



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1915th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 October 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair)

Contents

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

Seventh periodic report of Armenia (continued)

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Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

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

Seventh periodic report of Armenia (continued) (CEDAW/C/ARM/7; CEDAW/C/ARM/Q/7; CEDAW/C/ARM/RQ/7)

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

Articles 10–14

2. **Ms. Ameline** said that, although the State party's commitment to gender equality in employment was commendable, it appeared that little progress had been made on the ground. The new Labour Code adopted in June 2022 failed to establish any suitable mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of equality and protection from gender-based employment discrimination. She wondered whether the current revision of the Labour Code envisaged the introduction of comprehensive non-discrimination provisions and whether the State party planned to strengthen the capacities of the Health and Labour Inspectorate for the effective enforcement of labour legislation. Access to employment for women from minorities and recruitment of women to decision-making positions were important components of addressing contemporary challenges.

3. It would be useful to know whether any progress had been made towards the abolition of the list of jobs and professions considered dangerous for women, minors and people with limited capabilities for work, contained in decision No. 2308-N of 29 December 2005, which perpetuated a degree of segregation in employment.

4. She wondered whether any management indicators were in place to monitor company policies on parenting and career management, including the creation of a supportive environment for pregnant women and women returning from maternity leave. It would also be interesting to know whether the State party would be ready to take a combination of incentives and compulsory requirements to close the gender wage gap and address structural inequalities. She asked whether the new Labour Code would include provisions on harassment.

5. Domestic workers in the State party, two thirds of whom were women, were particularly vulnerable. She was curious to know whether there were any plans to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). It would also be useful to find out whether any measures were envisaged to help rural women, women with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups enter the labour market, as diversity and inclusion were important aspects of economic success.

6. Participation of girls and women at all stages of the digital transformation process was also crucial to ensure they were not left behind. The delegation might wish to elaborate on any measures taken or planned to restore equality of opportunity for women and girls in that regard, for example through intensive training.

7. **A representative of Armenia** said that the Constitution and the Labour Code guaranteed freedom of choice of employment and protection from employment discrimination, including on grounds of gender. Article 168 of the Labour Code provided for equal pay for men and women. Male-female wage differentials were largely a result of career choices. While the majority of women worked in education and health, men were predominantly employed in the construction and transport sectors. Women often held jobs that required higher education levels but that were less well paid. Statistics revealed that 49 per cent of working women had completed higher education; 26.2 per cent had completed vocational training; and 41.3 per cent had completed secondary school. Of the total number of women in employment, 28.5 per cent worked in education and health, 12.6 per cent in the hotel and retail sector, 9.6 per cent in manufacturing, 6.9 per cent in the public sector and 1.8 per cent in construction and transport.

8. In the context of the development of a new employment strategy, an in-depth study of the labour market had been conducted, which had highlighted problems affecting different population groups, including women. Nearly all employment programmes had been suspended, as existing programmes would be redesigned and new programmes would be developed to suit the contemporary labour market. Targeted programmes were envisaged to enhance women's participation in the labour market. Approximately 26 per cent of beneficiaries of a business employment promotion programme implemented in 2022 had been women.

9. The Labour Code regulated health and safety at the workplace, with an emphasis on the rights of mothers. The current amendments to the Code would strengthen those rights further. Working women were entitled to additional breastfeeding breaks every three hours, which could be combined or moved to the beginning or the end of the working day at the woman's request. Under the new provisions, the child's age limit for breastfeeding would be increased from 1.5 to 2 years. The Labour Code prohibited the termination of an employment contract of a pregnant woman on any grounds from the day on which the employer received a medical certificate attesting to the pregnancy until one month after the end of maternity leave. The rights to pregnancy and maternity leave and benefits were also regulated. The Code established a series of guarantees to afford pregnant women special protection at the workplace, including exemption from working overtime, night shifts or on public holidays. There were currently no plans to ratify ILO Convention No. 189.

10. **Ms. Stepanyan** (Armenia) said that the amended Labour Code had been circulated, discussed with civil society and submitted to the Government for approval. Sexual harassment was addressed in the Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of 2013. A new subparagraph on violence and sexual harassment in employment relations had been added to article 3, on principles of labour legislation, of the Labour Code. Article 164, on the procedure for granting annual leave, of the amended Code would provide for domestic violence leave. Overall, more than 85 per cent of the Labour Code provisions had been amended.

