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“The role of national mechanisms in promoting
gender equality and the empowerment of women:
achievements, gaps and challenges”
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National machinery: achievements and challenges - experiences of Lithuania.

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Beijing Platform for Action highlighting importance of institutional machineries in the separate critical area provided necessary preconditions for creation and development of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality as well as inspired to make an efforts to ensure effective functioning of such national machineries. Furthermore it contains several strategic objectives in this area. Adopting Beijing Platform for Action the governments committed themselves to take actions in order to reach goals established. Outcome document of Beijing +5 contains detailed review of achievements, remaining obstacles and challenges, as well as actions to be taken, so indicating new methods for further development of national machineries.

Taken into consideration Beijing Platform for Action, requirements of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, National machinery in Lithuania is established starting from 1994 and successfully developed further. Today it covers broad range of active players, including Parliamentary level: Human Rights Committee of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (Parliament) as well as Commission for Family and Child Affairs, also and Informal group of Women Parliamentarians. Governmental level: Head of National machinery - Minister of Social Security and Labour, who is also in charge of gender equality, relevant division in the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Adviser to the Prime Minister on gender issues, Interinstitutional Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (cooperating with the rest structures of National machinery, such as Parliamentary structures, Equal Opportunities Ombudsmen's Office) also Women's NGO's, scientists and researches), focal points in every Ministry, responsibilities of all governmental institutions implement gender issues in the area of their competences in line with the gender mainstreaming approach, according to the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, independent Ombudsperson on Equal Opportunities, social partners, four gender studies centres and more then 100 active women's organizations, including National Women's Forum, recently established at the Commission of the Family and Child Affairs of the Parliament. The most recent achievements in this area are establishment of persons responsible for gender equality in local municipalities so strengthening implementing level of national machinery.

Political will

Gender equality issues, gender mainstreaming remain a priority policy in Lithuania. Activities in this field include rapid development of institutional mechanisms, tools and methods, appropriate legislation, adoption and implementation of programmes and projects.

Principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment is established in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. This principle is also enshrined in a number of laws: Law on Elections, Law on Referendum, Law on Civil Service, Law on Local Self-Government, Labour code, Civil code and others.

In 1998 the Parliament adopted the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Law establishes duties of all state institutions to implement equal rights of women and men so creating legal background for gender mainstreaming, prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination of men and women in the employment area, education, science, provision of goods and services. An amendment to the Law of 2002 broadened the areas where equal opportunities for women and men have to be implemented and included equal rights in the field of consumer's rights, prohibition to ask job seekers about their age, marital status. Since January, 2005 Law on Equal Opportunities comes into force, which prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds other than sex: race, religious, disability, sexual orientation, age etc.

Structures and mandates

1. Parliamentary level

1.1. Human rights Committee – Initiates and considers laws related to discrimination on all grounds, including sex.

1.2. Parliamentary Commission for Family and Child functions since 1996. It initiates and considers laws, legal acts on gender equality, women's rights, rights of the child, family policy.

1.3. Informal Group of Women Parliamentarians.

All women parliamentarians from all parties formed an informal group of women parliamentarians. The aim of the group is to discuss women's and gender equality issues so facilitating and promoting gender equality, networking with active players of the society, first of all numerous and active women, NGOs.

2. Governmental level:

2.1. Position of Adviser to the Prime Minister on Equal Opportunities was established in 2002 to advise the Prime Minister on family, children, youth, gender equality issues and relevant NGOs. (previous similar position has been established in 1996)

2.2. On 26 November 2001, following the decision of the Government a Minister of Social Security and Labour was entrusted with a task of overall responsibility for coordination of gender equality issues in all spheres, actually acting as a Gender Equality Minister. So following gender mainstreaming all Ministries are responsible for implementation of gender equality issues in the area of their competence through preparation and carrying out of programmes and projects (see part II).

Ministry of Social Security and Labour is responsible for implementation of equal opportunities for women and men in the areas of employment and social security. Main activities of the Labour market and Equal Opportunities division within the Ministry involve drafting legislation, implementation of relevant laws and other legal

acts, aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, drafting and implementation of programmes, initiating relevant projects. Its responsibility also includes overall coordination of activities carried out on governmental level, preparation of the reports to UN on the CEDAW implementation, other international organizations, awareness raising consultancy, etc. Through implementing of programmes and projects and the Ministry also closely cooperates with relevant NGOs. Every year on the basis of the reports from all Ministries, Ministry of Social Security and Labour presents reports on actions taken, progress achieved and further actions to be taken to achieve goals established in the Programme of Government of Lithuania in gender equality field.

