

Alternative follow-up information
on the steps taken to implement the recommendations indicated in
Concluding Observations on the combined 7th and 8th periodic reports of Poland
submitted to the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women
by KARAT Coalition in Consultative Status with the ECOSOC
on behalf of
CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs

The Alternative Information elaborated by the CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs focuses on the two recommendations indicated in paragraph 49, namely on the steps taken to strengthen the national machinery for the advancement of women, para 17(a),(b), and to combat the underrepresentation of women in political and public life, including decision-making, para 29(a),(b).

CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs has been monitoring the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee since the time the document was issued in November 2014.

The members of the CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs:

- *Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny*
- *Fundacja Autonomia*
- *Fundacja Feminoteka*
- *Fundacja im. Izabeli Jarugi-Nowackiej*
- *Fundacja MaMa*
- *Fundacja La Strada*
- *Fundacja na rzecz Równości i Emancypacji STER*
- *Fundacja Przestrzeń Kobiet*
- *Fundacja Rodzić po Ludzku*
- *Fundacja Trans-Fuzja*
- *Instytut Spraw Publicznych*
- *Polskie Towarzystwo Prawa Antydyskryminacyjnego*
- *Społeczny Monitor Edukacji*
- *Stowarzyszenie Inicjatyw Kobietych*
- *Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej*
- *Stowarzyszenie Koalicja KARAT*
- *Stowarzyszenie Lambda Warszawa*
- *Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Kobiet „Victoria”*

National machinery for the advancement of women

1. Civil organizations forming the CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs express their disappointment with the lack of progress and recently even regression that can be easily observed in the national machinery for the advancement of women. During the first year of the period under review (i.e. until the Parliamentary election in October 2015) no steps were taken to implement the relevant recommendations of the CEDAW Committee. The mandate, authority and resources of the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (GPET) remained unchanged, further no separate budget was allocated for its gender equality activities and programs. The National Action Plan for Equal Treatment was not modified and

no financial resources were allocated for its implementation. The office of the GPET, however, was held by a gender equality expert who mainstreamed gender into her equal treatment policy, reacted to the acts of discrimination against women, and advocated for gender equality. For example, she advocated for ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

2. The results of the parliamentary election of 2015 have severely impacted the State's approach to gender equality and women's rights, including the status of Poland's national machinery for the advancement of women. In January 2016 the Prime Minister's Chancellery where the GPET is located was restructured. The Bureau of GPET was closed down and its staff, who over the years gained expertise in gender equality issues, no longer deal with the subject. Since that time the GPET's work has been facilitated by the Department for Parliamentary Affairs and for Councils, Teams and Plenipotentiaries of the Prime Minister's Chancellery. The office of the GPET was combined with a newly established office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and was officially called the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment. This title, in which the "equal treatment" was placed in the second place, did not seem to be accidental. The then Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment openly admitted during the interviews and meetings with NGOs that gender equality was not on his priority list. Moreover, he considered equal treatment policies to be rather the domain of NGOs than the area of the government's commitment. In fact he did not perceive to be responsible for developing and implementing policies in this field. During the 60th UN CSW Session the GPET (Wojciech Kaczmarczyk) presented the Government's concept of gender mainstreaming. According to it, gender equality will be achieved "through family mainstreaming" which includes activities aimed at promoting the notion of the family being trendy (*The family mainstreaming covers the activities towards the promotion of the "fashion for the family"*¹).

3. In October 2016 a new person was nominated to hold both offices: Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. At the same time the Department for Civil Society was created, however no steps were taken to establish a similar unit for equal treatment policies, not to mention for gender equality. Similarly to the former government plenipotentiary responsible for equal treatment policies also the current one has no expertise in the field of gender equality and equal treatment.² There is no reason to believe that either of the issues is among his priorities.

4. It is impossible to assess whether the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee had an impact on the implementation of National Action Plan for Equal Treatment (NAP) in 2015 since no report has been presented for that period yet. There is also no information, which would indicate that NAP was being implemented at all in 2016 and that steps have been taken to develop a strategic document for gender equality and/or equal treatment for the coming years.

5. It should be noted that in the present political situation in Poland the only State institution that addresses gender equality is the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsperson). It is important to note, however, that despite the CEDAW Committee's

¹ The presentation of GPET Wojciech Kaczmarczyk during the 60th CSW Session available in English at: http://www.spoleczenstwoobywatelskie.gov.pl/sites/default/files/general_debate_new_2.pdf

² Source: information on the GEPT Adam Lipiński at governmental website (<http://www.spoleczenstwoobywatelskie.gov.pl/aktualnosci/zmiany-w-obszarze-wsparcia-spoleczenstwa-obywatelskiego-nowy-pelnomocnik-rzadu-min-adam>)

recommendation to provide the Ombudsperson with resources that would enable him/her to fully implement his/her mandate to protect women's rights and promote gender equality, the budget of the Office in 2016 was reduced to the level of 2011. The State Budget for 2017 has not been accepted yet but the funds allocated in the bill for the Ombudsperson's Office are also lower than that proposed by the Office, and thus not sufficient for full implementation of Ombudsperson's mandate in the field of gender equality.

Participation in political and public life

6. During the period under review no initiatives have been taken by the State authorities to implement the recommendation of the CEDAW Committee to amend the Electoral Act with an aim of achieving parity in the Parliament. There were also no actions that would encourage the political parties taking part in the election in 2015 to place women and men in alternating positions on electoral lists for Sejm (lower chamber of Parliament). The results of that election is yet another argument that the efficiency of the 35% quota system is limited in terms of attaining parity. The quota did result in the increase of the percentage of women on electoral list to Sejm (around 43% in 2011 and 2015), and in the long term leads to strengthening the position of women in political parties. This does not, however, prevent female candidates from being offered places on the lists which are less likely to be elected. Although in 2015 the percentage of female parliamentarians in Sejm was highest in history (27%), the result of the election is far from parity and thus not satisfying.

7. The quota and the "zip" systems is not applicable in case of the election for Senate, the higher chamber of the Parliament, due to the system of single-member constituencies that has been in force since 2011. According to it, each political party can nominate only one candidate and the "winner takes all". As a result in 2015 there were only 14% of the female candidates and in 57 districts out of 100 there was no single woman running for Senate. Consequently, there are only 13 female senators among 100 Senate members.

8. In regards to the Committee's recommendation formulated in paragraph 29(b), the CEDAW Coalition of Polish NGOs appreciates the temporary special measures that have been applied, and up-dated in 2015, by the Ministry of Treasury to achieve the full participation of women in the supervisory boards of state-owned companies. Despite this, the Coalition express its disappointment with the lack of understanding of the concept of special measures in other departments of the government.