REPORT ON THE HELSINKI CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE:
A MIRROR ON THE FUTURE

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
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I. STRUCTURAL CHANGE, ADJUSTMENT AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

- Structural change as it affects society invariably has implications for gender roles and gender relationships. It is therefore quite relevant to look at the role of women from this standpoint. Another consideration is that the dynamics of change may offer opportunities to guide development in specific directions. Far-reaching structural changes are now under way in OECD countries and this holds out potential prospects for transforming society along lines that would allow a better balance in gender roles.

Towards a new society, the active society?

- According to the OECD analysis, human resources will be the most important factor in future structural change and adjustment. This certainly bears positive implications for women. As human resources are expected to play such a strategic role, economic and social objectives can no longer be seen as separate, or even competitive. Instead, they come to be perceived as indivisible or at least, as complementary. Expenditure on training, as well as certain welfare expenditures, start likewise to be regarded as investments contributing to productive capacity.

- An appropriate system of incentives is needed to encourage workers to acquire the skills that will make them highly productive, and therefore highly paid. Acquiring skills will have to be a lifelong pursuit and involve a wide variety of activities -- educational, occupational and other -- all recognised as conferring qualifications. The building up of this new, active society calls for broad attitudinal and institutional changes (new forms of partnership in particular).
For many countries, structural changes in the economy have brought rapidly growing unemployment. Women’s unemployment occurs in the first place because of labour-shedding in those sectors employing mainly women (textiles and garments, office jobs, certain service jobs both in the public and in the private sector). There are two additional contributing factors. First, high rates of male unemployment are found to generate discrimination against women; it has been observed that both the public employment agencies and employers tend to give preference, quite openly, to the male unemployed applicants. Second, pressures on the public sector budgets -- to which unemployment adds -- have resulted in a slow down in public sector recruitment (which affects women in particular) and sometimes, too, in public service cut-backs. Women are highly dependent on the provision of some of these services that enable them to engage in an activity outside the home. When these services are lacking, women can be forced into unemployment or out of the labour market. These difficulties of the adjustment process for women are especially severe in countries making their transition towards a market economy, as Z. Széman reported for Hungary.

For many of the participants in the Conference it did not seem very realistic to suppose that the welfare State model -- as observable in the Nordic countries in particular, where the welfare State has largely contributed to women’s employment and economic independence -- can be perpetuated unchanged into the future. Direct State provision of services is being called increasingly into question. In addition public sector can be expected to move closer to private sector concerning the whole range of conditions applying to employment. What will be important in the future is therefore not so much the public/private divide but whether or not certain social services are provided and the quality of the jobs available.

Two broad strategies will need to be emphasized: associating equality and efficiency on the labour market, and promoting the active society by prompting men and women alike to demonstrate flexibility and engage in a diversity of activities.

Equality and efficiency on the labour market

Women do not compete in the labour market on an equal footing with men because family responsibilities continue to lie mainly on them. This inequality generates a great deal of unfairness towards women (by restricting their ability to earn) and also impairs labour market efficiency (as women’s productive potential remains under-used and under-developed).

G. Schmid indicates that the concept of equality always needs to be specified. It will have different implications depending on the labour market conditions (supply and demand elasticities, organisational pattern). According to whether a market is characterised by perfect competition, hierarchical structures, team work or wholly subordinate relationships, equality will be achieved at different levels and by different means. This argues for overall action combining, in a flexible way, a variety of measures: measures to ensure all players on the market are given equal means; income redistribution;
universal rights (e.g. a guaranteed minimum income); and the outlawing of
discrimination in any form. The rules of the game applying to the labour
market should also be adjusted to the diversity of its participants. Such a
global approach would make it possible to do away with, or at least compensate
for, the disadvantages deriving from family responsibilities and the high
concentration of women in low productivity, low wage sectors.

The gender contract

•Can the fact be changed that family and domestic responsibilities lie
mainly on women? This amounts to challenging the traditional gendered
distribution of roles -- a process already well under way, since women are
participating massively in the formal economy. Men, on the other hand, do not
seem keen to take more responsibility in the private sphere. L. Rantalaiho
points out that in the Nordic countries the highly developed welfare state was
what had made this situation possible. Today’s threats to the welfare state
make it urgent to find different solutions; a change in men’s attitudes is
clearly of paramount importance in that respect. She proposes to refer to a
"gender contract", in which men and women are the main contracting parties
(instead of the State and women). Re-negotiation of this gender contract is
urgently required.

