

ITALY

**REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR
ACTION**

Rome, May 1999

PART I – OVERVIEW OF TRENDS IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY¹

1. The Scenario

1.1. Changes in the Political and Institutional Context²

The Italian political scenario has changed deeply in the years that followed the Beijing Conference. From 1992 onwards, Italy witnessed a long period of political instability, during which early elections were called twice. Finally, in May 1996, a Center-Left coalition led by Romano Prodi won a Parliamentary majority and formed a government. This new government inherited an extremely difficult economic and financial situation. Nonetheless, Mr. Prodi's government was successful in launching a process of economic recovery, which enabled Italy's participation in the European Economic and Monetary Union. Italy was also able to win back credibility in the international arena.

Despite these positive developments, many unresolved problems still remained in the country. Italy was in need of a deep and extensive reform of its state structure and institutions, as well as a reform of its economic and social policy. In October 1998, the dissent of a component of the Parliamentary majority regarding the Budget brought down the Prodi government. In the weeks that followed, a new political majority was formed. While the Parliamentary majority remained a Center-Left coalition, its make-up was different. Massimo D'Alema became the new Prime Minister. The new executive set itself the priority of adopting the institutional reforms that were needed to ensure greater stability to the democratic life of the country, along with initiatives to promote economic growth and employment.

Both of these objectives are highly relevant for the position of women in Italian society, as well as for the attainment of the objectives set out in the Beijing Platform of Action. The democratic content of the institutional reforms will hinge also on the extent to which these reforms overcome the democratic deficit represented by gender unbalance in decision-making. The effectiveness of the government's employment and growth policies will be gauged also on the use it makes of the great resource represented by women's new identity, by giving women full access to employment, to social services and to the economic resources of the country. This trend may be supported by the progress towards European integration: the Amsterdam Treaty fully recognizes the principle of gender equality, and equal opportunities between women and men have been included among the four pillars of European Employment Guidelines.

¹ Contains the answers to Part I of the Questionnaire.

² Contains the answer to the last question of Part I of the Questionnaire.

1.2. Changes in the Social and Economic Context³

One of the most significant and widespread changes to have occurred in Italy in the last twenty years is the transformation in the identity and experience of women. As is true also in the rest of Europe, today most Italian women believe that they live a better life than their own mothers led before them. They consider the main factors in this improvement to be not only improved socio-economic and health care conditions, but also the greater freedom and scope for independent choices which they enjoy in their own personal lives, in procreation and in their access to education and training.

In Italy, the female school attendance rate has increased more than the rate for males, and it is currently higher for all levels of education. Specifically, 82 per cent of girls attend secondary school against 79.9 per cent of boys⁴, and 93.4 per cent of girls pass the middle school examination against 92.3 per cent of boys. At the other end, the drop-out rate from university studies is only 10.3 per cent for females against 15.4 per cent for males. Out of one thousand males who pass the middle-school examination, 562 continue through secondary school, and 107 graduate from university. Instead, for female students, out of the one thousand girls who pass through the middle school, 665 go on to graduate from secondary school, and 160 graduate from university.

A similar female edge is also apparent in informal learning processes. Girls read more books than boys do (67.3 per cent against 45.5 per cent). They go more often to the theatre (23.8 per cent against 15.9 per cent), and they write more diaries, stories and poetry (51.1 per cent against 20.2 per cent). They sing, dance, go to museums, paint and make sculptures in a ratio that is consistently higher than that of the boys in their same age brackets.

While advanced learning skills and the will to invest in their personal education are highly visible in young women, giving them a clear advantage over the males of their same age, it should also be noted that this trend is seen in all age groups, and that it applies not only to individual experience but also to the collective and organized dimensions. In Italy, women are the members of society who are best able to reflect on their past experience and to adapt to the continuously changing conditions. This is true both regarding their personal lives, and their caring activities, their family lives, and their voluntary work, their professions and grass-roots associations. Life-long learning and the building of networks and social laboratories appear to be very much a part of women's experience today. These very characteristics are considered highly relevant today for the development of new skills and leadership, as well as for job creation and

³ Contains the answer to the second to the last and, indirectly, also to the second question of Part I of the Questionnaire.

⁴ Except where expressly indicated, ISTAT is the source of all data contained in this Report.

social cohesion in a society which features both strong technological innovation and high social and environmental risks.

The impact of this positive potential on the access of women to paid employment is still highly contradictory. The changes in female subjectivity and assertiveness are evident in the increased participation rate in the labor market. Between 1993 and 1998, the number of women holding jobs rose from 7,135,000 to 7,364,000. However, so did the number of unemployed female workers (up from 1,236,000 to 1,491,000). The number of women in the working population is also on the rise, as is the pressure exerted on the labor market, owing to the number of women who no longer intend to stop working after their marriage or after the birth of their first child. Moreover, the more highly-qualified professional figures are increasing in number: women entrepreneurs (from 54,000 to 83,000), professional women (up from 125,000 to 200,000), female members of cooperatives (from 65,000 to 128,000), female middle managers (from 230,000 to 324,000). Vice versa, the number of female industry workers is on the decline (down from 2,118,000 to 2,069,000), as is the number of women working in agriculture (from 623,000 to 458,000). Female office workers have, instead, increased (up from 2,898,000 to 3,132,000), and the number of women employed in the important services sector is on the rise (from 4,032,000 to 5,307,000).

These positive trends clash with the difficulties that are experienced by women in the labor market. According to official employment statistics, unemployment is still the most common status for young women between 15 and 24 years of age, and is higher than in the case of males in the same age bracket (39.3 per cent of young women are unemployed against 29 per cent of males). In the South, the figures are even starker: 64.9 per cent of girls are unemployed against 50.6 per cent of boys. For the older generations, the female unemployment rate is steadily higher than that of the men. Moreover, there is also a stronger presence of women in the black market and in the so-called flexible and atypical working schemes.

Part-time employment is more common amongst women (13.3 per cent) than men (3.2 per cent), and women account for 70.1 per cent of part-time workers. The gender difference is less conspicuous in the case of short-term employment, which accounts for 7.3 per cent of the male workers' contracts against 9.5 per cent of the contracts of the female workers. Regarding part-time employment, in a majority of cases it is a scheme chosen by the woman herself (66.6 per cent in the case of adult women, 46.5 per cent in the younger age group). The situation in fixed-term employment is different, as it is a choice only for 47.9 per cent of the women with this type of employment contract. In the 15-29 year age group, flexibility appears to be more of an imposition than the result

of a free choice, both in the case of part-time and fixed-term contracts. New jobs tend to be very precarious and offer the workers very little job security.

The impact that these difficulties and contradictions have on the lives of women is compounded by the two heaviest forms of inequality in Italian society. The first is an absolute imbalance in the sharing of family responsibilities, which rest almost entirely on the shoulders of women. The second is the imbalance in decision-making power, which lies almost entirely in the hands of men. Family relations are a sphere in which Italian women make a strong emotional and creative investment. In all forms of families, both traditional and non-traditional, women perform all of the caring activities and exercise authority, while at the same time they ensure the relational and affective bonds. Yet, families are also marked by strong contradictions and inequities.

For the women who hold a job and have children, family work is central to their lives and leisure time is residual. Instead, for the men who are employed and have children, the reverse holds true: their leisure time is central to their lives, and family care is a lesser concern. More than one half of the women who are employed and have children work 60 hours plus a week (including both their paid employment and caring work). More than one third of the women work 70 hours plus a week. Among the men, only 15 per cent work more than 60 hours a week, summing their paid employment and family work together. And only 21.4 per cent of fathers with children under two years of age take some care of them every day. The paradoxical consequence of this state of affairs appears to be that from the point of view of their work-load, women are better off without a partner. In fact, single mothers perform an average of 2 hours less of family work per day compared to married women with children.

Naturally, these statistics should be interpreted not only in the light of the figures on employment and the availability of services, but also when considering the changes in family models that have occurred in Italy, as in other European countries. Family models are more and more diversified, and the number of families represented by single parents, non-widowed singles, cohabitation and second-time families number 3,600,000 and involve a total of 5,947,000 persons or 10.4 per cent of the population. Between 1990 and 1998, the number of unmarried couples rose from 184,000 to 344,000, and they now represent 2.3 per cent of the total. Also, the number of persons living alone has increased. So has the percentage of young people between 18 and 34 years who still live at home with their parents: from 51.8 per cent in 1990, this figure climbed to 58.7 per cent in 1998. On the other hand, 71.3 per cent of families are made up of a maximum of three members, and the Italian birth-rate (1.15 per cent) is one of the lowest in the entire world. (This figure does not take into account the birth-rate of the immigrant population that resides in Italy, which tends to be higher). It is hard to

assess the degree to which this trend may be related to the figures given above concerning the unbalanced distribution of caring responsibilities. It certainly is a fact that the burden of performing two jobs - one for the market and the other in her family - along with the lack of social services, may easily represent an obstacle to the fulfilment of a woman's desire for maternity.

The other area of deep inequality is that of the distribution of decision-making positions. Despite the increase in the number of women holding government responsibilities, the number of women in Parliament is still unjustifiably low and in no way representative of the social reality of women. In fact, only 11 per cent of parliamentarians are women. And only 6.4 per cent of the mayors are women, while there are no women at the head of the regional governments, and only 5.8 per cent of the provincial bodies are led by women. The situation is equally negative in the civil service: the percentage of women in management roles ranges from 5.4 to 7.8 per cent (with the sole exception of research institutions, where women managers total 14.7 per cent). In private-sector business, women managers range between 3.1 and 4.8 per cent in medium to large-sized enterprises, while they are more strongly represented in small businesses (10.5 to 12.5 per cent). In the mass media, 3.3 per cent of the editors of daily newspapers are women, against 37.4 per cent of the editors of weekly publications. In the universities, women account for 3.1 per cent of the Rectors, and 11.1 per cent of full Professors. In the judiciary, only 4.1 of women are Presidents of Court sections. This figure clashes strongly with the fact that women have steadily outnumbered men amongst the successful candidates in the recent state examinations for access to a career in the Italian judiciary.

There is clearly an underlying contradiction between the dynamic experience of women and the new capabilities they have developed on the one hand, and the persistence of obstacles that prevent their access to decision-making powers and political representation on the other. The qualitative impact of the role of women on the transformation and modernization of Italy seems quite weak if formal, quantifiable and institutional powers are considered. This pattern represents a clear deficit in democracy. It is one of the key elements that has spawned the current crisis in the credibility of Italian institutions. It also explains the need for an expansion and consolidation of the notion of citizenship, and for profound reform in the forms of participation of all citizens, men and women alike, in the life of our country.

2. Policies for the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action⁵

⁵ Answers to questions 1 and 4 of Part I of the Questionnaire.

In such a complex framework, the challenge represented by the full-fledged implementation of the Beijing Platform in Italy today is more than just a question of numbers. It is related to the quality and meaning of the transition process which is underway in Italy, as well as to the possibility, and indeed the necessity, that one of its founding elements should be the assumption of a gender perspective in all government policies. In this perspective, a major and unprecedented innovation was the appointment of a Minister for Equal Opportunities in the Prodi Cabinet, as requested by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities after the Beijing Conference⁶.

The approval of the Italian Plan of Action to implement the Beijing Platform is a first milestone in this new course. The Plan of Action took the form of a Prime Minister's Directive, which was addressed in March 1997 to all members of government. Its aim was to promote women's empowerment and to recognize and guarantee freedom of choice and enhanced quality of life for women and men. The text of the directive, and the practical objectives that are set out therein, focus on the key concepts of the Beijing Conference: empowerment and mainstreaming. The "building of a mainstreaming culture" states the Directive "implies the need to overcome a sectoral notion of 'women's issues' or a conventional idea of equal opportunities, consisting in a set of actions to overcome disadvantage. The most innovative aspect of mainstreaming consists in the need for initiatives which cut across all government actions".

On this basis, the Directive identified priorities for action in Italy. The targeted areas for **political and institutional action** included:

- ◆ the promotion of women in decision-making,
- ◆ gender impact analysis,
- ◆ coordination and reform of institutional action
- ◆ international cooperation.

The following priorities were identified in the **economic and social spheres**:

- ◆ training and education,
- ◆ promotion of female entrepreneurship and employment (both in employed labour and self-employment, as well as in the non profit-sector),
- ◆ gendered policies on time-use, work organization and working-time,
- ◆ health care,
- ◆ violence against women⁷.

⁶ Romano Prodi appointed the Rt. Hon. Anna Finocchiaro as Equal Opportunities Minister, Massimo D'Alema appointed Prof. Laura Dalbo.

⁷ Respectively, for the first group of questions, strategic objectives G.1, H.1, H.3; for the second group, strategic objectives B.4, F.5, F.2, F.6, C.1-C.5, D.1-D.3.

This choice of priorities was based on an understanding of the Italian society in which the objective of "guaranteeing freedom of choice and enhanced quality of life for women and men" means addressing issues such as the following:

- The contradictions between employment and non-employment and between productive and reproductive roles, in all of their complexity (different and changing forms of women's work, a new approach to women's learning processes and culture, the issue of caring responsibilities);
- Women's sexuality and freedom, with both the promotion of personal well-being and health, and actions to contrast the denial of freedom through violence against women;
- The forging of a new culture and new practices in social relations and in gender relations, and of educational patterns to enable their dissemination;
- The design of new social policies, along with new town planning and sustainable environment policies, that are compatible with the different needs of women and men;
- A different quality in international relations and cooperation, in what is becoming increasingly a multi-cultural context⁸.

3. Mainstreaming, Empowerment, Affirmative Action: Evaluating Results and Obstacles⁹

In an evaluation of the results and obstacles which have so far been encountered, it is impossible to consider the objectives aimed at mainstreaming in isolation from the others. As mentioned above, both the Italian Plan of Action (the 1997 Directive), and the work carried out by the Department for Equal Opportunities, strongly emphasize the importance of the link between mainstreaming in government policies and the process of women's empowerment at all levels, in particular in their relations with civil society and women's associations. In addition, affirmative actions continue to play a major role, as do all other specific actions aimed at women, according to the dual track (mainstreaming plus targeted policies, projects and organizations) which has repeatedly been considered as the essential approach, both by the United Nations and by the European Union. And indeed the national dimension is increasingly interwoven with a European dimension, which has represented a key forum for women to share and advance their experiences.

The complexity of this approach has met with many difficulties both at an institutional level and in civil society, including in women's movements. It has been clear from the

⁸ Strategic objectives E.1-E.4.

⁹ This and the following item 4 contains answers to the third and fifth questions of Part I of the Questionnaire.

outset that this approach entailed not only a potential partnership, but also a potential source of conflict between the two sexes. Indeed, it met with strong resistance on the part of actual power holders. Moreover, even the most open and gender-sensitive politicians and decision-makers have always considered women's policies as separate issues and have found it very difficult to take on board a gender perspective that cuts across all government policies.

This mix of resistance to change and difficulty in understanding mainstreaming policies has become evident in the practice of social dialogue undertaken by the Italian government in the design of its economic and social policies. Theoretically, dialogue with civil society should have represented an ideal arena for women, an arena in which they could have enjoyed greater visibility and bargaining power, as women tend to be much stronger in civil society than in the institutions. In actual fact, however, this was not seen on any of the occasions in which policies have been concerted with the social partners, despite specific proposals submitted both by the National Commission and by the Department for Equal Opportunities. These occasions ranged from the discussions on economic and employment policy, which led to the adoption of the Social Pact for Development and Employment, to social dialogue on welfare and social security, or to the discussions on the use of the European Structural Funds¹⁰. Women as actors were absent from all of these different levels. This was true both literally, in the sense that there were no real-life women sitting round the negotiating tables (with only a tiny number of relevant exceptions), and metaphorically, as a gender perspective was lacking in all of the policies that were negotiated and adopted. This absence was also due to the difficulties that were encountered in affirming an approach based on mainstreaming within women's movements themselves. In the seventies, most women explicitly chose the political-legislative arena as a priority for action, albeit in strong conflict with the establishment. But in subsequent decades, women's movements and associations have increasingly shifted their interest to the cultural and social arenas. This has engendered a strong growth in women's knowledge, experience and autonomy. But it has also resulted in women having a weak position in the institutions, both political and, indeed, cultural (for instance in schools, universities and in the mass media).

4. Actions taken

¹⁰ See, inter alia, document "Reform of the welfare state and female condition" drafted by the National Equal Opportunities Committee following the consultation with the Social Solidarity and Finance Ministries, the Labor Undersecretary, and the President of INPS.

In this complex situation, the challenge of mainstreaming has met with many difficulties and some significant results. Both are illustrated in the analysis of the twelve critical areas of concern. The most significant examples are listed below.

4.1 IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SPHERE

Italian employment policies are increasingly in line with European policy-making. The common initiative of European Ministers for Women has led to the introduction of substantial innovations in terms of mainstreaming and equal opportunities in the European Employment Guidelines. The most important result in Italy has been the fact that women's policies have escaped from the confinement of "specific policies" and some of the crucial issues for women have been fully integrated in the government's priorities. These issues are being taken forward with determination by the Minister for Social Solidarity and the Minister for Equal Opportunities. A number of important results have so far been achieved and they include, in particular, the following:

4.1.1 Child-friendly policies, with the approval of a national plan (April 1997) and an ad hoc law for the promotion of children's rights (Law 285 of August 28, 1997), with a 741 billion lire financing for local projects to provide childcare services and to support parent-child relations¹¹.

4.1.2 Family-friendly policies, which were no longer addressed exclusively to female workers, but also to both parents. They are linked to a more general need for time-use and working-time policies¹². Again, the concerted action of European Ministers for Women on this subject has played a key role. In Italy, the issues of working time reductions and flexibility is currently on the agenda. A draft government bill, which currently lies before Parliament, envisages parental leaves for the parents of children under eight years of age. The same draft bill envisages contributions to companies that apply family-friendly contractual provisions, such as reversible part-time schemes, tele-working, flexible hours (both in-coming and out-going), time banks, etc. Another step forward was the approval of a government's bill on the introduction of tele-working in public administration, for male and female workers.

4.1.3 Policies concerning violence against women, after years of standstill and marginalization, have finally gained new visibility and achieved important results¹³. The first breakthrough was the approval, after twenty long years of Parliamentary debate, of a

¹¹ See chapter "L. The Girl-Child".

¹² See chapter "F. Women and the Economy".

¹³ See chapter "D. Violence against Women".

new law against sexual violence on February 15, 1996. Initiatives to combat violence against women were launched both by the Prodi and the D'Alema governments. The Cabinet approved draft legislation against domestic violence, recently adopted by one of the branches of Parliament. Many projects against sexual and domestic violence were introduced at local level, and a new law against sexual harassment was approved by Parliament, along with new legislation concerning the sexual abuse of children. Furthermore, a number of initiatives have been taken against what is, unfortunately, a growing scourge: trafficking in women and children. The new law on immigration envisages that a special residence permit for reasons of social protection may be granted to the victims of trafficking. It also finances programs for the social assistance and integration of these women. The government has introduced a draft bill that aims at enhancing the effectiveness of criminal enforcement and protection of victims.

