CROATIA

Government of the Republic of Croatia
Office for Gender Equality

QUESTIONNAIRE
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION
AND THE OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Part One: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

The conclusions of the Fourth World Conference on Women represented one of the most important incentives for the promotion of the status of women in the Republic of Croatia. Based on the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, in 1996 the Government of the Republic of Croatia founded the Commission for Equality Issues as a consultative body, comprised of representatives from all ministries and other relevant state institutions. Further institutional changes were directed toward a functional and organizational strengthening of national policies. In 2000 the Commission was renamed the Commission for Gender Equality. In 2003 that body was abolished and, as a result of lessons learnt and new legal regulations, the Government Office for Gender Equality was set up as a national expert body in charge of the implementation of the Gender Equality Act and the implementation of the National Action Plan.

The gender equality and women's empowerment policies were accepted at the highest state level by a decision of the Parliament and through the adoption of national action plans in 1997 and 2001. Currently, the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2001-2005 serves as a basis for the promotion of women's rights. Through it, and based on the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents from the Special Session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5), an additional framework for goals and action models concerning the promotion of women's rights were defined concurrent to the detected critical action areas. The new National Policy is an annexation of the previous one; it redefines the program of previous work and introduces the principle of establishing an institutional network both at the national and local levels for the promotion and advancement of gender equality.

The nongovernmental organizations dealing with gender equality issues participated in the drafting of the above mentioned National Plan, which enabled the realization of full cooperation between the Commission as a state body and the nongovernmental sector in the areas of promotion of the status of women and the implementation of the Beijing Platform. They also worked together in raising awareness of the need for the promotion of gender equality by organizing meetings and open debates to discuss different issues related to the status of women, ranging from their representation in political life to the elimination of domestic violence. The financial support for projects of the nongovernmental organizations concerning the implementation of the Beijing Platform has also begun.

The implementation of the National Plan has indicated that the realization of the foreseen goals is closely related to the financial means available for the implementation of particular measures. In other words, some of the foreseen measures cannot be implemented due to the lack of financial support. Insufficient statistical indicators presented an obstacle for more efficient action, as does the lack of educated staff in state administration, which would implement the equality policies systematically in all areas of state policy.

In Croatia, a significant improvement in the observed period of time was made in the area of political participation of women: the number of female parliamentarians increased from 5.7% in 1995 to 21.8% in 2000, at which level it remained after the 2003 elections. In 2000 the Croatian Parliament established the Gender Equality Committee as a special working body, additionally
advancing the existing institutional framework. That same year, and at the proposal of the Government Commission for Gender Equality, the Republic of Croatia signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

After the Twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly «Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace», the Government of the Republic of Croatia, beginning with the Outcome of the Special Session of the General Assembly and the observed shortcomings in the implementation of the National Policy by 2000, had begun a dialogue with the nongovernmental sector about further actions. At the national conference «Women in Croatia 2001-2005», representatives of the Croatian Parliament, nongovernmental women's organizations, political parties, labor unions and scientific institutions evaluated the current activities in the area of gender equality and reached conclusions about the goals of further actions, the basic guidelines of the new national policy and the institutional mechanisms for its implementation.

After including gender equality among the highest values of the constitutional order by amending the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia in 2001, on July 23rd 2003 the Croatian Parliament issued a special law – meant exclusively to prevent discrimination based on gender – the Gender Equality Act. At the same time, two other specific anti-discrimination acts have been adopted: the Law on Protection from Family Violence and the Law on Same-Sex Marriage.

