

# **SLOVAKIA**

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995) AND THE OUTCOME OF TWENTY-THIRD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (2000)**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

#### **Part One: Overview of results and problems in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and advancement**

In the period following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing the Slovak Republic was concerned with developing policies for gender equality and empowerment of women. The Government adopted an action plan to support the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and mechanisms were put in place to monitor achievement of goals set out in these documents.

Over the past decade, the Slovak Republic has laid down its priority goals to improve the quality of life and independence of women. Despite positive results that have been achieved in this area there still remain numerous critical obstacles in the society which undermine the opportunities to improve the women's quality of life and the creation of conditions for equalisation of opportunities between men and women in all policies and areas of society's life.

#### **The following activities were undertaken after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing:**

##### **Institutions established**

- in 1996 the Coordination Committee on Women's Issues was established,
- in 1997, within the UNDP project, the National Centre for Equality of Men and Women was set up,
- in 1999 the Department for Equal Opportunities was organisationally made part of the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR (MoLSAF SR),
- in 2003, a Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women in the Society was set up with the National Council (=Parliament) of the SR Committee for Human Rights, National Minorities, and the Status of Women,
- in 2001, a constitutional Act No. 90/2001 of the Collection of Laws established the institute of the Public Defender of Human Rights (Ombudsman)

##### **Documents adopted**

Two documents, namely the National Action Plan for Women in the SR and the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men have become the Government's basic documents in the area of women's policy issues and equal opportunities of women and men.

**National Action Plan for Women in the SR (hereinafter NAP)**, as a follow-up to Beijing Platform for Action, was approved by Government Resolution No. 650/1997 of 16 September

1997, as the principal programme document with a view to improving the status of women in the Slovak Republic within the horizon of 10 years. It covers priorities, strategic goals and steps (measures for the solution), which should be implemented by the Government of the SR through the Government-authorized subjects, with a view to creating such conditions which would facilitate development and non-discrimination of both women and men. The Coordination Committee on Women's Issues was assigned to produce annual reports on progress in fulfilling the tasks of the National Action Plan for Women in the SR. The implementing subjects for NAP include state administration bodies, social partners, self-government, research institutions, NGOs, and other interested subjects. NAP contains eight priority areas at which the implementing subjects directed their attention: to implement in practice the legally embedded equal status of the woman in family, employment and society; create room for personal choice in development of life strategies of women in the family, employment and the society; create conditions for the elimination of economic disadvantages which may lead to material hardship of women; shape public opinion to respect equality of men and women; create conditions for protection and promotion of women's health; create conditions for the elimination of violence against women; create conditions for personal development and vocational realisation of women with lesser development chances (such as women living in rural areas, women of Roma ethnic group, unemployed women, women inadequately prepared for their motherly role, women with disabilities); promote the activity of organisations focused on support and development of women at national and international levels.

The latter document to ensure gender equality in Slovak society is the **Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men**, approved by SR Government Resolution No. 232/2001. The concept identifies the tasks for the state and other subjects in areas where gender discrimination manifests itself most markedly and defines 31 measures and recommendations for the implementation, with active participation of non-governmental subjects. The application of equal opportunities in the SR includes the legislative and institutional provision, and particularly, the practical implementation. State bodies, social partners, self-government, research institutions, non-governmental organisations, and other interested subjects cooperate in the implementation of the concept's measures.

Both programme documents of the Government - the National Action Plan for Women and the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men - are currently **updated and monitored** by the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination of the MoLSAF SR, which submits annual information to the Government of the SR on the progress achieved. A more substantial review of the documents is scheduled for 2004.

**The implementation of the tasks** of the National Action Plan for Women in the SR and the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men as efficient instruments to promote gender equality is constrained from several aspects:

1. no special budgetary allocation was made for the implementation of the tasks, with implementing institutions pursuing them from their own budgets which have not been increased specifically for the purpose,

2. in the light of the priorities in the Government Statements of Policy of individual Governments since 1996, some tasks have been inconsistently emphasised or minimised.

**The documents of the UN Millennium Declaration, and the Millennium Development Goals have been integrated into relevant sectoral programme documents.** In the area of education, compulsory school attendance is enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, beginning at the age of six, and lasting for 10 years. Free access to education is guaranteed in primary and secondary schools, and universities, according to financial possibilities of the state, with comprehensive provision of guidance, and measures to prevent truancy, with a view to reducing the number of dropouts. In order to ensure fastest possible integration of children of migrant parents, as well as unaccompanied minors in mainstream schools, a concept of education was developed and approved by the Ministry of Education of the SR. Education for foreigners in secondary schools and universities is allowed within the meaning of the law.

Amendments of the School Act made greater differentiation and diversification of education and training possible. Better conditions are created for the implementation of some basic human rights - the right to select the type of school by the child's parents and the right to such education and training as suits best to the individual capabilities and interests of children without distinction by sex.

### **The area of environment**

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development was approved by the Government of the SR in 2001 and by the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 2002, with a Government Resolution setting out to pursue the goals, priorities and objectives of the strategy in individual sectoral policies, strategies and programmes, as well as in the approved legislation. The National Council made a request to the Government to submit annually, at March 31, a report on the progress made in fulfilling the tasks of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development by individual sectors.

According to recent information on the situation in supplying population with drinking water (the Report on Water Management in the Slovak Republic in 2002), as of 31 December 2002, there were 84 % of population supplied with water from public water mains, the proportion of population supplied with water from public systems should reach 85% by the end of 2005. The outlook for the period by 2015 envisages raising this percentage to 92 percent.

### **The area of healthcare**

Under-five mortality rate, an indicator recommended by WHO, has been monitored in Slovakia since 1993 and is showing a declining trend from that year (12.9‰ for the year 1993, 9.5 ‰ in 2002). Further decline is anticipated by 2015.

Equally, the maternal mortality rate in the SR has been decreasing; the parameter has not increased since 1985, being 7.87‰ in 2002. The prospect of further reduction depends on correct cause management. *A National Programme of Sexual and Reproductive Health for 2004*

- 2010 is currently being prepared in the SR. One of its targets is to introduce sexual education for all grades of schooling, with a set content for individual grades by 2005, and to reduce, by 2010, the number of unwished pregnancies in teenagers and adolescent youth by 50 percent.

In 2002, the *National Programme of HIV Prevention in the SR* was developed and in 2004 a legislative framework will be created, which is necessary for the prevention of discrimination against HIV-positive persons, with a view to eliminating social discrimination of people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The basic document aiming to improve nutrition of the population was prepared in 1999 under the title the *Programme for Improving Nutrition of the Population in the SR*. It is implemented in cooperation with other sectors (finance, education, agriculture) and was prepared on the basis of WHO recommendations concerning healthy diet.

**From the international documents, to which the Slovak Republic is a party in the area of gender equality, the most important is the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the former CSSR ratified, and which went into effect on 3 September 1981. Through succession, the Slovak Republic is a contracting party to the Convention from 1 January 1993. In 1998 Slovakia defended the Initial Report of the SR before the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.**

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR discussed the reservations presented by the CEDAW Committee. The Coordination Committee for Women's Issues conducted analysis of the status of women in the Slovak Republic and evaluated the topicality of the Committee's observations. In order to implement the Committee's recommendations measures have been adopted through the Government document of the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Men and Women. Success in implementing these measures has been seen, for example, in the areas of legislation regarding violence against women, public awareness (a campaign Fifth Woman), there has been a significant drop in the number of abortions (by around 60% over the course of the last decade), the cooperation with NGOs has been made more efficient. Despite intense efforts to introduce quotas for increasing the number of women in political decision-making, this has not been achieved; there has been no significant increase in the number of childcare facilities, etc.

