



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Eighty-second session

Summary record of the 1894th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 22 June 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Narain (Rapporteur)

Contents

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

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Morocco (continued)

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Ms. Narain (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

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

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

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Morocco (continued)

(CEDAW/C/MAR/5-6; CEDAW/C/MAR/Q/5-6; CEDAW/C/MAR/RQ/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Morocco joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that, in response to the Committee's question from the previous day, all citizens in Morocco enjoyed the rights guaranteed under national legislation and the Constitution on an equal basis. That included lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. There had been a number of court cases concerning allegations of violence against members of that group, in which rulings had been handed down in the victims' favour and the perpetrators had been punished.

Articles 10 to 14

3. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo** said that illiteracy remained a serious problem in Morocco, particularly among older women and women in rural areas. She wished to know what campaigns the State party had set up to reduce the illiteracy rate and whether it had made plans to take specific action aimed at reducing illiteracy among women in rural areas. The Committee would welcome updated statistical information on the number of girls in rural areas who did not attend school and the number of girls who had left school early because of pregnancy or the need to support their families. It would be useful to know what, if anything, the State party was doing to promote the reintegration into education of early school leavers. She also wished to know what action was being taken to address sexual harassment in school, including information on any specific preventive measures that had been adopted. Clarification as to how remote learning had functioned for schoolchildren during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic would be of interest to the Committee, as would further information on any additional measures being taken to prevent girls in rural areas from being left behind. She was also interested to know whether the State party was taking any action to promote the access of women to professions that were traditionally considered to be the domain of men. Lastly, it would be useful to hear whether any consideration had been given to developing an evolving programme of sex education that took into account the physical and sexual development of female pupils.
4. A representative of Morocco said that the importance that the Government attached to schooling was illustrated by the fact that over 20 per cent of its budget was allocated to education spending.
5. With regard to girls in rural areas, there were approximately 7.5 million schoolchildren in rural areas and they were taught by around half of the country's 315,000 teachers. Under the strategic vision for the reform of the education system for the period 2015–2030, the Government had committed to adopting positive discrimination measures to improve schooling in rural and poor areas. Since the adoption of that strategy, the enrolment rate of girls had increased considerably. To combat pupil dropout rates, financial support amounting to around \$260 million per year was provided for poor families to enable them to keep their children at school. School-age girls in rural areas also benefited from the provision of educational tools and materials. The Government was working alongside a number of civil society organizations to improve access to education and had developed specific programmes for girls and young women under the age of 19 and between the ages of 19 and 24.
6. Two national programmes had been put in place to combat illiteracy, one of which was coordinated by the Ministry of Religious Endowments and Islamic Affairs. In accordance with the results of a national study, a schooling programme was being developed with the aim of reducing the illiteracy rate in the areas most affected by illiteracy. Between 2013 and 2022, around 6 million people had benefited from public measures taken to combat illiteracy, including many girls. The majority of those beneficiaries lived in rural areas.

7. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that an agreement had been reached between the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Justice concerning a strategy to combat early school dropout. At the same time, the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development and the Ministry of Education were working together to establish a framework agreement on the reintegration of girls who had left school. The police had an important role to play in notifying the Ministry of Education of children who had abandoned their schooling so that the Ministry could take the appropriate measures to ensure that they returned to school. Unfortunately, the situation concerning school dropout was exacerbated by the persistence in some communities of outdated traditional beliefs concerning the role of women. One of the main themes of the Government's strategy therefore consisted of convincing parents as to the importance of letting their children attend school. The Government also allocated around 90 million Moroccan dirhams (DH) annually to providing accommodation for female pupils in rural areas who had to travel long distances to attend primary school. Those facilities, which were administered by the Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development, accommodated around 100,000 girls. Regional councils also played an important role in providing transport services between schools and isolated villages.

8. **A representative of Morocco** said that the Ministry of Education had incorporated lessons on sex education and sexual and reproductive health into all school curricula and that it also worked in partnership with non-State educational organizations that were active in that domain. Part of the Ministry's strategy consisted of raising awareness among family members of sexual and reproductive health and reminding them of the important role they had to play in ensuring that young girls were prepared for adolescence.

