family affairs with two separate offices in the rank of ministers (for women's issues and for family affairs), as well as 2) appoint the office of ombudsperson for the equal status of women and men.*

In the meantime, not only the rank of the institution for women has not increased, but the issues of the advancement of women has been completely depreciated. The government's response to the UN questionnaire states: *The role and tasks for the Plenipotentiary for Women has been incorporated in the new government (end of 1997) in the responsibilities of the Plenipotentiary for Family. Women's issues are dealt with at the level of department director.* This laconic statement (1999) does not express sufficiently clearly the basic political and ideological change, that is **de facto abolishing the government institution for the status (and advancement) of women**. On the 7th of November 1997 with the decision of the Council of Ministers the government abolished the office of the plenipotentiary for the status of women, the first government mechanism of this type in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (established in 1986). The newly established office of the Plenipotentiary for Family only entails as part of its responsibilities a continuation of the most important programs and works in progress, which were inherited from the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women.

The experience and evaluation of the last 11 years (1986-1997; for 7 years the office was filled, and it was vacant for over 4 years) of functioning the government institutions for the status of women, it is clearly evident that due to the political system changes the role of the office has been degraded and there have increasing efforts (especially in the years of the right option government) to neutralise the problem of the advancement of women. In the consecutive names of the office it is possible to see a gradual process of moving away from the initial mission, that is actions for the improvement of social and professional status of women, until the issues of the advancement of women are completely given up. The stress has been shifted to the family.

7.2. National Action Plan for the advancement of Women

In the *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995) it is stressed that *a future program of action* (for advancement of women) *should contain concrete tasks, indicate time-scale and people responsible for implementation of those tasks.* In 1996 the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women prepared the National Action Plan. It was an attempt to adjust Polish solutions to the recommendations included in the Beijing Declaration and Platform

for Action. The program contains timetable, indicates people responsible for implementation of tasks, foresees monitoring and evaluation.

The government response to UN questionnaire states: *After the adoption in Beijing of the Platform for Action the government of Poland adopted in April 1997 the National Action Plan for the advancement of women up to the year 2000. The current government in Poland is implementing this plan and its resolutions.* While the first part of the statement does not raise controversy, the second part is simply false. The Women's Association for Gender Equality–Beijing 1995, conducted in autumn 1998 a questionnaire survey regarding the issue of implementation of the National Action Plan, sending the questionnaire to the ministries and other national institutions, as well as to local authorities. Lack of response from the local authorities (most probably) caused a written recommendation from the Plenipotentiary for Family on the 2nd of December 1998 (... *it is not recommended to give response to the questions asked in the questionnaire of the Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995*).

Based on a small number of returned and filled in questionnaires by the local authorities, as well as the contents of the written statements sent instead of participating in the survey – it is possible to conclude that the National Action Plan is only implemented on a very small scale. It is evident from the questionnaires that there are no individuals in the departments and local authorities' offices who would be responsible for co-ordination and monitoring of the implementation of the National Action Plan (the one positive exception is the National Statistics Office – GUS). The departments and local authorities do not inform about implementation of the National Action Plan tasks which are common for all the central and regional branches of government administration; the allocation of financial resources is very small or none.

On the basis of the information received from the local authorities, it is clearly apparent that there are no people appointed for the implementation of the National Action Plan. Lack of such appointments leads to conclusion that at a regional level **the program is not being implemented.**

The political personal changes introduced in November of 1997 in all the offices of government administration caused lack of continuity of actions and practically postponing the National Action Plan *ad acta*. The current team of administration officials are not even familiar with the Plan and the individuals appointed previously to oversee its implementation have been called off, or their responsibilities have been restricted to concentrating solely on family issues.

