



# 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 1675th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 28 February 2019, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Gbedemah

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(*continued*)

*Fourth periodic report of Serbia*

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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)

*Fourth periodic report of Serbia* ([CEDAW/C/SRB/4](#); [CEDAW/C/SRB/Q/4](#) and [CEDAW/C/SRB/Q/4/Add.1](#))

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

2. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia), introducing her country's periodic report ([CEDAW/C/SRB/4](#)), said that extensive consultations involving representatives of government ministries, relevant State and independent bodies, civil society organizations and other stakeholders had been held as part of the process of preparing the report. The report did not contain detailed information on the implementation of the Convention in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, however, as the administration of that part of the country had been fully entrusted to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. The Mission should be asked to report on the implementation of the Convention in that area of the country, where non-Albanian speakers faced serious violations of their human rights.

3. Serbia reported regularly to the United Nations on its efforts to implement the international human rights instruments to which it was a party. It had implemented all but 1 of the 24 recommendations that had been made in the Committee's concluding observations on its previous periodic report ([CEDAW/C/SRB/CO/2-3](#)). The Convention and the Optional Protocol had been translated into 16 languages spoken by national minorities, and all the Committee's general recommendations had been translated into Serbian, with translations into other languages to follow. In 2014, Serbia had ratified the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention.

4. During the period under review, Serbia had made every effort to give effect to the measures set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It had been among the first countries to sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). The Government had done its utmost to improve monitoring of efforts to implement the recommendations made by the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council, many of which concerned gender equality and the advancement of women. The Government's Council for Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations of the United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms, set up in 2014, was developing indicators for that purpose.

5. The adoption of a number of national strategies or plans, including the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, had made it possible for Serbia to ensure the continuity of its efforts to protect and promote the rights of women. Those ongoing efforts included strategies for increasing men's participation in household labour and childcare and promoting the social inclusion of Roma men and women. A strategy on ageing had also been developed. Mechanisms had been created to monitor the implementation of all national strategies and their accompanying action plans.

6. Legislative developments in the period under review had included the adoption of the Law on Free Legal Aid and the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence. Penalties for some criminal offences had been stiffened, and laws to combat discrimination against persons with disabilities had been adopted. More families with children had been made eligible for financial support, and, for the first time, a woman who was out of work, self-employed or an agricultural worker when she gave birth would be entitled to special compensation. Fathers were also entitled to parental leave.

7. A legislative amendment had made it possible to issue identity cards to more than 25,000 members of the Roma community. Under the Law on Registries, regulations for the reissuance of missing or destroyed records from Kosovo and Metohija had been established and it was now possible to register a change in the gender listed in a person's birth records.

The Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection contained provisions stating that it must be interpreted in a gender-sensitive manner, and an amendment to the Law on the Budget System called for the gradual introduction of gender-responsive budgeting. A bill on gender equality, which would replace the Law on Gender Equality currently in force, was awaiting adoption. Efforts to improve the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination and the Family Law were ongoing.

8. A newly established unit of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs focused on policies to combat discrimination and improve the status of women, and more than a hundred gender equality bodies were in place locally. The Government would continue to encourage the country's municipalities to sign the European Charter for Equality of Men and Women in Local Life. The Government had strengthened its cooperation with civil society through the provision of financial support for projects and the development of clear procedures for involving civil society representatives in all levels of decision-making.

9. The scores obtained by Serbia on the Gender Equality Index, a tool for monitoring gender equality policies, were better than the average for European Union countries in some areas – political decision-making, for example – but lower in others, such as work and time use. Outreach campaigns and training would be conducted to ensure that Serbia continued to make progress towards a gender-equal society.

10. The participation of women in public and political life had continued to grow, although more efforts were needed at the local level. The National Assembly was 37.6 per cent female, and women occupied a number of leadership positions in the executive and judicial branches of the Government. They accounted for a relatively small share of the country's municipal authorities, however.

