

FRANCE

FOREWORD

This paper contains the responses of France to the Questionnaire on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome documents of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly ("Beijing + 5").

Consistent with the methodological notes accompanying the questionnaire, this paper presents:

- The broad lines of French policy for equality between women and men.
- Measures taken, progress achieved, and obstacles to be addressed in the critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform.
- Institutional mechanisms adopted for promoting women's rights and gender equality.
- Remaining challenges and the measures planned by the government to address them.

These points relate primarily to the most recent period. Further information on implementation of the Beijing platform of action to the year 2002 can be found in:

- The paper presenting the national programme of action for applying the recommendations of the Beijing conference, presented by France in March 1997.
- The report on France's implementation of the recommendations in the programme of action from the fourth Beijing conference ("Beijing + 5") prepared in October 1999.
- The fifth French report on application of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), presented in April 2002.

Part one. Overview of achievements and challenges
(Gender equality policy)

RESPONSE:

Since her appointment to the government in June 2002, the Minister Delegate for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has brought a new and dynamic approach to the promotion of equality between women and men in France.

This new approach has three main features, consistent with a three-pronged methodological initiative, and is being applied in four broad fields of action.

I. Three main features of the new approach

1. Thinking positively

The first concern is to address the question of the equality of treatment between men and women from a positive angle that will release women's energies and talents, which are so important not only for the performance of the nation as a whole but as factors for social equity and strengthening democracy.

2. Social dialogue

The second concern is to bring this question into the social dialogue itself, so that management and labour can come to grips with the question of equality and make it a priority in their negotiations on employment and the organization of work.

3. Recognizing the subnational dimension

The third concern is to take the concept of equality down to the local and regional levels, where it must be introduced in each employment pool and adopted by all stakeholders.

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTION:

1. An integrated and comprehensive approach:

It is clear that the various issues must be addressed together, because any action in one field will almost automatically impact on the other fields. Thus, simultaneous progress must be made in the field of promoting parity and women's access to positions of responsibility, the field of occupational equality, the field of women's rights and respect for human dignity, including the issue of violence, and the field of reconciling family and working life and schedules.

2. An approach that involves multiple ministries and partners

The approach must lead gradually to the building of new relationships between the ministry responsible for women's rights and all government departments and agencies concerned.

3. A multiyear approach:

Only multiyear commitments are likely to succeed, recognizing that the integrated approach to equality will require our partners to equip themselves with the methodological tools for promoting equality: preparing gender-specific data, impact studies, awareness campaigns, and networking among stakeholders.

III. THE FIELDS OF ACTION

1. Parity and access for women to positions of responsibility in political, economic and social life.

2. Employment equity

This objective requires action in several fields:

- Initial training.
- Women's transition into the workforce.
- Career development in businesses.
- Combating discrimination and sexual harassment.
- Entrepreneurship.

3. Women's rights and respect for human dignity

This involves actions targeted at:

- Providing information on contraception and voluntary interruption of pregnancy.
- Combating violence against women.
- Combating trafficking and prostitution.
- Amending family law.
- The portrayal of women in the media.

4. Reconciling family and working life

Steps are being taken in three directions:

- Daycare facilities for young children and elderly dependents.
- Adaptation of working time in businesses.
- Social activities, including opportunities for recreation and culture.

This policy is fully consistent with the international framework for promoting gender equality. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has applied in France since 1984. The concern to move forward in giving concrete expression to this instrument has also guided the French authorities in their action. Several recent laws have been designed to respond more effectively to the requirements of the

Convention: for example, the law of 6 June 2000 to promote equal access for women and men to elected mandates and elective positions, the law of 9 May 2001 on occupational equality between women and men, the law of 16 November 2001 on combating discrimination, and the laws of 4 March 2002 on parental authority and family name.

Second part:

Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (10 p)

(Actions taken and results in each field, obstacles in each field, lessons learned in each field)

RESPONSE:

A. WOMEN AND POVERTY

French society is passing through a critical period of change and uncertainty that has resulted in the phenomenon of exclusion. No social class is immune from this phenomenon. One of the principal causes of exclusion, beyond economic factors, is to be found in the weakening of social, family, cultural and religious bonds that has brought with it less sharing, more egoism, and more isolation. Efforts to overcome exclusion must be constantly adjusted to reflect tendencies among the various target groups. Thus, until the last few years the specific needs of excluded women were not sufficiently taken into account. A thorough and critical review of all "social emergency" provisions in 2003 revealed the need to adapt in order to deal with new issues: violence, alcoholism, and mental illness, and to address new population groups: asylum-seekers, homeless youth, single women, victims or not of violence. A statistical study by *Samu Social* of Paris surveyed the alarming increase in the number of young women who had called the "115" hotline¹: up by more than 60% in four years. The Catholic aid agency *Secours Catholique*, in its latest annual report, stresses the growing insecurity of single-parent families, which are increasingly numerous. According to the last survey by IINSEE², 28.9% of persons sheltered or monitored by the association are single parents, and most of them are single mothers. Many of these women have experienced violence in the course of their life and are at risk of further violence from living in the street.

