



LOBBY EUROPEEN DES FEMMES  
EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

European Women's Lobby  
*Resource Kit on Institutional  
Mechanisms for the Promotion of  
Equality between Women and Men*

Original: English  
May 2008

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# CONTENTS

## Introduction

### **Section 1: Commitments made in favour of creating institutions dealing with equality between women and men**

- 1.1. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- 1.2. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- 1.3. European Commitments made towards institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

### **Section 2: Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men at international and European level and in EU member States**

- 2.1. United Nations entities specializing in issues of equality between women and men
- 2.2. United Nations: the proposed strengthening of the Gender Equality Architecture
- 2.3. Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men at European level
- 2.4. Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men in EU Member States

### **Section 3: Assessing the efficiency of a country's institutional mechanisms**

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## Introduction

The present Resource Kit presents some information to help NGOs to evaluate and influence international and European institutions as well as their national governments and enable them to strengthen weak or inefficient institutional mechanisms dealing with women's rights and gender equality.

Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men are state bodies or institutions, which work on the promotion of women's rights and equality between women and men. They can be placed at all levels of government (national, regional, local) or within international institutions. Their role is to design, promote the implementation of, execute, monitor, evaluate, advocate and mobilise support for policies aiming at equality between women and men.

Institutional mechanisms are essential tools for the promotion of equality between women and men. Some European countries established institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women as early as the 1960s. It was in the 1970s however that these mechanisms became visible at the national and international level.

The Beijing Platform for Action, which was the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, identified twelve critical areas of concern, including "Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women". With signing the Beijing Platform for Action, 189 governments agreed to improve the machineries for equality between women and men. Since 1995, European countries have therefore either established or strengthened their

institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men. However, evaluations made in the meantime still identify obstacles such as inadequate financial and human resources, lack of political will and commitment, lack of understanding of the concepts of equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming, unclear mandates, marginalized location in the government structure, lack of data and methods of assessment or insufficient links with civil society.

## **Section 1: Commitments made in favour of creating institutions dealing with equality between women and men**

### **1.1. United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>1</sup>**

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 is the first legally binding instrument to take a comprehensive approach to prohibiting discrimination against women and is a significant achievement for women. The Convention defines discrimination against women very broadly to include discrimination that occurs in the private sphere as well as the public arena, and to include indirect discrimination as well as direct discrimination. It prohibits discrimination in many areas including political and public life, economic and social life and family life. The CEDAW establishes the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to monitor progress towards its full implementation. The Committee also makes General Recommendations based on its examination of reports and information from countries that have ratified the Convention.

**A recommendation<sup>2</sup>** of the CEDAW Committee concerns Effective National Machinery and Publicity and recommends that States parties:

*“Establish and/or **strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures, at a high level of Government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to:***

- (a) Advise on the impact on women of all government policies;*
- (b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively;*
- (c) Help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination; (...)”*

### **1.2. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action<sup>3</sup>**

The Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) express the agreed commitments of the governments, NGOs, donors and other institutions present in Beijing. Most countries have produced National Programmes of Action (NPAs), which set out their strategies and programmes for implementing the commitments made.

**Critical area number 8** of the Beijing Platform for Action concerns installing and promoting institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and includes the following three strategic objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the CEDAW can be found at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

<sup>2</sup> No. 6 (1988)

<sup>3</sup> The full text of the Beijing declaration can be found at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>.

1. Creating or strengthening national machineries and other governmental bodies;
2. Integrating gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects;
3. Generating and disseminating data and information--broken down by gender--for planning and evaluation.

The BPfA introduces the idea of a **double strategy** to progress towards gender equality including specific bodies and programmes for gender equality *and* gender mainstreaming (objective 2). This double strategy/dual approach implies on the one hand continuing with specific policies, institutions and programmes focusing on women's rights, such as programmes against violence against women or for the integration of women on the labour market, which are still necessary to counterbalance existing discrimination and inequalities between women and men in all areas of life. On the other hand, this double strategy implies the integration of a gender equality perspective in all policies, including those that are not seen as traditionally relevant in terms of gender equality (ex making sure that transport or health or security policies take into account the needs and perspectives of both women and men and that they contribute to more equality).

