EGGE – EC’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment

Assessment of the National Action Plan for Employment 2002 from a Gender Perspective

France

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Introductory Note

1/ Have the gender equality bodies been involved in the NAP's preparation and how?
There is no reference in the introduction to the French 2002 NAP concerning the working method used. However, I know that each year, the Women’s Rights Service participates in various meetings, that draw up and assess the NAP and it can be considered one of the active actors, making suggestions for discussion. Overall, many agreements now exist between the Women’s Rights Service and most Ministries – this procedure was developed during 2001-2002.

A. National employment policy in context

1/ Assessment of how far this chapter addressed the specific gender gaps and gender developments in the national economic and employment context

This section of the French NAP is only 2 pages long (out of a total of more than 100 pages). It emphasis that, after an annual growth rate of +3% and a significant reduction in unemployment, the French economy has suffered from economic slowdown related globally to the “American economy’s landing”. But, unlike some neighbours, France limited the extent of the slowdown, thanks to an active employment policy (260,000 more jobs created in 2001, as a result of the reduction in working hours, reduced employers’ contributions and “new services – youth employment” measures). In this section, there is little on the place of women in the labour market (unemployment or employment), except for mentioning that “the unemployment rate is stable at 9% of the economically active population (7.6% of men and 10.8% of women)”. A little later, mention is made of the fact that “the number of category 1 women job-seekers (the masculine noun is used) continues to fall (-1.6%)”. It is true that the situation of young and older people is much more problematic, but, nevertheless, this introduction could have highlighted the continuing gender gap in unemployment rates (3.2 points).

B. National action to raise employment rates and improve quality at work

1/ Is the gender dimension taken into consideration

• in the analysis of the national strengths and weaknesses in terms of raising employment and identification of the main challenges between now and 2010? How?
This section is very short and also does not make special mention of women’s employment rates. Only the issue of increased employment rates of the oldest and youngest are really referred to. The only reference to gender is an indirect one: it is recalled that, in the end, only lasting improvement of the labour market will encourage young people to enter the labour market earlier and older people to remain longer and “will have beneficial effects on the economic activity of women of intermediate age (especially those over the age of 45, because of generation effects)”. This economic approach seems very liberal and relates to an absence of direct intervention by public authorities on behaviour in the area of economic activity…

• in the initiatives undertaken to improve quality at work? How?
No measure aimed at improving quality at work is proposed and even less so with a gendered dimension.
2/ Does the NAP set national medium-term targets in terms of employment rates overall and for women?

Targets set by the Stockholm Summit are 57% for women’s employment rate in 2005 and 60% by 2010. In France, women’s employment rate – including both full-time and part-time work – is still below this target, because in 2001 it was 55.2% (according to national data in the INSEE Employment Survey). Women’s employment rate continues to increase (+1.1 point compared with 2000). If this rate of growth continues at about one point per annum, France should come close to European targets in that the gap with the 2005 target is now only 1.8%. But, of course, that implies that current efforts are maintained, or even reinforced. But the new NAP seems sceptical about this target and emphasises, rightly, that data in terms of full-time equivalents would be more comparable within Europe.

C. Response to recommendations

1/ Does the NAP respond to the gender equality recommendations?

Once again, recommendations for France in 2002 do not include any reference to gender equality. It is, therefore, logical that no reference to gender equality appears in responses to recommendations. Nevertheless, we can observe that some measures promoted in the French NAP include risks of discrimination against women or could be observed in this way, given that the absence of recommendations in this field does not mean that all problems have been resolved regarding unemployment, pay, occupational segregation, etc. – on the contrary. Thus, as far as recommendation Nº 2 is concerned (following up efforts to encourage low skilled and low paid workers to look for and keep a job): at no point, is the gender of such workers referred to. But, it is well known that a significant proportion of low paid workers are women, notably in part-time work, for whom “poverty or unemployment traps” play an increasingly big role. This merits special attention and specific assessment. Likewise, we emphasised in our previous report that the “employment bonus” could be a disincentive for dual earning households, where the women works part-time. But such a case is never envisaged (assessment concerns a single person on RMI and a couple with children, neither of whom work…).