7.3. Co-operation of state administration with the NGOs

Both the *Recommendations for the Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* (1995), as well as the National Action Plan stress the necessity of identifying the mechanisms of co-operation between the state administration with the NGOs working for the advancement of women and equal status of women and men at the national, regional and local levels. **The National Action Plan makes the co-operation with the civil society a priority:** one of the ten chapters has focused on this particular problem. The program goals assume continuation of the former institutional forms of co-operation: Forum for co-operation with NGOs and the Plenipotentiary for the Family and Women, as well as establishment of new offices: appointment (with the Plenipotentiary) of an office for the co-operation and maintaining regular contact with women representatives of the NGOs. These aims assumed regular consultations of crucial documents and statutory proposals with the NGOs, as well as delegation of specific tasks to them: expert opinions and services. The National Action Plan also encompassed creation of mechanisms for co-operation on issues and financial back up for NGOs.

The government response to the UN questionnaire deliberately does not mention lack of institutional forms of co-operation with NGOs, it merely refers to: *NGOs working in the field of women's issues participate in the program against violence, train the unemployed women and*

organise some professional training. Some of these organisations participated in preparation of the proposal of the equal status of women and men Act. The evaluation of this “co-operation” by women’s organisation has been very negative.

On the basis of a questionnaire survey conducted by Women’s Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995 among the organisations working for the advancement of women, the overall majority of respondents stated that there is evident lack of any co-operation in the area of problems of equal status of women and men, between Plenipotentiary for Family (in the period of 1997-1999) and NGOs. The majority of women respondents on the other hand, gave positive evaluation to the co-operation with the previous Plenipotentiary for Family and Women and the office – in the period of 1995-1997.

7.4. Project of establishment of a parliamentary commission for equal gender status.

At the beginning of November of 1999, the proposal to establish a parliamentary commission of Equal Status of Women and Men was rejected. The Commission was to oversee compliance with the constitutional principle of equality of rights of women and men before law and other system solutions. Particular attention was to be drawn to the right to employment and social insurance, Family Law Code, education and culture, as well as compliance with the requirements of European Union.

Recommendations

- reinstate as a matter of utmost urgency, the institution for the advancement of women or establish an institution for equal status of women and men and to grant such office the authority to guarantee effectiveness: direct influence over the policies of the government, statutory initiatives, controlling and executive instruments and functions, as well as a separate budget which would allow implementation of equality programs and strategies;
- adopt the equal status of women and men Act;
- review and adjust the national legislation with respect to compliance with constitutional provisions for gender equality and the international Human Rights –women’s rights documents; comply with the reproductive rights of women and guarantee them the right to safe and legal abortions;
- implement National Action Plan up till the year 2000, evaluate the implementation of it so far, update the actions outlined in it for the consecutive years;
- make sure, that the co-ordination of the National Action Plan is done by a gender-sensitive individual;
- create a database on the grounds of gender, include a gender-perspective analysis in the conducted research and to use the available documentation about the status of women in strategy planning and government programs.

Kinga Lohmann (Women’s Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995)

8. Human Rights of Women

8.1. Government commitments

The National Action Plan incorporated the following tasks in the area of women's rights:

- implementation of all the international instruments for protection of human rights and ensuring that they are applied to women, as part of carrying out the principle of equality of women and men by law;
- dissemination of documents concerning the rights of women and issues of equality, as well as the conclusions drawn from their implementation;
- a guarantee of equality and non-discrimination of women in the national law and respecting it in practise, through, amongst other things, drafting of the Act of equal gender status, equal treatment of parents with respect to their ability to care for and raise children, as well as fighting the stereotypes regarding roles of women and men in the family as well as in public life;
- raising the awareness of law regarding human rights as women's rights and gender equality, by undertaking actions aimed at government bodies, society at large and women themselves;
- supporting the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination, which introduces an option of lodging a complaint by an individual or a group.

A more detailed elaboration of each of the individual government commitments, concerning a revision or establishment of a legal provision, which could allow implementation of equality of women and men in particular problem areas (e.g. employment law, labour market, health, violence, shaping of basic life conditions, media) can be found in the remaining sections of the National Action Plan.

8.2. Implementation of the government commitments - evaluation

The Polish Constitution guarantees equality of all the citizens before the law.

