



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Fifty-fifth session**

Summary record (partial)* of the 1145th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 18 July 2013, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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

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

*Combined second and third periodic reports of Serbia (continued)
(CEDAW/C/SRB/2-3; CEDAW/C/SRB/Q/2-3 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Serbia took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 10 to 14

2. **Mr. Knežević** (Serbia) said that more than half of the political parties registered in the State party represented ethnic minority groups. Under the Law on Gender Equality, political parties and trade unions were required every four years to adopt and publish a plan of action for the promotion of equal representation of men and women within their membership. A number of parties represented in the National Assembly had complied with the Law. Although no trade unions had made public such plans to date, many had nevertheless introduced initiatives to advance the interests of women members and combat discrimination in the workplace.

3. **Mr. Miroslav Milošević** (Serbia) said that one woman held the position of State secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which in Serbia was equivalent to the rank of deputy minister. Two of the five assistant ministers of the Ministry were women. A total of 15 women currently headed Serbian embassies and consulates.

4. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) noted that women were currently underrepresented at the local government level and efforts would be made to improve the situation.

5. **Mr. Knežević** (Serbia) said that a representative of the Statistical Office sat on the Gender Equality Council to help the Government of Serbia to monitor the implementation of its gender policies. The Office had a dedicated working group which was responsible for collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data with the help of up-to-date methods used Europe-wide.

6. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that, although the 2014 budget for campaigns to raise awareness among women of their rights had not been finalized and the economic crisis had reduced the available funding for such activities, her Government would do everything to make any campaigns as effective as possible within its limited means.

7. **Ms. Mohorović** (Serbia) said that the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of the Roma had been adopted in 2013. It was currently funded by donors and would be covered under the 2014 budget. Some donors had also pledged their continued support for the plan. The plan covered equal opportunities, participation in political life, the prevention of forced marriages, protections against human trafficking and combating violence against Roma women.

8. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that efforts were being made to improve the conditions of women with disabilities, particularly with respect to employment, social protection, health care and education. Much more needed to be done to promote accessibility. A working group under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy monitored and identified obstacles to the implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Status of Disabled Persons and was developing an action plan for its implementation in the 2013–2015 period. Women with disabilities were among the target groups of the legislation on the development of social entrepreneurship.

9. **Mr. Randjel Milošević** (Serbia) said that under the Family Law, the courts were empowered to impose a number of measures to protect victims of domestic violence, including restraining orders and others. Social care workers had been especially entrusted to provide victims with support and were authorized to initiate protection measure proceedings. The law also provided for prompt hearings of domestic violence cases and effective appeals against decisions to a higher court.

10. **Mr. Jovanović** (Serbia) said that amendments to the Civil Code were currently under consideration and were before the public, including provisions governing family matters. Once finalized, the Code would codify the existing Family Law. The new Code also provided for protection measures against domestic violence such as mandatory treatment of offenders for alcohol and substance abuse.

11. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that all health-care and social protection providers, including NGOs, were held to minimum standards of service. Cross-cutting efforts had been made to eliminate gender stereotypes, including through increased family counselling services, educational reform and cooperation with the media. The law on social entrepreneurship would empower more women by boosting employment among single mothers, women with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

12. **Ms. Hayashi** asked whether there was a mechanism in place to promote school enrolment and prevent Roma children from dropping out of school. She requested information on the Government efforts to engage with civil society on programmes to support the Roma and other minority groups, and on steps taken to remove stereotypes from secondary school textbooks. Further details would be welcomed on measures taken to encourage women to opt for subjects traditionally taken by men.

13. **Mr. Bruun** expressed concern at the lack of data regarding women's employment, long-term unemployment among young women and minority groups and the pay gap. Further information would be appreciated on action undertaken to enforce the new Labour Law, on training on labour legislation provided to trade unionists, employers and other stakeholders and on the State party's activities to improve the position of women in the labour market. He also sought clarification on cases of employment discrimination, including sexual harassment, dealt with by labour inspectors and the remedies available to victims. He would appreciate information on any provisions, such as parental leave, that had helped to break down gender stereotypes and promote equal sharing of family responsibilities, and the extent to which men availed themselves of such leave. The delegation should also provide more specific details of the law on social entrepreneurship and the steps taken to eliminate discrimination against minority women.

14. **Ms. Al-Jehani** asked what measures the State party had adopted to address the reproductive health needs of women and girls with disabilities and to provide better health-care protection and long-term care to older women, particularly in rural areas.