11. Following its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the country had embarked on major legislative and institutional reforms, which also affected intersectoral employment strategies and other labour-related documents. The shift from a medical to a functional approach to the assessment of disabilities would be effective as of 1 February 2023.

12. **A representative of Armenia** said that the Health and Labour Inspectorate was responsible for monitoring companies' compliance with labour legislation, including provisions relating to equal pay and the ban on dismissal during pregnancy and maternity leave. By decision of the Prime Minister of July 2021, the mandate of the Inspectorate had been extended to include the monitoring of labour-related non-discrimination provisions.

13. **Ms. Ameline** said that, while she greatly appreciated the State party's political commitment to structural changes, more emphasis must be placed on implementation. Complaints mechanisms were often ill equipped to help translate principles into de facto equality on the ground. The State party might wish to engage with employers' organizations to make a case for equality as an asset, not a constraint.

14. **A representative of Armenia** said that the draft education strategy had been approved by the Government and submitted to the National Assembly. Adoption was expected for November 2022 and the attendant national action plan had already been drafted. The main objective of the strategy was the creation of an inclusive, knowledge-centred education environment across Armenia to make high-quality education services accessible for all citizens for a lifetime.

15. In the context of the far-reaching reforms in the education system, new education standards had been developed to make a transition to a competency-based education system. Wellness and civil education had been introduced as mandatory subjects. The new standards, which had been approved by the Government in February 2021, established gender sensitivity as a core competency and listed precise learning outcomes at all levels of education. In the academic year 2021/22, the new standards had been piloted in grades 2, 7 and 10 in 80 schools in Tavush Province. During the current academic year, they were piloted

in grades 3, 6, 8 and 11. From the academic year 2023/24 onward, all schools across Armenia would operate under the new standards. Requirements for textbooks based on those standards would be announced shortly.

16. A gender-sensitive approach had been applied consistently to all reforms. Special training had been provided to experts tasked with revising the education standards, in cooperation with the Council of Europe. Modules on gender sensitivity had been included in all mandatory, State-funded teacher training courses. In implementation of the new standards, professional orientation classes in schools would henceforth provide gender-neutral career guidance. Special measures were being implemented to foster girls' education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Special programmes were also being conducted for women scientists.

17. Discrimination based on language or membership in an ethnic minority group was prohibited under domestic law, and members of ethnic minorities had the right to an education and were entitled to use their languages freely. The Government had been working to increase the number of preschools in the country, especially in municipal communities (*hamaynker*) with large ethnic minorities. It had, for example, provided funds for the establishment of a preschool in a municipal community in Armavir Province with a largely Yazidi population, and it was building a modular preschool in Alagyaz, Aragatsotn Province, which would also serve six other nearby municipal communities with Yazidi populations. Under a 2020 law on preschool education, ethnic minorities were entitled to have the education in such preschools provided in their native language.

18. The languages of ethnic minorities were taught in schools even if there were fewer pupils than typically required to open a class. Several schools in Yerevan offered Yazidi language classes to students in grades 1 to 12. The Government published print and online versions of textbooks in the languages of ethnic minorities, including Yazidi, Assyrian and Kurdish. Education in Russian was available in 45 schools throughout the country. Students from ethnic minority communities with sufficient entrance exam scores could be nominated by leaders of their community for tuition-free seats in professional education programmes. The Government held regular consultations to inform ethnic minority communities about their rights and educational opportunities.

19. The Government had, together with development partners, implemented several projects since 2014 to foster Yazidi girls' ability to continue their educations. These involved, for example, public awareness campaigns and skills-building activities for teachers in Armavir and Aragatsotn Provinces, and training sessions for Yazidi community representatives, including teachers, social workers and representatives of civil society organizations from six regions.

20. The course entitled "Healthy Lifestyle" had been revised and expanded. It was now offered in grades 5 to 11 and addressed the issues of gender equality, exploitation and sexual violence through classes on topics such as gender roles, stereotypes, prejudices, social norms, discrimination, and sexual and reproductive health. Violence, persecution and exploitation constituted a separate topic, covering issues such as trafficking and harassment. The classes that were offered to students depended on their age. Textbooks had been prepared and teacher training was being conducted. The revised course would be rolled out in all schools in 2023.

