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**REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION IN
THE UNECE REGION**

Note by the secretariat*

SUMMARY

This regional review examines the regional implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is based on national responses to the UN questionnaire prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in cooperation with the regional commissions. Summaries of each country report are included in ECE/AC.28/2004/4/Add.1 and 2.

While many countries made some progress in the 12 areas of the Platform for Action, this progress was uneven. There were worrisome trends in most countries in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), where women's position in the economy deteriorated as a result of job losses, a move towards low-paid jobs in both the formal and informal sectors, and cuts in social protection. In these countries, women's access to health services deteriorated and there was a substantial rise in poverty.

In the most advanced economies, women's employability improved and new measures were introduced to help parents combine work with family responsibilities.

Traditional views about women's roles are resurging in a number of countries and violence against women remains a key concern throughout the region. On the positive side, progress, although uneven, has been made in women's access to decision-making positions and the development of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Legislation for gender equality has also been developed, but legal gains still have to be translated into de facto gender equality achievements.

Among the key challenges for the years ahead are ensuring real progress in implementation, monitoring and benchmarking of progress in gender equality in all 12 areas of concern and giving urgent attention to reversing negative trends in Eastern Europe and CIS.

* Late submission due to a lack of editing facilities and insufficient secretarial support within the UNECE as well as delays in receiving national responses to the UN questionnaire from some Member States.

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Introduction

1. The Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth Conference on Women in 1995 and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 marked key steps towards gender equality.

2. The Platform for Action builds on gender-related commitments made at previous United Nations conferences as well as on the framework established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), emphasizing a rights-based approach to gender equality in order to empower women.

3. This review of the implementation of the Platform for Action reflects the specificity of the UNECE region. Progress is measured not only against the commitments made in Beijing but also against those embodied in the conclusions of the UNECE Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (Geneva, 19-21 January 2000). These conclusions centred on : women and the economy; violence against women and girls; women and girls in armed conflict; women in power and decision-making; and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

4. Since 1995, there has been progress in many countries and in all areas of concern, although there have been setbacks in most countries in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Women enjoy better access to employment, better education and better health. Some reach high positions in decision-making and many run their own businesses or reach top executive positions in the corporate world, especially in North America.

5. Despite the uneven progress, countries share similar problems in promoting gender equality. Most remain concerned about poverty, especially among single mothers and older women; the obstacles to quality jobs; discriminatory practices and the persistence of the gender wage gap; weak enforcement mechanisms for anti-discrimination legislation; inadequate social protection, especially for atypical work arrangements, and the lack of sensitivity to the gender aspects of welfare and pension reforms. This has to be seen in the context of very slow progress, and in some countries even a reversal, in rethinking institutional frameworks and

policies that are based on the man as breadwinner and do not take into consideration the relationship between paid and unpaid work.

6. Violence against women remains a key concern for all countries in the UNECE region as they face widespread domestic violence and more trafficking in women. In many countries women's participation in the decision-making process, especially at national levels, remains an important area for further action.

7. The 10-year review takes place against a background of continued political instability in a number of new democracies within the UNECE region, conflicts and post-conflict situations, massive migratory movements among and within countries, and the growing threat of terrorism. It also takes place in a new geopolitical situation reflecting the EU expansion to include 10 new member countries. This creates new opportunities, but also raises concerns about the potential marginalization of a significant number of non-EU member countries within a wider Europe.

8. As shown in their summary responses, most countries have a particular interest in: women and the economy (employability, including women's self-employment, social protection, gender budgets, gender statistics); strengthening of national machineries; and violence and trafficking. The secretariat has prepared notes with more in-depth discussions on these subjects and reference is made to them throughout this report.

9. The present review underscores the need to take the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action forward. It outlines both the achievements and the challenges in the 12 critical areas of concern, and points out areas for further action identified by the UNECE countries.

I. ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION

A. Women and poverty

- *Achievements: Many countries reported some decrease in the number of men and women living in poverty. Most countries developed national action plans to combat poverty that are gender-sensitive and focused on child poverty. Many countries introduced active labour market policies, projects and programmes to increase and promote women's participation in the labour market and improve access to economic resources.*
- *Challenges: Reducing poverty, as a number of countries reported relatively high poverty rates. Improving the situation of single mothers and older women who are at high risk of poverty due to discrimination in the labour market, in access to resources, goods and services, and gender wage gaps. Addressing child poverty, as up to 30 per cent of children in a number of countries live in the poorest households. Improving indicators and statistics related to the feminization of poverty.*

10. Women's poverty is a concern, especially in South-Eastern Europe, such as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in some countries in Central Asia and all three Caucasian countries. In these countries, women's poverty often affects ethnic and other minorities and immigrants, but it can also be a problem among the native population, especially in rural areas. It is also often related to military conflicts and post-conflict situations.

11. Statistics on women's poverty are inadequate due to the lack of regular data on the distribution of income within households, except from special surveys. Views of the widespread nature of women's poverty are largely based on poverty rates for female-headed households, mostly single mothers and their families and older women living alone. Data on child poverty contribute to the picture.