•Different power and social value have been traditionally attached to
two areas of activity and responsibility -- production and reproduction, labour
market and family -- and this together with the gendered roles distribution
allowed to establish men’s superiority. Today production is still regarded as
more important than reproduction, market activities than non-market activities.
A major rigidity in the system results which acts as an impediment to more
diversity and change in individual lives. What is at issue is therefore no
longer so much recognising specific rights to women as valuing equally all
areas of human activity and acknowledging their necessary interconnectedness.

•A myriad of institutions produce regulations that govern almost all
aspects of daily life; they need to be updated to facilitate the renewal of the
gender contract. Many policies still focus on the "male worker" and the
"traditional family". The perceived tensions between the values of
individuality and solidarity may well result from the fact that "worker" and
"family" are often taken as abstract, empty concepts whereas they apply to a
variety of concrete situations. Changing the gender contract will require a
long and permanent process. There seems to be no point in waiting for better
economic times, on the contrary; however any strategy to renegotiate the gender
contract needs to take into account the labour market situation.

Conclusion

•Some aspects of the structural adjustment process are of particular
interest to women. In most cases they touch upon problems which are in fact of
crucial importance not only for women but also for society as a whole. The
current economic crisis in many countries makes it still more urgent to find
innovative, effective ways to promote change along lines beneficial to women
and society alike. This requires in particular giving women a voice in the
decisions that influence the direction of change.
II. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND HOW TO ACHIEVE THEM

Theme 1. Broadening the occupational choice and upgrading female occupations

• In all OECD countries, women are still largely confined to a restricted number of occupations where they make up the vast majority of the workforce. Most of these occupations are unskilled, offering no career prospects; starting wages are low and rise only slightly even after years of experience. Hitherto the policy response to this state of affairs has taken two directions: broadening the range of occupational choice for women and raising wages in occupations in which women predominate.

• The conference discussed these issues in the context of the sweeping employment restructuring under way in most countries, and widespread unemployment in some. It was pointed out that gender segregation severely hampers labour market adjustment. The dual aims of wider choice and higher status of occupations are thus conducive to economic as well as social efficiency.

Broadening the range of occupational choice for women

• This aim has now come to be seen in a wider perspective, i.e. with a view to ending gender segregation in employment so that all jobs are done by men and women as well. Therefore men are also a target. Family, school and training all come into it.

- combatting stereotypes

• Sex stereotypes are established at a very early age in the socialisation process, dictating what is feminine and masculine. These stereotypes need to be fought and the influence they exert on the building up of a sex identity also.

• Stereotypes contribute to and perpetuate segregation. A number of countries have introduced measures to change stereotyped attitudes resulting in gender segregation in schools, training institutions and enterprises. Heightening awareness of the problem and mobilising all parties concerned are essential features of these actions. Success stories -- such as the Nordic Bryt-project, a Nordic Council of Ministers’ project to break sex segregation of the labour market -- show that there are ways through which stereotyped behaviours can be effectively changed.

• A priority concern in all countries is to prevent girls from losing interest in mathematics and science early on, since this severely restricts choice of jobs -- especially better-paid jobs -- later on. Moreover the more women scientists and technologists there are, the more women will be able to shape change in society. In contrast, no country seems much interested in preparing boys for domestic and family responsibilities.
- curriculum reform

• Gender segregation in schools due to subject choice could be redressed through curriculum reform. The role of initial education is nowadays being reconsidered in the light of rapid change in the type of jobs that are available and the skills required. Schools are now expected to provide all children with basic core knowledge and learning mechanisms. This core education will be standard for all young people and it will have a recognised value on the labour market as the indispensable prerequisite for the vocational training directly associated with each specific job. Several countries have already adopted education reforms along these lines; in the United Kingdom, for example, the introduction of a core national curriculum will ensure that, at least up to the age of 16, all young people acquire qualifications in a similar range of subjects.

- labour market measures

• Among the labour market measures those schemes designed to bring women into traditionally male occupations seem to raise some degree of scepticism. There are great difficulties in implementing them, and most schemes have achieved only mediocre results.

• Women are also being encouraged to set up their own businesses in a number of countries; this is seen as a way of enabling them to realise a plan of their own choosing and escape discrimination which they often have to face in dependent employment. More thorough assessment of the own-business strategy is however required as there are yet few results from evaluative studies.