4.1.4 The initiatives for **the promotion of women's entrepreneurship** have finally, after five years, led to the funding of Law 215, specifically addressed to women in business. This decision was followed by a multi-media information campaign, and by the creation of an observatory, the adoption of a toll-free number and also of other measures to facilitate the access of women to the financing provided for under Law 215, but also to all of the other measures that support small businesses, such as access to credit, training and guidance, the streamlining of procedures for the start-up of new businesses, as well as promotion and consultancy in the planning, start-up and implementation phases.

4.2 ON THE POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Despite the difficulties mentioned above concerning the low number of women in decision-making positions, a number of positive developments have been registered in democracy and representation, as well as in the introduction of mainstreaming in institutional policies.

4.2.1 Following Beijing, there has been a considerable increase in **the number of women who hold government positions** (3 women ministers and 9 undersecretaries of state in the Prodi government, 6 women ministers and 10 undersecretaries in the D'Alema government). Beyond these numbers, it is also important that the traditional pattern of the segregation of women to roles which were considered as being typically female (such as social policies or education), has been broken. For the first time in the history of the Italian Republic, the government of Massimo D'Alema has appointed a woman as Minister of the Interior. Women have also been confirmed in Undersecretary positions in the Ministries of the Treasury, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Labor.

4.2.2 The role of **women in institutions** has gained momentum and visibility in the debate on the pending election of the new President of the Republic, where it has been clear that choosing a woman would represent a major innovation on both the political and symbolic levels. Furthermore, a provision on gender-balanced representation was introduced in the draft law to reform the Constitution. This provision encourages the adoption of affirmative actions in electoral laws, aimed at promoting the under-represented sex¹⁴.

4.2.3 The government has adopted a draft bill (which is now being read by Parliament) concerning the generalization of **gender statistics**. The aim is to ensure that the official statistics produced in Italy take gender differences into account. This step will enable fuller implementation of the Beijing Platform, and give continuity and new impulse to the steps already taken by ISTAT - the National Statistics Institute. These steps do not only concern the collection of gender-disaggregated data, but also new surveys on the quality of life and on gender relations, in addition to the development of new gender-sensitive indicators.

4.2.4 As to **mainstreaming in development cooperation policies**, the joint work between the Foreign Ministry's Development Cooperation Department (DGDC), and the Department for Equal Opportunities has led to the drafting of: "Guidelines for gender policies in development cooperation". In these years dialogue, solidarity and decentralized cooperation experiences by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, peace and feminist movements, have witnessed an increased presence of women in emergency relief to areas of armed conflict¹⁵. The guidelines concern the enhancement of the role of women in the various phases of cooperation, ranging from political dialogue to humanitarian relief, and encompass sectoral aid, institution-building and empowerment of civil society.

¹⁴ See chapter "H. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women".

¹⁵ See Report on critical areas E (Women and Armed Conflict) and I (Human Rights of Women).

PART II – FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

2. The promotion of women in national budgets

There is no gender mainstreaming in the State budget. In other words, an awareness of the different needs of male and female citizens does not emerge from the definition of the budgetary items, as recommended by the Beijing Platform. A review of the resources allocated expressly to the promotion of women in the national budget has revealed the existence of very few targeted measures. The major budgetary items in favor of women are those set aside for the Law on women's entrepreneurship (215/92) and the Law on affirmative action (125/91). However, in recent years there has been a positive trend in the spending ratio of appropriated resources for these laws. The balance sheet data for the 1995-1998 period showed that the spending capacity was very low up until 1996. This resulted in a considerable loss of the available resources (25 billion lire were not spent for the promotion of women's entrepreneurship owing to the lack of implementing legislation, which was only approved in 1997, 30 billion lire for affirmative actions were not spent between 1995 and 1996).

Starting from 1997, a reversal in trend has occurred. The appropriated funds have been fully spent, and those set aside to finance Law 215/92 were in fact insufficient. The funding for the facilitations provided for by Law 215/92 were therefore integrated with 10 billion lire in 1998 and 20 billion lire in 1999.

Smaller budgetary items for the promotion of women that are contained in the national budget include the following:

- Funds to finance the Equal Opportunities Department and the National Commission for Equal Opportunities: 20 billion lire per year, fully spent;
- An allocation for women and children who are the victims of trafficking in the fund provided by Law 40/98 on immigration: 10 billion lire;
- Other minor items: social security contributions to working women who return to the labor market after at least two years of non-employment (Law 196/97); a social security fund for women who perform unpaid family and caring activities (Legislative Decree 565/96); financing for the assistance to maternity under Laws 448/98 and 449/97, (the latter, in particular, is linked to provisions for women with atypical contracts).

3.a Structures and mechanisms for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and follow-up to other international conferences

The review of the Beijing Platform implementation status in Italy was entrusted to the Equal Opportunities Department, as was the drafting of the National Plan of Action in 1997. The drafting of this report, and the initiatives that will follow to prepare the

special session of the United Nations General Assembly "Women 2000", was carried out under the responsibility of a "cross-competence" Committee, coordinated by the Department and including gender experts and representatives of all relevant ministries and departments. NGOs were consulted on the contents of the Report.

Regarding other international conferences:

- The Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Foreign Ministry (DGDC) is responsible for the follow-up to the Copenhagen Social Summit. A coordination group has been set up with other relevant ministries and departments, including the Equal Opportunities Department.
- The Social Affairs Department, in collaboration with the DGDC, has the main responsibility in the follow-up to the Cairo Conference on Population and Development. In this case, too, a representative of the Equal Opportunities Department has been involved.
- The Environment Ministry is responsible for the follow-up to the Rio Conference. There are no forms of coordination with other ministries, or on gender issues.

3.b Coordination of follow-up to the global conferences

The various Committees that are responsible for the follow-up of the conferences have not met to define common guidelines for action, nor has the Foreign Ministry given responsibility to other Italian institutions for the follow-up to the Vienna Conference on Human Rights. The Equal Opportunities Department cooperates with the Foreign Affairs' Directorate General responsible for human rights, and it has worked in all fora to promote inter-institutional exchange and gender mainstreaming.

3.c The role of non-governmental organizations

The run-up to the Beijing Conference witnessed the intense participation of women's movements and associations. Many debates and preparatory documents were organized, with exchanges of delegations, and with networking of the women who were interested in participating actively in this global process. Consequently, many Italian women and women's associations took part in the Huairou Forum and/or were included in the government delegation.

After Beijing, the NGOs, the associations and the individual women who took part in the conference have worked on the following three levels.

- Dissemination in Italy of the Conference and Forum results;
- Expansion of the networks and international initiatives;
- Dialogue with institutions.

I. Dissemination of the Beijing results

In the two years following the Beijing Conference, many initiatives were organized at a local level such as meetings and debates, exhibitions, publications, videos etc. This action was supported by the networks that had developed during and following the Huairou Conference, and in particular by:

- The network "Taking Beijing Home"¹⁶, which organized a series of meetings and debates in various Italian cities and helped disseminate the Conference papers and documentation;
- The "Italian Women's Caucus" comprising women in institutions, associations, political parties and universities, which was created to promote the involvement of civil society in the preparation, monitoring and follow-up of the Beijing Conference. The Caucus continues to promote national and international meetings;
- The "Forum of Native and Migrant Women", for two years stimulated debate on the role and rights of immigrant women. The Forum fostered greater attention on the issues of immigration and achieved, *inter alia*, the appointment of an immigrant representing the Forum to the National Commission for Equal Opportunities;
- The National Commission for Equal Opportunities played a major role in coordinating and stimulating women's NGOs, also through the publication and dissemination of thousands of copies of the Beijing Platform and a host of related publications. The National Commission also worked to create opportunities for debate on many of the Platform themes, by organizing meetings on the following subjects: the welfare state, women in small and medium-sized business, reconciliation of professional and family life, equal opportunities in Community law, information and mass media.

II. Expansion of initiatives and international networks

Following Beijing, the international relations of many associations, NGOs and also some local authorities were stepped up, often stimulated by their Equal Opportunities Committees. The Mediterranean area, with the crises in the Balkans, in Algeria and Palestine, has increasingly become an important area for the exchange and building of women's networks, to foster women's empowerment and political and cultural cooperation.

These networks include:

¹⁶ The Conference "Taking Beijing Home" which was organized in Bologna on Oct. 20-22, 1995 by the Orlando Association paved the way. The same Association organized the 1997 "Many Women One Planet" conference which dealt with women's networking and the possibility for global interaction. In that period, the first server for women was set up, with support from the Bologna municipality. It is run by women to host woman-oriented Internet sites.

- The networks developed in 1988-89 between Italian, Palestinian and Israeli women, to promote an active role for women in the peace process and in the future of the Middle East;

- The network built before and during the war in the former-Yugoslavia, with women of different ethnic groups, to work for dialogue and reconciliation;

- Networks with Algerian women on issues related to human rights and women's rights, in particular with support for the petition against the Family Code.

In the last two years, many conferences and meetings have been organized, with a strong participation of women from the Maghreb, Middle Eastern and Balkan countries. An important experience was the Conference "Mediterranean Women. Different Cultures, Universal Rights" which was held in Naples in February, 1999 and which was organized by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities. On that occasion, an award for a university thesis on the subject of "Women and Human Rights" was instituted.

III. Dialogue with institutions

The only permanent and cross-disciplinary forum for dialogue between the government and women's organizations after the Beijing Conference was the National Commission for Equal Opportunities. At the time of the Beijing Conference, and in the year that followed, this was also the only national coordination body for all gender-related issues that reported to the government. The Commission translated and disseminated the Beijing Declaration and Platform in Italy.

The appointment of an Equal Opportunities Minister in 1996 led to a consistent practice of consulting and involving women's organizations. This was seen, in particular, in the following activities:

- National Conferences (for instance, the "Zero Tolerance" Conference in Bologna on violence against women¹⁷);
- Standing committees (for instance, the Committees on women's entrepreneurship and trafficking in women¹⁸);
- Operational coordination of institutional and NGO initiatives (for instance, the Coordination Forum on solidarity actions in Albania, the recent Forum on humanitarian aid for the Kosovo emergency)¹⁹.

¹⁷ See chapter D, "Violence against Women".

¹⁸ See chapters F, "Women and the Economy" and D, "Violence against Women".

¹⁹ See chapter E, "Women and Armed Conflict".

Regarding the NGOs in development cooperation, where a small number of women's organizations had been active in the past, one of the positive results of the Beijing Conference has been an enhanced awareness of the importance of a gender-oriented approach to all projects and programmes, as well as a greater number of initiatives for the empowerment of women. This "genderization" of programmes and projects, which has already been adopted by some NGOs, will be expanded following the publication of the "Guidelines for the enhancement of the role of women and the promotion of a gender perspective in Italian official development aid", drafted by the DGDC of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, with the support of the Department for Equal Opportunities.

ITALY

PART III

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN OF THE
BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

A. WOMEN AND POVERTY

Context

In the last few years, poverty in Italy has for the first time affected not only the unemployed, but also the working poor, those people who despite the fact that they are gainfully employed, simply do not earn enough to guarantee their own families a dignified standard of living. In 1997, 2,245,000 families were reported to be living in conditions of "relative poverty"¹. This figure shows a rise of 166,000 over the previous year, and it corresponds to a total of 6,908,000 individuals. The families who live in conditions defined as "absolute poverty", and who are unable to afford basic goods, instead numbered 1,504,103, for a total of roughly 5,007,000 individuals or 8.9 per cent of the Italian population.

Absolute poverty is concentrated mainly in the areas with deep economic imbalances, high unemployment rates, inadequate schooling and vocational training levels, and large numbers of elderly people. The areas with the greatest social malaise are located in the Mezzogiorno², the South of Italy, where 70 per cent of the poor families live. Poverty affects the extreme age brackets disproportionately: in the South, 26.6 per cent of the young under 18 years and 31 per cent of adults over 65 years are poor (ISTAT, 1998 Report on Italy).

The 1997 Report by ISTAT (Italy's national statistics body) gave the following poverty rates in a gender and geographical breakdown:

Women	North = 6.8 per cent	Center = 9.5 per cent	South = 27 per cent
Men	North = 3.2 per cent	Center = 4.6 per cent	South = 23.5 per cent

National average: Women = 12.8 per cent
Men = 10.6 per cent

Economic malaise is seen especially in the case of couples with three or more children (23.9 per cent, mainly in the South) and couples with at least one dependent minor (10.1 per cent), followed by families in which the breadwinner is elderly (9.4 per cent), and one-person families (8.1 per cent, especially in the North).

¹ In Italy, poverty is assessed on the basis of consumption levels. The threshold of "relative poverty" was established by the National Committee on Poverty at 1,233,892 lire per month for a family of two persons, while "absolute poverty" is defined as a monthly income of under 994,273 lire for a two-member family.

² In particular in Catania, Bona, Catanzaro, Reggio Calabria and Naples.

As is true for the rest of Europe, old-age poverty (+65 years) in Italy is "feminized". This is due to personal circumstances such as the fact that women account for 72.8 per cent of the elderly persons living alone. Amongst the forms of extreme poverty, the number of homeless persons is on the rise, with a 3.3 per cent increase over last year (23.3 per cent of the homeless are young women).

Female immigrants account for over 40 per cent of the foreigners residing in Italy. For these immigrants, poverty is an endemic condition, although it is not generalized. The poverty of these women is due both to their exclusion from the regulated production cycle and to difficulties in access to stable lodgings and health-care services. It is often very difficult to safeguard the rights of these female workers, and to combat black market labor and enforce the industry collective labor contract, because these women do not have regular residence permits. It is also true, however, that many female workers hold un-registered jobs, even though they do possess a regular residence permit granted for reasons of work.

Finally, the link between diseases and poverty should also be emphasized. While the lack of adequate income may be a cause of disease, the opposite also holds true: disease may engender poverty. This is seen not only in the case of severe and disabling pathology that renders the individual entirely dependent on his or her family and on the social services, but it also occurs in the case of chronic and intermittent diseases, that may force the unwell person to drop out of the labor market. Some forms of the common mental diseases of women (which are certainly not due to "natural" reasons) fall within this latter category.

ACTIONS TAKEN, OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED, COMMITMENTS

Poverty eradication efforts have taken the form of

1. **national initiatives, to alleviate poverty in Italy**
2. **international development cooperation programmes.**

1. In Italy

1.1. Actions taken

Besides the programmes which were co-financed with European Union and Italian government funds, other initiatives were funded by ad hoc laws or by the 1998 and 1999 Finance Acts. The latter included, in particular, initiatives to promote individual and community services managed by the Social Affairs Department.

- **Law 216/91³: contributions for vulnerable under-age children.** This law provides financing for public and private sector projects to local authorities in areas that are affected by high juvenile delinquency and school drop-out rates. The initiatives range from sheltered communities to measures to assist needy families, the provision of facilities for socialization in neighborhoods at risk, and the use of school facilities for extra-scholastic activities⁴.
- **Law 104/95⁵: assistance to families with severely disabled members.** This law appropriated 208 billion lire for the 1998-2000, 3-year period, for home care and other services and also for the reimbursement of certain expenses incurred by families with severely disabled members⁶.
- **Law 285/97 "Measures for the promotion of the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents"**⁷. One of the main objectives of this law was to reduce childhood poverty, by adopting an innovative approach, in which public and non-profit entities (associations, voluntary groups, Onlus) design the programs together. The funding amounted to 800 billion lire for the 1997-1999, 3-year period (which was allocated mainly to the Southern regions) and 312 billion from the year 2000 onwards.
- **Law 40/98 on immigration**, which facilitates the access of female immigrants to self-employment (this previously came under a reciprocity constraint that has been abolished).
- **The 1998 Budget Law** allocated 250 billion lire in the 1998-2000 period, for pilot projects to guarantee a **Basic Income** to families (almost always single-parent family units with a woman as breadwinner) in cities and neighborhoods with high poverty rates. The pilot project, which is open to male and female unemployed workers, provides for their participation in vocational training courses for access to a new job. A total of 39 municipalities were selected for this programme⁸.
- **The 1999 Budget Law** introduced:
 - a) Funds in favor of social cooperatives;
 - b) **Family benefits (National Social Fund):** 270 billion lire for the 1999-2001, 3-year period. Immigrant families, however, are not entitled to these benefits;

³ Renewed by Legislative Decree 209/94.

⁴ The activities are funded by the Social Affairs Department and by the Interior Ministry, while the initiatives aimed at crime prevention are funded by the Justice Ministry.

⁵ And subsequent amendments.

⁶ The funding was allocated by the Social Affairs Department.

⁷ See chapter "Girl children".

⁸ In the Mezzogiorno: Caserta, Naples, Isernia, Foggia, Bari, Matera, Cosenza, Reggio Calabria, Vibo Valentia, Enna, Sassari and Oristano.

- c) Maternity "checks" (National Social Fund) which are disbursed through the municipalities: 25 billion lire has been allocated for 1999, 125 billion for 2000 and 150 billion lire for 2001. Immigrant women are also excluded from these measures;
- d) Increases in social pensions (National Social Fund) totalling 430 billion lire in 1999, 445 billion lire in 2000 and 455 billion lire in 2001;
- e) Extension of the tax incentives for small businesses and non profit organisations.

1.2. Obstacles encountered

The statistical survey methods currently in use do not consent an adequate analysis of poverty and, in particular, of extreme poverty, in an economically-advanced country such as Italy. Though many studies on the living conditions of the Italian population have been performed, a gender analysis of poverty is still lacking. This inevitably hinders the identification of effective strategies for actions aimed at women. These actions are also made more difficult by the rapid changes in domestic economic conditions due to an increasingly heavy dependence on the globalized economy, and to budgetary constraints.

1.3. Commitment to Further Actions

The following measures are currently under examination by Parliament:

- A government draft bill to facilitate the acquisition and rental of housing for young couples through subsidies and soft loans;
- A draft bill on welfare relief reform, in line with the European Union, which refers also to the new demands for well-being that are linked to the evolution in families and in lifestyles.

The government is working on a review of the survivors' pensions scheme, to ensure that the pensions are not cut in the case that the widow has no other source of income or when the family unit has to care for a disabled member.

On a local level, a relief policies have been developed to assist single persons who are sick and require assistance, providing for home care, and enabling them to continue to live in their own homes

2. Italian initiatives to alleviate poverty in developing countries

2.1. Actions taken

Since 1995, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, which is responsible for cooperation policy, has included poverty eradication and women's empowerment amongst its priorities for official development assistance. Since the cooperation budget was heavily retrenched in the second half of the nineties, poverty control actions have focused on a small number of top-priority areas. These actions were based on mainstreaming - that is focusing on the role of women in broader programmes - and on women's empowerment.

• **Mainstreaming initiatives**

Building on the experience gained in 1996 in emergency situations, from 1997 onwards positive results have been obtained in promoting an active role for women in "human development" programmes. These are programmes that have a strong social impact. They are said to be "integrated", in that they encompass economic promotion (with a special focus on the creation of micro-scale businesses in the urban or rural contexts), and activities in the health-care sector, providing for basic needs and stimulating participation and democratization processes. Integrated programmes enable participation at different levels in public life, and so offer a good opportunity to target resources to women. Specific gender mainstreaming actions were identified for the first time in two human development programmes: a rehabilitation programme in Angola and a programme for the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises in South Africa.