12. Women bear a disproportionate share of the costs of economic downsizing and reductions in welfare and social expenditure. In addition, there are systemic disadvantages in the existing framework of institutions regulating property rights, labour markets and welfare systems. In all countries, women have lower incomes for work, from property, including land, and from other sources, such as pensions. Therefore, they are at a

higher risk of poverty and social exclusion also in North America and Western Europe. In the United States, 90 per cent of adults who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (welfare) are women. In France, women account for 80 per cent of those earning less than the minimum wage.

13. Many countries, such as Azerbaijan, Denmark, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the United Kingdom, have adopted measures to combat poverty among women. National plans for poverty reduction include financial support for families with children, single mothers and single retired women. In Kazakhstan, a special programme was established to improve nutrition for low-income mothers and children. Increasingly, countries also are tackling female poverty through active labour market policies and support to self-employment. The latter includes micro-credit schemes, such as in Bulgaria and Slovakia. National plans to combat poverty often take a comprehensive approach, encompassing measures related to income, employment, education and training, health and housing, childcare, single parents and single older people.

14. Measures to reduce women's poverty also recognize the link between the economic well-being of children and that of women. Child poverty, especially in large families, is high in a number of countries. Tax credits (see box) and strategies to give all children a head start have been used to ease the problem, sometimes as part of a wider programme of action for single parents and initiatives to prevent poverty in the next generation.

15. A key challenge is to mainstream a gender perspective in all planned activities and measures. This requires changes in the institutional framework, which is still based on the man as breadwinner, and gender-neutral market mechanisms. It is also necessary to improve the collection of statistics and the analysis of women's poverty to establish effective measures and policies. In addition, further specific policies to strengthen the finances of families with children need to be developed. These might include provision of parental insurance, children's allowances, housing allowances and maintenance allowances.

Azerbaijan launched and developed government programmes to reduce female poverty. Land reform resulted in more than 500,000 women becoming landowners.

In Bulgaria, the Council of Ministers adopted the National Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and The Employment Strategy envisaged measures guaranteeing equal opportunities for men and women. In 2003 women constituted over 42 percent of participants in the programme "From social assistance to employment".

The United Kingdom's Child Tax Credit brings together income-related assistance for families with children, creating a portable system of support spanning welfare and work. The Working Tax Credit helps make sure that work pays, providing financial support and assistance with childcare for low-paid workers. The Child Tax Credit and the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit are paid directly to the main career in the family.

B. Education and training of women

- ***Achievements:** The performance of girls and boys in education was raised in most responding countries. All countries have education systems for primary and secondary schooling that are compulsory and free. Most countries include gender equality in their educational programmes. Most women and men in the UNECE region are literate. In most countries, women's access to all levels and types of education and training is on the increase.*
- ***Challenges:** Giving urgent attention to the decline in education of boys and girls in few countries in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. Increasing women's share in male dominated disciplines, including telecommunications and information technology. Addressing stereotypes, which persist in education materials in many countries. Improving gains from women's education, as in most countries women remain in a disadvantaged position on the labour market although they are better educated than men. Ensuring women's access to lifelong learning, which remains limited, especially for women over 45.*

Improving literacy rates among female immigrants through better funding of specific programmes for such women.

16. Women's education has improved over the past decade. This progress was especially swift in some West European countries, such as in Greece, Portugal or Spain. Access to education, however, deteriorated in few countries in Central Asia and in the Caucasus, such as in Armenia, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where there was a decline in enrolment rates in basic education. In some of these countries, such as in Tajikistan, ratio of girls to boys in basic education also deteriorated. Decline in the quality of public education and growing stratification in access by income level are problems, which affect girls and women's education in a number of countries in Eastern Europe and CIS.

17. Some countries effectively encouraged women to enter male-dominated disciplines, such as commerce, law, mathematics and computer science. Spain and France both reported that women were moving in this direction, while in Uzbekistan, Tashkent University opened a centre for training women in telecommunications and information technology. However, in most countries women continue to opt for a "female" education profile, which limits their opportunities in the labour market.

18. Most governments have shown commitment to ensuring equal and non-discriminatory access to education. A number of countries revamped their education programmes at all levels to include gender-specific topics. National curricula were revised to teach girls and boys about gender issues, including the problem of violence against women. In Finland, legislation ensures the right of students to a safe learning environment. In Israel, a web site was created to provide guidelines on gender issues for teachers and school officials and numerous training programmes sought to help teachers promote gender equality.

19. The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, several Central Asian nations with large immigrant populations and others introduced changes to help immigrant children integrate into their national education systems. Nonetheless, more efforts need to be made to improve education levels and learning opportunities for women immigrants.

20. Equal access to lifelong learning is of concern to most countries. Many countries support adult education and trainings for women, especially in the context of obtaining new skills after childbirth. These programmes exist in most countries in Western and Eastern Europe as well as in a number of CIS countries, such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Despite achievements, access to lifelong learning is still inadequate, especially in Eastern Europe and CIS, where adult education is now offered mostly by private companies without quality control. It is often of low value and the fees are high. Among the gender-specific barriers are constraints on women's time related to their unpaid caring functions at home, but also discriminatory practices by employers, who are more willing to "invest" in male employees.

21. Overall, there is scope for further progress to ensure adequate education opportunities for women. Increased awareness of the importance of education as a catalyst for women's well-being is necessary, especially in cases of early marriage or single parenthood. Among areas for action are: attention to lifelong learning; diversification of women's education profile; reversal of negative trends in access to education in some countries; and further improvement of gender-disaggregated statistics on education, especially quality indicators.