Article 32

1. *All persons shall be equal before the law. All persons shall have the right to equal treatment by public authorities.*
2. *No one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever.*

Article 33

1. *Men and women shall have equal rights in family, political, social and economic life in the Republic of Poland.*
2. *Men and women shall have equal rights, in particular, regarding education, employment and promotion, and shall have the right to equal compensation for work of similar value, to social security, to hold offices, and to receive public honours and decorations.*

It is however, worrying that despite that the new Constitution adopted in 1997 obliged the government to review the national legislation regarding its compliance with the new standards, when it comes to reaching the level of actual gender equality, the authorities reduce this problem to a general constitutional principle, and reject any proposals aiming at adjustment of legislation in this respect.

The Constitution does not resolve the issue of establishing a national office responsible for overseeing the presence of gender equality and non-discrimination of women, both in the legislation and in social practice. Lack of alternative system solutions for those issues, procedures for claiming those rights or sanctions for breaking them – are also evident.

During the period of 1995-1997, the Plenipotentiary for Family and Women managed to get the government to express political will to implement the full scope of the Platform for Action. The Plenipotentiary also supported conceptual work on the parliamentary proposal of the gender equality Act, as well as expressed commitment to promote and support it, both at the government and the parliamentary forum. A Forum for Co-operation of NGOs and the Plenipotentiary was set up; it worked on evaluation of government proposals of system solutions, looking at the rights of women *de iure* and *de facto* as the main criteria. A change of government in autumn 1997 brought a set back both in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the co-operation of the government with the women's rights NGOs. Despite the government's commitment to establish an office for the advancement of women, the new government dissolved the existing office representing the rights of women.

Despite the statements included in the government Report, the office of the Plenipotentiary for Family, which was established in 1997, renounced any activities associated with the Beijing recommendations or the National Action Plan.

The employment law is an area of particular concern, where grave violations of gender equality take place. There are legal grounds for pursuing the principle of equal status in the new, modified employment code of 1996 (but merely in the basic rules of employment law), which states:

art. 11 (2) The employees have equal rights on the grounds of fulfilling the same duties: this particularly concerns equal treatment of women and men in employment.

art. 11 (3) Any form of discrimination in the relations at work, particularly on the grounds of age, disability, race, nationality, beliefs, particularly political or religious, or union membership – is inadmissible.

Those articles have a purely declarative character, because such framing of law does not define or mention claims. There is no definition of procedures in cases of non-compliance with these principles, or sanctions for their violations. Neither does the Employment Code include rules or laws protecting women against discrimination in getting access to employment.

The pension contributions Act of November 1998 ignored postulates of women's rights organisations regarding equal of the retirement age for women and men. The solutions which have been adopted discriminate against women. The contribution period is shorter for women by 5 years; the method of calculating the final amounts also mean that the a pension for a woman (born after the 1st of January 1949) may be lower by 30-40% than that of a man employed at the same position and performing the same duties.

For the majority of the Polish society, and particularly for a large part of the political circles, the rights of women are not identified with human rights. The current government elite are not interested, for ideological reasons, in eliminating laws or practise discriminating against women. They neutralise the problem, concentrating merely on so called pro-family policy, which further consolidates the stereotypes of social roles of men and women.

Despite the information included in the government Report, there are currently no actions implementing any of the commitments from the National Action Plan concerning proclamation and abundance of the rights of women.

The government is deliberately keeping quiet about those commitments, which – on the grounds of radically catholic ideology – have been arbitrarily eliminated, together with some progressive solutions which functioned up to 1997 (on par with the Beijing Platform). This mainly refers to such issues as:

- reinstatement of the restrictive antiabortion Act, restricting the right of women to reproductive health;
- introductions of marital separation to the Civil Code, thus making access to a divorce more difficult;
- rejecting any ideas to introduce statutory guarantees of gender equality, like the negative attitude of the government towards the parliamentary proposal of the equal status of women and men Act;
- keeping a register of jobs with no access for women;
- introduction of a longer statutory maternity leave, leading to deepening of the discrimination against women in the employment market;
- subjecting in the case of women, their rights as individuals in the context of human rights – to the right of inviolability of a family;
- undermining the right of women to professional career, participation in public life, economic independence and a choice of self-fulfilment – thus perpetuating traditional stereotypes of social roles.

