



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Seventy-second session

### Summary record of the 1671st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 26 February 2019, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Gbedemah

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(*continued*)

*Eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*

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

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

*Eighth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CEDAW/C/GBR/8; CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8 and CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8/Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom), introducing her country's eighth periodic report (CEDAW/C/GBR/8), said that her Government was determined to leverage the current global debate generated by the “#MeToo” movement and other campaigns for the protection of hard-won gender equality rights in order to strengthen its compliance with the Convention. The United Kingdom had a long tradition of protecting human rights and liberties at home and of meeting its human rights obligations in the international sphere. In addition to a comprehensive constitutional and legislative framework, which included core national legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998, human rights were protected through a system of devolution. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland bore primary responsibility for complying with the country's international obligations in relation to matters within their areas of competence. However, the Northern Ireland Assembly, which had devolved powers in areas relating to equality, had been suspended since January 2017. Since progress in some areas covered by the Convention was contingent upon the restoration of the Assembly, the Government was committed to re-establishing the devolved government at the earliest opportunity.

3. Mechanisms to enhance coordination and collaboration between the central and devolved administrations included the Gender Directors' Network, which brought together those responsible for gender equality from the various governments. The Government Equalities Office, which led work on policy relating to women and equality, was soon to become part of the Cabinet Office, a move that would help to accelerate government-wide action to tackle inequality.

4. In the period since the previous dialogue with the Committee, significant strides had been made to improve women's lives within the United Kingdom and its jurisdictions. The territorial application of the Convention had increased from three to seven overseas territories, marking an important step towards the implementation of the Committee's previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/GBR/CO/7). Various legislative changes, including ending men's military conscription in Bermuda, had also been introduced, signalling a strong commitment to advancing women's rights. As a result, consideration could now be given to withdrawing the reservation made by the United Kingdom upon extending the Convention's application to Bermuda.

5. The British Government had a strong track record of promoting women's economic empowerment, as demonstrated by the introduction of measures such as flexible working, shared parental leave and increased childcare entitlements for working parents and by the record numbers of employed women and women-led businesses. The national gender pay gap was at its lowest ever level – at just under 18 per cent – and large employers were now required to publicly disclose their gender pay gaps. Around £5 million in government funding had been provided in order to help caregivers to return to paid employment. Women represented 60 per cent of those benefiting from the national living wage, which was due to increase in April 2019. A new strategy on gender equality and economic empowerment was shortly to be launched. It set out the Government's plans to address the persistent economic barriers faced by women at every stage of their lives, in particular women living in precarious financial situations or with complex needs.

6. In the political sphere, the United Kingdom had its second woman Prime Minister and a record number of women members of parliament. In addition, women led several of the country's key political parties, represented a quarter of Supreme Court justices and held more senior positions in the civil service than ever before. Even so, tackling women's underrepresentation in public and political life remained a key government priority. To that end, a national programme to encourage women's greater participation in democracy had

been launched to coincide with celebrations in 2018 marking the centenary of women's suffrage.

7. A number of measures had been taken to eliminate violence against women and girls in all its forms, including harassment and unwelcome advances. The law had been strengthened to create new domestic abuse and stalking offences and to introduce the offence of failing to protect a girl from female genital mutilation or forced marriage. A new mandatory reporting requirement had recently led to the first prosecution of a female genital mutilation case. The number of prosecutions and convictions in domestic abuse cases had increased by 20 per cent and 28 per cent, respectively, since 2010. In January 2019, a landmark bill on domestic abuse, aimed at supporting victims and pursuing offenders, had been published, with similar measures being taken in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Government had pledged £100 million to tackle violence against women and girls, including by ensuring funding for rape support centres and refuges, and had established a new £17 million fund to promote early intervention and prevention.

8. The treatment of women offenders had been reviewed, in line with the Committee's previous recommendations, and a related strategy had been developed to improve outcomes for such women. In Scotland, various measures, including the creation of community-based custody facilities, were being taken to enable women to serve their sentences as close to home as possible.

9. The country's impending departure from the European Union had not altered the Government's strong commitment to recognizing and respecting human rights. The country had long been in the vanguard when it came to developing new legislation and policies to support women in the workplace, tackle violence against women and girls and increase women's participation in political and public life. Indeed, the United Kingdom had already exceeded European Union minimum standards in many areas – such as entitlement to paid annual, maternity and parental leave – and had introduced equal pay rights and outlawed sex discrimination even before the European Union had set down any such requirements. She wished to reassure the Committee that strong safeguards were in place to protect the rights of all individuals after the United Kingdom left the European Union.

