



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
8 August 2025

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Ninety-first session

Summary record of the 2167th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 27 June 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Akia (Rapporteur)

Contents

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

Fifth periodic report of Botswana (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



In the absence of Ms. Haidar, Ms. Akia (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

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

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

Fifth periodic report of Botswana (continued) (CEDAW/C/BWA/5; CEDAW/C/BWA/Q/5; CEDAW/C/BWA/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Botswana joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to continue replying to questions raised at the previous meeting (CEDAW/C/SR.2166).

Articles 7–9

3. **A representative of Botswana** said that persons seeking to obtain citizenship of Botswana through a spouse must meet certain requirements, including with respect to residency. Applications received the same treatment regardless of whether they were from men or women, and decisions were reached on them by a committee.
4. A 2021 study on the reasons for women's long-standing underrepresentation in the legislature had found that, because of their multiple roles and responsibilities in the household, women had less time than men for campaigning. The Government had asked the executive secretaries of political parties to review the parties' internal procedures with a view to making it easier for women to stand for political office. Its efforts thus far had been unsuccessful. She would welcome information from the Committee regarding the experiences of countries that had implemented quotas. She wished to know how long those quotas had had to be kept in place before women had been able to compete on an equal footing with men.

Articles 10–14

5. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she wished to know when the bill on the Education Act was expected to be adopted and when the ban on corporal punishment, which was provided for in the bill, would go into effect. It would also be helpful to know the timeline for implementation of the initiatives relating to inclusive education for girls with disabilities referred to in the State Party's replies to the list of issues and questions in relation to its fifth periodic report (CEDAW/C/BWA/RQ/5). She wished to learn what percentage of out-of-school girls had returned to school in the previous five years and whether sexual harassment in schools was prohibited by law. She would be grateful for information on any measures taken to encourage girls to study non-traditional subjects, eliminate gender stereotypes in teaching material, make schools more accessible to women and girls living in remote areas or from the Basarwa (San), Balala and Nama communities, create Indigenous language curricula for girls from those communities and ensure that girls affected by child marriage could return to school and complete their education.
6. **A representative of Botswana** said that efforts were being made to suspend the use of corporal punishment in schools pending completion of the review of the bill on the Education Act. The Cabinet business committee had returned the bill to the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education, asking it to consult with parents and other stakeholders on the issue of corporal punishment. The Ministry must complete that process by the end of November 2025.

7. Under the national curriculum for primary and secondary schools, comprehensive sexuality education was taught as part of the life skills programme, both on a stand-alone basis and in connection with other subjects. School guidance and counselling teachers facilitated the programme. The curriculum included programmes with instruction in local languages.

8. There was a policy in place to allow teenage mothers in rural areas to return to school after childbirth, with counselling and reintegration support offered. Under another policy,

students could continue with their education during their pregnancy and, following childbirth, return to school in line with the advice of a doctor.

9. Botswana participated in the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) "child-friendly schools" initiative to create a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for girls in all schools. The Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) led campaigns to raise awareness in communities of the importance of girls' education. The Ministry of Education provided merit-based financial assistance to vulnerable girls to cover the costs of tuition, uniforms, transportation and examination fees. An additional policy addressing gender in education, which was guided by the National Policy on Gender and Development, sought to mainstream gender equality in the education system, ensure monitoring of gender parity in schools and of enrolment and completion rates, contribute to the elimination of gender-based violence in schools and support girls studying science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

10. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she would welcome answers to her earlier questions concerning access to education for Indigenous girls, the creation of Indigenous language programmes for such girls and the steps taken to ensure that girls who were victims of child marriage could return to school and complete their education.

11. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she would be curious to know to what extent the State Party considered the establishment of separate facilities for students with disabilities, such as the country's centre for persons with intellectual or multiple disabilities, to be a form of segregation and discrimination and whether it had considered the possibility of establishing an educational resource centre that could support inclusive education.