The government Report does list a number of international legal acts which have been signed by Poland, but does not have any reference to how they are being implemented.

The above conclusions regarding how the principles of women's rights are being observed by the Polish authorities, as well as comments to the official government Report, have been confirmed in the comments made by the UN Human Rights Committee (July 1999). It concerned the government report on the implementation of the International Pact of Civil and Political Rights, which has been ratified by Poland. The comments have been on to the Polish authorities, where the Committee expressed concern over the following:

- lack of any mechanisms, which would give the State party an ability to apply in a systematic way to the recommendations of the Committee;
- numerous forms of discrimination against women, both in the Polish society and the national legal system. The committee has sadly noted that the State party in its periodic report devoted very little attention to the issue of gender equality;
- is very concerned to note: a) severe abortion legislation, b) restricted access to contraception for women, c) exclusion of sex education from the school curriculum, d) insufficient programs of widely available family planning education;
- the Committee is also concerned with the lack of gender equality in the employment sector, for example: a) there is only a small number of women in high technical posts, managerial and political posts, with a large proportion of women at the low paid sectors, b) the overage salary for women is merely 70% of that for men, c) there is no equal pay for equal work for women and men, d) there is a tendency amongst employers to require pregnancy tests;
- the Committee is concerned with the implications of the Polish pensions system, which by keeping different retirement age for women and men, leads to lower retirement for women; it also notes that the right to a retirement later than at the age of 60 is not often used, therefore women will have lower pensions as a direct result of less years of employment;

- the Committee is concerned with: a) a high number of reports of domestic violence, b) lack of any means of pursuit in civil courts, c) insufficient number of shelters and safe houses for women who are victims of domestic violence. Suitable legal provisions and administrative means have to be introduced in order to correct those failings.

The government report does not refer with a single statement to the above comments of the Committee. It is necessary to add that the comments were consciously and deliberately omitted or belittled in the public statements made by the government representatives who were present at the session of the Human Rights Committee.

The current government has not been informing the society about its rights, has not respected and ignored the international commitments. It particularly applies to the proclaiming and implementation of women's rights in Poland.

Recommendations

- return to implementation of the National Action Plan;
- Establish a national mechanism of gender equality;
- set up a parliamentary committee for gender equality;
- adopt the gender equality Act, as carrying out the principle of equality of all citizens before law;
- modify the legislation so that it would guarantee of women's rights, particularly in the fields of: economic rights, employment law, reproductive law and protection from violence.

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Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka (The League of Polish Women)

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9. Women and the media

The National Action Plan defines two strategic goals concerning participation of women in media:

- seeking full and equal participation of women in mass media;
- promotion of gender equality principle and support to balanced participation and stereotype-free image of women in mass media.

The government's report is reduced to quoting the National Plan's strategic goals from the media chapter. However, nothing is said whether the goals are being implemented and in what way.

Women's participation in decision-making positions in media is low. Contrary to the National Plan's assumptions, no principles have been worked out regarding:

- proportional employment of women and men on all levels of managerial structures in media;
- Giving NGOs working in women's rights area to free access to programs and promotion of their activities in TV and radio; no instruments have been created that would allow implementation of this task, especially free access to the programs.

Overt discriminating practices take place while employing women in public media. Recruitment of candidates for news anchors (only men were seek after) or candidates for weather women (for women only) by local TV station in Wroclaw in October 1999 can serve as a good example. The head of the station asked about the reasons why only men could read news answered "it just suits better".

