



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

Distr.: General
19 October 2022

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Eighty-third session**

Summary record of the 1912th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 11 October 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Safarov (Vice-Chair)

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Mr. Safarov, Vice-Chair, 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)*

Eighth periodic report of Finland (continued) (CEDAW/C/FIN/8; CEDAW/C/FIN/Q/8; CEDAW/C/FIN/RQ/8)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Finland joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland), resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that Finland prioritized providing support to civil society actors and key United Nations entities, such as UN-Women and the United Nations Women for Peace Association, with a focus on the safety of women human rights defenders. While just 3 per cent of Finnish ambassadors had been female in the 1990s, the number of women ambassadors had begun to rise substantially in 2005, and they now accounted for over 47 per cent of ambassadors.
3. **A representative of Finland** said that, to mitigate the harmful effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on children and young people, the Ministry of Education and Culture had regularly updated and distributed support packages to schools and education providers, and cooperation had been stepped up with the relevant professionals. As the pandemic wore on, measures were also being taken to ensure the well-being of education professionals at all levels.
4. A study was under way on equality, non-discrimination and diversity among teaching and research staff at higher education institutions. Recommendations would be made once the study would be completed at the end of the year. Universities were, however, autonomous and free to decide what actions to take.
5. Instruction at the various levels of education was human rights-based and gender-responsive, promoted equality and encouraged all children to make non-gendered choices. In addition, schools received guides on gender equality. Education institutions were required by law to conduct systematic equality work to dismantle gender segregation and prevent harassment. There was no reliable information on punishment for bullying and harassment, but school violence was addressed in the curriculum and by the body responsible for student well-being. All children, including refugees and those belonging to minorities, were entitled to a safe learning environment. That principle also extended to extracurricular activities.
6. **A representative of Finland** said that work conducted under the so-called anchor model, which involved the use of multidisciplinary teams and was considered a good practice at the European level, focused on early crime prevention, and thus addressed problems such as bullying. The teams also handled some domestic violence cases. The requirements to obtain citizenship were the same for all applicants, regardless of gender, and it was possible for Finnish citizens to hold citizenship of more than one country.
7. **A representative of Finland** said that shelters provided women victims of violence with counselling and assistance, such as help in applying for social security benefits and in securing accommodation. Services, including reintegration assistance, were tailored to victims' needs. Only the police or the prosecutor could refer cases of intimate partner violence for mediation, in accordance with established guidelines. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health contributed annually to the Council of Europe Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion, specifically to support and empower Roma women, and in 2022, it had funded an event under the Roma Women's Access to Justice programme. The country's third national policy on the Roma was being developed and would pay particular attention to the rights of Roma women and to diversity among the Roma population.
8. **A representative of Finland** said that, particularly in cases of sexual or violent offences, and in keeping with police guidelines, the nature of the offence and the relationship between the suspect and victim were taken into account when determining whether a case was suitable for referral to mediation. Special consideration was given in cases of aggravated circumstances or repeat offences. Although intimate partner violence could not be mediated

more than once, cases could be referred for mediation on initial complaint to the police, even where there had been prior incidents that had gone unreported. An interministerial study on the parties' experience of mediation in cases of intimate partner violence would be completed in early 2023.

9. **A representative of Finland** said that the number of high-ranking women military officers had risen from 61 in 2014 to 84 in 2021. Gender equality plans had been adopted across the defence forces to promote job satisfaction, non-discrimination and equality. Job satisfaction was measured through qualitative assessments by experts, while equality was measured using feedback on the mechanism to report inappropriate behaviour and on the remedial action taken in such cases. Questions designed to detect discrimination had been included in gender equality surveys, workplace atmosphere surveys and the final conscript questionnaire, and their responses were analysed for the same purpose.