- lifelong learning

• Lifelong learning is of great importance to women. It could result in skills acquired informally, through domestic, family and voluntary activities being recognised and validated, thus becoming transferable. In addition, women’s participation in formal training should be encouraged through an appropriate entitlement and incentive system and by adapting training institutions to women’s specific situation and needs.

Upgrading "female" occupations

• Female employment is largely concentrated in the services sector, the only sector which is still a net creator of employment. There are always increasing numbers of women in "female" occupations because these have been recruiting on a very large scale. For the future, though, prospects vary considerably from one occupation to another. Demand can be expected to remain buoyant for all those having to do with health care, training and recreation, but some occupations, such as that of secretary, seem threatened.

• Whatever the case, an upgrading strategy seems to have an interesting potential, though this will clearly involve varying degrees of difficulty and prospects of success. Where demand is high, -- as it is, for instance, for
nurses -- upgrading may be a way of attracting more high-calibre workers, which will in itself add value to the occupation. In the case of endangered occupations upgrading may be the only way to save an occupation and therefore to save women in the corresponding jobs from unemployment, most likely long-term.

• It could be envisaged to extend this upgrading strategy to a broad range of service occupations. By improving the quality of the services offered, demand can be increased and subsequently supply. It has been noted that the development of services has a positive impact on the employment of women, both directly and indirectly.

• An occupation may be upgraded in a number of respects: pay, tasks to be performed and skills required for that purpose, career prospects. For the "female" occupations, greater numbers of male entrants and recognition of the worth of women’s unpaid work may be additional elements of the strategy.

- raising earnings in "female" occupations

• Differences between men’s and women’s earnings are still quite large and, far from narrowing, the gap is currently tending to widen further. Part of the explanation is that typically female skills and abilities are not taken into account in evaluating jobs, even when they are needed to perform the tasks concerned, as by definition they must be in "female" occupations.

• All possible steps should be taken to advertise and remedy these earnings discrepancies. This includes the establishment of wage statistics highlighting the gender differences, public information campaigns, implementation of the wage provisions in equality legislation, etc.

• It is of particular importance to make the wage-setting system, including the criteria used to determine wage levels, as transparent as possible. In some countries gender-neutral job evaluation methods have been devised to implement the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Those methods should be widely disseminated and their effective use should be encouraged.

- redefining occupations, new job classifications.

• By identifying and recognising all the skills and abilities required in "female" jobs, it will be possible to devise longer, more diversified career profiles. This involves more than just raising pay, it means defining new types of occupation and occupational structures. Some countries are conducting studies of this nature, especially for secretaries and nurses. Provision of upward career tracks will require some type of modular curricula, allowing for instance to bridge the gap between academic and non-academic education.

• Highlighting and acknowledging the actual qualifications required in female occupations will not, however, succeed in all cases. Some female jobs lack content to such an extent that they can only be upgraded by enriching this content. There are cases where this has been achieved through a change in work organisation.
Upgrading of female occupations will generally require a revision of the current job classifications. Such revisions are being undertaken -- although for different reasons -- in a number of sectors. Care is needed to ensure that these revisions do in fact serve the purpose of upgrading female occupations, especially by raising minimum wages.

- mobilising the social partners

Much of the responsibility for determining wages and job classifications lies with the social partners. The scope of the bargaining process needs to be extended on these matters, and women have to get involved in it to a much greater extent.

- increasing the numbers of men in "female" occupations

Opinions differed among the participants as to the value of encouraging more men to enter "female" occupations. Some regarded this as a powerful accelerator for the upgrading process. Others considered that it would be bound to lead to gender segregation inside the occupation, and that only the men’s jobs would be upgraded.

- recognising the value of women’s unpaid activities

On this, too, opinions differed. Acknowledging that domestic and family activities require, and develop, a wide range of skills and abilities can clearly facilitate the upgrading of traditionally female occupations. These skills - or at least the functional abilities they demonstrate - could then be recognised in recruitment and promotion decisions. Greater male involvement in domestic and family activities would help to achieve this type of recognition. On the other hand, such recognition might lead to some degree of "professionalising" for unpaid activities (training, social protection, allowing for activity-related expenditures, etc.). At a time of high unemployment, there is a high risk that this would strengthen the pressures on women to limit their activities to activities outside the labour market.

Conclusion

In the past, policy-makers have tended to attach more importance to occupational diversification than to upgrading female occupations. A better balance between the two is probably desirable, given the foreseeable employment trends.

