

## **LITHUANIA**

Article 29 of the Lithuanian Constitution provides for equality of all people before the law and states that “a person may not have his rights restricted in any way, or be granted any privileges, on the basis of his or her sex, race, nationality, language, origin, social status, religion, convictions, or opinions.” Article 138(3) of the Constitution also ensures that “international agreements...shall be the constituent part of the legal system of the Republic of Lithuania.” Article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all rights set forth in the Covenant. Equality Now, in consultation with the Lithuanian Women’s Association and the Lithuanian Women’s Society, is concerned by the blatant and vigorous gender-based discrimination in employment practices in Lithuania, as well as by the lack of specific mechanisms and institutions to monitor and enforce the Constitutional principle of equality. Additionally, Equality Now notes that the scarcity of laws dealing with domestic violence, prostitution, and the trafficking in persons, as well as the under-enforcement of those laws which do exist, creates an environment in which the rights set forth in the Covenant are not fully enjoyed by Lithuanian women.

### **Discrimination in Employment**

According to the Lithuanian Women’s Association, there are no mechanisms for ensuring implementation of employment laws or checking violations (Annex 1, pg.4). This lack particularly affects women’s ability to secure employment. It is common for job advertisements to stipulate the sex and age of the applicant, with stated requirements such as “dynamic male” or “attractive woman under 35 years of age” (see ads in Annex 1, pg.5). This explicit discrimination violates Article 3 of the Covenant and Article 29 of Lithuania’s constitution. Equality Now further notes that it is reportedly common practice for employers to inquire about a woman’s marital plans when considering her for a position. Additionally, Equality Now is concerned by stipulations of employment under which women reportedly contract to not become pregnant for a certain number of years and, in the event of pregnancy, to “voluntarily” terminate employment (Annex 2, pg.5). In 1996, the Labour Exchange documented that 55.6% of women were unemployed as compared to 44.4% of men in Lithuania. These figures are especially disturbing given that women have consistently been enrolled in higher numbers at both the secondary and university levels over the past 11 years, with 56.3% of women attending university in 1996 while only 43.7% of men attended university in that same year. In 1996, the average monthly gross earnings of women was 75.3% that of men in Lithuania.

### **Violence Against Women**

Equality Now is concerned by the lack of police response to violence against women in Lithuania. The Ministry of Interior documented the deaths of 30 women in the first half of 1996 (34.5% of all murders during that time period) as a result of domestic disputes. According to one sociological survey, 33% of women reported being beaten at least once in their lives. Although there are laws prohibiting violence of this nature, as the Lithuanian Women’s Society notes, “the biggest problem in Lithuania is not creating laws, we have a lot of good laws, but people don’t pay attention to them -- not even the officials” (Annex 3, pg.1). According to the Lithuanian

Women's Association, there are currently no public programmes on the elimination and prevention of violence against women, there is unsatisfactory training of officers to fight violence against women, and there are neither shelters nor essential help systems for victims of violence (Annex 1, pg.24). Equality Now notes the death of Laima Skeberdiene, the Executive Secretary in the Ministry of Municipalities, who was killed by her husband, a policeman, in August 1997. Nijole Steponkutė, Chairperson of the Lithuanian Women's Society, states, "We knew her, and knew how many times he had beaten her, but she had to live with him in the same flat" (Annex 3, pg.1). The failure of the Government to effectively protect women from violence constitutes a violation of their right to equal protection of the law, as set forth in Article 26 of the Covenant.

### **Prostitution and Trafficking**

The Lithuanian Women's Society notes that with respect to prostitution and trafficking in women, "there are not enough laws dealing with these problems and criminals have free hands for making big money, even involving children in prostitution" (Annex 3, pg.2). Although Article 182 of the Lithuanian Penal Code makes trade on prostitution illegal, police estimates indicate that there were 70 firms offering the services of prostitutes in Lithuania during 1996. This is up from 52 firms in 1995. In 1996, only 32 cases of procuring were brought to trial in Lithuania, as compared to 37 in 1995 (Annex 1, pg.38). Increasing numbers of Lithuanian women are forced or tricked (through newspaper advertisements for *au pairs*, waitresses, and marriages) into organized prostitution, but there has been little response to trafficking on the part of the Government. The *Action Plan of Advancement of Women of Lithuania*, approved in November of 1996 by the Lithuanian Government, included in its mandate the need to "prepare the plan of immediate actions on prevention of child prostitution and forced prostitution" (Annex 1, pg.30). To date it appears that there have been no concrete measures taken by the Government to prepare or implement the "plan of immediate actions."

### **The Action Plan of Advancement of Women of Lithuania**

Two offices, the Advisor to the Government on Women's and Family Issues and the Commission on Women's Issues, were created in November 1996 and charged with implementing the *Action Plan*. Both offices were eliminated after the elections at the end of 1996. Equality Now notes that the *Action Plan* was intended to ensure implementation of the *Platform for Action* adopted in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Responsibility for the *Action Plan* now formally rests with the State Counsellor on Foreign Relations and Relations with NGOs. The State Counsellor, in addition to being responsible for the "creation of society of equal rights and equal opportunities," is also responsible for Lithuanian foreign relations issues such as integration into the EU and NATO. Currently, the *Action Plan* is primarily the responsibility of the Women's Issues Information Centre, a non-governmental organization, under the supervision of the State Counsellor. Equality Now is concerned that the State Counsellor's extensive mandate disproportionately shifts to Lithuanian NGOs the Government's responsibility to ensure implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the rights guaranteed under Articles 3, and 26 of the Covenant.

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1. General Information on the Status of Women in Lithuania  
Lithuanian Women's Association
2. The Implementation of Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities: New Local Initiatives and International Partnerships  
Dr. Kazimiera-Danutė Prunskienė, President of the Lithuanian Women's Association.
3. Submission prepared by Nijole Steponkutė, Chairperson of the Lithuanian Women's Society.