Finland is implementing a project called "Information Society Skills for All" as part of its National Information Society Strategy, which includes efforts to develop the information society skills of girls and women. There are also measures to increase the share of women in employment in the information industry.

In Ireland, the national training authority (FAS) tracks gender participation in all courses and in 2001 it secured funding to provide childcare for trainees. In 2003, 78,694 people, of whom 33,557 (43 per cent) were women, completed either a training or employment programme with FÁS. In 2003, women represented 45 per cent of training programmes, an increase of 35 per cent from 2001. The Gateway's

Initiative targets women returning to the workforce, offering personalized support and skills training.

The Swiss federal parliament in 1997 and 1999 voted a special appropriation to expand the number of apprenticeships, with the express objective of promoting gender equality. Those funds led to regional projects targeted at young women with lower education levels and at the integration of immigrant women.

The Ministry of Education in Turkey organizes programmes and training courses for women and girls who have not had access to formal education or who have dropped out. In 2000, nearly 700,000 women benefited from these courses. A majority took part in vocational training, while others attended socio-cultural and literacy courses.

In Uzbekistan, new employment programmes focused on training and employing women. As a result, women account for 44 per cent of the labour force and there has been an increase in women entrepreneurs. There was also a new campaign to educate women on their right to reproductive health services.

C. Women and health

- ***Achievements:** In most countries women have access to health systems and special screening programmes. In an increasing number of countries new policies and programmes to prevent teenage pregnancies were successful and more women have access to HIV treatment. Life expectancy among women continued to rise in most countries, although in some it is still below that of 1989. More attention is paid to the care and well-being of older women in a number of countries.*
- ***Challenges:** Improving health care, especially maternity services and medical care for children in a number of CIS countries. Including a gender perspective in health reforms, especially health insurance systems, in many countries. Addressing the rapid spread of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS in a number of CIS countries and countries in South-Eastern Europe. Reversing the setback in progressive legislation and policies on family planning in several countries. Ensuring proper sex education at school. Improving data collection and monitoring of progress.*

22. Women in the UNECE region generally have good access to health care. Women in most countries enjoyed longer life expectancy, suffered lower maternal and child mortality and had better access to many health care services. Many countries took effective measures to prevent teenage pregnancies and provide women with HIV/AIDS treatment, including through awareness-raising and education programmes. New health care programmes for older women were also developed, especially in North America and Western Europe. Greece was one of the countries to target women's health, particularly breast cancer, osteoporosis, breastfeeding and ill-treatment. It also set up 41 family planning centres. In Switzerland, meanwhile, women will for the first time have paid maternity leave following a referendum in September 2004.

23. However, there has been a serious reversal, especially in Eastern Europe and CIS. In 2001, women's life expectancy was lower than in 1989 in, for instance, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine (UN database). Maternal mortality rates increased in a number of countries, including Georgia, Lithuania, the Republic of Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and remain high, despite some improvement observed in the late 1990s. In addition, child mortality is high by international standards in several countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (UNICEF database). This jeopardizes commitments in the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals to reduce child mortality.

24. There have been deep cuts in public health services in most of Eastern Europe and CIS, with the introduction of market-based entitlements, such as private medical insurance, retirement homes and health care services. This, combined with a significant deterioration in the quality of public services, has reduced the access to health services for many women. Some countries, such as Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation established programmes to improve women's access to health services and reproductive health, which resulted in some decline in infant and maternal mortality rates in these countries.

25. Most countries made progress in sexual education, family planning and reproductive health through special programmes and, in some countries, legislative changes. However, early pregnancies, family planning and high-risk abortions remain a problem, particularly in countries with restrictive legislation. Poland reported that this led to more mothers abandoning their babies in hospital and to a resurgence of backstreet abortions.

26. In Eastern Europe and CIS the negative trends in women's access to health care need to be reversed and gender needs to be mainstreamed in health reforms. Good practices from other countries could facilitate this process.

*In **Belgium**, efforts have been made at federal level to integrate the gender dimension into the public health survey, and into studies of the health of female workers. Since 2001 an interagency group works on improving the knowledge on and access to contraception among young people.*

*The **Danish** Government produced "Healthy throughout Life", a health care programme for 2002-2010. It is a collaborative effort among 11 ministries and focuses on reducing major preventable diseases and disorders. The Minister for Gender Equality commissioned a report on "Gender differences in diseases and health."*

*The Sexual Health Clinic of the Family in **Finland** promoted sexual health and improved services, including through offering free counselling and treatment for girls under 18 and boys under 20. Another project sought to bolster men's welfare and the Clinic launched new services for sexually abused women. The Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients (2001) strengthened the rights of women with disabilities, who have special health care needs, especially during and after pregnancy, and for family planning.*

*In **Germany**, the Health Modernization Act strengthened gender-sensitive orientation of health care. Scientific reports, studies and statements must consider the aspects specific to age, gender and life situation.*

*In the **Russian Federation**, new institutions were established to raise awareness and prevent HIV/AIDS, including a federal centre as well as seven regional and 106 local centres.*