The Gender Equality Act protects and promotes gender equality as a basic value of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia, provides for protection from discrimination based on gender and the creation of equal opportunities for women and men in the political, economic, social, cultural, educational and all other areas of society. For the first time, a definition of discrimination based on gender was defined as a real inequality in all its manifest forms (direct/indirect/harassment/sexual harassment), and is based on provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

In May 2004 representatives of the Croatian government, the Croatian Parliament, nongovernmental organizations and experts led a society-wide debate about the implementation of the Millennium Goal 3, «Promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women», and agreed that, congruent with the specific circumstances in Croatia, the most important sub-goals by the year 2015 shall be: 1) the introduction of gender-sensitive education in school curricula; 2) the increase in participation of women in political decision-making; 3) the economic empowerment of women; 4) the repression of all forms of violence against women; 5) the improvement of statistical data gathering and analysis; 6) the strengthening of media support for gender equality; 7) the harmonization of private and professional life; 8) the strengthening of institutional mechanisms and 9) the strengthening of non-governmental sector.
Part Two: Progress in the implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly

The Republic of Croatia is party to all major international and regional treaties on human rights. The Government of the Republic of Croatia is reassessing the harmonization of new draft legislation with basic international documents regulating the gender equality issue. Since 1996 all the ministries must take into account the gender equality principle, when proposing new draft legislation to the Government.

In 1994, according to Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Initial Report on the Implementation of the Convention was submitted to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/CRO1), with an oral amendment to the Report regarding the application of the Convention from 1994 to 1998. In late January 1998, while presenting the Report in front of the same Committee, government representatives reported on legislative and other changes that had taken place from 1994 to 1998, aimed at improving the social status of women as well as promotion and protection of women’s human rights. The concluding remarks of the Committee have been translated and published as a brochure along with a summary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the National Policy for Promoting Equality, all of which were widely disseminated.


Since 1995, the activities in the legislative framework as well as the implementation of the National Plan of Action, including the previously mentioned amendments to the Constitution and the adoption of new anti-discrimination legislation have continued, with the aim of eliminating direct and indirect discrimination against women.

However, a systematic approach to the drafting of concrete measures aimed at improving the status of women in the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres - in other words, the inclusion of the gender equality principle in all aspects of state policies - has not been thoroughly formulated or implemented, even though the political will for the introduction of that principle is expressed in the National Policy for Promoting Gender Equality 2001-2005, and directly in the Gender Equality Act.

With the additional contributions of the nongovernmental sector and female members of certain political parties, during the last decade the concept of human rights of women has reached full affirmation and become an integral part of the generally used discourse in the analysis of conditions and in interpreting the status of women in the Republic of Croatia.
From 1995 cooperation with nongovernmental organizations dealing with the protection of human rights of women and the participation in partnership programs with these organizations has been encouraged, particularly in the area of discrimination on the basis of gender.

We shall continue to present some of the most important achievements in the implementation of certain areas of concern of the Platform for Action.

**In the area of human rights of women:**

The Government Commission for Equality Issues has, from its founding in 1996, dealt with the issues of education for human rights and closely cooperated with the National Human Rights Education Committee, especially in the field of educational programs concerning the relationship towards women and gender equality, in order to harmonize them with the internationally accepted standards in education.

For the purpose of promoting the gender equality principle, and introducing civil servants in charge of its implementation with that principle, The Manual on Gender Mainstreaming in Practice has been translated, in cooperation with UNDP, and a seminar on the issue has been organized for the members of the Government Committee for Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Committee of the Croatian Parliament as well as members of political parties.

Among the activities of state bodies in the implementation of the gender equality principle, we stress the following:

- In the National Family Policy from the year 2002, the focus was on the reconciliation of the private and professional life, with an emphasis on creating equal opportunities for men and women.

**In the area of women and health:**

In 2003 the State Institute for the Protection of Family, Maternity and Youth co-financed and implemented projects aimed at educating youth about sexual and reproductive health. That included the implementation of the following activities:

- In cooperation with the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Zagreb the first research within the project «The Longitudinal Research on Knowledge about Sexuality, Sexual Behavior and Relevant Attitudes of Adolescents» was conducted in 1998, and the second research within that project was conducted in 2003.