On 19 March 2003, a national plan to reinforce the campaign against insecurity and exclusion (PNRLE) was presented to the Council of Ministers. This 41-step plan is based anti-exclusion law voted by Parliament in 1998. It is intended to rally all the ministries concerned around the following objectives:

- Giving effect to civil rights and citizenship, by simplifying administrative procedures, improving the ability of social establishments to provide assistance to people in difficulty, and encouraging users to voice their opinions and participate in the life of the establishment.
- Improving access to care, with an emphasis on helping the mentally ill.
- Upgrading and expanding access to housing.
- Improving shelter and social reintegration facilities.
- Responding more effectively to the needs of the most vulnerable groups, by combating illiteracy and malnutrition and providing better access to electricity and telephone services, etc.

¹ A free help number for the homeless.

² National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies.

The President of the Republic has asked the government to undertake a thorough review of the 1998 law on exclusion, with a particular focus on basic human rights. This review will be conducted primarily at the local level by means of public forums involving all players in the fight against exclusion, including the victims themselves. This work will be wrapped up in June 2004 at a national conference on exclusion, which will be asked to propose measures to the government. The Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace will participate actively in this work to ensure that women's needs are fully taken into account.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

With the evolution of society and compulsory coeducational schooling, all fields of study and nearly all occupational areas are now open to girls. Girls perform better than boys at every level of school. Girls are in the majority among baccalaureate candidates and holders: at the 2002 baccalaureate examinations, the success rate for girls was 81%, and 75.8% for boys.

Yet girls' undeniable scholastic success, which often exceeds that of boys, has failed to translate into equal access to the labour market. The range of careers that women are likely to choose is still insufficiently diversified, and reveals the prejudices and stereotypes that still persist in society and in the education system. Girls are still reluctant to commit themselves to the longer, more selective training programmes that are most highly prized in the labour market: while girls account for the majority (58% in 2002) of university entrants, the trend is the reverse when it comes to post-graduate studies and the *grandes écoles* (the specialized professional schools). Of the 26,000 engineering degrees awarded in 2001, only 6,000 went to women.

There is clear evidence that women are now entering into professions that were formerly reserved to men, such as the police, the firefighting corps, or the building trades, where their skills and abilities are quickly recognized. Yet despite this progress, there is a long way to go before true occupational equality is achieved.

France has therefore committed itself to an overall policy of equal opportunity, from kindergarten to higher education, and continuing through lifelong learning. An interministerial initiative launched under the framework agreement of 25 February 2000 was expanded in March 2002 to other ministries and extended until 2006. That agreement has three objectives:

- To improve educational and vocational guidance for girls and boys and to find ways of matching initial training with job prospects.
- To promote education founded on mutual respect between the sexes.
- To strengthen tools for promoting equality and training.

A midterm assessment of efforts under the framework agreement will be made in 2004, when all the signatory ministries will come together to take stock and to plan labour market initiatives for coming years that will take account of the concerns of the new partners. The goal will be to build a common culture of equality and to promote effective partnership between all parties to the agreement.

At the initiative of the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace, the Ministry of National Education is conducting regional experiments for diversifying women's occupational opportunities and their fields of study, in cooperation with the regional authorities.

Finally, in 2003 a five-year cooperation agreement was concluded between the Ministry for Parity and Equality in the Workplace, the Ministry of Research and New Technologies, and the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), to advance the place of women in the scientific world.

C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

Currently, 80% of French women of childbearing age say they use some form of contraception. Yet the number of voluntary pregnancy terminations has remained stable for nearly 20 years at around 220,000 annually. The current situation reveals that there are a great number of teenage pregnancies (3000 to 4000 a year among girls under 16 years of age) and of pre-adult abortions (700 to 1000 per year), and that at the same time young people are inadequately prepared for a sexual and emotional life that respects the other person's body.