D. Violence against women

- ***Achievements:** There is more awareness among member States that violence against women is a human rights issue. Most countries stepped up efforts to combat violence against women, including through greater protection and better facilities for victims. A number of governments are working closely with NGOs on this issue. There is also more awareness of the problem of trafficking in women at all levels.*
- ***Challenges:** Strengthening legislative support to combat violence against women, which is still treated as interference in family affairs in many countries. Improving data and analysis related to violence against women. Giving more attention to trafficking in women in programmes aimed at fighting organized crime. Strengthening international support, including financial and professional resources, and improving coordination.*

27. Since 1995, awareness of violence against women and girls and commitment to preventing it have grown throughout the UNECE region. Most countries signed and ratified a number of international treaties related to violence against women and girls developed within the framework of the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

28. Up to 90 per cent of responding countries cited specific actions to help victims of violence. Countries introduced special education programmes, many of which involve men. Videos and short films about violence against women were made and shelters for battered women were opened. Many countries

established toll-free help-lines and shelters for abused women. In implementing these policies, governments worked with NGOs at all levels.

29. Some countries, such as Finland and the United Kingdom, allocate substantial resources to fighting violence against women through national budgets. A number of countries developed programmes and legislation focusing on trafficking in women. These included Denmark, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Poland. The Danish Government presented a national action plan, which includes measures to support victims, help families to prevent violence, including through treatment for violent men, expanding knowledge about the character and scope of violence against women and breaking the silence. There have been several national campaigns.

30. However, violence against women is still a serious and widespread problem across the UNECE region. As there are no consistent data, special surveys and studies are used to assess the scope of the problem. One such study from Turkey found physical violence against women in 34 per cent of households and verbal violence in 53 per cent. This study also showed that 46 per cent of children were subjected to physical violence. Domestic violence accounts for 20-25 per cent of violent crime in many countries.

31. A dramatic increase in the number of women being trafficked over the past decade from Eastern Europe and CIS to North America and especially Western Europe is of growing concern to most countries. Since 1989, according to estimates of the United States State Department, between 120,000 to 175,000 women from Eastern Europe and CIS have joined the sex industry in Western Europe each year. This increase is closely related to the rise in organized crime, inadequate anti-trafficking legislation, as well as changes on the supply side (deterioration of women's economic status) and the demand side (more demand for household help along with a booming sex industry). Measures, including criminalizing trafficking and launching awareness campaigns, were taken in many countries. However, more attention should be given to addressing the economic root causes of trafficking (see ECE/AC.28/2004/10).

32. In some countries, the persistence of violence could be attributed to difficulties in implementing laws and regulations, to a lack of awareness about regulations and mechanisms, to a lack of effective measures to deal with the underlying causes of violence and to the prominence of acts of violence in the media. In multicultural countries, violence against women can be a particular problem among certain ethnic groups.

33. Most countries reported that combating violence against women was one of their priorities. Clearly, however, a multidimensional approach to establishing effective policies, more commitment, focused programmes and resources are needed to make progress.

*In **Finland**, several NGOs provide guidance and support, including by telephone and the Internet, to women and girls experiencing violence or threatened with violence. There are also efforts to meet the special needs of immigrant women, for instance by providing services in minority languages. A project for men on non-violent alternatives in Espoo is piloting a meditative process. Many of the services involve voluntary work. The Church has strongly and visibly participated in prevention campaigns and actions to end violence against women.*

*Recently, **Italy** improved anti-trafficking legislation (228/2003) and strengthened the role of the Equal Opportunities Department, which co-ordinates the work of the inter-ministerial commission on trafficking composed of the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice and allocate funds for projects providing counselling, assistance and social protection to trafficked women, including through facilitating their employment and providing housing. A hot line was established in 2000 at national and local levels.*

*A Victim Support Unit was set up within **Malta**'s Police Force to provide protection to victims of domestic violence. Support services are also provided through the Domestic Violence Unit of its "Appogg" welfare agency including assistance by social workers, psychologists and other professionals. The agency also offers rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence. The Government provides financial support to NGOs that support and shelter victims.*

At Switzerland's initiative, 20 female ministers of foreign affairs and female government representatives met in Geneva to discuss a common action plan for combating violence against women more effectively and a joint declaration was adopted (15 March 2004).

In Turkey, fighting violence against women includes training security forces, health care personnel and other public servants who deal with the victims and educating women and girls about their legal rights. The Directorate General of Women's Status and Problems cooperates with civil society organizations.

E. Women and armed conflict

- ***Achievements:** Governments have recognized the violation of the human rights of women in armed conflict. There is increased awareness of the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention, peace-building and in post-conflict situations. A number of countries increased their quotas for women in peacemaking organizations. Most countries are working to improve legislation on this issue.*
- ***Challenges:** Improving international cooperation on women and armed conflict. Acknowledging and giving more attention to all forms of violence, related to conflict situations, such as forced migration, trafficking, sexual exploitation, prostitution, physical and mental abuse.*

34. Most countries showed a general understanding of the problem and a number were committed to involving women in conflict prevention, resolution and peace negotiation. Concrete policy measures and actions are, however, less common.

35. Several countries acknowledge women's role in peace-building and reconciliation. Finland's Ministry of Defence developed a code of conduct for peacekeeping missions and included gender issues in the training of peacekeeping personnel. Ireland's Government is committed to equal opportunities for men and women in the Defence Forces and to participation of women in all aspects of Defence Forces activities. The United Kingdom is looking at ways of ensuring that it nominates women for missions and posts in the United Nations and other international organizations. Similar measures were taken by Switzerland.

36. Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan launched new initiatives against trafficking and to improve women's situation in conflict and post-conflict situations.

37. Yet, further action is needed to assist women and girls affected by armed conflicts to regain their political, social, economic and legal status and ensure that they have inheritance rights. It is also necessary to allow women to contribute actively to conflict resolution rather than perceiving them as passive victims.

In Sweden, all troops undergo special mission-specific training on gender issues before they are sent abroad on United Nations peacekeeping missions. In 1999, Sweden adopted a Strategy on Conflict Management and Peace-building. This includes training of personnel and support to voluntary organizations that work to strengthen implementation of resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

F. Women and the economy

- ***Achievements:** Many countries introduced measures and developed new tools to improve women's employability, particularly in relation to the European Employment Strategy. Measures included active labour market policies, investment in better education, the introduction of flexible working patterns, including measures allowing employees to reduce or increase their working hours and a number of legislative changes to enable women to combine work and care.*
- ***Challenges:** Reversing negative trends in women's employability and in social protection in Eastern Europe and CIS. Eliminating de facto discrimination against women in the labour market, in access to resources, in hiring and in career development. Closing the gender wage gap. Improving the quality of women's jobs. Facilitating women's continuity of employment, including to better access to lifelong*

learning. Removing disadvantages of part-time employment. Promoting shared parental leave and providing more affordable childcare.

38. All responding countries viewed the economic aspects of gender as a priority. Women's position in the economy improved in most countries in North America and in Western Europe as a result of a better legislative framework, for instance in relation to the European Employment Strategy, and the introduction of new policies and measures, especially to improve employability and help women combine work with family responsibilities. This was reflected in higher participation rates, higher overall employment and some movement towards higher levels of responsibility and pay (see ECE/AC.28/2004/5).

39. More women became entrepreneurs and measures supporting women's self-employment were effectively used to support women's employability, especially in North America but also in many countries in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe and CIS (see ECE/AC.28/2004/CRP.2).

40. Nevertheless, the situation in Eastern Europe and CIS illustrates the fragility of women's economic position in times of crisis. Women's employment opportunities declined drastically: women's jobs suffered disproportional cuts, especially until the late 1990s, and women enjoyed fewer opportunities in the private sector, partly because of discriminatory practices. Women's presence in lower-paid sectors, such as public health and education, increased, as did their presence in low-paid jobs with few or no social benefits such as part-time or other non-standard employment arrangements and jobs in the informal sector. These tend to be jobs for which women are overqualified. The resurgence of traditional attitudes reinforces the perception of women as second-class employees (see ECE/AC.28/2004/6).

41. Despite the uneven progress, countries expressed concern over discrimination against women in the labour market. They also underlined the need to facilitate equal access to resources, rights and goods to help reduce poverty among women and further increase female participation in the economy.

42. All countries recognized the existence of a gender pay gap – in the United Kingdom it is 18 per cent, in Latvia over 20 per cent. In response, governments enacted laws making it easier for women to challenge unequal pay and funded voluntary pay reviews. Some governments introduced tax credits to help reduce the pay gap. Several set up equal treatment commissions with authority to investigate individual employers. Belgium launched a project (EVA), which aims to equip workers and employees with the tools for introducing new functional job classification and to encourage the revisions in order to make work classification system gender neutral.

43. Despite progress in helping women reconcile work and family responsibilities in Western Europe, e.g. in the Netherlands and France, the reduction in State benefits and the expansion of private health care, education or pensions, as part of the welfare reforms, remained a concern. These cuts in social protection schemes affected women disproportionately, because they strengthen the penalizing effect of unpaid care work. Although these changes were the most significant in Eastern Europe and CIS, their gender implications are of concern to all countries, as gender equality has been only a marginal issue in the social reforms throughout the UNECE region (see ECE/AC.28/2004/8).

44. Further action is needed to strengthen employment policy, adapt legislative systems and enforcement, create suitable working environments and introduce lifelong training, including in high-tech sectors and technologies, and introduce a gender perspective in social protection policies and mechanisms to make it easier for women to enter and leave the workforce and to combine employment with family responsibilities. To improve tools for mainstreaming gender into economic policies, new initiatives on gender budgets are needed, as well as further work on data (see ECE/AC.28/2004/CRP.1 and ECE/AC.28/2004/7).

A number of countries in central Asia and in the Caucasus, including Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan implemented special microcredit programmes in urban and rural areas to support women entrepreneurs, and promote the activities of women in business.

