

CYPRUS

Cyprus National Report

**on the implementation of the
Beijing Platform for Action (1995)**

and the

**outcome of the twenty - third Special Session
of the General Assembly (2000)**

Nicosia

2004

“Nothing lasts without peoples,
nothing can be done without institutions”

Jean Monnet

Report commissioned by the

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CYPRUS NATIONAL REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOME OF THE TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)

FOREWORD

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus I present to the United Nations the Cyprus Report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000).

The aim of the report is twofold: on one hand to review the Cyprus response to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and to the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) and on the other hand to identify current challenges and discuss forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of Cypriot women and girls.

On May 1st 2004 the Republic of Cyprus became a European Union member state. This important and long-awaited development has already produced far-reaching changes in all aspects of the country's polity, politics and policies. The impact of Cyprus' EU membership on national policies, including equality policy, has constituted a core concern in the context of pre- and post-accession strategies.

This report has been commissioned by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR) and compiled by the Jean Monnet Chair in European Political Integration of the University of Cyprus, in close cooperation with the NMWR, which provided the expert with the relevant data submitted by Government Departments and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Unfortunately, it had not been possible to reach a solution on the Cyprus question at the simultaneous referenda before the accession to the European Union, despite the considerable efforts deployed by the international community and the United Nations Secretary General. The policy of the Government of Cyprus is to keep the road open towards reunification. It is obvious that, due to the political problem caused by the Turkish invasion in 1974 and the continuing occupation and control of 37% of the territory of the Republic by Turkish military forces, the Government of Cyprus is prevented from exercising effective control and from applying its policies and programmes to the occupied part of the island. Thus all information collected in this Report concerns only the Government-controlled areas.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus expresses its readiness and willingness to continue its efforts towards achieving full legal and real Equality between Women and Men in the framework of the European Union institutions and in close cooperation with the international community.

Doros Theodorou
Minister of Justice and Public Order

Executive Summary

This report is presented to the United Nations by the Government of the Republic of Cyprus as a brief but comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000).

As requested, the report aims at identifying achievements, gaps and challenges, and provides an indication of areas where actions and initiatives are most urgently needed to further implementation, within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing) and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (Beijing + 5). Thus, the aim of the report is twofold: a) to review the Cyprus response to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) and b) to identify current challenges and suggest forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of Cypriot women and girls.

In preparing this report, we followed the guidelines given by the United Nations questionnaire, which has been specially designed to obtain comparable, mainly qualitative information from governments, and to facilitate the relevant multi-year program of work of the Commission on the Status of Women. The report draws on a variety of sources of information and statistics available to the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), which comes under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. Among the major sources used are Government Departments, the European Union (EU), Academic Institutions and NGOs. The report prepared by the Office of the Law Commissioner of the Republic of Cyprus on the Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), covering the period 1993-2003 has been extremely useful for the drafting of this report, as it constitutes the most and recent document providing relevant up to date data at national level.

The overall assessment of achievements and obstacles to the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern is made in relation to the commitments made, namely the initiatives and actions taken and the results attained. Due to the country's EU accession preparation, significant achievements have been registered at the legislative, administrative and civil society level. Nevertheless, the review and appraisal process reveals that, despite the indisputable progress and significant positive developments of the last few years, important gaps between the actions taken and the results obtained still persist. Remaining obstacles and barriers prevent the full implementation of the commitments made in Beijing.

The Government of Cyprus considers that the main challenges ahead pertain to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Thus, efforts at international and national level, should concentrate on how to promote full and successful implementation of the decisions of the Beijing process. Gender equality should be a reality for every woman. That is why it is of paramount importance to secure support at a high political level for the national coordination mechanism and find creative ways to promote: efficient and effective monitoring mechanisms, accountability of the different actors involved in the promotion of gender mainstreaming policies, visibility and empowerment of women. This implies the enhancement of a gender-sensitive environment for all social and political structures and processes.

In its efforts to implement the decisions of the Beijing Process, the Government of Cyprus has identified the need for information and experience-sharing, with regard to implementation, as well as the need to promote further development of all government policies as regards to gender as a high-priority target. The NMWR must be strengthened in terms of support-mechanisms and empowered in terms of human resources, so as to acquire the capability to build partnerships between government departments and NGOs and assist these changes. The successful application of information and experience-sharing policies at the international, European and national level may provide useful insights as to how to further successful implementation of gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies, even if such an effort is subtle in nature and regional, or even national, in focus. In the wider context of globalization, this may be the only way to succeed in thinking globally and acting locally in order to secure a real impact of policies on people's lives.

Equally important is the need for research/ field studies assessing the degree and nature of domestic policy change in a number of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, which are of particular interest to Cyprus, e.g. women in power and decision-making positions, women and the media, women and the economy, violence against women, women and armed conflict etc.

According to the guidelines given by the United Nations questionnaire, the report consists of four parts:

Part one highlights major achievements and obstacles encountered.

Part two focuses on the implementation of the various critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, except the area of institutional mechanisms and on areas identified in the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. It provides examples of achievements pertaining to policy developments, legislative changes and progress in programmes and strategies. It expressively refers to remaining obstacles, gaps and challenges as well as to lessons learned.

Part three focuses on institutional developments and/ or measures and structures put in place to support promotion of gender equality. More specifically it refers to institutional and other arrangements and actions identified in the outcome document of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly, such as capacity building programmes for line ministries, resource allocation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, partnerships e.t.c.

Part four provides information on remaining key challenges and constraints, focusing on the plans for future actions to address them, in order to achieve full implementation in each of the critical areas of concern.

The report has been commissioned by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), which comes under the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and compiled by the Jean Monnet Chair in European Political Integration of the University of Cyprus in close cooperation with the NMWR, which provided the expert with the relevant data submitted by Government Departments and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Introduction

This report constitutes a brief but comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000). It aims at identifying achievements, gaps and challenges and providing an indication of areas where actions and initiatives are most urgently needed in order to further implementation. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus is presenting this report, mandated in the multi-year program of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, to the United Nations, for its forty-ninth session in March 2005. The report provides the requested data in order to allow the Commission on the Status of Women to consider the two following themes:

- *“Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly” and*
- *“Current challenges and forward-looking strategies for the advancement and empowerment of women and girls”*

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus followed the guidelines stipulated by the United Nations questionnaire, which has been specially designed with the objective to complement the existing sources of information of the UN¹ and to facilitate the review and appraisal to be carried out by the Commission on the Status of Women at both regional and global level. Therefore, the responses from the government are provided both to the Division for the Advancement of Women in New York and the relevant Regional Commission in Geneva, Switzerland.

The Government of Cyprus considers that future actions require more sharing of know-how and experience in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action rather than the development of new legal international or national instruments. Therefore, in order to further our knowledge on obstacles encountered, the Government would like to suggest that the Secretariat takes advantage of data available through existing relevant databases (e.g. EU, Council of Europe) in the review and appraisal process, as an additional source of information.

¹ National Action Plans designed to implement the Platform of Action (submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women 1998 and 1999), reports submitted since 1995 by the States parties under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and information generated since 1995 during the review of the Commission on the Status of the Women of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Platform of Action, including through expert group meetings organized by the Division of the Advancement of Women. Other sources of information: Common Country Assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (CCA/ UNDAFs), Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), national Human Development Reports and Millenium Development Goal (MDG) reports, national reports on the areas, such as social development and sustainable development, official statistics available from the United Nations Statistics Division, the Population Division, the regional commissions and other entities in the United Nations system (ILO, UNESCO, WHO, etc.). Information from other United Nations entities responsible for follow-up to other Global conferences, mainly: UNFA on the follow-up of to the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and its review in 2002, as well as the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development in 1995 and its review in 2005.

THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Changes in political systems in general and policy changes in particular may be designed and politically highly salient, but they may also be gradual and incremental but, nonetheless, in the medium and long run, they also become noticeable and significant. In this respect, empirical evidence from the Cypriot case indicates that these two methods for change strategies are not mutually exclusive. They rather seem to be the two, though in the case of equality policies uneven, components of a double-track strategy. As a matter of fact, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of change forces stemming from the UN or the EU policy processes from other causes of policy change, such as economic globalisation, changing policy trends and endogenous political reforms.

Theories of institutional change may provide us with a useful framework of analysis. Theories of intentional institutional change are particularly relevant for explaining reforms in the context of the compliance with International Organization's legal instruments, given the fact that the changes are mainly based on goal-oriented adaptation strategies. Theories seeking to account for institutional change in terms of path dependency may be equally important in shedding light on how change occurs, how it is rooted in a specific context and how obstacles or resistance to change are taking place in a given political system incrementally. Adaptation pressure does not translate into domestic structural change without frictions. Indeed, pre-existing institutions and practices evolve into a "multi-level gatekeeper system"² and mediate these pressures, influencing structural outcomes. The use of these two theoretical and analytical frameworks is equally important in the effort to further our understanding on the appraisal of achievements and obstacles encountered at the implementation level.

The United Nations system and EU institutions have indeed been the source of many important and path-breaking changes that have strengthened and empowered democratic institutions and civil society organizations at national level. Both the United Nations and the European Community systems have emerged as major and constant sources for domestic change in a variety of fields. Whereas, in the UN system the ratification of legal and other instruments is done on a voluntary basis, harmonization with EU instruments³ is obligatory for member states and for accession countries. In the EU context, this stems from the primary obligation of EU membership to comply with the *acquis communautaire*. For member states it is an incremental ongoing process. For accession countries, as was the case for Cyprus during the relevant period (2000-2004), this required a considerable legislative, economic, financial, administrative and, most importantly, societal effort, well before membership became a reality⁴.

The impact of European polity and policies on accession countries is impressive. Accession countries not only have to make an important legislative effort in order to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, but they also have to introduce the necessary administrative changes for the relevant implementation and monitoring mechanisms. They have to comply with the political,

² TOFARIDES, M. (2003) "Urban Policy in the European Union: A Multi-Level Gatekeeper System", Ashgate,

³ Treaty provisions, Regulations, Directives.