• **Empowerment programmes.** This category includes those initiatives that are targeted chiefly at women and that may be classified as poverty eradication programmes. In Africa: an institution-building programme for the Ministry for Community Development and Women and Children's Affairs in Tanzania; the programme has a total duration of eighteen months, and a budget of one billion lire; it is implemented by an NGO;

- A program worth half a billion lire to support the Gender Policy section of the Center for African Studies of the Modjane University in Maputo, Mozambique, in their efforts towards women's empowerment in the reconstruction of Mozambique. This program has also been entrusted to an NGO;

- A NGO-run project, with a budget of over three billion lire, aimed at the promotion of women's micro-businesses in Zimbabwe.

In Latin America and the Caribbean: a 3-year project, funded through UNFPA, for integrated action in Honduras and El Salvador; the project is part of the initiatives implementing the Programme of Action of the United Nations Conference on Population and Development which was adopted in Cairo (1994).

in Eastern Europe: a programme for the promotion of working women and their economic and social rights in Albania, funded through UNDP, for a total of two billion lire. Furthermore, 70 billion lire were allocated in 1999 to the National Fund for Humanitarian relief in Albania, managed by the Social Affairs Department to deliver aid and services to children and teenagers.

In the Middle East: a programme in Palestine, funded through UNFPA, to create a healthcare and counselling service for women; the service will not only provide health care, but also information on legal rights and job placement.

The projects promoted by NGO's in the following countries should also be listed among the poverty control programmes: Albania, Bosnia, Columbia, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Palestine, Tunisia and Vietnam. These projects are largely aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship and they received a total financing of 10 billion lire from the DGDC.

2.2. Obstacles encountered

The difficulties that have been encountered are related chiefly to mainstreaming, that is to the adoption of a methodology that considers women not only as beneficiaries but also as agents in development programs. Regarding empowerment, a negative trend that has been observed, especially in the case of NGOs, is simply to provide assistance to women living in poverty.

2.3. Commitment to further actions

In view of the obstacles that have been encountered, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation has identified the need to launch more broad-based initiatives, to draw adequate attention to the multi-dimensional character of poverty eradication efforts and to give room to gender analysis in macro, meso and micro-scale policies⁹. Adopting a gender analysis of poverty means encompassing the issue of human rights and the need to empower the victims of social marginalization, along with an identification of the institutional base and the different economic levels (from macro to micro) at which women are excluded from the economy. Two multilateral programmes with the United Nations agencies UNIFEM and UNFPA are currently in the financing stage. Their aim is to promote mainstreaming and empowerment policies in the initiatives undertaken by the DGDC. The programs amount to a total of 10 billion lire for the year 1999/2000.

⁹ See introduction referring to the guidelines for a gender perspective in development cooperation.

Finally, mainstreaming procedures are to be integrated into other human development projects that are already underway in Mozambique, Cuba, Bosnia and Tunisia.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

Context

As stated in Part I of this report, Italy is well advanced in terms of women's access to, and performance in education. There are, however, blatant contradictions in the contents of school curricula and in teaching methodologies.

In basic education, schooling rates for girls and boys are equivalent, and at some levels (lower secondary school) girls actually do better than boys. In secondary school, the number of female students first surpassed that of males in 1985, and in the nineties the attendance rates of females have remained stable at around 80 %, steadily exceeding male attendance rates by 3 percentage points. Moreover, Italian girls have a tradition of good performance in schools, as shown by their lower drop-out rates and their better results in school-leaving examinations.

The choice of schools is indicative: the technical, agrarian, industrial, nautical and aeronautical institutes are mainly attended by male students, whereas commerce, tourism and social services institutes have a strong majority of female students, as do the lyceums (especially the classical, linguistic and teacher-training institutes). In secondary education, many of the features of traditional horizontal segregation still persist, with a polarization of male and female students in different types of schools.

In universities, women account for 54 % of the first-year students¹⁰ and 53.8 % of the total student population. Regarding their performance, 38.6% of the female students who sign up for university graduate within six years, against a markedly lower figure for the male students (32.8%).

While the female presence in schools is strong and qualified, gender-sensitive culture is completely lacking from the curricula, text-books, teaching methodology, and teacher-training courses, as well as from projects for school reform. Government culture has not yet assimilated the fact that the "feminist revolution" and women's better performance in education are amongst the factors leading to the so-called "male crisis": the fear and uncertainty that many young men feel in following new patterns of gender relations, and their clinging to obsolete models of stereotypical maleness.

Other contradictions are seen in the make-up of the teaching body. Women account for the vast majority of teachers (75%), but they are unequally distributed in the different educational levels. Women are the near-totality of teachers in the primary schools, but this percentage drops to slightly over 60% in lower secondary schools all the way down to 50% in higher secondary schools. Moreover, women account for the vast majority of

¹⁰ Figures for 1996-1997.

teachers of the humanities, but few women teach scientific subjects, and virtually none teach technical subjects.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The Prime Minister's Directive of March 7, 1997, identified the actions needed to introduce urgent changes in the educational system, mainstreaming the innovative content of women's culture in the reform of schools, universities and teaching, and promoting gender sensitive education.

To this end, joint efforts have been developed by the following institutions:

- Ministry of Education,
- Ministry for Universities and Scientific and Technological Research (MURST),
- Social Affairs Department,
- Equal Opportunities Department.

1. Ministry of Education

The Ministry set up a National Equal Opportunity Committee in 1989, building on the experience of Equal Opportunity Offices at the provincial and regional school authority levels. The Committee has formulated two 3-year plans for equal opportunities in education. The second plan (1997-2000) was based on the Beijing Platform, and adopted three action priorities:

- **Teaching methodology**, with a national workshop on gender mainstreaming in educational approaches;
- **Sex education**, with a national workshop¹¹ aimed at producing a Directive of the Education Minister to gender mainstreaming and sex education in the planning of teachers' activities, and in school curricula, with the support of universities, accredited research institutions and local social and health-care services;
- **Citizenship education**.

Another focus of the Education Ministry has been the education of teachers on gender issues and equal opportunities. The need for continuing education on these issues has been taken on board by the National Plan for Teachers' Refreshment Courses, and has been implemented in various ways throughout the country. Wherever working groups on

¹¹ In collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Ministry and the Research Dept. of the Education Ministry, March 2, 1998.

Equal opportunities in the provincial school authorities exist and cooperate with the local Equal Opportunity Committees, there is a steady and significant presence of these issues in schools, arising from the teachers' common experience in education programming. This experience has opened schools to new cultural developments, and helped to review and update school curricula. It has also helped teachers to create an atmosphere of greater socialization, often by building relations with university researchers and women's studies departments.

Finally, as concerns the right to education of immigrant children, Law 40/98 on immigration extended to all of them the right to basic education, on an equal footing with Italian children, and recognized the right of immigrant university students to apply for scholarships. To facilitate their learning of the Italian language and to help immigrant children in their schooling, a number of after-school initiatives have been launched. They are managed directly by the foreign communities.

2. Equal Opportunities Department

The most important initiatives of the Equal Opportunities Department are related to the two following items:

- Text-books in schools;
- Relations with the universities.

2.1. School Text-books

The Department has promoted a project¹² for the formulation of a self-regulated **Code of Conduct for publishers of school text-books** in concert with the Italian Association of Editors and CISEM, and educational research institute. By tapping the wealth of studies produced by women in these last twenty years, and with full respect for the freedom of publishers, the Code has the aim of ensuring the fair representation of the two sexes in text-books. Both men and women are to be shown as protagonists of the culture and experience that form our contemporary world and that constitute the basis for knowledge.

¹² The project is presented in the Fourth European Programme of Action and approved by the European Union. It also is a response to the recommendation addressed to the Italian government by the CEDAW Committee, when the Third Italian Report on the implementation of the CEDAW Convention against all forms of discriminations against women was presented to the United Nations.

The overall goal is that gender awareness may help the new generations to plan their lives free of old and new stereotypes, and to stimulate their understanding and full acceptance of other differences, be they ethnic, religious or cultural.

2.2. Relations with universities

The Equal Opportunities Department has engaged universities in the following ways:

- A steady relationship with the Conference of Rectors and the Rectors' Delegates¹³ to identify the universities where graduate and post-graduate courses may be offered to build specific competence in existing or new professions and to explore the possibility of access to European funds for women's studies;
- Support for the establishment of women's studies in Italian universities (courses, seminars, post-graduate studies, master programmes, etc.)¹⁴;
- Creation of a national observatory¹⁵ to monitor the numbers and positions of women in university and scientific research institutions, their training and career paths;
- Provision for political and economic support (also through a recently-formed Committee at the Equal Opportunities Department) to the network of young scholars in women's studies, and to the cycles of seminars and other initiatives that are organized by the network in a number of Italian universities.

3. Ministry for the Universities, Scientific and Technological Research (MURST)

In 1997, following a proposal of the Equal Opportunities Minister, MURST set up a working group of university teachers called "The cultures of differences and women's studies in university institutions". The aim was to enhance the role of women's studies in the ongoing reform process which applies, in particular, to the universities' new autonomy and flexibility in defining curricula and educational paths. The group won recognition for the importance of "gender culture" in the final report of the MURST Commission on teaching autonomy and it worked out proposals applying to the following items:

- Criteria for curricular review;
- Proficiency Testing Systems and teaching modules;
- MURST co-financing procedures for research programs;
- Evaluation criteria.

¹³ For Equal Opportunities, Teaching, Tutoring and Orientation.

¹⁴ Recognition is under way and is being followed by the Italian counterparts of the European Athena/Aoife network, of the WS centers, of the women delegates of rectors, etc.

¹⁵ ISTAT, National Research Council, National Committee for Equal Opportunities, Equal Opportunities Department.

OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

The main difficulty with respect to the good practices illustrated above, consisted in the lack of a political context in which these initiatives could fully express their potential for the renewal of education and culture in general. Generally speaking, educational policy has not taken gender issues on board. Few policies are aimed to change a system that has not responded to the new role of women in schools and that has objectively slowed down the progress of young women on the road to self-awareness, new opportunities, and potential for change in the workplace and in society at large.

Despite the wealth of ideas and initiatives that it has put forward, the Equal Opportunities Committee in the Education Ministry has had little impact on the school system. There is no trace of the seminar on educational guidance in the Ministerial Directives, nor in the draft reform. The Directive on sex education has yet to be issued. If organizational capacities are lacking at the local level, then the refresher courses on gender issues are simply not held, and this theme is absent from schools.

Regarding MURST, after the formation of the new government and the change in minister, the working group that had been set up within MURST in 1997 has yet to be reconvened.

Many problems have also developed in implementing policies for the integration of immigrant students. Intermittent funding for after-school services has meant lack of continuity, and hence it is still too early to assess this experience. A more serious problem is that of the integration of immigrant students who already have a diploma or degree from their country of origin into the Italian school and university system. In the worst case, their qualifications are simply not recognized in Italy. In the best case, it is necessary for them to go through a lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedure to achieve the recognition. This is a problem also in access to employment. In many immigrant communities, girls also appear to be dropping out of school after the compulsory school years (16 years of age).

III. COMMITMENT TO FUTURE ACTIONS

The following actions have been envisaged for the future:

- Strengthening Equal Opportunities bodies within the Ministry of Education, at both a central and decentralized level, providing them with adequate resources for effective action: the aim is to foster the introduction of gender culture in schools, according to the priorities set out in the 3-year Plan and an analysis of past experience;
- Development, promotion and dissemination of projects on the relationship of women and new technologies, with a view to educating boys and girls not only on how to use these

- tools, but also on how to acquire new forms of culture, respecting gender differences in learning modes, timing, and cognitive patterns;
- A project of the Equal Opportunities Committee at the Education Ministry, entitled "Educating to care". It proposes women's experience in caring as a relational mode: a form of listening and giving attention to oneself and to others, as well as to the surrounding reality, in both the private and public spheres, which cuts across every aspect of culture;
- Gender mainstreaming in the newly-established university courses in Basic Education, and in the new Teacher Training courses for secondary education¹⁶;
- A second phase in the school text-book project, producing a handbook for authors of new text-books, and teaching aids and guidelines for teachers;
- Studies of the Italian situation in the European framework, promoted by the National Observatory on Women in Universities and Research;
- An active contribution from Italy to the Fourth European Conference on feminist research, which will be held in Bologna (Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 2000), entitled "Body, gender, and subjectivity".

¹⁶ For this purpose, a seminar was held in May 1998 at the CISEM Research Institute, with the participation of the Equal Opportunities Department, and representatives of universities and schools.

C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

Context

According to Italian national statistics, women enjoy a markedly higher life expectancy than men (83 against 76 years). However, while women do live longer, their health status appears to be inferior to that of men. This is due not only to their subjective perception and to the impact of age-related diseases on the quality of life, but also to the social disadvantages of these women, arising from the heavy burden of caring work and the limited cultural and economic resources that they have compared to men. On the other hand, in recent years, thanks also to non-punitive, prevention-oriented legislation on matters like family-planning, women have gained a greater sense of responsibility concerning their health status and quality of life. There has also been an overall reduction in the number of voluntary pregnancy terminations.

The economic status of elderly women is often not good, and this diminishes their quality of life. Elderly women may suffer from a serious lack of information, owing to the fact that they live in isolation, and may also have low literacy skills and difficulties in relating to institutions. Their approach is often dictated by feelings such as fear and rejection (and even shame) which have, *inter alia*, resulted in elderly women at times seeking treatment in incurable stages of breast or uterine cancer. Poverty and loneliness, on their own or in combination, are the source of misery and disease.

While there are no formal discriminations in the access to health-care services in Italy, heavy discriminations are linked to social, geographical, economic and cultural conditions, as well as to nationality. The differences that exist are related to the standards of the regional health care programming, the number of services available in local areas, the quality and skill of general practitioners, investment levels in technological innovation, institutional information and economic resources which allow for a choice between service providers, in the public and private sectors.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The Italian Action Plan (1997 Directive) called for the following developments:

- Promotion of women's health
- Gender-disaggregated health-related data;
- Gender impact analysis of healthcare policies;
- Research and effective health-care projects for women, especially for reproductive health.

Following this, actions have been taken at both national and international level.

1. At national level

The new National Health Plan adopted by the Health Ministry is strongly based on preventive medicine, and on measures to reduce the impact of major diseases (cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, etc.). As to measures concerning women's health, they are specifically mentioned only in the special section of the Plan on "Mother-and-child" healthcare policies.

The National Health Plan for 1995-2000 also set out for the first time the principle that physical exercise plays a fundamental role in "the adoption of a healthy lifestyle". In Italy, physical exercise and sports is increasingly being taken up by women. The Decree for the Reform of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), which the government has recently issued, deals with the issue of equitable representation of men and women in the elective offices of the national sports federations. In schools, policies are being adopted to promote equal opportunities for girls in sports activities.

Other actions undertaken in the national health system include:

- The introduction of well-tested preventive and diagnostic measures in the pre and peri-natal period;
- Measures for the promotion of the health of pre-teen and adolescent females;
- New provisions in the immigration law to guarantee health care and social protection to immigrant women (whether registered or unregistered) in the case of pregnancy and motherhood, with the same rights as Italian citizens;
- Specific health-care service initiatives for immigrant women. These services are often provided in collaboration with voluntary and private-sector health-care associations and counselling services, but they have so far been available only in large cities. Health care for these women must take into account their culture of origin and, possibly, the differences in their relationship with their own body, and with the experience of delivery and maternity;
- Initiatives undertaken by the Health Ministry, in cooperation with regional authorities, for the prevention of breast cancer. Important examples concern the promotion of a prevention-oriented culture, which was undertaken by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, and the growing interest and activity of NGOs, such as Europa Donna, which uses mass media (advertising campaigns, testimonials, "ambassadors") to build an awareness of the need for prevention;
- The National Commission for Equal Opportunities, in collaboration with the Health Ministry, has created a "women and health" forum for the dissemination of information concerning the mother-and-child project, and for the formulation of opinions and proposals concerning the implementation of the guidelines.

The "healthy municipalities" network has activated an Action Plan on reproductive health, pregnancy, delivery and post-partum healthcare, based on women's right to choose and on prevention (including cancer prevention) measures. At national level, women's NGOs and healthcare workers are trying to introduce a culture of pregnancy and delivery more respectful of women. Three Italian regions (Marche, Emilia Romagna and Toscana) have passed legislation to modify the patterns of assistance with regard to delivery, and in view of reducing the excessive number of caesarean sections.

2. At international level

Italy has always attached considerable importance in its official development aid to health issues and, in particular, to mother-and-child health. The traditional programmes in this sector - which accounts for a large percentage of the cooperation budget - aim at promoting basic health care for women. Following the Beijing Conference, pilot projects for reproductive health were launched (for instance, a pilot project for two counselling services through UNFPA in Palestine and a similar project in Argentina, both implemented by the NGO AIDOS). Other projects have aimed at introducing women's empowerment in basic health-care programmes (for instance in Angola). In 1999, health-care workers will be given specific training to ensure that the empowerment component is permanently introduced into health-care programmes. However, the Italian approach is not to finance specific initiatives for "family planning", but rather to enhance the role of women in basic health services.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

I. Scarce attention for a gender perspective

The Italian health authorities rarely adopt a gender perspective. In the National Health Plan, there are very few references to the health status of women in general, or to the specific pathologies affecting women, as a consequence of their lifestyles and higher life expectancy. In biomedical research, gender-disaggregated data is often not available. Little is done to identify, prevent and control the risk factors for women's health in the different phases of their life cycle, such as adolescence or menopause, with reference to certain pathologies and mental health.

Italian universities do little to address the need to train social and health workers on the special issues in women's health. There is a lack of awareness concerning the importance of investing in women as the essential agents for the promotion of health in society as a whole. Finally, while the number of women physicians has certainly increased, there are very few women with decision-making powers in the health-care system, and limited strategies for empowerment.

2. Lack of facilities and services

As social and health care integration is lacking, women encounter greater difficulties in prevention and treatment. Moreover, health-care services are differentiated and unevenly distributed throughout Italy. In some areas, the prevalence of private-sector health care reduces the possibility for effective treatment for many women, especially for the elderly women who are more likely to be poor. Home care and chronic treatment facilities are scarce or even non-existent in some regions, and this has repercussions on the health of the other female family members who must act as care-takers.

The information tools and the dissemination of health-related messages and news is often inadequate. Moreover, the services are often self-centered, and there is a lack of measures to build up the health workers' ability to communicate and to reach out to users with an offer of prevention measures.

3. Lack of attention to reproductive health

In Italy, maternity is still treated like a disease. This leads to increasing medicalization and de-humanization of birth-giving, along with a rise in the number of caesareans. Considerable progress has been made in reducing the peri-natal mortality rate, but the rate is higher in the case of mothers with low-education levels or foreigners. Post-delivery care is severely inadequate. AIDS infection is increasing among women, and social and health-care related measures for prevention are in short supply. There is also a dearth of data and targeted research on pluri-abortivity.