### **1.3. European commitments made towards institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

The Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) includes a strong legal basis for the promotion of equality between women and men, which is stated as a task of the EU (Article 2). Further to the development of the concept of gender mainstreaming at international level, a gender mainstreaming clause was also introduced in the European Treaty (Article 3§2 of the Amsterdam Treaty). These legal commitments facilitated the establishment of new institutional mechanisms contributing to the promotion of women at European level.

After the Beijing World Conference on Women, the European Commission also started implementing a **double strategy /dual approach to gender equality**, combining specific actions and gender mainstreaming.

Apart from the political influence of the EU and the existence of specific European institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men, the European Union also imposes legal obligations to the Member States in this area. Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities of men and women in matters of employment (Recast Directive) notably includes the obligation for Member States to create bodies for the promotion of equal treatment:

*“1. Member States shall designate and make the necessary arrangements for a body or bodies for the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of all persons without discrimination on the grounds of sex. These bodies may form part of agencies with responsibility at national level for the defense of human rights or the safeguard of individuals' rights.*

*2. Member States shall ensure that the competences of these bodies include:*

*(a) without prejudice to the right of victims and of associations, organisations or other legal entities (...), providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination in pursuing their complaints about discrimination;*

*(b) conducting independent surveys concerning discrimination;*

*(c) publishing independent reports and making recommendations on any issue relating to such discrimination.”*

In relation to political commitments, the European Commission launched in March 2006 a **Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010** with the goal of accelerating progress toward gender equality. Part II of this Roadmap concerns improving governance and includes commitments in relation to institutional mechanisms and monitoring, such as, the creation of a European Gender Institute, the creation of the network of national gender equality bodies and supporting gender budgeting and gender impact assessment.

## **Section 2: Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men at International and European level and in EU Member States**

### **2.1. United Nations entities specializing in issues of equality between women and men**

#### **OSAGI - Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women**

The Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women is headed by the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women. This Office was created on 1 March 1997. The Office's main objective is to promote and strengthen the effective implementation of the Millennium Declaration, the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome Document of the special session of the General Assembly on Beijing+5.

#### **DAW - United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women**

The Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) was first established in 1946, it advocates the improvement of the status of women of the world, and the achievement of their equality with men. It aims:

- To promote, support and monitor the implementation of international agreements on gender equality and empowerment of women, including the Beijing Platform for Action, at international and national levels;
- To support the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol;
- To promote the mainstreaming of gender perspectives across all sectors, both within and outside the United Nations system.

#### **UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women**

UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to programmes and strategies to promote women's rights and gender equality.

#### **INSTRAW - United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women**

Created in 1983, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW) carries out research and training activities on different topics linked to equality between women and men at the national, regional and international levels.

### **2.2. United Nations: the proposed strengthening of the Gender Equality Architecture**

At the level of the United Nations, two important debates are taking place regarding institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

The first debate concerns the call by NGOs and some governments for the appointment by the United Nations of a **Special Rapporteur on laws that discriminate against women**.

Resolutions have been passed in 2005 and 2006 to consider the appointment of such as Rapporteur but as of March 2008 and despite a growing mobilisation of women's organisations, in particular during the 2007 UN Commission on the Status of Women (and support from some UN Member States), no formal decision had been taken on this and many countries are quite reluctant towards this issue.

On a broader level in relation to the reform of the United Nations, the High-Level Panel report 'Delivering as One' (November 2006) concerning the United Nations System-wide Coherence made recommendations for a **strengthened Gender Equality Architecture (GEA) within the UN**, which women's organisations worldwide have fully supported.