11. Documentation requirements for school enrolment had been eased with a view to facilitating the exercise of the right to education. Scholarships for secondary school students had helped lower dropout rates and improve performance, especially among girls. More than half the Roma students enrolled in school in the current school year were girls. Child migrants and refugees were required to attend preschool and elementary school. Access to preschool for children from vulnerable social groups had improved considerably.

12. Efforts had also been made to improve access to health care for women, in particular those belonging to marginalized population groups. For example, women were entitled to comprehensive health care during pregnancy and for 12 months after giving birth, regardless of whether they were insured. Health mediators had been hired to help ensure that Roma women were provided with health care. Parents could connect electronically to vital records offices from maternity wards in order to register births and apply for a health card, and since January 2019 it had also been possible to apply directly from a maternity ward for a parental allowance.

13. Gender equality and non-discrimination had been the foundation of employment policy in Serbia for years. Support was provided for the employment of particularly vulnerable groups of women, including Roma women and women with disabilities. Most of the beneficiaries of self-employment subsidies were women. Women accounted for 39 per cent of the persons with disabilities employed by the 56 companies that received support for participating in the occupational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.

14. Steps taken to curb violence against women and combat trafficking in persons included the enactment of legislation and the provision of training to law enforcement, judicial and health personnel. A shelter for trafficking victims, open to women and girls over the age of 16 and funded by the State, had been in operation since early February 2019. Efforts had also been made to improve the situation of rural women and put an end to the practice of child marriage.

15. Serbia had responded adequately to the waves of migration it had recently faced, including through coordination of the activities of numerous stakeholders to provide necessary assistance and protect the basic rights of migrants. The country had centres with places for 6,000 asylum seekers. Over the period from July 2017 to January 2019, women

had accounted for just under 15 per cent of the persons accommodated in those centres. The vast majority of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija had been unable to return to their homes, and funds were regularly allocated under the State budget for the improvement of their living conditions.

16. The Government was aware of the challenges the country faced, but it remained committed to further democratization, compliance with its international obligations and the advancement of women. The dialogue with the Committee was a part of its efforts to fulfil that commitment.

#### *Articles 1 to 6*

17. **Ms. Ameline** said that she would like to know more about the Government's efforts to raise the visibility of the Convention, particularly in the light of the rather regressive climate for women's rights in the State party. For example, would the recommendations put forward in the concluding observations that the Committee would shortly transmit to the State party be publicized and given priority by the Government's Council for Monitoring the Implementation of Recommendations of United Nations Human Rights Mechanisms? She would suggest that the State party link its work on the Sustainable Development Goals with its efforts to implement the Convention as a means of increasing the visibility of the latter. She was curious to know whether the bill on gender equality included an exhaustive definition of discrimination. In addition, she would like to hear more about practical steps being taken to increase access to legal aid, especially for members of vulnerable groups. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party had considered broadening the mandate of the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman).

18. **Ms. Rana** asked whether there had been a midterm review of the National Action Plan (2017–2020) for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and, if not, whether any plans had been made to assess its impact before the end of 2020. In view of reports that neither women and girls affected by conflict nor relevant civil society organizations had been represented on the working group responsible for drafting the Plan and assessing the impact of the 2010–2015 Plan, she would like to know how the State party had determined the composition of the working group and how civil society organizations were being involved in the Plan's implementation. Similarly, she wondered to what extent women's organizations were included in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction and what percentage of the State party's negotiators and mediators were female. It would also be interesting to know what measures had been taken to ensure that medical care and psychosocial support were made available to all women and girls, to protect women and girls from forced displacement and to prevent violence against internally and externally displaced women and girls.

19. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that the Convention had been translated into all minority languages with a view to increasing its visibility. The Committee's forthcoming concluding observations, like previous concluding observations, would be translated into Serbian and the minority languages, circulated to all ministries and State authorities and published on the Internet and through other media. Time frames for implementation of the Committee's recommendations would be set and the action taken to implement them would be linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The State constantly monitored the implementation of the Convention, both through the mechanisms mentioned in her introductory statement and as part of the monitoring of implementation of relevant national legislation.

