



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*

1. The Committee considered the eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ([CEDAW/C/GBR/8](#)) at its 1671st and 1672nd meetings (see [CEDAW/C/SR.1671](#) and [CEDAW/C/SR.1672](#)), held on 26 February 2019. The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in [CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8](#), and the responses of the United Kingdom are contained in [CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8/Add.1](#).

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its eighth periodic report. It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the Committee's previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7/Add.1](#)) and its written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group, as well as the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its delegation, which was headed by the Deputy Head, Government Equalities Office, Elysia McCaffrey, and included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva. The Committee once again notes that the State party's delegation did not include representatives of the overseas territories or Crown dependencies.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the State party since the consideration in 2013 of the State party's seventh periodic report ([CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7](#)) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

* Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-second session (18 February–8 March 2019).



- (a) Domestic Violence Act, in Anguilla in 2014, which provides greater protection for victims of domestic violence by empowering courts to grant a protection order;
- (b) Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act, in 2015;
- (c) Equality Act, in the Isle of Man, in 2017;
- (d) Equality Act (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations, introduced under section 78 of the Equality Act of 2010, in 2017, requiring private and voluntary organizations with more than 250 employees to publish their gender pay gap data;
- (e) Equality Act (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations, introduced under section 153 of the Equality Act of 2010, in 2017, requiring public bodies with more than 250 employees to publish their gender pay gap data;
- (f) Limitation (Childhood Abuse) (Scotland) Act, in July 2017, which removes the three-year limitation period for personal injury actions arising out of childhood abuse, as previously recommended by the Committee;
- (g) Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act, in March 2018.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption of the following:

- (a) Ending violence against women and girls strategy for the period 2016 to 2020, for England and Wales, adopted in March 2016;
- (b) National strategy of Scotland, entitled "Equally safe", aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, which was published in June 2014 and updated in March 2016 and explicitly recognizes violence against women and girls as a cause and consequence of gender inequality;
- (c) Female offender strategy, in England and Wales, in June 2018, aimed at diverting the most vulnerable women in the criminal justice system from custody through the provision of tailored support.

C. Sustainable Development Goals

6. The Committee welcomes the role played by the State party in support of gender as a standalone Sustainable Development Goal and takes note of its response to the inquiry of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee into the national implementation of Goal 5.

7. The Committee calls for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of the State party and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.

D. Parliament

8. **The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites the Parliament of the United Kingdom, as well as the Scottish Parliament,**

the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly where relevant, in line with their mandates, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.

E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

General context

9. The Committee takes note of the decision by the State party to withdraw from the European Union (known as “Brexit”) following the referendum of 23 June 2016. Noting that that decision has necessitated a close scrutiny of its national legislation and the changes that may be required, the Committee calls upon the State party to seize this opportunity to reinforce its human rights framework across its territory, including by incorporating the Convention into its national law, and to utilize the Convention as a strategic mechanism for empowering women. At this critical juncture, the Committee stresses that placing women’s rights at the heart of its deliberations and ensuring that women’s rights are strengthened will result in creating a stronger and more resilient society.

10. The Committee is cognizant of the State party’s structure of government, with devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and with separate governance structures in the State party’s overseas territories and Crown dependencies. It recalls, however, that the devolution of government powers does not negate the direct responsibility of the State party to fulfil its obligations to all women and girls within its jurisdiction, as set out in the Committee’s general recommendation No. 28 (2010) on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention. It also recalls that article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provides that a party to a treaty may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as a justification for its failure to perform a treaty. Recognizing the absence of a functioning government in Northern Ireland since January 2017, the Committee reiterates the obligation of the State party to take all measures necessary to ensure the effective application of the Convention to guarantee the rights of all women there, as well as in all of the overseas territories and Crown dependencies.

Reservations

11. Welcoming the withdrawal of some reservations in the Isle of Man, the Committee notes that the State party continues to maintain its reservations to the Convention, notwithstanding the fact that many of them have the character of interpretative declarations and may no longer be necessary.

12. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendation that the State party review its reservations with a view to withdrawing them.