2.3. Inter-Ministerial Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men consists of representatives of all ministries and two departments. This body is a primarily structure for gender mainstreaming. The Commission co-ordinates implementation of gender equality programmes and other gender-related measures. It submits proposals, recommendations concerning gender equality to the Government. The Commission works in close cooperation with other components of gender equality machinery: Equal Opportunities Ombudswomen, Advisor to the Prime Minister, researches, NGO's. This structure apart of gender mainstreaming is important point for networking of all components of national machinery, including public and private sector. The commission every year provides report on its activities to the head of National machinery.

2.5. Since 1997 Statistics Department under the Government compiles, analyses and publishes data on gender statistics. The publication "Women and men in Lithuania" is published yearly starting from 1997. Statistic data desegregated by gender gives possibility to identify gender equality problems in different fields and to take appropriate measures to combat inequalities.

3. Ombudsperson for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (established in 1999) takes overall responsibility for supervision of implementation of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Ombudsman investigates individual complaints on discrimination and sexual harassment; submits recommendations to the Parliament, Governmental institutions on the priorities in gender equality policy, including recommendations on amendments to relevant legislation; refers the materials to investigative bodies; addresses an appropriate person or institution with recommendation to discontinue the actions in violation of the Law on Equal Opportunities; hears cases of administrative offences and imposes administrative sanctions, etc.. Until 2003 Ombuds's office investigated 218 complaints and conducted 53 investigations. Statistics by gender varies each year. In average, more complaints are submitted by women, though men are equally active, in 2001 men submitted more complaints. Every year Ombudsperson submits report to the Parliament

4. Local level. Process of establishment of local level in institutional mechanism started in 2001 with the appointment of persons responsible for gender equality issues

in local municipalities. Municipality of the capital -Vilnius city municipality was the first, who made first such appointment.

5. Private sector -Social Partners. A majority of biggest trade unions has Women's councils. Women's councils play important role in the implementation of equal opportunities and equal treatment provisions in the labour market, ensuring awareness raising on the issue, promoting of women's rights in the employment area and education. Employers associations are still not so active.

6. Public sector. There are more than 100 active women's Non-governmental organizations, which draw society's attention to the needs and problems of women. Carrying out projects on equal opportunities in such fields as employment, education, politics and decision making, protecting women's human rights, combating violence against women and trafficking in women, health, including reproductive health, protection of environment the NGOs positively influence development of gender-equal society.

Emphasis on implementation

As a result of active work and collaboration among different institutions, legislation has been improved and do not contain discriminatory provisions. Implementation of gender equality is carried out through the goal-oriented programmes, projects, other measures and activities, executed in the coordinated manner.

The Government of Lithuania has approved the Programme for advancement of women in 1996. The aim of the program is to establish long-term gender equality objectives in following critical areas: protection of human rights of women; women's economic-social status; women and environment protection; women's health, family planning; women and education; women in politics and public administration; violence and harassment against women and girls; women and the media; system of statistics and gender differences. Two action plans for implementation of the programme have been already implemented.

National programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2003-2004 adopted by the Government in 2003 is a complex programme, covering implementation of concrete measures, e.g. in areas of employment, education and science, politics and decision making, combating violence against women and trafficking in women, health protection and environment, including combating stereotypes, awareness raising, etc.

Following gender mainstreaming principle activities on gender equality are included into different programmes. National Action plan on Human Rights, adopted by the Parliament in November 2002, Employment raising programme, adopted by the Government on May 2001, Measures to promote small and medium-sized business, adopted by the Government on July 2002. Lithuania is the first country in the region which has adopted the Programme on the prevention and control of trafficking in

human beings and prostitution. National action plan aimed to combat violence against women, especially domestic violence is already drafted and would be submitted to the Government soon.

Methodology of impact assessment of draft decisions, adopted by the Government, came into force from 1st August 9 2003. Methodology includes requirement on assessment of the impact of the draft decision to women and men.

Achievements

Measures implemented within different programmes, projects resulted in gender equality achievements such as small difference in salaries between women and men even in private sector, since 1994 lower unemployment level of women (almost equal in a moment), facilitated women's participation in small and medium sized business - almost 40 percent of small and medium businesses are headed by women. positively influenced reconciliation of work and family life, raised awareness on different gender equality aspects, including protection of women's human rights, combating violence against women and trafficking in women. Membership in the European Union provides for Lithuania promising perspectives for women in a European labour market, growing economical independence of women and more sufficient protection of women's human rights, support in addressing situation of vulnerable group so positively contributing to achievement of gender equality goals.

Challenges

Well developed national machinery covering all necessary structures presuppose turn to good governance, including clear mandates of structures, competences and knowledge both in gender equality matters and public administration and management, effective coordination of activities of different levels, monitoring and assessment of impact and reporting process. Balanced participation, involvement of men is not least in that list. Despite the progress reached such issues as unequal balance of women in politics and decision making, both horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market, combating traditional stereotypes, reconciliation of work and family life, violence against women, especially domestic violence, trafficking in women still remain to be addressed in the future.