9. **A representative of Morocco** said that the Ministry of Health had developed a National Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy, under which awareness-raising activities were organized for boys, girls and families. The Government had taken a series of measures to improve the health-care services and support provided at educational institutions, including by establishing over 120 medical centres at universities. A website had also been launched offering information for young people on health in several languages. Those measures were underpinned by ongoing research aimed at identifying current trends and any bad practices in relation to the sexual and reproductive health of young people in Morocco.

10. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that, despite the progress made in providing girls with access to education, the proportion of economically active women in Morocco remained disappointingly low. She wished to know whether there was any particular reason why the improved education of girls was not leading to greater participation of women in the labour market. The Committee would welcome further information on any obstacles that were preventing women from entering into employment and on any measures the State party was taking to increase women's access to paid work. Statistical information on the number of women who had an employment contract, and were therefore covered by social security, would also be of interest. It would be useful to understand how efficient recent decrees ordering the provision of social security for domestic workers had been, particularly in rural areas. She also wished to know what specific measures the State party had taken to include women in its COVID-19 recovery programmes.

11. The Committee would welcome further information on any measures that had been taken to make it easier for mothers to return to work, including by providing improved access to adequate childcare facilities and offering incentives to employers. In accordance with the Labour Code, mothers were entitled to take breastfeeding breaks twice a day. She wished to know whether that it was therefore commonplace for women to take their babies to work or whether employers were providing childcare facilities. It would also be helpful to hear more about any complaints concerning sexual harassment in the workplace, particularly those made by women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, and what measures the Government was taking to protect victims of such acts.

12. It appeared that access to health care in Morocco was largely dependent on social and geographic factors. She wished to know what measures the State party was taking to improve access to pre- and post-natal care for women in rural areas. Further information on the training courses that had been organized to raise awareness of the dangers of clandestine abortions, as mentioned in the State party's periodic report, would also be of interest. It would be useful to know whether the Government intended to make the legislation on abortion less

restrictive and, if so, what measures it planned to take. The Committee would appreciate further information on any measures taken to ensure that women and girls with disabilities were not placed in mental health institutions and that no medical interventions were performed on them without their free, full and informed consent.

13. Lastly, in its replies to the Committee's questions, the State party had made the somewhat vague assertion that children and teenagers were taught how to be aware of and protect their bodies. In practice, what did that mean?

14. **A representative of Morocco** said that progress had been made in addressing disparities in terms of access to maternal care services in urban and rural areas, according to the relevant indicators. There was no considerable difference in that respect. The Government took a participatory approach in all its efforts to uphold women's right to health care. A national action plan had been developed to enhance health-care services in rural areas. Under the plan, mobile clinics had been set up to provide various forms of medical care, including health care for pregnant women, in remote communities that were cut off by snowfall during the winter. Measures had been adopted under the rural health programme to reduce the maternal mortality rate, especially among women affected by COVID-19, and a campaign had been carried out to raise awareness among women of the need to receive continuous medical supervision and support during pregnancy. The Government had taken steps to ensure that mothers were provided with comprehensive health-care services within at least 48 hours after giving birth and that pregnant women in remote areas in particular had access to hospital beds. Screening for breast and cervical cancer were provided free of charge. Significant progress had been made in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV and the number of cases had fallen substantially. The Government's goal was to reduce the maternal mortality rate to 36 per 100,000 live births.

15. Women and girls were provided with access to mental health services. New treatment methods had been developed and a programme dedicated to women's mental health had been established to ensure prompt diagnosis. Furthermore, a campaign had been launched in partnership with several national health institutions to combat the stigma surrounding mental health. A report by the National Human Rights Council had underscored the importance of providing mental health care, and specialized units had been set up to that end. Guidelines had been issued for dealing with mental health issues in prisons.