Legislative and policy framework

13. The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the State party to strengthen its legislative and policy framework to promote and protect the rights of women and girls, including the efforts referred to in paragraphs 4 and 5 above. It reiterates its previous concerns expressed in 1999, 2008 and 2013, however, regarding the lack of measures taken to fully incorporate the provisions of the Convention into its national legislation, leading to a fragmented and uneven legislative framework on the rights of women and girls. It expresses particular concern that the absence of a functioning government in Northern Ireland since January 2017 has led to gaps in legislation and policy to ensure the effective protection of women there. Furthermore, while the Committee welcomes the extension of the applicability of the Convention from three

to seven overseas territories between 2016 and 2017, it remains concerned that the provisions of the Convention have not been given effect in all of its overseas territories and the Crown dependencies of Jersey and Guernsey.

14. Recalling its previous concluding observations, the Committee recommends that the State party incorporate all the provisions of the Convention into its legislation without further delay to ensure that the rights of women are guaranteed systematically and on an equal footing throughout all territories under its jurisdiction, including Northern Ireland. It also recommends that the State party, in accordance with its obligations under the Convention, take proactive measures to ensure that the Convention is given effect in all of its overseas territories and Crown dependencies.

15. The Committee notes that the Equality Act of 2010 prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of sex. It reiterates its previous concern, however, that the applicability of the Equality Act does not extend to Northern Ireland ([CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7](#), para. 18), and regrets that the State party, invoking the principle of devolution, has not taken any measures to ensure that women in Northern Ireland have at least the same protections with regard to equality as do their counterparts in the other administrations of the State party, notwithstanding the lack of a functioning government in Northern Ireland. The Committee remains concerned about the limitations of the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act to effectively protect women from discrimination, including intersecting forms of discrimination, and regrets the lack of progress made to bring into force the provisions of the Act relating to the public sector duty regarding socioeconomic inequalities (sections 1 to 3 of the Act) and the recognition of “combined discrimination” (section 14 of the Act).

16. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Revise its legislation in Northern Ireland to ensure that it affords protection to women there on an equal basis with women in other administrations of the State party;

(b) Ensure the uniform and effective application of the public sector equality duty, so that all public bodies across its jurisdiction systematically undertake gender equality impact assessments;

(c) Review and amend the public sector equality duty in order to address situations of intersecting forms of discrimination, such as discrimination faced by “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic” women, older women, women with disabilities, asylum-seeking and refugee women, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons;

(d) Bring into force the provisions of the Equality Act relating to the public sector duty regarding socioeconomic inequalities (sections 1 to 3 of the Act) and “combined discrimination” (section 14 of the Act).

17. The Committee is concerned about the disproportionately negative impact of austerity measures on women, who constitute the vast majority of single parents and are more likely to be engaged in informal, temporary or precarious forms of employment. It reiterates its previous concern ([CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7](#), para. 20) that austerity measures have resulted in cuts in funding to organizations that provide social services to women, including those that provide services for women only, as well as budget cuts in the public sector, where more women are employed than men. It notes with concern that reductions in social care services increase the burden on primary caregivers, who are disproportionately women.

18. **The Committee recommends that the State party undertake a comprehensive assessment on the impact of austerity measures on the rights of women and adopt measures to mitigate and remedy the negative consequences without delay.**

19. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act in May 2018, section 51 of which requires the Secretary of State to provide “all reasonable assistance” to the governments of the British overseas territories to enable each of those governments to establish a publicly accessible register of the beneficial ownership of companies registered in each government’s jurisdiction. Although the introduction of the Act constitutes a positive step in the fight against money-laundering, tax evasion and corruption, the Committee remains concerned that the offshore tax regimes in the overseas territories and Crown dependencies continue to enable multinational companies and wealthy individuals, as well as criminal organizations, to avoid paying taxes, leading to significant losses of revenue that could be utilized for public services for women.

20. **The Committee recommends that the State party continue to adopt measures to combat money-laundering and tax evasion, including by establishing public registers of companies and trusts in all of its overseas territories and Crown dependencies and undertaking independent, participatory and periodic impact assessments of the national and extraterritorial effects of its financial secrecy and corporate tax policies on the rights of women. It also recommends that the State party revise its corporate, trust, financial and tax legislation, policies and practices, with a view to fully realizing the enjoyment by women of their rights under the Convention, both nationally and abroad.**

21. The Committee notes the assurance provided by the State party that the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 converts the majority of European Union law into legal guarantees at the national level and that the minimum standards established by the European Union will be retained. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned that Brexit could, in the absence of comprehensive measures to empower women and national legislation incorporating the provisions of the Convention, lead to a retrogression in the protection of women’s rights in the State party. It is also concerned that women may be disproportionately affected by the negative economic impact of Brexit and the loss of funding from the European Union for specialized programmes and service for women and girls. Given the distinct circumstances in Northern Ireland, the Committee is further concerned that women living there will be particularly affected, including due to changes affecting cross-border trade.

22. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Undertake a thorough impact assessment of its withdrawal from the European Union on the rights of women, including women in Northern Ireland, and adopt effective measures to mitigate the negative effects;**

(b) **Ensure the inclusion of the provisions of the Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights and the *acquis communautaire* (accumulated legislation, legal acts and court decisions of the European Union) in its national legislation and include human rights and the empowerment of women at the centre of its approaches to tackling the current challenges;**

(c) **Ensure that any future change in legal provisions does not constitute a retrogression in the protection of women’s rights and adopt measures to ensure that its national legislation keeps pace with progress made with regard to women’s rights in the European Union;**

(d) **Ensure that any future trade and investment agreements negotiated by the State party recognize the primacy of its obligations under the Convention and explicitly consider their impact on women's rights;**

(e) **Ensure that the loss of funding from the European Union does not lead to gaps in support and services provided to women and girls, including by securing alternative sources of funding.**

Legal aid and access to justice

23. The Committee welcomes the measures adopted by the State party to facilitate access to civil legal aid for victims of domestic violence and child abuse. It notes that the introduction of court fees under the Employment Tribunals and the Employment Appeal Tribunal Fees Order 2013, which the Committee had found to be of concern (CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7, para. 22), was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court in 2017 and therefore suspended. The Committee remains concerned, however, that cuts to legal aid, as well as the strict criteria for gaining access to legal aid under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 continue to have a negative impact on women's access to justice and effective remedies in areas such as family, housing, immigration and welfare benefits law.

24. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that women, in particular women in vulnerable situations, such as women with disabilities, "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" women, asylum-seeking and refugee women and victims of gender-based violence and of trafficking, have effective access to justice and remedies with adequate legal support and representation, including by ensuring that legal aid and representation is accessible and available and the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations. It also recommends that the State party take effective measures to ensure that women have access to legal aid in areas that affect them the most, such as family, housing, immigration and welfare benefits law.**

National machinery for the advancement of women

25. The Committee welcomes the information provided by the State party delegation that the Government Equalities Office, its national machinery for the advancement of women, will be relocated from the Department of Education to the Cabinet Office as at 1 April 2019, to improve coordination among government departments. It also welcomes the establishment of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee to monitor the performance of the Government Equalities Office in June 2015. Nevertheless, the Committee remains concerned that the mandate of the Government Equalities Office is broad and not specifically aimed at advancing the rights of women. In addition, while noting that the Government Equalities Office convenes a Gender Directors' Network to bring together those responsible for gender equality in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the Committee reiterates its previous concerns of 1999, 2008 and 2013 regarding the lack of a unified and comprehensive national strategy or an effective coordinating and monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the Convention. It expresses further concern regarding the lack of systematic collection of data, disaggregated by sex, gender, ethnicity, disability and age, in particular with regard to intersecting forms of discrimination, to identify areas in which women lack substantive equality with men, inform policymaking and assess the impact of measures taken.

26. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Continue to take measures to strengthen the capacity of the Government Equalities Office to function as an effective national machinery for the advancement of women;**

(b) **Consider establishing a national oversight mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Convention, with the effective participation of its national human rights institutions and women's organizations;**

(c) **Develop and adopt a unified, comprehensive and overarching national strategy for the implementation of the Convention throughout the whole of its territory;**

(d) **Systematically collect and publish data, disaggregated by sex, gender, ethnicity, disability and age, throughout the whole of its territory to inform policymaking and assess the impact of measures taken.**

Stereotypes

27. The Committee welcomes the research undertaken by the Advertising Standards Authority on the harmful effects of stereotypical imaging and the objectification of women in the media and in advertising and the publication of its report on that research in July 2017. It commends the introduction by the Committees of Advertising Practice of a new rule in the advertising codes proscribing gender stereotypes that are likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence in advertisements, which will come into force in June 2019. Nevertheless, the Committee remains concerned about the persistence of gender stereotypes affecting the educational and career choices of women and girls, as well as the impact of unrealistic images perpetrated in the media, including social media, on the mental well-being of women and girls.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to engage with the media to eliminate stereotypical imaging and the objectification of women in the media and take further measures to eliminate negative gender stereotypes and to promote positive and diverse portrayals of gender, including in schools and through public campaigns.