In light of these concerns, the authorities have launched a determined policy for contraception and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, through nationwide information campaigns with active local participation (in 2000 and in 2001) and through the law of 4 July 2001 on voluntary interruption of pregnancy and contraception, which provides for compulsory sexual information and education sessions in the lower schools, high schools and colleges, as well as in facilities for the handicapped. That law also expands the possibilities of resorting to abortion.

To ensure that the recognized right to practice birth-control is not called into question and that all women can enjoy that right, it is important to pursue and monitor closely the implementation of legislative and regulatory provisions. Efforts to promote "education for life" must also be maintained and stepped up, in light of the apparently deteriorating relationships between girls and boys in tension-prone urban areas.

The rise in the number of births in 2001 was the highest that France had seen for 20 years, with a sharp increase in multiple births and premature births (56,000 in 2001 versus 44,000 in 2000). While maternal, perinatal and infant mortality as a whole has declined substantially, the rate of maternal mortality has remained constant for 10 years at around 10 deaths per 100,000 births. Experts estimate that 30% of these deaths could be prevented by proper care. The perinatal mortality rate (children stillborn or dead before seven days) stood at 640 per 100,000 births in 1999. Moreover, the need for restructuring, the demographic situation of the various health professions, the organization of perinatal services, and the implementation of the reduced working time rules have worsened professional working conditions and created difficulties and dissatisfaction among users.

It is in this context that the Minister of Health appointed two medical professors to undertake a study of perinatal services in our country. Their report, submitted to the minister in September 2003, proposed a "new perinatal policy" based on "differentiated care" for high-risk and low-risk pregnancies and childbirths, with the essential objective of guaranteeing medical, social and

emotional security for pregnant women and their child, improving the working conditions for health professionals, and maintaining diversity in the supply of care facilities.

Faced with the statistics that demonstrate a sharp increase in female smokers, the authorities are attempting to sensitize women (particularly pregnant women and girls) to the evils of tobacco. The high and growing number of women infected by HIV/AIDS demands an effective policy of prevention and therapeutic care. While aging may be a natural process, the life expectancy of French women is rising steadily and thanks to their longevity women now represent a majority of the elderly population. Health measures relating to prevention, treatment and support will be needed to improve their quality of life and their independence, in light of medical and technological progress. When it comes to mental health, the number of female suicides is on the increase. This trend testifies to the failure to identify and provide attention for women suffering mental disorders.

In light of these findings, the Public Health Policy bill now before Parliament marks an important shift in the concept of public health by introducing a gender-specific approach to pathologies and their treatment. One of the nine principles set forth for defining objectives and for preparing and implementing public-health strategies is the principle of parity, presented as "the principle according to which the definition of objectives in the preparation of strategies must systematically take into account the specific health needs of men and women". This declaration is clearly in line with the integrated approach to gender equality. The Ministry for Parity and Equality in the Workplace is following very closely the parliamentary debate on this bill, to ensure that the final wording of the act will take women's health needs into account.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The authorities have taken vigorous steps in recent years to prevent and combat violence against women. The plan of action implemented in 2001 helped to break the social taboo surrounding the subject, and led to the improvement of prevention and care services for victims of violence. Yet the activism on the part of girls and women living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods has recently been drawing public attention to the degrading acts of which many have been victims, the deterioration of relationships between girls and boys, and the denial of women's rights in low-income districts of the major cities.

Since her appointment to the government, the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has denounced as intolerable the continuing acts of public and private violence against women. At the Council of Ministers of 21 January 2003, she presented proposals for combating these unacceptable manifestations of persistent inequality on all fronts: conjugal and family violence, sexist discrimination, violence against immigrant girls and women, trafficking and exploitation of prostitution, violence in the workplace (sexual or moral harassment, as well as various forms of modern-day slavery, "sweatshops" and domestic servitude). In addition to enforcing fully and perhaps strengthening criminal penalties and providing assistance and peer support for victims, the policy that she intends to implement will promote individual and collective responsibility.

Since 1994, the criminal code has recognized conjugal violence as especially serious. The penalties for rape that were introduced by the law of 23 December 1980 were considerably

stiffened by the new 1994 criminal code, from 10 years' to 15 years' imprisonment. In addition, the criminal chamber of the *Cour de Cassation* (High Court of Appeals) has on two occasions recognized the existence of marital rape.

Recent laws have reinforced victims' rights to counselling, shelter and protection at police stations and in the course of judicial proceedings. In addition to the initiative taken by the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace, new provisions are planned to protect a battered spouse and to respond to emergency situations. The draft divorce act would allow such victims, even before any divorce proceedings are launched, to apply to the Family Court to order separate domicile, and specifically to remove the offending partner from the conjugal home.