20. She did not agree that women's rights were regressing in Serbia. Her Government was firmly committed to improving women's status in practice.

21. **Ms. Miladinović** (Serbia), referring to the question of visibility, said that not only were the Committee's concluding observations discussed in the National Assembly, the Parliamentary Committee for Human and Minority Rights and Gender Equality and the Women's Parliamentary Network, they were also the subject of public meetings. The National Assembly held two regular sessions and one or more extraordinary sessions each year; it worked throughout the year, however, on new and amending legislation. The next regular session was due to start on 1 March 2019, and it was hoped that the proposed new

legislation on discrimination would be adopted by 12 March. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society were frequently involved in parliamentary committee meetings and hearings. Indeed, the parliamentary committee working on the new draft law on gender equality had decided to withdraw the text temporarily in order to try to reach agreement with NGOs on certain issues. The Government hoped to be able to expand the duties of the Ombudsman.

22. **Mr. Vukićević** (Serbia) said that a major aim of the constitutional amendment process under way was to strengthen the independence of the judiciary. The process was thorough and inclusive, and the proposed amendments had been discussed at four round table meetings in the regions. The curriculum of the Judicial Academy included a special human rights module that covered all the United Nations human rights treaties. Special attention had been paid recently to the Istanbul Convention, the provisions of which underpinned the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.

23. The delegation could not provide any statistics on implementation of the new legislation on free legal aid as it would not enter into force until 1 October 2019. Much preparation was required before the law could be implemented effectively: the staff of the various institutions involved needed training, the public needed to be made aware of how to apply for and receive free legal aid, and overall capacity needed boosting, notably in the municipalities, where new legal aid units would be set up. The result would be greater access for all, in particular for women belonging to national minorities. The new law would not affect rights to legal aid under existing legislation in areas such as asylum and discrimination. Free legal aid would remain available to all victims of domestic violence, whether or not they were technically eligible.

24. **Ms. Mitić** (Serbia) said that, having reviewed its discrimination legislation as part of the European Union accession procedure, Serbia had found that it was not in line with relevant European Union law, notably Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. Accordingly, it had amended its legislation, which now clearly defined direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination included hate speech, harassment and degrading treatment, while indirect discrimination referred, *inter alia*, to situations that resulted in a person or group being disadvantaged because of their gender or sex. Direct and indirect discrimination were also covered in the draft law on gender equality.

25. **Ms. Gavrilović** (Serbia) said that the National Strategy for Gender Equality ran from 2016 to 2020, but its implementing action plan had been designed to cover just the first two years of that period, after which an impact assessment had been conducted by independent consultants, who had found that the situation had improved at the local level, with noticeable progress in changing attitudes and increased importance being attached to gender issues. Weaknesses identified had included a lack of financial resources for implementation and a lack of balance in the approach, with an overemphasis on domestic violence that had left little space for other matters, such as women's economic empowerment. A revised action plan, which would cover the period 2019–2020, should be finalized by 1 April; the drafting process would involve consultations in the major cities that would be open to civil society organizations, national and local institutions and the general public.

26. Women's involvement in peace missions was growing, as evidenced by the rise in their participation rate from 11.7 per cent in 2017 to 14.1 per cent in 2018, although the Government was aware of the need to encourage even greater participation.

27. **Ms. Milutinović** (Serbia) said that the Serbian judiciary had a good record on protection against discrimination, applying not only the general constitutional prohibition on discrimination but also all international conventions. Moreover, the Constitutional Court had ruled that the definition of discrimination should be that used in paragraph 7 of Human Rights Committee general comment No. 18, on non-discrimination. Judges regularly attended training on how to rule in discrimination cases and the Supreme Court of Cassation paid particular attention to such cases. Law school curricula also included courses that dealt with discrimination.