The recommendations offer a good proposal for restructuring and strengthening gender mainstreaming and gender equality: A campaign called GEAR (standing for Gender Equality Architecture Reform) was launched by NGOs to support such a strengthening. The key messages of this campaign relayed by a European working group of which the EWL is a member are the following:

- An **Under-Secretary-General should head the UN entity** for women, to ensure the necessary status required for representation and decision-making at the highest levels in policy-development and programme operations at the global and country levels. The new Under-Secretary-General post would provide higher level leadership to more effectively drive the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda.
- **Extensive field presence** and a strong policy and programmatic mandate are essential for a strengthened UN entity for women to effectively improve the lives of women on the ground.
- **Substantial and predictable resources** to ensure that the new entity for women has the capacity to meet expectations and deliver results at all levels. It must be funded initially at a minimum level of \$1 billion USD with increases over time.
- **Accountability** within the new entity for women, at both national and international levels, including through meaningful **involvement of civil society**, in particular non-governmental organizations for women.
- The new entity should also promote **gender mainstreaming** by the integration of gender equality and women's human rights throughout the UN and especially in the UN Country Pilots and in all UN reform processes.

Strengthening the UN's gender equality machinery is a crucial part of financing for development. It will better enable the UN and governments to deliver on promises made to advance gender equality and women's human rights, which are essential components of development at the global and country levels.

**Further lobbying is therefore needed on the part of women's organisations, for more information and to join the GEAR campaign,** please visit: <http://www.wedo.org/campaigns.aspx?mode=beijingbeyondemail> or email: [gearcampaign@gmail.com](mailto:gearcampaign@gmail.com)

### **2.3. Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men at European level**

At European level, each of the three main institutions has some form of institutional mechanism for the promotion of equality between women and men. However, while it would be better to have institutions dealing only with equality between women and men, both in the Council of Ministers and in the European Commission, equality between women and men falls within the competence of a body in charge of social affairs in general.

### **The European Parliament**

The European Parliament's **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality** can act through its own initiative in producing reports and through its legislative role for the adoption of legislation in the area of gender equality. However, the Committee on Women's Rights' existence is regularly called into question

In 2004, an internal **High Level Group on Gender Equality** was created within the European Parliament, in order "to ensure that the European Parliament takes into account the issues of gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities in all the policy areas which are debated in its committees".

### **The Council of Ministers**

Within the EU Council of Ministers, the **Council of Ministers of Social Affairs** is responsible for matters related to equality between women and men. There is no specific Council of Ministers for equality between women and men, despite its high status in European law and despite repeated demands from women's organisations. However, most EU presidencies have organised informal ministerial meetings on equality between women and men.

### **The European Commission**

Within the European Commission, gender equality policies are mainly the responsibility of the Commissioner and **Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**.

The Commission set up a **Group of Commissioners on Equal Opportunities** in 1996. The Group was initially dealing specifically with gender equality but since 2005, it is called Group of Commissioners on Fundamental Rights, Non-Discrimination and Equal Opportunities and its remit comprises anti discrimination and equal opportunities in general.

The **Inter-service Group on Gender Mainstreaming** was set up in 1996 as a support mechanism and to improve interdepartmental cooperation within the Commission in relation to gender quality and gender mainstreaming. However, the work of this Group is not made public nor does it include any input from civil society.

The **Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** is composed of representatives from national state administrations and of social partners and of the European Women's Lobby as observer. Its remit is to help the Commission formulate and implement Community measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities for women and men and to encourage the continuous exchange of information between its members.

The **Unit Equality between Women and Men**, located in the European Commission Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs is in charge of implementing European gender equality policies and strategies. The **Unit Equality, Action against Discrimination: Legal Questions** deals among other things, with European gender equality legislation (monitoring, implementation etc).

In 2006 a **permanent network for cooperation between the established national gender equality bodies and the European Commission** was established. The purpose of the network is to promote a uniform implementation of Community law in the field of equal treatment of women and men, but little information about the work of this network has been made available.