Finally, provisions have been made to help victims recover their independence:

- The provisions governing housing access and assistance now take account of the situation of women in difficulty, and specifically victims of violence: while young women and single women with no money or family support are often taken in, together with any young children, by community homes for mothers or at shelter and social reintegration centres, many situations ought to be dealt with under the ordinary legal right to housing. In this respect, it is up to the prefects to see that priority is given to the specific needs of women victims of violence in all social housing arrangements.
- Sensitizing the medical profession to the need to identify and give attention to women victims of violence: while efforts have been made to encourage physicians and healthcare professionals to identify and give attention to women victims of violence and to involve the medical profession in combating violence against women, there is still much to be done in this field.
- Stressing rehabilitation and the return to independence for victims, in addition to defending and recognizing their rights.

National and local associations, with the support of the authorities, are now grappling with the problem of addressing the difficulties faced by women victims of violence in a comprehensive manner.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

France is actively involved in work on this subject within international bodies and regional organizations.

As a permanent member of the Security Council, it supported adoption of Resolution 1325 on "women, peace and security". During public debate in the Security Council on October 2003, on the occasion of the third anniversary of that resolution, France stressed the prevention of violence, especially violence affecting young girls; combating impunity; and involving women in the peace process and in post-conflict social reconstruction. France has also supported resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women,

and the Commission on Human Rights, to prevent and combat violence against women, particularly in situations of armed conflict.

As a member State of the Council of Europe, France took part in the European ministerial conference on gender equality that was held in January 2003 in Skopje (in the former Federal Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and also in the negotiation and adoption of the resolution on "the role of women and men in preventing conflicts, in consolidating the peace, and in post-conflict democratic processes" that was issued by that conference.

As part of its bilateral cooperation with countries experiencing conflict, France has also attempted to support their efforts to promote respect for women's fundamental rights.

F. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Despite significant progress in national and European law towards the recognition of equal rights for women and men, flagrant inequities still persist in employment practices. To combat these inequities, all socioeconomic stakeholders will have to be brought to recognize women's skills and abilities and to encourage their initiatives.

While women accounted for one-third of the working population in France in the 1960s, that proportion was 46.1% in 2003. Today, more than 80% of French women between the ages of 20 and 50 years are actively involved in the country's economic life. Moreover, women are now pursuing their careers almost without interruption: most of them lead both a working and a family life. Yet this social change has allowed inequalities to persist: women accounted for 48.5% of the unemployed in July 2003, whereas they are only 46.1% of the workforce. A gender analysis of vocational careers shows that having the same diploma does not guarantee the same success: a young man with a baccalaureate will have a 17% chance, after 10 years' experience, of holding a management position, while the prospect for a girl with the same credentials is only 8%. Similarly, while pay differences between men and women average about 25%, the gap appears to be irreducible below 11%. Finally, while increasing numbers of women are entering the more prestigious professions, most women work as salaried employees, and account for 80% of employment at this level. This means that women are frequently employed in unskilled jobs (as secretaries, mothers' helpers, office workers) and face job insecurity, compounded by the trend to part-time work: women account for 80% of those earning less than the SMIC (the French minimum wage).

In light of the situation, the authorities and social and economic partners are working in the following directions:

Combating unemployment and facilitating women's access to permanent and high-quality jobs : a deliberate policy has been adopted, involving the following actions:

- In 2004 a target was set to reduce the level of long-term unemployment among women by 5%.
- The mixed workforce is being encouraged in businesses: economic and social partners are being urged to facilitate access and promotion for women in those sectors and jobs

where they are underrepresented (and in particular where there are recruitment difficulties), and at the same time to facilitate entry and promotion for men in traditionally feminine occupations (childcare and assistance for the elderly, for example).

Combating discrimination: employment discrimination between men and women has been the subject of several European union directives which France, as a member State, is required to transpose into domestic law. Those directives (the most recent dating from 2002) define both direct discrimination ("where one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is, has been, or would be treated in a comparable situation"), and indirect discrimination ("where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of one sex at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim, and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary"). This approach can be used to verify the proportion of women affected by discriminatory rules or practice, in comparison with a group of men under similar circumstances. It is also easier to identify disguised discrimination that may result from the application of neutral criteria, without any deliberate intent on the part of the employer, but resulting in implicitly discriminatory practices. This is the case with wage discrimination: in France, the overall pay gap between women and men is around 25%. This gap can be explained in part by the concentration of women in certain sectors and job categories, and by the effect of part-time work, which is performed mostly by women. Yet an unexplained and irreducible gap (7 to 11%) remains, and may reflect discriminatory practices. The 2002 European directive also deals with moral or sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. European law has also reversed the burden of proof in favour of persons claiming pay discrimination.