⁴ See: SWIERKOCKI, J. (2001) (ed) «Accession Negotiations – Selected Results, Interim Report», Lodz: European Institute

Preston, Chr. (1997) "Enlargement and Integration in the European" Union, London: Roudledge

(democracy, rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities), and the economic criteria (functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union), both defined by the 1993 Copenhagen European Council. At the same time they have to undertake steps towards enhancing EU political socialization of their citizens, who automatically acquire the European citizenship. It is no easy task for a small country⁵ with limited human and financial resources to cope with the complex accession process and introduce a series of important far-reaching reforms successfully. Cyprus, though, has successfully concluded the accession negotiations. One can easily understand how, over the last ten years, the EU has undoubtedly proved to be the most important driving force for Cyprus' socio-political, economic and institutional modernization. Hundreds of new laws have been adopted, numerous new institutions have been set up and a great number of structures in the public and private field have been adapted to the country's accession perspective, including the ones on gender equality. The European perspective of Cyprus acted as a catalyst for significant changes in all the above-mentioned fields.

⁵ Soetendorp, H. and Hanf, K.: (eds) (1998) "Adapting to European Integration. Small states in the EU", Essex: Longman

Part One: Overview of achievements and Challenges in Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

It is obvious that the assessment of achievements and obstacles to the implementation of the twelve areas of concern must be made in relation to the commitments made in the Beijing Platform for Action and its twelve critical areas of concern. More specifically, the assessment needs to also consider the initiatives and actions taken and the results attained. In the case of Cyprus, mainly due to the country's EU accession preparation, significant achievements have been registered in all areas of concern.

A two-track policy was pursued during this period, seeking the creation of new structures for the implementation and enforcement of equality legislation and the empowerment of equality bodies. This process constituted the main feature of this period, with relevantly significant results.

The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action shows that there were significant positive developments in all the Government's major priorities and commitments: set-up of new structures, empowerment of equality bodies, increased public awareness on women's issues, increased women's participation in public and political life, research on gender issues, strengthening of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, preventive measures taken to combat the problem of domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace, trafficking of women, and legal reform on a variety of issues, including gender equality, mainly through the harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union.

Nevertheless, the assessment shows that, even though significant positive developments have been registered, obstacles and barriers persist and prevent the full *de facto* implementation of the commitments made in Beijing.

Achievements: At the Beijing Conference, the Government of Cyprus reaffirmed its commitment to promote legal and real Equality between Women and Men in all walks of life and in particular to pursue the following measures:

- To reinforce the National Machinery for Women's Rights both in terms of budgeting, human resources and status within the Government, so as to enable it to effectively fulfill its task,
- To study the possibility of creating an Equal Opportunity Commission which will take on board cases of discrimination against women,
- To encourage and promote full and active participation of women at all levels of the political and decision-making processes, and
- To cooperate closely with the European Union on Women's issues, as part of the process of Cyprus accession to the European Union.

Based on the above commitments, as well as the wider framework of strategies and guidelines included in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government designed and formulated its **National Action Plan** for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly. The Government's **policy**

on gender equality and empowerment of women included the following major priorities and commitments:

- To promote legal reform
- To increase public awareness on women's issues
- To increase women's participation in public and political life
- To strengthen the National Machinery for Women's Rights
- To prevent and combat the problem of domestic violence
- To promote the harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union on gender equality issues

A network of civil servants, acting as contact persons in each Ministry, assures the follow-up of the implementation in the different areas. The coordination lies with the NMWR, which needs to be strengthened. There is room for improvement both in terms of accountability of the different actors and in terms of the network structure, as to the authority provided to the contact person and support mechanisms.

Since the examination of the previous Report, four major factors played a catalytic role on further advancing the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action in Cyprus:

Firstly, the follow-up process of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action gave a new impetus and intensified the efforts towards legal and de facto gender equality.

Secondly, the intensive pace of the accession process of Cyprus towards the EU, since 1998, necessitated the harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* and resulted in the enactment, within specified time limits, of very important legislation affecting women's lives in the area of equal treatment and conditions at work, and, parallel to this, the creation and/or strengthening of the necessary administrative infrastructure for the implementation of the relevant legislation and policies. There is common agreement that European integration has called into question many features associated with the traditional model of Cypriot politics and policies.

Thirdly, the peace initiatives under the UN Secretary General's good offices mission for the settlement of the Cyprus problem, along with the Government's efforts towards the reunification of the island, have boosted women's initiatives for bi-communal meetings and projects contributing to the peace efforts on the island, thus promoting the creative role of women in society and politics.

Furthermore, Cyprus' flourishing economy -Cyprus enjoys high per capita income (\$16,105 US dollars), low unemployment rates (3,5%)⁶, high human development (rated among the 22 countries in the world with the highest human development in 2000)- has increased the standard of living for both men and women in Cyprus. This economic progress could not have been achieved without the contribution and active participation of half of its population, the women of Cyprus.

⁶ Source: Economic and Social Indicators 2002, Planning Bureau, Cyprus

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)⁷ has been instrumental in promoting gender equality in Cyprus. On the basis of the CEDAW, the Government has intensified its endeavours towards gender equality with a series of legal, policy and implementation measures leading to very positive results. The Convention remains, to this day, one of the most important international legal instruments providing, since its ratification, the framework for the advancement of the status of women in Cyprus and the achievement of real equality between men and women at national level. In this respect, the Cyprus third, fourth and fifth periodic report (1993-2003) on the implementation of the CEDAW, prepared by the Office of the Law Commissioner of the Republic, is the most recent and comprehensive report on the progress achieved mainly on legal and policy developments.

For Cyprus, the **Millennium Declaration** and the **Millennium Declaration Goals (MDGs)**, can be considered as achieved. This explains the reason why no real public debate has taken place on this particular issue. In addition, the country's salient political developments, with regard to the solution of the political problem of Cyprus and its accession to the European Union during this very period, have shadowed any other development.

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union, from the 1st of May 2004, has certainly further enhanced progress in that direction. The Treaties of the European Union and EU Regulations, containing specific provisions for the purpose of ensuring full equality between men and women in practice, have supremacy over national law and direct effect in Cyprus. Numerous EU Directives which Cyprus was bound to transpose in its legal order and effectively implement, give particular emphasis on equal pay for work of equal value, access to employment, equal conditions at work, special protection for pregnant women and breastfeeding women, and social security benefits. This constitutes the main legislative and policy-making achievements, which provoked extensive policy discussion and parliamentary debates. "Positive action" to ensure *de facto* gender equality, provided for by the EU Treaties is now becoming a reality in Cyprus. In view of the fact that all "players" in the game – Government, Parliament and civil society – are determined to ensure that Cyprus is in a position to operate by EU standards at all levels and in all areas, the way has unreservedly been paved for further catalytic advancement of women in the country.

There is now an increased awareness of the necessity to systematically take into account the gender dimension in major policy discussions and parliamentary debates. This is a key development and produces concrete results. For instance, a more gender-responsive budget is now on track, with funds allocated towards gender mainstreaming or responding to women's specific needs, e.g. promotion of women's entrepreneurship. There is also the provision for funding research, which deals with issues of particular interest to women on a more systematic basis. This is an important development, illustrating the country's priorities and efforts to enhance its gender mainstreaming policy. Another significant development is the recent tax reform, which benefits mostly women, since it eradicates obstacles to women economic independence. This is a significant step towards demonstrating the progress both in terms of increased awareness and political will. It is a sign that the gender dimension is definitely on the

⁷ The Republic of Cyprus has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, by Law 78/1985, with a single reservation on Article 9, paragraph 2. This reservation was withdrawn on 28 June, 2000.

political agenda. The priority that this issue has been given, and will continue to be given, is of course the result of a complex matrix. The government's and civil society's degree of sensitiveness constitute the two key parameters for every successful joint effort.

To conclude with the achievements, the assessment shows that there were significant positive developments in all the Government's major priorities and commitments: legal reform, increased public awareness on women's issues, increased women's participation in public and political life, research on gender issues, set-up of new institutions, strengthening of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, preventive measures taken to combat the problem of domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace, trafficking of women, and harmonization with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union on gender equality issues.

Nevertheless, despite the progress achieved and the increased participation of women in all walks of life, there is still a lot to be done to achieve full *de facto* equality.

Obstacles: The review and appraisal exercise has also revealed that, despite the progress achieved, barriers remain and need to be addressed. This is a *sine qua non* condition for the successful further implementation of goals and commitments made in the framework of the multi-track strategy towards gender equality initiated in Beijing.

In general terms we can classify the obstacles to the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) in three broad categories⁸:

- a) *Political obstacles* (Lack of gender balance in almost all walks of life and thus masculine models throughout decision-making in all social and political structures and processes including government and political parties, parliament, judiciary, economy, and mass media as well as weak implementation and monitoring mechanisms)
- b) *Socio-economic obstacles* (Dual burden and difficult reconciliation of family and professional lives, especially in rural areas, feminisation of unemployment and poverty, weak follow-up mechanisms)
- c) *Ideological and Psychological hindrance* (Traditional roles, absence of gender-sensitive environment, lack of confidence and supportive networks, the image of women in the media)

Women's position in the Cyprus society has improved in all its manifestations since the previous Report. Nevertheless, even though traditional social prejudices and stereotyped attitudes have changed to some extent, they are still identified as the major obstacle for the advancement of women to the full. There is no doubt that the prevailing culture in all social and political

⁸ For the typology developed by Nadezhda Shedova in a more specific context see: Nadezhda Shedova, "Obstacles to Women Participation in Parliament", in IDEA "Women in Politics: Beyond Numbers" (<http://www.int-idea.se/women/index.htm>)

structures and processes is not conducive to gender equality. The low percentage of women in key decision-making positions makes things just more difficult. The glass ceiling still remains an important obstacle to women participating in decision-making posts.