Services to support maternity and prevent abortion, while they do respect a woman's right to choose, are still insufficient. The abortion rate is increasing among immigrants and teenagers. Women's and family counselling services encounter growing difficulties at a local level. Many of these services have either been closed or transformed into medical multi-speciality offices, thereby losing their original nature which was that of services that were positioned to listen and respond to the broad and diverse range of problems presented by these women, and to address not only their medical, but also their psychological, legal and social problems.

To date, there have been no medical or psycho-social assessments on the impact that assisted reproduction techniques may have on the health of women and their children. Assisted reproduction has become a very conflictual political issue in recent years. A controversial draft bill on this issue is currently being examined in the Lower House, and it has given rise to a heated debate in the entire country¹⁷.

¹⁷ On this subject see "Sterility and assisted procreation", published by the National Equal Opportunities Commission.

4. Financial problems

The difficulties of recent years have focused attention on the cost of health-care services and on how to cover the rising costs. This has been achieved, at times, to the detriment of service efficiency levels, with little attention being given to the matching of resources and individual needs. Service allocation is still based on the basic criterion of usefulness/uselessness. It is almost never predicated on opportunities (for example, on the need for prevention, information, health education). The new company management pattern that has been adopted for health-care provision by the health service in recent years is based more on "how much" the health services cost than on "what is needed" by the women and men of this country, in terms of adequate service standards and tested therapeutic efficacy.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

The practice of collaboration between the Equal Opportunities Department and the Health Ministry to guarantee the introduction of mainstreaming in all health-care policies is still underdeveloped. For the Minister for Equal Opportunities, the implementation of the 1997 Directive remains a priority.

Beyond the government dimension, many women in institutions, NGOs and trade union organizations are reflecting on these issues and advancing proposals to achieve the following results:

- Give new impulse to prevention-oriented projects, starting from schools, diet, healthy habits, physical exercise, etc.;
- Launch women projects in all of the regions, following the model that was adopted by the Toscana and Emilia regions, based on routine screening, the personal calling up by health centers, and monitoring of the risk parameters for tumors, osteoporosis and the indicators consenting an early diagnosis of many pathologies;
- Design of "caring for care-takers" initiatives: this is achieved through home care services, by providing economic support; by providing facilities to ensure social security coverage for the periods of work and caring activities; by reinforcing local social services and, finally, by creating a network (of families, individuals, public and non-profit social services, associations, voluntary workers, and neighborhood support) to prevent conditions of loneliness, isolation and abandonment;
- Highlight the fact that the woman who has taken care of many others throughout her life-time has no one left to take care of her in her old age;

- Foster favorable conditions for women in community centers (social centers and others), where equal opportunities for all are often not ensured; also provide help for low-income persons to access programs such as adult education. This would offer persons with lower cultural and knowledge levels the key to exercise many individual and collective rights and to perform the necessary tasks in daily living;

- Guarantee housing conditions for all, avoiding ejection from one's house and "deportation" from one's neighborhood. The right to continue to live at home is a condition for psycho-physical well-being which must be protected;

- Humanize residential facilities such as hospices etc., with the possibility for the residents to give a personal character to their rooms or parts of living room;

- Exploit the energy and resources of women, empowering them to promote the therapeutic process.

The objectives nearing completion include the following:

- The mother-and-child section of the National Health Plan is in the final stages of approval. This project should deal not only with reproductive health, but also with all other health-related aspects in the various phases of a woman's life. The project includes functional guidelines for the Mother-and-Child Department concerning integration of social and health-care services to offer prevention, treatment and responsiveness to needs. Two structures will be strengthened in the system: delivery facilities and counselling services;

- A study by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities entitled "Economic and social aspects for the prevention of high-risk pathologies in the female population" is soon to be published.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Context

In recent years, much progress has been made in Italy in raising the threshold of tolerance to male violence, thanks to the work of women's movements in society and the institutions particularly after the 1997 Directive was issued. This progress has been achieved despite many contradictions and, at times, open hostility.

Women have expressed their active solidarity towards the victims of violence through some hundred different associations disseminated throughout Italy. This network of associations has organized 15 women's crisis centers sponsored by local authorities. The centers, some of which even have secret shelters, offer a range of services including legal counsel, psychological assistance, emergency help lines and other forms of support. This experience has heightened the awareness towards violence against women and children.

Nonetheless, the situation remains severe and highly complex. In recent years, the number of reports to the police of sexual violence and physical and psychological abuse occurring within families has practically doubled. Moreover, many of the accidents with severe lesions that are reported as home accidents, instead mask cases of violence and abuse in the family home, as explicitly recognized in the latest National Health Plan.

A recent survey conducted by the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT), with a sample of more than 50,000 women, has revealed that in over 80 per cent of cases the violence occurs within the context of a trust-based relationship. The same observation is reported by the women's crisis centers. Roughly 90 per cent of the women who seek help from these centers have undergone physical and sexual violence in their families. Moreover, research projects have been initiated in many Italian universities on both the scale of violence against women and its repercussions on their physical and psychological health.

New issues have also emerged, such as trafficking in women and children and female genital mutilations (FGM). Trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Italy has involved women from Eastern Europe and Africa. This form of trafficking is under the control of criminal organizations such as the Italian and Albanian mafias. It reduces thousands of women into a state of enslavement through the continuous use of violence. FGM involve 30,000 Sub-Saharan women who are currently living in Italy and hundreds of girls who were born here.

I. Actions taken

The actions undertaken by civil society, by Parliament and Government (as indicated in the 1997 Directive) regarding this complex situation have focused on the following aspects:

- 1. Sexual violence.**
- 2. Domestic violence.**
- 3. Violence against children.**
- 4. Sexual harassment and blackmail in the workplace.**
- 5. Trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.**
- 6. Female genital mutilation.**
- 7. International activities.**

I. Sexual violence

The first outcome of the World Conference of Women in Beijing was the approval on Feb. 15, 1996 of a **new law against sexual violence**¹⁸. Twenty years after the introduction of the first draft legislation based on a citizens' initiative, for which 300,000 signatures had been collected, the Italian female members of Parliament decided to start working together. They overcame their party differences, and pooled their efforts. A major introduced in the new law is that the offence against the physical and psychological integrity of women, through sexual abuse, has been taken out of the category of offences against public morality, and put it into the category of crimes which violate personal rights and freedom. The other changes introduced by the new law included the unification under the single act of sexual violence of rape and sexual assault, and the provision that this crime was prosecutable on the basis of the irrevocable filing of charges by the woman.

This crime may also be prosecuted without the woman's filing a complaint in the case in which it is associated with other crimes and, in particular, with gang rape, as well as in the case that the victim of the act of sexual violence is under age, disabled or a person subjected to authority. By contrast the offence is not punishable if it is committed by

¹⁸ Law 66, which abrogated a series of articles contained in the previous 1930 Code, thereby changing Art. 609 which concerns personal rights and freedom. On this subject, the National Committee for Equal Opportunities, issued a publication entitled "Sexual violence: twenty years for a law".

children under 13, as long as the difference in age between the two children is not over three years.

This law has not been fully implemented and monitored, but has already been amended by a new instrument that was introduced against the sexual exploitation of children.

To respond more adequately to the women who denounce sexual violence in many police stations throughout Italy, special investigation services have been organized.

Many training courses have been organized for social workers in a variety of contexts. The first emergency service for the victims of violence was organized by the Mangiagalli Clinic in Milan and the University of Rome carried out a first study on gastro-intestinal pathologies produced by violence.

The Minister for Equal Opportunities reached an agreement with ISTAT concerning the first national study on sexual violence and also coordinated a "Urban Anti-violence Project", with European Structural Funds backing, in five Italian cities (Venice, Rome, Naples, Palermo and Catania). This latter project aims at investigating sexual violence in the more marginalized social contexts and providing training to social and health workers.

The network of Anti-Violence Crisis Centers in the Emilia Romagna region has conducted a first systematic assessment of its work over the last few years, and a similar study is being carried out in Lombardy.

The first integrated project against all forms of tolerance towards violence involving women was launched in Bologna. This "Zero Tolerance" project is jointly implemented by institutions and NGOs. It is based on prevention, the delivery of specialized services and a awareness-raising campaign addressing the local community as a whole. The Zero Tolerance Project is becoming a benchmark for other Italian municipalities.

2. Domestic violence

Acting on the proposal of the Minister of Equal Opportunities, the government presented a draft law "Measures against violence in family relations" which introduces to Italy some of the judicial measures that already exist in the legislation of other countries, such as "barring orders", to insure the removal of the perpetrator of violence from the family home. Until now, the only chance that a woman had to escape from a violent husband or partner was to abandon her home, which meant suffering another form of violence. If the draft bill, just adopted by the Senate is passed also by the Lower House, then the woman who is the victim of violence may choose to file a criminal complaint, asking for her violent partner to be arrested or, more simply, initiate a civil action, with the enforcement of barring order for her husband or partner to leave the family home and keep away from the places where the woman usually conducts her life. The order may also entail his

payment of family support. Thanks to the work of women and their associations, the severity of violence in families is gradually being recognized by all. The Interior Ministry has organized specific training courses on domestic violence for law enforcement officers.

3. Violence against children

In 1998, the Parliament passed a **law against the sexual exploitation of children**, under the pressure of public opinion which had been strongly alarmed by a number of serious episodes of violence, abuse and pedophilia, as well as by the campaign engaged by many associations against sexual tourism.

The Minister for Social Solidarity, with other ministries and NGOs, submitted the **guidelines against violence and abuse of children** to the government. These guidelines deal with the issues of information, monitoring and prevention, as well as the practical measures and the training of social workers to assist children who have been raped or abused; they also analyse the root causes of male violence against both women and children.

In many local communities, social and health workers, along with teachers, have addressed this issue following the indications set out in the government Plan and in Law 285/1997 on childhood¹⁹.

4. Sexual harassment

Considerable work has been done in recent years on the issue of sexual harassment and coercion in the workplace thanks to the efforts of women tradeunionists. This has led to the introduction of specific measures in the national labour contracts to protect working women from harassment. Many codes of conduct have also been drafted, especially in the civil service and health-care sectors. Sexual coercion in the workplace is widespread and it also affects self-employed female workers, as demonstrated by the ISTAT survey. Parliament has so far approved a very controversial draft bill against sexual harassment in one of the Houses.

5. Trafficking in women

Many initiatives, both legislative and practical, have been undertaken to address the issue of trafficking in women.

On a legislative level, the crime of trafficking has been included in the statute of the International Criminal Court as a specific case under the crime of enslavement. The

¹⁹ See chapter "L. The girl child"

Italian government, which had supported this hypothesis in the Rome Conference for the creation of the International Criminal Court in July 1998, approved a draft bill "Measures against trafficking in human beings" on March 9, 1999²⁰. It introduces the new crime of trafficking in human beings into the Criminal Code as a modern form of slavery, that is punished severely (from 5 to 15 years of prison). The definition of trafficking includes both trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (prostitution and sexual enslavement in the home), and forced labor, involuntary service and other forms of enslavement.

However, the issue cannot be dealt with through repressive measures alone. It is also essential to recognize and safeguard the human rights of the women who are caught up in trafficking and free them from the criminal gangs. For this reason, the Equal Opportunities Department has worked for the inclusion of a measure protecting the victims of trafficking in the new law on immigration (Law 40/1998). Art. 18 of this law enables the issuance of a six-month residence permit to whoever wishes to escape from the traffickers. This permit is renewable, and is granted for reasons of social protection. The permit may be given not only to the women who report the traffickers and bear witness in court, but also to all those women who are in danger because of their attempt to escape from the criminal gang that has exploited them, and who participate in a social assistance and integration program run by NGOs. During this period, the woman may seek employment and thereby obtain a regular status, and decide to remain in Italy. The associations that work in this sector, and which have so far only been able to offer shelter, protection and support to the victims, will now be able to boost the efficacy of their action.

This result was obtained thanks to the establishment of an Interministerial Committee, chaired by the Ministers for Equal Opportunities and Social Solidarity, with representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs and the Antimafia General Prosecutor. The Committee also collaborated with the Catholic and secular civic associations which have gained considerable experience in the field. The Committee worked on drafting a definition of trafficking in women, and on understanding its scale and implications. It also assessed the Italian legislation in force and designed the practical measures needed to help women in conditions of forced prostitution.

The cooperation between institutions and NGOs which have accumulated years of experience working with street prostitutes and have developed the knowledge and skills needed to address the problems of the victims of trafficking was essential for the success

²⁰ This draft is currently being read in the House of Deputies.

of the initiative. This experience has been invaluable for the action of government and institutions, and it has helped Italy to contribute to an understanding of trafficking in women in international fora, as documented by the Parsec study.

6. Female Genital Mutilation

The Equal Opportunities Department, in collaboration with the Health and Social Solidarity Ministries, organized a national seminar for obstetricians, gynecologists and pediatricians with the aim of helping them to understand and take proper care of the women who have undergone genital mutilations when they come to hospital for any kind of treatment or for delivery. This initiative has stimulated a greater awareness about FGM in universities and in many health workers who are organizing forms of response and forming regional guidance centers.

7. International activities

The international activities on violence against women are focused on providing assistance to the women who are the victims of armed conflict and they are described in that section. In addition, the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) of the Foreign Ministry has also financed a specific initiative against the trafficking of Albanian women. The initiative is a ODM Project for an informational campaign against trafficking in many areas of the country, especially in those rural areas where the aggression against young women is more severe. Moreover, the DGDC granted 500,000 USD to the UNFEM Trust Fund for initiatives against violence on women. The Equal Opportunities Department, the DGDC and UNIFEM will work together to identify the initiatives to be implemented chiefly in the Balkan area.

Starting in March 1998, a joint initiative in collaboration between the Equal Opportunities Department, other Italian Ministries and the U.S. State Department was implemented. A bilateral agreement was signed by President Clinton and Prime Minister Prodi for the exchange of information resulting from investigations, the training of specialized workers in both the countries of origin and the countries of destination and the protection of the victims and their family members in their countries of origin. In the European Union framework, the Equal Opportunities Department took part in a IOM Project²¹ on information gathering by European police forces.

II. Obstacles encountered

The culture of violence is still widespread in Italian society despite women's efforts to

²¹ Funded by the European STOP Programme and co-funded by the Interior Ministry.

change the situation. The judiciary, also, is not immune. A recent ruling handed down by the High Court of Appeal created a scandal and was hotly debated in Italy. This ruling held that a woman who wears jeans is not "rapeable", as it is impossible to pull this type of trousers off without the woman's consent. A large part of the country, its institutions and cultural milieu, without any differences in political affiliation, spoke out loudly against this ruling. Not by chance, the office that collects the motivations of the judges rulings has decided not to publish the motivation in this specific case, which means that this ruling will not go to form a precedent.

In other cases, male resistance and cultural and social complicity with violence is worsened by the lack of knowledge and adequate facilities. For instance, in the case of trafficking in women, the problems derive from the inability to see the difference between "independent" prostitutes and women victims of trafficking. Other problems are related to the size and complexity of illegal immigration and the difficulty to raise questions on male sexuality, in relation to the sex market.

Domestic violence is still an underestimated reality. The embedded misconception is that the rapist or abuser is a stranger. The social and family tendency to keep quiet about cases of domestic violence still persists. Other problems, such as female genital mutilation, are largely ignored and wrongly attributed to religious motivations, towards which the reaction is either total rejection or the fear to take action for a misplaced sense of "respect for cultural differences".

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

Bologna, which is the first Italian city to have formulated a comprehensive project against social tolerance for violence on women, hosted the First National Conference organized in October 1998 by the Equal Opportunities Department on "Zero Tolerance, experiences, projects and proposals against violence on women". The Conference reviewed the studies and initiatives that have been undertaken in Italy against violence and formulated guidelines for future initiatives. The guidelines contain the following suggestions:

- Launching of a large cultural awareness-raising campaign by all of the institutions and organizations involved, to be linked to the European Parliament "Zero Tolerance" campaign;
- Creation of a permanent observatory on violence against women and children by all of the competent institutions;
- Dissemination of training initiatives on the issue of violence against women for law enforcement officers and workers in the justice, health-care, school and university sectors;

- Support to NGO's that are active against violence and, in particular, financing for the associations that work against trafficking in women, as provided by the law on immigration for the implementation of assistance and social integration programmes;
- Setting up of a national toll-free help-line for the victims of trafficking to give them indications on where they can find information, shelter and assistance. The national center will work in close connection with local networks that can offer these women material assistance in escaping from the rackets, as envisaged by the law on immigration. An information campaign will also be launched on this issue;
- Establishment of a technical-scientific committee on female genital mutilation, for the systematic study of women who have undergone FGM and to develop guidelines for Italian universities and health-care centers on the right way to approach FGM, from both the health and cultural viewpoints, with regional reference centers that collaborate with experts.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Context

Women and armed conflict was a pressing and closely-felt issue for Italian women well before the Beijing Conference. Feminists, peace activists and women involved in development cooperation had a long-standing experience of dialogue and of working side by side with Palestinian and Israeli women, as well as with women from other Mediterranean areas and Africa. The outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, on the borders of Italy, led to a dramatic leap in quality in these peace-building initiatives. While governments wrestled with the political difficulties in achieving an effective end to the conflict and to the horrors of ethnic cleansing, civil society reacted by strongly stepping up humanitarian action to foster solidarity and to support the grass-roots initiatives for dialogue amongst the peoples of the warring parties. Women played a primary role in these efforts, with initiatives such as the "women in black" and the networks of Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian women. Women were also strongly represented in all forms of humanitarian relief, ranging from actions that arose spontaneously from civil society to official humanitarian aid, which was supported by local government or Italian cooperation emergency agencies in the former-Yugoslavia. These initiatives led to the creation of an innovative Coordination Forum, a forum of government entities, international agencies, local authorities, associations and groups of voluntary workers, with the aim of enhancing the efficiency of humanitarian relief and enabling civil society to use the services and economic and logistic resources made available by public institutions. Women were also strongly involved in this coordination work, as well as in the new forms of decentralized cooperation managed first-hand by NGOs and local entities. Italian women's participation in the Beijing Conference and the Huairou Forum, and in the follow up to this experience in Italy²² came at a time of growing interest for women and feminists in the theme of "women and conflict", and in the understanding of gender relations in other countries of the world, especially in neighboring areas such as the Mediterranean and the Balkans.