In France, the law of 16 November 2001 on discrimination prohibits direct and indirect discrimination at hiring and throughout the employee's working career. It also reverses the burden of proof to the benefit of the employee who claims to be the victim of direct or indirect discrimination. The law of 17 January 2002, the "Social Modernization Act", also prohibits direct and indirect discriminatory measures against victims or witnesses of sexual harassment from a colleague or a superior. It applies the same burden-of-proof rules as in cases of discrimination.

Within this framework of French and European law, the authorities are seeking to identify situations of discrimination, to sensitize and train institutional and economic players to combat discrimination, to promote positive action such as occupational equality contracts between the social partners in the various professions and industries, and to help enforce personal and social rights for first- or subsequent-generation women immigrants, who are often exposed to dual discrimination because of their sex and their origin.

Ensuring employment equality between women and men in businesses. To this end, the government has fostered social dialogue, and in December 2002 it organized a roundtable where worker and employer representatives agreed on the need to open negotiations on this issue, including matters relating to career progress. In this context, the social partners undertook in June 2003 to negotiate an inter-occupational agreement on employment equality. Annual wage negotiations are now being used to improve the position of working women in the various

occupational categories. As well, negotiations on vocational training can encourage the advancement of women. Consequently, efforts will have to be focused on:

- Advancing occupational equality in all branches of economic activity and within companies.
- Reducing pay gaps.
- Vocational mobility.
- Provisions do help women re-enter the workforce after a period of family leave.

As of next spring, companies will be able to exhibit a special "equality label" to show that they are committed to a new management approach, to the advancement of women, to recognizing their skills, and to making allowance for parenthood. A good-practices guide will be published to help companies implement this approach. The objective is to make social and economic partners more aware of the need to promote mixed employment and occupational equality, as factors for social integration, sound performance, and economic growth.

Promoting female entrepreneurs. The number of female entrepreneurs in France rose by 81% between 1988 and 1998 (to 570,000, or 27% of all heads of enterprises). Yet the resource represented by female entrepreneurship is far from being adequately valued and developed. To allow women to participate fully in achieving the Prime Minister's objective of creating a million new enterprises in five years, the ministries concerned are working to sensitize and enlist the cooperation of all players involved in the creation, takeover or relaunching of enterprises. These efforts focus on:

- Fostering recognition for the spirit of enterprise in the context of initial training.
- Information and coaching (in legal, economic, financial and taxation issues) for women in how to create a business, using local mentoring networks.
- Strengthening women's access to financing, especially from the banks.

The Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has sought to implement individualized coaching for girls in problem urban zones who want to create or take over a business.

The "Chrysalis" programme has been introduced for this purpose, with technical support from the Agency for Enterprise Creation (APCE). The intent is to facilitate access for would-be female entrepreneurs to the measures and institutions available under ordinary law for creating a business, and to give them the possibility of finding an established entrepreneur (male or female) as their coach or mentor.

G. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

a) Political life. France has chosen to promote parity in elected bodies: the principle of equal access for women and men to elected mandates and elective functions was written into the Constitution in June 2000, and several laws have been adopted to give effect to that principle:

The law of 6 June 2000 provides for different rules for ballots using the two-round list system and those using the single round system: in the first case, parity is required (i.e. 50% of

candidates of each sex), while in the second, which concerns only legislative elections, the law imposes a financial penalty on parties and political groups that fail to come within 2% of the 50% gender balance rule.

The laws of 11 April and 30 July 2003 reinforced the principle of alternation between candidates of the two sexes for the European elections, applying it to regional ballots and confirming it for Senatorial elections. The political parties still have the key role, however.

Real progress has been made in implementing the law of 6 June 2000. In the municipal councils of communes with 3500 inhabitants or more, which are elected by proportional representation, the proportion of women nearly doubled after the March 2001 elections, from an average of 25% to 47%. However, the number of women elected as mayors in these communes remains very low (171, or 6.6% of mayors of communes with more than 3500 inhabitants, versus 4.95% in 1995, for an increase of 1.65 percentage points). Since September 2001, the Senate has had 35 female members (10.9%), compared with 5.9% in 1998.