A **European Network of Equality Bodies called Equinet**, which has a permanent secretariat in Brussels, was also established. The role of Equinet is to develop co-operation and facilitate information exchange between Equality Bodies across Europe to support the uniform implementation of EU anti-discrimination law (but not gender equality legislation) and the levelling-up of legal protection for victims of discrimination.

The creation of a **European Institute for Gender Equality** was also decided in 2006. The Board of the institute was nominated in 2007 and it was decided that the Institute would be based in Vilnius (Lithuania). However, the work of the Institute is not foreseen to start before the end of 2008. The Institute shall provide help in terms of expertise, to improve knowledge and raise visibility of equality between men and women. The Institute shall contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all Community policies and the resulting national policies, and to the fight against discrimination based on sex, and to raise public awareness in relation to gender equality.

Over the years, the EWL has been making **recommendations in relation to strengthening institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women at European level**, including:

- Strengthen the mandate as well as human and financial resources of the existing Unit on equality between women and men currently placed within the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate and transform it into a **Directorate on Equality between women and men**, which could be placed within the European Commission Secretariat General to give it the ability to influence policy and properly monitor the implementation of legislation.
- Strengthen and resource adequately the existing **Commission Inter-Service Group on Gender Mainstreaming** and make its work more visible inside and outside the Commission.
- At least one of the meetings of the **Commissioners' Group on Equal Opportunities** per year should be devoted to equality between women and men only
- A **chapter on gender mainstreaming activities in each Commission Directorate General** should be included in the Commission's Annual Report on Gender Equality.
- Carry out a separate **gender impact assessment of the EU budget each year**, and introduce a **budget heading for activities on gender equality in the budget of each Commission unit**.
- Create a **women's information service** within the Commission to deal with awareness raising activities and public information, and **develop the EC web site on gender equality** on the model of the EC anti-discrimination website<sup>4</sup>, in all official languages.

#### **2.4. Institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men in EU Member States**

The nature, status, scope and resourcing of institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men greatly vary among Member States. For an overview of the institutional mechanisms in each country, please see separate Annex.

All EU countries have some civil servants responsible for equality between women and men. The majority of national machineries for equality between women and men take the form of departments, divisions, services, commissions, working groups, under a specific ministry or state secretariat. In a minority of EU Member States there are ministries, ministers, deputy ministers or state secretaries with equality between women and men as specific portfolio. However, the

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<sup>4</sup> See: [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/fundamental\\_rights/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/index_en.htm).

ministries usually have other responsibilities, such as social affairs or health and family, or less common Justice or Internal Affairs.

Another form of national machinery for equality between women and men is that of specific **institutes or centres**, under government supervision but with a certain degree of independence.

#### Presence of different types of institutional mechanisms in EU countries<sup>5</sup>

National Machinery	% EU-25
Ministers or state secretaries charged with equality between women and men or combined ministries including equality between women and men	44%
Specific gender equality ministries	12%
Operational gender focal points at all administration level	16%
Independent gender equality centres	32%

A noticeable recent development is the establishment or strengthening of **inter-ministerial or inter-departmental structures** that exists in most of the Member States. There has also been an increase in the number of **units, working groups, coordinators or gender focal points in the different departments**. While such structures have existed for quite a long time in some departments, typically that of employment, they are now often present in “new” departments, like foreign affairs. Another structure, typical for the Nordic countries but now also widespread in Eastern European countries, is that of an **Ombudsman** that deals with discrimination complaints, sometimes with gender equality specifically or equality matters. In some Member States, there are **Commissions specialized on a particular theme**. This is for instance the case for employment (case of) or domestic violence.

Other institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men include **observatories or monitoring centres** that evaluate progress in different policy areas, or **policy-oriented research and consulting centres** that deals with statistics, databases, information, reporting and supporting implementation of gender mainstreaming and that are neither attached to government offices or under government supervision. Independent bodies for the promotion of equal treatment have been set up in order to comply with European law.

