



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
22 June 2022

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-second session

Summary record of the 1884th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 15 June 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention
(continued)**

*Eighth periodic report of Türkiye (continued) (CEDAW/C/TUR/8;
CEDAW/C/TUR/Q/8; CEDAW/C/TUR/RQ/8)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Türkiye joined the meeting.*

Articles 10 to 14

2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to reply to the questions posed by Mr. Safarov on article 10 of the Convention that had remained unanswered at the end of the previous day's meeting.

3. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that reproductive health education had been incorporated into the national school curriculum for both boys and girls. Pregnant schoolgirls were taken out of mainstream schools and pursued their academic or vocational education through distance learning. The more than 100,000 students enrolled in the distance education system enjoyed the same rights and opportunities for gaining qualifications as those in the formal system. Open educational resources were made available to the students as an alternative means of continuing their studies in ways that they might not be able to do otherwise.

4. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, in comparison to men, women in Türkiye had experienced a higher loss of jobs, a greater reduction of working hours, a larger uptake of unpaid leave and a heavier burden of domestic and care-related responsibilities during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In such circumstances, it would be useful to understand what specific measures the State party had taken to ensure the reintegration of women into the labour market. In particular, she would welcome further information on any temporary special measures that had been envisaged to increase the participation of women in the labour market, to promote the transition of women from informal to formal employment, to narrow the gender pay gap, to reduce horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and to reduce the domestic and care-related responsibilities assigned to them.

5. According to statistics provided by the State party, women carried out almost five times as much domestic and care-related work than men, and having children was still having a significantly negative impact on women's participation in the labour market. The Committee would therefore appreciate further information on any measures that were being taken to enable women to continue in employment after they became mothers. Details on any action taken to address the lack of affordable childcare services and to enable fathers to fulfil their parental responsibilities would be of particular interest. She wished to know what measures had been taken to eliminate discrimination against mothers and pregnant women in relation to recruitment, career development and paid parental leave, and how the Government planned to redistribute care responsibilities between women and men. It would also be helpful to learn what measures had been taken to ensure that the high proportion of women who were engaged in informal employment were covered by social protection schemes.

6. Lastly, she would be eager to know whether the State party had adopted any specific measures to ensure access to formal employment for migrant, asylum-seeking, refugee and Kurdish women, as well as for women with disabilities and women belonging to minority or marginalized groups. If so, the Committee would welcome further information on the measures in question.

7. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that various measures and aims in relation to women's employment had been included in the Eleventh Development Plan. In that document, the Government had set the target of increasing labour force participation to 38.5 per cent and the self-employment rate to 20 per cent. In order to achieve those goals, relevant strategies and projects had been established in different sectors of the labour market. For example, under an employment incentive initiative introduced in 2018, the tax and social security premiums of women over the age of 18 were to be covered by the State for a period of 18 months. Through a separate project, which had been rolled out in seven provinces, the Government had provided financial assistance to help 4,000 employers employ 4,000 women

for a period of 22 months. Specific measures had also been taken to improve access to employment for women with disabilities and young women. For example, a four-day training course in sign language was offered to companies who recruited deaf or hard-of-hearing female employees.

8. A national board had been established to monitor and evaluate all those activities. The board was also responsible for overseeing coordination between the different stakeholders, since increasing employment rates among disadvantaged groups required close cooperation between the Government, the private sector and the Social Security Institution. The efforts were bearing fruit, however, and the rate of women in informal employment had dropped from 72.5 per cent in 2002 to 37.1 per cent in 2020.

9. Other measures had been taken to support the role of women within the family structure. For example, all women who gave birth or adopted children under the age of 3 were entitled to take maternity leave lasting between two months and a year. The State provided women with a number of incentives such as paid and unpaid maternity leave to support them and the family structure. The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services had worked with a private foundation and the United Nations on a project aimed at developing specific mechanisms to assist women who were not in education or employment. The project had so far been rolled out in eleven provinces.

10. With respect to childcare, all women benefited from public childcare services without discrimination throughout the country. The Ministry of National Education administered over 27,000 preschool care and education centres. Particular attention was given to vulnerable children, including children who were in the care of the State, children whose mothers were in correctional facilities and children of parents with disabilities. Every year, around a million vulnerable children benefited from childcare and early childhood education services funded in their entirety by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and the Ministry of National Education. The Turkish Employment Agency also ran training courses on the importance of early childhood education, with participating mothers receiving a monthly childcare support of 400 Turkish lira. So far, 721 women had benefited from the initiative. Under a separate project, mothers received monthly childcare support following their return to full-time employment. The Government planned to extend the project, which had already been rolled out in seven provinces but was scheduled to end in September. The project to support the employment of women through the promotion of the childcare profession, known as EDU-CARE, which would run until the end of 2022, was aimed at increasing the participation of mothers in the labour force, supporting mothers in work and promoting the transition of childcare workers to the formal employment sector.

11. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, since the Eleventh Development Plan had been launched in 2019, it must have been drafted before the outbreak of COVID-19. She therefore wished to know whether any changes had been made to that plan aimed at mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on women in the State party. She also hoped that, in responding to the pandemic, the Government had been proactive in adopting policies that would promote substantive equality between women and men.

12. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that one of the Government's key strategies for mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on women had been to promote entrepreneurship. It had taken various measures to provide women with the skills required to produce and sell home-based and small-scale goods and services. Women's cooperatives were playing an important role in that drive and public childcare services had also been strengthened. In general, the Government was still in the process of assessing the impact of the pandemic. It intended to formulate new action plans and adopt a new package of measures when the findings of those assessments had been published.

13. **Ms. Chalal** said that, although a certain amount of progress had been made in improving the access of women to health services since the State party's previous report, the Committee still had several concerns regarding the implementation of article 12 of the Convention.

14. The State party had not provided data on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of sexual and reproductive health services. She wished to know how many women had not had access to birth control and how many undesired pregnancies there had been during the

pandemic. The Committee would also welcome further information on any measures the State party intended to take in order to guarantee effective access to sexual and reproductive health services on an equal footing throughout the country, including for disadvantaged groups such as women living in rural areas and women with disabilities.

15. It would be helpful to know the size of the budget that had been allocated for the acquisition of family planning products over the previous three years. She understood that the Ministry of Health had set up a number of special advice centres that enabled young people – including those belonging to vulnerable groups – to acquire greater knowledge and understanding of sexual and reproductive health. She would be eager to know whether the Government planned to extend that good practice throughout the country and to incorporate the centres into the national health service.

16. Abortions could be lawfully carried out in Türkiye until the tenth week of pregnancy, or the twentieth week when the pregnancy was the result of rape. Many hospitals were nonetheless reluctant to carry out those procedures; a survey had indicated that the proportion of public hospitals that refused to do such procedures had increased from 12 per cent in 2016 to 54 per cent in 2020. It was very expensive to terminate a pregnancy at private clinics and there had been reports suggesting that doctors had requested authorization from a prosecutor or an attorney before carrying out the procedure. She wished to know why the number of public hospitals refusing to carry out abortions had increased and would also welcome further information on the measures that the Government intended to take to ensure the right to abortion without discrimination for all women, particularly those from vulnerable groups who were more likely to resort to unsafe alternatives. According to research conducted in 2018, 7 per cent of Syrian women had not given birth in a public establishment. She wished to know where those births had taken place.

17. Lastly, she wished to know whether the State party intended to increase the access of pregnant women to vaccinations against sexually transmitted diseases and whether plans had been made to incorporate a comprehensive learning programme on sexual and reproductive health into the public education curriculum.

18. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that access to sexual and reproductive health services, including free contraception and birth control advice, was a constitutional right for everyone in her country. Childbirth education classes had been set up at 1,595 public hospitals to inform pregnant women and their husbands or partners about pre- and post-natal processes, vaginal births and other childbirth methods, and pain management. Between 2015 and 2021, over 2.6 million pregnant women had benefited from those services. Health services were provided in her country without discrimination, and the Ministry of Health also operated facilities in rural areas where training on sexual and reproductive health was delivered to the most isolated communities.

19. Mobile health units were available in remote areas in order to cater for rural residents, including seasonal workers and their families. The units provided services free of charge and special programmes were in place to provide such workers with reproductive health care. Such care conformed to World Health Organization (WHO) standards and guidance material on prenatal and postnatal services was available. Pregnant women received hospital services free of charge, regardless of whether they had paid their health-care premiums.

20. The Government attached significant importance to informed consent for medical treatment. Permission had to be obtained from the parents or guardians of minors and persons under guardianship in order for them to receive such treatment. Court orders could be obtained where the parent or guardian had refused consent and the treatment was considered essential.

21. The cut-off point for the termination of a pregnancy was 20 weeks where the woman had become pregnant as a result of rape. A court order was required in such cases to confirm that the woman had been the victim of a sexual offence.

22. Refugee women were able to access the same health-care services as Turkish citizens. Care tailored to the needs of Syrian refugees was available at migrant health centres. Health-care professionals at those centres received in-service training on the difficult situation of

migrants and how to treat them accordingly. Midwives and nurses at the centres were given additional training in cooperation with WHO to improve care for pregnant migrant women.