In 1999, the main focus has of course been the Kosovo crisis. From a humanitarian perspective, the Kosovo crisis has generated a huge flow of refugees pressing to seek refuge in Albania and Macedonia. Most of the refugees are women and children. The men have either remained behind to fight, giving priority to armed conflict, or they have been captured by the Serbian militia. Thus, the women are the only mainstay of their families and they are experiencing hugely difficult circumstances and are having to shoulder more and more responsibility. Besides the problems in merely striving to

²² See answers to Part II of the Questionnaire.

survive, women are also having to cope with the repercussions of the physical and psychological violence that they have undergone, along with their children, and also the many cases of rape which they have suffered, as is increasingly being revealed.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The most significant actions of institutional and independent women's organizations in the wake of the Beijing Conference consisted in the following:

- 1. Policy making initiatives;**
- 2. Legislative initiatives;**
- 3. Continuation of the initiatives in Bosnia and other areas of armed conflict;**
- 4. Initiatives in Albania;**
- 5. Actions relating to the Kosovo conflict.**

Policy making initiatives

Guidance concerning how to support women in areas of conflict was provided by the Minister for Equal Opportunities and the Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGDC) of the Foreign Ministry, who often worked in collaboration. Specifically, this policy guidance effort has involved:

- ◆ Inclusion of the "women and armed conflict" issue in the 1997 Directive, which is the Italian Beijing Plan of Action;
- ◆ Organization of a workshop on this subject by the Minister for Equal Opportunities in collaboration with the DGDC, in February, 1997. The workshop reinforced the strategy adopted by the DGDC in the nineties following the warfare in Africa and the Balkans, which called for a specific commitment of Italy to actions aimed at promoting women in areas of conflict;
- ◆ Strengthening of the DGDC's international initiatives on these issues, to stress the priority of an active role for women in the peaceful settlement of conflict;
- ◆ Organization of a second workshop, again a cooperative effort of the Minister for Equal Opportunities and the DGDC in October 1998, on the approval of new guidelines for the enhancement of gender issues in development cooperation and on the initiatives to be implemented in Albania, Algeria and Palestine;

A specific DGDC initiative, in partnership with UNIFEM (United Nations Fund for Women) on women's leadership in lasting peace-building processes.

2. Legislative initiatives

The rights of refugees and displaced women was one of the most important themes in the Beijing Platform.

The Italian Government and Parliament are engaged in a reform of legislation on the right to asylum. Italy does not yet have comprehensive legislation on the asylum rights that are enshrined in Art. 10 of the Constitution. A Government draft bill and a Parliamentary bill to implement the Constitutional provision have both been introduced to the House. The consolidated text of these two instruments is entitled "Regulations on human protection and the right to asylum". It establishes asylum rights also for war refugees, who are currently considered as "de facto refugees". In recent years, Italy has witnessed massive inflows of persons who do not fit the definition of refugee as set out in the Geneva Convention. The draft legislation envisages the possibility of a collective recognition procedure in the case of massive inflows and the unconditional right to family reunion. In line with the Geneva Convention, refugees are equated with Italian citizens in terms of employment and self-employment rights, social security, social and health care and education. The contribution that is given for the first assistance to refugees covers the entire duration of the asylum application procedure.

3. Initiatives in Bosnia and other areas of armed conflict

In the years following the Beijing Conference, the initiatives that had been launched in the acute phase of the Bosnian conflict were pursued. NGOs and regional and municipal institutions in Italy launched a number of projects to support the role of women in peacemaking and reconciliation, as well as in the economy, or to promote women's health-related initiatives.

Generally speaking, the programmes under way aim at promoting an active role for women in the life of their communities, by strengthening the economic, social and political presence of women, and thereby encouraging the direct participation of women in the return to democratic life.

The DGDC's commitment to implement the Beijing Platform in Bosnia and in other war-stricken areas at first focused on action to defend women as "victims". Only in a second phase did the DGDC implement initiatives which recognized the active role that women can play in the post-war period.

The DGDC granted financing for women-oriented actions in emergency relief through collaborations that included in particular:

— The creation of a multi-ethnic women's association in Mostar to carry out emergency work for war victims;

- Emergency initiatives in Rwanda to help women rebuild their country;
- The identification of a women's component in the two mother-and-child health programmes in Afghanistan.

4. Initiatives in Albania

As in the case of the former-Yugoslavia, a Coordination Forum between government and civil society, chaired by the Social Affairs Minister, was set up to coordinate the solidarity-building initiatives in Albania. The women's grouping was a very active element in this forum. It has created an association for Albanian women, which is an integrated empowerment project for women and their associations, with the participation of twelve groups including NGOs, large associations, and Italian and Albanian women's and feminist associations. Working together with the Department for Equal Opportunities, the women's coordination grouping mobilized resources for empowerment actions and supported in particular:

- The economic role of women;
- The active presence of women in civil society;

The dissemination of information on the consequences of the trafficking of women in other European countries.

The positive offshoot of this initiative was the decision to include gender-policy planning in the Italy-Albania partnership programme with the active involvement of Albanian national institutions and the associations of Albanian women.

5. Initiatives for the Kosovo crisis

To face the humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo, the Italian government has undertaken the following initiatives:

- The **Missione Arcobaleno** (Rainbow Mission) with military personnel, voluntary workers, and national disaster relief staff, to set up refugee camps in Albania and to distribute food and provide medical first aid. Missione Arcobaleno is currently assisting 16,000 refugees and has a target of 25,000. The mission is funded by government funds and by a citizens' voluntary fund-raising effort;
- A **Coordination Forum**, similar to the ones set up for Albania and the former Yugoslavia, with the specialized international organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF), the humanitarian organizations and groups of voluntary workers that had been working in the area even before the Missione Arcobaleno, the Italian NGOs in Albania and Macedonia, and the DGDC emergency office. The volunteer solidarity organizations (Italian Consortium of Solidarity, ICS, Italian Red Cross, Caritas, Cric, and others) are currently managing camps that shelter over 10,000 refugees. They also provide support

to refugees hosted by Albanian families and other facilities (Aibi, Association for Albanian women, etc.); as well as schooling (Comunità Sant'Egidio), social and health care, transport services, relief material (for instance the Train for Life organized by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities with UNICEF), as well as performing many other activities.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

Despite these positive signs, in particular regarding emergency initiatives and the cooperation and collaboration of government and civil society, the bid to integrate a gender perspective in all situations of conflict cannot be said to have been successful. Both nationally and internationally, much remains to be done to enable women to draw new strength and a fresh awareness of their human, political and economic rights from the "crises" of the nineties.

The war between Yugoslavia and NATO countries, for instance, has a political character, which until now has in no way been influenced by a gender perspective.

There have not been any national or international initiatives of European, Russian or American women within institutions who have spoken out and asked their governments for a more active participation in the political events and in the choices relating to the continuation of the conflict or possible scenarios for peace, as recommended by the Beijing Platform and by many resolutions of the European Union Development Council.

Women have been divided on the issue of war. Some support the government action and the NATO initiative in defence of the Kosovar people. Other women, while equally condemning the ethnic cleansing and aggression perpetrated by Milosevic, believe that the military intervention has worsened the situation, rather than helping to solve it. It has not yet been possible to find appropriate settings for women to debate the issues of this war and to work out a common position.

More in general, the call of the Beijing Platform for a greater role of women in the various phases of peace-making, peace-enforcing and peace-keeping, and the participation of women in peace negotiations is still far from having materialized. This is especially the case in the interface of development cooperation and international relations.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

As can be expected in the current situation, the future commitments revolve mainly around the emergency actions in Kosovo. The women's group in the Coordination Forum of government and voluntary organizations has decided to focus on the following aspects:

- Coordination and communication between the solidarity projects that are aimed at women and promoted and managed by women;
- Publication of a manual, of training modules for male and female workers, and of other initiatives to ensure that the humanitarian action, whatever the implementing partner, should take into account shared criteria including attention to gender difference and operational patterns in keeping with these criteria.

The Department for Equal Opportunities and the DGDC have drafted gender guidelines for humanitarian action in Kosovo which include:

- Sharing and management of information on the conditions of women in the camps and on camp planning, using socio-cultural facilitators to map the needs and a common approach to surveying the health, social and relational needs;
- Specific and prompt training on gender issues for all humanitarian workers, both civilians and military, in government and non-governmental organizations;
- Attention to gender difference in responding to material needs, in particular regarding the delivery of goods (such as underwear, sanitary towels, products for personal hygiene, etc.), camp logistics and health care;
- The option to invest in women as agents, and not only as passive beneficiaries of aid, tapping their potential for the refugee self-management of basic services and collective activities in camps, taking into account the skills of the women;
- Enhancing the role of women in the peace process, with initiatives to identify the Kosovar women's potential for peace-building and reconstruction of civil coexistence, making use of the peace and human rights associations' capabilities, and supporting the work that has already been done by Italian associations with women of different ethnicity and from different parts of the former Yugoslavia (including Serbian democratic women), as well as the grass-roots organizations of Albanian women.

F. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Context

The position of Italian women in the labor market and in the economy in general is illustrated in the first part of this report.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The measures undertaken so far have fallen within the framework of both Italian and European employment policy. The action of the European ministers for women who have worked together with the European ministers for Labor and social security, has been useful in strengthening the European guidelines for equal opportunities, both through actions to support women (fourth pillar) and through the introduction of mainstreaming in all of the chapters and measures adopted.²³

In Italy, the focus has been on the following issues:

1. **The promotion of women's entrepreneurship and self-employment;**
2. **Women's position in the labor market;**
3. **Time-use and family-friendly policies;**
4. **Economic benefits for maternity and families;**
5. **Participation of women in decision-making processes regarding the economy.**

3. PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP²⁴

1.1. Actions taken

In Italy, women and men have a higher propensity for self-employment and entrepreneurship than in the rest of Europe. There is, however, still a gap in the respective propensity of women and men. It was considered that in the current situation for women in the labor market, self-employment and setting up new businesses offered greater potential for development than traditional wage labor. It was important, therefore, to open up these opportunities to a greater number of women than in the past. The strength of this policy lies in the affirmative action for women's entrepreneurship set out in Law 215/1992. This law provides funds for:

- the start-up and development of women's entrepreneurial activities,
- training,
- information
- technical and managerial assistance to women.

²³ See reports of the Informal Councils of Ministers for Women Meetings in Belfast and Innsbruck, May and July 1998.

²⁴ See Objective F1, J, F2, F4, of Beijing Platform of Action.

The weakness, up until 1996, was the fact that the financing for Law 215 had been blocked for years. One of the first initiatives taken by the Minister for Equal Opportunities was to have this financing unblocked, with allocations of 43 billion lire in 1997; 80 billion lire in 1988 and 105 billion lire in 1999.

Women's response to this initiative surpassed the highest expectations and revealed considerable potential for development. In the first two years, almost 9,000 applications were submitted for the creation of new businesses, and over half of these applications came from the less developed southern areas of the country (Mezzogiorno).

To meet this demand, and also to help it expand, other financial tools were used, not specifically oriented to women:

- The Guarantee Fund (Law 662/96 and Law 266/97 "Bersani"), to facilitate access to financing to small and medium-sized businesses that cannot provide credit institutions with adequate collateral;
- The "word-of-honor" loans (Law 608/96), issued by the government to unemployed people for the start-up of a business idea, without demanding financial collateral;

To exploit the full potential of this legislation (both women-oriented and general), the following tools were adopted:

- A multimedia information campaign with a toll-free line (over 50,000 contacts from June 1997 till today), the broadcast of a TV commercial and a guide on the national and regional legislative tools that promote and support new business creation;
- An Observatory on women's entrepreneurship, to monitor local and national legislation, expand the information network for women and create a "laboratory for good practices";²⁵
- An Internet site for women, that can be accessed individually or through a network of agencies;²⁶
- An interministerial Committee on women's entrepreneurship;
- Training and supporting activities financed by Law 215/92.

The Observatory launched a number of ad hoc initiatives with special targets that will be completed by the end of 1999:

- Two projects in two different sectors (tourism and crafts) and three regions (Calabria, Puglia and Sardinia) in a pilot integrated process for the creation, promotion, training and mentoring of new entrepreneurial and professional figures;

²⁵ The Observatory is placed under the Equal Opportunities Department, and it is managed free of charge by IGSPA (Imprenditorialità giovanile) with funding from sponsors and European funds.

²⁶ Chambers of Commerce, Provinces, Municipalities, Informagiovani, voluntary associations, trade associations, trade unions, employment agencies, BIC (Business incubator centers), etc.

- A pilot project for self-employment or the creation of businesses for female detainees, who are trained and assisted.²⁷

1.2. Obstacles encountered

In the case of non-gender specific legislation the difficulties consisted in inadequate legislative support for the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, and lack of an effective mainstreaming policy.

In the case of gender-specific legislation, obstacles encountered were:

- Inadequate funds for Law 215: only 17 per cent of acceptable applications were able to receive the financing envisaged.
- An undifferentiated package of benefits for the various options and phases in the life cycle of a business (start-up and development).
- The existence of financial facilitations alone and the request for personal collateral.
- Complex and costly procedures for access to funds.
- The adoption of an automatic selection mechanism for the projects, without an assessment of either the risk for the public investor or of the feasibility of the new business initiatives.

Commitments to further actions

- To allocate more substantial financial resources to support women's entrepreneurship (Law 215/92), and to adopt new implementing regulations for the law, so as to simplify the procedures for access to funds and reduce the cost of the bureaucratic procedure.
- To coordinate the implementation of Law 215/92 with that of regional instruments, local development pacts and other forms of programming negotiated at local level.
- To introduce a gender impact parameter in business promotion legislation and to adopt appropriate methodology for the monitoring and assessment of the results on women's employment levels.
- To promote adequate sectoral policies to favor sectors with a higher concentration of female workers.
- To extend business promotion legislation to new sectors which are currently excluded, such as innovative cultural, social and caring services.

²⁷ The project is called "Women inside and outside of prison". It is addressed to female detainees, who have received short sentences, and could go on probation.

- To promote a survey on women in business, their expectations, needs, and difficulties encountered in access to credit, start-up and consolidation of business; to study actions to help solve these problems.
- To develop an Intranet for the on-line management of data and information concerning the legislation on new business creation.
- To set up committees for the development of women's entrepreneurship in all of the provincial Chambers of Commerce that may provide information, technical assistance and support to new business creation.²⁸
- Where laws set an age limit for the beneficiaries (for instance, young entrepreneurs), raise these limits for women.
- To extend legislative provisions in order to include immigrant women.

2. WOMEN'S POSITION IN THE LABOR MARKET²⁹

The Italian government has used the following three types of instruments to improve the position of women (particularly the more disadvantaged ones) in the labor market:

1. European structural funds;
2. Measures to regulate labor in the informal economy ;
3. The law on affirmative action.

2.1. European funds

The two main initiatives which used European funds to promote women's employment are:

- A framework project, (with 31 billion lire from the European Social Fund), to promote the re-integration and employability of adult women who have dropped out of the labor market in the regions of the center-north. The project envisages guidance and vocational training courses and actions to support micro-businesses, self-employment and the creation of new businesses;
- A framework project to promote and finance training and other support measures for women who are interested in setting up their own business in the southern regions of Italy (Objective 1), developing a set of best practices.

The Equal Opportunities Department has worked in Italy and Europe to promote gender-sensitive strategies for the use of European funds, which so far have scarcely benefited women, despite European equal opportunities and mainstreaming policies. Specific

²⁸ For this purpose, a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by the Industry Ministry and the National Union of Chambers of Commerce.

²⁹ See Objectives F3, F5, F2, I) and F1, B) of the Beijing Platform of Action.

initiatives should be taken to promote the employment of disadvantaged women, with access to training, actions to assist in job retention and career development, on-going training, integrated paths for guidance, training and business creation.

Commitments to further actions

- Train professional figures that can help women in their integration in employment (counsellors, tutors, etc.);
- Solve the problems linked to sustainability of the new businesses (access to credit, venture capital, etc.);
- Provide incentives for the development and increased efficiency of social and assistance services.

2.2. Informal economy

Actions taken and obstacles encountered

Italy has a strong informal economy. This does not only apply to (women's) unpaid work in caring, family work, farming or in family-owned businesses, but also to work in manufacturing and in other businesses that are unregistered, or only partially registered, especially in the South. There are many studies on this black economy (ISTAT, CNEL, CENSIS, university studies, etc.), but none of this research has included any gender indicators. However, women appear to be heavily involved in the black economy, especially as workers in small manufacturing businesses to which work is outsourced, in sectors such as textiles, garments and shoe-making (where women account for some 70 per cent of the total workforce), farming and in other areas of self-employment.

To bring this black market employment into the registered economy, two new laws (Law 608/1996 and Law 196/1997) have introduced the idea of "gradual contracts", as they have been called, on a trial basis. These contracts provide for an agreement between the social partners and a set of government incentives to gradually bring the businesses that are in the black economy into the regulated economy. So far, textile, shoe-making and agricultural businesses in the Mezzogiorno have been involved, especially in Puglia.

Commitments to further actions

The "gradual contracts" are being extended to other sectors where the production and marketing processes are harder to identify, and the social partners are less organized, by integrating these sectors into the plans for local development.

2.3. The law on affirmative action³⁰

In 1991, Law 125 introduced positive actions into the Italian legislation, to promote women's employment and secure substantial equity between men and women in the workplace. The law grants financing to projects submitted by a range of entities (businesses, cooperatives, consortia, public-sector companies, trade unions, training centers, etc.). In recent years, funded projects have involved some 10,000 women (1,000 of whom were unemployed and over 500 students). The projects dealt mainly with work organization and evaluation criteria, working-time reorganization, facilitations for working mothers, the identification of new professional figures, access to expanding and, prevalently, male sectors, and organizational innovation. The National Committee for Equal Opportunities at the Labor Ministry and the Equal Opportunities Councillor³¹ are responsible for the implementation of this law and of other equal opportunities policies in the labor market.

Obstacles encountered

The obstacles encountered in the implementation of Law 125/1991 were twofold: 1) inadequate resources, insufficient funds and tools for the network of Equal Opportunities Councillors, and 2) Lengthy administrative procedures. This has diminished the efficacy and hindered the work of the Equal Opportunities Councillors. Between 1991 and 1998, 465 projects for positive action were approved for a total funding of 68.8 billion lire. Out of the 465 projects funded, only 386 have been executed or are under currently implementation.

Commitments to further actions

To address these difficulties, the following actions are being taken:

- Simplify procedures and reduce the time frame for project evaluation;
- Focus resources on pilot projects;
- Monitor results and learn from successful projects;
- Adopt tools for a wider dissemination of the results;
- Give priority to projects aimed at promoting women's employment and employability, solicit measures for professional and employment de-segregation, and for the development and recognition of women's skills;
- Design and implement family-friendly work organization innovation .

³⁰ See strategic Objectives (5 and F1, o) of the Beijing Platform of Action.

³¹ For a description of the functions of these bodies see the chapter on Institutional Mechanisms.

working-time patterns with a choice of several flexible modules and guarantees on career advancement and on the possibility of returning to a full-time module, if so desired.