- In 2002 the Student Medical Center conducted a program named «Health Education in Family Planning for Adolescents» which resulted in the publishing of educational material for students on a CD ROM.

- By the end of 2003 the Department of Reproductive Health of the Children’s Hospital Zagreb conducted a program named «The Health Education of Youth and the Protection of
Reproductive and General Health» in the form of courses, workshops, lectures and open debates for primary (compulsory) and secondary school students.

The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Sport have produced educational materials about reproductive health for children and youth in primary (compulsory) and secondary schools, in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations, the Department of Reproductive Health of the Children’s Hospital Zagreb and the Croatian Society of Medical Schools. The material was published in 50,000 copies and distributed in schools during 2002 and 2003.

In 2003 the Institute for Education of the Republic of Croatia in partnership with the Civil Initiative for the Introduction of Sexual Education into Schools formulated a project called «Human Sexuality and the Quality of Life» that is meant to be conducted in primary (compulsory) and secondary schools.

Of the more significant activities and institutions participating in the monitoring of HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Croatia, we should mention that the monitoring and reporting of this disease is regulated by the Law on Protection of Population from Communicable Diseases and the Statute on the Reporting of Communicable Diseases, as well as the Registry for AIDS in the Croatian National Institute of Public Health that has existed since 1986. The Committee for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS of the Ministry of Health was established in 1990. The National Program was drafted in 1993. The National Committee for the Prevention of HIV/AIDS, and the Ministry of Health are about to sign a contract for the implementation of the program “Expansion of the HIV/AIDS Prevention System in the Republic of Croatia”, that is to be financed by 4,900,000,00 USD during the following three-year period. Within this program, special projects are directed towards populations at risk such as drug addicts, including prostitutes.

The Croatian National Institute of Public Health is authorized to gather and analyze data related to health indicators sorted by gender.

In 2003 the Commission for Gender Equality conducted in cooperation with the Office for Human Rights and the Colposcopy Society of the Croatian Medical Association the campaign «SAY Yes to KNOWLEDGE», which included a number of lectures across Croatia, the publishing of brochures, T-shirts and other promotional materials that were widely distributed. The campaign was aimed at the early detection of cervical cancer, its prevention and acquainting men and women with the issue of sexually transmitted diseases.

**In the area of violence against women**

The status of women as victims of violence has been improved through the changes and amendments of the Penal Code conducted in 1998, particularly in the segment of protection of women's sexual freedoms by criminalizing marital rape.

The criticism of the expert community and the public pointed to the fact that the 1998 changes had not adequately sanctioned family violence, so considerable changes were introduced by the
Law on the Changes and Amendments to the Penal Code in 2000, additionally supplementing the legal protection of women from family violence.

- The procedure during the prosecution of a perpetrator of the criminal act of family violence was changed so that the state attorney can start the criminal procedure *ex officio*, immediately after concluding that a crime has been committed, instead of prosecuting the perpetrator based on a private act for the retribution of the injured party, that is, the victim of the crime.

- Article 215.a of the Penal Code prescribes three months to three years of imprisonment as punishment for the criminal act of violent behavior in the family.

- Accepting the remarks of nongovernmental organizations, as well as socio-economic realities, the definition of family members in the Republic of Croatia also includes domestic partners living in the same household.

Accepting the new Family Law, the term family violence is mentioned for the first time in the legislation of the Republic of Croatia, through an explicit prohibition of «violent behavior of a marriage partner or any other family member of legal age. »

In 2003, the Law on Protection from Family Violence was adopted, the goal of which is the efficient and permanent protection of persons at risk. It defines the concept of family violence, stipulates protection from family violence, the types and purposes of offenses and penal sanctions, the measures aimed at the protection of the victim from further family violence and the punishments for perpetrators. The Law introduces, along with imprisonment and monetary fines, a number of measures aimed at protecting the victim from further family violence.