Additional tools, like **gender impact assessment and gender budgeting** have been introduced by some member states, but not by all. The countries that use gender impact assessment have developed their specific methodology and used it on different levels of government. There is no common methodology in all the member states.

At the level of **parliaments**, some countries have specific parliamentary committees dealing with women’s rights, but in the majority of cases, those issues are dealt with by committees dealing with other topics as well (equal opportunities in general, family, social affairs etc).

#### Parliamentary committees dealing with women’s rights in Europe<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Source: Beijing +10 Report from the Luxembourg Presidency, 2005.

Country <sup>7</sup>	Chamber	Committee identified by parliaments as working with gender issues
<b>European Parliament</b>		Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
<b>Austria</b>	Lower	Committee on Equal Rights
<b>Belgium</b>	Lower	Advisory Committee on Social Emancipation
	Upper	Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Lower	Committee for Gender Equality
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Single	Committee on Human Rights and Religious Affairs
<b>Croatia</b>	Single	Committee on Gender Equality
<b>Cyprus</b>	Single	House Standing Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Lower	Permanent Commission for Family and Equal Opportunities
<b>Estonia</b>	Single	Constitutional Committee
	Single	Social Affairs Committee
<b>Finland</b>	Single	Employment and Equality Committee
<b>France</b>	lower	National Assembly Task Force on the Rights of Women and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women
	Upper	Senate Task Force on the Rights of Women and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women
<b>Germany</b>	Upper	Committee on Women and Youth
<b>Greece</b>	Single	Committee on Equality and Human Rights
<b>Hungary</b>	Single	Sub-Committee on Gender Equality of the Committee on Human Rights, Minorities, Civil and Religious Affairs
<b>Iceland</b>	Single	Standing Committee on Social Affairs
<b>Ireland</b>	Joint	Joint Committee on Justice, Equality, Defence and Women's Rights
	Upper	Deputies' Group "Obatsy - Family"
<b>Latvia</b>	Single	Sub-Committee on Gender Equality (under the Human Rights and Public Affairs Committee)
<b>Lithuania</b>	Single	Committee on Human Rights
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Single	Committee on Families, Equal Opportunities and Youth
<b>Malta</b>	Single	Standing Committee on Social Affairs
<b>Montenegro</b>	Single	Committee for Gender Equality
<b>Norway</b>	Single	Standing Committee on Family and Cultural Affairs
<b>Poland</b>	Lower	Committee on Family and Women's Rights
	Upper	Committee on Family and Social Policy
<b>Portugal</b>	Single	Sub-committee on Equal Opportunities of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Rights, Liberties and Guaranties
<b>Rep. Of Moldova</b>	Single	Committee on Human Rights
<b>Romania</b>	Lower	Committee for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women
	Upper	Committee for Equal Opportunities
<b>Slovakia</b>	Single	Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women
<b>Slovenia</b>	Single	Committee on Labour, Family, Social Affairs and the Disabled

<sup>6</sup> Source : Interparliamentary Union, more information about the precise mandates of the committees: <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/Instancelist.asp>

<sup>7</sup> The information was not provided by parliaments for some of the countries and is therefore missing in the chart.

	Single	Committee for Petitions, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities
<b>Spain</b>	Lower	Joint Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities
<b>Sweden</b>	Single	Committee on the Labour Market
<b>The FYR Macedonia</b>	Single	Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
	Upper	Committee on Social Issues, Health, Science, Education and Youth and Women's Policy

### Section 3: Assessing the efficiency of a country's institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

Institutional mechanisms/national machineries are essential instruments that governments must establish or reinforce to pursue their obligation to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of sex and to achieve equality between women and men. There are no ideal, fixed models valid for every country, as economic, social, cultural and political realities differ from country to country and institutional mechanisms, to be effective and sustainable, must fit into the national context and be sensitive to these realities.