10. The Government had noted the findings and recommendations contained in the Committee's report of the inquiry concerning the United Kingdom under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention ([CEDAW/C/OP.8/GBR/1](#)), which related to abortion in Northern Ireland. Since the Northern Ireland Assembly had legislative competence on the matter, the Government's priority, as she had said earlier, was the restoration of the devolved government in order to enable the people of Northern Ireland and their locally elected representatives to decide the right course for Northern Ireland on the highly sensitive issue of abortion. A substantive response to the Committee's report would be provided once the necessary political structures were in place. In the meantime, arrangements had been put in place to enable women residing in Northern Ireland to gain access to safe abortion services in England, Scotland and Wales.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

11. **Ms. Ameline**, commending the progress made by the United Kingdom since the previous dialogue, said that the Committee was concerned about the impact that the State party's impending departure from the European Union – or “Brexit” – would have on women's rights. Experience had shown that, at times of major change, there was often a regression in the protection of human rights in general and of women's rights in particular. Various reports by economists and human rights experts, such as the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, had raised concerns about the social and economic impact of Brexit on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society, including women. She therefore wished to know how the State party intended to safeguard existing rights while also stepping up its efforts to combat persistent gender discrimination and inequalities. She noted that a commission had been set up in Scotland to consider the impact of Brexit on women's rights. She wondered whether a similar approach was planned for the United Kingdom as a whole.

12. She would also like to hear what steps the Government was taking to ensure the full integration of the provisions of the Convention into national law and strengthen its application, and what measures were envisaged to incorporate the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice into the domestic legal order. She would be interested to know whether the State party intended to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention); what plans it had with regard to the Human Rights Act 1998, in which the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights were currently enshrined; and how it proposed to raise greater awareness of the Convention with a view to encouraging its invocation in the courts.

13. She would like to know whether the Government had considered aligning its efforts to fulfil its obligations under the Convention with its efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which included several interrelated targets and indicators. Lastly, she wondered what measures were being taken to reinforce the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement of 1998 and, in particular, to strengthen women's leadership and effective participation in the post-conflict process, in line with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security.

14. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the Government fully intended to continue its proud tradition as a world leader on women's rights and equality, even after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. Once it took up its new position in the Cabinet Office – right at the heart of Government – the Government Equalities Office would be able to work closely with other equality mechanisms and would have a stronger voice when it came to decision-making.

15. **Ms. Solomon** (United Kingdom) said that her Government continued to hold the view that it was unnecessary to incorporate all provisions of the Convention into the legislation of the United Kingdom, since the State was bound by the Convention under international law. There was a presumption against violations of international law in domestic courts, and the Convention had been invoked as an interpretative source, most recently in the Supreme Court case concerning abortion in Northern Ireland. In addition, section 2 of the Human Rights Act required the courts to take judgments of the European Court of Human Rights into account. The substantive provisions of the Convention were reflected in the Human Rights Act, the Equality Act and the equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland. Moreover, every governmental department was required to consider the impact of its policies on women and girls. Article 3 of the Convention provided for non-legislative measures, affording States parties flexibility in determining how best to achieve the objectives of the Convention. The United Kingdom had sought to comply with article 5, for example, not just through legislation but also by implementing diverse strategies, commissioning research, and working with media regulators and other relevant bodies. Nevertheless, she assured the Committee that if legislation was deemed necessary to ensure compliance with the Convention, the necessary action would be taken.

16. **Ms. Rutherford** (United Kingdom) said that the long-standing tradition of ensuring that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was respected in the United Kingdom would not be changed by Brexit. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 required the courts to apply the retained general principles of European Union law and underscored the importance of existing jurisprudence.

17. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that workers' rights under European Union legislation, including equality rights, would continue to be enforced. The United Kingdom had committed itself to backstop arrangements for social and unemployment policy and would build on those arrangements in the future partnership agreement. Any changes would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

18. Northern Ireland and the other devolved administrations would be obliged to comply with the Convention in all devolved policy areas. The Westminster Government retained powers to ensure that their actions were compatible with the international obligations of the United Kingdom, but it would only exercise those powers in cases of genuine urgency. The Gender Directors' Network was tasked with ensuring that account was taken of devolution and with developing more effective mechanisms for input and engagement on the part of both

the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Network meetings were held about four times each year.