*In **Belgium**, the **Electronica** project was launched in 2001 to promote women's employment in the new technologies sector. The project is co-financed by the European Social Fund in the context of a federal programme for 2000-2006. The longer-term goal of the project is to change mentalities among women, trainers, employers and other stakeholders.*

*In **Canada** a national Women's Economic Forum was set up, an Aboriginal Women's Business Planning Guide was developed and a new Canadian Women's Innovation Award was created in 2003 in response to the recommendation of a federal task Force on Women's Entrepreneurship.*

*The **Czech Republic** launched a training project targeting the private sector to improve mechanisms for applying, enforcing and monitoring equal opportunities at enterprise level.*

*In **Germany**, a parent receives one pension credit point per year for three years, regardless of whether the parent is employed or not. If the parent is employed, the caring credits are added to the credits earned from obligatory pension contributions withheld from wages.*

*In 1999, the **Netherlands** Government began a four-year project to facilitate the combination of work and family responsibilities. "The Daily Routine Incentive Scheme" involved 140 experiments across the country: 'mother contracts,' flexible working hours, new forms of day care, service points and convenience counters, small-scale businesses in day care and care for the elderly, development of localized time-control policies and safer routes from home to school.*

*In **Poland**, the Plenipotentiary and All-Polish Alliance of Trade Unions initiated a survey carried out by the National Labour Inspectorate on discrimination. It asked employees how often they encountered discrimination on grounds of sex and whether they were personally involved, heard of or witnessed such situations. Provisional results of the survey showed that over half of the employees surveyed had come across discrimination.*

*In the **United Kingdom**, the National Assembly for Wales, in partnership with Wales TUC and the Equal Opportunity Commission Wales, launched a campaign in 2002 called 'Close the Pay Gap' to raise awareness of pay discrimination and encourage employers to carry out pay reviews. An audit carried out within the National Assembly itself showed inequalities in the pay system, which were addressed.*

G. Women in power and decision-making

- ***Achievements:** There are more women in decision-making positions, in governments and in elected bodies, especially at local levels. In most countries, awareness of women as decision makers grew. Especially in Eastern Europe and CIS, more women entered local politics as a result of democratization and the development of civil society. There were positive legislative changes and government actions in a number of countries.*
- ***Challenges:** Ensuring continuity of progress, which was very uneven and in many countries women's political participation is still very low at national levels. Strengthening campaigns addressing traditional views of women as homemakers, not decision makers, and cultural barriers. Making electoral systems more favourable to women candidates, improving the transparency of recruitment practices and reducing male dominance in certain areas of decision-making.*

45. In the past decade, women's participation in politics and decision-making has increased in line with democratic changes in many UNECE countries. All countries now recognize CEDAW and its provisions on decision-making and power-related issues, such as the right to vote, the composition of government, civil servants, funding granted to women's organizations and quotas.

46. Progress was, however, uneven and varied over election periods. It was also characterized by volatility and setbacks. While some countries increased the share of women in national parliaments between 1994 and 2003, e.g. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (up from 3.3 to 18.3 per cent) and Bulgaria

(up from 10.8 to 26.2 per cent), others experienced a decline, e.g. Lithuania (down from 17.5 to 10.6 per cent).

47. The Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands consistently had the best record (between 45 and 36 per cent). Austria, Germany, Iceland and Spain also scored well (over 30 per cent). In Belgium, women's share in the parliament increased from 12.7 to 35.3 per cent. At the lower end are countries, which scored below 10 per cent, including Turkey (4.4 per cent), Ukraine (5.3 per cent), Albania (5.7 per cent), Uzbekistan (7.2 per cent), and Serbia and Montenegro (7.9 per cent). Many countries scored around 10 per cent, such as the Russian Federation, Romania, Hungary and Kazakhstan. Women's share is around 12-14 per cent in France, Greece, Ireland and Italy.

48. A number of countries committed to achieving gender equality in government and public offices. In Ireland, the Government set a minimum target of 40 per cent for women's representation on State boards and the Netherlands has a target of 50 per cent by 2010. In many countries, however, current legislative systems do not require proportional representation of women and men among candidates nominated for elections. Quota systems introduced in several countries, such as Germany, Greece and Norway, have improved women's electoral chances.

49. Nevertheless in most countries urgent action is needed to achieve progress, especially in women's representation at the national decision-making level. This should include public awareness campaigns, the development of indicators to monitor and evaluate progress and innovative measures to encourage all stakeholders to ensure equal participation of women and men in political parties and elected bodies.

France has chosen to promote parity in elected bodies: the principle of equal access for women and men to elected mandates and elective functions was written into the Constitution in June 2000, and several laws have been adopted to give effect to that principle, including different rules for ballots using two-round list systems and those using the single-round system: in the first case, parity is required, while in the second, which concerns only legislative elections, the law imposes a financial penalty on parties and political groups that fail to come within 2 per cent of the 50 per cent gender balance.

The Netherlands developed a benchmark project - 'Women in senior positions'. Its purpose is to develop points of reference and compare women's access to senior positions in different sectors of the labour market. In addition to quantifying progress, the project will also track issues of quality. Therefore, the benchmark will include means of combining work and care, part-time positions at higher levels, recruitment, selection methods and career policy. As of 2004, companies will be able to use the benchmark to judge their own results.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

- ***Achievements:** All countries carried on building institutional mechanisms, with a wider range of institutions established and developed. Gender equality was promoted across all governments and at all levels. Some countries established means to monitor the main areas of concern. Gender budgeting received more attention.*
- ***Challenges:** Strengthening institutional mechanisms in a number of countries by addressing weaknesses due to a lack of professionals and financial resources or an inadequate understanding and awareness of gender equality issues. Raising awareness and recognition of gender equality as a human right. Improving data and further develop tools, such as gender budgets, to mainstream gender into all activities and programmes.*

50. There has been considerable progress in legislation over the past ten years, due in part to the better functioning of the national machinery. All countries viewed national mechanisms as important in monitoring advances in legal equality, identifying areas where legal action was needed and controlling implementation (see ECE/AC.28/2004/4/Add.2).