### **Action in the area of legislation**

In legislation Slovakia did not achieve the adoption of a separate law on gender equality or on equal opportunities between men and women. In 2004 a so-called anti-discrimination bill is being submitted to the Government and the National Council of the SR (Parliament), which contains important anti-discrimination provisions, consistent with EU Directives No. 2000/78/EC and No. 2000/43/EC.

Within labour legislation, the Labour Code contains prohibition of discrimination, inter alia, also on the ground of sex, referred to both in the Labour Code Basic Principles, and in § 13, titled Prohibition of Discrimination. Prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex is part of each piece of legislation concerned with employment, such as the Act No.5/2004 on employment services and others.

Other legislative changes that we consider to be a success and a major progress toward greater respect for the rights of women have occurred in the area of violence against women.

There were done major changes in criminal and civil proceedings in 2001- 2002 by the adoption of the Government bills regarding the issues of violence against women in the Criminal Code, the Rules of Civil Procedure, and the Civil Code. Also provisions were eliminated that were not consistent with the provisions of international documents – the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The amendment of the Criminal Code ensures prosecution by law of criminal offences committed against a family member, without requiring for prosecution the consent of the victim of violence or rape. The amendment of the Rules of Civil Procedure introduced a new kind of preliminary injunction – temporarily ban of the entry of the house or the apartment in which lives the close person, or person in care or custody of another person justifiably suspected of committing the offence of violence against this close person. It also introduces additional measures restricting the rights to the apartment so that the battered woman does not need to leave her residence and other protective injunctions, such as protective treatment for the violent offender, etc. The last of the groups of legislative changes were those pertaining to the trafficking of women (trafficking of human beings).

**The allocation of budgetary resources** explicitly for the purpose of discharging the tasks of equal opportunities between women and men has not yet reached a desired level. In the future there will be a possibility - within the European Social Fund, particularly within the Strategic Operational Programme Human Resources and the initiative EQUAL - to use special resources, funding the projects aimed at achieving the goals of women empowerment and equal opportunities between women and men.

Starting from 2002 activities, have been intensified in two areas – the issue of violence against women and the issue of balancing participation of women in decision-making positions, particularly, increasing their participation in politics.

The Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination has intense cooperation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society groups, experts and the private sector and other non-participating/third parties in order to support gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In the Slovak Republic more attention is given to supporting parenthood, with an emphasis on a more active share of men in parental responsibilities, and a review of the stereotyped perceptions of their role. A number of seminars organised by NGOs and research institutions, and also in cooperation with foreign experts, highlighted a new approach to paternity stemming from the conviction that the presence of the father in rearing the child brings a better quality of life for both the children and the men – fathers. Improvement of partnership relations between parents that share upbringing of their children equally (with emphasis on common day-to-day experiences) is a factor not to be disregarded.

## **Part Two: Progress in the implementation of critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and other initiatives and activities set out at the twenty-third special session of the UN General Assembly**

The Slovak Republic can give following examples of successful actions, legislative changes, programmes and projects in the area of equal opportunities:

### **The area of violence against women**

In addition to the legislative changes in the area of violence against women, referred to above, in 2001, a campaign “Fifth Woman” was conducted within the project titled Zero tolerance against violence against women.

The “Fifth Woman” campaign was the first media campaign against gender based violence organised for the purpose of public awareness-raising of the phenomenon of violence against women, as a gendered problem caused by power inequality by gender in the society. The campaign, inter alia, led to a call for the introduction of security measures and activities in the interest of victims of violence against women.

In 2003 a research team of the International Centre for Family Studies conducted the first representative study on the issues of violence against women. Within its findings researchers noted that within a broad definition of all forms of violence, in the SR every fourth woman living in a partnership relation has experienced violent behaviour of her partner. Over the course of 2003, the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination worked on the preparation of the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and in Families, which will be completed in 2004.

### **The area of balancing participation of women in decision-making positions, particularly participation of women in political life**

Within cooperation with the Kingdom of the Netherlands two major projects were implemented in the SR focused on problems of equal opportunities.

**At the level of government institutions**, in cooperation with the interested non-governmental organisations and research institutions, the project MATRA „Equal opportunities in the SR” was implemented. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family was the partner organisation, while its Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination, the Coordination Committee for Women's Issues (MoLSAF SR) and the Section for Human Rights and Minorities of the Government Office of the SR were the users.

The purpose of the project was to prepare a proposal for strengthening the competencies of the existing bodies and creating more efficient bodies (institutions) addressing the problems of equal opportunities in the SR.

In the long-term view, a strategy was developed to shift the issues of equal opportunities at governmental level with regard to the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination, more on issues of equal opportunities in employment and social sphere. As an

example of good practice, a proposal was prepared on an umbrella body in the form of the Council of the SR Government for Equal Opportunities, or still more dynamic and effective, the Plenipotentiary for Equal Opportunities, duly staffed with experts within the Office of the Plenipotentiary. The project started up a number of important activities, offering opportunities to discuss effectively the problems of institutional comprehensive coverage of the issues of equal opportunities between women and men at governmental and parliamentary levels. After the first official institution for the issues of equal opportunities of women and men was established at the level of the National Council of the SR (=Parliament) – the Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women in the Society, at the Parliament’s Committee for Human Rights, National Minorities, and the Status of Women, an analysis was undertaken within the project of its activity, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the work of the Commission. A plan to make the work more efficient was designed, having regard for the accession of the Slovak Republic to the European Union and the need to coordinate parliamentary committees in individual countries to compare with the European Parliament’s committees.

The other MATRA project, implemented at the level of non-governmental sector, was titled „Strengthening participation of women in public and political life in the SR“. The project’s objective was to achieve a more balanced representation of women and men in the democratic structures of Slovak society by increasing women’s participation in public and political life. *Professional Women*, a citizens association, was the project coordinator, working in collaboration with the *Centre for Conflict Prevention and Resolution*, and on the part of Dutch partner, the *Institute for Public Issues and Policy of the Netherlands*.

The project aimed to increase women’s participation in public and political life in the SR, with the collaborative efforts of non-governmental organisations, state administration and political parties at national and regional levels.

The project was implemented in the years 2001 to 2004. The main project activities included stimulation and organisation of public debate on the need of and the conditions for women’s participation in public life and politics, creation of the Platforms for women’s participation in politics, whose representatives comprised political, public and social life figures. Before parliamentary election, the election for upper-tier (regional) self-government, and local level, trained trainers were training women who decided to enter political and public domain. A total of 600 women were trained across Slovakia. Other important activities included the publication of an irregular newsletter “Letters”, guidance provided to those women entering public life, as well as activities aiming to change legislation with a view to achieving the introduction of quotas in the Act on elections.

Notwithstanding the failure to achieve in law the quotas on the party lists of candidates, some political parties began considering or introduced their own internal rules to strengthen the status of women in their political parties and in the media, in particular.

Both projects, described above, were implemented in close cooperation of state administration officials, chiefly the staff and experts of the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination, and the representatives of non-governmental organisations. In order to achieve synergetic effects they were supporting each other in the activities.