19. The Government was committed to ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Outstanding issues that needed to be addressed included extraterritorial jurisdiction. The Government had already assumed jurisdiction in cases of forced marriage and female genital mutilation, but jurisdiction in cases involving rape of persons over 18 years of age and sexual assault remained pending. Further amendments of domestic law and the enactment of primary legislation in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were required to establish such jurisdiction. The Domestic Abuse Bill published on 1 January 2019 would bring about the requisite changes in England and Wales. The Government had published reports on progress towards ratification of the Istanbul Convention in November 2017 and October 2018.

20. The Government had pledged increased funding of £100 million to tackle violence against women and girls, to finance rape support centres and national helplines, and to promote early intervention. Starting in April 2019, rape support centres in England and Wales would receive an additional £800,000, and a 10 per cent increase in funds, totalling £24 million, would be provided for a three-year period for rape and sexual abuse support services.

21. **Mr. Ramsden** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom would undertake a voluntary national review of progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals during the current year. It would report, in particular, on progress in respect of Goals 5 and 10. In addition, a national progress report would also be produced to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

22. Application of the Convention had been extended to the overseas territories in response to requests from the Governments concerned. Their laws and policies were assessed, and the request was then endorsed by the relevant ministers. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office worked in partnership with the Governments of the overseas territories to assist them in monitoring compliance with the Convention.

23. **Ms. McCabe** (United Kingdom) said that, in the absence of an executive in Northern Ireland, the issue of gender equality was being addressed by undertaking research and consultations and preparing options for incoming ministers. Officials from Northern Ireland engaged with colleagues in the Government Equalities Office and other devolved administrations in order to remain fully informed of issues related to gender equality and compliance with obligations under the Convention.

24. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security was the Government's strategy for implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The Plan had an outward focus on the international development, defence and diplomatic efforts of the United Kingdom and was designed to complement domestic strategies, such as the Ending Violence against Women and Girls 2016–2020 initiative. The Government recognized the meaningful impact of women's participation in the Northern Ireland peace process, although it did not consider Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to be specifically applicable in the context of that process.

25. **Ms. Ameline** said that the dualist political system and the principle of parliamentary sovereignty in the State party called for an approach based on the incorporation of the provisions of the Convention into domestic law in order to ensure that it served as an instrument of non-discrimination and empowerment. She recommended that the State party should conduct a review of existing legal provisions, which continued to exhibit shortcomings in terms of the prevention of discrimination, for instance against migrant women and women in detention. Noting the existence of sharia courts in the State party, she asked how it ensured that fundamental rights were not subject to an interpretation that might narrow their legal scope.

26. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know whether the State party planned to develop a clear monitoring and evaluation framework for the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in order to measure its impact, including assessing whether foreign aid provided to post-conflict countries had been used to promote gender equality and address women's diverse security needs. Noting that the United Kingdom had been the sixth largest global

arms exporter between 2013 and 2017, she asked whether the State party would consider suspending arms sales to conflict zones where there was a clear risk that the arms might be used to commit serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

27. **Mr. Bergby**, noting that the State party awaited initiatives from the Governments of overseas territories before supporting their implementation of the Convention, said that, in his view, it should take the initiative and play a more active role in promoting the application of the Convention in those territories.

28. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that, while United Kingdom law did not prevent persons from abiding by religious principles, any alternative dispute mechanisms must operate in conformity with national law. Where there was a conflict with national law, the latter would prevail. There was no parallel court system in the United Kingdom, and sharia law did not supersede national law under any circumstances.

29. Detention played a key role in ensuring effective immigration controls and securing the borders. However, it was vital to ensure that detention and removal were conducted with dignity and respect. The Government took the welfare of detainees seriously, and independent inspections were conducted to verify that detention facilities were safe, secure and humane.

30. Export control regulations under the Arms Trade Treaty, including those relating to gender-based violence, were based on the consolidated European Union and national arms export licensing criteria. The first criterion concerned respect for the State's international obligations and commitments. The second criterion concerned respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the final destination country and that country's respect for international humanitarian law. The Government would not grant an export licence if it considered that exported items might be used for internal repression, serious violations of international humanitarian law, gender-based violence or serious violence against women or children.