Women in media – participation in decision-making bodies

National Council of TV and Radio Broadcasting	0% of women
Supervisory Board and Management Board of public TV	0% of women
Polish Radio Supervisory Board	0% of women
Polish Radio Programming Council	33% of women
Directors of public radio channels - national and local	16% of women
Presidents, directors, editors-in-chief with their deputies of non-public radio channels	21% of women
Directors of public TV channels	
National (4 channels)	25% of women
Regional (11 channels)	0% of women
Presidents and directors of non-public TV channels	
National (6 channels)	0% of women
Regional	33% of women
Editors-in-chief of daily press (63 titles)	14% of women

The National Action Plan mentions **amendments in legal framework and procedures related to media in order to respect constitutional principle of men and women equal status.**

This strategic goal has been divided into program to be implemented in two stages: a draft of legislative changes was to be developed in 1997-1998, and to be implemented since 1999.

No analysis of legal principles governing media in the respect of equal status has been carried out. No procedures have been introduced regarding:

- obliging mass media to observe and to promote equal status principle;
- ban to finance, from public means, programs that strengthen stereotypes regarding male and female roles in the society;
- ban to use by journalist the sexist language;
- procedures allowing monitoring of the content of programs broadcasted by public and non-public licensed media;
- motivating advertising to show both women and men in a non-discriminating way.

The media has not been obliged to release informational and educational programs based on equality toward the law and gender discrimination ban as well programs improving social status of women.

What's more, the Government's Plenipotentiary for Family (1997-1999) had made frequent public statements (both in the Parliament and media) how **harmful the change for traditional stereotypes** on social and family roles for men and women would be. The statements made by the Plenipotentiary showed open disrespect to the Beijing Platform recommendations as well as to the assumptions of the National Action Plan. He clearly supported the existing image of woman as a "traditional mother and wife", at the same time ignoring other social and political roles women play.

The National Action Plan includes **equal status education to be provided for persons employed in mass media (including advertising) and those studying journalism.**

Following tasks were to facilitate the idea:

- introduce into curricula of journalism schools the contents taking into account equal status issues as well as sensitivity training programs on discrimination issues;
- organize training courses for advertising people and media decision-makers;
- initiate broadcasting of information and educational programs on equal gender rights and women's status;
- create a group of experts in media;
- support consumers' initiatives – those who watch mass media programs and readers of the press – monitoring how the gender equal status is observed.

The tasks are not being implemented. What's more, one should state that the media not only avoid promoting women's equal status, but also do not release information on the issues important for the gender equality. Very often the information regarding women is presented in biased way or no information is released. Refusal to place the information about an open letter sent to the Ministry of Justice and signed by over 100 NGOs and prominent representatives of science and culture on systematic and increasing tendency to give very low penalties for rapists is one example. The letter, sent to all important media, has been totally ignored.

Finally it should be added that the goals and tasks of the National Action Plan were to be promoted through mass media and informational materials prepared by the Plenipotentiary Office. No such materials have been prepared, and mass media don't play their role of intermediary because the Plenipotentiary Office does not provide them with any information.

Barbara Limanowska (National Information Center for Women's Organizations and Initiatives OŚKa)

The NGOs' postulates for action

to achieve the goals of *Platform for Action*

The questionnaire prepared by the Women's Association for Gender Equality – Beijing 1995, sent out to 240 NGOs working for the advancement of women, was aimed at collecting postulates to the government and the public administration to reach the goals set out in Platform for Action. 31 organisations from all over Poland responded to the questionnaire. Some of the organisations proposed postulates from all the identified areas of concern; some forwarded recommendations only directly related to the specific area of their activity. Those postulates concerned the following 12 groups of issues:

- Women and poverty
- Education and training of women
- Women and health
- Violence against women
- Women and armed conflict
- Women and the economy
- Women in power and decision-making
- Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- Human rights of women
- Women and the media
- Women and the environment
- The girl-child

The most postulates were proposed in the following subjects: women and poverty, women and the economy, human rights of women, women and health and violence against women.

The decline of the economic situation of a lot of women and families, limited access to health service provided by the state, social costs of introducing reforms – all those issues are present in the majority of the responses submitted.