Apart from an equal pay policy, most countries at present have no experience of upgrading female occupations. At most, discussions have started on what are the options and on the definition of broad directives. More progress is urgently needed, since the equal pay approach can give only very limited results so long as the general economic climate remains unpropitious for a rise in wages.
The issue of diversifying women’s occupational options and upgrading female occupations cannot be considered separately from the issue of compatibility between work and family responsibilities. Working conditions count for a great deal in girls’ choice of one occupation rather than another and in the kinds of job women look for. Increasing compatibility across the board — that is for all occupations — could do much to facilitate occupational diversification.

Theme 2: Increasing compatibility of employment and family commitments

Adjustments at the level of society and of the individual
- the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between men and women.

Reconciliation of work and family obligations is usually considered as a problem concerning women only. Such advances in equality of opportunities as can be hoped for from a solution to the problem posed in these terms will be limited at best. For there is some risk that a demand for compatibility perceived as exclusively female may be made a pretext for perpetuating or even aggravating gender segregation in employment, and for employers to discriminate against women. Besides, greater compatibility exclusively for women can contribute nothing to the redefining of traditional roles, or to a better balanced sharing of domestic and family responsibility between the sexes (reformulating the gender contract).

Men must be encouraged to share domestic and family responsibilities, and men too should be demanding greater compatibility between work and family responsibilities. Time-budget surveys show the scale of the imbalance between the time men and women devote to domestic and family responsibilities. Several countries have mounted campaigns to raise awareness of the non-traditional roles, with press and television to the fore. Some countries, especially Nordic ones, have introduced special measures to prepare boys for their domestic and family responsibilities, and to help men exert such responsibilities in their own life. These programmes usually lay the main emphasis on the man’s role as father. Other countries have undertaken community education schemes conducive to a better understanding of the working family’s problems, and encouraging a wide debate on ways of sharing paid and unpaid activities.

- child-care services

Two broad arguments can serve to justify public provision of child-care services. The first cites to society’s direct responsibility for “its” children. The second is more of an economic argument, to the effect that it sees social services as an integral part of the infrastructure needed for the successful operation and growth of the economy. Both arguments reinforce the traditional claim for child-care services as a way to establish equal opportunities for women. All these arguments are set out in a statement submitted by the Netherlands delegation at the conference (see Annex).
In these circumstances, declining availability of crèches and other child care facilities at affordable prices in some countries is a cause for considerable concern. It hits the poorest population groups hardest. In some transition countries there are increasing number of street children with no one to take care of them. At all events, child care facilities are usually inadequate or -- as is the case for school-age children -- practically non-existent. In addition to direct public subsidies for child-care services, some countries are encouraging employers to take on their employees' child care problems. Another avenue currently being explored is the local-level partnership of government, industry and the voluntary sector.

In practice, the child care problem very often has to be solved through the informal sector. In high unemployment countries, grandparents are tending to play a greater part -- which raises the question of whether "early retirement" schemes may not in fact help to solve the child care problem as well. Not all participants agreed about this, some doubting whether such inter-generational flows would be practicable on a large scale, others whether this was what the parents and grandparents would really want anyhow.

- care for the elderly

Reference to grandparents indirectly raises the problem of care for the elderly. Participants recognised that this was a very important one, but did not discuss to any extent ways of dealing with it.

Adjustments at employment level

Most firms are still organised by reference to the pattern of a male employee with a full time housewife. This worker is relieved of all domestic and family responsibility (other than supporting the household financially) and, in addition, all his personal needs are taken care of at home. This has made possible the development of employment practices through which the totality of a worker’s time and energy is mobilised to the benefit of the firm. Such practices make it practically impossible to combine work responsibilities with family responsibilities and are therefore scarcely conducive to greater gender equality through some redistribution of traditional roles.

Employment practices need to be adapted so that male and female workers can adequately respond to their responsibilities in all areas. This appears as a major challenge for the future.

- leave entitlements

Leave provision under an employment contract gives the worker the ability to interrupt its activity for a period while maintaining some of the basic employment benefits. This has definite advantages over being obliged to stop work altogether because no leave is provided for.

However, leave is only granted for specified reasons and for limited periods of time. Work still has primacy. The very granting of leave for a specific reason (family, training, rest) is a recognition that work is not
compatible with these situations. Leave, moreover, obviously cannot solve the problem of the need to combine work responsibilities with others such as domestic and family ones, on a routine basis, day after day.