D. Progress Report

1/ Analysis of gender mainstreaming in terms of

a) mechanisms

The participation of social partners in drawing up the 2002 NAP was reinforced in a more formalised way than in previous years: there were 6 discussion and arbitration meetings with the 5 representative national trade union confederations (CGT, CFDT, FO, CFE-CGC and CFTC) and the various employers organisations (MEDEF, UPA, CGPME…). This is worthy of emphasis, especially as two themes were chosen by the social partners: securing occupational careers and feminisation of employees. It should be emphasised that the feminisation of the employees is an economic asset (economic development, emphasis put on the quality of employment and working and living conditions, notably professionalisation of service jobs and reconciling social times). However, the contribution of social partners notes that inequality persists for women, notably in the area of pay policy and access to responsibility. This is the reason for the types of action chosen: “Desectorisation and feminisation of employment; reconciling social times and policies regarding different kinds of time; requalification of service jobs and reducing pay inequality; development of corporate organisation and women’s occupational capacities”.

b) Policies: gender mainstreaming in the three first pillars:
- **Pillar I:** concerning *SPNDE* (“Service for a new departure towards employment”), which aims at ensuring personalised follow-up of all the unemployed (after 6 months’ unemployment for young people and a year for adults); **the share of women is very significant of their presence in unemployment and even beyond – their share increased from 56% in 2000 to 58% in 2001.** The same goes for *PAP* (“Personalised action project”), which implies developing a preventive approach for all the unemployed – the share of women is fairly high: 54.3% and proportional to their share amongst the unemployed. 52,000 young people approached the *TRACE* programme for young people in great difficulty – 52% of them were young women.

However, amongst incentive measures for returning to work (employment bonus; maintenance of minimum benefits during the first 6 months of pay from economic activity, instead of 3, as previously; reduced residence tax rates, etc.), no reference is made to gender, on the contrary: as we remarked previously, these policies are based on the family (still defined traditionally, with only one economically active member) and not on individualised rights; but we know that real equality implies real analysis of the principle of individualising all benefits, otherwise the most fragile employees within households are be penalised, i.e., women, in most cases.

As for training job seekers, efforts have been made concerning apprenticeships. Paradoxically, tertiarisation of apprenticeships has not led to a feminisation of such contracts – women still only represent 30% of apprentices. No measure regarding feminising apprenticeships is proposed.

As for general and life-long education and training, notably in the field of new technology, there is no direct reference to gender. However, the proportion of women doing vocational training remains very low (only 23%). Many efforts should be noted, such as the creation of *VAE* (validation of experience), which makes it possible for those without diplomas to obtain recognition via their occupational or extra-occupational experience. Indirectly, *VAE* could enable many women, who wish to go back to work, to promote and put to advantage experience, which they have had in the domestic sphere and which has never before been recognised in the labour market. This debate is not at all dealt with here (statistics on *VAE* beneficiaries are not gendered). But it should be noted that in pillar IV, reference is made to two agreements in plastics processing and trade, with a view to facilitating women’s access to *VAE*. Moreover, as far as recruitment is concerned, problems related to the lack of nurses (the masculine noun is used) and “home helps” (with the introduction of “personalised autonomy benefit”, which is likely to concern between 500,000 and 800,000 people) is emphasised. The desire to render such occupations more attractive (regarding pay and working conditions, etc.) is emphasised, but there is no reference to the issue of the presence of both women and men in these jobs, which is, however, necessary, as the large majority of women are victims of this low level of occupational recognition.

Finally, the fight against discrimination is reinforced, notably regarding immigration and the disabled, but here again, it seems that the issue of gender discrimination has become secondary or totally disappeared? In any case, no reference to this dimension appears here.

- **Pillar II:** there is no reference to gender in the 2002 NAP regarding start-up aid, including in statistical data. In previous NAPs, reference was made to the relatively small proportion of women, who start new businesses, and the desire to increase help for them, but there is nothing in the 2002 NAP.

The “New services – youth employment” programme achieved planned targets – 350,000 people have been recruited since 1998. The proportion of women is favourable (56.9%) and increasing, but no analysis is proposed, notably regarding the risk of reinforcing occupational
segregation (women remain very much the majority of those working in services to individuals…).