Postulates

Adoption of the gender equality act and appointment of an office for women status

The most often proposed postulate concerned the need for adoption of the gender equality act and appointment of the office for the advancement of women on national, regional and even on the local authority level. There is a need, according to the respondents, for introducing institutional solutions for the purpose of improving the situation of women. The office for women should assist them in various scopes of life, work toward a shift from woman as an object to a subject, secure respect of human rights of women, promote education of gender equality and at the same time initiate legislative changes, thus leading towards achieving the goals of Platform for Action. The office is expected to act on the basis of data and the results of conducted research, statistic data sorted according to gender and appropriate diagnosis, so that the assistance is directed at those who are in need of it.

The equal status of women and men act will bring the following changes: it will speed up the process of including women in the labour market, assist the development of a private sector, enable a larger input of individuals in the country's economic development, increase employment opportunities and consequently fall of the unemployment rate amongst women.

There is an increasing need for establishment of both a national and regional offices for women's issues. The office of the Plenipotentiary of Women and Family ought to be expanded and include a plenipotentiary for equal gender status; furthermore its status should rise to a ministerial level. This would ultimately bring more a representative set of information about family issues in the country, enable making appropriate decisions aiming at the improvement of life conditions of families nation-wide.

A plenipotentiary should be appointed in every local authority, together with other institutions run training courses for unemployed women, control granting of social benefits, co-ordinate preventive measures research.

Counteracting the feminisation of poverty

The NGOs quoted a lot of facts associated with increasing impoverishment of women, particularly single mothers, disabled women, 'postproductive age' women, who usually live alone after the decease of their husbands. The respondents accuse the government for a lack of social policy and **demand a preparation of a realistic system for the most impoverished, the weakest, particularly the women, who most acutely experience the current socio-economic situation in Poland.** The pointing towards the phenomenon of 'inherited poverty' in the one-parent families. **Women demand monitoring of life conditions of individual social groups, one-parent families, single elderly women, etc.**

The fight against the poverty of women is a fight for a healthy, harmonious family – a financially independent woman is able to give more love to her family, better care, security and warmth. Children raised in such conditions will be well cared for, well fed and will not look for drugs, feel need to consider theft, there will be less poor and uncared for persons around. A financially independent woman will have a better sense of her self-worth; there will be less family conflicts, less violence and more respect in the family.

According to NGOs there is a need for:

- preparing a strategy to fight poverty, particularly in rural areas;
- raising the awareness level amongst women;
- breaking down the psychological barriers of women, who are unemployed, poor or sick;
- activating women professionally, preparation of programs fighting the high unemployment rate, actions towards achieving an equal status of women and men in the employment market, etc.

Equal opportunities in the labour market; development of enterprise.

The increasing feeling of a disadvantaged position of women against men in the labour market is confirmed by statistic data. Women organisations quote the survey conducted by Centre of Public Opinion Research (CBOS) in November 1998, which demonstrated that more than half of the respondents feel that a woman of the same education and performing the same job as a man, gets a lower financial reward for her work.

The inequality at the employment market further confirmed by statements made by a lot of respondents:

The equality in a place of work in Poland consists of offering women those jobs, which have been rejected by men.

The discrimination in the labour market forces women to living in poverty.

The overage time spent without employment is longer for women than for men. The high numbers of women who loose jobs (...), is – by comparison to the number of men – almost twice as high. During restructuring of companies, women are more often targets of the compulsory job cuts.

There are not equal enterprising opportunities for women right now.

Equal opportunities in the labour market is the main goal in striving to reach an equal gender status - all the efforts should concentrate on achieving it.

The NGOs postulate for:

- creation of mechanisms to execute the rights to equality at the labour market; establishment of regional offices of plenipotentiaries of the National Employment Office;
- introduction of appropriate acts to regulate recruitment process (employers should be obliged to give reasons for which women with a similar level of education and work experience were rejected in favour of men); making it impossible for an employer to advertise for a job discriminating on the basis of gender; introduction of protection of data (the preliminary stages of recruitment process should be anonymous, in order to eliminate a possibility of rejecting someone on the grounds of gender);
- greater flexibility of retirement age for women and men; creating effective mechanisms for part time employment; securing and easy access to child care; support for the activities of NGOs who promote the principle of equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market;
- providing financial support for NGOs promoting women in the labour market.