31. **Mr. Ramsden** (United Kingdom) said that the Government was working closely with the small number of overseas territories to which the Convention had not yet been extended. It would continue to draw attention to the benefits of application of the Convention and assist those territories in completing the process as speedily as possible.

32. **Ms. Francis** (United Kingdom) said that on International Women's Day in 2018 the First Minister of Wales had announced a review of gender equality. The report on phase 1 had been published in July 2018. A report on phase 2, which focused on legislation supporting human rights and equality, would be published in July 2019. Experts, representatives of civil society and equality groups were engaged in discussions of the legislation, including the benefits to be derived from the incorporation of the provisions of international conventions.

33. **Ms. Bird** (United Kingdom) said that the First Minister of Scotland had set up an independent Advisory Group on Human Rights Leadership. The group had issued a report in late 2018 and a national task force would be set up to proceed with its work. The First Minister had also set up an independent National Advisory Council on Women and Girls representing stakeholders from all parts of Scotland.

34. **Ms. Reddock** said that the Committee was concerned about indefinite detention of immigrants and detention of pregnant women in the State party. There had been reports of sexual abuse, lack of beds and health-care units, and cramped conditions in detention centres. Immigrant detention should be a last resort and indefinite detention should be prohibited.

35. **Ms. Amedine** said that political coordination with a view to tackling legislative diversity should be recognized as a matter of urgency, especially in the context of Brexit. The State party should reaffirm its commitment to rendering the Convention and women's rights a driving force for development and non-discrimination. It should also withdraw its reservations to the Convention.

36. **Ms. Haidar** said that the decision to incorporate the Government Equalities Office into the Cabinet Office on 1 April 2019 was a welcome development. However, the challenges stemming from Brexit would increase the complexity of monitoring and

coordination procedures and the risk of disparity between the various territories. She noted with concern that the State party had not contemplated the establishment of an oversight mechanism to track the activities of the various bodies involved in the implementation of the Convention and to assess progress in addressing existing challenges. As Brexit would entail the loss of European Union funding, especially for vulnerable and needy groups, she would like to hear how the State party planned to address the lack of resources.

37. Although violence against women was an issue of great concern, she noted that the funds allocated by the United Kingdom Government to address the issue would not compensate for cuts in funds for local governments. The State party's highly commendable system of human rights institutions could also be threatened by inadequate funding. In addition, it was not clear how the State party intended to preserve and reinforce the transparent process of selection and appointment of staff. Lastly, with regard to the State party's reluctance to incorporate the Convention into domestic legislation, she wondered what measures would be taken to ensure that all stakeholders, especially in the different governments, were fully aware of the State's obligations.

38. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she wished to know what steps the State party was taking to ensure that the provisions allowing political parties to adopt women-only shortlists of parliamentary candidates enabled the participation in public and political life of more vulnerable groups of women, such as women with disabilities, women of African or Asian descent and women from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community. She would welcome an indication of the impact of the Voluntary Search Code, which had been developed to improve the representation of women in the public and private sectors, in particular on company boards.

39. She would also welcome information on the application of the special measures for access to employment and health care established in the Equality Act 2010. In particular, it would be interesting to learn what progress had been made in Scotland towards increasing the representation of women in leadership roles and in the sciences, technology and mathematics. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party had planned any temporary special measures to offset the cuts in funding for services to vulnerable groups that had resulted from the adoption of austerity measures and the reductions that were likely to follow the State party's withdrawal from the European Union.

40. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the Government Equalities Office led policy development in relation to women, sexual orientation and transgender equality and was responsible for the wider equality framework. The Equalities Office had undertaken to ensure that the new strategy on gender and economic empowerment would benefit all women in the country. The Office was fairly small, so monitoring the impact of gender and equality initiatives was challenging. One of its strengths, however, was in working effectively with other government departments for the advancement of women and girls. Recently, for instance, the Office had cooperated with the Department for Education on a study of the educational choices made by boys and girls, which had looked at ways of ensuring that curricula encouraged girls to consider careers in science, technology, engineering or mathematics.