Gender-based violence against women and girls

29. The Committee welcomes the adoption of measures to combat violence against women and girls, including the strategy on ending violence against women and girls for the period from 2016 to 2020 in England and Wales and the national strategy of Scotland, entitled "Equally safe", aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls. Nevertheless, the Committee remains concerned about the lack of uniform protection of women and girls from all forms of gender-based violence across the jurisdiction of the State party, noting with particular concern the inadequacy of laws and policies to protect women in Northern Ireland. It also expresses concern that:

(a) Asylum-seeking women, migrants and women with insecure immigration status who experience gender-based violence, including domestic violence and rape, refrain from seeking protection and support services for fear of having their immigration status reported to authorities;

(b) Women with disabilities face challenges in gaining access to justice and seeking protection for gender-based violence, in particular when violence is perpetrated by their caregivers;

(c) The system of commissioning services has reportedly led to funding for service provision given to large and generic service providers, rather than organizations providing specialist services for victims of gender-based violence, which may entail inadequate or inappropriate support for those victims.

30. **With reference to its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, and recalling its previous recommendation to the State party, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;**

(b) **Adopt legislative and comprehensive policy measures to protect women from all forms of gender-based violence throughout the State party's jurisdiction, including Northern Ireland;**

(c) **Ensure that asylum-seeking and migrant women and women with insecure immigration status are able to seek effective protection and support services without fear of having their immigration status reported to authorities;**

(d) **Ensure that its laws and policies effectively protect women with disabilities from all forms of gender-based violence, in particular violence perpetrated by their caregivers;**

(e) **Ensure that the policy of commissioning services does not undermine the provision of specialized services for women who are victims of gender-based violence.**

Female genital mutilation

31. The Committee commends the State party on the introduction of a mandatory reporting duty, which came into force in October 2015, requiring health-care and social-care professionals and teachers to report all known cases of female genital mutilation in girls under 18 years of age to the police. It also welcomes the first conviction for female genital mutilation in February 2019. However, the Committee remains concerned that the practice persists and that it is reportedly increasingly being performed on babies and infants to avoid detection.

32. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the full implementation of its legislation on female genital mutilation and take further measures to effectively prosecute perpetrators of this offence. It also recommends that the State party step up its efforts to raise awareness that female genital mutilation is a form of child abuse and gender-based violence against women and girls.**

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

33. The Committee welcomes the adoption in 2015 of the Modern Slavery Act, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) and the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act, which introduce new criminal offences for trafficking in persons, slavery, servitude and forced and compulsory labour. However, the Committee is concerned that the definition of trafficking as set out in the Modern Slavery Act is conditioned on travel of the victim. While appreciating the ongoing reforms to improve the national referral mechanism, the Committee remains concerned that many victims of trafficking and modern forms of slavery remain unidentified and that the support provided to victims is inadequate, putting victims at risk of homelessness, destitution and further exploitation.

34. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that the definition of trafficking in persons in its national legislation is in line with the internationally agreed definition set out in the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially**

Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;

(b) **Adopt a comprehensive national strategy to combat trafficking in women and girls, as previously recommended;**

(c) **Continue to improve the national referral mechanism, including by implementing the reform package announced in October 2017, to ensure that victims of trafficking are properly identified and adequately protected and supported.**

35. The Committee expresses concern about reports of the increasing number of women who are turning to prostitution due to poverty and of the practice of male landlords offering accommodations to women in return for sex (known as “sex for rent”). It is also concerned that existing services provided to women in prostitution are focused on harm reduction, rather than on exiting prostitution, which may have the effect of prolonging the exploitation of women in prostitution. While noting that it is an offence to pay for the sexual services of a child, the Committee is concerned that the prosecution is required to prove that the accused believed the child to be under 18 years old, rather than the burden of proof being placed on the accused, which contributes to impunity for exploitation of child prostitution.

36. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Take effective measures to ensure that women in vulnerable situations have effective access to employment opportunities, housing and social security so that they do not need to resort to prostitution or “sex for rent”;**

(b) **Take effective measures to reduce demand for commercial sex, including by carrying out educational and awareness-raising measures targeted at men and boys and focused on combating all notions of the subordination and objectification of women;**

(c) **Revise legislation to decriminalize prostitution and clear the criminal records of women who have been convicted for offences related to prostitution to enable them to seek alternative forms of employment;**

(d) **Ensure the availability of specialist services that are adequately funded, inclusive and accessible to assist women and girls in exiting prostitution;**

(e) **Create educational and employment opportunities for women who wish to exit prostitution;**

(f) **Undertake research into the prevalence and nature of prostitution in Northern Ireland and Scotland, in addition to the research that is currently under way in England and Wales, to identify the necessary changes to be made to legislation and policy;**

(g) **Revise its legislation to shift the burden of proof from the prosecution to the purchaser of sexual services for cases involving minors, as previously recommended ([CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7](#), para. 41).**

Participation in political and public life

37. The Committee welcomes the increasing number of women who are represented in Parliament, the judiciary and the police force. Nevertheless, the Committee remains concerned about the underrepresentation of women in political and public life, in particular in Northern Ireland, and the low representation of “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic” women and women with disabilities in political life. While welcoming the adoption in Scotland of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act in March 2018, which is aimed at achieving the objective of 50 per

cent representation of women in non-executive positions on the boards of certain public bodies by December 2022, the Committee remains concerned about the inadequacy of measures adopted by the State party to accelerate the representation of women in all areas of political and public life throughout the whole of the State party's territory.

38. The Committee recommends that the State party take specific targeted measures, including temporary special measures, to improve the representation of women, including "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" women and women with disabilities, in Parliament, the judiciary and decision-making positions in the foreign service and its diplomatic missions. It calls upon the State party to take measures to address the low representation of women in political and public life in Northern Ireland, including by ensuring the implementation of section 43 A of the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 enabling the use of gender quotas.

Women and peace and security

39. The Committee welcomes the adoption in January 2018 of the State party's fourth national action plan on women and peace and security, for the period from 2018 to 2022, which provides a framework for ensuring that the provisions of Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) and related resolutions are incorporated into the State party's defence, diplomacy and development work abroad. The Committee reiterates its previous concern, however, regarding the lack of measures taken by the State party to implement resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) in Northern Ireland, where women continue to face intimidation by paramilitary groups and are underrepresented in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes.

40. With reference to the Committee's general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, the Committee recommends that the State party take concrete measures to ensure the effective participation of women in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding processes in Northern Ireland, in line with Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), including by:

(a) **Addressing the obstacles to their participation, including intimidation by paramilitary groups, as noted in the report on the inquiry conducted in 2014 by the Northern Ireland Assembly All Party Group on Women, Peace and Security and the Westminster Associate Parliamentary Group on Security Council resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#) on women and peace and security;**

(b) **Guaranteeing the participation of women in the context of the transitional justice mechanisms envisaged in the Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill.**

Education

41. The Committee commends the measures adopted by the State party to encourage girls to consider jobs in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, including through apprenticeships. The Committee remains concerned, however, about the continued underrepresentation of women in higher education and careers in those fields. It is also concerned about the findings of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, in its report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, regarding the prevalence of sexual harassment of girls in schools. In addition, while welcoming the adoption, in April 2017, of the Children and Social Work Act, which introduces a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to make relationships education mandatory in primary schools and relationships and sex education mandatory in secondary schools in England from September 2020, the Committee

notes that the regulations to bring the provision into effect have yet to be adopted and that there is wide variation in the content of sexual education across the State party.

42. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Strengthen efforts to encourage girls to pursue non-traditional subjects and take coordinated measures to encourage girls to take up courses in science, technology, engineering and mathematics;**

(b) **Continue to implement the recommendations of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee contained in its report of October 2018 on sexual harassment of women and girls in public places;**

(c) **Take measures to introduce into school curricula mandatory, age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive rights, including issues such as gender relations and responsible sexual behaviour, throughout the State party;**

(d) **Promote human rights education that includes a focus on the empowerment of girls and the Convention in schools.**

Employment and economic empowerment

43. The Committee commends the State party on its efforts to increase the participation of women in employment and welcomes the announcement that it will publish a strategy on gender equality and economic empowerment. It also welcomes the adoption of legislation to introduce a requirement for companies and public bodies with over 250 employees to publish their gender pay gap data in England, Scotland and Wales and the voluntary initiatives led by the business sector to increase the representation of women in the private sector, such as the Hampton-Alexander Review. However, the Committee remains concerned that:

(a) Women continue to be underrepresented on corporate boards and executive positions and are concentrated in lower paying positions in all occupational sectors and in lower paying occupational sectors such as health, education and retail;

(b) Women are more likely to be engaged in informal, temporary or precarious forms of employment, including employment with zero-hours contracts;

(c) Sexual harassment in the workplace remains prevalent, as noted in the report of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee on the subject published in July 2018;

(d) Women belonging to marginalized groups continue to face obstacles in gaining access to employment and are concentrated in low-paying job sectors.

44. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Continue to take proactive and specific measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions in the workplace and decrease the horizontal occupational segregation of men and women, including by increasing access for women to apprenticeships in fields where they are underrepresented;**

(b) **Take measures to increase opportunities for women to gain access to formal and secure employment and discourage the use by employers of zero-hours contracts;**

(c) **Ensure that the provisions regarding mandatory pay gap reporting in the Employment Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 are brought into effect in Northern Ireland;**

(d) **Encourage employers to publish a narrative with their gender pay gap data, with a view to better understanding the reasons behind the gender pay gap, and to take appropriate remedial measures;**

(e) **Introduce a mandatory duty on employers to take reasonable steps to protect women from sexual harassment in the workplace;**

(f) **Adopt specific measures, including temporary special measures, to facilitate access for women belonging to marginalized groups, such as “Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic” women and women with disabilities to the labour market in order to increase employment rates among those groups of women and reduce the concentration of such women in low-paying jobs.**

45. The Committee welcomes the measures taken by the State party to expand the childcare entitlement for working parents in England, Scotland and Wales. However, the Committee is concerned that childcare costs remain excessive, in particular in Northern Ireland, which constitutes an obstacle for women in entering into and progressing in the workplace. In addition, while welcoming the introduction of flexible working arrangements in 2014, the Committee regrets that it can only be exercised after 26 weeks of employment. It also regrets that, notwithstanding the introduction of shared parental leave in 2014, uptake among men has been low.

46. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the availability of affordable and accessible childcare facilities and/or arrangements throughout the State party, in particular in Northern Ireland;**

(b) **Consider removing the 26-week waiting period for employees who wish to apply for flexible working arrangements;**

(c) **Provide further incentives to encourage men to take parental leave, such as non-transferrable leave, and encourage men to participate equally in childcare responsibilities.**

Health

47. The Committee welcomes the introduction, in June 2017, of a scheme to enable women from Northern Ireland to obtain access to abortion services in England with coverage by the National Health Service. The Committee deeply regrets, however, the continued failure of the State party to implement the Committee’s previous recommendations and the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on the inquiry under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention ([CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1](#)), in which the Committee found that the State party was responsible for grave and systematic violations of women’s rights under the Convention in Northern Ireland, to ensure access for women to abortion services, including by decriminalizing abortion, on the grounds that abortion is a matter for the authorities in Northern Ireland to consider ([CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/2](#) and [CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8/Add.1](#)).

48. **With reference to paragraph 8 of the present concluding observations, and noting article 33 of the Belfast Agreement (or Good Friday Agreement) of 1998, which provides that the Westminster Parliament shall legislate as necessary to ensure that the international obligations of the United Kingdom are met with respect to Northern Ireland, the Committee urges the State party to implement, without further delay, the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on the inquiry under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention ([CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1](#)).**

49. The Committee remains concerned about obstacles faced by women belonging to marginalized groups, such as asylum-seeking and refugee women, migrant women, Roma and Traveller women, and victims of trafficking in gaining access to healthcare services, including as a result of their inability to provide identity documentation, proof of address or immigration status.

50. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen the implementation of programmes and policies aimed at providing effective access to healthcare for women belonging to marginalized groups, in particular asylum-seeking and refugee women, migrant women, Roma and Traveller women, and victims of trafficking.

Socioeconomic benefits

51. The Committee recalls its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7, para. 62) and remains concerned that the payment of the universal credit, which consolidates six separate income-related benefits, into a single bank account under the universal credit system risks depriving women in abusive relationships of the ability to gain access to necessary funds and trapping them in situations of poverty and violence. It is also deeply concerned about the introduction of a two-child tax credit limit, except in certain circumstances such as rape, which has a perverse and disproportionate impact on women. The Committee is further concerned that the increase in the State pension age for women from 60 to 66, following several legislative changes, has affected the pension entitlements of women born in the 1950s and is contributing to poverty, homelessness and financial hardships among the affected women.

52. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) **Ensure that women in abusive situations are able to independently gain access to payments under the universal credit system;**
- (b) **Repeal the two-child tax credit limit;**
- (c) **Take effective measures to ensure that the increase in the State pension age from 60 to 66 does not have a discriminatory impact on women born in the 1950s.**

Rural women

53. The Committee is concerned about the obstacles faced by women and girls in rural areas in gaining access to education, employment and healthcare and support services due to, among other things, limited resources and access to transportation and the Internet. In addition, although the Committee commends the measures taken in Scotland and Wales to halt the practice of hydraulic fracturing to extract fossil fuels (known as “fracking”), it is concerned that women in rural areas in other territories of the State party are disproportionately affected by the harmful effects of fracking, including exposure to hazardous and toxic chemicals, environmental pollution and the effects of climate change.

54. Recalling its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) **Adopt inclusive and accessible measures to facilitate access for women and girls to education, employment, healthcare services and support services in rural areas, including by ensuring their access to transportation and the Internet and their participation in decision-making processes regarding rural development;**

(b) **Review its policy on fracking and its impact on the rights of women and girls and consider introducing a comprehensive and complete ban on fracking;**

(c) **Ensure the equal participation of rural women and girls in policymaking processes on disaster mitigation and climate change, in line with its general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.**

Asylum-seeking and refugee women

55. The Committee expresses concern about the detention of asylum-seeking women, including pregnant women and nursing women, and the absence of a general time limit on immigration detention in the State party. It is also concerned about the destitution of refugee and asylum-seeking women, due to extremely low levels of financial support available to them, which is also difficult to obtain, and the lack of access to employment and housing for those women, which places them at further risk of exploitation, abuse and trafficking.

56. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Introduce a general time limit on immigration detention and implement alternatives to detention;**

(b) **Take immediate measures to end the detention of pregnant women and nursing mothers;**

(c) **Take measures to enable asylum-seeking and refugee women to gain access to employment and appropriate housing.**

Women in detention

57. The Committee welcomes the adoption in June 2018 of the first female offender strategy, aimed at diverting the most vulnerable women in the criminal justice system away from custody through the provision of tailored support, in England and Wales. However, the Committee regrets that the strategy does not cover all administrations of the State party, including Scotland, where the rate of imprisonment of women continues to be high, due to the rise in the use of custodial sentences. It remains concerned about the inadequacy of mental health-care services in prisons and at the disproportionate rates of self-harm and suicide among women.

58. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Allocate sufficient resources to effectively implement the female offender strategy and ensure that a similar strategy is also adopted in other administrations of the State party;**

(b) **Continue to develop alternative sentencing and custodial strategies, including community interventions and services, for women convicted of minor offences;**

(c) **Take further measures to improve the provision of mental health-care services in all prisons, taking into account the particular needs of women.**

Marriage and family relations

59. The Committee welcomes the consultations initiated by the State party on divorce reform, in particular the proposals contained in the document entitled “Reducing family conflict: reform of the legal requirements for divorce”. However,

it is concerned about the obstacles faced by women in religious marriages who seek a divorce, as well as the relatively high number of forced marriages in the State party, despite efforts made by the Forced Marriage Unit.

60. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Ensure that the new legal requirements for divorce provide for no-fault divorce and introduce an obligation for the celebrant of religious marriages, including Islamic marriages, to civilly register such marriages;**

(b) **Strengthen efforts to combat forced marriages, including by sensitizing parents on the need for free and full consent of their daughters to enter into marriage, in line with article 16 (1) (b) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 21 (1994) on equality in marriage and family relations, and consider alleviating the costs for the repatriation of victims.**

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

61. The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in its efforts to implement the provisions of the Convention.

Dissemination

62. The Committee requests the State party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the de facto official language of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), as well as in the overseas territories and Crown dependencies, in particular to the Governments, the parliaments and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.

Ratification of other treaties

63. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments¹ would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which it is not yet a party.

Follow-up to concluding observations

64. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 13, 21 (a) and (b) and 25 (b) above.

¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Preparation of the next report

65. **The Committee requests the State party to submit its ninth periodic report, which is due in March 2023. The report should be submitted on time and cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.**

66. **The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).**