An additional difficulty for Cyprus is the de facto division of the island, which prevents the Government from having control over the entire territory of the Republic. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus regrets that due to the continuing illegal occupation and effective control of 37% of its territory by Turkish military forces, the Government is unable to ensure the application of gender equality laws and policies to the whole of island and that, therefore, it is also deprived of its ability to apply these laws and policies to those living in the part of the country under foreign occupation. Due to the above-described situation, no reliable information and data are available regarding the enjoyment of the relevant rights by the Cypriot population living in the area that is not controlled by the Government. Therefore, all information and data presented in the present Report concern the government – controlled areas.

It is earnestly hoped that a just and viable solution will soon be achieved and that the next Periodic Report of Cyprus will give information and data on the whole of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus.

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

A. Women and Poverty

Achievements: As mentioned in the Beijing+5 report, conditions of extreme poverty and standards of living below the national average are rather limited in Cyprus, while hunger and starvation have been overcome long ago. Therefore, poverty can only be identified in terms of what is locally perceived to be an acceptable standard of living in Cyprus. According to the latest Census of Population carried out in 2001, 71% of Cypriots reside in the urban areas and 29% in the rural areas. In its endeavours for equality of opportunity for all citizens and to combat urbanization, the Government is concerned with supporting people, in particular women, belonging in the latter category. Among the most vulnerable groups in this respect are single mothers, rural women and retired older women. Efforts were made to improve the situation concerning women and poverty regarding social pension, public assistance and monthly child benefits for single mothers.

Single parents in Cyprus, the majority of which are women, face the danger of long-term exposure to poverty. The government offers employment incentives and provides these women with social services support, even if they have a full-time job. The newly established “Single-Parents Organization” and other NGOs, such as “Family Planning” aim to provide social and psychological support to its members and lobby for better conditions on behalf of this group. The percentage of foreign population residing temporarily or permanently on the island has been constantly increasing, as have mixed marriages. Migrant/foreign women are a very vulnerable social group and their integration and protection of their rights constitute a future challenge. The Government, with the creative input of civil society, has to devise a specific policy to address their needs and protect their rights.

Obstacles: As mentioned above, conditions of extreme poverty and low standards of living, which are below the national average, are rather limited in Cyprus. The main obstacles pertain to the difficulty of identifying, or even anticipating the identification of potential social groups, which may find themselves in precarious conditions because of restructuring in socio-economic activities.

B. Education and training of women

Achievements: There is an increased awareness that education and training for women is one of the most valuable means of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. For Cyprus, as a member state of the European Union, it is also a key priority for achieving the goal of the *Lisbon strategy*⁹, which is a commitment to bring about economic, social and environmental renewal in the EU, in the wider context of the knowledge society. Women and

⁹ In March 2000, the European Council in Lisbon set out a ten-year strategy to make the EU the world's most dynamic and competitive economy. Under the strategy, a stronger economy will drive job creation alongside social and environmental policies that ensure sustainable development and social inclusion.

Science¹⁰ appears as strategic lever for reinforcing gender balance in science and society¹¹. As EU has set as a priority objective to be the strongest knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, special attention should be paid to knowledge society. The way towards *e-democracy* and *e-governance* is on the agenda¹². According to the 2002 data published by the Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus in May 2003, the percentage of the population above 15 who regularly uses the Internet is 23,3%. Gender disaggregated statistics reveal that the gender gap is still quite important: 26.9% of Cypriot men over 15 years of age are internet users, whereas the equivalent figure for women is only 20.1%¹³. This points out that the knowledge society has not, as some hoped, automatically broken down the gender divide and barriers. The hope of gender-neutrality in computer communication does not hold in the light of empirical evidence neither in Cyprus nor in other EU countries. The NMWR is aware of the fact that if women are not to be squeezed out of competitive, high expenditure sectors of economy and science, it is high time for the Ministry to design and develop specific actions.

We should underline the role of Higher Education Institutions, mainly the University of Cyprus and various private colleges in the promotion of research and raising public awareness campaigns on gender issues, especially among younger people. No major problems can be reported with regard to women and education and the main issue is the selection of disciplines and to which extent gender mainstreaming was taken into consideration when these disciplines were determined. The gender segregation of academic disciplines in many ways reflects and is closely linked to the structures of the gender division of labour in the economy and in the family. Innovations and difficulties in their implementation go hand in hand. Two educational innovations introduced by both the Primary and Secondary Education constitute interesting case-studies. The first one concerns Home Economics classes open to boys as well, and not only to girls, as the case had been traditionally. At the beginning there were vociferous protests by parents, who disagreed with their boys' participation in these classes. Appropriate communication strategies yielded expected results. The second one concerns Technology, which traditionally was offered only to boys and it is now offered equally to boys and girls with great success. There were, in this case too, objections by parents. Indisputably, despite the difficulties at the implementation stage, these achievements constitute a significant step forward in the long process of changes in stereotyped gender roles in society. Statistics show that women are greater in numbers at Secondary and Higher educational institutions and have even better performance than boys, who seem to have a greater number of drop-outs during Secondary education. As far as vocational training is concerned, women have a high participation percentage (over 40%) for a number of years in training sessions offered by the Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA), which is the main responsible institution for workforce training, which is

¹⁰ See: European Union Women and Science/ Helsinki Group: <http://www.cordis.lu/improving/women/helsinki.htm>

¹¹ Agapiou-Josephides K. "Political Science/ Projet Athena: Women in the Profession: Assessing the Gender Gap in European Political Science. A Preliminary Report", EpsNet on line publications <http://www.epsnet.org/publications> , 2001, 26 p.

¹² See: Agapiou-Josephides K. «*Cypriot Report and Analysis of the Legislatures and Political parties websites*» 21p. On-line publication on the official website of the European Parliament http://www.europarl.eu.int/stoa/publi/default_en.htm (2004) See Trechsel A., R. Kies, F. Mendez, and P. Schmitter (2003) "Evaluation of the Use of New Technologies in Order to Facilitate Democracy in Europe: E-democratizing the Parliaments and Parties in Europe", STOA (Scientific and Technological Option Assessment), European Parliament, Directorate-General for Research

¹³ Sources: EU: Eurostat; Cyprus: Statistical Service of the Republic of Cyprus

provided on a non-discriminatory basis. In particular, during the year 2002, 4549 (52.2%) of the 8708 people who took part in the HRDA training courses were women. HRDA offers a variety of courses in collaboration with tertiary education institutions. HRDA has initiated a number of studies on women in the workforce, inactive women etc.

Obstacles: Although, Cyprus has achieved equal access to education for girls and women, the latest remain underrepresented and quite often are squeezed out of competitive, high Research and Development (R&D) systems. For Cyprus, this may constitute a major concern for the successful implementation of the *Lisbon strategy*. More attention should be paid to develop a more inclusive policy process, mainly in the key field of new technologies.

During the period under review there was one woman Minister of Education. At present, the Director of Culture Services is a woman. However, there has been no Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, nor any director of any of the Departments of the Education. (Primary Education, Secondary General Education, Secondary Vocational Education and Higher Education), notwithstanding the fact, that 71% of the teaching staff at primary and secondary level of the education are women. According to a research¹⁴, factors hindering the promotion of female educators are grading, additional qualifications and interview results¹⁵. The Government is aware that it has to take into account the *glass ceiling* and *double burden* effect in its future forward-looking strategies for equal opportunities in the key area of education.

As far as the Secondary Technical and Vocational Education is concerned, the proportion of girl pupils in the overall population still remains very low despite a significant increase from 8% to 16,8%. The equivalent percentage for evening classes is 24%.

C. Women and health

Achievements: Health care in Cyprus is provided to all persons without discrimination on the basis of age, sex, religion, ethnicity or other attribute. The standard of living and the quality of health care are high, and this is reflected in the health indicators, which are comparable to those of other developed countries. The expenditure as percentage of the GDP has been increasing constantly. It was 4.47% in 1990, 5.02% in 1995, and 6.04% in 2000. In 2003, 34 women doctors and 98 men doctors were involved in decision making in the area of health. Women enjoy a high level of health with a life expectancy at birth estimated for the period 2000/2001, at 81 years, compared to 76,1 years for men. This may be attributed to the fact that women are less subject to the harmful effects of violence, accidents and smoking. The completion of the new public General Hospital in the capital will, by the end of 2004, provide upgraded services in all sectors of health.

¹⁴ Referred to in the “Cyprus Third, fourth and fifth periodic report (1993-2003) of the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of the All Forms of Discrimination against women”, Office of the Law Commissioner, 16 February 2004.

¹⁵ Source: Ministry of Education and Culture. According to the Ministry’s grading system, teachers receive a grade between 33 and 39. Whereas the majorities (55%) of male educators receive the grade 39, the majority of female educators (51%) receive 34-35. Men receive higher scores than women in professional training, professional competency, organization/ administration/ human relationships, general attitude and action. Men also score higher than women in personal interviews for positions of promotion. Women teachers possess less additional qualifications than their male counterparts

Cyprus remains a low prevalence country for HIV/AIDS, particularly for women, who are outnumbered by 6 to 1 by men with regard to HIV infection. This ratio may be even higher, because according to official figures, women have a higher likelihood of being tested if their partner is found to be HIV-positive and therefore more likely to be diagnosed if they are infected. According to the criteria of the World Health Organization, it is estimated that the number of people with HIV infection among the adult population in Cyprus is not more than 500, and the rate is 0,1%. The main concern for the Ministry of Health has been to prevent the further spread of the virus. The National AIDS Programme has continued to be implemented according to the principles for prevention of the transmission of the virus and the reduction of the social and personal consequences of HIV-infection.