It is the general feeling however that leave for family reasons -- parental leave, care of sick children etc. -- does make it somewhat easier to reconcile responsibilities at work and at home and has a potentially beneficial effect on equality of opportunities. In quite a few countries entitlement to parental leave seems to have become much commoner in recent years, and it is therefore very important to find out what real impact parental leave has on equal opportunities. Available evidence suggests first that impact depends on the specific terms of entitlement, which vary considerably from one country to another, second, that the extent to which leave is taken up by the women entitled also varies greatly from group to group. In addition the fact that fathers make very little use of their parental leave makes the entitlement a two-edged sword from the equal opportunities standpoint.

Extending the duration of parental leave, which in some countries can be spread over several years, raises the question of the risks for re-entry into work at the end of the leave. The risk is all the greater at times of high unemployment and rapid structural change; in some countries a tendency for young mothers to under-use their leave entitlement can be observed. In any case, when leave periods are long, back-to-work schemes such as some countries already have are essential. Successful back to work can also be jeopardized when child care services or other type of assistance in combining employment and family are lacking.

It is generally assumed that take-up depends above all on whether parental leave is paid or unpaid. Recent studies indicate however that this is not always the case and that it is not the only factor; nature of work responsibilities and type of enterprise/employer seem to make quite a difference as well. The question is whether the worker on parental leave always needs to be replaced, or can be replaced. Smaller firms may be hard put to it to replace an employee on leave; and the greater the skills and responsibilities involved, the more difficult it is to replace a worker. It is also a matter of tolerance and of the firm’s culture; parental leave is perhaps more readily accepted in a firm which mainly employs women. One way of minimising these difficulties for both workers and employers would seem to be to introduce much greater flexibility in the way parental leave entitlements can be used.

Parental leave interests fathers as well as mothers, and the low take-up by fathers -- even when leave is paid, and at a high enough rate not to involve any financial sacrifice -- is a conspicuous failure. For that reason, some countries have started earmarking part of the parental leave entitlement for fathers. But that will not do away with the obstacles to a greater take-up which stem not only from men’s own attitude but also from the specific culture, terms of employment and work organisation in predominantly male sectors.

- flexibility at work
Leave entitlement enable workers to free themselves from the constraints of the professional activity. To increase compatibility of work and family responsibilities constraints themselves could be lessened, i.e. shorter daily working hours would be an obvious improvement. Added flexibility in working conditions and terms of employment - such as flexitime, work at home, casual jobs - can also help; self-employment is an example of a type of employment that allows a priori a much greater degree of flexibility.

There is a problem however and it is part-time work and other types of flexibility allowing a greater compatibility tend to be confined to predominantly female, low-skill sectors. In predominantly male sectors, the norm is still full-time employment, often for long hours. The flexibility there is in male sectors (overtime, continuous work, night shifts) is not of such a kind as to help cope with responsibilities at home, even if surveys show that many men would prefer shorter hours. Moreover, whatever the sector, making a career always requires to be fully available for the job over a period of time which can extend to long years.

Is the employment norm changing? Employers appreciate flexibility. Can this be turned to advantage, for instance by making male and skilled work more flexible, thus at the same time meeting the needs of employees who have family responsibilities? Part-time employment for men is definitely on the increase but for the moment only for the youngest and oldest. As concerns the prospect of more flexible hours for jobs involving responsibilities, like say, managers, this does not appear a very realistic option to many of the participants.

- involving the social partners

Firms should open themselves more to the family and the social partners should pay more attention to workers’ family responsibilities, especially in the predominantly male sectors. Everyone stands to gain. Ways of making work and other responsibilities more compatible should be more to the fore in collective bargaining, especially bargaining at enterprise level where working conditions and flexibility needs can most appropriately be determined. This includes more flexible working conditions and terms of employment – in particular leave entitlements, and also access to a range of family services. It would be worth looking into the advantages – in terms of freedom of choice and flexibility – offered by some innovative schemes such as the time-cheque and service-cheque schemes that are being tried out in some countries.

Conclusion

Collective as well as individual measures are required if men and women alike are to be able to reconcile their responsibilities at the work-place and at home. In particular, the development of family services should be encouraged in all possible ways. On the other hand a genuine sharing of tasks by men and women in their private sphere is only possible if standard conditions of employment are radically changed.