Where the problem of trafficking in persons is concerned, Croatia has so far mostly been mentioned as a transit country, but a smaller number of cases concerning Croatia as the destination country or the country of origin has also been observed, totaling 22 cases of trafficking. This data concerns the period between May 2002 and June 2004, when the systematic monitoring of this problem began, with the establishment of the National Committee for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons.

The National Committee members are representatives of all relevant ministries and state administrative agencies, the Croatian Parliament, the State Attorney’s Office, the representatives of nongovernmental organizations and the media. One of the first duties of the National Committee was drafting of the National Plan for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons. The Plan was created in close cooperation with the International Organization for Migrations (IOM), which has, as an active partner of the Croatian Government, organized a number of campaigns aimed at raising public awareness on the phenomenon of trafficking.

Within the implementation of the National Policy for Promotion of Gender Equality, a number of activities have been undertaken aimed at eliminating violence against women.

- In 1998 a comprehensive campaign was initiated, aimed at preventing violence against women, called «Open the Door to the Truth». In 2001 the Commission cooperating with the
Office for Human Rights, conducted a campaign called «Say no to Violence», which was exceptionally successful and highly visible. Part of the financial resources gathered by the campaign was donated to two nongovernmental organizations as aid in equipping shelters for women and children who are victims of violence.

- The Working Group for drafting the National Strategy fighting Violence against Women is currently being formed.

- Since 1998 the Government of the Republic of Croatia has continually provided financial resources for the support of organizations that work in the field of fighting violence against women.

**In the area of women and armed conflict**

At the Fourth World Conference on Women the delegation of the Republic of Croatia especially argued that the practice of systematic rape during armed conflicts be defined as a war crime within the Platform for Action, believing that the systematic practice of rape of the Croatian women during the Homeland War, should have been adequately denounced within the framework of international law and international practice. Rape as a war crime has been instituted by the Penal Act of the Republic of Croatia.

The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Croatia has been authorized to introduce a course on international humanitarian law within the educational programs of military schools, with special emphasis on the prevention of violence against women in armed conflicts and post-conflict period.

- The concept of gender equality was included in the 2002 National Security Strategy. The Defense Act from 2002 established the Gender Equality Board in the Ministry of Defense, with the mission of realizing equal treatment and status and enabling equal approach and opportunities for both genders, employees of Croatian Armed Forces.

- During the early 1990s refugee women and female victims of war were at the center of attention of governmental institutions as well as the nongovernmental organizations dealing with the human rights of women. Different forms of aid were given at the time, ranging from accommodation to medical and psychological assistance, depending on the degree of suffering they were subject to. The Republic of Croatia informed the UN Committee on the Elimination against Women in detail about the female war victims, including female refugees, in its special report dedicated to this issue.

- In February 1998 the Ministry of Development and Reconstruction began to implement the project called «Social and Economic Re-Integration of Women Who Suffered in the Homeland War», with the aim of ensuring the protection of, aid to and training of refugee women. The basic goal of the research was to address the problems of female victims from war, and to recommend modalities of expert assistance in order to accelerate their socio-economic reintegration.
In the area of women at the labor market

The status of women in the labor market is regulated by the Labor Act, whose provisions reflect the high standards of equal opportunities for men and women, in accordance with the guidelines of the European Union.

- The Labor Act provides for the prohibition of discrimination based on gender of persons seeking employment and persons gaining employment. There is also a provision about the obligation of the employer to pay equal wages to men and women for equal labor or labor of equal value.

- Positive measures regarding the protection of motherhood and the rights of both parents related to the nurturing and caretaking of children were implemented through the provisions of the Labor Act. It is also important to mention the affirmation of the institution of paternity leave (the changes and amendments of the Labor Act foresee a two-month prolongation of the maternity leave if the father of the child is to use at least three months of the total parental leave); the provision of basic pension and health insurance based on all types of labor for the duration of maternity, parental and paternity leaves.