Prenatal transmission is kept at extremely low levels. This is due partly to the low prevalence of HIV infection in women, and partly to the measures taken for the prevention of prenatal transmission of the virus in isolated cases of pregnant women who are found to be positive. All pregnant women are offered testing and counseling for HIV and all seropositive pregnant women are provided with free drug regimens and advice aiming to prevent the transmission of the virus to their babies. A new strategic plan for prevention of AIDS has been prepared for the period 2004-2008, based on the same principles with further elaboration.

Concerning the important problem of breast cancer among women in Cyprus a nation-wide campaign was undertaken to screen women for breast cancer and alert them to the dangers entailed when regular check-ups. The screening program for the detection of cancer is functioning since 1995 and is provided to all women. The active role of a particular NGO, Europa Donna, had a complimentary role to play in this campaign. It contributed with fund and awareness raising and its continuous psychological support to women.

One of the main features of this period is the burgeoning of active and dynamic NGOs concerned with health issues. Most of these NGOs are women's NGOs (e.g. Europa Donna) or are mainly driven by women (e.g. Organization for the Protection of Patients Rights). Their ceaseless activities contributed to the upgrading of services provided and to the raising of awareness levels among the population.

Obstacles: The absence of a National Health Scheme could be considered a major hindrance, although the issue is being dealt with and a framework has already been elaborated and is at an advanced stage of development. The absence of such a scheme is largely compensated by two factors: firstly, public health care is provided to all citizens for a symbolic or a very small fee and secondly, the complementarity of the public and private sectors in providing health care for a very wide range of health areas, as well as providing alternative choices. Furthermore, the small size of the island facilitates the access of people living in rural areas to district or national health services, and is even more promoted by the operation of mobile units and district doctors, providing specialized health services and weekly visits.

D. Violence against women

Achievements: There is an increased awareness of and commitment towards preventing and combating violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, which for a number

of years was a taboo. This has been achieved mainly through *inter alia*, improved legislation, policies, programmes and setting up and strengthening of the necessary structures for the protection of victims of violence. Successful cooperation has been achieved between governmental and non-governmental organizations in the field of preventing violence against women. Training has been provided to all interest groups to ensure maximum performance, since a high degree of specialization is a necessary prerequisite in the support of victims. The pioneering initiatives of civil society, in particular women's organizations, in the field of preventing violence against women and offering assistance to girl and women-victims of domestic violence, has played an important role in the provision of support services to women-victims of violence and in promoting awareness-raising campaigns. The sensitization programmes developed were aiming at making the problem visible to society and thus creating a more conducive environment for the change and adaptation of the legal, administrative and support mechanism frameworks.

As regards trafficking and exploitation of women, which internationally is becoming increasingly worrying, there is an increased sensitivity witnessed both among the public and the government authorities. This has been achieved mainly due to the joint efforts of governmental and non governmental organisations. The Ombudsman enjoys increased investigative powers and her interventions proved to be instrumental in dealing effectively and efficiently with this kind of cases. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus, having the political will to play an active role in the prevention and combating trafficking in human beings, has proceeded with significant legislative and administrative measures¹⁶.

¹⁶ **Legislative measures:** In the light of forthcoming membership to the EU, Cyprus enacted the Combating of Trafficking of Persons and Sexual Exploitation of Minors Law, 2000 (L.3(I)/2000) which is in line with the corresponding Joint Action of 24 January 1997, adopted by the Council of the European Union on the basis of Articles K3 of the Treaty on European Union concerning action to combat trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation of children. Law 3(I)/2000 criminalizes such activities, provides for severe punishments as well as protection, compensation and rehabilitation of victims and extends the jurisdiction of Cyprus courts. Offences under this Law, including the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children, the use of children for pornography and the production, display, showing or transmission of such productions could be extraditable and could also be predicated offences for the purposes of confiscation of the illicit proceeds, under **the Anti-Money Laundering Law (L. 61(I)/1996**, as amended).

A very important element of **Law 3(I)/2000**, is the appointment of the Director of the Department of Social Welfare as the Guardian of Victims of Sexual Exploitation, who is responsible for the provision of humanitarian support and assistance to the victims, as well as for the channelling of complaints to the competent authorities for investigation. In line with the new Directives and Policies of the EU, the Law Office of the Republic is in the process of preparing two separate laws, one on the Trafficking in Human Beings and the other on the Sexual Exploitation of Children. The Protection of Witnesses Law, 2001 (L. 95(I)/2001) was enacted in June 2001, corresponding to EU Resolutions of 23rd November 1995, on the protection of witnesses in the fight against international organized crime, and of 20th December 1996 on individuals who co-operate in the fight against organized crime.

The Court, before which any proceedings take place, is empowered to take measures to protect any vulnerable witnesses needing protection from all forms of direct or indirect threat, pressure or intimidation. Such measures include the exclusion of the public from the courtroom and providing for a witness needing protection to give his/her testimony in circumstances which will allow such a witness not to face the accused (by the use of a special partition or a closed television circuit).

Alignment with the *acquis communautaire* and international law is an ongoing process. For this reason the existing legal framework regarding combating trafficking in all its forms (smuggling of migrants, sexual exploitation, forced labour etc.) is undergoing amendments in order to implement the provisions of the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols, which Cyprus ratified by Law 11(III)/2003.

Obstacles: Insufficient understanding of the root of the problem and of its real dimensions, as well as inadequate data, further impedes informed analysis and policy making. The effective implementation of the law depends heavily on the sensitization and specialization of all professionals involved in the handling of cases of violence. Lack or insufficiency of these factors constitutes a major difficulty. It also relies on the level of co-ordination and co-operation among all services involved, i.e. police, social workers, doctors etc, which may not always be adequate. Another major obstacle is the reluctance of women, victims of violence and/or trafficking and exploitation, to report violence against them and seek support and assistance. This lack of reporting of incidents further prevents us from grasping the real dimension of the problem. The government has tried to overcome this obstacle by promoting legislation protecting victims of violence which usually find themselves either in a precarious or an illegal situation. Discriminatory socio-cultural attitudes and economic inequalities may reinforce women's subordinate place in society, thus making their position more difficult. The Government as well as the Advisory Committee on Violence will continue and intensify their efforts to combat violence, trafficking and exploitation against women and further strengthen the co-operation with NGOs working in this field.

E. Women and armed conflict

Achievements: Another area where women of Cyprus have been very active for the past 30 years, but more so in recent years, is the area of peace. Women facing the tragic consequences of occupation and subsequent displacement have been particularly sensitive on matters of human rights and peace.

The Women's Movement has organized demonstrations against the illegal Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus, mass peaceful marches and has contributed to the creation of channels of communication between the two communities and promoted a culture of peace on the island.

The NMWR's gesture to invite Turkish Cypriot Women NGOs to fully participate in its workings and share its benefits, was done in the hope that the intercultural dialogue will benefit both communities. Bi-communal initiatives between Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot women have also taken place during the past few years, including the establishment of bi-communal women's groups. Another initiative, namely a multi-communal one concerning women from all five Cypriot communities, emphasized the active role of Cypriot women in any cross-cultural approach efforts¹⁷.

Administrative measures

The Government of Cyprus, recognizing the seriousness and complexity of the issue, and also taking into consideration the Country's vulnerability to illegal trafficking of women due to its cross continent geographical location and the need for multidisciplinary approach, has established a Monitoring Unit for combating trafficking and sexual exploitation of human beings.

By its Decision No. 54.281, dated 19.9.2001, the Council of Ministers, at the request of the Attorney-General of the Republic, decided the setting up of a group of experts (Monitoring Unit) to coordinate action on the issue of combating trafficking of persons and sexual exploitation of minors.

¹⁷ See: Hadjipavlou M. "Women in the Cypriot Communities. Interpreting women's lives", The Peace Center, Nicosia: 2004, 224 p.

The Federation of Women's Refugee Associations (KEGYK), established in 1999, to promote the issues of the internally displaced people in Cyprus, have also been active in campaigning to raise awareness on the Cyprus political problem and the specific problems of the internally displaced women in Cyprus. Another noteworthy development in this field was the setting up of the International Eco-Peace Village in 1998 with the vision to contribute towards achieving the broader goal of peace for Cyprus and the other countries in the region¹⁸.

Obstacles: Peace itself and Culture of Peace are inextricably linked to decision-making structures and processes, where gender balance is strikingly absent. The marginal participation of women in political and economic leadership minimizes the effect women are having in grass-roots organizations.

F. Women and the economy

Achievements: Cypriot women enjoy high standards of living, thanks to the island's economic development. Their status and position in economic life has improved significantly during the last years. They have benefited most from the increase in employment during the last decade, narrowing the gap between male and female employment rates¹⁹. Female employment, according to the Labour Force Survey, accounted for almost 44% of total employment, in 2002, whereas in 1990 women accounted for 38% of total employment. With an unemployment rate of about 3-4%, Cyprus enjoys conditions of "full employment". The percentage of unemployed women is decreasing, though, as in many other countries, it has always been slightly higher than that of their male counterparts: 73% and 56% of newcomers registered unemployed in 1999 and 2002 respectively were women.

The current review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was formulated in a rapidly changing global context. The globalisation process has presented new challenges for the fulfilment of the commitments and the realisation of the goals of the fourth World Conference on Women, which has resulted in policy shifts, pattern-transformation of production and accelerated technological innovation. With the creation of more jobs and the introduction of new working methods, new opportunities have arisen for the employment of women. Unless women have equal access and receive adequate training, they run the risk of being squeezed out of such fast-growth and promising sectors. One of the major achievements, as far as women in the economy are concerned, is the fact that there is now increased awareness about the importance of mobilising all talents from the potential workforce

¹⁸ Its mission is to create an eco-sensitive international village, which focuses on the training of women and youth in ecological issues and sustainable development, in conflict prevention and peace, as well as in conflict resolution.