21. The education system had shifted to distance learning in March 2020, at the outset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. To ensure that students and teachers had access to digital devices and the Internet, the Government had, in cooperation with partner organizations, provided several thousand computers and other digital devices to students; allowed teachers to use school computers at home; and, in cooperation with service providers, made low-rate Internet packages available to students and teachers and ensured that no charge was applied when they accessed the main educational platforms. The Government had developed training courses on online teaching methods, which had then been completed by several thousand teachers online, and some 7,000 teachers had participated in intensive, two-week training courses on those methods. Educational content had been developed for television and had been broadcast on public and regional television networks. Video lessons, with sign language interpretation, had also been produced for the new distance learning platform that had been launched. Additional summer courses had been held in 2020 for

students who had been unable to take part in distance learning. A hotline had been set up with support from the Asian Development Bank to provide psychological support to teachers and students. After the 12-week period of school closures – a relatively short period compared to other countries – a centralized distance learning system had remained in place for two years for students for whom COVID-19 posed a significant risk and who could therefore not return to the classroom. The system had been used by over 10,000 students.

22. Following the war in 2020, all children from Artsakh, or Nagorno-Karabakh, had been allowed to continue their education in Armenian schools without facing any obstacles in terms of documentation and had been provided with all the necessary learning material. Psychological support had been provided for students and parents, and teachers had been trained in how to support students in such situations.

23. To increase the safety of the country's schools, around 80 per cent of which were located in areas with a medium or high risk of seismic hazard, the Government had launched an initiative to renovate at least 500 kindergartens and 300 schools by 2026 and made funding available to up to twenty schools each year to address structural risks. Schools and preschools were required to have disaster management plans, which children helped develop. Data on safety was available through the safety module of the education management information system. Under a 2022 amendment to the Law on General Education, the State was required to fund the renovations needed to make school buildings accessible, and it would begin doing so in 2023. In addition, by 2021, all schools had completed the transition to an inclusive education system. As at October 2022, some 1,800 children with disabilities were registered in the country's public schools. Home schooling was organized for some. Software was being developed to disaggregate data on students with disabilities, and that data would be available beginning in 2023. Some tuition fee waivers were available for students with disabilities at the higher and vocational education levels.

24. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she appreciated the immense goodwill demonstrated by the delegation's responses. The State party might consider doing the following: gathering data on the number of students who dropped out of school for reasons related to armed conflict, gender or disability; examining whether the eligibility requirements for scholarships awarded to members of ethnic minorities served to exclude women; offering in schools comprehensive sex education that specifically addressed teenage pregnancy, bullying and economic violence; monitoring the outcomes of its efforts to protect the rights of women and girls who were members of ethnic minorities; and ensuring that the guarantees contained in the Safe Schools Declaration were observed and reflected in domestic legislation.

25. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that although the State party had made commendable efforts to improve the health-care system for girls and women, family planning services in rural areas were still poor and the State did not ensure the availability of contraceptives. The abortion rate remained high, and the maternal mortality rate was higher than in the countries of the European Union. She would therefore appreciate information on measures to ensure that women had access to adequate and effective family planning services and that the State budget devoted specific appropriations for that purpose. She asked whether the exceptions to the 12-week limit on abortion included pregnancy due to rape or incest, or cases when the mother's life was in danger or there was a risk of severe fetal impairment.

26. She wondered whether the State party had any plans to conduct mapping of regions where there were shortages of medical specialists and to take steps to guarantee that the requisite specialists were available in all regions. As the accessibility of medical services was still a problem for women with disabilities, she would like to have some information about any efforts to improve professional health workers' knowledge so as to guarantee the adequate provision of health services for people with disabilities without discrimination. What steps were taken to ensure the accessibility of health centres and other services for women with disabilities?

27. Despite the improvement of the services provided to HIV patients, women were still disproportionately affected by HIV. She would therefore be grateful for details of measures to improve awareness of the particular needs of women living with HIV and to eliminate discrimination against and stereotypes concerning them. She wondered whether there was any programme to train health practitioners, educators and social workers on how to help and

support persons living with HIV and their families, for example by directing them to the right medical services. Lastly, the Committee would welcome some information about any efforts made by the State party to assist women suffering from mental health issues or drug abuse and whether they had access to treatment and good-quality support services.

