

**Belgium's commitments to the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

Combating gender discrimination and violence against women and girls, promoting gender equality and promoting and protecting women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms are core priorities of Belgium's internal and external policies since years. This commitment entails that no tradition, no religion, no value, nor any custom or culture can ever justify gender discrimination, violence against women and girls, or violations of their rights. It also includes full access to sexual, reproductive health rights and services.

The full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is central to these objectives. The 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women reminded us of the progress made but also of the challenges ahead.

Since 2002 the Belgian Constitution expressly guarantees the principle of gender equality. In recent years, new legislation and action plans were adopted at all levels of governance. Belgium has ratified the CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol without formulating any reservations and has submitted its periodic reports on the implementation of this Convention in a timely manner.

Gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment are part of the Sustainable Development Goals but are also an essential means to this development. The post-2015 agenda represents a unique opportunity to push gender equality forward, including through the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of all goals and targets. Sex disaggregated data are thus essential to monitor progress for men and women in this process.

Despite the progress made, real gender equality is not yet achieved in practice.

Therefore, in addition to the commitments made by the EU, Belgium commits :

<b>General</b>
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- To continue to submit in a timely manner its periodic reports on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to give due consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

- To accelerate its domestic ratification procedure in order to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and will notify the Secretary-General in writing of its agreement to the amendment.

#### **Investing in gender equality at the national and international levels**

- To continue to advocate for the ratification of the CEDAW Convention and its Optional Protocol as well as for its effective implementation.
- To continue its close and strategic partnership with UN Women, which is a multilateral partner organisation of the Belgian development cooperation. Core funding contribution to UN Women amounts to 10.150.000 € in total for the period 2013-2015. In addition, Belgium contributes 2.000.000 € to implement the UN Women project in the Democratic Republic of Congo on 'Appui aux droits et participation des femmes Congolaises dans le cadre de la resolution 1325'. Belgium also provides core contributions to other UN agencies which have an important commitment to gender (UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP and OHCHR).
- To continue to support civil society in their work regarding gender equality. Belgium's funding through non-governmental organizations is gender mainstreamed, a gender platform has been created in the framework of the 2013 law on financing the non-governmental development cooperation. In addition, a gender advisory committee has been created by law, in order to facilitate the advisory role of civil society (including academic representation, labor organizations, non-governmental organizations).

#### **Updating or establishing new action plans, strategies and policies on gender equality**

- To adopt, implement and evaluate gender mainstreaming legislation or methods at all government levels (such as federal action plan on gender mainstreaming – 2015-2019; new Framework of the Flemish Open Coordination Method – 2015-2019; Walloon Gender Action Plan 2015-2019; new legislation for gender mainstreaming at French-speaking level – to be adopted in 2015). There will be a focus on the development of sex disaggregated data.
- To adopt the sixth national action plan on the fight against gender-based violence (2015-2019), which is being developed in line with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). This action plan will focus on partner violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, forced marriages and so-called honour-related violence. A multi-disciplinary approach based on an integrated policy, prevention, protection, prosecution

and partnership is key in the fight against gender-based violence and will therefore be the main theme throughout the national action plan. The intra-Francophone plan to fight sexist and domestic violence, adopted in July 2015, will be integrated into this new national action plan.

- To implement the second national action plan 'Women, Peace and Security' (2013-2016), implementing Security Council resolution 1325. The priority objectives of this national action plan are the protection of women and girls from all forms of violence during conflict, including sexual violence, the empowerment of women and girls, and the participation of women in conflict resolution.
- To implement the third national action plan to combat trafficking in human beings and human smuggling (2015-2019), which pays particular attention to the gender dimension of trafficking.
- To continue to implement the Development Cooperation Law of 2013. In its basic principles, this Law explicitly mentions gender mainstreaming in all interventions of Belgian development cooperation. This covers all channels (governmental, multilateral and non-governmental), and includes political dialogue, sectorial strategies, seminars, and public awareness.
- To adopt a new gender strategy for the Belgian Development Cooperation. This strategy will be in line with the new EU Gender Action Plan and will also draw lessons from the thematic and strategic evaluation of gender in Belgian Development Cooperation, covering the period 2002 -2011. The strategy will define the development cooperation priorities regarding gender and propose a concrete plan of actions. Belgium will share progress on this work within the Gender Experts Group.
- To implement the anti-discrimination plan of the French-speaking Community (2014-2019) which covers gender discrimination.

#### **Enhancing women's leadership and participation at all levels of decision-making**

- To monitor and implement its various regulations on gender parity and quotas on the electoral lists, management boards, public administration, advisory and other decision-making bodies (at public and/or company level) and to take other necessary measures in order to reach gender parity at all levels of decision-making.

#### **Introducing new laws or reviewing and implementing existing ones to promote gender equality**

- To ratify as soon as possible the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) without formulating any reservations.

- To evaluate and adapt the legislation on the fight against gender discrimination.
- To implement the legislation of 2014 on sexism in public spaces, which recognizes sexism as a criminal offence in certain circumstances.
- To evaluate and revise the entire sexual criminal law in the context of the reform of the criminal justice code.

<p><b>Preventing and addressing social norms and stereotypes that condone gender inequality, discrimination and violence</b></p>
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- To put the fight against sexual violence on the political agenda as a national priority by taking specific measures (see national action plan on gender-based violence), for instance by creating sexual assault referral centers for victims of sexual violence in order to offer appropriate, uniform, efficient and swift care to victims.
- To implement and evaluate the Gender Pay Gap Law of 2012 and pursue the publication of the annual Belgian gender pay gap report.
- To pursue efforts to ensure that every child under the age of 3 years can benefit from affordable and qualitative childcare.
- To promote gender equality between boys and girls and to continue developing a gender and LGBT sensitive policy in education from the earliest age on (in particular in school textbooks and through the initial and continuing training of teachers in the importance of gender-related issues).
- To monitor and promote the representation of women in the media and engage the media into the fight against gender stereotypes.
- To take effective measures to address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that affect women and girls.

<p><b>Launching public mobilization and national campaigns to promote gender equality</b></p>
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- To launch campaigns to fight violence against women and girls (e.g. : campaigns to sensitize men, to break the silence when it comes to sexual violence, to prevent violence in relationships of young adolescents, to prevent FGM, ...)
- To launch campaigns to raise awareness on gender discrimination/gender stereotypes and their consequences.