EGGE – EC’s Expert Group on Gender and Employment

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

Portugal

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PORTUGAL: ASSESSMENT OF THE 2002 NAP FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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June 2002

Introductory Note

Previously to the analysis it is necessary to stress that political changes have recently occurred in Portugal with eventual effects on the employment policy and namely on its higher or lower sensitiveness to some issues namely the gender dimension of that policy. A new political majority resulted from the election process of last March and a new Government has been empowered last April. It's by now too early to make a balance of the existing differences. Still it is deserve noting that an “Explanatory Note” included on the report refers that the document “although it has been reviewed according to the new government program does not yet contemplate some measures that are currently under preparation and that will imply strategic changes occurred in the national policies. The main changes will take place in the guidelines of pillars II and III”. It’s also stated that the changes to be introduced “will have, particularly, implications at the level of job creation in services”. So pillar IV is not mentioned as being the aim of relevant planned changes. Still, the reference to “job creation in the service sector” as the main outcome of the changes to be incorporated will, obviously, generate relevant effects from a gender perspective.

Also it is worth noting that the recent political changes led to a new organisation of the Government in which there is no specific structure (Ministry or State Secretary) handling the issue of Equal Opportunities. The issue of Equal Opportunities is explicitly included on the Government Program and its main agent regarding labour market issues is CITE (Commission for Equality on Labour and Employment) which already existed and that works under the direct supervision of the Presidency of the Government and of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

Referring now more precisely to the preparation of the NAP2002 (as in previous years and as will continue to be the case) CITE has been the institution working on the field of Equal Opportunities that has been involved on the preparation of the Plan being the main provider of imputes on this specific area.

A. National employment policy in context

The Portuguese NAP2002 is divided in two parts. The first one, under the general title “General Framework”, tries to characterise the context to which the Plan refers trying to stress the main characteristics of the Portuguese labour market and of the Portuguese economy that are relevant to the understanding of the proposed measures. In the sections where the Portuguese labour market is characterised the gender dimension is included in a way that allows a clear characterisation of its gendered dimension. There is a general but quite clear presentation of the main indicators that show the relevance of the gender discrepancies, the relevant differences that the Portuguese labour markets shows when compared to the EU average, and the recent
dynamics of the more relevant variables stressing the ones that point out to a positive evolution and those that evidence a negative evolution.

In general terms the main aspects that have been stressed are:

- The fact that Portugal has already reached the quantified targets set in the EU for 2005 concerning the employment rates and being quite close of the targets fixed for 2010 (as to these targets the female employment rate is already higher than 60% and the total value attained in 2001, 69.1%, is quite close to the 70% target);

- Activity and employment growth have been stronger in the group of women than in the group of men despite the prevalence of a relevant activity and employment gender gap. Some particular aspects are stressed in the activity and employment dynamics of the youngest showing relevant differences in gender terms;

- Relevant information is included concerning the gender gaps visible in different age and qualification groups; relevant information is also included related to the dynamics of some particular types of employment, namely part-time and self-employment, and their diversity as regards gender;

- The persistence of a gender gap in the unemployment rate disfavouring women; particularities in gender terms are also included on the analysis of youth and elderly unemployment rates, long term unemployment rate and incidence of unemployment in differently qualified groups;

- Differences on education incidence in the Portuguese population according to gender are also stressed. The higher involvement of women in education and the evidence of a relevant generational effect in the prevailing educational structure are stressed; particularities on the qualification structure of jobs occupied by men and women are also reported.

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

1. Integrating the gender dimension in the analysis of the national strengths and weaknesses of the Portuguese labour market

On the line of the previously referred characteristics and under the global title “Main features of the employment system” (Part I, item 4) the Portuguese NAP2002 explicitly refers to the “globally positive behaviour” of the Portuguese labour market, namely in terms of the EU standards. Still “important structural weakness in the employment system still persist” namely concerning the “existence of groups with particular special insertion problems in the labour market” including “women that have less favourable activity, employment and unemployment rates than men and that are more concentrated in low wage jobs face significant pay gaps and are more represented in LRU” (Part II, Horizontal Objective A). So gender issues are explicitly considered as one of the main structural problems of the Portuguese labour market.

Still, and taking into account the fact that the Stockholm targets concerning the employment rates are already reached and the fact that the Lisbon targets for the same indicator are almost reached, the main targets included in the NAP are “to maintain, in a sustained way, the level of the global and female employment rate by strengthening
the growth of qualified employment in the services”. The recognition of relevant vulnerability elements referring to the quality of employment in Portugal, namely in terms of workers’ qualifications, wages, occupational health and safety and work conditions justifies the implementation of measures aiming at promoting quality and relying essentially on the promotion of training actions (in schools, in vocational training centres and in firms), the promotion of actions aimed at preventing risks and accidents at work and the reinforcement of legal and regulation framework and of the inspection actions.

Under the Horizontal Objective B that is the one that explicitly deals with the topic of “improving quality in work” there is an explicit reference to the issue of the necessity to facilitate the access of some groups, namely women, to the labour market “through specific active measures and special financial support”. On the general characterisation of the gender inequalities that prevail in the Portuguese labour market are underlined the inequalities related to earnings and those related to sectoral segregation. Two main mechanisms of action are defined in order to reverse this situation: i) to act in the field of changing attitudes (promotion of training in the area of Equal Opportunities, promotion of publicity campaigns on the same topic, attributing awards to firms and public services having innovative good practices in the area, …); ii) to increase and ameliorate the structures of care to dependants on grounds of promoting the conditions to reconcile work and family life (promotion of care equipments and services essentially to children, developing legislation on paternity leaves, …).