28. **A representative of Armenia** said that the law of the country ensured that women had equal access to health care, including reproductive health services. By law, every person had fundamental reproductive rights, such as the right to their own private sex life and to protection from all violations of their physical integrity, including sterilization, forced pregnancy and sexual exploitation. Everyone was entitled to full, accurate information and could consult medical services on all aspects of reproductive health issues. Women had the right to safe childbirth, voluntary sterilization, artificial termination of pregnancy, the use of contraceptives and infertility treatment. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the aggression of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, which had made it necessary to provide medical care and rehabilitation for thousands of refugees, health-care priorities had changed and the budgetary appropriations for protecting reproductive health and motherhood had increased to 7.9 million drams in 2020. Free medical assistance was provided during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period. Outpatient gynaecological care was also available free of charge for vulnerable groups in all parts of the country. As part of the Government's constant efforts to ensure high-quality accessible reproductive health care, standards, protocols and recommendations for female reproductive pathologies had been drawn up and the list of medical services offered to women and girls had been expanded. In addition, the Government had allocated funds to a new programme to boost the birthrate and to provide special services for high-risk groups.

29. A package of additional consultations and tests for young children had been introduced along with genetic screening tests for some population groups. Particular attention was paid to improving the affordability and accessibility of health care for women outside the capital, for example by establishing mobile units offering free mammography in three regions. Certain tests were available for all women in the 30–60 age group throughout the country.

30. All medical staff received refresher training on gender issues and extensive efforts were also being made to offer training in HIV-related issues.

31. In order to address the shortage of specialists in some areas, a scheme that offered short-term appointments on very attractive terms had been in place since 2012. The database on medical staff was regularly updated.

32. Women with disabilities received the full range of medical assistance, including medication and treatment for infertility. The Ministry of Health was working to ensure accessibility in medical facilities through the provision of ramps and lavatories for persons with disabilities. It had also drawn up guidelines on providing medical assistance and services for persons with disabilities. An Internet platform called "Welcome baby", which disseminated full information about the medical care available to women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period, was made accessible to women with disabilities through various means. The Ministry's National Institute provided lifelong training to enhance specialists' qualifications. In that context, a textbook on the protection of the sexual and reproductive rights of women with disabilities had been produced. Midwives and gynaecologists also received training in that matter. The curricula of medical schools likewise covered the subject.

33. Grants from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria helped to fund measures to prevent the spread of HIV and to remove the stigma attached to it. Women living with HIV received various forms of support and medical care. Some 2,500 of them received free medical assistance. The refresher courses on HIV-related issues run by the National Health Institute for medical staff paid particular attention to gender equality and the avoidance of stigma and discrimination, particularly in respect of vulnerable groups living with HIV-AIDS.

34. Transgender persons, drug addicts and sex workers were provided with the means of contraception. After an artificial termination of pregnancy, medical staff were obliged to

provide advice on the use of modern contraceptives. The rate of abortion had halved between 2000 and 2016.

35. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that she would like to receive a written reply to the question of whether contraception was available at a low cost, or free of charge, to women in low-income groups.

36. **Ms. Tisheva** said that, in the light of the very substantial gender pay gap and the weak economic empowerment of women in Armenia, she would like to know how the 2020–2023 Strategy for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Development had been implemented in practice, if any temporary special measures had been taken to improve women's access to loans or training and if women had received any grants or preferential treatment to encourage them to set up innovative businesses. It would be interesting to learn what results had really been achieved in terms of start-ups, how many women, including those in vulnerable groups, had been given loans and how many enterprises were actually up and running. Was the State party intending to formulate a new strategy to include a gender approach? Could the State party say whether it had identified women's main training needs, for example with regard to obtaining financial and legal advice, developing managerial skills or networking. The Committee would be grateful for a description of the social insurance coverage of self-employed women and women working in family businesses; it wished to find out whether they were covered during periods of temporary inability to work and whether they could draw maternity and childcare benefits.

37. Lastly, the Committee was curious to know whether women participated in decision-making, whether they were consulted at the national and local levels about initiatives based on the National Action Programme of adaptation to climate change for 2021–2025 and whether they benefited from those initiatives. Similarly, it wondered what steps had been taken to ensure the greater involvement of women in the green economy. How did they benefit from it and were they consulted on it at national and local level?

38. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that 82 per cent of rural women did unpaid, informal work on family plots and farms, while 28 per cent of rural households were headed by women and had per capita incomes almost twice as low as those of male-headed households; moreover, such women played a negligible role in decision-making at the municipal community level. She therefore wondered what steps the State party planned to take to promote rural women's advancement.