¹⁹ The difference between male and female employment rates appears to be small amongst the younger age group of 15-24 years, estimated, in 2002, at 2 percentage points, but this gap increases to 21 percentage points amongst the persons aged 25-54 and further increases to 35 percentage points for the older age group (55-64). In 1992, the respective differences were 2,1 percentage points, 30,6 percentage points and 50,9 percentage points. The services sectors absorbed in 2002 the 84% of the female employment and the 62% of the male. Almost 50% of the employed women are concentrated in the sectors of trade, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing and education, while almost 58% of the male employment is concentrated in the sectors of manufacturing, construction, trade and public administration.

of the country, in order to achieve full economic growth and remain a competitive market. But since this awareness-raising policy is newly introduced and not yet imbedded in the country's economic culture and policy process, and the economy still remains male-dominated, emphasis may be given to aspects other than that of gender. The Planning Bureau, when preparing the annual budget takes into account gender perspectives and concerns of women in order to monitor budgetary allocations. The Statistical Service provides relevant data necessary for carrying out assessments from a gender equality perspective. The importance of gender perspective in the development of macroeconomic policy, although can be identified in many aspects of governmental policy, is still not widely recognised, especially the private sector.

Being aware of the importance of mobilisation of women, the Government has made some efforts to stimulate women's active participation in the working patterns of the economy and decision-making. A Committee on the Equality of Sexes in Employment and Vocational Training was created exactly to pursue these goals. The committee was founded in 2003, based on the article 22 of the Law on Equal Treatment of Men and Women on Employment and Vocational Training [Law 205(I)/2002].²⁰ As far as vocational training is concerned, women have a high participation percentage (over 40%) for a number of years in training sessions offered by the Human Resources Development Authority (HRDA), which is the main responsible institution for workforce training provided on a non-discriminatory basis. During the year 2002, 52.2% of the people who took part in the HRDA training courses were women. Moreover, HRDA has initiated a number of studies on women in the workforce, inactive women etc.

There is an overall improvement at the legislative and administrative level, mainly due to the harmonisation process with the *acquis communautaire*: improved provisions for maternity and parental leave, child care facilities, reconciliation of women's family and professional responsibilities. All these changes have been pursued mostly by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

In March 2002, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism has elaborated a special program, *Scheme to enhance Female Entrepreneurial Activity*, to encourage women entrepreneurship, by helping finance the creation of women-owned companies with special grants²¹. The activities of approved projects include manufacturing, agrotourism, and e-commerce.

²⁰ The Committee consists of a Chairman/woman appointed by the Minister of Labor and Social Insurance and one representative of each of the following: the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Service of Public Administration and Personnel, the Employers Organization and the Employees Organization, which are member of the Employees Advisory Board. The committee is appointed for a period of 2 years with the possibility of re-appointment. The Committee has an advisory role and may recommend the introduction of measures and the implementation of programmes for the promotion of equality of sexes, may collect statistical data on issues falling within its field of responsibilities and advise or formulate recommendations for introduction or revision of relevant legislation. It may submit and receive complaints, which must be transmitted to the Chief Inspector for handling and for which it should be suitably informed.

²¹ The scheme aims, inter alia, to:

- encourage women aged 18-55 to undertake self-employed work in manufacturing and selective activities in trade, services and tourism;
- create viable enterprises, particularly in rural areas, to serve the specific needs of the local economy;

During this period we also observed the creation of the first Women's Cooperative Bank. The Bank seeks to soothe the problem of access to financial resources. Three hundred and fifty women with the vision to improve the standard of living of women founded the women's co-op bank, which started functioning in January 2001. The Bank does not rely on donations but on deposits and its clients can be both men and women²². The involvement of women in the decision process may be slow but is gradually picking up pace.

Obstacles: Despite the many innovations in the sector, some structural characteristics remain. A gender gap still exists in terms of equal wages for equal labour and equal opportunities for career advancement, while gender structural differentiation in particular jobs persist. This is usually the case concerning employment in High Technology sectors. Many women with comparable skills and experience are confronted with a gender wage gap and lag behind men in career advancement and mobility, particularly women from rural areas. Women continue to earn less than men, at least in the private sector, some jobs that are still considered "female" are still low paid and most women are employed on a part-time level and not as full time, mainly due to their family and social obligations and constraints. In some cases consistent general stereotyping still prevents women from fully exploring their opportunities and pursuing a career that will enable them to live up to their full potential. They remain the most vulnerable group of the work force, which is usually the first to suffer from unemployment or structural economic readjustments. Women seem to constitute the majority of the long term unemployed²³. In 1990 long term unemployed women formed 55%, whereas this percentage increased to 59% in the year 1995 and

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- encourage women to use new technologies in the production and marketing of their products and services (e.g. information technologies);
 - increase the employment opportunities for university graduates.

²² The objectives of the bank, inter alia, include:

- To enhance the creation and promotion of women-owned businesses, preferably in new fields. The coop has actively participated in the creation of the National Scheme to Enhance Female Entrepreneurship launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism.
- To cooperate with the Government as well as various Institutions in Cyprus and abroad in order to absorb funds and services in the framework of a number of projects. These sources could be utilized for the provision of more flexible loan terms. In addition to the aforementioned programme, the coop has been part of a number of European (e.g. Women's Eurochambers) and Euro-Mediterranean (e.g. AIM, SIFRA) networks.
- To carry out research on women-related issues. The bank's first project was on *Female Entrepreneurial Activity in Cyprus*. Its findings were used in the formulation of suggestions towards the National Scheme to Enhance Female Entrepreneurship launched by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism. A second one is planned on a *Comparative Study Between Men and Women Entrepreneurs in Cyprus*.
- To organize seminars and workshops in order to support and promote the economic advancement of women-owned businesses (e.g. on preparing business plans). Free advice/ guidance (e.g. in the preparation of the business plan) was provided to women interest in applying for the National Scheme to Enhance Female Entrepreneurship.
- In future: The coop is currently looking into ways to create a business incubator for companies launched by women. This should enable women sustain their launched ventures within the first two most difficult starting years by providing office space, office assistance, mentoring and legal advice, links and networking.

The seven board members represent all towns and are experts in banking, business, and research. They are in contact with all the Cabinet Ministers and professional bodies - as for example, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, etc.- in order to establish links and promote their views on women-related issues. To this end, it works closely with the NMWR, which subsidized its first research project.

²³ Long-term unemployed are people who have been unemployed for a period of 12 months or longer.

63% in 2002. A greater effort is needed to proceed with fully-pledged gender sensitive economic policies and budget procedures, which take into account the gender perspectives and the concerns of women and men.

G. Women in power and decision-making

Achievements: Women at Higher Levels of Government: Despite the increasing number of women actively involved in politics, women are underrepresented in the Government, Parliament, Judiciary and almost all decision-making bodies in general. (See: 2003 Cyprus indicators for measuring progress in the field of political and public decision-making, Rec (2003) 3 Council of Europe)

In the **Cabinet**, there is only 1 woman among the 11 Cabinet ministers, the Minister of Health. There was another woman Minister appointed in 1993, the Minister of Education and Culture. For the first time, women have been nominated at high-ranking political posts. This constitutes indeed an important development, which opens the way for new role models for women. In particular, these appointments include the Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), the Law Commissioner, the Auditor-General, the Deputy Accountant-General of the Republic, and the Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data. For the first time, a woman holds position in the Public Education Commission (a five-member Commission). It is also worth noting, that during this period, women Ambassadors were in post in Brussels, London, Washington and in other important capitals. The presence of women at all levels of the professional staff within the Civil Service has also increased with their participation, reaching the level of 37% in the entire Civil Service and the percentage of women's participation in the senior officials category increased from 5% in 1995, to 14% in 1999, to 21% in 2001 and to 28.81% in 2003. In August 2003, 25 women were members of the Boards of Semi-Government Organizations, which are Boards appointed by the Government, out of 165 members, representing 15.15%. However, some Boards still appear to be 'men's clubs'.

Judiciary: Another major achievement is the first ever nomination of a woman as a member of the thirteen-member Supreme Court. Although in the Supreme Court there is only one woman, the percentage of women judges in the courts below has been constantly increasing. While there were no women judges in 1980, they constituted 5.3% of all judges in 1990, 15.2% in 1995, 21.7% in 2000 and 26.4% in 2003.

The interest among women to claim a seat in **Parliament** has been constantly increasing. In the 1991 elections, there were only 31 women candidates, in 1996 there were 56 and in 2001 there were 85. The increase is partly due to new party formations and an increase in Parliamentary candidate numbers as the whole. Despite the interest, in the 1991 and the 1996 elections only 3 women were elected, and in 2001, 6 women, in a total of 56 representatives. At the European Parliament elections in June 2004, no women were elected, but, since three of the elected MEP's had been members of the House of Representatives, with their resignation three women are now entering Parliament, which increases the number on women MPs to 9 (16.1%). No woman has yet held the office of President of the House of Representatives.

After **Local Government** elections in the year 2001, 74 women Municipal Councillors and members of other local area governing bodies were elected, out of a total of 398 (19%), compared to 66 women out of 384 (17%) in the previous elections in 1996. There is, today, one woman Mayor out of a total of 33 (3%), compared to 4 women Mayors (12%) in 1996. The President of the Republic of Cyprus as well as Political Party Leaders and Women's Organizations have declared their full support to a further balancing out in women's participation in decision-making and politics, in order to meet the goal of a minimum 30% representation of women before 2005, as set by the Beijing Platform of Action.

Recent research has shown that both male and female Cypriot voters do not fully trust women yet, who remain 'invisible' for a variety of reasons. Another research carried out by the Women's Organization of the United Democrats Party reveals that the main reason for the low representation and participation of women in politics is due to the conservative traditional features of the Cyprus society. The education system, the media, as well as the family are not at all supportive and encouraging to women's efforts to enter the political scene.