16. Morocco had laws in place governing who could take part in medical research. Consent was always required and no one was forced to participate against their will. A 1959 law protected mental health patients by enabling them to appeal against decisions to place them under medical supervision. Recent amendments to the law protected such patients from discrimination, torture and other forms of ill-treatment and, under a bill presented to Parliament, such patients would have to be consulted about any decisions affecting them.

17. **A representative of Morocco** said that unprecedented financial support had been provided to people who had been unable to work, including those employed in the informal sector, without discrimination. The payments amounted to US\$ 200 per month. The funding came from the regular State budget with additional contributions from other public and private sources. Half of the beneficiaries of programmes to reintegrate workers into the labour force after the lifting of measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic were women. Furthermore, initiatives were being implemented to incorporate all women into the social protection system.

18. The Ministry of Economic Inclusion, Small Business, Employment and Skills had reached agreements with trade unions and employers as part of efforts to harmonize wages across the agricultural sector and thereby remove regional disparities. A national system governing wages in the sector would be fully operational by 2028. To support women in employment, additional childcare facilities were being set up and men had recently been granted an entitlement to 15 days' paternity leave. Sexual harassment in the workplace was prohibited under the Labour Code and Act No. 103-13.

19. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that childcare facilities had been made available for public sector employees throughout the country as part of its plans to ensure gender equality in the workplace. The Government was working in cooperation with the United Nations Children's

Fund (UNICEF) to train additional childcare staff to afford more women the opportunity to work.

20. **A representative of Morocco** said that abortion was permitted only in cases of incest, rape, severe fetal impairment and in order to protect the health of the mother. Women in those situations who wished to terminate their pregnancy did not require prior authorization from any third party in order to do so.

21. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would appreciate an explanation of the purpose of training courses on the dangers of clandestine abortions when interruption of pregnancy was generally illegal outside of the specific cases described. She would be grateful for clarification of the fact that half of the beneficiaries of labour reintegration programmes were women, given that they accounted for little over one fifth of the labour force.

22. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that of the 800,000 persons who had received unemployment benefits from the State during the COVID-19 pandemic, 42 per cent had been women. Trade unions were represented on the Gender Parity and Anti-Discrimination Authority, which was aimed at ensuring women's economic empowerment, in cooperation with the private sector. Some 135,000 job opportunities had been created under an equal opportunity employment programme. A number of efforts had therefore been made to increase the participation of women in the labour market.

23. **A representative of Morocco** said that the health system's approach to abortion was that of prevention, given the danger inherent in illegal abortions. To that end, women were provided with contraceptives under the family-planning programme, and awareness-raising programmes on reproductive and sexual health were conducted, including for adolescents, with a view to increasing knowledge about the risk of unwanted pregnancy, how to prevent it, and the dangers of illegal abortions. Some 124 medical centres had been set up in universities and schools to that end. Pregnant women received medical and psychological support, including women who had had abortions and been exposed to dangerous risks.

24. **Ms. Bonifaz Alfonzo** said she wished to know what results had been achieved with the "My Situation" programme to improve women's career prospects, particularly in terms of measurable changes. She would also like to hear about any measurable outcomes of the programme aimed at launching young entrepreneurs, called the Intelaka programme. Despite the efforts undertaken by the State party, there continued to be high levels of poverty, a gender-equality gap and discrepancies between urban and rural areas. She wished to know what was being done to help women in rural areas find sustainable development alternatives. Did they benefit from specific programmes and funding for women's projects, such as loans? She would also like to know about any measures to increase women's access to recreational activities, culture and sport.

25. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that while progress had been made towards achieving gender equality, including in rural areas, obstacles remained to rural women's economic independence, including the high illiteracy rate. She would be interested to hear of any measures taken to combat those obstacles. A number of programmes had been implemented in rural areas to support women's and girls' health, including the national reproductive health strategy and the national plan to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality. Nevertheless, maternal mortality rates remained high, and only 74 per cent of deliveries were carried out in health facilities in rural areas compared to 96 per cent in urban areas. Rural women and girls did not have easy access to medical services compared to urban women, and 90 per cent of them did not have health insurance, compared to just over 50 per cent in urban areas. She wished to know about any efforts undertaken to improve women's access to health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services, and whether the husband's permission was still required to seek such services.