41. The female employment rate, at more than 71 per cent, was at a near-record high, and there were 1.6 million more women in work than in 2010. As a result of tax changes soon to be introduced, millions of women would either be exempted altogether from income tax or have their income tax bills reduced. Women would be the primary beneficiaries of the increase in the National Living Wage. An additional £1.7 billion a year had been spent on the social benefits system, from which numerous women received support. Those numbers demonstrated the country's commitment to making sure that women were not disproportionately affected by austerity.

42. The United Kingdom would continue to receive European funding until it left the European Union. Furthermore, the Treasury had guaranteed funding through 2020 for organizations that had successfully applied for European funds.

43. As part of the "Ask Her to Stand" campaign, organized in conjunction with the hundredth anniversary of women's suffrage in the United Kingdom, women who had the potential to run for office were encouraged to do so. A fund to support candidates with

disabilities had been set up in 2019. The United Kingdom had the most diverse Parliament it had ever had, but it was still not fully representative of the diversity of the population. Ongoing dialogue with political parties, which were responsible for putting candidates forward, was expected to yield additional progress in that regard.

44. The country's 100 largest publicly traded firms were on track to have women account for a third of their board members by 2020, in line with a target backed by the Government. The Government was actively promoting the benefits to businesses of a diverse workforce.

45. **Ms. Bird** (United Kingdom), noting that half the members of the Scottish Cabinet were women, said that the First Minister of Scotland had been made a global advocate for gender equality by the United Nations. Highlighting the importance of having women in senior positions would be a core part of her work in that role. The Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act would enter into force shortly. The Scottish Government was looking into ways of helping people with disabilities participate more fully in public and political life and reviewing public recruitment and appointment processes. One aim of those efforts was to ensure that people obtained posts that put them in a position to prepare for weightier responsibilities.

46. **Ms. McCabe** (United Kingdom) said that, under statutory equality duties introduced in 1998, the authorities of Northern Ireland could assess the impact, simple or more complex, of all policies on efforts to promote equality for all, which provided a solid basis for developing policies and programmes in Northern Ireland. Recently published guidance had again focused attention on the importance of the statutory equality duties in giving due consideration to multiple forms of discrimination.

47. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the Government was of the view that diversity in Parliament strengthened democracy and that no one should feel excluded from seeking elected office because of his or her gender, sexual orientation, faith or ethnicity or because he or she had a disability. The Government Equalities Office had partnered with the Office for National Statistics to improve the collection and use of equality data. The aim of the newly established Centre for Equalities and Inclusion of the Office for National Statistics was to identify data gaps and improve the evidence base for monitoring and reporting on inequality in the United Kingdom, which in turn would enable the Government to ensure that its policies were properly focused.

48. Executive search firms had worked together to develop a voluntary code of conduct in 2011, which had set out best practices for appointing members of corporate boards. An enhanced code had been developed in 2014. The standard code had been signed by 40 search firms, while 13 had signed the enhanced code. The Hampton-Alexander Review, conducted in 2016, contained recommendations for extending those best practices to other executive searches.

49. **Mr. Ramsden** (United Kingdom) said that austerity measures had not interfered with efforts to tackle violence against women and girls. For the current financial year, for example, the Government had set aside £7.2 million for 97 rape-support services in England and Wales. Starting in April 2019, rape and sexual abuse support services would receive an increase in funding of £800,000, allowing them to help more victims. The Government recognized the need for longer-term funding, and, as a result, grant-funding periods would be extended from one year to three. A total of £24 million had been allocated for the following three years to ensure that victims of rape and sexual violence were provided with support and counselling.

50. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know what plan the State party had developed to combat harmful gender stereotypes in advertisements and in all media platforms. Had new rules and guidance on advertising practices been put in place and, if so, how were the rules enforced? She wondered whether the Law Commission, which had received funding for a review to explore whether current legislation met the challenges of abusive online communications, had conducted the review, whether there was a body that monitored stereotyping and sexism in the media and whether the State party would consider including the issue of online violence and abuse targeting women and girls in the curriculum for sex and relationship education.

51. She would like information on the number of sex-assignment operations performed on intersex children. It would be interesting to learn whether the State party had any plans to adopt legislation aimed at eliminating such surgeries and addressing obstacles to access to justice for intersex children subjected to such procedures – especially statutes of limitations. She would also like to know whether the amendments to the law on female genital mutilation had been accompanied by prevention campaigns and prosecution of the perpetrators.