On the other hand, at the time of the legislative elections in June 2002, although the law sets financial penalties for political parties and groups that fail to come within 2% of the 50% gender balance rule, only 38% of candidates were women (versus 22% in 1997). The new Assembly has only 71 female members, or 12.31%. Women are scarcely more numerous than they were in the previous legislature of 1997, where they held 63 seats, or 10.9% of the total.

Overall, these outcomes still fall short of the democratic parity ideal, and further measures are needed, beyond legislative provisions, to improve women's representation in all elected bodies, whatever the election mode, and in elective functions. The authorities are giving thought to the following issues: the holding of multiple electoral mandates, which in effect limits the number of available positions, and reconciling the time demands of elected office with those of other activities (occupational, family, personal).

b) Economic life. In 2003, women accounted for 46.1% of the economically active population in France, but they represented only 7% of management positions in the 5000 biggest companies, and only 5% of the members of the boards of directors of large French concerns were women. Some companies are making it a priority of their management strategy to appoint women to management positions. They are convinced that this will strengthen corporate management and the organization of work. Yet such "innovative" businesses are few in number. The authorities are therefore seeking to encourage and draw attention to the leaders in this regard so that others will follow their example. Labour unions have also committed themselves firmly to the advancement of women within their organizations, recognizing that greater involvement by women in the social dialogue will strengthen certain aspects of negotiations (for example, on reconciling working and family life).

c) The civil service. While women account for an overall majority of French public servants, they hold few of the senior positions. At the end of 2001, women accounted for nine out of 117 prefects, 18 out of 179 ambassadors, seven out of 110 paymasters general, and 168 out of 1857 department heads at the regional and *département* levels.

In light of these findings, all ministries have been developing multiyear plans for improving women's access to senior jobs and positions since 2000. Those plans establish three- to five-year targets for women in each category of employment at the middle and senior management levels. Some of those plans are to be renewed during the course of 2004, and the ensuing negotiations with management will give a "second wind" to this initiative. The responsible officers in each ministry constitute a network that promotes the exchange of experience and good practice in managing equality.

The law of 9 May 2001 on employment equity between women and men now guarantees balanced representation of women and men on civil service election and promotion juries as well as among government appointees to advisory bodies.

A comparative report on general employment and training conditions for women and men in the public service is submitted every two years to members of Parliament.

In March 2003, a working group reporting to the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace submitted proposals on four issues: improving awareness of inequalities, reorganizing work schedules, revising recruitment channels and conditions, and influencing career development.

These steps are intended to modify practices among human resource managers, and indeed progress has already been made in terms of equality between men and women in the civil service.

The President of the Republic has called for "a profound change of mentalities" to combat discrimination against women in the conditions of employment, and on 29 October 2003 declared in the Council of Ministers that the public service should set an example for occupational equality. He asked the government to adopt numerical targets for achieving equality that can be monitored and the results published. Those responsible for gender equity policy in the public service thus have an even stronger mandate to pursue their efforts.

d) Voluntary bodies and associations. A survey on "*La Vie Associative*" by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies shows that in 2002, 45% of French people age 15 and over (or more than 21 million individuals) were members of an association. Overall, men are more likely than women to join associations (49% versus 40%). Women tend to participate more in parent-teacher associations and religious associations, while men are drawn more heavily to sporting or occupation-related (e.g. company retirees) groups. Men represent 60% of the leadership of associations, including those where females form the majority of the membership, with the exception of parent-teacher associations. With respect to paid employees of associations, women represent the majority, but they are usually engaged only part-time and in unskilled jobs.

There are already a few provisions in place, of an incentive nature consistent with the organizational freedom of associations. The "charter of reciprocal commitments" between the State and associations that are members of the Permanent Conference of Community Associations (CPCA), signed on 1 July 2001, calls in its basic principles for improving the

balance between women and men in positions of responsibility. In the same spirit, a circular from the Prime Minister dated 1 December 2000 commits government departments to engage in dialogue with the associations to encourage them to set an example in implementing equal responsibilities for women and men.

I. THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

France is developing policies to guarantee and promote respect for women's rights, which our country regards as an integral part of human rights. These policies are being implemented through partnerships between the authorities and associations. This is the case, for example, with the network of 120 Women's Rights Information Centres (CIDF), which with their local units represent 688 information centres designed to highlight the role of women in society and to promote their independence in the legal, vocational, economic, social and family spheres. The network is coordinated by a national information and documentation centre on women and families (CNIDFF)

France is also engaged, side-by-side with its partners in the European Union, in the struggle for the respect of women's rights, to ensure that equality between women and men remains a fundamental value and an essential objective of the Union. It does the same within the United Nations. For example, France participates in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women. As a State party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), France was also examined on 3 July 2003 by the committee of experts on its implementation of the convention. The committee's recommendations from that review are being taken by the government as a guide to action.

J. WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

For some years, media advertising has represented women in ways that many view as humiliating and degrading and as even undermining human rights, when such portrayals spark violence against women or discrimination on the basis of sex. The stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes that are reproduced and repeated in this way essentially reflect ignorance or the thoughtless (and sometimes deliberate) expression of outdated patriarchal notions. The publicizing of such portrayals undermines efforts to promote effective gender equality.

The authorities who work closely with community associations to prevent and treat violence against women have undertaken a review of aberrant advertisements that feature the exclusion or domination of women.

On the basis of that review, the French advertising industry's self-regulating body, the BVP (Advertising Standards Office) has issued a new recommendation on "portrayal of the human being", based on the principle that "advertising should not be demeaning and should avoid any abusive exploitation of human beings and their image". The specific text declares that "advertising must not reduce the human being, and in particular the woman, to the function of an object", and that "advertising must avoid inducing the idea of submission or dependence, demeaning the human being and in particular women".

The BVP recently issued an assessment of these new ethical rules in practice. The few instances of lapses found in that study were quantitatively insignificant: of 15,047 advertisements published nationwide by the press and on billboards from January to May 2003, only 43 (or 0.29%) contained images inconsistent with the recommendation on "portrayal of the human being". This positive picture must however be tempered by the realization that, on one hand, the negative impact of even a few inappropriate visuals cannot be overlooked, while on the other hand two-thirds of the lapses identified concerned the portrayal of women. Finally, none of the advertisements identified as nonconforming was submitted to the BVP for advice before publication (planned advertisements are not systematically submitted to the BVP). It is nonetheless true that the advertising industry is making a willing effort at progress.

Determined to enlist civil society's collective awareness and to stimulate public debate, the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has been working with the BVP and the advertising posters and films industry to come up with ways to combat the publication of images that offend against human dignity, and particularly against women. Without excluding the possibility of amending the law of 29 July 1881 on freedom of the press to ban discrimination by reason of sex or sexual orientation, everyone is agreed that self-regulation and self-discipline must be reinforced.

K. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The role of women in resource management and in preservation of the natural environment is today recognized. Yet their participation in decision-making in these areas is not sufficiently appreciated and encouraged. The commitments made at the Johannesburg Summit on sustainable development called upon everyone to pursue efforts in this direction. In France, these commitments have led to adoption of a national strategy under which any government action will now be examined from three angles: economic, social and environmental, and sustainable development. The programme of action to implement the strategy includes the need to promote equality between women and men and to encourage women's participation in sustainable development, recognizing that "discrimination between women and men is the very negation of many of the values of sustainable development". These principles are recalled in different segments of the programme, in particular those relating to health and social issues, in the section on government operations, and in the chapter on international action by France on behalf of sustainable development.

L THE GIRL CHILD

The criminal code punishes assault that involves mutilation. If the victim is a child under 15 years, the maximum penalty is raised to 15 years imprisonment, or to 20 years when the assault is committed by parents or grandparents. Publicity about the trials of excision practitioners and conspiring parents have created greater awareness among physicians and society at large, as well as the families concerned, of the need to put an end to these practices.

By way of prevention, the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace will shortly publish an updated version of the 1989 information brochure on the subject. Entitled "Let's save our girls from excision", it defines female genital mutilation, its causes and its consequences, and recalls

the terms of the international conventions, of French law, and of the legislation adopted by many African countries, as well as the steps to be taken when girls are threatened with excision in France or abroad. In addition, the minister has established a partnership on this question with organizations working with the target groups concerned, in liaison with the medical profession and social workers.

Part three

Developing institutional mechanisms for promoting gender equality (4 p)

A decree of 17 June 2002 named Mrs. Nicole AMELINE as Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace, with the mandate to promote measures to enforce society's respect for women's rights and to strengthen the guarantees of equality in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

To fulfill this mandate, the Ministry for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has a unit on women's rights and equality, with a budget of €18,025,000 for the year 2003, and a staff of 220, of whom 50 work at headquarters and 170 in the regional and *département* offices.