3.3. A new law on parental leave

The government has approved a draft law on parental leave which is currently being examined by Parliament. The proposal, which has been confirmed in substance by the House of Deputies Labor Committee, establishes the individual right for both parents of children under 8 years of age to take leave from work for periods of up to ten months, as well as to go on leave alternatively in the case of the child's sickness. Prior to this, the right to take a leave to care for a child was recognized to the father only in the case in which the mother was a regular employee. The new law establishes that the parent may take the leave even in the case that the other parent is not entitled to such a leave. Moreover, the bill also envisages:

- Grants to companies that apply family-friendly contractual provisions such as reversible part-time, tele-working, flexible working-time schemes, both incoming and outgoing, time banks and other facilitations for parents of children under 8 years of age;
- Training programmes for the reintegration of workers after periods of extended leave;
- Other leaves in case of special needs of the spouse, co-habiting partner and close-relatives;
- Unpaid educational leaves, with the guarantee of job maintenance.

3.4. New regulations on night-time work

In Italy, Law 903/1977 prohibited night-time work for women. In actual fact, the absolute ban applied only to working mothers, and waivers could be applied to all other female workers through collective bargaining. Labor contracts therefore established how many female workers could be allocated to night-time shifts, in what ways and with which guarantees, at every bargaining round. The ban established by Italian law was declared to be illegitimate by the European Court of Justice that had already issued the same ruling on similar regulations in other countries. The grounds for this ruling are the classical arguments of formal equity: a ban that applied to women alone would be an obstacle to their access to work, as women's work would become less productive and less attractive to business.

The Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities has steadily taken a position against a straightforward lifting of the ban against night-time work, despite the procedure initiated by the Court of Justice. The Minister considered that the elimination of the ban should be associated with a set of guarantees that would apply to both men and women. When the decision of the European Court was transposed into Italian law, the Minister for

Equal Opportunities proposed an amendment, on the basis of which the following provisions have been written into the law:

- Absolute ban to assign women to night-time shifts during pregnancy and up to the first year of age of their child;
- No obligation for male and female workers to accept night-time shifts if they have a child under 3 years, or if they are the single parent of a child under 12, or if they live together with a disabled person.

The law that was approved by Parliament on Jan. 27, 1999, recognizes the caring work of both parents and provides special protection to single-parent families. It also encourages the sharing of family responsibilities between women and men.

3.5. Time-use policies at municipal level

Law 142/1990 on local government, entrusted the responsibility for the coordination of shop-opening hours, municipal office hours, and the opening hours of the branch offices of public administration to the mayor. This power was expanded by the Prodi government.

Using the new regulations, over 100 Italian municipalities have adopted time management policies to diversify and increase the flexibility, and often lengthen, the working hours of public services, shops, and schools, as a family-friendly measure. Most of the plans were negotiated between the Municipality and all of the social actors concerned, including in many cases women's NGOs. Local Exchange Trade centres (LETS) that have been established by many of the local plans are managed by women. In these LETS, citizens trade hours of work and/or caring and educational activities on a free and voluntary basis, according to their specific needs and capabilities.

4. ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR MATERNITY AND FAMILIES³³

4.1. Maternity benefits

In Italy, maternity policy is still based chiefly on Law 1204/1971 which offers strong protection to employed workers (with two months of paid leave prior to delivery and three months of paid after delivery), but does not meet the needs of other women, either unemployed, self-employed, or engaged in other forms of work. In 1998, Parliament adopted the following measures:

³³ See strategic Objectives F1, C), and F of the Beijing Platform of Action.

- The 1998 Budget extended maternity benefits to the working women who are currently not protected, even though they are registered by the national security system, such as self-employed workers, workers with atypical contracts, etc.
- A measure to ensure maternity benefits to free-lance women workers registered with professional social security schemes, (including notaries, lawyers, medical doctors, pharmacists, veterinary surgeons, architects, auditors and engineers), but not covered by maternity benefits.
- The latest Budget instituted a maternity benefit also for low-income mothers who do not benefit from any other social security maternity benefit.

Another problem is that maternity benefits are part of the so-called social charges, which are paid for by payroll taxes. This means that they increase the cost of labor. In the "social pact" for development and employment, that was signed in 1998 by the government and the social partners, an agreement was reached that those social costs that are important for society as a whole, such as maternity, should gradually be transferred to the general taxation system. In this way, maternity benefits would increasingly become a right of all female citizens, and not only of employed workers - without jeopardizing the rights to which these employees are entitled, especially in terms of maintenance of their income levels.

4.2 Family benefits

The main innovations are listed below:

- Assignment of a monthly benefit of 200,000 lire to low-income large families in the 1999 Budget;
- The agreement in the Social Pact that the cost of family benefits should gradually be shifted from the "social charges", that are covered by payroll tax, to general taxation, for the same reasons as given above regarding maternity leave;
- The proposal of the Minister for Equal Opportunities for tax rebates to families that resort to paid caring services to assist children, sick family members or elderly persons;
- The commitment of the Italian government to increase the tax deductions for children and bring them closer to the much higher level of deduction that is consented for a dependent spouse.

5. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES ON ECONOMIC MATTERS

As mentioned in the first part of the Report, women, and a gender perspective, have not played an important role in the discussions between the government and the social partners that led to the formulation of employment, welfare and economic policy. A

number of measures have been adopted by the government and the social partners to make up for this shortcoming:

- A clause in the Social Pact (December 1998) introduces the principle of gender analysis and the creation of a monitoring unit on the gender impact of the Social Pact;
- Participation of women in the negotiations on the allocation of the European structural funds (2000-2006). Women should also be included in the groups that draft and monitor the implementation of the National Employment Plan, to ensure the adoption of equal opportunities and mainstreaming in local development strategy;
- The promotion of additional protocols on equal opportunities in the "local development pacts" for employment and in local community planning efforts.

Other initiatives:

- The National Development Agency, in concert with the Minister for Equal Opportunities, (who is preparing an ad hoc convention), has set up a strategic-planning group on women's entrepreneurship;
- The CNEL (National Council of Economy and Labor) has set up a committee on women and development, and the National Research Council has a committee for female researchers;
- The role of women in trade union bargaining processes has been strengthened, in agreement with the trade union leaders and the employers;
- The Agriculture Ministry set up in 1997 a National Observatory on women's entrepreneurship and work in agriculture, with the aim of collecting data, monitoring the employment levels and potential for women in agriculture, and formulating policy and strategy. The Observatory has three working groups (on statistics, legislation and international work) and it collaborates with the FAO to contact similar bodies and create twinship agreements with developing countries.

G. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING

Context

To talk about the presence (or, for that matter, the absence) of women in decision-making processes and roles means to address the difficult issue of the relationship between women and power. This relationship has followed a complicated and often tortuous path in the past, with moments of light, but also many dark clouds. The steps forward that have been made have often required a lead time before being translated into visible and stable results. The story of women and power has not been one of progressive growth. Rather, it has been a long and winding road, where breakthroughs have never meant an absolute guarantee for the future.

For example the presence of women in the Chamber of Deputies, after a high point of 13 per cent in 1987, dropped down to 8 per cent in 1992. It then rose again to over 14 per cent in 1994, only to fall, though less drastically, to 11 per cent in the latest 1996 general elections. Attempts to improve this state of affairs have proved very difficult.

In 1995 a set of provisions contained in various electoral laws (No. 81/1993, No. 277/1993, No. 43/1995), which had the aim of guaranteeing a gender balance in electoral lists, in various forms and proportions, was abolished by the Constitutional Court which adopted a very restrictive interpretation of the formal principle of the equality of all citizens enshrined in the Constitution.

As to government positions, for a long time, there were no women whatsoever in the Italian governments. This male monopoly was only broken in 1976, when a first woman Minister was appointed (Tina Anselmi). During the eighties and early nineties (with some ups and downs) a token presence of women in the many governments that followed gradually became the norm. Furthermore the crisis of the political party as the conventional form of political activity has resulted in a growing distance between the parties and large groups of citizens, especially among young people and women.

In fact, an active role for women in Italy is not seen simply as the assimilation of women in decision-making processes. It is perceived, instead, as something that creates a "disorder", in that it proposes a logic, hierarchies and values which aim at more than a simple re-allocation of power between men and women. By introducing the gender difference variable, women are bringing about a change in the rules of the game.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

Innovation introduced after the Beijing Conference have concerned:

1. Women in government

2. **European initiatives**
3. **Constitutional reforms**
4. **NGO's activities.**

1. Women in government

In 1996, with the government led by Prime Minister Romano Prodi, three women were appointed as including, for the first time in Italian history, a Minister for Equal Opportunities, Ms. Anna Finocchiaro. The other women in the Prodi government were Livia Turco and Rosy Bindi, respectively the Minister for Social Solidarity and for Health. Moreover, eight women were appointed as Undersecretaries for the first time, in Ministries such as Labor, Treasury, and the Interior. Thus, with 17.1 per cent of women in the Cabinet (12 women out of a total of 70 members), for the first time Italy surpassed the European Union average, which in 1996 stood at 16.8 per cent.

The new government of Massimo D'Alema has the highest number ever of women ministers for Italy (6 out of a total of 26) and of women undersecretaries (10 out of 54). This amounts to a total of 20 per cent of the members of government (16 women ministers and undersecretaries out of a total of 80). Once again, Italy has matched the European Union country average (which rose to 20.2 per cent in 1998).

However, what is most significant is the role of the women in this government. The "segregation" of women to certain areas, which were traditionally considered to fall in the female sphere of competence, has been overcome. The 6 women Ministers hold the following offices: Interior (Rosa Russo Jervolino), Health (Rosy Bindi), Cultural Affairs (Giovanna Melandri), Regional Affairs (Katia Bellillo), Equal Opportunities (Laura Balbo), and Social Solidarity (Livia Turco). The fact that a woman is the Minister of Interior has a special symbolic significance. This is an area where male roles have typically been dominant, on the basis of a conventional gender-based division of knowledge and competence.

The allocation of competencies amongst the undersecretaries is even broader, with women holding responsibilities for the Presidency, Parliamentary Relations, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Justice, Treasury, Education, Labor and Health Ministries.

2. European Initiatives

The third and fourth European Programmes for Action for Equal Opportunities between women and men, were an important stimulus to the Italian initiatives concerning women and decision-making processes. This theme was included in the Programmes' specific objectives. The European "Women and Decision-Making Processes Network", which comprised national experts and operated between 1992 and 1996, was an opportunity

for Italy to highlight and disseminate information on a subject which until then had not been of particular interest. The European Conference which was entitled "Women for the Renewal of Politics and Society", and which was organized in Rome by the Network of Women and by the national Commission for Equal Opportunities, was a peak point in this process, and it culminated in the signature of the "Charter of Rome" on May 18, 1996, by the women ministers of the E.U. countries. This Charter, which was signed by the women ministers in the Prodi government on the day of their swearing into office, marked a turning-point in the European approach to the subject. The absence of women was here explicitly referred to as a "deficit in democracy". The themes and programmes of action of the Charter and the Conference were written into the Recommendations of the Council of the European Union "For a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making processes", on December 2, 1996.

3. Constitutional Reform

In recent years, the National Commission and the Department for Equal Opportunities have carefully monitored the unfolding of the reform process in Italy. The National Commission for Equal Opportunities stimulated research on these issues and submitted to the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Reform (April 1997) proposals for amendments that were worked out with the input of female constitutional experts, to reformulate Articles 55 and 56 of the Constitution, as well as Art. 84 (the law promoting a balanced gender representation) to ensure the full participation of women in decision-making bodies. These amendments were written into the draft issued by the Parliamentary Committee in Art. 60, 77 and 107. Similar ideas were taken up by the D'Alema Government in its draft legislation on constitutional reform, which would overcome the problem raised by the 1995 ruling of the Constitutional Court mentioned above.

4. Ngo activities

The National Commission for Equal Opportunities was very active on the subject of decision-making processes, both in its work with the Women's Network in decision-making, and through a number of its own initiatives³⁴.

³⁴ See the conference organized in Todi in november 1998 on the subject "For a culture of men and women, working together for the government of the common good".

Women NGO's have also been very active, both in their relations with public institutions and in the implementation of self-organized initiatives. In the second half of the nineties some women's groups created women's "schools for politics", such as:

- "Emily in Italy", emulated the idea of the U.S. and British Emily's List, to promote and strengthen the participation of women in politics.
- The Hannah Arendt School of Politics was created by the Orlando Association of Bologna, to the role of women in the public sphere.
- Another school of politics is active in the Veneto region, with the support of the Equal Opportunities Councilship of the City of Venice.

Though these "schools" are very different one from the other, they share a common feature. The women who participate in the schools are not interested in adapting to the dominant male models in politics, but in "studying" how feminist practices and theories may influence political mechanisms and practices. Regarding political parties, measures such as women's quotas (between 20 and 40%) have been adopted by the statutes or regulations of some parties (Popular Party, Refounded Communists, Democratic Left). In trade unions, an anti-discriminatory rule was included in the statutes (for instance, by the National Confederation CGIL).

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

As mentioned in the introduction, the results obtained so far have been somewhat piecemeal. For instance, the stronger presence of women in government has not offset the basically male-dominated logic of its decision-making processes. Nor has it countered the negative trends that have been registered in the number of women elected to office or appointed to key positions.

In the joint Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Reform (the forum which was to review the basic rules of Italian democracy, and where the contribution of women's thinking and experience could have been of primary importance), the presence of women committee members was even lower than the percentage of women elected to Parliament.

Despite general statements of principle, the dominance of one gender in the upper echelons in the decision-making structures does not appear to be a problem for the men who hold those roles. There is a form of male self-preservation which appears to be hard to transform, without generating conflict.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

Among the "cross-border" tasks that are assigned to the Minister for Equal Opportunities, there is an advisory role to the Prime Minister, concerning the appointments for which the government has competence. To this end a data bank on women with special competence in a variety of sectors is currently being developed by the Department for Equal Opportunities. Furthermore the National Commission and the Department for Equal Opportunities intend to continue their campaign to elect more women to representative bodies, and to adopt a Constitutional Reform which may foster this process.

Finally, an amendment, which had been specifically requested by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, has been written into the law on the public financing of political parties. It proposes to give incentives to those political parties that ensure a more balanced gender representation. Measures to support women's political coordination groups have also been envisaged.

H. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Context

Prior to the Beijing Conference, the institutional mechanisms in Italy for the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men consisted in the following bodies:

- *The National Commission for equality and equal opportunities between men and women, which was set up under Law 164/1990, and placed under the Prime Minister's Office. The Commission comprises representatives of political parties, the social partners, women's associations and other representatives of civil society. It has a consultative capacity and provides policy guidance for activities aimed at ensuring equality between women and men and equal opportunities. Although it was created as a consultative body, up until 1996 it also acted as a coordinator and point of reference for all government action in equal opportunities. It organized the Italian participation and initiative at the Beijing Conference as well as in other international fora for debate and initiatives for women;*

- *The National Committee for the implementation of the principles of equal treatment and equal opportunities between working women and men, which was set up in accordance with Law 125/1991 and placed under the Labor and Social Security Ministry. The membership of this Committee includes representatives of trade unions and employers, as well as representatives of women's associations and movements. The Committee advances proposals, provides information and sensitizes public opinion, promotes the adoption of affirmative actions, gives its opinion on projects in progress, formulates codes of conduct, proposes solutions to collective disputes, and may request the Labor Ministry Inspector's Office to investigate the employment situation in workplaces; it also promotes appropriate representation of women in the government bodies that are competent for labor issues;*

- *The Committee for women's entrepreneurship, which was set up under Law 215/1992³⁵, and placed under the Ministry for Industry, Trade and Crafts. The Committee has responsibilities for the orientation and general programming of the initiatives set out in Law 215, and also for affirmative actions to promote women's entrepreneurship;*

- *The Equal Opportunities Councillors, that are present at the various levels of government (national, regional, provincial) as provided by Law 125/91. At a regional and provincial level, the equal opportunities Advisors act as the promoters of women's*

³⁵ On the activity of the Committee see also the chapter "Women and the Economy".

employment and as guarantors against discrimination, and they may bring legal action in cases of alleged discrimination.

These various bodies continue to be operational.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

In the aftermath of the Beijing Conference, the National Commission for Equal Opportunities took up the Beijing Platform, along with the Fourth Programme of Action for Equal Opportunities of the European Union, as a definition of the scope of its work. It adopted the principle of mainstreaming and a gender perspective in its policy options and government practices. In particular, the National Commission for Equal Opportunities issued a document under the title of "Short and medium-term strategies for an equal opportunities policy"³⁶ and it invited all of the equal opportunities committees at the regional level to develop regional plans on the areas of concern for which the regions had competence. The National Commission for Equal Opportunities set itself, in particular, the objective of ensuring that responsibility for the advancement of women be rested in the highest level of government, and it asked the Prime Minister designate in April 1996 to appoint a Minister without portfolio or, alternatively, an Undersecretary of State. This request was accepted and on May 18, 1996, the Rt. Hon. Anna Finocchiaro was appointed as Minister for Equal Opportunities.

This basic option was followed by other political and institutional decisions regarding the following issues:

1. **The role of the Minister for Equal Opportunities;**
2. **The creation of an Equal Opportunities Department;**
3. **The strengthening and expansion of existing bodies;**
4. **The reform of Public Administration;**
5. **The commitment to generate and disseminate gender statistics.**

I. The role of the Minister for Equal Opportunities

The powers delegated to the Minister for Equal Opportunities by both the Prodi and D'Alema governments are not defined on a specific or sectoral basis. Rather, they are related to mainstreaming functions that cut across government policies as a whole. This means that the Minister for Equal Opportunities may legitimately interact with all other ministries and public administration bodies for the realization of the agreed objectives. This delegation of powers substantiates the idea of a mainstreaming competence and it is

³⁶ The document was one of the first contributions to the Prime Minister's Directive of March 1997 which is Italy's Plan of Action to implement the Beijing Platform (see Part I of this Report).

achieved through innovative instruments, such as the attribution to the Minister of Equal Opportunities a power of veto over the instruments of the other ministers. This veto power has the purpose of bringing the contested instrument back to the Council of Ministers for further discussion. Another novelty introduced in the delegation of powers gives the Minister the right to assist the Prime Minister in decisions concerning the Prime Minister's appointments.

This mainstreaming competence has been tested in recent months in connection with important political measures such as:

- the drafting of the Budget;
- the adoption of measures on immigration;
- the draft reform of the welfare system;
- the formulation of proposals for the Employment Action Plan and its Implementation Report;
- the new Social Pact;
- the drafting of important instruments at an international level.

Thanks to the efforts of the Minister for Equal Opportunities, the Italian Plan of Action for the implementation of the Beijing Platform was approved on March 7, 1997. This approval took the shape of a Prime Minister's Directive. The Directive, which is illustrated in Part I. of this report, is addressed to all levels of the state administration. It is an instrument that provides policy guidance to local authorities, requesting them to achieve of the Plan's objectives through their own independent initiatives.

2. Equal Opportunities Department

Prime Minister's Decree No. 405/1997 set up an Equal Opportunities Department, which is the administrative body supporting the Equal Opportunities Minister.

The Department has the following responsibilities:

- Policy guidance, proposal and coordination of legislative and administrative initiatives for the implementation of equal opportunity policies;
- Promotion and coordination of fact-finding and monitoring activities, as well as research initiatives and policy formulation in the field of gender equity and equal opportunities;
- Guidance and coordination of central and local administration to ensure the appropriate implementation and enforcement of the government legislation and policy.