The equal treatment of men and women in the labor market depends on the provision of a sufficient number of institutions and services for childcare and care for senior family members. The insufficient development of family and childcare services stems from two basic factors: the financial (public services are expensive) and the value factor (the traditional structure of Croatian society enabled the dependence on the family and its support, especially regarding the care and upbringing of children). As a consequence of this heritage, only about 35% of children aged 3 to 7 attend public preschool educational institutions nowadays. The situation is even less favorable considering children aged 1 to 3, only 15% of which can be accommodated at infant daycares.

During 1996 the new Labor Act came into force defining the special protection of pregnant and nursing women, through the prohibition of their employment in harsh working environments that could endanger their health. The penal provisions of the same Act sanction an employer through a monetary fine if he does not comply with its provisions.

In the area of promoting entrepreneurship of women:

- In 1997 the Croatian Counseling Network (CCN) for Small Enterprises was founded as a contractual network of providers for the professional service of business counseling for male and female small business entrepreneurs, craftsmen/women, cooperative ventures, and small and medium trade merchants. The Croatian Counseling Network co-finances and ensures counseling services to women beginners-in-entrepreneurship directed to the Network by the Croatian Employment Agency.

- In 2003 the Ministry of Crafts and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises developed a special credit line for women and started granting loans to women self-employees.
• The Economic-Social Council adopted a number of measures aimed at improving the position of women in the labor market in 2004.

• Nongovernmental organizations, in cooperation with experts in the area of the economy, continually organize seminars and workshops to encourage female entrepreneurship. There is also the Organization of Women Entrepreneurs in Croatia.

In the area of education

The National Human Rights Education Program was published in 1999 with the financial support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Office in Zagreb, and, along with the publication «Basic International Documents in the Area of Human Rights Education», was disseminated to all educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia, starting with preschool institutions and ending with secondary schools (over 16,000 copies).

• The National program is applied in a cross-curricular manner in the educational system, as a special optional subject in the higher grades of primary (compulsory) school and in secondary schools, through project tutoring, extra-curricular and extra-school activities.

• Since October 1999, the Commission for Equality Issues of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, cooperating with the Center for Women’s Studies, and with the aid of the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Science and Technology and Croatian universities, has organized a number of public lectures and open debates on the inclusion of women in society.

In order to develop adequate educational and informational programs that are to take into consideration the role of language in developing awareness about gender equality, in June 1998 the Ministry of Education and Sport published instructions on gender sensitive use of language in schools in order to stop using terms of masculine gender as general terms for both genders in the school system.

Aiming to eliminate stereotypes in education, the area of gender equality is especially emphasized in the Primary (Compulsory) and Secondary School Textbooks Act. The case was the same in the Textbook Standard adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Croatia.

• In April 2004 the Office for Gender Equality initiated partnership of the nongovernmental sector with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sport in order to undertake activities aimed at the elimination of gender stereotypes from school curricula. It also recommended that female members of nongovernmental organizations be included in authorized committees.

• The nongovernmental organizations conducted a number of themed lectures and workshops on gender equality and the gender sensitive use of language for school employees.
In the area of women and environmental protection:

The National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2001-2005 also contains policies devoted to environmental protection, with the aim of actively including women in the processes of planning, decision-making and implementing the environmental protection and sustainable development programs and programs for ensuring equal management of natural resources. It outlines measures for ensuring the active participation of women in environmental protection actions and the application of the preventative protection principle; the promotion of informing women about environmental pollution and ecological disasters; the insurance of the complete realization of the right of women to a clean and healthy environment, accommodation and community infrastructure and the elimination and prevention of architectural barriers to persons with disabilities, taking into special account the needs of disabled women.

- During 1998 the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Sport published a manual intended for students, teachers and parents, named «A Safe Step and the Right to Air» cooperation with UNICEF, through the project «European Network of Schools Promoting Health», during 1998,

In the areas of women in power and decision-making and women and the media:

In the parliamentary elections held in 1995, the number of female parliamentarians in the House of Representatives of the Croatian Parliament, was 5.7%, and the percentage of women in the Government of the Republic of Croatia was relatively low (for example, of the 17 ministries in 1997, only 5 women obtained ministerial or deputy ministerial posts).

