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La France à la loupe

Equal opportunities action in France

Equal opportunities are at the heart of the Republic pact and their very principle is embodied in the Republic's motto. At a [press conference](#) on 1 December 2005, the Prime Minister declared equal opportunities a "major national cause for 2006."

Equal opportunities action is **cross cutting**. It concerns various areas (employment, education, housing, urban policy, antidiscrimination, gender equality, action to assist the disabled, etc.) and mobilises **different ministries** and independent administrative authorities. A Ministry in charge of the Promotion of Equal Opportunities has been in place since 2005.

Equal opportunities were incorporated into the [Social Cohesion Plan](#) prepared by Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing, and adopted on 18 January 2005. This plan covers a series of **concrete measures** in three areas: **employment** (reducing unemployment), **housing** (solving the housing crisis) and **equal opportunities**. This last track provides for measures to assist disadvantaged children, improve regional equality and combat discrimination.

In this area, the act of 1 December 2004 established the **High Authority to Combat Discrimination and Promote Equality** (HALDE) to address all forms of discrimination and make legislative and regulatory proposals. The authority submitted its first activity report to the government on 5 May 2006. The government has also set out to foster **diversity in businesses** with the [Diversity Charter](#) launched in 2004 to encourage businesses to employ staff representative of the diverse elements of French society.

Government action to foster the integration of disabled persons (a major national cause for 2003) gave rise to [Act 2005-102 of 11 February 2005](#) on the equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of disabled persons.

Gender equality work led to the passing of [Act 2006-340 on equal pay on 23 March 2006](#).

The **urban riots** of autumn 2005 brought equal opportunities to the fore of government action. The government followed up its initial firm response (declaration of a state of emergency)

with appropriate measures: selection of equal opportunities as a major national cause for 2006; creation of **six prefects in charge of equal opportunities** in the *départements* most affected by the unrest (Val d'Oise, Essonne, North, Seine-Saint-Denis, Rhône and Bouches-du-Rhône) on 22 December 2005 (Decree 2005-1621); and announcement of an **action plan** on 1 February 2006, which gave rise to [Act 2006-396 of 31 March 2006](#) on equal opportunities. The main measures of this act are the:

- Creation of [junior apprenticeships](#) starting at 14 years old
- Remuneration of training courses lasting more than three months
- Creation of [15 new urban empowerment zones](#) on 1 August 2006 in particularly disadvantaged districts with over 8,500 inhabitants
- Creation of the National Agency for Social Cohesion, Equal Opportunities and Voluntary Service, tasked with taking action in deprived districts
- Strengthening of the powers of the High Authority to Combat Discrimination and Promote Equality (HALDE), which can now fine acts of discrimination
- Legalisation of "testing" (impromptu discrimination testing)
- Actions to help combat discrimination in the television and radio broadcasting field (CSA – High Audiovisual Council)
- Strengthening of the mayor's powers to take action against incivility: measures concerning school absenteeism and the payment of family allowances ([parental responsibility contract](#))
- Establishment of [voluntary civilian service](#) lasting six to 12 months for young people aged 16 to 25, drawing on existing mechanisms: the national police force's Cadets de la République programme, the Second Chance Defence scheme and socio-cultural voluntary service. Civilian service is expected to take in some 50,000 young people by the end of the year.

Article 8 of this act, which established the **Contrat Premier Embauche** (CPE – First Job Contract), an open-ended contract with a two-year trial period during which the contract can be terminated by employer or employee, was **replaced** by [Act 2006-457 of 21 April 2006](#) on youth access to working life in business, which implements concrete measures to further youth training in professional skills and the entry of young people into the world of work.

In the area of urban policy, the equal opportunities act is accompanied by a set of measures decided on by a [meeting](#) of the **Interministerial Committee for Urban Affairs and Urban Social Development** (CIV) on 9 March 2006. The committee has set up a new generation of contracts: the urban social cohesion contracts (CUCS) signed by the government and the communes take over from the urban contracts as of 1 January 2007 and cover a redefined priority geographic zone.

On 2 June 2006, the Prime Minister reviewed the [progress made with the act of 31 March](#) with the different ministers responsible for its implementation and the six prefects in charge of equal opportunities. A **National Agency for Social Cohesion, Equal Opportunities and Voluntary Service** ([ANCSEC](#)) was set up to handle issues relating to integration, combating discrimination, voluntary civilian service and reducing illiteracy.

Following the points put forward by the Head of State during a televised interview, the Prime Minister announced a new series of measures for **employment** and **education** at his press

conference on 28 June 2006: reading assessments in the second year of primary school; strengthening of the priority education zone system with the “**target success**” programme focusing on 249 schools with major difficulties; establishment of a “**public careers guidance service**” to give secondary schools and universities a one-stop address for careers guidance services and to build a better bridge with the world of work.

On 29 June 2006, a [debate on equal opportunities](#) was launched on the forum.gouv.fr site: “How to further equal opportunities?”.

To find out more

WEBSITES

- ↻ **French Ministry in charge of the Promotion of Equal Opportunities**
<http://www.egalitedeschances.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ **French Ministry for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing**
<http://www.cohesionsociale.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ **French Ministry in charge of Social Cohesion and Gender Equality**
<http://www.femmes-egalite.gouv.fr/>
- ↻ **High Authority to Combat Discrimination and Promote Equality (HALDE)**
<http://www.halde.fr>
- ↻ **Site on the disabled act**, French Ministry in charge of Social Security, Seniors and Disabled Persons
<http://www.handicap.gouv.fr/>

DOCUMENTATION

- ↻ **La loi pour l'égalité des chances (The equal opportunities act)**, French Ministry for Employment, Social Cohesion and Housing (March 2006)
<http://www.cohesionsociale.gouv.fr/eclairage/loi-pour-egalite-chances-adoptee-9-mars-793.html>
- ↻ **L'action pour l'égalité des chances (Equal opportunities action)**, French Prime Minister's site (May 2006)
http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/information/les_dossiers_actualites_19/action_pour_egalite_chances_806/