

Government unveils new National Plan for Equality

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In July 2003, the Portuguese government presented the second National Plan for Equality. The plan aims to promote equality between women and men in a wide range of areas, addressing matters such as education, employment, balancing work and family life, preventing violence against women, and social protection.

The second National Plan for Equality (Plano Nacional para a Igualdade, PNI), covering 2003-6, was publicly unveiled by the government on 15 July 2003. The PNI sets out to improve equality between women and men in areas such as: education; culture; the balance between private, civic, professional and family life; power and decision-making; economic life and employment; health; preventing violence against women; fiscal and social protection policies; living conditions and the environment; poverty and social exclusion; international cooperation; and the media. The plan provides for monitoring mechanisms during its implementation.

The PNI contains two main areas of intervention:

- 'structuring measures', generally addressed to the public administration, where teams will be set up in each Ministry to be responsible for the dissemination of the equality strategy and ensuring the implementation of the plan; and
- measures in specific areas that require the close collaboration of all parties. These focus on the following four key areas
 1. professional activity and family life, which covers the issues of labour, employment, maternity and paternity and the balance between work and family life,
 2. education, training and information, aimed at improving the general standard of information in relation to gender equality and its implications,
 3. citizenship and social inclusion, which addresses various areas regarded as requiring prompt intervention, aimed at facilitating the improved participation of women in various areas of life, particularly in politics, and
 4. cooperation with countries belonging to the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (Comunidade de Países de Língua Portuguesa, CPLP), encouraging dialogue with Portuguese-speaking countries in which the position of women is particularly difficult.

The plan also provides for incentives for companies that adopt policies promoting a more balanced representation of men and women in particular sectors and occupations. One of the hopes expressed is that employers should understand that the balancing of work and family life is not only an employee's right but also a key instrument in encouraging greater productivity.

The implementation of the PNI is essentially the responsibility of two public bodies, the Commission for Equality and Women's Rights (Comissão para a Igualdade e para os Direitos das Mulheres, CIDM) and the Commission for Equality in Work and Employment (Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego, CITE). They are responsible for putting the plan into effect and should adopt a proactive approach to intervention. They should attempt to strengthen the horizontal relationship between different parts of the public administration and should contact companies directly, seeking to raise their awareness in relation to issues such as the implementation of equal pay for equal work. Interdepartmental teams will also be established in each Ministry, with responsibility for the coordination, implementation, monitoring and assessment of the integration of a gender perspective in all policies and programmes. The Ministries will adopt positive action measures, with a view to developing human resource management policies that promote equality.