The present labour market situation in many countries seems fairly propitious for such radical change. Employment flexibility has grown considerably and is seen as a way of introducing necessary adjustments on the
labour market. Part-time employment and more leave entitlement certainly makes for a better labour force mix. However, it becomes much less certain that the part-time worker will be able to access a full time job, or that an employee will be sure of recovering his job after a spell of leave.

Since flexibility is today far from uniformly applied in male and female employment, trying to develop it by all possible means as a way to achieve equal opportunities may entail some serious risks. Active collective bargaining on workers’ family needs, especially in predominantly male employment sectors, is probably a safer avenue.

Another point of concern is that large pools of unemployed workers in certain countries may tempt some to regard the unemployed as a ready-made answer to the question of who is to look after children and the elderly.

Theme 3  Empowering women and power sharing

Women are chronically under-represented in seats of power - political parties, trade unions - and in senior decision-making positions. As a result, they have little influence in the shaping of structural change. Various countries have introduced strategies specifically designed to remedy this. The political arena is the most important target because only there can the full range of problems of concern to women be covered.

Access to power: from the top or from the bottom?

Somewhat paradoxically, the "glass ceiling" seems easier to penetrate at the highest level, i.e. for women to accede to top decision making positions. Today there are women heads of state, ministers (even of economic affairs or defence), trade unions presidents. At the same time and in the same countries, women are very poorly represented among elected representatives at political and union level.

Many countries have taken steps to ensure that women are more seriously considered for public appointments. Usually, this means looking for female candidates, and setting numerical targets for the public appointments to go to women over a given period. To facilitate the implementation of such an approach, registers of potential female applicants have been established in some countries. In view of the great number of public boards and committees and the role they play, such an approach can be expected to give women more voice in policy decisions.

The quota systems adopted by some political parties and unions serve the same purpose. In public administration also in several countries targets are set for the number of women to be appointed to high-level posts and positive actions are introduced to that end.

Although it is important to have women in very senior positions, because that obviously enhances their image, and these positions are highly visible and influential, glass ceilings at lower levels also have to be penetrated. So many
women are stuck "with their feet in the mud", with practically no prospects of climbing higher. Achieving greater female participation in decision-making at lower levels calls for different strategies and a much longer time span.

Mobilising women and helping them to organise

Several countries have run campaigns to encourage women to participate more actively in politics, especially by standing for election. They have been effective, but a single campaign is not enough it needs to be repeated. These campaigns contribute to a greater awareness of women’s under-representation -- not only by women themselves, but by society as a whole, including the media. Media have much to answer for. The unflattering picture of politicians conveyed by press and television has a great deal to do with women turning their back on politics.

Campaigns are usually conducted in co-operation with women’s associations. The importance of these associations cannot be too greatly stressed. They get women together to establish their priorities and so build up solidarity. In the associations, women learn to organise, and gain practical experience of the skills required in politics and public life generally: self confidence, communication skills, etc. It is essential that such associations have at their disposal the financial resources they need to extend their activities.

More generally, networks through which women can communicate, exchange information and discuss joint action are a strong instrument to extend women’s influence and power. They need not necessarily be formal; informal networks can be as influential. For example, it is questioned whether having separate women’s sections in trade unions or political parties is always effective, since it seems to lead to matters of concern to women being treated as side issues, and women as minority groups. Networking by women should be encouraged in all walks of life, in the private sector as well as in the public sector, in trade unions and political parties, and at all levels -- local, national and international.

And again, just as for participating in the labour force, for a woman to be in a position to participate in politics and feel prompted to do so, she must not be required to shoulder all the domestic and family responsibilities. In the same way, the skills acquired, whether in the home, at work or in politics, need to be recognised, and to be transferable from one sector to another.

Conclusion

There are signs of change. Several countries reported instances of women rallying successfully to achieve some political goal. Elections to the European Parliament in 1994 will perhaps be an opportunity for similar mobilisation on an international scale.

The point was made, too, that power is not shared. Greater involvement of women in this as in other spheres will lead to qualitative as well as quantitative change, if only because of the diversity it brings. There is a
need to devise new power models, different from the prevailing one. Feminist studies may have something useful to contribute to the discussion on this issue as on others, i.e. the gender contract and gender-discriminating practices in employment.

III. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the conference "A mirror to the future" was to discuss the validity of the approach set out in the report "Shaping Structural Change: The role of women" in the light of structural changes under way in the participating countries, especially in Finland, the host country, and to consider how the report’s directions for action could be put into practice. A number of conclusions emerged from the discussions.