A lot of the respondents feel that the fight with the unemployment rates amongst women is, amongst other things more enterprising opportunities. Their postulates say that:

It is necessary to make women aware, that looking for a 'hiring' job is not the only opportunity to change their situation. The market economy has opened other opportunities to women, amongst them also an option to set up their own company where an owner decides about the activities undertaken by the company, sets her own working hours, style of work etc. This flexibility to make decisions about themselves is very crucial for women, who want to be professionally active and simultaneously cannot be freed from the responsibility of caring for their children.

It is far more effective to fight the high rates of unemployment, particularly amongst women, through a comprehensive and wide offer of training in the professions which are in demand in the employment market; incentive to consider self-employment or setting up own companies – training, consultancy, loans, special programs for women who are unemployed.

An option to get preferential credits for women, which would enable them to get set up, encourage to independent activity and could solve some of the problems, especially for women in single-parent families.

Observance of human rights of women

The responses of the respondents demonstrate clearly that the practise is more discriminating than the law itself. Is it however possible to consider that law, which does not function on practise, is essentially good?

The state of awareness, where everybody is equal before the law, but not in everyday life, seems to consolidate the Polish law. The Constitution proclaims equality of women and men, but at the same time it is possible to observe a lack of any legal acts of lower order, which would make this idea a reality.

A phenomena of discrimination exist more in the stereotypes of Polish reality, than in the legal provisions. Any legislative attempts to secure equal gender status are met with little understanding of issues, by either the politicians or the society at large.

The respondents also state that women have a low level of awareness of law:

Currently the awareness of law and awareness of discrimination issues is very low amongst women themselves.

There is no awareness of law amongst women who are inhabitants of rural areas; the access to legal codes and regulations is poor; there is a lack of institutions, especially in rural areas, which would assist women in getting access to such information.

The postulates of NGOs are clearly specified and refer to changes needed in the areas of:

Constitutional law:

- introduction of parity rule of democracy to the future constitution;
- inclusion in the catalogue of citizen's rights and freedoms the right of women and men to both their professional life and their family life.

In the sphere of equality law:

- statutory regulations of equality of gender status and equal opportunities for women and men;
- establishment of bodies overseeing the implementation of the act, the protection of one's rights as well as the possibility of claiming them.

The postulates also concern:

The development of the awareness of law:

- actions directed at the authorities in order to raise their awareness of law (actions on behalf of full understanding of the essence of the principle of equality of women and men);
- dissemination of information about the international instruments protecting the human rights of women;
- raising the awareness of stereotypes existing in the social practice regarding the attitudes towards gender and division of social roles; the negative impact those stereotypes on the decisions made by the national authorities; the urgent need to eliminate those attitudes.

Actions directed towards the society as a whole and towards women:

- gathering and dissemination of information (in an easy accessible form of leaflets) about the rules and provisions of law regarding women, as well as about the existing national, regional and international procedures enabling women, whose rights were violated, to pursue their rights, demand that the violations are stopped and seek compensation;
- raising the level of knowledge amongst women seeking their rights about the tools the mechanisms that are available to them (e.g. information about the right to apply for exemption from costs for women seeking divorce).

Improvement of health condition of women

A lot of the postulates proposed were directed at **the health service**. The postulates of the respondents demonstrate that the medical service in our country is by en-large inadequate. The recent reform of the health service did not bring improvement of medical services or the prevention measures concerning health. Women do not have a constitutional guarantee or a statutory guarantee of access to a range of health services and specialists. A lot of the medical services are not free of charge. Women mention individual charging rates e.g. for breast x-rays examination, ultrasonography, or a hormone level testing. The medication is too expensive in proportion to salaries. There are no discount rates for a large number of medications. Women from rural areas have a particularly difficult access to specialist medical care and examination. They feel there is double discrimination against them: on grounds of gender and on grounds of place of inhabitancy.