- **Pillar III**: Although, in previous NAPs, the introduction of the Aubry law showed a desire to integrate equality in agreements and reconcile family and working life better, there is also no reference to gender in this pillar – thus, information is given about the fact that there is a commitment to create about 340,000 jobs and keep 67,000 jobs linked to the introduction of the 35 hour week, but there is no data on the proportion of women.

2/ Analysis per guideline of Pillar IV

- **Guideline 16**: Amongst measures announced in 2001, two aspects are emphasised – firstly, training and raising awareness of equality actors have continued with the introduction of training units on raising awareness of public agents, the creation of a Parity mission in science and technology in the Ministry of Research and the creation of a network of equality correspondents in the Ministry of Agriculture. Moreover, visibility of statistics has also continued (publication of 2 studies: “Regards sur la parité” and “L’égalité en marche, chiffres clés 2001”). New measures include:
  - A plan of action for increasing mobilisation of actors – it involves creating a steering committee for developing training; drawing up an inventory of existing training; putting information online in the Women’s Rights Service’s website; developing a reference framework for trainers.
  - Monitoring quantitative targets – following on from decisions that have been made since the 1999 NAP, the proportion of women in employment measures will be made more visible and will be monitored more closely, notably regarding TRACE and PAP (new departure). The target of at least 55% of women beneficiaries will be adjusted for measures concerning long-term unemployed youth (c.f. below).

Moreover, social partners recalled the central role played by the Higher Council on Occupational Equality in the search for real partnership between the social partners and the State.

- **Guideline 17**: It is recalled that women represent 45.8% of the economically active, but 55.4% of all the unemployed (49.1% of category 1, namely the unemployed, who are seeking a “normal” job). According to the NAP, the gender gap between unemployment rates continues to become smaller (but is still 3.2 points). Women’s qualified employment continues to increase (35% of executives and professionals are women), but they remain globally concentrated in a small number of jobs (61% of women are in 6 occupations); finally, the overall pay gap is still 25% (12% to 15%, ceteris paribus).

- In terms of the 2001 appraisal, one can note: efforts in the field of initial training, in order to reinforce equality and the presence of both women and men in different fields; there have been special efforts in the agricultural sector – facilitating women’s access to training and employment in rural areas, launching a programme called “Women, education and rural employment: integrating equality” (life-long training, women’s employment, participation of women in local development, network of equality correspondents).

**In the field of occupational equality**, the 9 May 2001 law, turns equality into a compulsory subject for collective bargaining (with tools made available for social partners); introduces a mechanism for promoting women in workplace elections; lifts the ban on night work for women in industry, by offering guarantees for everyone (and notably the possibility of transferring to the day shift, if employees have family problems). Moreover, AFPA (responsible for adult training) has fixed a target of a 12% increase in the proportion of women in computer training and hotel and catering training in the framework of its equality plan. Moreover, an agreement between the Women’s Rights Service and ANACT (responsible
for improving working conditions) envisages methodological support for companies concerning equality and organising time. Two agreements (in plastics processing and trade) on facilitating women’s access to validating their experience have been made.

In the **field of integration in employment**: agreements have been signed on towns (women and girls in sensitive districts); the problem of immigrant women; women’s access to starting new businesses (a point that is not referred to in Pillar II)…

- **New measures in 2002**: in the **field of initial training** - perpetuation of the inter-ministerial agreement on equal access of girls and women and its extension to the Ministries of culture, transport, equipment and justice; creation of an equality inspector in each local education authority, reinforcement of curricula on equality, drawing up of an equality charter for companies in the field of vocational training; intervention of women researchers in schools…

In the **field of occupational equality** - a working group of the Higher Council on Equality has been given the job of drawing up a quantified target for reducing the pay gap between men and women. **AFPA** has launched a campaign called “Discover new occupations, which you have not thought about”. The target of 55% of women received in support services is envisaged, as is the increase from 13% to 18.5% of the proportion of women in training, that leads to qualifications in targeted sectors. A new agreement with the Building Federation concerns women’s access to this sector. Finally, the January 2002 law on social modernisation partly concerns sexual harassment – it removes the reference to a hierarchical relationship (a colleague can be responsible for harassment), reverses the responsibility of proof and removes the characteristics of sexual harassment, thus making a more supple interpretation possible. In the **field of occupational integration**, the aim is, thus, to reduce the above-average representation of women in long-term unemployment, with a quantified target: a 1 point drop in the male/female gap, in order to bring the gap between women and men’s long-term unemployment down to 3.5 points; experiments in the town of Orleans of lasting integration of girls and women (in partnership with the town, **AFPA**, a temporary work agency and the Women’s Rights Service); reflection on double discrimination (women immigrants) in partnership with **FAS** (social aid fund for immigrant workers) and the Population and Migration Department.