28. **Ms. Ameline** said that parliament's role in dissemination of the Convention was vital in creating awareness and encouraging change. She was pleased to hear that the new law on gender equality would address both direct and indirect discrimination.

29. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know whether the State party had plans for a midterm assessment of the 2017–2020 National Action Plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), what criteria had been used to select the civil society organizations that had been invited to provide input on the Plan and how the State party had ensured that the voices and experience of women and girls affected by conflict were heard. She would also like to know more about funding arrangements to ensure proper implementation of the Plan. She wondered whether the State party had a system in place for collecting data on conflict-related violence against women in a variety of areas and covering various categories of women.

30. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that Serbia had continued its efforts with regard to implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) during the reporting period. The Political Council set up to monitor implementation met regularly and would continue to meet to evaluate progress and determine what remained to be done. The fact that it had not been possible to allocate as much funding as the Government would have liked did not mean there had been no improvement. Indeed, although it was true that better monitoring mechanisms were needed for full implementation, the statistics provided to the Committee showed that progress had been made.

31. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, while the State party was to be commended for having set up the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, the Committee understood that it was under-resourced and depended on external funding. Moreover, it was not a permanent body but needed to be reconfirmed by each new Government. It was therefore a fragile institution and subject to political pressure. She would appreciate a comment from the delegation in that regard.

32. She welcomed the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting for the Action Plan on implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality but noted that it, too, relied on external resources, ostensibly because the Government's budget resources were insufficient. However, there seemed to be enough budget resources to enable the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs to set up its own Sector for Anti-Discrimination Policy and Improvement of Gender Equality, which appeared to duplicate the work of the Coordination Body. The issue seemed to be not so much a lack of resources as a lack of political commitment.

33. She would like to know whether the Protector of Citizens (Ombudsman) was effectively the State party's national human rights institution, established in conformity with the Paris Principles.

34. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that the State party was to be commended for the positive impact of the temporary special measures introduced in several areas, particularly to facilitate school attendance by Roma pupils, notably Roma girls, and boost their educational attainment. Temporary special measures had also been applied in the fields of employment, health care and housing, but what was lacking was gender-disaggregated statistics on their impact in all fields. The Committee, in its previous concluding observations, had expressed concern at the absence of gender-relevant statistics on the application of temporary special measures and would welcome information on the steps being taken to address that concern.

35. She noted that the draft law on gender equality made provision for temporary special measures, the most significant being a 40 per cent quota for the representation of women in several areas of social life. She would like to know whether the new law made provision for the application of temporary special measures in any other areas.

36. **Ms. Gavrilović** (Serbia) said that she understood the Committee's concerns regarding the status of the national mechanism to improve the status of women, but disagreed that there was any lack of political will with regard to gender equality and the improvement of women's status. The Coordination Body for Gender Equality was a high-level body chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. Moreover, it had been established in 2014 by government decision and had remained stable through three changes of

Government. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs had indeed set up an internal department on discrimination and gender equality. That decision had been supported by the Coordination Body, which believed such a department should be created in every ministry.

37. The introduction of gender-responsive budgeting – which all government departments and local self-government units were required to implement by 2020 – was a clear example of the Government's commitment to bring about gender equality. Even though the Government had had limited financial resources, its efforts to implement gender-responsive budgeting had been highlighted by the United Nations as an example from which other countries could learn.

38. **Ms. Paunović** (Serbia) said that gender issues were dealt with across Government at the sectoral, departmental and local levels. For instance, more than 70 per cent of local self-government units had gender equality mechanisms in place. Admittedly, improvements needed to be made to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of those mechanisms. However, the Government had amply demonstrated its commitment to the cause by introducing gender-responsive budgeting and endeavouring to implement all the recommendations of the Committee in a gender-sensitive manner.