To better coordinate its initiatives, the Department created interdisciplinary bodies such as a committee and an observatory for the promotion and development of women's

entrepreneurship, and a committee for the coordination of government actions against trafficking of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation³⁷.

3. Strengthening and expansion of existing bodies

The National Commission and the Department for Equal Opportunities work in a coordinated fashion, respecting their different responsibilities. Following the Beijing Conference, the Commission stimulated the dissemination of information and the promotion of a political and cultural debate on broad issues such as health, civil service reform, development cooperation, human rights, the fight against trafficking of human beings, the problems of the welfare state and political representation³⁸.

The institutional mechanisms for equal opportunities have been expanded in geographical terms. The National Commission for Equal Opportunities has always given special attention to strengthening regional committees and local-level bodies, and it has organized a regular consultation with the regional committees on a two-monthly basis, to set up an organizational network. The regional dissemination of these bodies will soon be completed with the creation of the regional equal opportunity committees in Sicily and Lombardy. Many local government bodies, and in particular municipalities and provinces, have also set up committees and advisory bodies. The most recent development has been the creation at the local level of Equal Opportunities Councillors or, more often, Councillorships (usually for social policy) with a broad scope, that includes delegated powers for equal opportunities.

This has triggered a process at local level that reproduces national developments, with the creation of bodies that can introduce mainstreaming into local decision-making processes.

4. The reform of Public Administration

Public Administration is of special importance and interest to women, who represent the majority of citizens using the services and roughly one half of the employees. The National Commission for Equal Opportunities submitted comprehensive proposals on the reform of Public Administration and in recent years the following legal measures were adopted:

³⁷ See chapter "Women and Violence".

³⁸ "Riforma e vita quotidiana", 1998; newsletter "Né più né meno"; re-printing of "pagine rosa"; "Quaderno sulla violenza sessuale" 1997; "Questioni di bioetica" 1997; creation of an Internet site for information in 1997; awareness raising campaign on the violated rights of Afghan women "A flower for the women of Kabul"; up-dated re-issue of "Arcobaleno" - a guide to the rights of foreign women in Italy - and the women's code.

• Law No. 81/93, Art. 27, provides that the municipal and provincial statutes establish regulations to ensure the conditions for equal opportunities under Law No. 125/91. It also promotes fair gender representation in their governing bodies and committees, as well as in the agencies, institutions and companies reporting to the local authorities³⁹;

• Legislative Decree No. 29/93 (Art. 61), and subsequent amendments, specifically sets aside one third of the seats on examining boards to women.

- Legislative Decree No. 80/89, in compliance with the requests advanced by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, has introduced general principles pertaining to equal opportunities. With reference to the 1997 Directive and to the Fourth European Programme of Action, it has also introduced gender culture into the training programs for the public administration offices. Moreover, the principle of reconciliation of professional and family life has also been introduced to promote access to training of female civil servants. Training on gender policy and equal opportunity principles should be offered to all civil servants, men and women alike. The National Commission Equal Opportunities has its own representatives in the Government Committee monitoring the reform of the civil service.

In the sphere of institutional powers, though at a different level, an Equal Opportunities Commission was established in the Senate, in March 1999. The Committee is made up of women Senators and female employees of all of the employment grades in the Italian Senate.

5. Generating and disseminating gender statistics

As set out in both the Beijing Platform and the Italian Plan of Action, gender disaggregated data and gender statistics are essential for the equal opportunities bodies, and for government itself, to work effectively.

After the Beijing Conference, the Italian National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) began studies to produce gender disaggregated statistics. It also conducted innovative studies on specific aspects of social life that are of special importance to the lives of women and to an understanding of gender issues, such as the different forms of families, violence and abuse, time-use and the distribution of caring work.

To consolidate this experience, the Government approved a draft bill on Feb. 25, 1999, on the "Collection of gender statistics", which is currently being discussed by Parliament. This legislation calls for a generalization of gender-related statistics, and for

³⁹ In May 1997, the Interior Ministry, responding to the National Equal Opportunities Committee, issued a circular (No. 8/87) Urae, which rejected the reservations on the subject of non-constitutionality of Art. 27, and envisaged, inter alia, the "obligation for the statutes to envisage forms of promotion of the presence of both sexes".

gender-disaggregated data to be included in all statistical information, in the design, collection and dissemination phases. This initiative entails the need for the public bodies belonging to the national statistics system to update their survey methodology so as to give visibility to gender difference.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

The fact that a Minister and a Department for Equal Opportunities have been set up does not in itself mean that the strong resistance in the public administration, even at the highest levels, towards women's empowerment policies has been overcome. Mainstreaming policy cannot be said to have fulfilled its potential. The powers delegated to the Equal Opportunities Minister are not limited to specific areas or sectors, but apply to government policy as a whole. The downside is that with the sole exception of provisions taken on the initiative of the Department for Equal Opportunities, the Minister for Equal Opportunities never has direct competence. Instead, her competence must always be "brokered" with other Cabinet members.

At a local level, the work of the Equal Opportunity Councillors has been very difficult. These Councillors have had scanty resources and tools with which to carry out their two institutional functions of political initiative and bringing legal action against discrimination.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

The areas where efforts will be focused are the following:

1. **Mainstreaming;**
2. **Actions against discrimination;**
3. **Local equal opportunities bodies.**

1. Mainstreaming

It is important to reflect on the best experiences of European governments and study how to achieve the coordination of all sectors of the administration which is essential for mainstreaming, and which was also set out as an objective in the 1997 Directive. It is also important to transfer the best parts of the experience gained so far into the reform process of the executive power, which will be based on a streamlining the powers of the Prime Minister's Office, which will have powers in programming and coordination. Competence which is currently allocated to different administrations will be pooled.

2. Actions against discrimination

The experience of the Equal Opportunities Councillors and the National Committee at the Labor Ministry, and the three-year experience of the Department for Equal Opportunities, all go to prove that there are many situations in which individual women or groups of women complain about cases of what may, or may not be, discrimination. While many of these cases do not lead to legal action, for complex reasons, there is, nonetheless, the need for political attention and initiative. The overall objective (which will be implemented with ad hoc legislation on the Equal Opportunities Councillors) is to identify tools that may be used to deal with the various forms of discrimination, not only gender-related, but also discrimination for reasons of race, language, religion, political opinion, and personal and social conditions. The aim is to move in a multi-cultural perspective without, however, losing sight of the specific features of gender discrimination.

3. Local equal opportunities bodies

The National Commission for Equal Opportunities has launched a survey on the regional, provincial and municipal committees concerning their make-up, numbers, funding and institutional counterparts. The study has been entrusted to an ISTAT expert. The 1999 Budget adopted a 20 billion lira fund to strengthening the functions of Equal Opportunities Councillors. The aim is to issue regulations to redefine and strengthen these functions, as well as to strengthen the legal tools available to the Councillors, especially in the areas with high unemployment rates, and with reference also to vocational training and re-skilling. The functions relating to enforcement of anti-discriminatory regulations will also be reinforced. Other measures include an increase in paid leave, reimbursement and compensation, a reassessment of the appointment criteria and a fund for the operations of the Equal Opportunities Councillors, which will also cover the cost of legal suits.

I. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Context

In a democratic country such as Italy, the respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms is guaranteed by the Constitution to male and female citizens alike, on equal terms and without any gender-based discrimination.

In the last few decades, a new frontier in basic human rights and freedom has been identified by women's movements and by the development of a new female awareness, in our country as in other parts of the world. A woman's control over her own life and body, her freedom from violence and her freedom of choice in all aspects of public and private life are now considered by most women to be an integral part of their fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Beijing Platform came at a time of strongly expanding individual and collective awareness among women, and in the country as a whole. The Beijing process, its run-up and follow-up, reflected this growing awareness.

Yet, throughout the nineties, the Mediterranean region has witnessed explosions of sexist violence against women in the areas closest to Italy. These explosions were echoed in the spread of fundamentalism, in particular in Algeria. It would have been impossible for Italian women to ignore what was happening at only a few hundreds of kilometers from their country. The result has been a shift in mentality, and a heightened awareness in looking at international events through the eyes of a woman.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

As mentioned in Part I of this report, the center-left governments, which first came to office in 1996, have given new momentum to the human rights of women, with the establishment of the Minister for Equal Opportunities. Parallel to this, the issue of human rights in general, for men and women, has increasingly come to the fore, both in international politics and in Italy itself.

1. The international level

In addition to the campaign for the abolition of the death penalty (which is of special importance, although it is not characterized by a gender perspective), Italy has been active on the following issues:

Establishment of the International Criminal Court;

The human rights of women victims of fundamentalism;

Enhancement of women's role within the United Nations.

1.1. The International Criminal Court

The International Diplomatic Conference which adopted the Statute of the Court was held in Rome (July 1998). Italy contributed not only to the successful outcome of the Conference, but also to the introduction into the Statute of provisions to guarantee the human rights of women and a correct definition of gender-related crimes. The active presence of women in the Italian delegation to the Conference, and the close collaboration that developed on these issues between the Foreign Ministry, the Justice Ministry, and the Department and National Commission for Equal Opportunities, were essential factors in achieving these results, as was the active dialogue between these institutions and women's NGOs.

1.2. The human rights of women victims of fundamentalism

The main campaigns in which Italy has taken part aimed at the protection of the rights of women in Afghanistan and Algeria, and the rights of all of the women who are victims of fundamentalism and intolerance. Italy has also supported initiatives against female genital mutilation⁴⁰.

Examples of these efforts are given herebelow:

- A campaign called "A flower for the women of Kabul" was launched by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, in collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Department and the European Commission. This campaign received ample coverage in the media and it stimulated a spate of complementary initiatives by NGOs, local authorities and women's associations;
- The campaign to support the rights of Algerian women, which was taken forward by CISA and other women's and peace associations, condemned the fundamentalist aggression, gave support to journalists, democratic women and teachers, and organized a collection of signatures against the Family Code which denies the basic rights of citizenship and equal dignity to Algerian women;
- Economic cooperation projects were implemented by national institutions, local government and NGOs, often jointly, as in the case of the project promoted by the Foreign Ministry and the Forlì Municipality for the building in Algiers of a center to assist traumatized women, or the projects to support Albanian women's NGOs;
- The initiatives of the "women in black" and other peace and solidarity groups to support the human rights of Palestinian women.

⁴⁰ See chapter D, "Violence against Women"

NGO campaigns to promote the human rights of women in the world have been highly visible and vocal, often more so than the work carried out by government institutions.

1.3. Enhancement of women's role within the United Nations

Another sector in which Italian initiative has been stepped up following Beijing and the institution of a Minister for Equal Opportunities, has been its work in fora such as the **Commission on the Status of Women** and its contribution to the **Cedaw Committee**.

Italy's Third Report on the implementation of the Convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, submitted in July 1997, was favorably received by the Cedaw Committee. The contents of that report should be considered as an integral part of our assessment on the implementation of the Beijing Platform in Italy.

The importance attributed by Italy to these and other international instruments, is evidenced also by the Italian delegation's commitment to the approval of the additional Protocol to the Cedaw Convention. Throughout the negotiations, Italy has worked for the broadest and most concrete possible definition of the possibility for women to have recourse.

2. Promoting the human rights of women in Italy⁴¹

In this field, the most important initiatives have concerned the following:

- **The human rights of immigrant women;**
- **The human rights of Italian migrant women abroad**
- **The rights of women detainees.**

2.1. The human rights of immigrant women

The considerable work done by associations and NGOs in projects for the first assistance and integration of immigrant women has stimulated government initiative. In this regard, the fact that an immigrant woman is a member of the National Commission for Equal Opportunities and that two women immigrants represent the National Commission and the Department for Equal Opportunities in the Forum on immigration set up by the Social Affairs Department, is highly significant. But the most important innovation was the adoption on March 6, 1998, of the new law (**Law 40 on Immigration policy and the regulation of entry and residence in Italy for citizens from non-European Union countries**).

⁴¹ See also the chapters on "Violence against women" (on trafficking, genital mutilation, etc.) and "Women in armed conflict" (on the rights of displaced women and women refugees).

The government bill which was rapidly approved by Parliament (by Italian standards) was the fruit of a heated debate in the institutions and country at large. Women played a role of primary importance in this debate, starting from one of the strongest promoters of the law, the Minister for Social Solidarity Livia Turco. A few of the salient provisions of the new law are listed below:

- The principle that the basic rights of the human person should be recognized to the foreigner present on Italian territory, regardless of his or her nationality and legal status;
- The right of access to emergency health care and to all of the entitlements relating to the social protection of pregnant women are to be guaranteed to legal and non-legal immigrants and may not entail any form of reporting to law enforcement authorities;
- Basic education is guaranteed to all children, with exactly the same rights as Italian children;
- The right to family unity: the text⁴² provides that male and female immigrants who have a regular residence permit may request a similar permit for their spouses, underage children and dependent relatives, on the condition that they are able to provide them with adequate lodging and up keep;

A policy for the social integration of immigrants, with the introduction of innovative instruments such as the "Indefinite residence permit" and the position of "cross-cultural mediator";

- The creation of a national fund for migration policy, under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, to promote education "inspired by the criteria of living together in a multi-cultural society and the prevention of discriminatory, xenophobic and racist behavior for the officers of government bodies and of private institutions that are commonly in contact with foreigners or that are competent for matters relating to immigration";
- Provisions against the exploitation and abuse of the women and children who are introduced illegally into Italy;
- Measures for the integration of children in schools and education for immigrant adults.

The law was financed with 5 billion lire for 1998 and 68 billion lire for 1999. These funds are to be administered by the regions (80 per cent) and by the Central Administration and Social Affairs Department (20 per cent). The National Committee for Equal Opportunities has set up a standing working group with representatives of the most numerous communities of women immigrants in Italy.

2.2. The human rights of Italian migrant women abroad

⁴² The Office of the Minister for Equal Opportunities collaborated directly in drafting this provision.

The rights of Italian women abroad were the subject of the first Conference organized by the Foreign Affairs Ministry, CGIE, and the Department and Commission for Equal Opportunities, in November 1997. The conference was prepared, and followed, by an intense effort at networking with women belonging to various communities abroad. Equal Opportunity Committees were created in many cities (Zurich, Berlin, Frankfurt, Latin America, etc.). The National Commission decided to grant an award for a university thesis on the condition of Italian women living abroad.

2.3. The human rights of female detainees

Another important legislative initiative of the Equal Opportunities Minister regarding the human rights of women was the bill "Alternative measures to detention for the protection of the relationship of detained mothers and their children". This instrument enables the conversion of a detention sentence into alternative measures such as house arrest, or probation, if the total sentence, or the residual number of years of detention, is under four years and if the child living with the mother is under ten years of age.

This possibility used to exist only in the case of detention sentences of under three years and until the fifth year of age of the child. Crimes such as association with the Mafia, international drug trafficking and armed robbery are excluded from this provision.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

On the international level, the major obstacles to the initiatives undertaken were related to the limited efficacy of the existing international instruments. In the promotion of human rights, as in the case of armed conflict, the gap that exists between the body of international law and the measures available for enforcement is dramatic. Indeed, the issue of national sovereignty weighs even more heavily on the sphere of human rights, because most of the violations occur within an individual state, and not in conflict abroad, and they may at times be the work of the ruling authorities themselves.

There is also a complex relation between a government's interest in promoting human rights and the other relevant national interests of an economic and geopolitical nature. Often these interests are not matching, and sometimes they impinge on the effectiveness of action to guarantee the respect for human rights. This is a contradiction that is observed in the foreign policy of all countries.

Both of these two obstacles are not specific to the implementation of the Beijing Platform, but are on the table of the international community as a whole. That is why Italy emphasizes general instruments to deal with these difficulties, such as the creation of the International Criminal Court as described above, or the important proposals made by Italy concerning reform of the United Nations, as well as a strengthening of the tools

for European Union common political intervention. It should, however, be noted that when it comes to women's rights, the obstacles may weigh even more heavily than on other issues, and there are additional political difficulties such as the government's lack of interest in these issues, or a marked gender imbalance in decision-making centers.

On a national plane, the main obstacles to the full implementation of human rights for all are not of an institutional nature. As mentioned above, Italy has very advanced legislation on these issues. The problems arise from a complex web of social, economic, political and cultural factors that are especially relevant for immigration policy and the integration of immigrants in Italy.

Like other European countries Italy has witnessed the emergence of xenophobic and racist campaigns in recent years, with widespread examples of intolerance towards non-European Union immigrants. These campaigns exploit widespread fears about competition in the labor market, and the calls for law and order from the citizens of areas where organized crime is strong and where the presence of new "non-European" Mafias (Albanian, Russian, Chinese) tends to screen the role of Italian organized crime. The "foreigner" becomes the scapegoat for every episode of violence. This is made worse by the fears linked to the strong increase in the numbers of (often illegal) refugees, who are escaping from areas of conflict such as Kosovo, the Kurdish areas etc.⁴³ and who reach the Italian coasts by crossing the Adriatic Sea. Moreover, Italy has not yet ratified the Union Nations Convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

The Equal Opportunities Minister intends to support the approval of the bills that currently lie before Parliament concerning female detainees and asylum rights⁴⁴. She also wishes to build on her commitment to the slogan "all human rights for all", not only with regard to women' rights, but also to anti-racism, and to equal opportunities for homosexuals, and to pursue the combat against all forms of fundamentalism. The Department will also work to prepare the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly "Women 2000".

⁴³ See the chapter on "Women and armed conflict".

⁴⁴ See the chapter on "Women and armed conflict".

J. WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

Context

The nineties witnessed a surge in the presence of women in mass media. The number of women hired in editorial staffs has strongly increased and, according to some estimates, most of the free-lance workers in the sector are women.

The media community is thus becoming feminized, but only at grass-roots level. Decision-making power is still firmly in the hands of men and most editors and heads of staff are men. In the public radio and TV service, only one woman is an editor of a TV news program, and while there are many women in the editorial staff, they are scarcely represented in the higher echelons of journalists' career⁴⁵.

Those who decide what is, or is not, news are usually men. And the criteria that make news in the case of women are stereotypes. A recent study has confirmed that there is a wide gap between what women do and say in society and the way women are represented in the media. Newsworthy women are the exceptional women, the victims, the man-eaters, the leading top models. However, something has started to change in recent years thanks to the women who work in the media and the contribution given by the Equal Opportunities Department.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

From the earliest days of her mandate, the Minister for Equal Opportunities has denounced the inability of mass media to grasp the new element that women represent in this society. She has complained about the laziness of news-giving based on stereotypes, as well as the lack of women in decision-making. Actions taken have concerned the following:

1. **The public radio and TV service;**
2. **Targeted information campaigns;**
3. **The presence of women on-line;**
4. **The image of women from the South of the world.**

1. **The public radio and TV service**

In 1997, when the Italian public radio and TV service (RAI) renewed its Board of Directors, three women were appointed for the first time. Prior to this, under the center-

⁴⁵ See the White Paper published by the Conference "Women, Information and Power" which was organized by the Equal Opportunities Committee in collaboration with the journalists trade union (FNSI), and the Rome Municipality; in particular see the integrated study by CENSIS on the presence of women in the media system (news, publishing and publicity agencies) and the female image reproduced by that system.

right government, a successful woman manager had been appointed as Chairman of the Board.