A number of advisory bodies have been set up under the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace:

- The High Council for Sexual Information, Birth Control and Family Education (CSIS) includes associations, government departments, and qualified individuals. It proposes measures for government to take to provide information to young people and adults and to promote the training of qualified teachers in these fields.
- The High Council for Occupational Equality between Women and Men comprises representatives of labour unions and employers, government, and qualified individuals. It conducts studies and makes proposals to promote occupational equality.
- The National Commission and the Departmental Commissions for Action on Violence against Women bring together the people responsible for implementing this policy to consider appropriate measures.
- The Gender Parity Observatory conducts studies on the status of women nationally and internationally, and proposes measures to promote parity.
- Two parliamentary committees have been created within the National Assembly and the Senate to monitor the enforcement of laws concerning women's rights and gender equality, to make recommendations, and to advise elected officials about the consequences of government policy in these fields.

The Ministry for Parity and Equality in the Workplace provides support for community action within its field of competence. It provides funding for the national network of 120 women's rights information centres (CIDF), as well as for associations that maintain telephone hotlines for female victims of violence.

Consistent with the 1995 Beijing initiative, French policies for equality include both specific measures targeted at certain categories of women, and designed to overcome specific inequalities, and comprehensive gender mainstreaming activities, i.e. crosscutting approaches that take account of the respective situation of women and men in preparing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating measures.

The government statistics system is accordingly being amended to provide more information on the respective situation of men and women.

Some 30 partnership agreements have been signed between the ministry for women's rights and other government departments and agencies, with numerical targets for measuring women's progress in various areas of policy, such as for example:

- The Interministerial Agreement on the promotion of equal opportunities between girls and boys and men and women in the education system.
- A five-year framework agreement with the Vocational Training Institute for Adults (AFPA), designed to double the number of women in vocational training courses.
- A framework agreement with the Population and Migrations Directorate and the Action and Support Fund for integration and combating discrimination, to promote the integration of immigrant women and the female descendents of immigrants, and to prevent and combat the double discrimination, based on sex and origin, that they often face.
- Establishment of a network of equality referral officers in the civil service.

Finally, an informative appendix to the State budget has been instituted: "the yellow budget paper on women's rights and equality" describes the government's financial effort and analyzes actions taken in these fields by the various ministries (eight for the 2001 draft budget law, and 15 for 2003).

Part four

Main challenges and actions to address them (3 p)

- Fields in which measures must be taken.
- Measures planned by the government.

Since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, a number of laws have been adopted to reinforce the principle of gender equality, a principle to which France is strongly devoted and which it considers inseparable from fundamental human rights as a whole. Programmes have been adopted in the various critical areas of concern identified by the Beijing platform (political decision-making, economic life, combating violence, for example). These policy initiatives have achieved real progress, but they have yet to produce concrete equality between women and men.

As the CEDAW committee pointed out, during the last examination of France in July 2003, much remains to be done, in particular to improve women's access to positions of responsibility, to strengthened their place in the work force, to guarantee the principle of equal pay for equal work, to identify the needs of older women and prepare appropriate measures to meet them, to prevent negative and discriminatory portrayals of women in the media, to provide trafficking victims with the support they need, to eliminate discrimination against immigrant and refugee women and female members of minority groups, as well as violence against immigrant women and girls, and to promote better health for women by combating smoking and drug addiction, for example.

Aware of the progress that remains to be made in all these fields, and determined to address these challenges with French society as a whole, the Minister for Parity and Equality in the Workplace gave new impetus to the gender mainstreaming approach in our country at a conference on equality that she sponsored in March 2003. That effort relies on a three levers:

- The National Council for Gender Equality will bring together representatives of civil society, the economy, and subnational levels of government. It will be consulted on all questions relating to gender mainstreaming.
- The National Charter for Equality between Women and Men will establish common commitments for the national government, subnational governments, the social partners, associations and economic agents relating to four themes: political and social parity, occupational equality, respect for human dignity, and reconciliation of work schedules with other aspects of life.
- The PARITÉ network ("Promotion of Actions and Reinforcement of Initiatives to Create Equality") will provide a forum for discussion between public and private stakeholders on equality issues. A web site will be created.

In addition, the introduction of equality targets for government programming in coming years will help to reinforce the "gender budgeting" approach. Beginning in 2006, the budget structure of France will be amended and the budget bills submitted annually to Parliament will be

organized into budgetary programmes that will establish objectives and expected outcomes for all the government's planned policies.

In this context, the Ministry for Parity and Equality in the Workplace has proposed the establishment of an interministerial programme on "equality between men and women" for pursuing the four basic objectives of national policy:

- Parity and access to positions of responsibility.
- Occupational equality.
- Enforcing rights and respect for human dignity.
- Reconciling work schedules with other aspects of life.