ASPEKT engages in a broad publication activity of mainly feminist literature. In addition, there were several publications published recently (apart from translations of foreign titles), such as:

*Kvapilová, E., Porubánová, S.: Nerovné cesty k rovnosti (pohľady na ľudské a občianske práva žien na Slovensku) Bratislava 2001 [Unequal roads to equality (views on human and civil rights in Slovakia) Bratislava 2001]*

*Kvapilová, E., Porubánová, S., Rodová rovnosť: prečo ju potrebujeme? Bratislava 2003 [Gender equality: Why do we need it? Bratislava 2003]*

*Collective of authors: Glosár rodových pojmov (zatiaľ nepublikované) [Glossary of gender terms (in print)]*

*Filafelfiová, J., Radičová, I., Puliš, P.: Záverečná správa z výskumu: Ženy v politike Bratislava, 2001 [ Final Report of the Study: Women in politics, Bratislava 2001 ]*

*Juránová, J., Cviková, J.: Ružový a modrý svet, Aspekt, Bratislava 2004 [Pink and blue world, Aspekt, Bratislava 2004]*

*Publications published by the Women's Alliance of Slovakia: Násilie na ženách, Volebné právo žien, Reprodukčné práva žien, Mohlo by byť inak [Violence Against Women, Women's Suffrage, Women's Reproductive Rights, It Could Be Different]*

**In the Slovak Republic the particular commitments for individual critical areas of concern, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, have been pursued as follows:**

### **1. Women and poverty**

The government of the SR adopted a number of materials containing measures to reduce the risk of poverty of women, such as the Concept of Employment Policy until 2002, the National Action Plan of Employment for 2002 and 2003, the National Action Plan for Women (NAP) and the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (CEOWM). The last two provide a basic scheme for taking special measures to address the issues of the elimination poverty from gender perspective.

The Government of the SR adopted the Joint Inclusion Memorandum (JIM) on the basis of which it is going to prepare a National Action Plan for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion focused on the prevention of social exclusion and assistance to marginalized population groups. JIM identified the areas at risk of poverty in the SR, in which gender equality will be promoted.

The Act No. 195/1998 Coll. on social assistance, as later amended, is the legislative framework creating the legal prerequisites for implementing the Constitution-guaranteed rights of women and men facing material hardship to such an assistance as is necessary for providing for their basic living needs. The forms of solving material and social hardship include social counselling and social services, including home (nursing) service, organisation of common meals, transport service, care in social service facilities and social loan.

Rural women are a group particularly at risk. The problem of creating equal conditions for the development of economic activities of rural women is provided for under the Act No. 503/2001 Coll. on the support of regional development. The Programme of Revitalisation of the

Village in Slovakia, whose guarantor is the Ministry of Environment SR, the Development Plan for Agriculture and the Countryside of the SR, whose guarantor is the Ministry of Agriculture, and the programme of the Ministry of Economy SR – National Agency for the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprise supporting enterprise of special groups – school graduates and women, also pursue the requirement of providing support to rural women. In order to support women in the countryside, the Agency for the Development of Countryside designed a pilot project called “Saving groups of rural women” with a view to creating a group micro credit scheme targeting rural women. This involves setting up the saving groups of (4-6) women and the accompanying seminars and training with the purpose to set up or extend a business.

The area of providing housing is an important protection against social exclusion. The problems of municipal responsibility for housing development in the administered territory was addressed by adopting the Act No. 453/2001 Coll. Municipalities, inter alia, procure and approve housing development programmes and co-participate in creating adequate conditions for housing in municipalities. The solution of housing problem (of women as well) was taken into account in the draft amendment of the Civil Code, published in the Collection of Laws under No. 261/2001.

The risk areas, so-called “poverty gender gaps”, in which gender equality needs to be promoted include: gender segregated employment and remuneration gaps between women and men for equal work and work of equal value; gender equality in access to education, retraining and training; gender equality in access to health services and to provision of high quality reproductive health services; gender equality in access to social services and ensuring their accessibility and quality.

From the aspects, referred to above, it is crucial to eliminate long-term unemployment of women, increase attractiveness of women with children as workforce, purposefully adjust the available jobs to different flexible forms of work (flexible working hours, shared work positions, part-time contracts, teleworking, home workers etc.), reduce gaps in remuneration between men and women, preclude gender segregation in the labour market where women are significantly over-represented in the lower paid sectors (health, education, public administration, light industry, etc.), ensure balancing in the amount of pensions and thus eliminating the risk of feminisation of the old age and poverty.

The Government of the SR prepares programmes to increase employability of women facing higher risks of social exclusion. They include particularly long-term unemployed women, women members of the Roma ethnic group, women with disabilities, older women, women with problems of social inclusion (ex-offenders, homeless, alcohol and drug addicts), families with greater number of children and incomplete families, youth growing up in disadvantaged social and family environment, girls lacking completed basic school education and special schools leavers, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

Relatively high education level of women creates comparatively satisfactory baseline for their inclusion in the labour market. Yet, there are barriers in access to further education, retraining and training, which derive from family duties that are, by stereotype, attributed chiefly to women. Despite this, women show greater interest in training and retraining. The predominant orientation of women to schooling in humanities reduces women's attractiveness as a workforce.

Therefore, in training women, emphasis is laid on computer literacy and skills in information technologies.

The promotion of gender equality and free choice in access to health services and provision of quality reproductive health services is vital in the prevention of feminisation of poverty. In this respect information of women, particularly those from socially disadvantaged groups is important on options and rights which the health system has to offer.

The promotion of gender equality in access to social services and the provision of their accessibility and quality is an important factor in reducing the risk of poverty. In this context childcare services in nurseries and kindergartens are also of significance. Low standard of housing and living in a multiple-disadvantaged area contributes to feminisation of poverty, creating foundation for multiple-victimisation and (cross) discrimination (for example, a Roma woman with multiple children, unfinished education, unemployed, exposed to cultural stereotypes).

The use of solidarity in families means increased unpaid women's work and their disproportionate burden. In connection with reconciliation of work and family life, for a major positive achievement may be regarded the constructive approach of regional and district offices towards extending social services. Employers, who extend their social programmes and seek untraditional, integrated, and financially less demanding ways and means to extend the range of social services, play a significant role. Non-governmental organisations are very active in this field, for example in setting up mother centres, centres for women victims of violence, etc.

## **2. Women's education and vocational training**

Article 42 (1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic provides that every citizen has the right to education, without distinction by sex. School attendance is compulsory. Under Article 42 (2), citizens have the right to free education in primary and secondary schools, according to the citizen's capabilities and the possibilities of the society also in universities. Art.35 (1) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic provides that everybody has the right to free choice of occupation and to the preparation for it, as well as to engagement in business and other gainful activity.

The education level of Slovakia citizens is high; women and men enjoy the right to education without distinction. The education level of women is roughly the same as that of men and contributes significantly to the women asserting on the labour market.

Of the economically active population, the proportion of women and men with university education has been shown to be on the same level over a long-term period (11 % to 12 %). More economically active women than men achieve complete general secondary education (over longer period, around 36% in women, 23% in men). A research degree was achieved by 1. 4 thousand women and 0.4 thousand men. There is more women with basic education among economically active population, the number of workers with this education has been gradually falling both in women and men (from 13% in 1995 to 4.8% in women and 4% in men). Women

equally as men have access to further training and retraining, with women tending to use retraining to a greater extent.

In the area of education, further education/training and retraining gender stereotypes persist. For this reason, there is a plan to intensify the introduction of measures that would attract women to those vocations/professions which are traditionally regarded as male, and which would eliminate the disproportion in this domain. As regards the recommendation for the initiation of alternative education (mainly with regard to disadvantaged groups) and a system of vocational training, with a view to stimulating girls and women to take up study in all subjects, particularly untraditional ones, and eliminating gender bias, which exists in the system of vocational training, there still persist obstacles on the way to achieving this goal.