However, there are some basic requirements for the creation, reinforcement, implementation and effective functioning of the commitments of countries with regard to the achievement of gender equality.

Such elements have been defined by a Recommendation<sup>8</sup> on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in November 2007, they include:

- i. full implementation of the objectives and actions contained in the **Beijing Platform for Action**, in particular Section 8 on institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- ii. that gender equality mechanisms be at the **highest political level**; more specifically, that the national co-ordinating unit be at the highest level of government, under the direct responsibility of the president, prime minister or cabinet minister, and that units or focal points be set up within ministries or other government departments or within regional and local power structures, at the highest level of those departments and structures;
- iii. that institutional mechanisms have the **necessary authority, visibility, political recognition, necessary funding and human resources**, and that their action is fully supported by political power at the different levels of its exercise;
- iv. that the overall structure of gender equality machinery includes an **interdepartmental/inter-ministerial structure** with high level representatives with decision-making powers from all relevant policy areas in order to ensure the effective functioning of the process of **gender mainstreaming**;

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<sup>8</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Council Of Europe Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms, available under: <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1215219&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

- v. that the **mandate of institutional mechanisms has a clear legal basis with well-defined functions and responsibilities**; and that these necessarily include the **dual-track approach** to gender equality work: 1. specific policies and actions, including positive action when appropriate, for the advancement of women and gender equality; 2. promotion, monitoring, co-ordination and evaluation of the process of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes;
- vi. that institutional mechanisms develop **gender expertise both within themselves and as capacity builders** for gender equality at different levels of government and administration and for that purpose develop **methods, instruments and tools** for gender analysis/gender impact assessment and gender budgeting, as well as training on gender equality and the use of these methods, instruments and tools;
- vii. that **resources for the core operational costs** of institutional mechanisms – staff, facilities, regular functioning of the institution – are the **sole responsibility of the state**, even if funding for specific actions and projects can also be found from various sources;
- viii. that institutional mechanisms **establish formal and informal links of co-operation** with other public institutions and administrations in general;
- ix. that institutional mechanisms establish formal and informal links of co-operation with a wide range of **civil society organisations, namely women’s and human rights NGOs**, the media, the research and academic community, social partners and other relevant social actors, as well as with international and European organisations pursuing gender equality objectives;
- x. that mechanisms for gender equality are established at **parliamentary level**, as well as independent agencies and other bodies, such as ombudspersons that may receive complaints for discrimination on the basis of sex.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the situation shows that national machineries have been set up or strengthened in most European countries and recognised as the institutional base for promoting equality between women and men. In many countries, these **machineries have achieved greater visibility, status, outreach and coordination of activities**. Gender mainstreaming, the goal of which is to include a gender perspective in all laws, policies, programmes and projects, has become a widely accepted strategy, even if its implementation stays problematic.

However, **some obstacles remain**, such as, inadequate financial and human resources combined with a lack of political will and commitment in some countries. The insufficient understanding of gender equality and gender mainstreaming among government structures, lack of training as well as continuing gender stereotyping and discrimination are also important obstacles to the efficiency of gender equality policies. In addition to that, some national machineries have **unclear mandates or are marginalized within the government**. Their activities have been hindered by structural and communications problems within and among government agencies. The **lack of data disaggregated** by sex and age in many areas and of methods for assessing progress as well as lack of authority of national machineries and insufficient links to civil society impedes the progress towards equality between women and men.

In general, there is a **lack of knowledge about existing machineries** dealing with women’s rights and gender equality, as well as, in some cases, a **lack of visibility of their work**. This

shows the need for more **publicity for their work**, but also for more **monitoring and evaluation**.

Finally, it must be noted that there are **wide gaps in the implementation of gender mainstreaming** through lack of a coherent strategy, reliable methodology, financial resources and a clearly stated political will and commitment. The use of gender mainstreaming as an alibi for inaction or worse for eradicating of positive action calls for attention and monitoring.