- **Guideline 18**: the 2001 appraisal reports on the state of development of childcare facilities for young children (228.67 million Euros investment aid, i.e., 30,000 to 40,000 more children in crèches, plus an agreement with **CNAF** (National family allowance agency), which will make it possible to care for 64,000 more children between 2001 and 2004). The amount of help with paying for a registered childminder has been increased, in order to make it easier for least advantaged families to have access to this system. **Département** level commissions on childcare for young children have been created, in order to promote the development and quality of all forms of childcare. There is an agreement with **CNAF** for better care for children between 3 and 16 years outside school hours (+ 10,000 children, i.e., 368 million Euros from 2001 to 2004).

**New measures in 2002**: an additional 228 Million Euros will be devoted to collective childcare. Crèches and drop-in childcare centres will be transformed into a single service, in order to render crèches’ opening hours more flexible, use available place more fully and create better links with nursery schools. The project on innovative forms of childcare will continue. An agreement between the State and the Paris region aims at helping women at the end of **APE** (parental childcare allowance) regarding their return to work. Tools and reflection will be developed, with a view to taking more account of life times and reconciling working and family life for everyone (lengthening of paid paternity leave from 3 to 14 days; reform of parental authority; help for companies regarding reconciling life times; project of a
“childhood cheque” (for paying for all kinds of childcare expenses, regardless of the type chosen)…

In all, the proportion of the 2002 ESF devoted to pillar IV is 37.25 million Euros, i.e., 5.1% of the overall budget (which is estimated at 724.97 million Euros). It represented 5.4% of the total in 2001, i.e., 38 million Euros out of a total of 706 million Euros, which is in fact a slight drop, when the amount itself is small.

E. Statistical Information

Statistical data concerning equality are identical to those for last year: unemployment rate gaps, degree of concentration of women’s employment, proportion of women in measures of employment aid, pay gaps, number of childcare places for the under 3s and the 3 to 6 year olds, women’s employment rates according to the number of children and new indicator on the quality of employment on “work organisation and balance between working and private life (flexible and atypical hours, by gender). Expected indicators for guideline 18 (cover of childcare and care for the elderly) are not provided; there is nothing on the elderly and one cannot deduce the proportion of children benefitting from childcare facilities, because only raw data are provided and there is no reference to overall numbers of children; moreover, there is nothing on children over 6 years old (outside school hours). However, some data do exist – I know that about 50% of children between 0 and 3 years are looked after by other people, besides parents…

F. Example of good practice

There is no example of good practice, except for consultations with social partners in a project called “COPARSOC”, aimed at pooling experience of social partners in drawing up NAPs in all European countries, by exchanging national experiences. The gender issue does not appear directly, except internally in the initial project. However, some information boxes in connection with equality have been provided by social partners – e.g., an RATP (Paris urban transport) agreement, which promotes women's employment and childcare for staff; an agreement in plastics processing on validating experience and promoting women, in particular, in the sector.

In conclusion, the 2002 NAP does not challenge the process, that has existed in France for several years now, in the field of gender equality. Given recent political changes, one could have feared the suppression of certain measures. However, it seems that the visibility of efforts and the desire to reduce all forms of inequality are not totally satisfactory – thus, few elements concerning gender exist throughout the NAP as a whole (especially in Pillars II and III). However, what seems to me to be the original nature of the French NAP is its working method in the Ministries and partnership regarding social dialogue – many agreements have been made and prolonged during this period between the Women’s Rights Service and agriculture, education, research… Although often in France difficulties regarding social dialogue are emphasised, it seems that in the field of equality and through European strategy, a certain degree of consensus appears, notably regarding the Higher Council on Equality. We can suppose that these efforts will, sooner or later, be reflected in a real reduction of persistent inequality, of which little mention is made in the 2002 NAP (especially pay inequality and occupational segregation).