The main barriers include persisting stereotyped perceptions of the roles of men and women in the society and the lack of political will.

### **3. Women and health**

On the whole, adequate health care is accessible in the Slovak Republic to men and women, as it follows out of the Act on health care No.277. In primary health care for women, the main activity is focused on the prevention and dispensary care of medical practitioners and physicians in the branch of gynaecology and obstetrics, while in secondary health care it is on the implementation of cardiovascular and oncologic programmes, and the development of mother and child care.

A significant success in our view has been achieved in the area of reproductive health, with the decrease in the number of abortions. Over the last couple of years, the Slovak Republic reached the level of European countries with lowest numbers of these interventions, under a law that is compatible with most countries of the European Union. In the SR the number of abortions in the last decade has come down by almost 60%. There has been considerable increase in recent years in the number of women users of modern contraceptive methods. Currently around 6% of women use hormonal contraception and 7 % of women have been inserted intrauterine device.

The Ministry of Health of the SR has prepared a draft National Programme of Sexual and Reproductive Health for the years 2004 - 2010 which will create legal framework necessary for adequate care after sexual and reproductive health of the adolescent and ensure access to confidential and high quality services. It also sets itself the objective to further reduce the number of unwished pregnancies in teenagers, and raise the health awareness. Another of its targets is to introduce, by 2005, sexual education at all grades of schools, with a prescribed content for individual grades, and, by 2010, reduce the number of unwished pregnancies in teens and adolescent by 50 percent.

Within the fight against HIV/AIDS, the legal framework is being created in the SR, which is necessary for the prevention of discrimination against HIV positive people. In 2002 the *National Programme of the Prevention of HIV in the SR* was developed incorporating specific prevention programmes for special groups at risk. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in pregnant women is monitored; children that are born are devoted special care.

The Public Health Office, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, ensures food security. The principal document aiming to improve the nutrition of the population was prepared in 1999 on the basis of WHO recommendations regarding healthy diet entitled, the *Programme for the Improvement of Nutrition of the Population of the SR*.

The problem areas continue to be the insufficient interest of women in preventive gynaecological examinations, despite the broad media coverage of their necessity, and the financial affordability of contraception for the social groups of women who are in long-term material hardship.

Women comprise roughly 20 % of the clients dependent on illegal drugs. In the Centre for the Treatment of Drug Addictions specific group programmes for women with drug addictions have been designed.

#### **4. Violence against women**

Violence committed against women and in families is a serious social problem, which, to some extent, still remains veiled with prejudice and myths about violence against women in the minds of people. It is often not made sufficiently visible and recognised as a problem by the society, given the persisting gender stereotypes. In 2003 a National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Committed Against Women and in Families was prepared, which will be discussed by the Government in 2004. This task is a joint effort of the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (MoLSAF SR), the Expert Group for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and in Families at the Government Council of the SR for the Prevention of Crime, and experts from non-governmental organisations. On the basis of this strategy there will be concerted action in all sectors concerned and the society as a whole.

In 2000 the Social Assistance Act was amended to enable developing a network of special facilities for women impacted by violence, where they should be offered special social help and social assistance, social and psychological advice, mediation of legal advice, and other forms of specialised counselling.

In the area of violence against women, changes that have been achieved in legal regulations, in particular, the amendment of the Criminal Code, the Rules of Criminal Procedure, and the Act on offences, the Civil Code, the Rules of Civil Procedure, the Act on police corps, and the Labour Code, can be regarded to be a success. These changes bring improvement in the options for the protection of victims of violence committed against women.

In 2003 there was a representative survey of domestic violence conducted for the first time in the SR, showing that every fourth woman in Slovakia living in a partnership relation has experienced violent behaviour of her partner.

Trafficking of women is covered by the provisions of § 246 of the Criminal Code, as an offence of trafficking of people. Police authorities monitor the situation in the crime of women

trafficking. Equally, the system of statistical records keeps information on the number of victims and the penalties imposed on the offenders.

Major changes have been made to the following legal provisions: The Criminal Code now makes it possible to punish acts covering the accomplishment of elements of the offence of battering committed against a wider scope of persons, namely after divorces against ex-wives and ex-husbands, cohabiting partners, their children, former cohabiting partners, their children. The lawmaker has also extended the objective side of the merits in this offence and fixed increased criminal penalty for committing the offence.

In the Rules of Criminal Procedure, the scope of criminal offences, in which the consent of the aggrieved party is required, has been narrowed, and legislative provisions have been adopted to prosecute by law criminal offences against the family member without requiring consent of the victim of the violence or rape. As the result of the amendment referred to above, in the criminal offences of violence against a group of citizens and individual; infliction of bodily harm; restriction of personal freedom; blackmail; forcible entry into dwelling; rape against a person who is, or was, at the time of committing the offence, husband or partner to the aggrieved party, the consent of the aggrieved party with prosecution is not required.

A new kind of preliminary injunction has been introduced into the Rules of Civil Procedure, by which the offender may be temporarily prohibited entry in the house or flat, in which the person lives who is his close, or a person in his care or custody, and in respect of whom he is evidentiary suspicious of the offence of violence.

The passage of the amendment of the Civil Code enables the court, at the motion of one spouse, to restrict the right of the other spouse to use and enjoy the flat or house which is their community property, or eliminate him from its use altogether, where further co-existence has become intolerable due to physical or psychic violence or a threat of such violence in relation to the spouse, or a close person living in their shared house or flat.

It is equally provided, that where a divorced spouse during the matrimony or after the divorce, committed or commits physical or psychic violence against the other spouse or a close person, living in their common dwelling, the court may rule that the spouse is not entitled to a substitution of dwelling. On the basis of the cited amendment of the Criminal Code, blackmailing of a close person, or a person in the perpetrator's care or custody, has been inserted as a qualified criminal offence in the second section of the referred paragraph.

According to the cited amendment of the Criminal Code, the court will be able to impose a protective treatment on a perpetrator, who committed a violent crime against a close person or entrusted person, where it may be reasonably expected with regard to this person, that he will continue in violent acts. With this amendment also a new kind of appropriate restriction is introduced, which a court may impose on the perpetrator of an offence against close or entrusted person. This restriction prohibits the offender to approach the aggrieved party at a distance less than 5 meters and also to move in the vicinity of the dwelling of the aggrieved party.

The last group of legislative changes concerned women trafficking (trafficking of people). The Criminal Code established the change to the hitherto perceived woman trafficking in the light of the Slovak Republic becoming not only a transit but also a destination country. The provision has been extended to cover punishment for the person who transports the victim, as well as the person, who after handing over continues committing the crime also within the target country.

## **5. Women and armed conflict**

Under Article 35 of the Constitution, the Slovak Republic provides asylum to foreigners, who are persecuted for the exercise of political rights and freedoms. Article 52 reads that foreigners shall exercise basic human rights and freedoms, guaranteed by the Constitution in the SR, unless these are explicitly accorded to Slovak nationals only.