10. **Ms. Ameline** said that persistent structural inequalities, notably in employment, would hinder the country's ability to adapt to a changing world. It was surprising, for instance, that professions in the State party remained quite segregated along gender lines. That had a major impact on career paths, salaries and retirement pensions and would only worsen with the digital transition. She wished to know what steps the State party intended to take to accelerate the achievement of desegregation in all economic sectors and what indicators had been established to build a culture of equality in the workplace. She wondered whether the State party's commendable goal of narrowing the gender pay gap to 12 per cent by 2025 would be met and whether it could be achieved without imposing more stringent constraints on businesses. What was the State party's view of the professional equality aspect of the gender equality agenda adopted by the local administration in the Åland Islands?

11. There was a need for businesses to see the inclusion of ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities in the workforce and non-discrimination against parents as advantages rather than as constraints. In that connection, it would be useful to hear about the expected outcomes of the parental leave reform and to find out whether the reform took into account the situation of single mothers. She noted that few workplace harassment cases were brought before the courts, despite the fact that such harassment had been criminalized in 2014. The Committee would like to know how judges understood the relevant provision, whether the recent court decision broadly interpreting the status of victim would become the new norm and whether the mandate of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman might be expanded to include action against discrimination in the workplace. Lastly, she was curious to learn about the State party's plans to ensure that artificial intelligence applications would be inclusive.

12. **A representative of Finland** said that, while more women had begun to train in traditionally male-dominated fields, the same could not be said about men in female-dominated fields. In science, technology, engineering and mathematics, for example, men represented 80 per cent of the workforce; the proportion was reversed in areas such as education and social services. Unfortunately, the same pattern was replicated among the immigrant population. One of the objectives set in the Government gender equality report – which also dealt with the theme of artificial intelligence – was to double the number of people in gender-equal occupations by 2030. In addition to being the key to the current labour and skills shortage, dismantling gender segregation was also a way to attract workers to the country's regions. A recently launched research programme on the link between segregated occupations and the gender pay gap would run until the first semester of 2024.

13. Implementation of the Act on Equality between Women and Men (the Equality Act) was monitored by the Ombudsman for Equality and the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal. Employers were prohibited from terminating contracts on account of pregnancy or the exercise of the right to parental leave. When a contract was terminated while the worker was on parental leave, the termination was deemed to be unlawful unless the employer could prove there were other grounds for termination. Changing corporate mindsets and practices was the best way to prevent discrimination on those grounds.

14. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that artificial intelligence was widely used across a range of government services, including in health care and the legal system. The National Artificial Intelligence Programme, also known as AuroraAI, had been initiated in 2020 and would be completed in 2022. Its purpose was to provide a single portal through which citizens could

obtain access to the services that they needed at different stages of their lives. Another national programme, known as Artificial Intelligence 4.1, would provide support to Finnish businesses based in Finland and abroad. The Government was working hard to promote the use of artificial intelligence, and it was aware of the dangers that it potentially posed in relation to human rights.

15. **Ms. Ameline** said that she wished to know whether mechanisms for tackling sexual harassment in the workplace would be established and whether steps would be taken to enhance access to secure, well-paid employment for women, including migrant women.

16. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that she wished to know what measures were being taken to reduce the incidence of eating disorders among women and girls and to ensure that such disorders were identified and treated as early as possible. She wondered what was being done to reduce the suicide rate among women and to ensure that mental health problems and drug addiction, which disproportionately affected young women, were effectively diagnosed and treated. She would be interested to know whether any plans were in place to make contraception freely available to women in all municipalities and to reduce the value added tax applied to women's sanitary products. The Government might consider making such products free of charge for women on low incomes.

17. The Committee would be grateful to hear whether any measures had been taken to repeal section 2 of the Sterilization Act, which permitted the sterilization of women with restricted legal capacity, without their consent. It would also welcome information on measures to prevent and raise awareness of female genital mutilation. She would be grateful to learn more about the health situation of Sami women and any steps taken to improve their access to social and health-care services.