15. **Ms. Schulz** was concerned that the State party's focus on the low fertility rate would prompt it to restrict access to abortion. Given that abortion appeared to be used in the State party as a contraceptive method, were there plans to increase the limited range and accessibility to other methods and to improve the current underused family planning services? Could the delegation provide information on the abortion rates? What was being done to enable minority women, especially those with disabilities or HIV/AIDS, to gain equal access to services and to assert their reproductive health rights? Since a number of women were resistant to first-generation antiretroviral drugs, would second-generation HIV drugs soon be available? What treatment was available and administered to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and how were women informed about the availability of such treatment?

16. **Ms. Djordjević** (Serbia) said that the Law on the Fundamentals of Education provided equal access and equal opportunities to all school-age children. Children from minority backgrounds were also given the option of attending classes conducted in their native languages. An intersectoral approach had proved particularly effective in increasing school enrolment rates of Roma children, with Roma health mediators advising the Roma population of their educational rights as they attended to their health needs. The Government appreciated the Committee's concern at the fluctuating enrolment and dropout rates for Roma girls, but the overall number of Roma girls attending school had risen since 2004. Such an increase had been due, in part, to the awareness-raising campaigns carried out by the Government to explain the latest elementary school enrolment procedure to the Roma community and the population at large.

17. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that the Government was committed to combating stereotypical cultural norms and its recent gender review of elementary school textbooks had produced good results. However, more efforts were needed to address gender stereotypes in secondary school textbooks. In terms of encouraging a higher number of women to pursue non-traditional careers, the Government did not intend to take measures which forced more women to study non-traditional subjects if they did not wish to do so. No restrictions were placed on a woman's freedom to choose a career path in Serbia and a person's choice of career was considered by the Government to be a basic human right.

18. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that the Government's main aim was to reduce the dropout rate of Roma children at all of the country's 4,000 educational establishments. From 2014, a scholarship programme would fund the education costs of around 1,000 Roma students and in the meantime the Government would continue to run its Second-Chance Project to provide additional adult education classes for any Roma individuals who had not completed their primary education.

19. **Ms. Ivanović** (Serbia) said that in accordance with the National Employment Strategy for 2005–2010, several temporary measures aimed at increasing the employment of Roma women had been introduced. Employers had been encouraged to hire Roma workers and the Government had targeted employment training programmes and awareness-raising campaigns at the Roma population in an effort to encourage Roma women to take up work.

20. **Mr. Knežević** (Serbia) said that, under the 2009 Law on Gender Equality, the Courts were required to forward their rulings on gender discrimination cases to the Directorate for Gender Equality. In 2010, the Government had adopted a Rulebook on Records and Documentation of Final Court Decisions on Gender Discrimination to assist the Courts in their treatment of gender discrimination cases. Since that time, significant progress had been made to bring the perpetrators of such acts to account, including the successful resolution of two high-profile gender discrimination cases, involving KBC Bank and the Football Federation of Serbia.

21. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that fathers were legally entitled to paternity leave and the number of men taking advantage of such provisions had steadily increased. Under labour regulations, all women benefited from positive discrimination measures. Special support initiatives, such as the establishment of social entrepreneurship centres, had been made available to unemployed women, especially Roma women, women with disabilities, and long-term unemployed women. They provided them with training, help in finding employment or funding to set up their own businesses.

22. **Ms. Pantić-Aksentijević** (Serbia) said that the Ministry of Health had recently introduced a scheme to purchase hydraulic gynaecological beds to increase women with disabilities' access to reproductive and maternal health care. The national health budget also included provisions for hospital equipment in order to enable health-care centres to

provide access and care to a greater percentage of the population, including women with disabilities and older women.

23. In an effort to address the shortfall in sustainable funding for health-care provisions for older persons, the Government had established a high-level commission to devise a national health-care strategy by the start of 2014. Health-care stakeholders at all levels would be involved in the subsequent implementation of the strategy.

24. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that as part of the new health-care strategy for older persons, additional health-care centres would be set up in rural areas to advise older women on their right to health care and to encourage them to undergo preventative health checks.

25. **Ms. Pantić-Aksentijević** (Serbia) said that, since 2009, 75 Roma women had trained to work as health mediators in health-care centres and provide a link between health-care professionals and the Roma community. Under the Roma health mediator scheme, there had been a significant increase in the percentage of Roma women accessing gynaecological and maternity health care. There had also been a noted rise in the number of Roma women undergoing preventative health checks.