Special attention is devoted to women, pregnant women, mothers and children. This involves treatment in case of sickness, health care of pregnant women and nursing mothers, but also education in parenting, childcare and family care, healthy diet, and the development of hygienic habits. Within these programmes activities were pursued, which were organised by the Organisation for Assistance to Refugees in the residential refugee camps, with the support of the Office of UN High Commissioner for Refugees, ZU in Slovakia (UNHCR). They included the reproductive health of the woman and education for family planning, in cooperation with the Slovak Society for Family Planning and Training for Parenthood, a cycle of popular lectures with video projections and practical demonstrations focused on childcare, and family care, child rearing, healthy food, first aid, in cooperation with health facilities, the Health Education Institute, the Pedagogical Faculty of Comenius University, and other institutions and individuals.

In 2000 the project entitled the „Psychological assistance for asylum seekers“, was implemented. It focused on relieving fear, tension and anxiety, preventing conflicts and psychosomatic diseases, as well as on healthy development of children and coping with cross-cultural differences. The project, supported by the Migration Organisation Office of the Ministry of Interior of the SR, was implemented by the Organisation for Assistance to Refugees, in collaboration with the Centre for Advice and Psychological Services. Special attention was devoted to the psychic development of children.

In addition, women are given support in the area of training and integration in the labour market. Retraining courses for women are held in residential camps designed to develop relevant skills in accordance with the labour market needs and opportunities to use them in the labour market.

The project “Education of children of migrant parents – refugee status seekers and refugees in the Slovak Republic” with its design, content, pedagogic documentation, and methodology can be adequately replicated in residential refugee camps throughout the territory of the Slovak Republic. A language course of 184 hours, taught according to a teaching plan, syllabus and methodological instructions is specifically catering for children of migrant parents but can also be used for the unaccompanied minors.

## 6. Women and the economy

Despite the existing non-discriminatory legislation, the analyses and statistics show that there are a number of inequalities in the labour market between men and women in the SR. The high female employment in the Slovak Republic calls the society to action for the elimination of gender inequalities. The Government of the SR adopted the Concept of Employment Policy for 2002- 2003, its objective being further specified in the National Plan of Employment, and the National Action Plan of Employment for 2002- 2003. Both national plans were drawn up, according to “Employment Principles” adopted by the Council of the European Union, laying down four basic pillars for the area of employment policies. One of them (pillar IV) is directly designed to strengthen the policies of equal opportunities in access to employment. Under this pillar a number of measures have been identified aiming to improve the situation in the area of integrating women in the labour market.

The average wage of women for the last few years reached around 71% – 75 % of that of men, with women reaching lower wages in each of the education category. The traditional stereotyped distribution of work into so-called typically female and male leads to women working mostly in sectors typically associated with lower remuneration and social status. Although women take a high proportion in the labour market, their role in management is a minority one. Hence we need to note persistent gender segregation (both horizontal and vertical) on the labour market.

The high rate of female participation in the labour market is associated with several factors impacting the decision-making of women in joining the working process. They include, above all, the high value attributed to work by women in their value systems, the economic necessity stemming from the existence of double-income model of family, an attitude to work as a sphere of social contacts and self-realisation.

The total rate of employment in the SR for 2003 was 57.7%; the female employment (women aged 15-64 years) for the same period was 52.2 percent. With the exception of 2002, this indicator has been showing an increasing trend for the last 5 years.

The rate of unemployment is roughly the same for both women and men, with 17.6 % for women in 2003, which is 0.3% more than for men, but the rate of unemployment shows a declining trend relative to 2001 and 2002. However, a greater proportion of women in long-term unemployment exceeding 25 months is typical.

The rate of employment of older workers shows relatively large differences between men and women (men over 50 years, 35.2%, women 18.4% - the difference being 16.8%), which is, to a large extent, due to significantly lower retirement age of women. This factor is being brought to line with the principle of gender equality through the currently effective Act on social insurance No. 461/2003.

Barriers to the implementation of gender equality comprise chiefly:

- persisting occupational distinction of typically female and male occupations,

- career interruptions owing to maternity,
- a more difficult qualification advancement as a result of maternity, childcare and care of the family or household, care after older relatives,
- earlier termination of the working activity,
- a more difficult promotion into management positions, gender stereotypes,
- insufficient flexibility in the organisation of work,
- lack of programmes and projects designed to reconcile family life and work and to promote more parent-friendly attitudes of the employer to working parents,
- access to social services and the provision for their affordability and quality may be an important factor in reducing the risk of poverty. In this context childcare services in nurseries and kindergartens are also important.

Measures to alter the existing status are very hard to enforce and require increased performance of the economy and changes to the gender stereotypes held by the society, and above all, by employers. The Labour Code contains a number of provisions to facilitate reconciliation of work and family duties (shorter working hours, flexible working time, etc.).

To eliminate discrimination against part-time workers, the Labour Code provides an explicit guarantee of equal working conditions for workers employed part-time with those provided for workers working the prescribed weekly working time. In practice, however, the application of these provisions may be associated with problems. The shorter working time is used only by a small percentage of workers. In 2002 there were 1.9% of workers working part-time – 1.1% of men 2.7% of women. The women/men ratio of workers working part-time was 67.2% women to 32.8% men. According to the study of 2001, women prefer flexible working time to part-time work that is associated with reduced income.

The implementation of a number of projects funded or undertaken by the relevant organisations and institutions contributes to addressing the above-described problems. One example is the programme of individualised employment services, which is part of the National Action Plan for Employment. In 2002, 8 projects having this focus were implemented in Slovakia.

Within practical activities for the creation of conditions facilitating entry of women into labour market, different subjects conduct retraining courses, training, motivation courses, counselling and psychological courses to eliminate psychological barriers in job search and employment and many other activities. Several job clubs of the National Labour Office have made women employment their specific concern.

In many cases, employment and self-employment has been addressed through different projects, which were joint efforts of labour offices, employers' organisations and NGOs.

With a view to facilitating reconciliation of family and work responsibilities, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR has implemented the project of social audit, "The Family and Work", the purpose of which is to motivate employers for creating family-friendly working conditions for their employees. In the context of the cited project, since 2000, an annual competition was held, under the title "The Family-friendly Employer", with the motto of "Connecting the world of work with the world of the family".

To achieve progress in the elimination of gender segregation on the labour market and to overcome the existing barriers, within the European Social Fund, training programmes will be initiated for employment service workers in the area of equal opportunities and the elimination of manifestations of discrimination and gender stereotypes, as well as programmes of the labour market monitoring from the aspect of the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, with special regard to vocational training and preparation.

From a preventive perspective, it will be crucial to start efforts in vocational training (currently stereotyped training persists – the preparation for so-called typically female and male occupations), disrupt gender stereotyped training concepts namely: launch training for gender-untraditional vocations, and promote training focused on the elimination of barriers of employability, caused by gender-stereotyped socialisation.

In this respect Slovakia ratified the ILO Convention No.156/1981 on equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women workers: workers with family responsibilities.

Rural women have a specific position on the labour market. Even in the countryside, women comprise a significant portion of the working process, around 41 percent. The greater part of women is active in non-manufacturing sphere, chiefly in services and agriculture. The transformation of agriculture resulted in job reductions, a phenomenon impacting women most. There are more women than men with basic education in rural areas, the fact determining high proportion of women in seasonal agricultural work. This sector also has low wages, which are often undervalued. Also loss of some services in rural areas and closing of pre-school facilities contributes to the fact that many women rely on social welfare, do not seek another employment, or join the domestic farming. Improvement of the status of women in rural areas may favourably affect women's efforts to set up of a trade, or some other form of business. However, the increase in women-entrepreneurs in the countryside is small, most women commute for work to towns. This situation is partly due to low information and mobility of rural women.