12. **A representative of Botswana** said that there were some 48 centres for learners with special needs. An effort was made to bring learners without severe disabilities into mainstream schools. Assistive devices were provided free of charge, augmentative and alternative communication methods were used and vocational training was available to women with disabilities. NGOs provided funding to expand access to education for girls and boys with disabilities.

13. **A representative of Botswana** said that learners with disabilities were generally integrated into ordinary schools. The specialist facility had been built for learners with severe disabilities. The programme to use mother tongues in schools would benefit all learners, particularly those whose first language was not Setswana, and was being rolled out in phases.

14. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she would like to know what mechanisms the State Party used to monitor and assess employment policies and programmes, including with respect to the enforcement of provisions on maternity leave in the private sector. She wished to learn what percentage of workers in mining and quarrying were women. She wondered whether the State Party planned to amend its employment legislation to have the Government administer all maternity leave benefits, increase paid maternity leave to 14 weeks, introduce paid paternity leave and prohibit the dismissal of pregnant mothers, and whether it intended to pass legislation explicitly prohibiting sex-based discrimination in hiring, remuneration, training, promotion and demotion. It would be helpful to know how the State Party planned to combat customary practices and stereotypes that perpetuated discrimination against women in employment. She would be grateful for data, disaggregated by disability, on the employment of women with disabilities in the public and private sectors, and information on any measures taken to ensure access to employment for women with disabilities.

15. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know what steps the State Party had taken or planned to take to increase access to healthcare and nutrition services and to information on HIV/AIDS and contraception in remote communities; how it planned to address the alarming results of unsafe abortions, including the associated maternal mortality; whether a review had been undertaken of section 160 of the Penal Code and the possibility of decriminalizing abortion; and, if so, what the outcome had been. She would appreciate information on the services provided to women and girls with or at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and the main measures taken to prevent transmission. She would also like to receive an update on the State Party's efforts to provide age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education in schools and youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services. It would be helpful to know what the impact of those efforts had been.

16. **A representative of Botswana** said that the country's employment legislation prohibited discrimination and alluded to bad treatment but did not address sexual harassment in the workplace. However, the Employment and Labour Relations Bill contained a comprehensive section on gender that covered matters such as sexual harassment in the workplace, discrimination against pregnant women and gender-based violence. Sexual harassment was addressed in the Public Service Act.

17. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Ministry of Health worked closely with the Ministry of Child Welfare and Basic Education to provide services relating to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights in both schools and the health system. A programme on adolescent sexual and reproductive health had been developed to teach boys about gender-based violence. Abortion remained illegal in Botswana. It was allowed only under very restricted circumstances.

18. Occupational therapy and mobility aids such as walking frames and wheelchairs were provided to persons with disabilities under a rehabilitation programme run by the Ministry of Health.

19. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Employment and Labour Relations Bill would be presented to the National Assembly in July 2025. A number of employment issues were being addressed under the Decent Work Country Programme and through the tripartite arrangement that brought workers, employers and the Government to the table to discuss the concerns of all parties.

20. **A representative of Botswana** said that the out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education programmes, which were run together with NGOs, had reached 62,788 persons between 2019 and 2024. Parents participated in discussions of issues relating to sexuality during Parent Child Communication dialogues. Both comprehensive sexuality education and adolescent sexual and reproductive health were addressed in secondary schools in certain remote areas.

21. **A representative of Botswana** said that the public health system provided effective care to persons with HIV/AIDS. Drugs were freely accessible, even to foreigners. Post-exposure prophylaxis was available.

22. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Decent Work Country Programme was expected to have a positive impact in both the formal and informal sectors. The pending review of labour legislation was expected to result in broader availability of family responsibility leave and maternity leave, including in the informal sector. The Government had conducted workshops with various entities to find ways to mainstream gender issues in the workplace. The Government's labour rights system was accessible to all and ensured that workers' rights to maternity leave were protected.

23. According to a 2024 survey by Statistics Botswana, 1,246 women were employed in the mining and quarrying sector. The Government was engaged in talks with the Women in Mining Botswana Organisation on gender-responsive procurement in the mining sector. An event promoting the ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), had been held in May 2025. Disaggregated data on the employment of women with disabilities were unavailable.