18. **A representative of Finland** said that the parliament was currently considering a bill that would prohibit the sterilization of women with restricted legal capacity. The updated action plan for the prevention of female genital mutilation would strengthen measures to prevent that practice and to support victims. The action plan provided for enhanced cooperation between relevant actors and would ensure that good practices were shared between them. It also contained recommendations on increasing the amount of research into female genital mutilation.

19. National law provided that the Sami people, in common with other linguistic minorities, had the right to use their native language when engaging with health-care and social service providers, with interpreters provided if necessary. In practice, however, it was difficult to ensure the provision of Sami-language services throughout the country, particularly in sparsely populated areas. A bill on the reform of social and health-care services would provide for the establishment of so-called well-being service counties, which would begin operating in 2023. The well-being service county for Lapland would be responsible for developing social and health-care services in the Sami languages and promoting cross-border cooperation for the provision of social support and health care for the Sami people. It would also provide for the establishment of a Sami language board, which, among other functions, would assess the requirements for Sami-language social and health-care services in different parts of the country.

20. **A representative of Finland** said that the Ministry of Education and Culture had granted €12 million to mechanisms for promoting students' well-being in higher education institutions. The funding would be used to develop peer support activities and guidance services for students and to enhance the availability of psychological and psychiatric support for them. Student welfare services in schools had been strengthened and plans were in place to appoint more school psychologists and social workers. Measures to promote school attendance took into account the problems faced by young people. The Ministry of Education and Culture funded several mental health projects in the area of sports.

21. **A representative of Finland** said that the parliament was currently considering an initiative to reduce to 10 per cent the value added tax applied to women's sanitary products.

22. **Ms. Al-Rammah**, noting that women had been disproportionately affected by the cuts made to social security benefits between 2016 and 2018, said that she wished to know what steps were being taken to support vulnerable women and to ensure that they had an adequate

standard of living. She would be grateful for information on any programmes established to support women entrepreneurs, including those belonging to minority ethnic groups and those on low incomes. She wondered whether programmes to promote economic independence had been established for poor women living in shelters for victims of violence.

23. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she wished to know what measures were being taken to ensure access to health-care services, including childbirth services, in rural areas with declining populations. She would welcome information on the results achieved to date by the National Action Programme to Combat Racism and Promote Good Relations for 2021–2023 and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concerning the Sami People. The delegation might also describe any measures that had been implemented to improve the safety and well-being of women prisoners. The Committee would be grateful to learn whether any programmes had been established to promote the integration of migrant women and, if so, with what outcomes. She wondered what was being done to ensure that older women and women with disabilities had an adequate standard of living and did not fall into poverty. Lastly, she was curious to learn about the health-care services and other forms of support made available to Roma women, including Roma women with disabilities and those who were victims of gender-based violence.

24. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that, in 2022, Finland had been rated as the happiest country in the world for the fifth consecutive year. For Finnish people, happiness meant being content with one's quality of life, which partly depended on the quality and availability of public services. The Government was conscious of the difficulties that it faced in trying to provide such services in every part of the country and was focused on finding the best ways to overcome those difficulties.

25. **A representative of Finland** said that women in shelters received individualized support in accordance with their personal circumstances. No specific programmes were in place to support any particular group of women in shelters. In a country as large as Finland, it was difficult to ensure equal access to health-care services for people in every part of the country. Rather than focusing on the distance that patients had to travel to hospitals and clinics, the Government made efforts to ensure that the quality of existing services was as high as possible. The five university hospitals in Finland were fairly evenly distributed around the country.

26. **A representative of Finland** said that the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concerning the Sami People had been adopted in cooperation with the Sami Parliament. The Commission had experienced some initial difficulties, including the resignation of two commissioners, but those problems had been overcome and the Commission was now ready to begin its work. In six prisons, separate wings would be established for women prisoners to ensure their safety and well-being. In order to facilitate those changes, structural improvements would be made and more female staff would be employed. The Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women provided for training to be delivered to the staff of the prison and probation service in order to raise their awareness of the needs and circumstances of women prisoners.