The Government, through the National Machinery for Women's Rights, has taken a set of measures to increase women's participation in political and public life. These include, *inter alia*, training seminars on issues such as Women in Politics, the solution of the Cyprus problem etc. NGOs have been in recent years very active in promoting the participation of women in political and public life, and to this end, they have organized campaigns and seminars, as for example the Cyprus Federation of Business and Professional Women who have organized events to support women candidates from all political parties in 2003.

The NMWR, in view of the May 2001 Parliamentary elections, had launched a successful public campaign to support women candidates²⁴.

Political Parties: Three of the political parties have introduced the quota system to favor the participation of women in their decision-making bodies and candidate lists. More specifically, the quota system in the Statutes of the Democratic Rally provides for a minimum participation of 20% for women in all collective bodies and candidate lists. This percentage is to increase to 30% by the year 2005. A similar provision exists in the Statutes of the Social-Democrats Movement and the United Democrats Party where the quota system of a minimum participation rate of 25%

²⁴ The campaign included:

- strong political statements by the Minister of Justice and Public Order (President of the NMWR), during various public events to support women's election;
- contact with the leaders of political parties requesting their full and practical support to increase the number of women in the candidate lists and also for their election;
- contacts with the mass media to give equal opportunities to women candidates during the pre-election period;
- posters and advertisements with the slogan 'Give Voice and Power to Women';
- a very broad circulation of a booklet presenting all women candidates (their CVs and political aspirations);
- organization of a special event under the auspices of the Minister of Justice and Public Order to honor all women candidates in the presence of the mass media representatives in which a special film was shown;
- preparation of lists with the names, addresses and other details of all candidates distributed widely to facilitate contacts and networking;
- collaboration with a radio station of pancyprian coverage (Radio Athena) through a daily programme on 'Women in Political Life' where all women candidates were given the opportunity to present themselves to the public.

for women in all their decision-making bodies. This is a good starting point but women still face, beyond the *double burden*, many prejudices when pursuing a political career. Political parties play an important role in Cyprus's social and political life, and can become either facilitators of rapid change and promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming or gate keepers, controlling change and maintaining existing obstacles towards women's equal participation in politics.

Obstacles: Notwithstanding substantial improvement, the actual participation of women in decision-making bodies in all areas, and in politics in particular, remains very low (0%-20%), as it is the case in many Mediterranean countries and/or in the so called Latin Rim. It is obvious that the absence or marginal presence of women hinders the inclusion of a gender perspective in these critical spheres of influence. As mentioned above (see p. 20), a number of obstacles do persist: political and socio-economic obstacles as well as ideological and psychological hindrances.

The Media is considered to be the Fourth Estate in Modern Day Politics and as such has a catalytic influence on the public and their perception of politics and society in general. The fact that women are not usually invited to programs during prime time viewing hours and that the image usually projected is associated with women's traditional roles constitutes an obstacle for women's equal participation in politics and decision making.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

See Part III of the report.

I. Human rights of women

Achievements: On the basis of both the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the *acquis communautaire* in the field of equality, an important number of legal reforms have been undertaken to prohibit all forms of discriminatory provisions, in an effort to eliminate them from civil, penal and personal status law governing marriage and family relations, work and employment rights etc²⁵. Cyprus has signed and ratified all relevant international conventions so Cyprus has a complete and up to date legal framework. As has already been noted in this report pertaining to other critical areas of concern, NGOs, old and new, the NMWR and the National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights²⁶ have contributed immensely to efforts promoting respect of Human Rights. Campaigns that had been undertaken and the consequent highlighting of existing problems have been essential in making the public aware of their rights and the law.

²⁵ See Cyprus third, fourth and fifth periodic report (1993-2003) on the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women., Office of the Law Commissioner, Nicosia , 2004, 102 p.

²⁶ The National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights ("the Institution"), an independent body, established by a Decision of the Council of Ministers (No. 48.386, dated 16.9.1998), which is composed of the Law Commissioner, as President, and representatives of the Attorney-General of the Republic, various Ministries, the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data, the House of the Representatives, the University of Cyprus, NGOs engaged in the promotion of human rights, and professional associations, such as the Cyprus Bar Association, the Cyprus Medical Association and the Association for Journalists.

Obstacles: Traditional social prejudices and stereotyped attitudes are still identified as the major obstacle to full implementation of women's human rights.

J. Women and the media

Achievements: Over the past decade Cyprus, and European media in general, have changed dramatically, raising new issues and questions which, until now, had not been given due attention from a gender perspective. Given the role of the media in forming public opinion in contemporary democracies, the question whether gender images in the media have changed – or are changing – and in which direction, cannot be answered in a straightforward way. Undoubtedly, there has been significant progress in changing the popular conception of women's role in society. Nevertheless, new and highly sexist depictions of women continue to co-exist alongside more unconventional roles for women.

The expansion of the media landscape has opened up more opportunities for women working in the media world, as well as more platforms for women invited by media to express their views and positions. The NMWR elaborated on a specific program to encourage and support financially media which were willing to give more visibility to women either by introducing new programs or by introducing women's perspectives. Three radio stations, one in Limassol and two in the capital, responded positively to its invitation.

In today's commercial media environment, media policy-makers must be responsive to their audiences. This applies both to state-owned and privately owned broadcasting corporations.

An important development in the audiovisual landscape of is the establishment of the Cyprus Radio Television Authority, which is the competent regulatory body for the establishment, installation and operation of private radio and television stations throughout the Republic of Cyprus. It is an independent Authority and was established under the Radio and Television Law (L. 7(I) of 1998, as amended). It is run by a board consisting of a chairman, a vice chairman and 5 members, out of whom 2 are women, appointed by the Council of Ministers, for a 6-year period. According to sections 26(1)c and 26(1)f of the said law, the broadcasts of all licensed stations are governed by the principles of respect for the personality, repute, status and private life of the individual and the ideals of democracy and human rights. Furthermore, section 33(3) (b) provides that advertising and tele-shopping shall not include any discrimination on grounds of race, sex, religion and nationality. Regulations, recently enacted deal with, *inter alia*, matters of discrimination. The Cyprus Radio Television Authority closely monitors stations and can take measures in cases where discrimination occurs.

Obstacles: Despite the participation of women in greater numbers in the media at various levels, the real power at the decision-making levels still lies in men's hands. Negative or degrading images of women and bias against women are still depicted through the media, mainly in popular programmes, while their conventional role is promoted. Furthermore, women are still largely underrepresented in programmes broadcasted during prime time zones, especially political ones. Stereotyping, prevailing political culture, lack of gender balance in decision-making and the double burden effect are identified as key obstacles towards broader promotion of women as

reliable political figures, decision-makers or “leader” figures. Nevertheless, women are not usually invited to programs during prime time viewing hours and women working for the media still face the glass ceiling effect when it comes to high profile or top-rank administrative positions. The percentage of women participating in televised or broadcasted panel discussions is still very low.

K. Women and the environment

Achievements: Women and the environment is an issue taken up by many women’s groups successfully and awareness building has become a key issue for the political agenda of most political and social forces of the country. Since Cyprus faces a number of important environmental problems and is forced to handle its mounting obligations effectively in this field through the harmonization process towards the EU, environmental issues have been set highly on the priority agenda of the government. Women, having played a vital role in promoting a greener political agenda and quality of life, now find themselves initiated in the decision-making process of this important policy.

Obstacles: There is still a lack of public awareness about environmental risks and problems, and women’s limited access to resources and information, particularly in rural areas, as well as clash of interests with powerful economic establishments, hinder their cause. Environmental policies and programmes lack a gender perspective, failing to take into account women’s roles and contributions to environmental sustainability. A gate-keeping system is in place in this field also, despite the fact that more women than men are active in environmental NGOs, with men still claiming the spotlight.

L. The Girl child

Achievements: Cyprus does not face problems regarding child exploitation either at the family level or in the field of employment. The country’s socio-economic situation, the educational system (obligatory primary and secondary education until the age of 15) and the prevailing culture safeguard the well being of children. Although child exploitation is non-existent in Cyprus, the government is very sensitive on the issue, and is monitoring it closely. The existing legislation for the protection of children is most effective. As regards legislation, Cyprus has ratified a number of relevant international instruments and brought its laws, mainly family law²⁷, in line with the *acquis communautaire*. This secures a high protection level for children residing in Cyprus. The emphasis during the period under review was placed on improving existing laws, but even more effort was put in securing implementation of the new legislation. A bill on family

²⁷ Among the new laws that have been enacted in this field are: The Adoption Law, 1995 (L. 19(I)/1995) bringing the domestic law in line with the European Convention on the Adoption of Children; The Marriage Law, 2003 (L. 104(I)/2003) which consolidates and modernizes two existing laws, covering on the one hand civil marriages among Greek Cypriots (Law No. 21/1990) and on the other hand mixed marriages and marriages where at least one of the parties is not Cypriot; (Cap 279). A very important element of Law 104(I)/2003 is that it allows, for the first time, civil marriages between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Law 104(I)/2003 is fully in line with the provisions of the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, which was ratified by Law No. 16(III)/2002. A number of amending laws have been enacted with a view to improving existing legislation. These include Parent and Children (Amendment) laws, Property Rights between Spouses (Amendment) laws, Family Courts (Amendment) laws, Children (Legal Status) (Amendment) laws.

mediation introduces the institution of family mediation to all family cases including parental care, maintenance of children, alimony, property relations between spouses. The bill is fully in line with the Council of Europe's Recommendation (R.98) of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on family mediation.

Moreover, Cyprus adopted a Tax Reform as from July 1st 2002. Within the provisions of the tax reform, the child benefit and the mothers' allowance have been promoted to support families with children and to lower the tax burden caused by the increase in indirect taxation. According to the legislation²⁸, every family residing in Cyprus with at least one child is entitled to a basic benefit provided that parent(s) and child live under the same roof. Benefit is payable to the parent or guardian, until the last child reaches the age limit.