24. **Ms. Barriteau** said that she wished to know whether the Employment and Labour Relations Bill specifically addressed sex-based discrimination in hiring, remuneration, training, promotion and demotion, to what extent the rights of women with disabilities were addressed in the Bill and under the labour rights system mentioned by the delegation, and whether the Bill provided for paid paternity leave and included a prohibition against the dismissal of pregnant women.

25. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wondered whether the State Party had assessed the impact of its strategies to reduce unwanted pregnancies among girls.

26. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know whether a review of sections 160–162 of the Penal Code had been initiated; how the State Party was responding to the rising rates of adolescent pregnancy in the country; and what it was doing to address the health complications that resulted from unsafe abortions, including those performed with

misoprostol procured on the black market, and from the delays in seeking care following an unsafe abortion due to the associated stigma and the fear of the repercussions. She wondered whether the State Party had any national clinical abortion care guidelines.

27. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to know whether a gender-responsive approach was being taken in the preparation of the National Development Plan; whether the State Party was taking any steps to increase transparency in military and defence expenditure; and what it was doing to enhance pension and social benefit schemes and extend coverage under them to, for example, women in the informal economy, domestic workers and migrant women. She would also like to know what beneficiary categories there were under the existing social security systems.

28. She wondered what impact the Lefatshe Boswa programme had had in terms of raising women's awareness of their land rights and, consequently, on the implementation of the Revised Botswana Land Policy and the use of the Land Tribunal; what steps the State Party was taking to systematically produce gender-disaggregated statistics on women's economic participation and access to financial resources; and what it was doing to implement the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. She would be grateful for information on the budget for developing facilities for women's and girls' sports and recreation and on the measures to be funded with the budgetary resources that the Government had committed to putting towards increasing women's participation in sports leadership.

29. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government used comprehensive sexuality education, Parent Child Communication dialogues on sexual and reproductive health and rights and Peer Approach Counselling by Teens (PACT) as tools to address the issue of early, unintended pregnancies. Connect With Respect, which was a classroom programme for the prevention of gender-based violence, and the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored and Safe (DREAMS) Programme also played a role, as did the efforts of NGOs such as Stepping Stones International. Condoms were available in school clinics.

30. **A representative of Botswana** said that the Government was working with the World Bank to review the effectiveness of the social safety network and ensure that vulnerable groups such as women in rural areas were properly accommodated under it. Gender-disaggregated statistics on land ownership were not available. The Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs had submitted a chapter for the new National Development Plan under preparation. The Minister was visiting other ministries to ensure that gender was mainstreamed in legislation, policy and programming. The Government had decided to establish so-called transformation offices to monitor and evaluate the initiatives it was introducing.

31. **A representative of Botswana** said that, according to 2022 statistics, 44.9 per cent of women owned agricultural land while 44.5 per cent had access to it. In the chapter that it had submitted for the National Development Plan, the Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs had identified the adoption of the bill on gender equality as a strategic priority and had focused on financing for gender equality and the need for dedicated budgets to ensure gender mainstreaming. The Ministry, in partnership with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), had added a component on climate-smart agriculture to the EntreprenHER programme. The Ministry of Agriculture had made significant gains in raising awareness of such agriculture among women farmers.

32. **The Chair** said that she wished to know whether the State Party would strengthen its capacity to detect and investigate illicit financial flows and to prosecute the perpetrators.

33. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know how gender mainstreaming was being promoted in climate adaptation policies for rural communities and in rural development strategies, including those relating to climate resilience, agriculture, innovation and sustainable land use. It would be interesting to know whether data on the impact of climate change on agriculture and women's livelihoods were gathered and, if so, whether such data informed the development of policy.

34. He would welcome additional information on the measures taken to support women refugees and asylum-seekers. In particular, he would like to know whether the State party

would consider withdrawing its reservation to article 17 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees so that refugees and asylum-seekers could apply for work permits.