26. Although the Government was concerned at the widespread use of abortion as a means of contraception, there were no plans to restrict women's access to it. Instead, the Ministry of Health had carried out awareness-raising campaigns to educate women on the associated risks and the alternative forms of contraception available. In terms of the Committee's concerns at the cost of undergoing an abortion, any increase in price would be a reflection of the varying service prices between the public and private health-care providers. While the Government had access to data from public health-care providers on the number of abortions performed and their cost, none of its most recent data incorporated statistics from the private health-care sector as there was no clear evidence of a price increase. Once the planned integration of the public and private health-care sectors had been completed, the Government would be in a better position to provide the Committee with more accurate data.

27. Women's lack of awareness of alternative forms of contraception was due, in part, to a lack of health-care funding, and the Government intended to use donor funding to introduce several projects, including an online counselling service, to promote women's reproductive health. The quality and accessibility of family planning services would be improved and, in an effort to make more modern contraceptives available to women, the Government would seek additional funding and work in partnership with the international community, particularly the United Nations Population Fund, to assess how best to meet the country's birth control needs.

28. Lastly, on the issue of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS, she stressed that the Government remained committed to providing appropriate treatment and advice to pregnant women with HIV/AIDS and would work to reduce the national transmission rate.

29. **Ms. Schulz** asked whether there were plans to make the information contained on the Government's sexual health website available to school-age children and whether the State party intended to shift the focus of its sexual and reproductive health education to a more rights-based approach.

30. **Ms. Bailey** asked whether the State party intended to implement a strategy to address the high dropout rate of Roma girls at primary schools and their low enrolment in secondary education.

31. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether classes on sexual and reproductive health were a mandatory part of the curriculum for all secondary school pupils and, if not, whether the State party intended to make them so.

32. **Ms. Neubauer** asked the delegation to provide gender-disaggregated data on persons working in the diplomatic service to enable an accurate comparison to be drawn between the representation of men and women. She also wished to know how the minimum standards of service imposed on social service providers would affect NGOs composed of Roma women and women with disabilities, who would be unlikely to meet the educational requirements under those standards.

33. **Ms. Pantić-Aksentijević** (Serbia) said that, unfortunately, the Government's national budget was not sufficient enough to cover the costs of providing second-generation antiretroviral drugs to all those who needed them. The Government had signed contracts with NGOs and other donors to provide such treatments to persons with HIV/AIDS and it would continue to look for creative ways to develop new funding models in an effort to expand HIV/AIDS treatment throughout Serbia.

34. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that sexual and reproductive health came under the subject of biology, which was compulsory in all schools. In addition, a special programme on health education had been introduced in the majority of schools to complement the material covered in biology lessons. Her Government planned to introduce that programme in all schools in Serbia. Communities and NGOs were also involved in rolling out the programme.

35. In May, a number of Government ministers attended a conference on issues related to the Roma community in Serbia. The conference had served as an opportunity to reflect on the progress achieved by Serbia in integrating Roma children into the mainstream school system and had highlighted the need for the Government to do more to curb the dropout rate of those children.

36. **Mr. Miroslav Milošević** (Serbia) said that women accounted for around 25 per cent of the heads of diplomatic missions and around 30 per cent of the senior level posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2012.

37. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that minimum standards for social protection and health-care services had been developed to ensure that beneficiaries were adequately covered. No group had encountered problems of access to services as a result of the introduction of the standards.

Articles 15 and 16

38. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari**, noting that women could only claim a parental allowance for their first four children, sought clarification of the exception made in the event of a woman's fourth pregnancy resulting in a multiple birth. She asked whether the State party had considered introducing temporary special measures to remedy gender-related discrepancies in programmes to promote entrepreneurship.

39. While the law on social welfare provided adequate support to women with disabilities and to those caring for them, she asked whether the regulations necessary for the implementation of the law had been adopted. She asked what the State party planned to do to tackle the feminization of poverty, given that more than 65 per cent of households living below the poverty line were headed by women.

40. She asked about the status of the new Family Law mentioned by the delegation and the reasons for its introduction and would appreciate details of any major changes made to the previous legislation. Noting that early marriages still occurred in Serbia, she welcomed the fact that early marriage would be covered by the programme to assist the Roma community. However, she would appreciate more information on the steps taken to raise the awareness of the Roma community about the risks of early marriage. She failed to understand why a number of provisions concerning early marriage and related issues had

been removed from the Criminal Code, as that seemed to undermine the efforts undertaken to eradicate the phenomenon. Lastly, she asked what the State party was doing to address the issue of fathers failing to pay child maintenance.