Obstacles: Since no major problems exist, no obstacles can be reported.

²⁸ As from 1.1.2003 the Child Benefit to Families With Three Children Law, 2002 (L. 8(I)/2002) and the Child Benefit Law, 1987 (L. 314/1987) has been substituted by the Child Benefit Law, 2002 to 2003, (L. 167(I)/2002, as amended by Laws 22(I)/2003 and 57(I)/2003).

Part Three: Institutional Development

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order is the competent Ministry in Cyprus for the overall promotion of gender equality and the protection of women's rights in all walks of life. It has established an instrument to this effect, the "National Machinery for Women's Rights" (NMWR), which was set up by the Council of Ministers, (Decision no.40.609, dated 16.2.1994) as the continuation of the Permanent Central Agency for Women's Rights (established in 1988). The NMWR deals with all matters concerning women, focusing on the elimination of legal discrimination against women and the promotion of real equality between men and women. More specifically, it advises the Council of Ministers on policies, programmes and laws promoting women's rights. It monitors, coordinates and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of these programmes and laws, carries out research on the issue, promotes education and training programmes on relevant issues, supports and subsidizes women's organizations, contributes to the mobilization and sensitization of the Government Sector on equality issues and serves as a cooperation channel between the Government and NGOs working in this field.

The NMWR is a system of four bodies, which comes under the auspices and chairmanship of the Minister of Justice and Public Order, with the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry as Deputy Chairman. The most important achievement in the field of institutional development, since the previous report, is the setting into place of a series of significant advisory and monitoring institutions and thus empowering the gender mainstreaming process.

The NMWR :

- acts as a channel of communication between the governmental sector and the civil society (NGOs, Academic Institutions, etc),
- promotes inter-ministerial collaboration especially through the Gender Focal Points,
- facilitates the integration of gender issues into Government policies,
- encourages and supports the setting up of and collaborates with other bodies/structures which promote gender equality, such as the National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights, the Women Studies Center in the University of Cyprus, the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence, the Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training,
- develops close links with all International Organizations working in this field.

Due to its coordinating role, the NMWR has been very much involved in the preparation of the Periodic Reports under the CEDAW, as well as other progress reports on equality issues i.e. Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Beijing +5).

The NMWR is fully funded and staffed by the Government budget. Its budget covers mainly the cost of programmes and activities undertaken by the NMWR (research, seminars, training, experts advice and publications), as well as the subsidies for relevant projects and activities undertaken by Women's Organizations, Academic Institutions and other NGOs. Thus, the operational expenses and the compensation of the personnel working for the NMWR are covered by the annual budget of the Ministry.

The budget of the NMWR has been increasing considerably during the last years, namely from 44,000 Euros in 1995 to 366,000 Euros in 2003. The annual budget of the NMWR is part of the budget of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order. The wages of the staff and the operational expenses are paid by the budget of the Ministry. Efforts to secure additional financial and human resources and upgrade its status will be continued in order to enable it to perform its role effectively, which goes far beyond the development of women's specific activities and extends to the inclusion of a gender perspective in all national plans and policies (Gender Mainstreaming).

The General Secretariat of the NMWR consists of only two professionals who are assisted by external experts, whenever this is required, in order to cope with the increasing bulk of work (reports, organization of seminars, etc). The establishment of a modern Government Equality Unit, which should be in a position to influence the Government Sector more widely and effectively, and offer high-level services/ programmes to the public, and particularly to women (information, guidance, legal advice, educations/training programmes), has been declared by the new government. In order to perform appropriately its tasks as needed in the dynamic context of European integration, the EU perspective, the NMWR needs to be strengthened and empowered.

The help of the European Union has been sought in order to achieve this goal. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, within the framework of the EU Program for the implementation of the Policy Framework for Gender Equality, has organized a seminar with the participation of EU experts, in which the "European policies and Strategies in the area of Gender Equality and the necessary mechanisms for their implementation at the national level", have been analyzed to government officials and NGOs representatives.

The seminar was held in May 2003. One of the EU experts has undertaken to prepare and submit to the Government a Report with concrete suggestions as to how the National Machinery for Women's Rights should evolve, based on the experience of other European countries.

The NMWR plays an important role in bringing together women of all communities of Cyprus. It has invited Turkish-Cypriot women's NGOs to join the organization and take an active part in its activities. Two of them responded positively and now benefit from NMWR subsidies to develop their activities. Furthermore, a bi-communal project group, coordinated by a Turkish-Cypriot representative, has been set-up to develop and implement bi-communal projects in the field of gender equality.

Projects and activities

During the period under review, the NMWR has made itself visible pursuing a number of projects and activities in line with the National Plan of Action. These include:

- A campaign for "More Women in Politics", which resulted in doubling the number of women MPs.
- Introduction of Gender Mainstreaming within the Public Sector.
- Public awareness on gender issues through collaboration with mass media including a daily radio program.
- Training of the Police in addressing effectively the domestic violence cases.

- Development of research in areas affecting the lives of women.
- Contribution in the setting up/empowerment of the necessary/appropriate mechanisms bodies dealing with the enforcement of relevant legislation/promotion of gender-equality in general.
- Supporting women's groups and initiatives (Cooperative Women Bank/Eco-Peace Village, Bi-communal Women's Groups, Association of Single Parent Families).

The National Machinery plays a key role in the area of Law Reform, by

- monitoring general progress towards legal equality,
- identifying areas where legal action is needed,
- monitoring the enforcement of the existing legislation, and
- by initiating the setting up of Law Reform Committees to deal with specific issues.

New Law Reform Committees have been set up, by a decision of the Council of Ministers, at the initiative of the NMWR, to study matters relating to Family Courts and Causes for Divorce, Domestic Violence, Civil Marriage, Family Mediation, Sexual Harassment, Trafficking and Exploitation of Women and Children. As a result of their work a number of laws have been enacted, including the Combating of Trafficking of Persons and Sexual Exploitation of Minors Law, 2000 (L.3(I)/2000) and the Violence in the Family (Prevention and Protection of Victims) Law, 2000(L.119(I)/2000). In particular, in the field of Family Law, which comes under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, a series of amendment laws have been enacted improving the laws on Property Rights Between Spouses, Parents and Children Relations, Family Courts, the Children Law and the Marriage Law.

The contribution of the NMWR has also been substantial in relation to the elimination of discrimination in the Republic of Cyprus Citizenship Law of 1967, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Cyprus reservation on article 9(2) of the CEDAW. The NMWR has taken the lead for the signing and ratification of the U.N. Protocol to the CEDAW, as well as the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages. The NMWR had also contributed in the preparation of important equality laws in the framework of the harmonization process with the *acquis communautaire*.

The Government's commitment and strong political will towards gender equality is manifested by acceding to and ratifying two very important international legal instruments for women's human rights, namely:

- The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by Law 1(III)/2002, and
- The Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, ratified by Law 13(III)/2002.

In addition to the NMWR, other institutions have been put in place in the public sector during the period under review promoting gender equality according to their specific sphere of competence. These include the:

- **Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman)**²⁹,

The Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman), established by the Commissioner for Administration Law, 1991 (L. 3/1991, as amended), is a very important institution for the extra-judicial control of the administration and safeguarding of human rights. The Ombudsman has competence to investigate complaints against any public service and its officers, including the police and the army for any act of maladministration or omission violating human rights.

The NMWR as well as women's organizations have strongly supported the setting up of an Equal Opportunities Commission to investigate complaints of sex-discrimination has been extensively discussed during these years. The Council of Ministers has finally decided, due to the small size of Cyprus, instead of creating a new body, to extend the competence of the Commissioner of Administration so as to be able to investigate complaints of sex discrimination, as it has already been mentioned above.

- **National Institution for the Protection of Human Rights**³⁰.

The Institution receives hundreds of complaints per year. A considerable number of these complaints come from or relate to women (e.g. medical care for pregnant women, housing claims, asylum seekers, sexual harassment, civil debts, conditions at work, family violence, etc.). The Institution, further investigates, *ex proprio motu*, problematic issues which come to its attention. On the basis of the findings of its investigation, the Institution makes suggestions to the Government and/or the House of Representatives (Parliamentary Committees).

- **Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence**³¹.

The Committee was established under Law 119(I)/2000 for the prevention and combating of violence in the family, with competence to:

- monitor the problem of violence in the family in Cyprus;
- inform and educate the public and professionals using the media, conferences, seminars and re-education programmes;
- promote research;
- promote services necessary to deal with all aspects of violence in the family;

²⁹ Reports concerning investigation individual complaints are submitted to the competent public service department/officer, and contain, in the event of the finding of violation, the Ombudsman's suggestions or recommendations for reparation measures within a specified period. The annual reports, which are submitted to the President of the Republic, the Council of Ministers, and the House of Representatives and are also published, contain the Ombudsman's observations and suggestions.

³⁰ See above I Human Rights of Women, p. 38

³¹ The Committee members are selected from public and private sectors. Public sector appointees are selected by the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, Social Welfare Services, Legal Service and Police. Private sector appointees are selected by associations/organizations involved in combating family violence.

- monitor the effectiveness of related services and the application and enforcement of the relevant legislation.

- **Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training**

The Law No 205(I) of 2002 on Equal Treatment for Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training provides for the establishment of a Gender Equality Committee, with an advisory role, which will be responsible for considering matters falling within the scope of this Law.

The Committee was established on the 15th June 2003 and will, among others, supervise the implementation of this Law, promote studies and research relevant to matters falling within its competence, advise any interested person, free of charge, on matters relevant with the equality of men and women and submit, by its own initiative, complaints or accept complaints, which it will then forward to the Chief Inspector for proper handling. According to the above Law, any person who intentionally does not comply with its provisions is guilty of an offence and may be punished with a fine or imprisonment or both.