35. The delegation might describe any steps taken to ensure equal access to education, healthcare and social services for Indigenous and rural women, refugees, asylum-seekers and forced migrants, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, and women and girls with disabilities. Details of any relevant education programmes, especially programmes for women and girls with disabilities, would be appreciated, as would information on efforts to promote access to communications technology for Indigenous women. It would be useful to have data about women with disabilities in employment. He also wished to know how the State Party monitored the situation of women with disabilities more generally and whether it would ensure that all population data gathered were disaggregated by sex and disability. Lastly, he wondered what would be done to support the process of decriminalizing same-sex relations between women.

36. **A representative of Botswana** said that a number of NGOs had launched campaigns to educate rural women and girls about the effects of climate change, adaptation strategies, sustainable practices and the importance of involving women in climate action discussions at the community and policymaking levels. Under the Climate Change Policy of 2021, consideration was being given to the incorporation of gender-related matters and climate change into school curricula. Gender issues were addressed in the Climate Change Policy itself, which called for the incorporation of the gender perspective in all measures relating to mitigation and adaptation, in recognition of the disproportionate effect of climate change on women. The policy also promoted the participation of women, including women with disabilities, in the implementation of climate-change response measures in rural areas. The National Action Programme to Combat Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought of 2022 set out measures to protect women and other vulnerable groups from the effects of land degradation and desertification as well as measures for promoting sustainable livelihoods.

37. **A representative of Botswana** said that a multisectoral presidential commission had been established to investigate the multifaceted problems facing the Basarwa community and to formulate recommendations for tackling those problems. The Government was conducting ongoing consultations with the Basarwa to determine what forms of restitution they should receive for having been forcibly removed from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

38. Refugees were now entitled to apply for work permits and could integrate into Botswana society.

39. **A representative of Botswana** said that the funding of sports was not subject to any gender discrimination, as reflected by the strong performance of the national women's football team.

40. Legislative measures had been taken to bring national law into compliance with international regulations relating to illicit financial flows. The Financial Intelligence Agency was responsible for monitoring such flows and taking action against them.

41. The Rural Development Council, which was chaired by the Vice-President of Botswana, had recently met to identify the areas most affected by lack of rainfall in 2024 and the forms of support that would be provided to affected groups.

Articles 15 and 16

42. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wished to know how many times the Convention and other international instruments had been cited in constitutional doctrine, especially that relating to family law. In that connection, she would welcome information on family law in respect of Basarwa women and their land and inheritance rights.

43. She would appreciate the delegation's comments on the apparent conflict between section 15 (3) of the Constitution, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, and section 15 (4) (c), which established that anti-discrimination clauses were not applicable to laws governing adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other matters of personal status law. It would be interesting to know whether the conflict between the two provisions would be resolved by the constitutional review process being conducted in the State Party.

44. Given that women's inheritance rights had been affirmed in a landmark court ruling in the case of *Mmusi and Others v. Ramantle and Others*, she would like to know whether discriminatory laws on inheritance had been revised and whether a review of the State Party's entire corpus of laws would be conducted in order to identify other discriminatory provisions. Since laws were not always implemented in practice, she wondered whether the State Party would consider reviewing the de facto as well as the de jure situation.

45. She wished to know whether the State Party would consider appointing women as chiefs of village committees to prioritize the rights of women and girls and facilitate the process of harmonizing formal law and customary law. In addition, she wondered whether village committees responsible for children's affairs, which were required to include a girl member, addressed the issue of early marriage and whether they ever invoked the Convention. What progress had the State Party made towards its goal of eliminating early and forced marriages by 2030?

46. Lastly, she welcomed the legal reform being conducted to divert first-time offenders away from the criminal justice system. Given that many women prisoners in Botswana had grown up in poverty or in dysfunctional families, it would be interesting to know whether the gender perspective would be incorporated into the reform.

47. **Mr. Safarov** said that it was still not clear what measures were taken to promote access to water, electricity and education for all women, including Indigenous women.

48. **A representative of Botswana** said that additional information on the questions raised would be provided in writing. She wished to thank the Committee for its valuable insights, which would guide the Government in its efforts to eliminate discrimination against women in Botswana.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.