52. In view of concerns expressed by survivors of domestic abuse, she wondered what steps would be taken to ensure that the draft domestic abuse bill was inclusive and took account of the experiences of different groups of women victims and the protections and support services they needed. In addition, she would like to know whether the bill would provide for multi-agency arrangements for the protection of high-risk victims and whether the State party intended to increase funding for support services for domestic abuse victims. Lastly, she would welcome information on the State party's plans to improve the disaggregation of domestic violence data.

53. **Ms. Bethel** asked whether the delegation could elaborate on the challenges faced by the State party in bringing its legislation into line with the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. She would also like to know the timeline for the adoption of regulations for effective victim support and assistance through the implementation of section 50 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and what measures and programmes were in place to train officials responsible for the identification of trafficked women and girls.

54. Similarly, she wondered whether the Government was prepared to back a victim-support bill that would provide short- and long-term protection and support to victims of trafficking by guaranteeing their right to specialized support and assistance during a recovery period and for 12 months thereafter. She also wondered what scope there was for the provision of legal aid to trafficking victims and what obstacles there were to granting immunity from prosecution to victims who had been compelled to commit criminal offences. Victims of trafficking were not automatically entitled to remain in the United Kingdom, a situation that left them vulnerable to further exploitation or re-trafficking and hindered the prosecution of traffickers. How did the State party intend to address that situation? Lastly, she wondered why the procedure for determining whether a person was a victim of trafficking was so lengthy, what happened to the person during the determination process and what institutions were responsible for providing care and support once an individual was found to be a victim of trafficking.

55. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know what measures the Government took to help women leave prostitution, which was a form of trafficking. Did they receive legal aid? Were there hotlines, shelters and medical and psychological services for them? What plans had been made to help women in need find decent work in order to prevent them from turning to prostitution? She would like to learn what actions had been taken to reduce demand for trafficked women and girls and to sanction traffickers. In addition, she wondered how the adoption of the so-called Nordic model of combating prostitution had worked in Northern Ireland, how much money had been set aside to help victims of sexual exploitation and what percentage of trafficking victims were women. She would also like to know whether appropriate training was offered to social workers and providers of care. It would be interesting to hear the delegations' thoughts on what could be done to address the factors that made the State party an attractive destination for sex traffickers.

56. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the authorities in England had just issued a call for evidence regarding intersex genital mutilation, as they were aware that their understanding of the issue was incomplete. Her delegation would follow up with the Committee on the matter once the exercise had been completed.

57. Advertising in the United Kingdom was regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority, an independent regulator. Regulatory codes applied to all media, whether broadcast or online, and set standards for accuracy and honesty to which advertisers were expected to adhere. Those standards were regularly reviewed and updated by the industry to ensure that they remained effective, and proposed changes were subject to public

consultation. The Authority could sanction non-compliant advertisers, and it could ban advertisements that, by objectifying women or girls, sexualizing them inappropriately or depicting unhealthily thin bodies, reinforced gender stereotypes. A new rule specifically stating that advertisements must not include gender stereotypes that were likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence was set to take effect in June 2019. A review of the new rule would be conducted 12 months after its entry into force.

58. Media regulators upheld standards set out in media codes of practice. The Office for Communications, for instance, monitored compliance with a broadcasting code, and most newspapers followed an industry-wide code of practice. While recognizing the independent status of media regulators, the Government would continue to work with them and with other relevant bodies to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination in the media and to highlight the potential negative impacts of stereotypical portrayals of girls and women in the media.

59. The Government had undertaken to combat misogyny, bullying, intimidation and violence online and off. To that end, consideration was being given to recent recommendations made by the Law Commission regarding means of addressing coordinated online harassment and the misuse of private images and information.

60. **Ms. Francis** (United Kingdom) said that, in the face of the worrying increase in online gender stereotyping and abuse, Wales had overhauled its school curriculum, placing a greater emphasis on relationships and sexuality education. Guidance was to be published on bullying, including cyberbullying, following a recent public consultation on the issue.

61. The Welsh Government had been working with public sector bodies and NGOs to determine how best to identify, rescue and support victims of modern day slavery and bring perpetrators to justice. Training programmes for that purpose had been in place for several years, and around 30,000 individuals had received training to date. A multi-agency victim support pathway had been put in place, supported by a coordinator whose post was funded from assets confiscated from criminals under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. The Welsh Government also worked closely with NGOs to ensure that women in prostitution were kept safe and received the support they needed.