All the barriers referred to above are multiplied in the case of Roma population. Very many pupils of Roma nationality do not continue education after compulsory school attendance, thus getting on the labour office registers at an age of 14-15 years, without any training, with many of them not having completed the primary school. Long-term unemployment of the Roma already carries the seal of specificity. As a positive example, we may cite programmes trying to use the potential of Roma women, their influence on further generations, (for example, a programme for Roma women leaders, implemented by Open Society Foundation). The case of

Roma minority is a good example of how gender issues are reflected in all problems of the society. If women and girls are offered sufficient opportunities, training, education, and health care, it will empower them within the community, and in the long run, it may also bring about the improvement of the situation of the Roma minority as a whole. Greater delineation of gender roles increases the need for gender-specific approach to all solution strategies. In an exceptionally gender-segregated environment, as the experience of many years from abroad shows, communication and work with gender-homogenous groups proves successful, also in education of adult population. The attempts in Slovakia thus far indicate that one workable way is to empower women, who are very active. At the same time, regard must be taken of the special status of the woman, who is appreciated primarily as the (biological) mother, take into account the role of maternity in the hierarchy of values of this minority and try to use it productively for the benefit of improving coexistence of majority and minority society.

## **7. Women in power and decision-making**

Women in public positions and decision-making processes in the SR are under-represented. After elections in 2002, there are currently 29 women of the total 150 seats in the National Council (Parliament), which is 19.3%; in the year 1998 the share of women in the parliament was 14%. Women have had small representation in governments over the last decade - the government of the 1998- 2002 term had two women (one Deputy Prime Minister and one minister), the current Cabinet following 2002, has no woman, there are two female State Secretaries in two sectors. There are only 10% of women on the decision-making boards of major companies; in central administration, at level 1:32% and at level 2: 34% of women.

The proportion of women on party lists for the elections in 1994 was 15% of all candidates; in 1998 it was 16.8%, in 2002, 23.4%, which indicates a rising trend.

Top-down, towards lower tiers of state administration, the proportion of women is increasing. After 1998 elections, no woman was holding the position of a Regional Office chairperson; there were 9 District Office female chairpersons, which comprised 11.4%. Women representation at communal level follows the principle: the lower the level, the higher the women's representation. After 1998 elections, women mayors comprised 17.5%, which accounted for 478 women, after 2002 elections it was 19.4%, which accounted for 565 women. In the elections for local self-government authorities in 2002, 81% of men and 19% of women were elected.

The current legislation in the SR does not prescribe any obligation of proportionate representation of men and women in nominating candidates on the party lists for elections. Neither is there any internal party agreement among political parties about inclusion of a proportionate number of women on party lists. In 2001, the Ministry of Interior of the SR, in cooperation with the MoLSAF SR, prepared a draft bill, amending the Act of the Slovak National Council No. 80/1990 Coll. on elections for the Slovak National Council, as later amended, the Act of the SNC No. 346/1990 Coll. on the election for local self-government authorities, as later amended, and the Act No.303/2001 Coll. on the election for the authorities of regional self-government and on amending the Civil Rules of Procedure, which contained the anchorage stipulating that “every third [candidate] should be of the other sex as the two previous

are". The proposal did not get through. A similar attempt was made in 2003, failing equally. These efforts remain, for the future as well, at the centre of concern of both the institutional mechanisms for equal opportunities, and the non-governmental organisations operating in the area of support of women and equal opportunities between women and men.

## **8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

In 1999 the Slovak Republic terminated its 8 years long membership on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Cooperation is being developed with the UNDP and the Population Fund UNFPA, whose regional centre was opened in Bratislava in 2000. The following are currently the national institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women in the SR:

- the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR
- the Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women in the Society with the National Council (=Parliament) Committee for Human Rights, National Minorities, and the Status of Women
- the Commission for Equal Opportunities (former Commission for Women) at the level of the Confederation of Trade Unions

We give more information on these issues in Part III below.

## **9. Human rights of women**

The status of women in the Slovak society is given by the fundamental legislative norms and international conventions, which the SR has signed. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic ensures equal basic rights and freedoms for all citizens in the territory of the SR, without distinction on the grounds of sex, race, colour of skin, language, faith and religion, political or other convictions, national or social origin, national or ethnic group affiliation, property, lineage, or other status.

A number of human rights documents in this area are binding on the SR. This concerns the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women, Optional Protocol to this Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms. Provisions of the cited documents have been progressively reflected in the national legislation of the SR.

Within the institutional provision for human rights, one of the Deputy Prime Ministers has been charged with the human rights agenda; in several other sectors, departments of human rights have been set up; within the National Council, the Committee for Human Rights, National

Minorities, and the Status of Women of the NC SR was created and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights was established.

Under Article 46 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everybody can claim, in a statutorily prescribed procedure, his or her right at an independent and unbiased court. Women have virtually not been using this procedure. The National Council of the SR passed the Act on public defender of human rights, which went into effect on 1 January 2001. This law provides the scope and the way in which the public defender of human rights, as an independent body, contributes to the protection of basic human rights and freedoms of natural and legal persons. The Slovak Republic has acceded to the Optional Protocol of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (ratified by the SR in 2001) thus ensuring the option of international legal protection of Slovak women in case all national remedies have been exhausted. However, the above-referred means of protection of the citizen are not sufficient. Currently a bill is prepared on equal treatment in certain areas and on the protection against discrimination and on amending of some acts, the so-called "Anti-discrimination Act". It is scheduled to be debated in the Slovak parliament for May 2004.

## **10. Women and the media**

The cooperation with the media in presenting untraditional and stereotypes-free image of the woman has to date been an unfulfilled task, which is now a concern of national institutions for the empowerment of women and non-governmental organisations.

The elimination of violence in public-law institutions, such as on television and radio, is governed by the Act No. 308/2000 Coll. on broadcasting and retransmission and on amending of the Act No.195/2000 Coll. on telecommunications (amended by the Act No. 206/2002 Coll.), namely in section 5, „Protection of human dignity and humanity, the minors, and the right to correction“.

The law does not provide rules or principles for the presentation of the woman in the media. The cited act on broadcasting and retransmission accords the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission certain competencies in tackling problems of presenting, for example, violence in the family, or violence against women and children. The adoption of this law was one of the conditions for the conclusion of Chapter 20, on culture and audiovision, within the accession process of Slovakia to the European Union. The law does not sanction all the affairs it should, and also the established sanctions are not efficient enough. In printed media, readers have the option to approach the editor-in-chief, or claim their rights by court. Despite the measures that have been adopted media experts point out to the persistent presentation of violence, particularly on television.

A number of lectures, workshops and conferences have been held on gender-balanced image of the woman in the media, which were designed for journalists. The call of a journalistic competition, aimed at the presentation of a positive image of women in the media and their participation in the development of the society in Slovakia, is an interesting activity having the purpose to improve the image of the woman in the media.

Pupils encounter education in the mass media in primary school, within the subject of the ethical education, in the thematic unit “Effects of the mass media”; in secondary schools, within the Ethics, and in the basics of Sociology and Political Sciences, in such themes as the “Ethical values of competition and cooperation”, the rules of “fair play”, television, the education of a critical viewer. However, non-governmental organisations and experts are critical about the inadequate efficiency of measures in this area. Non-governmental organisations try to cooperate with the media in presenting their activities in the field of women issues.