Concerned about such a low percentage of female representation in political life, nongovernmental organizations have started a long campaign for the increase of that figure. Along with organizing different meetings, the Ad Hoc Coalition for the Increase of the Number of Women in the Parliamentary Elections was set up during 1999, under the slogan “Fifty-one percent”. There is an ongoing discussion on the models of increasing the political participation of women in Croatia.

After the 2000 and 2003 elections, there was a considerable increase of the number of female parliamentarians of up to 23%; two women are vice-presidents of Parliament (out of five vice-presidents in total); three are presidents of parliamentary committees (out of 25 committees in total), which makes up 12% of the total number of presidents of the parliamentary committees. In the Government of the Republic of Croatia, there are 28.75% of women in leading positions (one vice-president and one secretary of the Government, four ministers, six state secretaries, 29 assistant ministers and six secretaries of ministries).

The obligation of the media to contribute to the introduction of the gender equality principle is regulated through the Gender Equality Act. The same was done through the inclusion of provisions prohibiting sexual discrimination in the new Media Act, adopted in April 2004.
Part Three: Institutional Development

Important and versatile institutional changes aimed at promoting gender equality and strengthening the position of women have been taking place in Croatia in the observed period of time.

There are several national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality at the state level. The Gender Equality Committee was established by Parliament in 2001, thus strengthening the total mechanisms for the promotion and protection of the human rights of women. The Committee was founded as a generic working body of the Parliament, whose jurisdiction comprises the activities of identification and monitoring of gender equality policy implementation in the legislation of the Republic of Croatia. The Committee encourages the adoption of international legal instruments on gender equality, participates in the drafting of the national legislation and monitors their application as well as the implementation of the National Policy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Croatia. It also establishes measures and activities to improve gender equality; proposes packages of measures to eliminate discrimination between the sexes; promotes equal gender representation in the composition of parliamentary working bodies and delegations; participates in the drafting of documents on the integration activities of the Republic of Croatia through the amendment and adaptation of legislation and executive measures to achieve gender equality according to the standards applied in the legislation and programs of the European Union; prepares draft legislation and other regulations on gender equality; undertakes efforts to introduce the principles of gender equality in education, health-care, public information, social policy, employment, free enterprise, decision-making processes, family relations; encourages cooperation between other bodies and institutions dealing with gender equality in the Republic of Croatia.

In 2001 the Parliament adopted a new strategic plan, that is, the previously mentioned National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality, along with a program of its implementation and recommended measures for the improvement of areas of concern emphasized by the Beijing Platform.

Based on the adoption of the Gender Equality Act in 2003 the Croatian Parliament appointed an Ombudsman for Gender Equality that same year, meant to act independently and autonomously in order to monitor the implementation of the Gender Equality Act and other regulations regarding gender equality, to revise cases of infraction of gender equality and cases of discrimination against individuals or groups, to submit recommendations for initializing the procedure of assessing the constitutionality of a law, or the constitutionality or the legality of other legal acts if he/she estimates that the gender equality principle has been breeched.

Also based on the Gender Equality Act, the Office for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Croatia was established in March 2004, as a central expert body of the Government in charge of the implementation of the Act and the coordination of all the activities aimed at the realization of gender equality. The Office is still in the process of becoming fully operational, but considering its multiple mandates and portfolios foreseen by legislative provisions, insufficient staffing and financial resources of the Office will need strengthening.
The Office recommends to the Government of the Republic of Croatia and to other state institutions the adoption or change of legislation and other regulations, as well as the adoption of other measures; it drafts the national policy for gender equality and monitors its implementation; conducts research, produces analysis and reports on the implementation of the national policy to the Government of the Republic of Croatia; follows the harmonization and implementation of the law and other regulations concerning gender equality with the international documents; prepares national reports on the fulfillment of international obligations in the area of gender equality, cooperates with nongovernmental organizations active in the field of gender equality and provides partial financing for their projects or activities; promotes knowledge and awareness of gender equality and receives protests (complaints) of parties about the breeching of provisions of the Gender Equality Act or other regulations.