27. **A representative of Finland** said that, although there were no government programmes specifically for women entrepreneurs, the 35 per cent of entrepreneurs who were women benefited from initiatives implemented by organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce. In addition to the proposed legislation on the integration of immigrants, which would benefit immigrants outside the workforce such as those caring for children, amendments to the Aliens Act would soon come into force; they would simplify and shorten the residency permit application process. The Government had proposed measures to clarify regulations on the employment of foreigners, but they did not address women specifically. In response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the Government had also proposed amendments to the Act on the Reception of Persons Seeking International Protection and on the Identification and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. The new provisions would promote the integration of persons fleeing the conflict and identify the services required by beneficiaries of temporary protection who had been allocated a municipality of residence.

28. There were no specific measures to promote the employment of women with disabilities, partly because they fared better in the labour market than their male counterparts. A range of measures had been adopted to assist persons with partial work ability, which was a concept that was not well defined in law. They included the establishment of a State-owned enterprise tasked with promoting their employment and reforms to the wage subsidies system to promote the employment of job seekers whose ability to work was hindered by injury or illness.

29. **A representative of Finland** said that the third national policy on the Roma was being drafted and would pay particular attention to several groups within the Roma community, including women. With regard to poverty alleviation, social security benefits were granted based on individual needs, and legislation had recently been passed to help households cope with rising energy bills. Families with children would receive additional financial support in December 2022, a measure that would be of particular help to single mothers. In addition, households whose incomes did not cover their basic needs received financial assistance. Social security benefits rose in line with the national pension index, and an additional increase had been granted in August 2022 to respond to rising prices. The numerous measures adopted to promote gender equality in remuneration would also address problems facing older women. Non-governmental organizations had been consulted on proposed reforms to the social security system, a process that had taken the needs of vulnerable groups into account. Reforms to disability legislation had been proposed with the aim of strengthening the right to self-determination of persons with disabilities.

30. **A representative of Finland** said that gender mainstreaming formed part of the implementation plan of the National Action Programme to Combat Racism and Promote Good Relations for 2021–2023, which would be the subject of an independent evaluation in 2024.

31. **A representative of Finland** said that, in certain circumstances, a person could undergo sterilization despite being unable to understand the circumstances surrounding the procedure.

Articles 15 and 16

32. **The Chair** said that he would welcome statistics on the number of births in early marriages, particularly since the State party's introduction in 2019 of a minimum age for marriage. He also wished to know whether the State party planned to amend its national legislation to criminalize forced marriage, which was currently punished as aggravated trafficking in persons. It would be useful to hear how the State party addressed legal obstacles caused by differences in national legal systems in family law cases where one of the spouses was of non-European Union nationality, particularly child custody cases. Lastly, he wished to know whether paternity leave was compensated in the same way as maternity leave and how the recent changes to the parental leave system were implemented in practice.

33. **A representative of Finland** said that the public had been consulted on the criminalization of forced marriage. The delegation would subsequently provide information in writing on child custody cases.

34. **A representative of Finland** said that, given that the reforms to the parental leave system had been introduced only very recently, information on their effect was not yet available. The reforms, which provided for 40 days' leave for the parent who had given birth, followed by 160 days' non-transferrable parental leave for each parent, aimed to increase fathers' involvement in childcare, thereby enabling greater women's participation in the workforce and helping to close the gender wage gap. Single parents were entitled to use all 320 days of parental leave.

35. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would welcome information on any plans to introduce paid carers' leave, given that caring responsibilities traditionally fell disproportionately to women.

36. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the members of the delegation would convey the Committee's high expectations of Finland to their colleagues in Helsinki.

37. **The Chair** said that the State party's efforts to improve the situation of women in Finland were to be commended.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.