## **11. Women and the environment**

Gender issues have been considered in the preparation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and in the preparation of the National Report on the Development of Settlement and Housing in the Slovak Republic, which was approved by the Government of the SR on 21 February 2002. In both documents gender issues were targeting the development of rural settlements, access to resources - the issue of unemployment, development of employment, comparing rural and urban settlements, poverty – all disaggregated by sex.

## **12. Women in childhood and adolescence**

The Slovak Republic is an advanced European country, where boys and girls are provided healthcare, education and social care equally, ensured by legal provisions. There are no harmful customs or traditional practices which would infringe human rights of women and girls and which would prevent them from full enjoyment their human rights. The status of the adolescent people, including girls, is governed by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

Education for matrimony and parenthood is an important part of educating adolescent boys and girls in Slovakia. It is understood to be an integral part of the pedagogic process. In educating children for matrimony and parenthood, schools use supra-subject curriculum, hence the topic is incorporated in the teaching process through almost all subjects: at level I, through the elementary teaching, natural science, national history and geography, reading, arts, music and religion; at level II, in the subjects of natural sciences, literature, essay writing, civics, ethics, arts, religion and family preparation.

A number of programmes on family planning and sexual partnership are promoted through PHARE projects, and other projects, and are periodically evaluated.

The education for a drug-free life comprises a substantial part of teaching for positive life orientation. Drug prevention coordinators work at schools, guiding the activities of teachers and pupils.

The introduction of specific education in gender equality and the elimination of gender stereotypes in the education of girls and boys still remains a challenge.

The barriers are the curricula and syllabuses, as well as textbooks, which are designed according to gender stereotypes. A gendered analysis of the curriculum and textbooks appears to be desirable, and their revision, for which there is not sufficient political will at present. Consistent preparation of men and women teachers is a prerequisite for the elimination of gender

stereotypes, one, which is aimed to make them understand gender stereotypes, and their harmfulness, and appreciate that this is the only way they will be able to avoid promoting gender stereotypes in their own approach to children and people.

In Slovakia there is no targeted and long-term programme of gendered education for students preparing for the pedagogic professions. (Some colleges included related courses in the courses that they offer, but it is rather based on initiative of individuals, often encountering misunderstanding and inadequate support, than a conceptual approach). The general low financial remuneration of pedagogic work is a great barrier, too, in the preparation of high-quality teachers for this area and does not create an adequately motivational environment.

### **Part Three: Institutional development**

The attention of the Government of the SR devoted to the issues of gender equality may be seen also from the status of the Government bodies and the importance of documents, dealing with these issues. Over the course of 1995-2003, the following institutions dealt with women's issues and equal opportunities between women and men in the SR:

- from 1996, the Coordination Committee on Women's Issues, terminating its work in 2002,
- in 1997, the National Centre for Equality Between Women and Men was set up within a project,
- since 1998, the Commission for Women has been operating at the level of the Confederation of Trade Unions, which is mainly concerned with women's issues related to trade unions,
- in 1999 the Department for Equal Opportunities was made part of the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR (MoLSAF SR); its competencies extended in 2003 to include the area of anti-discrimination, whereby the agenda of the department was extended on marginalized groups and national minorities,
- in 2001, a new institute was introduced in the Slovak constitutional system – the public defender of rights (Ombudsman),
- in 2002, the first body for the status of women at parliamentary level was created, the Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women at the NC SR Committee for Human Rights, Nationalities and Status of Women.

**The Coordination Committee on Women's Issues (CCWI)** was established subject to the Government resolution No. 7/1996 of 9 January 1996, as advisory, coordination and initiative body of the Government of the SR for the issues relating to the status and interests of women in all areas of life. The Committee members included Government officials, representatives of the NC SR, non-governmental women's organisations, trade unions, municipal authorities, selected central bodies of state administration, research institutions, religions, and experts dealing with the issues of women, families, children and youth. The Committee operated until the end of the Government term in 1998. In the new term, the Committee was transformed into inter-ministerial expert body of the minister of labour, social affairs and family, without changing its title, and the chair, again the minister of labour. Thereby its status was diminished, a fact with which NGOs, in particular, expressed their disagreement and dissatisfaction.

CCWI was concerned with gendered inequality between women and men in different areas of life. The meetings of the Committee at that time were an important and the only periodical platform for non-governmental organisations to present their views, problems and constructive proposals for the solution of women's issues in the SR and provided an occasion for genuine dialogue of the Governmental and non-governmental views addressing these issues.

Within CCWI worked expert groups on issues of employment, social issues, issues of women in decision-making processes, and the expert group for education and research, gender statistics and analyses.

Most important activities and outputs of CCWI included: monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan for Women in the SR, the preparation of the document the “Initial Report of the SR on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” and its updating in 1998.

The CCWI expert groups were preparing reference materials for CCWI deliberations, and the Committee dealt with them within its competencies that could not be overstepped (as advisory, coordination, and initiation body of the SR Government). CCWI prepared materials and in their context also proposals for solutions of such issues as determining child maintenance allowance, standards for the evaluation of conditions created by employers for the needs of reconciliation of work and family roles of women, organisation of “round tables“ on the contribution of women to GDP, questions of teaching ethics, and religion, it prepared the analysis of the Basic Agreement Between the Holy See and the Slovak Republic from gender aspect, etc.

In 1998, CCWI published the publication „Women and men in Slovakia“ in English and Slovak versions, and subsequently, in 2001, „Women and men in Slovakia II“. The publications contain the basic indicators monitoring the status of women in the SR.

The Coordination Committee on Women's Issues had limited or minimal decision-making powers (which was the subject of dissatisfaction of NGOs representatives) and did not have special budget for its activities. It terminated its activity in 2002. The CCWI agenda was in part taken over by the Department for Equal Opportunities set up in February 1999 within the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. At present discussions are in progress about the future arrangements for the issues of equal opportunities, given the cross-sectional nature and social importance.

Through agreement between the Government of the SR and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), in 1997, the National **Centre for Equality Between Women and Men** was established as an information, documentation, and coordination centre, whose main remit was to establish contacts between foreign and domestic non-governmental organisations. This project ended its activity in 2000.

**The Department for Equal Opportunities** was set up in February 1999 within the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. This department, in cooperation with other ministry's departments was discharging the tasks in the area of equal opportunities for women and men, and in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence.

The tasks involve in particular:

- in cooperation with legislative department, preparation of drafts of legal regulations, draft principles of the law, ensuring the principle of equal opportunities between women and men

in all areas of life of the society, and supervising anti-discriminatory provisions of legal regulations,

- preparing conceptual documents, programme documents, draft measures, and initiating ancillary action to improve the situation in the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, to increase women's participation in political and public life, materials for restructuring partnership in the family on the basis of equality, and promoting the implementation of NGO projects in the area of equal opportunities,
- co-participation in bringing the SR legislation regarding equal opportunities between women and men in line with the EU law ,
- coordination in enforcement of the principle of equal opportunities between women and men in all Government policies (gender mainstreaming) on the basis of conventions and recommendations adopted by the United Nations organisation, the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation, and others,
- from substantive aspects, contribution to reviewing international conventions, and the preparation of their ratification, and the elaboration of national assessment reports,
- management and control of the performance of state administration,
- undertaking of methodological guidance and provision of expert positions on legal regulations, within the scope of its own competencies,
- cooperation with other ministries and central bodies of state administration, bodies of local state administration and self-government authorities at all levels, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic, the Federation of Employers Associations and Unions of the Slovak Republic, and non-governmental organisations in enforcing the principle of equal opportunities for women and men and the application of the principle of equal treatment,
- annual evaluation, in cooperation with responsible subjects, of the basic strategic documents: “National action Plan for Women in Slovakia” (information on implementation is given annually to the Government) and the “Concept of Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men” (the evaluation report is given to the Council for Economic and Social Agreement).