62. **Mr. Ramsden** (United Kingdom) said that, in England, the authorities worked with the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and other agencies and partners to ensure that legislation provided genuine protection to those working in prostitution. There did not yet seem to be unequivocal evidence that any one approach was best suited to tackling the harm and exploitation associated with prostitution. The Government was aware that there were a range of legislative approaches and was closely monitoring the impact of the measures introduced in Northern Ireland following the adoption of the Nordic model. Policy changes needed to be based on evidence, and £150,000 had been allocated for a study of the prevalence and nature of prostitution in England and Wales.

63. **Ms. Chapman** (United Kingdom) said that the legal provisions governing female genital mutilation had been strengthened in 2015, since which time the courts had issued 296 protection orders. The first successful prosecution of a case had taken place on 1 February 2019. Other initiatives included supporting and funding community engagement work, raising awareness of female genital mutilation among frontline professionals and the reform of social work education. In addition, hospitals routinely recorded information that could be of use to social services and the police.

64. One outcome of the evidence-based review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, described in the Government's replies to the Committee's list of issues ([CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/8/Add.1](#), paras. 20–21), was the recently published Legal Support Action Plan, whose main objective was to tailor support to the needs of those seeking justice. The exceptional case funding scheme would remain a crucial component of legal aid, ensuring that it was available to anyone eligible in any case where failure to provide it would or might entail a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights or other enforceable European Union law. Exceptional case funding could also be made available to potential victims of modern slavery or human trafficking in immigration cases. In that regard, she wished to draw Committee members' attention to the Victims Strategy published in 2018, the aim of which was to ensure support for victims across the United Kingdom.

65. **Ms. Bird** said that, under the Equally Safe programme on violence against women in Scotland, prostitution and sexual exploitation were a priority, and a multi-agency group had been set up to focus on that issue specifically. Scotland took a slightly different approach to human trafficking inasmuch as there was a statutory duty to support victims. The duration of support had recently been doubled from 45 days to 90 days, but in many cases it was given for longer. No legal action could be taken against a victim who had been forced to commit an act defined as an offence.

66. The Government of Scotland had recently conducted a consultation on female genital mutilation and was considering its next steps. It recognized that the issue was a sensitive one and wished to learn from the experience of others. In allocating roles to the various agencies involved, however, it was important to ensure that any reporting requirements or other measures put in place did not deter victims from coming forward and claiming the support they needed.

67. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that the package of reforms to the National Referral Mechanism included measures to strengthen the role of first responders, in part by defining that role and the training that first responders should receive. Those measures should help improve the identification of potential victims of modern forms of slavery and the quality of referrals. Cases would be handled by a new competent authority separate from the immigration system. In addition, victims would be given longer to transition into local communities, with support continuing for six months after they left the mechanism.

68. As to the potential impact of the draft Domestic Abuse Bill, that legislation alone could not provide all the answers. Complementary measures included an allocation of £8 million to support children affected by domestic abuse; greater support for elderly, disabled, male, and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender victims; the creation of a crisis support system; improved support for victims in the family court system; training to enable the professionals concerned to recognize and tackle abuse; and provision of an extra £20 million to organizations combating domestic abuse.

69. In addition, the Government was considering recommendations on the extension of the Destitute Domestic Violence Concession to cover all women with an insecure immigration status and not only, as was currently the case, those in a relationship with a British citizen. In any case, under existing safeguards, victims of abuse who were vulnerable migrants who might be rendered destitute, including those without valid permission to stay and failed asylum seekers, could apply for extra support. Local authorities could thus offer a safety net in the form of housing or financial support in cases where withholding support would breach individuals' or families' human rights.

70. A programme had been launched in 2018, with £5 million of budget support, to help women who had left work to take on caring responsibilities to return to work. One objective of that programme was to help women wishing to return to the police force to do so with due recognition of experience already acquired.

71. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would like to know how the State party intended to reduce the pull factors that were making the United Kingdom a destination for sex trafficking. She also wished to know how the State party intended to reduce demand for prostitution and whether it had made an assessment of the Nordic model. Lastly, she would like to hear the delegation's reaction to comments by the European Union Anti-Trafficking Coordinator concerning the lack of funding in the State party for victim support.