The Gender Equality Committee consists of:

- a Chairman appointed by the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance
- one representative of each of the following, also appointed by the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance:
 - the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance,
 - the Ministry of Justice and Public Order,
 - the Department of Public Administration and Personnel, of the Ministry of Finance
 - the employers' organization which is a member of the Employers' Advisory Body and
 - the employees' organization which is a member of the Employees' Advisory Body.

The secretarial and other material and technical support of the Committee is provided by the ministry of Labour and Social Insurance.

- **Investigation and Assessment of Work Committee under the Equal Pay legislation**

The law on Equal Pay between Men and Women for the same Work or for Work of Equal Value (L 177(I)/2002) provides for the establishment of a Committee for the Investigation and Assessment of Work and defines its terms of reference. The Committee, for the purpose of carrying out its powers relating to the application of this Law, collects information, carries out investigations, assesses comparable jobs and submits a report to the inspector in charge.

These important institutional developments together with the setting up of specialized and dynamic civil society organizations, and/or the empowerment of old ones, contribute significantly in enhancing the country's overall capacity to offer high level protection to its citizens. This is achieved by the fact that it allows the dual top-down and bottom-up approach to policy process to work in synergy. The significant improvement of the institutional capacity of Cyprus and the empowerment of civil society structures constitute the main features of this period.

Part Four: Main Challenges and actions to address them

The Government of Cyprus considers that the main challenges ahead pertain to implementation and thus, efforts, should concentrate on how to promote further and successful implementation of the decisions of the Beijing process. Gender equality should be a reality for every woman. That is why, it is of paramount importance to find creative ways to secure high political level of support for the national coordination mechanism, efficient and effective monitoring mechanisms, accountability of the different actors involved in the promotion of gender mainstreaming policies, visibility of gender equality and gender mainstreaming actions, empowerment of women and creation of gender sensitive environment for all social and political structures and processes. The Government of Cyprus supports grass-roots organizations, at national and local level, and contributes in the setting up/ empowerment of the necessary / appropriate mechanism bodies dealing with the enforcement of relevant legislation/promotion of gender-equality in general. It organizes public awareness campaigns and training programmes for women and men. In addition, in its efforts to empower women and women NGOs, through networking and cooperating in the EU framework, the Government has subsidized an NGO to set up an independent consulting office on EU programmes, in order to provide assistance for women's NGO to submit proposals. One of the many challenges in the horizon is the successful integration of migrant workers. As mentioned before, the established legal framework is in line with international instruments and constitutes an important step forward for a successful inclusive policy. Nevertheless a lot remains to be done until the integration process is imbedded in the local political culture and produces tangible scale results.

Needless to say that one key success factor is the establishment of a modern Government Equality Unit, which should be in a position to influence more widely and effectively the Government Sector and to offer high-level services/ programmes to the public and particularly to women (information, guidance, legal advice, educations/training programs). Such a unit has been declared to be under way by the new government. For the time being, the General Secretariat of the NMWR consists of only two professionals who are assisted, whenever this is required, by external experts, in order to cope with the increasing bulk of work (reports, organization of seminars, etc).

The Government has identified the need for research/ field studies as an urgent priority, in order to enhance the understanding of the differing impacts of policies on women and men and develop adequate tools to assist with the policy design, implementation and monitoring process. This need refers to a number of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, which are of particular interest to Cyprus e.g. women in power and decision-making, women and the media, women and the economy, violence against women etc.

The percentage of foreign population residing temporarily or permanently on the island has been constantly increasing, as have mixed marriages. Migrant/foreign women are a very vulnerable social group and their integration and protection of their rights constitute a future challenge. Customary practices such as girl genital mutilation or marriages forced upon children or honour-murders have not been reported as yet on the island, but should not be excluded with the increased influx of migrants. Cyprus has already taken legal measures to deal with some of these matters, such as penalizing genital mutilation and child or forced marriages, by imposing a

minimal age for marriage and requiring free consent of the individuals, as well as registration of marriages.

The Government intends to pay special attention to the issue of gender mainstreaming and knowledge society, as a constantly changing environment has presented new challenges for the fulfillments of the commitments and the realization of the goals of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The reason is that, despite the opportunities Information Communication Technology (ICT) offers to women, it also reinforces existing hierarchies and discriminations, according to EU sources³².

Equally important is the need for information and experience sharing on implementation aspects of the Beijing process, which may be subtle in nature and regional-or even nation-specific in focus-, but nevertheless may provide useful insights. In the wider context of globalization, thinking globally and acting locally, may be the only way ahead to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

³² European Commission, Social Agenda, Brussels, No 6, July 2003

Concluding Remarks

Democracy, cannot afford by definition to be gender blind. The fact that tracking progress on gender equality is constantly on the agenda is in itself a sign of progress. But, for commitments to be materialized and to have a real impact on women's lives, we need **political will, action and accountability**. The main difficulty is lacking synergy of these three factors in order to optimize results and accelerate the pace of progress. The strengthening, both in terms of budget and human resources, of the NMWR, who plays an important coordinating role, appears as a *sine qua non* condition for any successful forward looking strategy.

The overall assessment of achievements and obstacles to the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern is made in relation to the commitments taken, namely the initiatives and actions taken and the results attained. Due to the country's EU accession preparation, significant achievements have been registered at the legislative, administrative and civil society level. This is a major progress, which constitutes a noteworthy stepping-stone towards the full implementation of the Beijing process commitments.

The accession of Cyprus to the European Union, on the 1st of May 2004, enhanced the country's efforts for further progress in that direction. The Treaties of the European Union and EU Regulations, containing specific provisions for the purpose of ensuring full equality between men and women in practice, will have supremacy over national law and direct effect in Cyprus. Numerous EU Directives, which Cyprus is bound to transpose and effectively implement, give particular emphasis on equal pay for work of equal value, access to employment, conditions at work, special advantages for pregnant women and breastfeeding women, and social security benefits. "Positive action" to ensure de facto gender equality, provided for by the EU Treaties is now becoming a reality in Cyprus. In view of the fact that all "players" in the game – Government, Parliament and civil society – are determined to ensure that Cyprus is in a position and, in fact, can operate by EU standards at all levels and in all areas, the way has irreversibly been paved for further catalytic advancement of women in the country.

Nevertheless, the review and appraisal process reveals that, despite the indisputable progress and significant positive developments of the last few years, important gaps between the actions taken and the results obtained do persist. Remaining obstacles and barriers prevent the full implementation of the commitments made in Beijing.

The role of NMWR has been instrumental during this period. It can now count on an important network of governmental and non-governmental organisations in promoting gender equality. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action shows that there were significant positive developments in all the Government's major priorities and commitments: **legal reform, set-up of new institutions, increased public awareness on women's issues, increased women's participation in public and political life, research on gender issues, strengthening of the National Machinery for Women's Rights, preventive measures taken to combat the problem of domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace, trafficking of women, and harmonization with the *acquis communautaire*** of the European Union on gender equality issues.

The Government of Cyprus considers that the main challenges ahead pertain to implementation and thus efforts should concentrate on how to further promote and successfully implement the decisions of the Beijing process, at international and national level. Gender equality should be a reality for every woman. That is why it is of paramount importance to find creative ways to secure high political level of support for the national coordination mechanism, efficient and effective monitoring mechanisms, accountability of the different actors involved in the promotion of gender mainstreaming policies, visibility, empowerment of women and creation of gender sensitive environment for all social and political structures and processes.

Equally important is the need for research/ field studies assessing the degree and nature of domestic policy change in a number of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, which are of particular interest to Cyprus e.g. women in power and decision-making, women and the media, women and the economy, violence against women etc.

As EU has set as a priority objective to be the strongest knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010, special attention should be paid to knowledge society. The knowledge society has not, as some hoped, automatically broken down the gender divide and barriers. The hope of gender-neutrality in computer communication does not hold in the light of empirical evidence neither in Cyprus nor in other EU countries. The NMWR is aware of the fact that if women are not to be squeezed out of competitive, high expenditure sectors of economy and science, it is high time for the Ministry to design and develop specific actions according to a forward-looking strategy.

We now have a clear mind on how to consider the further implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and on the way though which we can overcome the double challenge of *de jure* and *de facto* equality in contemporary democratic societies which, like every challenge, contain its share of difficulty and potential. It is a matter of fact that when women's groups are strong and mobilised in a pluralistic system, adaptation is rather facilitated. Where they are relatively weak compared to other groups with different views (for example employers organisations, political parties hierarchies, etc.), adaptation may be hindered. The case of Cypriot women falls within the second category mentioned above, and thus need to deploy greater efforts.

? gender-sensitive democracy securely rooted in the political culture of people is the surest pledge for our world's stability and prosperity. That is why it is of paramount importance to create an enabling environment and design and implement policies that promote the culture of democracy and peace, in all educational systems and all social and political structures and processes. Furthermore, capitalizing on the new information technologies, including the Internet, to improve the global sharing of information, research, lessons learned and best practices related to achieving full *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality, can play a key role in keeping women in the mainstream of forward-looking strategies in polity, politics and policies.

In the wider context of globalization the need for information and experience sharing on implementation, which may be subtle in nature and regional- or even nation-specific in focus, remains an important way forward for achieving the advancement and empowerment of women for the benefit of all, women and men, girls and boys. Thinking and acting, both globally and locally, at the government and society level, empowers all actors and speed-up changes.

Abbreviations

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

EU: European Union

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

HRDA: Human Resources Development Authority

MEP: Member of European Parliament

ICPD: International Conference on Population and Development

ICT: Information Communication Technology

ILO: International Labor Organization

KEGYK: Federation of Women's Refugee Associations

MDG: Millennium Declaration Goals

MP: Members of Parliament

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

NMWR: National Machinery for Women's Rights

PRSP: Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNDAF: United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks

WHO: World Health Organization