The NGOs postulate for:

- general access to medical care in all stages of life; undertaking of preventative measures differentiated to women in different age groups (e.g. cancer diseases, osteoporosis, psychological therapy during labour, maternity, preparation for menopause after after-menopause);
- widening of medical services; introduction of free of charge national health service for the disabled and the elderly;
- introduction of obligatory, free of charge smear tests, breast examinations; introduction of preferential charges for medical services, particularly for unemployed women.

Women's organisations note a great need for access to prenatal care, as well as offering special medical help to people with serious mental health problems, genetically caused diseases – in the area of family planning. Their postulates include:

- providing a possibility for family planning – access to contraception, sexual education, education in the field of conscious family planning and responsibility for sexual behaviour and reproduction.

Eliminating of violence against women

A lot of the postulates concentrate on elimination of violence, especially violence against women, domestic violence and dealing with results of such violence. The respondents state:

There is no system for protecting women.

There is a lack of means and specialists to undertake preventive measures, particularly in rural areas.

There is no system of institutions for the benefit of women victims of violence.

The NGOs postulate for conducting a campaign for dissemination of principles of tolerance, humanitarian principles and counteracting of violence, school and extra curriculum education programs regarding counteracting of violence. They also feel that:

It is necessary to create a system of counteracting violence against women and help to the victims of violence.

They submit specific proposals:

Appointing a person solely for the purpose of working with families at each police station, as well as for helping pathological families.

A change of statutory provisions for prevention and medical care of alcohol abuse, not ignoring reports of violence, including those which leave a doubt.

Educational measures for promotion of gender equality

For the purpose of elimination of manifestations of discrimination on the grounds of gender an education program for the society as a whole is necessary, sensitising to issues of gender as well as promoting the gender equality. Those aims encompassed in the National Action Plan require implementation – according to respondents. They postulate for the preparation and implementation of the program for:

- raising the level of awareness of women regarding cultural interpretation of gender;

- development of interests and abilities of women, particularly technical skills and those which are traditionally associated with men.

A lot of respondents pay attention to schoolbooks, which present women in their traditional roles and contribute to discrimination of women. They also feel that the idea of equal status of women and men is not taken into consideration in national media.

They put forward specific proposals to the government and suggest that it should commission the NGOs the tasks associated with the idea of gender equality by:

- educational work in the school by e.g. organising seminars and school activities for older pupils of primary schools and their parents;
- promoting this idea in national media;
- introduction of changes in school books to incorporate gender perspective;
- educational work in the society (preparation of leaflets and organising of street festivals, etc.).

A larger participation of women in power and in the decision-making process.

Postulates of a larger participation of women at all levels of decision making process appear in a large number of questionnaires:

If more women were in high positions in parliamentary government and judicial bodies, there would be improvement in the position of women, but also men.

If women were partners in negotiations, there would be now wars. Women are able to solve all problems without armed conflicts.

Assuring access of women's organisations to cooperate with the authorities at all levels.

Qualifications should be decisive in appointments of crucial management positions and this principle should be clearly regulated in the legislation. The participation of women in political life is negligible; a predomination of stereotypes that a woman is not capable to hold positions at any position of power is still predominant at this level.

The respondents indicated to the solutions, which aim at assuring a larger representation of women in the parliament, senate, government, top seats in political parties. For example: introduction in election regulations of a statutory provision for equal representation of women and men in the legislative and the governmental bodies; giving equal status to political parties and nongovernmental organisations promoting women in the election campaigns. This problem, according to them, is closely related to the enterprising activity of women, elimination of impoverishment of women, counteracting of discrimination of women, as well as solidarity with women: mutual support, cooperation of women's organisations on the issues of women's rights.

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Implementation of the Platform For Action by the Polish Government

Alternative report

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