39. She would be grateful for information on how gender was mainstreamed into the Strategy for Overcoming the Consequences of Ageing and Social Protection of the Elderly People and the 2017–2021 Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy and on whether a new strategy was under development. She also wished to know how the State party planned to address the problems faced by women with disabilities, which included the lack of specific targets in the national employment programme for women with disabilities, barriers to health-care services, including physical barriers, uniform social benefits regardless of degree of disability, failure to respect sexual and reproductive rights and continued institutionalization, in particular of those with psychosocial disabilities. In addition, it would be useful to know how gender was mainstreamed into the State Programme on Primary Assistance for Reintegration of Citizens Returning to Armenia (Including Forced Returns). Furthermore, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons faced social discrimination based on their gender identity or sexual orientation and were often the victims of hate crimes. Transgender women were particularly vulnerable to harassment and were denied access to adequate health-care services. Matters relating to change of gender and gender marker continued to present a problem. She therefore wished to know what steps the Government planned to undertake to ensure that specific legislation was in place and effective remedies were available to protect the rights of lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons.

40. **A representative of Armenia** said that the Ministry of Economic Affairs was currently implementing a number of projects regarding rural economic empowerment. Women's participation in economic activities remained an issue of concern and was being addressed in the Action Plan of the Government of Armenia for the period 2021–2026.

41. The first programme, which was being implemented by the State agency to support small and medium-sized enterprises, related to start-up business incubation, with a focus on rural areas, where people lacked the collateral to obtain credit from banks. The State had thus set up a fund that provided guaranteed loans to entrepreneurs who had passed a State entrepreneurship training programme. Although the programme was open to both men and women, the State sought to encourage women to apply for it: while interest at a rate of 9 per cent was charged on loans to men, the rate for women was just 7 per cent. Of the approximately 600 participants since 2020, 45 per cent had been women, with the proportion steadily increasing every year. The Government had been forced to abandon plans to double the programme budget, however, owing to the attack by Azerbaijan on the sovereign territory of Armenia in September 2022. Another programme to help rural women entrepreneurs develop their businesses, to be operated jointly with the United Nations Development Programme, had been postponed – again owing to the invasion – and was likely to start in November 2022.

42. Following the 2021 elections, the Ministry had undergone restructuring, including the establishment of a department for public-private dialogue, with the aim of fostering civil society participation in policy development. The Ministry was following that public-private dialogue process to devise development strategies for the textiles, leather and furniture sectors, all of which employed significant numbers of relatively low-paid women. The strategies were aimed at bringing about better working conditions in such sectors, with a particular focus on establishing childcare and other support services and on better pay.

43. **Ms. Stepanyan** (Armenia) said that, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 44-day war waged by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and the recent attack on the sovereign territory of Armenia, the Government was working on the development of an ambitious strategy for the reform of the labour and social protection system within the framework of the Action Plan of the Government for the period 2021–2026. It was also developing an employment strategy. Gender and disability were cross-cutting themes in the new strategies.

44. The levels of social benefits paid to persons with disabilities, which were the same regardless of degree of disability, would be subject to reform in 2023. In addition, the Government would start collecting disaggregated data on disability. The deinstitutionalization of adults with psychosocial disabilities, supported by civil society partners, was at the pilot project stage; the project was currently being assessed, with a view to future implementation.

45. **A representative of Armenia** said that there was a programme under which voluntarily returned migrants could apply for financial aid. Between January 2021 and September 2022, 95 persons were beneficiaries of such aid, 43 of them women and 6 of them persons with disabilities. A European Union project had been set up to increase migrants potential to promote development in Armenia by helping returned migrants start companies and develop their business skills. Grants of between €2,000 and €10,000 were available and had been awarded in respect of 80 of 125 applications received since its launch.

Articles 15 and 16

46. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would be grateful for the State party's comments on the fact that, while the legal minimum age for marriage was 18 years of age, or as young as 16 years of age with parental consent, early marriage of Yazidi girls was reportedly widespread and the Government apparently lacked any procedures for identifying forced marriages or programmes to prevent early marriage.

47. In addition, since de facto marriages were common in Armenia and denied women property rights, among other rights, she also wondered how the Government addressed the consequences of their dissolution, through either separation of the partners or the death of one of them. Furthermore, she would appreciate the State party's comments on the Committee's suggestion, in general recommendation No. 29 (2013) on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution, that Governments should protect women and children from the economic risks inherent in de facto marriages.

48. **The Chair** invited the delegation to provide written answers to the questions under articles 15 and 16 of the Convention owing to the time constraints.

49. **Ms. Stepanyan** (Armenia), thanking the Committee members, civil society in Armenia and her country's national human rights institution, expressed her Government's determination to continue working towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.