26. Some 80 per cent of women over the age of 60 had no health insurance or income, compared to 26 per cent of men. She wished to know what support they received, whether they were included in the social protection plans, and whether they had access to health services and shelters or homes. Noting that 50 per cent of persons with disabilities were women and girls, whose illiteracy rates remained high compared to men, whose school enrolment rates were low, and only a small minority of whom were employed, she asked how the social protection of those women and girls was ensured, as well as their access to

education, health, judicial, social and economic services. She would also like to hear what efforts were undertaken to combat gender stereotypes, such as awareness-raising campaigns and training for media professionals. She wished to know what services and support were provided to refugee women and girls to protect them from all forms of violence, including child marriage, and to ensure their access to health, education, and socioeconomic support. She would also appreciate information on health and education services provided to women in detention and on any programmes to facilitate their reintegration into society upon their release.

27. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that the national fund for the development of rural areas, to which DH 50 billion had been allocated, had been implemented up to 2020.

28. **A representative of Morocco** said that women accounted for half the rural population, and their main activity was agriculture. Programmes for rural development had benefited rural women and improved their job opportunities. Poverty of rural women had been reduced to 9 per cent compared to 25 per cent in 2011. Programmes to reduce social and economic discrepancies had been in place since 2016. One million job opportunities had been provided, 14,000 roads had been built in rural areas to facilitate movement and reduce isolation, education programmes had been implemented and health and education infrastructure had been improved. Over 100 school buses had been introduced, and 60 per cent of villages had been given electricity generators. Some 37 per cent of rural women had benefited from programmes for the creation of income-generating projects, training and capacity-building, and 33,000 women had benefited from technical and vocational training programmes and enterprise training programmes. Seminars and workshops on marketing techniques had helped women improve their skills, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and trade unions had provided them with advice. Since 2012, over 10,000 agricultural cooperatives had been created, with women constituting 80 per cent of their membership. The cooperatives ran activities across the country and took decisions that affected rural women.

29. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that under the Intelaka programme to support young entrepreneurs, nearly 196,000 financial loans had been provided to women.

30. **A representative of Morocco** said that in order to increase rural women's integration into the labour market, programmes had been implemented in the field of economic integration, job creation and job-seeker support, and investment had been increased in value-added projects, in line with the new development programme. Two programmes had been of particular importance: one employment opportunity programme aimed at empowering young people over the age of 18 and another that, in conjunction with civil society organizations and local cooperatives, had provided more than 250,000 temporary jobs since 2020, particularly in rural areas.

31. **A representative of Morocco** said that, as part of its efforts to eradicate illiteracy by 2030, the Government had established a national agency to combat illiteracy and had funded and implemented literacy programmes, particularly aimed at women in rural areas, that had benefited some 1.2 million persons, over 90 per cent of whom were women. Over 11,000 women inmates had also benefited from literacy programmes. Women were able to continue in higher education with the help of government-funded programmes aimed at rural women in particular.

32. **A representative of Morocco** said that the judiciary did not discriminate between nationals and foreigners, whatever their administrative situation, when providing its services. Some 20 per cent of the victims of domestic violence who had received legal assistance had been foreign women. Women with disabilities were provided with sign-language and Braille interpretation.

33. **A representative of Morocco** said that efforts to improve the living conditions of vulnerable women had been prioritized. Funding of DH 18 billion had been allocated to more than 600 projects to rehabilitate refugee centres and specialized victim-support centres, benefiting some 49,000 women. A national programme had been implemented to support vulnerable women and their families through the provision of 2,800 income-generation projects, 30 per cent of which had benefited women. Financial support of DH 320 million had also been granted to vulnerable women.

34. **A representative of Morocco** said that men and women prisoners had equal access to health care. Women prisoners were screened for breast and cervical cancer and hygiene kits were distributed to them. The General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration allowed women prisoners who were pregnant or had very young children to stay in so-called mothers' homes, which were designed to be pleasant, well-lit environments. Women prisoners had access to educational and vocational training programmes to enhance their chances of reintegrating into society after their release.