72. **Ms. Haidar** said that ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention was no substitute for proper access to justice for women within the State party. Given that the Convention had not been fully incorporated into domestic law, she would like to know how the State party intended to provide such access and ensure proper oversight of the Convention's implementation. It would be interesting to learn whether the State party intended to look more thoroughly into the issue of tax evasion, a problem whose impact was usually felt first in funding for social services and therefore hit women particularly hard. In addition, the State party might undertake research to improve its understanding of intersectional discrimination affecting young women living in rural areas and those with mental disabilities.

73. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she wondered whether the Equally Safe strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women in Scotland had taken account of the specific needs of women with disabilities, in particular their lack of economic empowerment and the fact that in many cases they depended on their abusers for their livelihood. She would like to know what reasonable accommodations were made in the State party to ensure access to justice for women victims of violence who had physical impairments and whether the new Domestic Abuse Bill made specific provision for women and children with disabilities. Lastly, she noted that a loophole in section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, on controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship, enabled abusers who were also carers to escape punishment. Did the State party intend to remedy that situation?

74. **Ms. Ameline** said that, given the spread of ever more virulent hate speech in the State party, notably during the Brexit campaign, she would like to know what steps the State party was taking to protect vulnerable groups, in particular foreign minorities.

75. **Ms. Bethel** said that she was perplexed at the State party's reluctance to apply, in the Modern Slavery Act, the internationally recognized definition of trafficking given in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. She wondered why the Act did not simply grant victims immunity from criminalization, which would be more consistent with a human rights-based approach. She would also be interested to know why the Government did not support the Modern Slavery Victim Support Bill introduced by Lord McColl, which seemed to put forward a human rights-based approach to victim protection.

76. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to hear the delegation's response to the criticism of the Domestic Abuse Bill by women from black and minority ethnic communities, who had said that it failed to address their special needs and who had proposed an alternative bill. The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security did not address violence against women perpetrated by military personnel or contracted security personnel or partners. In that connection, there was considerable concern in Northern Ireland about the intimidation of women by paramilitary groups. In the light of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and the Committee's general recommendation No. 30, she would like to know how the State party intended to address what amounted to a barrier to women's participation in decision-making and peacebuilding.

77. **Ms. McCabe** (United Kingdom) said that the Women in Community Transformation Programme had been set up under a 2016 action plan for tackling paramilitary activity and coercive control in Northern Ireland. Building on women's proven role in supporting peace processes, it provided opportunities for them to become even more involved in community development issues. Feedback had been very positive. In addition, the Paramilitary Crime Task Force was working to tackle organized crime links to paramilitary groups and all forms of coercion and intimidation.

78. **Ms. Chapman** (United Kingdom) said that a whole-system approach was taken to dealing with victims of modern slavery, especially those with disabilities and particular vulnerabilities. Training was provided to the police and others involved in dealing with victims soon after initial contact, and reasonable accommodation was made in order to facilitate their effective access to justice. In certain cases, under the Mental Capacity Act 2005, the court could appoint a "litigation friend" to conduct the proceedings on an individual's behalf. Specific steps were taken to ensure that a person lacking capacity was appropriately involved in the proceedings.

79. **Ms. Bird** (United Kingdom) said that an independent review of Scottish hate speech laws had been conducted in 2018 to determine how they might be supplemented. According to the Crown Office, crimes related to race and sexual orientation were the most common categories of hate crimes.

80. **Ms. Francis** (United Kingdom) said that Wales had had a Hate Crime Incident Framework in place since 2014. It also funded a national hate crime centre offering advocacy and support services, thereby allowing victims to report hate crime without having to go to the police. Training was provided to the organizations involved in the centre and the framework. In addition, Wales had a well-established network of regional community cohesion coordinators that had developed very good relationships with a number of

communities. In recognition of the impact of Brexit on levels of hate crime, additional funding had been allocated to strengthen those teams' capacity and expertise.

81. **Ms. McCaffrey** (United Kingdom) said that £8.5 million of extra funding had been allocated to the police in order to improve the operational response to human trafficking. With regard to tax evasion, in the interests of transparency the United Kingdom published impact notes on individual tax measures, which included an assessment of their expected impact on equality. Under the hate crime action plan, additional funding had recently been allocated to protect places of worship, along with some £1.5 million for projects to tackle racially and religiously motivated hatred.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*