All the ministries and other state administrative bodies are to cooperate with the Office regarding the implementation of the Gender Equality Act and to specify an official who will perform the job of a gender equality coordinator. All the ministries have appointed the gender equality coordinators and have begun the process of defining the manner of concrete cooperation with the Office regarding the implementation of the Act and the introduction of the gender equality principle into different segments of national policy. The Office has set up cooperation with other state organizations such as the State inspectorate, the Central Bureau of Statistics, the State Employment Office and others. The policy of the Office is based on close cooperation and openness toward the nongovernmental women's sector via common meeting sessions and participation on certain projects, as well as on cooperation with other nongovernmental organizations.

Aside from the mentioned institutions in the areas of general human rights, there is a certain number of other structures, including the Parliamentary Committee on Human and National Minority Rights of the Republic of Croatia, the Coordination for Social Activities and Human Rights and the Office for Human Rights of the Government of the Republic of Croatia.

The process of constituting and full functioning of the county and municipal committees for gender equality has not yet been consolidated at the local level. These mechanisms were foreseen by the national plan for the promotion of gender equality and, in that regard, Croatia, considering the spatial distribution records significant differences. In less than half of the cases (of the total of 21 counties) the mentioned committees are active, and only a small number of them are extremely active. One of the most important goals of the Office will be:

a) The constitution of committees in all Croatian counties;

b) Encouraging more efficient work of the existing committees and

c) Constituting a network and coordination of activities between the national and the local/regional levels.

At that, it is important to familiarize and inform local officials about the basic documents, legal provisions and other regulations dealing with the issue of gender equality considering the fact that there is still little progress in this area.

The political will for the introduction of the equality principle into all aspects of the national policy has been expressed in the National Policy for Gender Equality, and directly in the Gender
Equality Act. Gender mainstreaming was introduced as a legal obligation, stating that all state bodies and legal authorities with public jurisdiction must implement the special measures and adopt action plans for the improvement of gender equality. The Gender Equality Act also states that all other laws and regulations are to be harmonized with its provisions. Special chapters of the Act regulate the issues of discrimination in the areas of employment and labor, education, political parties, the media and the statistical data.

The statistical data in the Republic of Croatia are mostly, but not completely, sorted by gender. Most of the data is gathered by the State Bureau of Statistics, and concerns education, population, the justice system and the administration, and the issues of labor and employment. Part of the statistical data sorted by gender can be found in the State Employment Service, the Croatian National Institute of Public Health, the Croatian Institute for Retirement Insurance, as well as some of the ministries and other state administrative organizations.

The Gender Equality Act foresees that all statistical data and information gathered, evidenced and analyzed in the state bodies at all levels, in the public services and institutions are to be registered by gender. The Office for Gender Equality will ensure the dissemination of this information to the public by publishing documentation.

The basic difficulty is the different methodology of institutions in charge of gathering and analyzing data, which often hampers their comparative presentation and analysis. The aim of the Office for Gender Equality is to provide a unified methodology for all statistical data gathering and publishing. The existing statistical data is invariably used in policy areas such as the planning of increase of political participation of women, labor and employment, education and other areas.

There are discussions in the Parliament about the position of women during the harmonization and adoption of various legal proposals. There is a developed and influential nongovernmental sector in Croatia, included in the monitoring of the Fourth World Conference on Women at different levels.