51. Most countries in the UNECE region have national action plans and have ratified CEDAW. There has been progress in the legislative framework of countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which established national machineries in the late 1990s. However, these machineries are isolated from the government structure and decision-making processes and have few resources (see ECE/AC.28/2004/4 CRP. 4). Many other countries in the UNECE region, especially in CIS, have similar problems.

52. National mechanisms vary greatly in structure, resources and de facto impact on the advancement of women. Some are headed by ministers, as in France and Poland. Staff numbers vary from 1 person, in Georgia, to 220 in France.

53. Gender bureaux are located in different parts of government. They may be part of ministries of labour and social affairs, such as in Slovakia, or there may be widespread networks of regional offices, such as in Belgium, France or Spain. Their roles vary from acting as the main mechanism for securing equal rights and coordinating gender policies to drafting and developing government policies in collaboration with other ministries. In all countries these institutions work in three key areas: strengthening institutional support for gender equality, monitoring and enforcing implementation of commitments, and strengthening the synergy between institutional mechanisms and civil society.

54. In the past decade, links have tightened between national machineries and other stakeholders, such as line ministries, parliaments, research institutes, academia and the media. In all countries, ties with NGOs have strengthened. At the same time, NGOs took a lead in lobbying for better national mechanisms in many countries, especially new democracies, such as in Georgia.

55. Many countries improved tools for gender mainstreaming, including gender disaggregated data and analysis. This was achieved through cooperation with national statistical offices and better links with research institutes.

56. Despite these gains, many challenges remain. In particular, isolation and limited resources, including qualified staff weaken gender machineries. Many gaps still exist in tools and measures to promote the advancement of women relating to budgets, improvement in gender statistics as well as mechanisms for monitoring and benchmarking progress.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia set up a section on gender statistics within its State Institute for Statistics.

In Slovenia, new legislation, including Parental Care and Family Benefits Act (2001), Employment Relations Act (2002) and Equal Opportunities Act (2002 and 2004) substantially strengthened the legislative framework and law enforcement mechanisms for gender equality in all policy areas and among stakeholders at all policy levels. Gender equality became part of public debates and policies of central and local governments.

In Spain the Institute for Women's Issues played a key role, as member of the Monitoring Unit on Equal Opportunities, in developing indicators on specific equality issues: employment, the informal economy, beneficiaries of the Minimum Income Plan, marginal groups, such as homeless women, and reconciliation of family life and work.

I. Human rights of women

- *Achievements: All countries recognize the status of women based on fundamental legislative norms and international conventions. The constitutions in all countries enshrine equal rights and freedom for all members of society, without discrimination by sex, race, religion or other status. Human rights are a priority in all governments' policies, with emphasis on the rights of women, children, minorities and people with disabilities.*

- ***Challenges:** Improving the de facto recognition and implementation of the principle of gender equality as a human right in some countries, partly because the importance of gender equality issues as human and democratic rights can be underestimated. Improving political and legal tools. Improving cooperation with NGOs that promote gender equality awareness and human rights of women.*

57. A majority of countries listed achievements in this area. There were legal changes throughout the UNECE region in regulations on human rights, particularly on violence against women, trafficking in people and education. In Turkey, one of the most important achievements was the introduction of human rights, including women's rights, in primary and secondary school curricula in 1995.

58. On the other hand, countries also face political, legal and social problems in enforcing and recognizing women's human rights. There are a number of ways to improve this situation, most notably through further implementation of all human rights instruments (e.g. CEDAW). In addition, government machineries and women's organizations could be strengthened and existing laws better implemented. It is also necessary for women's organizations and networks to make women more aware of their legal rights.

At a national conference "Women in Croatia 2001-2005", representatives of the Croatian Parliament, women's NGOs, political parties, labour unions and scientific institutions set goals to promote the role of women and set basic guidelines on a new national policy and institutional mechanisms for its implementation.

In France, policies to promote respect for women's rights were implemented through a partnership between the French authorities and 120 women's rights information centres, coordinated by a national information centre.

Lithuania strengthened the protection of women's rights through new laws and codes. These range from measures to safeguard equal opportunities to the strengthening of criminal penalties for trafficking in people and domestic violence. The country's new Labour Code includes many gender-related provisions.

In the Russian Federation, the new Law on Political Parties promotes equal participation in the political sphere for men and women. The country also introduced a Law on Government's Guarantees of Equal Rights and Freedom for Men and Women and a 'Gender Strategy Document.'

J. Women and the media

- ***Achievements:** In most countries, cooperation with the media is an important part of strategies to combat stereotypes and raise awareness about the economic aspects of gender equality, violence and other issues. Efforts involved work with media professionals, including codes of behaviour. Many countries launched projects designed to provide insight into gender and gender portrayal on television.*
- ***Challenges:** Introducing the issue of women in the media in the legislative system in many countries and ensuring that codes of conduct are respected. Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media. Increasing human and financial resources to promote gender awareness in the media.*

59. Despite the difficulties, there has been progress, with many countries, including Portugal, the United Kingdom and Sweden, addressing media issues through national action plans. Raising awareness, amending legislative systems, training media workers and allocating more money to promoting gender awareness by the media could all help to make further progress.