That same year, the Minister and the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, as well as several women's groupings, intensified their lobbying in the radio and television service. Also in 1997, RAI approved "Duo" a research and pilot project for women's empowerment in the management and programming of RAI. The project, which was designed by the sociologist Marcella Chiesi, drew its inspiration from the Beijing Platform for Action. It was organized into three phases addressing top management, middle management and journalists and creative artists. The aim was to give them the tools and language they need to go beyond a stereotypical interpretation of the identity of women and gender relations. It also aimed at implementing gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment within RAI, identifying male and female target audiences to which an innovative pilot product could be addressed. The tools used were workshops and action learning.

RAI also decided to conduct an integrated survey on the image of women put forward by TV products. This initiative is sponsored by the Minister and by the Commission for Equal Opportunities.

2. Targeted information campaigns

The office of the Minister for Equal Opportunities has lobbied for a radical change in the media stereotypes which show women as victims, in need of protection and, generally, as a marginal part of society. An example of the new trend is the first government information campaign on women's entrepreneurship, launched in 1997. It was an ironical campaign, that emphasized both the traditional and innovative skills of women and suggested that they could be harnessed in a productive and creative direction. Many women's associations and NGOs have learned to use media campaigns with confidence in recent years, often thanks to the voluntary contribution of the leading publicity agencies. Women-oriented campaigns have included one for AIDS prevention launched by the Committee for the civil rights of prostitutes, a campaign entitled "A flower for the women of Kabul" promoted by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities, with the support of the Equal Opportunities Department and the European Commission, and the campaign to support Afghan women by AIDOS. The National Commission for Equal Opportunities created a "Women in the Media" Forum, comprising female journalists in the press and broadcasting services, which promoted a Conference on these issues in 1997, in collaboration with the Equal Opportunities Commission and Department.

3. The presence of women on-line

In Italy, roughly 30 per cent of Internet users are women. There has not been any government action to promote the use of new technologies. The only initiatives in this sense have been taken by the female users themselves. A pioneering experience was that of Gopherdonna, which created a series of on-line conferences on a great variety of subjects. In 1997, thanks to funding from the Bologna Municipality, the first female server was set up by an association called Orlando. It hosts Internet sites created by women's associations and groups. A first survey on the presence of women on-line was conducted by Info@perla, a feminist publication. A second survey is currently underway. The Webgrrl network has also reached Italy, while the first women's institutional site was created by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities in June 1997 (<http://www.palazzochigi.it/comparita>).

4. The image of women from the South of the world in Italian media

A project was implemented in 1997-98 by AIDOS, an Italian association of women for development, with funding from the Foreign Ministry. Its aim was to give "positive" news to Italian media on women in developing countries. News on the political, social and entrepreneurial achievements of the women of these countries. News that is, that belies their traditional image as victims (without, however, neglecting the need to denounce their problems and difficulties). The project involved one hundred journalists in the press, TV and radio media.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

The glass ceiling in the media means that mainstreaming and empowerment policies are hard to implement. While the image of women entrepreneurs has been successfully improved, there still is a lack of information on the work of women within society at large. With the exception of women's magazines, the traditional news circuits are reluctant to give up a stereotypical approach where women are either pretty images or the victims. Virtually the only media image of immigrant women is that given by the crime pages, where they are invariably associated with prostitution.

It has also been hard to pursue the projects that were launched in the past. The "Duo" project in RAI, which was supposed to be implemented in three phases, ground to a halt after the first.

But the glass ceiling is not only an external imposition. In the media, as elsewhere, women bear the burden of their dual role. In the Conference "Women, information and power", organized by the National Commission for Equal Opportunities in early 1998, several reports were made concerning violations of maternity rights by a number of editorial groups. The difficulty of participating in a male-dominated media system,

where the news criteria and the approach to work are alien to a gender perspective, also clearly emerged.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

The Minister for Equal Opportunities has the intention of re-launching targeted communication campaigns. A campaign is currently being designed for the women who are the victims of trafficking, to inform them on the opportunities offered by the new law on immigration to apply for residence permits and to receive social assistance if they wish to change their lives. The process of innovating the media image of women, which was initiated following the Beijing Conference with support from the government, the journalists' trade union (in particular its Equal Opportunities Committee), and the media workers themselves, will also be revived.

K. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Context

Environmental rehabilitation, sustainable development, innovative environmental policy: these have been the main guidelines in the government's actions to protect the environment in the last few years. Environmental policies do not contain a gender approach, nor are they oriented to enhancing specifically female resources. The woman-environment relationship was not taken up as a specific issue in the National Plan for the Implementation of the Beijing Platform (1997 Directive). However, sound environmental management has a direct impact on the lives of all citizens, men and women alike. Italy's main environmental problems are linked to the poor hydro-geological conditions of the terrain, waste management, protection of inland water bodies and the sea, city pollution from heavy traffic, protection of natural reserves, pollution of industrial areas and sites, and the need for a better balance between urban and rural areas. Much time has been lost, and the solutions to environmental degradation rely heavily on the resolve of all of the actors involved: the government, regional and local authorities, and public and private-sector agencies. It is also important to recognize the actions and contributions of a variety of social actors. A positive and significant development has been the increase in the professional presence of women in agriculture, who bring a growing awareness of environmentally-friendly production such as agri-tourism, organic farming, etc.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The Italian government has undertaken the following actions that have had a relevant impact on the daily lives of women and men:

- **Quality of life in cities**

The level of air pollution in many urban centers has improved somewhat in recent years, at least as far as carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide concentration are concerned. The situation is worse for ozone, carbon dioxide and benzene. City mobility is one of the main factors in urban air pollution. The government adopted a measure in 1997 which gave car-owners a 2 million lira incentive to buy a new car if they turned in their old car for wrecking. This was a strong incentive for the acquisition of low-fuel-consumption vehicles (under 9 liters per 100 km), and the result has been reductions in NOx of 4 per cent and in CO and COV of up to 8 per cent. Pilot projects for car pooling and collective taxis have also been funded, and municipalities have received financing to buy low-emission public transport vehicles, and to build bicycle paths.

- **Global warming and the Carbon tax**

Pursuant to the commitments undertaken by Italy for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) and at the Kyoto Conference on weather change (1997), the government passed a Carbon tax in 1998. This is a tax on fossil fuel energy products which increases progressively with the level of CO2 released by their combustion. The tax will be phased in by 2005, and it will have a positive impact on the cost to consumers of more environmentally-friendly fuels.

- **Natural reserve policy, protection of flora and wildlife**

The natural park sector received great attention in 1997, when the first national conference on protected areas issued the new policy guidelines for the sector. This led to a revision of Law 394/91 on nature parks. The role of the regions was enhanced, and in 1998 the protected areas were extended by an additional 75,000 hectares, and they now account for 8 per cent of the Italian national territory.

- **Electromagnetic and noise pollution**

After the alarms sounded by environmental and consumers associations, the government set up an interministerial working group (Environment, Health and Communications Ministries) with the aim of preparing a draft framework law on electromagnetic pollution. In 1998, the Environment Ministry issued noise abatement regulations for railways and airports.

- **Waste reduction, recycling and recovery**

In 1997, a reform of urban waste management was launched. It is based on three main guidelines: reduction in waste production, waste recycling and energy and material recovery from waste. The new legislation provided that as of Jan. 1, 2000, only inert waste may be disposed of in landfills, (that is waste identified by technical specifications and residual waste from treatment and recycling processes). Companies in the sector have adopted numerous initiatives (in particular, the creation of CONAI, a national Consortium on packaging, along with sectoral Consortia for plastic materials, wood, aluminium, glass, steel and paper). The government also defined a new system for urban waste taxation which will shift from the basis of home size to a rate calculated on the quantity and type of waste produced (with the aim of stimulating reductions in the amount of waste produced by households).

A programme agreement on non-perishable goods has also been reached for home appliances (refrigerators, washing machines, etc.), televisions and computers, to encourage the replacement of older, more polluting models with new-generation appliances, through a mechanism similar to that applied to motor-vehicles. The agreement is still not operational. As women have the main responsibility in home economy, they are more interested in these measures and are the targets of the informational campaigns.

- **Areas at a hydro-geological risk**

The tragedy of Sarno, a small village in Campania that was buried under a mudslide before people's eyes, led to an effort to identify high-risk areas for landslides and floods throughout Italy, and to adopt various levels of protection measures.

- **Protection of the seas**

A number of actions have been undertaken to safeguard Italy's 8,000 kilometers of coastline, by directly involving the 14 coastal regions, the businesses that draw their living from the sea (fishing and tourism) and ecologists. These actions include a monitoring network on algae, and a "Clean Sea" campaign, with 17,000 inspections performed by the Ecological Operational Unit of the Carabinieri throughout the coasts of Italy, in addition to other measures that have enabled a ban against swimming to be lifted along 100 kilometers of coastline. Also, a 3-year campaign (1998-2000) was funded to monitor hydrocarbon pollution, along with a programme (announced by press campaigns) to rehabilitate the sea bottom in protected marine reserves, which have been further extended.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

Environmental policy is increasingly global in scope, and must be addressed by both the international fora and local-level political and economic strategies. Italy is recovering its role and influence in these global fora, even though the recommendations and commitments entered into at a national level are not rapidly transposed into domestic regulations. The delay that Italy has accumulated is especially severe vis-à-vis European Union regulations. These delays are compounded by the unresponsiveness of many regions, especially in the Mezzogiorno, where the government has transferred environmental competence, without, however, providing adequate financial resources. To fulfil its mission, and heighten the effectiveness of environmental protection, the Environment Ministry must undergo a functional reorganization and strengthening. It is also important to streamline spending procedures. This may help to guarantee effective and realistic use of the resources available to the Ministry, which rose from 833 billion lire in 1996 to 1,125 billion lire in 1998, a figure that is doubled by the resources coming from European funds.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

The Equal Opportunities Department, the Environment Ministry, and the Observatory for Women's Entrepreneurship and Work in Agriculture within the Ministry for Agricultural Policy have not yet begun to collaborate. It would be important for them to work together to ensure that women play an appropriate role in this field. Numerous European studies have demonstrated that women who are well-informed consumers and producers may be key to encouraging the production of low-environmental-impact consumer goods, to the growth of organic agriculture, and also to the increased use of renewable energy sources.

L. THE GIRL CHILD

Context

The transformation of Italian society, with the ensuing strong collective emancipation of women, a steady drop in birth-rates and a widespread culture of the value of gender difference, have all meant that girls are not only accepted, but enjoy great consideration. The break-up of the old patriarchal model has led to a sort of "privileged alliance" between mothers and daughters. This positive trend has been amplified by the universal principle on which Italy's school and health systems are based, as well as by the fact that the children are fewer in number and are more likely to be given the same consideration, regardless of gender⁴⁶.

However, there are other factors at play, such as the economic situation, and the persistence of an excessively feminized representation of girls, based on a superficial aesthetic dimension. Girls are both the subjects and objects of an increasingly invasive and aggressive market that tends to give a reductive representation of girls as sexual playthings. This is an expression of an ancient tendency, which was once cloaked over, but which has recently taken on new and worrisome forms in our society, namely the sexual and mental abuse that occurs outside and, more often, within the family. Reports of sexual violence, which have recently involved small boys and young male teenagers in a number of tragic cases, have been a cause for concern and astonishment and, at times, true social alarm. Yet, attention towards the many more numerous and hidden cases of violence against small girls, which are only apparently less devastating, is more wavering.

Two new and serious developments have also been registered: trafficking in human beings, which involves many children and teenagers of both sexes, and female genital mutilation⁴⁷. Another limited but worrisome development is the exploitation of child labor in various areas of the country, which is also linked to immigration. Trade unions are mobilizing against this serious problem. Illegal immigration from Eastern Europe, and in particular from Albania, as well as from Africa, involves many cases of small girls and teenagers of both sexes, who are variously exploited and forced to beg, and to take part in petty crime, theft, bag-snatching, etc. They are also exploited sexually. This scourge, in particular, affects very young Albanian teenagers who are forced into prostitution and maintained in conditions of true enslavement.

Another problem is that of early and undesired pregnancy, not among Italian girls but in the nomadic communities that live in great poverty and hardship. In society at large,

⁴⁶ See also Part I and chapter "B. Education"

⁴⁷ See chapter "D. Violence against women"

despite the information campaigns and sex education initiatives (admittedly of variable number and quality throughout the country), girls do not have an adequate knowledge of their sexuality and of contraception. The existence of many counselling centers for teenagers has not solved the problem of the lack of adequate information on sexuality, contraception and abortion. As a result, in the case of both under-age teenagers and immigrants, the abortion rate is on the rise, whereas there has been a generalized drop for Italian adult women.

As to female genital mutilation⁴⁸, many of the girls who have been brought to Italy, or who were born in this country, are at a risk of sexual mutilation, even though Italian legislation is very strict on this point and no Italian health care facilities are willing to perform this mutilation.

I. ACTIONS TAKEN

The center-left governments have proved highly sensitive to children's rights and policies, which have included:

1. **A National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents**
2. **A law to promote the rights of children**
3. **Institutional mechanism to promote children's rights**
4. **Codes of conduct to protect children**
5. **Local and NGO activities**
6. **Other initiatives.**

1. National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents

To prevent child-related actions from being sectoral and disjointed from a comprehensive framework, the government adopted a Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents in April, 1997. The aim of the Italian government's Plan of Action was to coordinate the actions and resources of the state, regions, municipalities and private sector. The Plan promotes the rights of all boys and girls and enhances their contribution to decision-making. It points out priority areas of intervention such as the eradication of poverty, universal access to education and adequate training for the labor market, a healthy environment, the building of a truly multi-ethnic society, respect for human rights, the combat on all forms of violence, exploitation and marginalization and, finally, prevention of juvenile delinquency.

Child-related policy did not have any gender orientation at first and girl children were simply understood to be covered by the general concept of childhood. However, this

⁴⁸ See chapter "D. Violence against women"

neutral approach was later questioned and modified, thanks also to the mainstreaming actions of the Equal Opportunities Department and to the pressure of women's NGO's.

2. Law to promote the rights of children

Law 285/97 "Measures for the promotion of the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents" has set up a National Fund for the promotion of the rights of children and adolescents with 800 billion lire for the 1997-1999, 3-year period and 312 billion lire for 2000. The objective of the fund is to provide for the following:

- Implementation of services to prepare and support the parent-child relationship, measures to combat poverty and violence, alternative measures to admitting children to educational-residential institutions;
- The introduction of innovative recreational and educational services for small children;
- Affirmative action for the promotion and protection of children's rights, for a better use of the environment and an improved quality of life, and for enhanced respect for gender, cultural and ethnic differences.

3. Institutional mechanism to promote children's rights

Law 451/97 set up Documentation and Analysis Center and a National Observatory on Children chaired by the Social Solidarity Minister and comprising experts, representatives of the various ministries that have competence for under-age children, representatives of local authorities, members of associations, voluntary workers and social cooperatives. The Observatory prepares a Plan of Action for the protection and development of children every two years.

The same Law 451/97 also established the Parliamentary Committee for Children with responsibility for guidance and monitoring over the implementation of international agreements and Italian legislation on the rights and development of children. Also, the Italian Day for the Rights of Children and Adolescents was established, and it is celebrated on Nov. 20, the day that the U.N. Convention was signed.

A national and international Conference was organized with UNICEF Italy to review the United Nations convention on children's rights in the light of the Beijing Platform.

4. Codes of conduct

The government and social partners have developed Codes of Conduct, such as:

- A Code of Conduct for TV, which commits public and private sector television broadcasters to improving the quality standards of television programming for children;

The Charter against the exploitation of child labor in which the government, employers' associations and trade unions are committed to supporting the ILO Convention on the exploitation of child labor; sustaining the work of NGOs in prevention and elimination of child labor; and combating sex tourism through legislation and sensitization campaigns aimed at tourist agencies. In this field, Italy adhered to the international ECPAT campaign (End Child Prostitution Affecting Tourism), through Terra Nuova, a coordination of NGOs.

5. Local and NGO activities

The regions have adopted a comprehensive framework for the implementation and promotion of the rights of children. The regions have broad delegated powers in sectors such as health care, social assistance and promotion, cultural development, education, recreational activities.

Many facilities have been set up by the non-profit sector to help children in difficulty: roughly 800 family-style communities shelter 5,000 children and employ 2,000-2,200 educators. Organizations of voluntary workers have created 2,322 facilities to support children and adolescents (1,316 caring for both, 534 assisting only small children, 472 for teenagers). These centers employ a total of 73,433 volunteers (1997 data). Equally noteworthy is the work of the Italian UNICEF Committee. The campaigns for "Child sponsorship" have been relatively successful. Numerous organizations for international development organize these "adoptions" where poor children of developing countries are supported by monthly payments. Every year, some 1,500 billion are channelled to developing countries in this type of aid programme.

6. Other initiatives

• Regarding prevention and repression of violence and abuse against children, two instruments - Law 66/96 against sexual violence and Law 269/98 "Provisions against the exploitation of prostitution, pornography, and sex tourism affecting children, as a new form of enslavement" - were both passed⁴⁹. Ad hoc services were also set up by associations of women that are active in the prevention of violence against women and in the support of the victims, to provide special care for the adolescents who are the victims of abuse (in Milan, Venice, Florence, Bologna and Rome). A Committee was created by various ministries, acting on the initiative of the Social Solidarity Minister, to deal with the issue of violence and abuse of children and adolescents, by issuing national

⁴⁹ See Chapter "D. Violence against women"

guidelines that are addressed to all institutional services and agencies that deal with children.

- In early 1999, Parliament passed a law ratifying the Hague Convention, which had been signed by Italy in 1993, on the protection of minors and on cooperation in international adoption.

- The Environment Ministry launched a programme of positive actions for "Child friendly municipalities", and it created an award and a "Child-friendly label" for the municipalities that have adopted the best environmental and town planning policies to protect and enhance the participation of children.

II. OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED

The lack of gender-related statistics is one of the major obstacles in gaining an understanding of the true conditions of girls and the definition of adequate policy. Difficulties are encountered also in the social services nationwide. There are areas where these services are either lacking or inadequate. In Rome itself, the Municipality has reported a ratio of 1 social worker to 23,000 citizens (the ratio should, instead, be 1:1,500). The reasons that are usually given for these blatant shortcomings are a lack of funds and budgetary constraints. Another problem that has been reported is the separation of competence between social and health care, due to a recent reform of the health sector, which has resulted in further budgetary cuts and a lack of coordination of the two sectors. The resources set aside for children in the fund that was established by Law 285/97 are very limited if compared to the costs incurred for welfare and social services by local authorities.

III. COMMITMENTS TO FURTHER ACTIONS

All programmes and actions adopted will continue in the coming years.