The existing institutional framework needs further development, in order to realize an efficient implementation of the legislature and to realize the foreseen elements of the national plan for the promotion of gender equality.
Part Four: Main challenges and actions to address them

In the aim of full implementation of the Platform for Action and the Outcome of the Twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and considering the fact that the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality is in force until the end of 2005, the Office for Gender Equality will in 2005 begin drafting the new, third, national policy for promoting gender equality; it will include the representatives of nongovernmental women’s organizations in its drafting and lead a wide public discussion.

The goal of the new National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality, acknowledging the positive examples from the two previous national policies, and having in mind their shortcomings, especially the difficulties in the implementation of certain measures, will be the definition of several areas of concern, directed toward the concretization of basic national priorities in the area of gender equality.

Based on the public discussions conducted so far, the following most important goals have been identified:

1. Introduction of gender sensitive education into the curricula, which will be attempted through changes in the textbooks and curricula on all educational levels, through inclusion of experts in the committees for curricula development, through the education of training and teaching staff, as well as through the support of gender-oriented research and women’s studies, and through action directed toward a greater informatics and computer literacy of women.

2. The increase of the participation of women in the political decision-making process in the Croatian Parliament, the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the executive bodies of the local and regional authorities, the increase of the number of women in the executive boards and supervising boards of the public sector, the changes of the electoral system, and the complete statistical monitoring of the political participation of women. The Office for Gender Equality will draft a strategy and start a campaign for the greater inclusion of women into politics regarding the fact that local elections will be conducted in May 2005. In doing so, it will cooperate with other institutions for the promotion of gender equality and the women’s network.

3. The improvement of the position of women in the labor market, including the economic empowerment of women and the decrease of the level of unemployment, the increase of the share of women entrepreneurs, the drafting of a program aimed at economic empowerment of single mothers and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in the labor market, all of which is to be achieved through a consistent implementation of the Labor Act and the Gender Equality Act. Based on the conclusions of the Economic-social Council, the Office will conduct two projects in the mentioned area in cooperation with other state institutions, labor unions and the employers’ association.

4. The prevention of all forms of violence against women is one of the priorities where activity will be directed toward the change and adoption of new penal legislature and the improvement of penal procedure protecting the victims of violence and trafficking, the
education of authorized bodies and services, the increase in the number of shelters and the provision of free legal aid, as well as the adoption of the National Strategy for Fighting Violence Against Women.

5. The improvement of the statistical data gathering, including the systematic monitoring in the areas of social security and labor market and the periodical publication of statistical data sorted by gender. The Office has in that regard, set up cooperation with the Central Bureau of Statistics.

6. The strengthening of media support for gender equality through the monitoring of the Media act and through media content analysis, the increase of the number of gender-sensitive programs on public television and in the total media space and the constitution of a yearly award for work in the media.

7. The reconciliation of private and professional work, especially taking into account the increased number of preschool institutions and other public services, adjusting the working hours of the educational institutions to the working hours of the parents, the increase of the number of men using parental leave, and especially taking into account the systematic research of unpaid leave.

8. The strengthening of institutional mechanisms both on the national and the local level is a permanent mission in the promotion of gender equality policy.

The Office for Gender Equality will direct its activities toward the encouragement for constitution of committees on the local levels (counties, towns, and municipalities), their strengthening and mutual coordination, as well as the strengthening of the existing committees, that is, of a more efficient manner for solving gender equality problems in local communities.

The goal of the Office in the coming years is to ensure a more efficient cooperation with the nongovernmental sector, providing partial financial support for nongovernmental projects and programs, and the common implementation of all of them.

Special attention needs to be dedicated to the improvement of the position of female national minority members, and there is a plan to draft an action program in this area, with condition and trend analysis, in cooperation with minority organizations and the Office for National Minorities.

The public activity and promotion of awareness about gender equality is a permanent mission of all institutional focal points. Along with publishing and dissemination activities, the holding of a number of seminars, conferences and workshops at different state and local levels, with different nongovernmental organizations and civil society partnerships, is the plan for future action.