The training toolkit "Screening Gender" is a co-production of five public service broadcasting organizations, YLE (Finland), ZDF (Germany), NOS (Netherlands), NRK (Norway), and SVT (Sweden). It contains a variety of tools designed to provide insight into gender and gender portrayal on television. The materials can be used in a wide range of training contexts.

Portugal, together with France, Italy and Spain, published "Guidelines to eliminate gender stereotypes

from the media and advertising". They analyse stereotyping in the media and contain checklists and other tools to help recognize gender stereotypes. They have been presented to some national media and there are plans to work with journalists and students in communications.

In Slovakia, lectures, workshops and conferences for journalists covered issues such as the image of women in the media, violence in the family and violence against women and children.

In the United Kingdom, the Government recognizes that increasing the number of women in senior broadcasting posts can result in a more positive portrayal of women. To this effect, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport set a target of 50 per cent representation by women on its sponsored bodies by 2005.

K. Women and the environment

- ***Achievements:** Women actively promoted environmental issues and expressed their concern for the quality of life and its sustainability. Women had an important role in advocating the ethical aspects of environmental protection, reducing resource consumption and processing and reuse.*
- ***Challenges:** Increasing awareness about the link between the environment and the role of women in its protection. Increasing human and financial support to achieve this goal. Ensuring the requirements for sustainable development are respected (waste management, access to water and sanitation, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus).*

60. Many UNECE countries wish to involve women actively in environmental decision-making and integrating gender equality into sustainable development policies and programmes, for instance on human settlements, consumption of environmentally sound products and energy efficiency. Many women take action to protect the environment and join green NGOs.

61. Efforts should be made to put women's experiences and contributions to an ecologically sound environment at the heart of the agenda for the 21st century.

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation financed projects combining natural resource management and the empowerment of women. Within Norway, a three-year project was designed to integrate the gender perspective in the municipal planning process.

The Land Use and Building Act in Portugal actively involved women in developing participative and interactive working methods as part of land use.

In Slovakia, gender issues were considered during the preparation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and the National Report on the Development of Settlement and Housing.

L. The girl child

- ***Achievements:** Almost all countries reported that boys and girls were treated equally. A growing number of countries introduced sexual health education at school. There were also projects and working groups against violence and sexual abuse involving children and programmes on combating drugs.*
- ***Challenges:** Establishing long-term programmes on gender education for student teachers. Addressing the gender stereotypes which still exist in education curricula, syllabuses and textbooks. Ensuring equal treatment of girls from immigrant families.*

62. Given that there is equality of treatment for girls and boys throughout the UNECE region, the issue of the girl child was not a particular concern for most countries. However, in few some Central Asian countries, access to primary and secondary education for girls deteriorated.

63. Among issues for further action are: combating negative attitudes and stereotypical portrayal of girls, ending violence against the girl child, developing and enforcing legislation against genital mutilation. Some countries took important steps in these areas. Some countries need to analyse the gender perspective in curricula and textbooks and revise these teaching materials. Eliminating gender stereotypes depends on educating male and female teachers about the problem.

In Finland, sexual health education will again become compulsory at school. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health set up a working group to study violence and sexual abuse and to target care. This led to the publication by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health of a guide for social welfare and health care authorities and the police on identifying and investigating violence against children and sexual abuse.

Changes made in Italy's education sector following an influx of immigrant families contributed substantially to integration and equal opportunities.

The Norwegian Government adopted a programme entitled "Government's Efforts to Combat Female Genital Mutilation 2002". It consists of 33 measures, with many education, information and communication activities. Similarly, the United Kingdom adopted a new Female Genital Mutilation Act in 2003. It enables prosecutions where the abuse of a British national takes place overseas. It makes it an offence for the country's nationals or permanent residents to carry out female genital mutilation abroad, even in countries where it is legal. It also makes it illegal to aid, abet, counsel or procure female genital mutilation abroad. The maximum penalty has been raised from 5 to 14 years' imprisonment.

In Sweden, the Government presented a document on the children's rights perspective of international development work. It underlines its commitment in this area and emphasizes the importance of measures to increase gender equality in development cooperation.

II. THE WAY AHEAD: SOME AREAS FOR FURTHER ACTION

64. All UNECE governments recognize that, despite achievements in gender equality, much work remains to be done. There is a strong commitment across countries and governments to continue supporting efforts to implement the Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly (Beijing +5).

65. Many governments identified future action to create structures with a legal mandate to coordinate development, and implement and monitor gender equality policy. Questions remain, however, about whether such mechanisms should be part of government structures or independent and how their work should be coordinated.

66. The main challenges ahead can be divided into six themes:

- Increasing awareness of gender equality throughout society, across all levels of government, NGOs, the education sector and the media.
- Women and the economy: increasing women's employability; tackling the gender pay gap; increasing the number of women entrepreneurs; bolstering women's representation in governing bodies; fighting discrimination in employment; creating more childcare places; extending childcare services in disadvantaged areas.
- Women's health: improving access to health services; narrowing the gap in health care between urban and rural areas; reducing teenage pregnancy.
- Women and education: training women, especially in information and computer technology; raising their representation rates in scientific disciplines.
- Institutional mechanisms: role of women in decision-making, political representation, participation in government and electoral programmes; gender budgeting.
- Violence against women: preventing domestic violence and trafficking.