Is an adjustment strategy which seeks to combine equality with efficiency possible during a period of recession?

When the report "Shaping Structural Change" was being produced, the effects of the upheaval in central and eastern Europe had yet to make themselves felt, and economic indicators in OECD countries were quite favourable. By June 1993, when the follow-up conference in Helsinki took place, things had radically changed. The situation in Finland, the host country, is one example among many.

Male unemployment always appears as a threat on equal opportunities for women. When men are harder hit than women, which is the case in some countries, this is an aggravating factor. However, when not just the symptoms of recession but effective ways out of it are considered, the prospects for equal opportunities look very different. Everything ultimately depends on the way the recession is analysed.

The deep recession in most OECD countries does not lead to a calling into question of the approach set out in "Shaping Structural Change: The role of women". Far from it it makes some of the lines of action proposed all the timelier.

To get out of from recession, OECD countries are currently seeking to make their industries more competitive and more flexible. Competitive advantage today depends largely on the service content and quality of the products to be traded. This requires workers with certain kinds of skills, some of which women usually possess even though this is not always recognised or made use of in the kind of work they do. What needs to be done is to make it easier for women to have access to jobs in which they will be able to bring all their skills into play and in which those skills will effectively be recognised as useful.

On the equality front, the depth and duration of the recession are prompting some countries to favour some measure of work sharing among all labour force participants. Part-time working is spreading, even for men, which may prove to be a means of upgrading it. Whether men are readier to share
domestic and family responsibilities when they have more time on their hands because of unemployment or shorter working hours is a question that needs to be investigated.

Lastly, the causes of recession point to the need for more concerted policy at international level. In that regard, economic and structural policy must go hand in hand -- and equal opportunities must be on the agenda as part of structural policies.

Further work is required on the implementation of the approach set out in "Shaping structural Change: The role of women".

The report of the high-level group of experts offers an excellent basis for discussing how an adjustment strategy aiming at equal opportunity can be implemented. This requires an on-going process and precise target- and action-setting in the various policy fields. Given the permanent nature of the process regular stock-taking and progress reports will be essential.

Several countries are already drawing on the report for those purposes. This first conference was an opportunity for a fruitful exchange of views on the action that is being undertaken. Other similar conferences would be useful. The opportunity to compare experiences and views at international level is uniquely valuable, in a field where not much can be achieved by looking to the past. What counts more is how one looks at the future.

During the conference the authors of the report pinpointed a number of aspects deserving more detailed consideration: the concept of a gender contract, and how it incorporates the values of individualism and solidarity; the objective of economic independence and the balance between production and reproduction; the deceptiveness of the apparent gender neutrality of laws and regulations, and how to remedy it; the need to change the rules of the game, in addition to achieving greater numerical equality.

The report "Shaping Structural Change: The role of women" needs to be followed up at OECD level too. The conference raised a series of fresh questions which would merit further investigation, possibly within the remits of specific Working Parties and Committees, more particularly the Working Party on the Role of Women in the Economy. Moreover the OECD reviews policy and monitors trends in structural adjustment in Member countries. It would seem quite appropriate for equality of opportunities to form part of that review and monitoring process.
ANNEX

Statement by the Netherlands Delegation


CONSIDERING the analysis in the report of the high-level group of experts to the OECD "Shaping structural change, the role of women, and the reports brought forward to the conference,

CONSIDERING the discussions during the conference,

CONSIDERING the contributions of the participants from Eastern-European countries,

CONSIDERING that in some countries child-care facilities are being sharply reduced under short term financial pressure,

RECOGNISING that access to employment and economic activity for women greatly depends on the availability of comprehensive social support networks, and especially child-care facilities,

UNDERLINING the recognition in the report of the high-level group of experts of the collective responsibility for social support networks,

Ask from OECD:

1. to take an active policy to advocate -- in the mutual interest of both economic efficiency and gender equity -- the commitment of governments and both sides of industry to facilitate the maintenance, development and extension of systems and provisions for combining work and family responsibilities, including care for the elderly, for both men and women, while emphasising the long term benefits, both socially and economically, of the investment in the availability of sufficient accessible child care facilities;

2. to include this statement into the conclusions of the conference

3. to use all appropriate ways and means to circulate the conclusions of this conference on the highest possible levels.