23. Health-care services for mothers and infants had been available throughout the pandemic. Since 2020, more hospitals had been certified as mother-friendly, bringing the current total to 85. Lactation consultants had continued to provide services during the pandemic and the number of consultants had been increased significantly since 2019. The Ministry of Health strongly encouraged breastfeeding through measures such as providing childbirth education classes for pregnant women. The number of baby-friendly hospitals had continued to rise over the same period and there were currently over 600 such hospitals across the country. Treatment for COVID-19 patients was classified as emergency care, which meant that it was accessible to all citizens, free of charge. COVID-19 vaccinations were administered, also without charge, to all pregnant women on request.

24. The HIV/AIDS Control Programme of Türkiye for the period 2019–2024 had adopted a human rights perspective to ensure equal access to treatment for all persons living with HIV. The Programme sought to address HIV/AIDS not just as a health-related but also a cross-cutting issue. Work was carried out with the Ministry of National Defence to provide training on HIV/AIDS, including measures to prevent the spread of the disease, to soldiers throughout the country. HIV tests were widely available free of charge and were performed in full confidentiality. Those who tested positive were referred to the relevant health-care centres for treatment, which was covered by the Turkish universal health insurance scheme and thus free at the point of service.

25. **Ms. Chalal** said that she would like to know what budget resources had been set aside for the purchase of family planning products for the previous three years. She would also appreciate hearing about the steps taken to ensure that adequate feminine hygiene products were made available to Syrian refugee women.

26. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she wished to know what steps had been taken to achieve women's economic empowerment and ensure participation of women in leadership roles. She wondered what measures had been adopted to tackle poverty among women of all ages and to combat social exclusion of older women in particular. She would be interested to hear how the State promoted women's participation in sports and other recreational and cultural activities. It would be useful to know whether there were any effective mechanisms in place to reduce the high rates of relative and extreme poverty in rural areas, and whether a gender equality perspective had been incorporated into policies for the protection and management of natural resources, including water supplies. Were there legal and policy frameworks in place to protect the natural environment and the livelihoods of rural women?

27. It would be helpful if the delegation could explain the methods and indicators used to measure and monitor the outcomes of public policies to ensure inclusion and equality of women with disabilities. She would like to know how the State party would improve access to shelters for women and children with psychological as well as physical disabilities and ensure that persons in such shelters received the special support services that they required.

28. She would appreciate information about policies to protect women human rights defenders from arbitrary detention and to guarantee that the human rights of such women were respected while in detention. It would be useful to have updated and detailed information regarding specific measures to address the various intersecting forms of discrimination faced by Kurdish women.

29. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that seminars had been held for women nationwide, including in rural areas, in order to boost financial literacy and business management skills and to raise awareness about the support and incentives available from the Government. Training courses on how to establish and run cooperatives were provided as part of a project to encourage women's cooperatives. The Government's target was to have 3,500 such cooperatives throughout the country. A pool of consultants had been created in order to lend assistance where needed and a project entitled "My Sister" had been established whereby women entrepreneurs helped train others on how to run their own cooperatives. Women farmers were provided with knowledge and expertise to develop their business ideas, given training on the relevant agricultural techniques and granted various kinds of business incentives and ongoing support.

30. Day-care centres for older migrants had been set up in the six provinces where Syrian refugees were concentrated. Under the Government's financial support programmes, cash allowances were provided to older women, and those with disabilities received additional payments. All Turkish families were entitled to benefits of varying amounts depending on whether they had one, two or three or more children and, as of 2021, women whose spouses had died received monthly support payments under the Government's financial assistance programmes. Furthermore, allowances granted by the Ministry of Family and Social Services for families with adoptive or foster children meant that more children in alternative care could be placed with families rather than be housed in State institutions.

31. All women and girls with disabilities were treated as equal citizens, and action plans had been drawn up in conjunction with civil society organizations with a view to supporting them and ensuring their rights were respected. Education on and initiatives to raise awareness of children with disabilities had been conducted for some 1,200 teachers to date. Medical staff at reproductive health centres in the country's 81 provinces were also given training in the reproductive health needs of persons with disabilities. In addition to formal education, vocational and technical education opportunities were open to everyone. Lifelong learning programmes were run in public education centres, in conjunction with local authorities and civil society partners, and were designed to cover a wide range of interests.

32. Women who had been subjected to violence, and the children accompanying them, were accepted by women's shelters with no discrimination on any ground, including disability. In 2021, 903 women with disabilities had stayed in shelters, 265 of whom had mental disabilities. In the first four months of 2022, more than 400 women with disabilities had stayed in shelters. There were also specialized shelters for women with disabilities; in 2022, such shelters had provided refuge to 13 women, 7 of whom had mental disabilities. Post-trauma support was provided to the women and children in shelters, on which more details would be provided in writing.

33. Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons were treated equally and discrimination on any ground was prohibited under the Constitution's provision on equality. Persons who felt that discrimination had nevertheless occurred were free to take legal action to claim compensation in court and there were examples of such discrimination cases that had been brought.

34. Nobody could be discriminated against on the ground of ethnic origin, religion or race. Nevertheless, regional discrepancies in the level of economic development did exist between the eastern and central parts of the country, and the Government had been working for decades to try to close that gap. That regional disadvantage did not apply specifically to Kurdish women alone but also to all persons living in the region.

Articles 15 and 16

35. **Ms. Haidar** said that she had been concerned to learn that, while under the Civil Code the legal age for marriage was 18, exceptions were allowed at age 17 with the approval of the parents and, in exceptional circumstances, at age 16 with the approval of a judge. That "backdoor policy" was in practice facilitating many early and forced marriages. In addition, even younger children were sometimes married in religious weddings that were recognized by society but not by the State. While it had previously been a criminal offence to conduct a religious marriage before a legal marriage had taken place, in 2015 the Constitutional Court had decriminalized that practice. She wished to know when the National Strategy and Action Plan on the Prevention of Early and Forced Marriage, ratified in 2018 and revised in 2020, would be adopted, and how it would be implemented in order to put an end to early and forced marriage.

36. She had also been concerned to learn about a draft amendment to the Criminal Code whereby amnesty would be provided to perpetrators of child abuse who married their victims. According to media reports, the amendment would exonerate perpetrators of child sex abuse if the child was over 14 years of age and had not made a complaint, in which case the pair could be officially married provided the age gap between them was not more than 15 years. She would like to receive information on whether that amendment – which would in practice encourage child marriage – had been withdrawn definitively. Also, did the Government plan

to acknowledge in its political discourse that early and forced marriages were harmful practices? That would be useful in helping to end the phenomenon of child marriage.

37. In the context of the plan to end indefinite spousal alimony, she wished to know how the Government intended to strengthen the enforcement of alimony payments mandated by the courts, and to prevent the false declaration of income status as a strategy to avoid or reduce payment of alimony.

38. She also wished to know whether the State party would consider aligning the Civil Code with article 16 of the Convention, enabling women to keep their own surnames after marriage and give them to their children if they chose to do so.

39. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that over half of marriage applications from 16-year-olds were rejected by judges. Cases of sexual abuse involving minors under the age of 15, even when married, were investigated ex officio under the Criminal Code. With regard to impunity in cases of sexual abuse, it was true that without a complaint there was no legal case; however, persons such as teachers or medical staff who became aware that a minor under the age of 15 was married were obliged to notify the police or judiciary authorities in order to start legal proceedings. Many awareness-raising activities were carried out, especially for women and girls, in order to end early and forced marriages; to the same end, girls were encouraged to continue in education. Those activities had led to a significant drop in the number of early and forced marriages. Universities and civil society organizations contributed to the Government's efforts in that regard, and targeted actions were carried out in certain provinces to reduce their high rates of early marriage. In 17 cities specific measures had been introduced to that end, including provincial action plans and awareness-raising activities. Training was also given to neighbourhood administrators, whose functions included conducting marriages, and to counsellors, parents and children. As a result of the provincial action plans, as of 2021, the number of early and forced marriages of 16- and 17-year-olds had decreased significantly.

40. Only official marriages were recognized under the Civil Code, and religious marriages were considered to be invalid. Different categories of alimony were regulated under the Civil Code and cases where alimony was not paid were investigated. Single-parent families who did not receive alimony payments received funding from the State, under orphan-support programmes. Disadvantaged households were granted conditional cash transfers and were covered by health assistance programmes. Disadvantaged families of members of the armed forces (spouse and children) were also granted social assistance. The other assistance programme was for large single-parent families with dependent children, including children with disabilities.

41. Under the Civil Code, women could choose their family name if they applied to the competent authorities. The Constitutional Court had ruled that women could use their birth name without adding their husbands name.

42. **The Chair** thanked the delegation for the answers provided and expressed the Committee's continued concern at the State party's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.

43. **Ms. Yanık** (Türkiye) said that she wished to thank the Committee for its constructive comments. The importance of implementation of the Convention had grown in the face of the current global challenges for women and girls, including armed conflict, climate change and pandemics. The Committee's general recommendations in response to emerging issues were invaluable, and her Government would welcome a new general recommendation to address the challenges presented by digital technologies, including gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, online violence and hate speech.

44. The fact that every country had a different national context should not be an obstacle to achieving universal ideals. However, the Committee should bear in mind a country's particular legislative and security priorities, socioeconomic status and unique problems in its reviews and dialogues. Türkiye remained firmly committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.