2. National medium-term targets in terms of employment rates

As stated above the established quantified target (already included in the NAP2000) is the one of “reducing by 25%, by 2003, the differences between employment rates for women and for men and by at least the same percentage for youth” (Guideline 17)

C. Response to recommendations

Portugal had one recommendation on 2000 and in 2001 explicitly on questions related to pillar 4 indicating the need to pursue the efforts to reconcile work and family life and to promote a better gender balance at a sectoral level. The response to this recommendation, as referred above, has been relying on two main areas: changing attitudes and increasing and ameliorating the provision of care to dependants.

The relevance agreed to cultural changes, completely justified in my perspective, is of course less effective in the short run than in the medium and long run. Still some of the actions and namely those that have to do with improvement of paternity rights, can have important short term effects in terms of bringing the subject of gender equality into the political agenda and so into the public debate and, doing so, contributing to evidence the fact that gender issues refer both to men and to women as they reflect on social well-being. At this purpose it seems important to refer what is stated on the Portuguese NAP’s Implementation Report 2001: “The reinforcement of the rights of

1 There is a contradiction, or at least a not clear link, between this objective and the target established under Guideline 17 which sets the objective of « reducing by 25%, by 2003, the differences between employment rates for women and for men »

2 The gender gap on the employment rates was, in 2001, 15 pp for the population aged 15 to 64 (76.7% for men and 61.7% for women) and 10.8 pp for those aged 15 to 24 (49% for men and 38.2% for women).
working men as fathers has been covered by legislative interventions with a double objective: on the one hand, to offer better opportunities to the men for reconciling work and family life, and on the other hand to ensure that employers do not penalise women for having a family.

So the response has been centred on the consolidation of the measures that have been already included in the NAP2000.

D. Progress Report

1. Gender mainstreaming

The existence of a Global Plan for Equal Opportunities is recognised in the NAP2002 (Guideline 16) as an important tool to promote gender mainstreaming. Taking into account the evaluation of the existing Plan the previous Government was preparing a second Plan on the topic. This process stopped after the changing of the Government. Still it is deserve noting that the program of the actual Government, under the title of Equal Opportunities, includes an explicit reference to a future National Plan on Equality.

Also it has been created a system of data to allow the collection, monitoring and follow-up of equal opportunities indicators.

As to the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming within the NAP2002 there are no relevant differences towards the previous NAP: there is a clear effort to include the gender dimension on the general context of each pillar and on several guidelines and an obvious concern towards ensuring an improvement in the gender balance in the implementation of measures regarding the promotion of training and employment. The most important elements of explicitly recognised gender dimension being:

- **Under Pillar I:** i) the reference to the importance of promoting gender balanced participation in the training actions considered (Guideline 1, 2, 4, 5); ii) the reference to the needs on promoting pre-school education (children aged 3 to 5) as a means of improving both education quality and equal opportunities (Guideline 4).
- **Under Pillar II:** i) the reference to the importance of promoting a gender balanced participation in the new jobs created through active measures to incentive the start of new business (Guideline 9); ii) the recognition that there is a potential for job creation in the sector of family support services with positive effects on the quality of living, on raising employment and on reconciling work and family life (Guideline 10, 11); iii) Special treatment, for fiscal purposes, of the expenses of firms regarding care support for their employees’ children (Guideline 12).
- **Under Pillar III:** no explicit references.

2. Pillar 4

The dispositions of the Portuguese NAP2002 under Pillar 4 are the same of the previous plan. Being so there are no new initiatives to be referred. This fact is not surprising taking into account the fact, previously referred, that the main rationale of

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the measures implemented to promote equal opportunities relies on changing attitudes and developing structures of care.

Some results of the measures implemented in previous years are explicitly referred on the NAP’s Implementation Report 2001 and can be synthesised as follows: i) Women almost always reach the major participation in employment policy active measures namely in those that refer to the Employment Social Market, to the support to contracting, to courses and to vocational training to the unemployed. Men are the majority of beneficiaries for measures aimed at developing self-employment and apprenticeship; ii) women’s employment grew faster than men’s but also did unemployment; iii) the first training actions targeting strategic groups developed in 2001 involving consultants/trainers in gender mainstreaming and social negotiators in areas relating equal opportunities and non-discrimination in gender issues; iv) the implementation of a prize to be agreed to firms with good and innovative practices in the field of equal opportunities had, by now, two editions. 15 prizes have been granted in two years and the number of candidacies had a relevant growth (24 in 2000, 66 in 2001); v) there’s a noticeable development in the pre-school structures and new programmes are being implemented in the area of elderly and other dependants care.

As to the relative importance of Pillar 4 on the NAP’s budget to 2002 it refers to 1.3% of the total budget (0.5% regarding guidelines 16 and 17 and 0.8% regarding guideline 18). Most of the financing comes from FEDER and ESF (64.2% of the total budget to the three guidelines).

E. **Statistical Information**

The NAP’s Implementation Report 2001 includes information on the following indicators: PREV1, PREV2, PREV3, ACT1. There is no quantitative information on the other indicators included in the list of indicators to be used in the NAPs 2002. The same applies to the NAP2002: information on the 4 referred indicators is previewed but there’s no reference to the other indicators of the list. More efforts need to be addressed in terms of providing and diffusing relevant information.

F. **Example of good practice**

No example of best practice has been given.

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5 Idem, p.65.