In 2003 the competencies of the Department for Equal Opportunities were extended within the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family to include also the area of anti-discrimination. The department’s tasks are financed within the budget of the sector and are determined by a budgetary allocation.

**The strategy of gender mainstreaming** is still in its initial stage in the SR. In order to pursue equality efficiently it is necessary that the institutional provision and the application of equal opportunities in the Slovak society covers all levels of state administration and self-government of upper tiers. Despite proposals that have been presented, for extending the substantive responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family with issues of

equal opportunities, this was not successfully achieved within the Act No. 347/1990 Coll. on the organisation of ministries and other state administration bodies of SR. Individual sectors at present do not have separate workers dealing specifically with equal opportunities (so-called Focal points). Mainly through projects, the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination ensures training and information for state administration and self-government staff on the development and the current trends in gender equality issues.

Despite the fact that the focal points for gender equality and empowerment of women have not been established at relevant ministries, the ministries within their scope of competencies, cooperate in the implementation of measures of the National Action Plan for Women and the Concept of Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men. Equally, a worker has been appointed responsible for the horizontal implementation of the principle of equal opportunities in the European Structural Funds.

In 2002, the first body for the status of women at parliamentary level was created, the **Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women** at the NC SR Committee for Human Rights, National Minorities and the Status of Women. A member of the Parliamentary Committee chairs it; its members are recruited from representatives of NGOs operating in the interest of advancement and raising of the status of women in the society. The Parliamentary Committee cooperates with the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination, mainly through the Commission. The Commission has the right to articulate its views on the issues of women, laws, and other questions, which are debated in the Parliament. If the Committee identifies with their comments, they may then be discussed by the Parliament.

The Parliamentary Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women, as well as the Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination cooperate with NGOs, and experts of the university and research base.

The **Commission for Women** working at the level of the Confederation of Trade Unions is currently refocusing on the issues of equal opportunities between women and men, particularly with regard to employment.

In 2001 a new institute was introduced in the Slovak constitutional system – **the public defender of rights (Ombudsman)**, whose agenda is not specialised, and who does not have a separate special office for the issues of the protection of women's rights.

## **Part Four: Main problems and activities for their solution**

In our visions for future advancement of the status of women and progress in the issues of gender equality and elimination of gender stereotypes, e.g. within MATRA project on institutional capacity building for equal opportunities in the SR, we may anticipate constitution of parliamentary and governmental structures of equal opportunities, enjoying the highest possible status:

- the establishment of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Opportunities with his or her own budget and the relevant competencies, or a special ombudsman for equal opportunities between women and men,
- the establishment of the Council of the Government for Equal Opportunities as an advisory body to the SR Government. At this Council a Platform would operate for the dialogue with non-governmental organisations,
- strengthening the competencies and the position of the body for equal opportunities within the structure of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, which would mean setting up of a separate section for equal opportunities between women and men,
- creating of a unit (focal point), responsible for the agenda of equal opportunities at individual ministries and other bodies of state and local administration.

MoLSAF SR put on its agenda to develop the **Framework Strategy on Gender Equality**, on which the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women should build, as well as the updated Action Plan, comprising the core and topical tasks currently presented in the National Action Plan for Women in the SR and the Concept of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in the SR.

The Department for Equal Opportunities and Anti-discrimination of the MoLSAF SR will continue implementing the project „Introducing equal opportunities in the agenda of regional and local self-government“. The objective of the project is to train local government elected officials and the staff in the issues of equal opportunities and acquaint them with the existing institutions for equal opportunities in the EU member states, and the possibilities to introduce gender aspect in all policies, measures and activities, at every level of governance, with special emphasis on the activities' outcome.

### **Intentions for the future**

We need to put in place a coherent political framework for gender equality, which will

1. explain the mandate and responsibility of all administrative structures at national, regional, and local level,
2. outline mechanisms of accountability, coordination and monitoring for all these levels,
3. ensure adequate human and financial resources.

We recognise that in the SR we need to create a structure with clear legal mandate for the coordination of development, implementation and monitoring of national gender equality policy, including, making reports on compliance with the obligations vis-à-vis international organisations. Equally, we need to set up in all sectors and in local and regional administration focal points for the introduction of gender mainstreaming.

In order to ensure law enforceability in the area of equal opportunities, equal treatment and anti-discrimination, it is necessary to set up an independent body, or, as the anti-discrimination act proposes, modify the powers of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights in Bratislava, as an autonomous supervisory body in gender quality, with some form of representation of relevant non-governmental organisations and lobbyist groups, for monitoring policies.

In the future we will need to achieve strengthening of the Parliamentary Commission for Equal Opportunities and the Status of Women in the Society, enabling it to play an effective role in influencing the agenda and political outputs. In medium-term horizon, the Commission could work through the Committee of NC SR for Human Rights, National Minorities, and the Status of Women on the establishment of a structure coherent with that of the European Parliament.

There is a need for more information campaigns to make the public aware of the crucial issues regarding gender equality and the need to change stereotypes both in the gender domain as well as in fighting discrimination. Training in gender issues will need to be implemented within the European Social Fund, in which gender equality is one of the basic horizontal principles.

There is a need for civil society groups to work together on drawing up strategies, lobbying and influencing the parliamentary agenda for the promotion of the process of creating the political framework for gender equality and anti-discrimination in the SR.

**It will be vital to eliminate barriers regarding equal opportunities, mainly:**

- on the labour market
- in decision-making in public, economic, and private life
- in stereotypes in all areas of public and private life
- in violence against women
- in the area of gendered education.

Measures on the above areas are adopted within the Concept of Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men, which will be reformulated in conjunction with the tasks of the National Action Plan, in accordance with the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, which will also be passed in the year 2004.

**We anticipate undertaking the following tasks, with time frames for monitoring their progress once a year:**

1. Create effective institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality, suppression of gender stereotypes and implementation of the strategy of gender mainstreaming.
2. Support measures for the observance of equal opportunities in employment and for reconciliation of work and family life and ensure equal opportunities in employment within company social policies and collective bargaining, ensure implementation and control of equal remuneration between women and men for work of equal value.
3. Support projects for advancement of rural women and women with smaller development chances.
4. Initiate changes in curricula and textbooks in the interest of raising sensitivity to gender equality and the elimination of gender stereotypes.
5. Create conditions and extend possibilities for self-realisation of women in decision-making positions, promote modification of the Act on political parties and the Act on elections to ensure women's representation in politics, and in political parties, for example, by introducing quotas and other short-term provisional measures.
6. Draw up the Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, and subsequently, the strategies for individual areas of concern, with follow-up action plans, such as the National Strategy for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women.
7. Ensure that top managers of state administration (ministries and other central bodies of state administration, regional and district offices) and self-government officials are acquainted with the issues of equal opportunities for women and men through instruction, seminars and training.
8. Initiate the introduction of the agenda of equal opportunities in ministries and central bodies of state administration, regional and district offices, and self-government regional authorities.
9. Ensure through research institutions of the MoLSAF SR systematic monitoring and research into the area of equal opportunities.
10. Promote increased representation of women in policy-making positions in the media and support activities, which respect gender dimension in presenting women in the media. Ensure training for media workers with a view to eliminating gender stereotypes and improving media and public information on gender equality.