**Gender mainstreaming is not a goal in itself, but it is one of the strategies besides specific institutional mechanisms, programmes, policies and positive actions to be used to achieve the goal to transform society in support of women's rights.**

#### **What women's organisations can do:**

- Lobby governments in relation to the strengthening of the United Nations' Gender Equality Architecture (see contacts in the relevant section of this paper)
- Use the check list above to evaluate the efficiency of the institutional mechanisms for gender equality in your country
- Adapt/ translate/ send the model lobbying letter and questionnaire hereunder to your government

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#### **Model lobbying letter on institutional mechanisms, which can be adapted to the national situation, translated and sent to the relevant minister or other bodies**

[*place*], [*date*] 2008

[*name, surname of Minister*]  
Minister for [*area*]  
[*Address*]

Dear [*Minister*],

#### **Re: National institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

Institutional mechanisms are essential tools for the promotion of equality between women and men. Equality between women and men is an objective of the European Union and numerous commitments have been made by European countries in this area, including through the signing of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995). Besides, in November 2007, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (CoE) has adopted a Recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms<sup>9</sup>. I am therefore writing to you to urge you to implement this Recommendation at the national level in the shortest possible time and to ask you to provide me with information about the national mechanisms in place.

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<sup>9</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 available under:  
<https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1215219&Site=CM&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=FFB55&BackColorLogged=FFAC75>

The Recommendation includes a set of principles and standards aiming at ensuring gender equality at all levels of society, as an indispensable requirement for securing human rights, social justice and democracy. In addition, the Recommendation sets up requirements, including in relation to effective institutional mechanisms for gender equality. The enclosed questionnaire is a check list of those requirements and I would be most grateful if you could please give answers to those questions.

The Recommendation also highlights the need to establish partnerships with civil society actors, including women’s organisations, which play an important role in promoting equality between women and men.

Achieving equality between women and men in Europe requires wide action at all levels, out of which civil society is only one. Therefore, *[name of organisation]* calls upon the government of *[country]* to adhere to the principles and guidelines included in the CoE Recommendation, and to put them into reality.

Sincerely yours,  
*[name of signatory]*

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**Questionnaire on the requirements needed for effective institutional mechanisms for the realisation of equality between women and men**

This questionnaire is based on the requirements highlighted in Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms.

1. Ideally, gender equality mechanisms should be located at the <b>highest political level</b> (under the direct responsibility of the president, prime minister or cabinet minister), is it the case?	
2. Are <b>focal points</b> set up within ministries or other government departments or within regional and local power structures, at the highest level of those departments and structures? If yes, which ones?	
3. What are the <b>resources</b> (human and financial) of the different existing national mechanisms at all levels?	
4. Are the <b>resources for the core operational costs</b> of institutional mechanisms the <b>sole responsibility of the state</b> ?	
5. What action is undertaken to ensure the <b>visibility</b> of the mechanisms in place?	
6. What <b>interdepartmental/inter-ministerial structure</b> with high level representatives is in place, in order to ensure the effective functioning of the process of <b>gender mainstreaming</b> ?	
7. How is the <b>mandate of institutional mechanisms</b>	

defined?	
8. Is a <b>dual-track approach</b> to gender equality including specific policies and actions and gender mainstreaming properly implemented?	
9. Do institutional mechanisms play a role of <b>capacity builders</b> for gender equality at different levels and have they developed <b>methods, instruments and tools</b> for gender mainstreaming, gender impact assessment, gender budgeting and training? Which ones?	
10. What are the formal and informal links of co-operation established with <b>civil society organisations, namely women's and human rights NGOs</b> , the media, the research and academic community, social partners and other relevant social actors?	
11. What mechanisms for gender equality are established at <b>parliamentary level</b> , as independent agencies or other bodies, such as ombudspersons that may receive complaints for discrimination on the basis of sex?	