35. **A representative of Morocco** said that the Ministry for Solidarity, Social Development and the Family had developed a strategy to build respect for human dignity under which older persons received comprehensive support, including a minimum income. Women with no families received social support from around 60 associations established for that purpose. There were no restrictions on access to education for women with disabilities, whose right to education was established by law. Around 30,000 girls with disabilities had benefited from support provided by the Social Solidarity Fund. The Government had committed a significant level of funding to promoting school enrolment for boys and girls.

Articles 15 and 16

36. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that she wished to know what measures were being taken to ensure that all instruments with a legal effect directed at restricting the legal capacity of women were deemed null and void and that women always gave their free and full consent when entering into a marriage or obtaining a divorce. The State party might consider repealing article 490 of the Criminal Code, which criminalized sexual relations outside of wedlock. It might also consider establishing marital rape and sexual harassment as separate offences under the law. She wondered whether associations might be allowed to take legal action on behalf of women victims of violence. The Committee would be grateful to learn what barriers prevented women from obtaining access to justice. In particular, she wondered whether legal aid was made available to women on low incomes, whether courthouses were accessible to women with disabilities and whether interpretation services were provided in hearings.

37. The State party might describe any measures being taken to eradicate the stigma and prejudice faced by prostitutes, lesbians and bisexual and transgender women, including in their dealings with the justice system. In that regard, it might consider establishing a legal prohibition on discrimination against members of sexual minorities. The Committee would be interested to know why the State party had failed to implement its recommendation to amend the Family Code with a view to prohibiting polygamy (CEDAW/C/MAR/CO/4, para. 37). Noting that judges frequently authorized marriages involving at least one person under the age of 18 years, she asked whether the State party would ensure that the minimum age for marriage was always strictly enforced.

38. The State party might consider amending the Family Code to provide that women and men enjoyed the same rights to custody and guardianship of their children, including in the event that they divorced and remarried. The Committee would be interested to hear about any steps being taken to guarantee that the biological fathers of children born out of wedlock were legally recognized as those children's fathers. It would also be grateful to learn about any measures being taken to eliminate gender-discriminatory inheritance practices and to ensure that all contributions made by a woman to a couple's marital assets, including in the form of domestic work, would be taken into account if she decided to seek a divorce. The delegation might state what support was provided to women victims of violence and whether a fund would be established to support them. She wondered whether the State party recognized single-parent families and whether single mothers would continue receiving any benefits to which they were entitled, without being prosecuted, if they had sexual relations out of wedlock.

39. **A representative of Morocco** said that sexual harassment was an offence under the Criminal Code and was defined as an act or form of psychological pressure directed against a colleague in a manner that disrupted the workplace. A woman could be deprived of the guardianship of a child only in the circumstances set out in law. If the child was under 7 years of age, such a measure could not be taken unless the continuation of the guardianship would have adverse consequences for the child. The State provided free legal assistance to all

women victims of violence. The Government was considering the possibility of amending the law to make it more difficult for judges to authorize marriages involving a person under the age of 18 years. Women who had no other forms of social support could receive assistance from the Social Solidarity Fund.

40. **A representative of Morocco** said that men and women had an equal right to receive legal aid. In 2020, the Government had published a report specifying that 50 per cent of the recipients of legal aid were women victims of violence. The conditions governing the ownership and sharing of property during and after a marriage were set out in law. Husbands who wished to divorce their wives could not do so unilaterally as they were required to pass through the appropriate legal channels. Single mothers did not face any discrimination. Parties to a divorce who lived abroad were required to receive an official communication informing them of the decision taken in the divorce proceedings. A significant proportion of requests to authorize marriages involving a person under the age of 18 years were rejected by the courts.

41. **Ms. Hayar** (Morocco) said that the Government was proud of the progress it had made towards establishing gender equality and would continue working with the Committee and other international partners to further empower women in Morocco.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.