41. **Ms. Hayashi** said that Serbia had the largest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in Europe. She asked whether the State party planned to introduce a system for monitoring refugees and internally displaced persons in Serbia in the near future. Furthermore, the Committee had received reports that the Commissariat for Refugees possessed no disaggregated data on refugees or information on violence against women refugees. She asked what measures the State party had adopted to protect women asylum seekers from gender-based violence. Lastly, she asked whether the Roma women who had not been able to register previously had now been registered in accordance with the Law on Registry Books.

42. **Ms. Ivanović** (Serbia) said that the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children had been amended in 2009. While a parental allowance was granted to families for their first four children, an exception was made if a woman with three children gave birth to more than one child. The Government had taken affirmative action to boost employment among the Roma community, which had helped to lower the unemployment rate of Roma women.

43. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that many of the regulations necessary for the implementation of the law on social welfare had already been adopted and that more would be passed in the near future. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in collaboration with international organizations, had drawn up an action plan for the implementation of the law. Regulations on financial benefits and social assistance had been adopted. The fact that more citizens were claiming those benefits meant that the law was functioning effectively. More regulations were in the process of being drafted.

44. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that there were an estimated 66,000 refugees in Serbia and around 40 refugee centres. Between 2008 and 2012, the Commissariat for Refugees had found lasting housing solutions for a large number of refugees. Her Government had also adopted a national strategy for assisting refugees and internally displaced persons. Adequate funding was required to ensure that the measures adopted to assist refugees were effective. Currently, funding was provided by the Government, donors and the European Union. The mandate of the Commissariat for Refugees had been broadened to cover issues relating to migration.

45. **Mr. Miroslav Milošević** (Serbia) said that there were an estimated 66,000 refugees from the former Yugoslavia in Serbia. In addition, there were around 230,000 persons who had been internally displaced from Kosovo and Metohija to other parts of Serbia. In total, Serbia thus currently had some 300,000 internally displaced persons.

46. **Ms. Mohorović** (Serbia) said that asylum seekers were housed in asylum centres. All costs of accommodation, health care and education for asylum seekers were covered out of the national budget. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had not fulfilled its mandate in addressing crisis situations in Serbia.

47. **Mr. Randjel Milošević** (Serbia) said that, in 2012, his Government had adopted a new law governing judicial proceedings for unopposed personal status, family and other matters. The law set out the court procedure for establishing the date and place of birth of persons who were unable to register through normal administrative channels. Women who had not been registered at birth could be registered under the new procedure. New provisions governing temporary and permanent residence allowed for the registration of permanent residence at the address of a social welfare centre.

48. **Mr. Jovanović** (Serbia) said that to marry a minor was considered as an offence under the Criminal Code and prosecuted by the courts. Penalties were generally harsh and included prison sentences.

49. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that there had been an increase the number of fathers failing to pay child maintenance. That fact could be attributed in part to the economic crisis. Her Government was aware of the need to provide financial aid to women who found themselves in that situation and was consulting civil society to determine when a mechanism for that purpose could be introduced.

50. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari**, noting that, under customary law, a bride could be bought and often brought a large dowry, asked whether the State party had considered outlawing that custom. She also wished to know whether the State party had considered introducing a mechanism that would allow women to be paid child maintenance directly under a government benefit scheme.

51. **Mr. Randjel Milošević** (Serbia) said that all suspected cases of forced marriage were investigated thoroughly to ensure that women were not victims of human trafficking. In some families, it was customary for the bride to bring gold and other items given to her as gifts to a marriage. In the same context, the groom gave presents to the bride's parents. That act in and of itself did not constitute a crime. However, in the event of a crime being committed, a report was filed and the marriage could be dissolved.

52. **Ms. Janković** (Serbia) said that her Government was in fact considering the establishment of a public fund for child maintenance along the lines suggested. She expressed her appreciation on behalf of the Government of Serbia for the work done by the Committee. The dialogue that had taken place would assist her Government in fully implementing the Convention.

53. **The Chairperson** thanked the delegation for what had been a constructive dialogue and commended it on its efforts to promote women's rights in Serbia. She hoped that the Government of Serbia would give due consideration to the recommendations formulated by the Committee.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 5.05 p.m.