39. **Ms. Vuković** (Serbia) said that the law on basic education contained provisions on preventing discrimination and was currently being amended to recognize gender identity and gender discrimination. With regard to the impact of the temporary special measures introduced, the primary school enrolment rates of girls were on a par with those of boys and, according to the available data, girls outperformed boys at the primary and secondary levels of education. It was true, however, that patriarchal behaviours and beliefs surrounding predominantly male and female professions persisted, with girls generally studying traditionally female subjects, such as health and social care, and boys tending to favour the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. That being said, 54 per cent of pupils enrolled in four-year technical high schools were girls.

40. To increase the primary enrolment rate of children from vulnerable groups, in particular Roma girls, the requirement to provide identity documents – which Roma, internally displaced and returnee children often lacked – had been waived. Various initiatives had also been adopted at the secondary and tertiary levels to reduce the dropout rate among girls and to encourage more women to pursue higher education.

41. **Ms. Popović Ivković** (Serbia) said that the Ministry of the Interior – a traditionally male-dominated ministry responsible for policing and national security – had made significant progress with regard to increasing the representation of women, who now accounted for almost a quarter of its employees and occupied almost 20 per cent of leadership positions. Working in cooperation with the Swedish police, the Ministry was developing a programme to improve gender equality in the police force and empower more women to take on senior positions. The programme would set out clearly defined objectives and indicators. In addition, a network of women police officers had been created with a view to encouraging more women to seek leadership positions within the Ministry.

42. Significant progress had been made in preventing domestic violence and in empowering women to report such violence. More than 1,300 police officers had received specialized training on domestic violence and a working group of senior police officers and representatives of NGOs and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) had been set up to discuss ways to tackle that issue.

43. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would welcome clarification on the mandates and responsibilities of the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality and of the anti-discrimination and gender equality department within the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. She also wished to know whether there were plans to establish gender equality departments in every ministry, what the composition of the Coordinating Body was and how often its members met.

44. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that, based on the delegation's replies, it seemed that girls largely continued to study traditional subjects. She

would be interested to know what subjects the girls enrolled in technical schools were studying and whether the Government had introduced any temporary special measures, such as quotas or scholarships, to encourage more girls to take up studies in traditionally male subject areas.

45. **Ms. Gavrilović** (Serbia) said that the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality, the highest national mechanism for gender equality, was responsible for effectively guiding and monitoring the work of other mechanisms, such as the anti-discrimination and gender equality department in the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. In addition, each ministry had at least one focal point in charge of gender equality. Those focal points met regularly and were involved in policymaking and implementing national action plans on gender equality.

46. Her Government's political will to improve gender equality in all areas of life was self-evident. In 2016, Serbia had been the first non-European Union country to introduce the Gender Equality Index, and its gender equality score had improved by more than three points from one reporting period to the next, double the European Union average. The Government was also working hard to tackle the issue of domestic violence. The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – the independent body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention – was currently in Serbia conducting its assessment.

47. **Ms. Mitić** (Serbia) said that the draft law on gender equality provided for the introduction of temporary special measures, including a 40 per cent gender quota to improve the representation of women in areas of social life in which they were seriously underrepresented. The overriding objective was to ensure equal rights for all citizens of Serbia, irrespective of factors such as gender, race, political affiliation or disability.

48. **Ms. Vuković** (Serbia) said that all schools had school counsellors who provided educational and career advice with a view to encouraging girls to recognize the benefits of pursuing non-traditional subjects and career paths. A new comprehensive system of data collection was shortly to be introduced. It would include unique identifiers for every pupil so that their academic achievements could be tracked throughout their entire school career. It was hoped that the new system would enable the authorities to identify more quickly those pupils at risk of dropping out so that preventive action could be taken.

49. **Ms. Tisheva**, while welcoming the legislative reforms undertaken by the State party in recent years, including the adoption of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the criminalization of marital rape and stalking, said that several challenges remained in relation to article 5 of the Convention. In particular, the Committee was greatly concerned by reports of a media backlash against the idea of gender equality and by the rise of extremely conservative views of the traditional family and women's role as mothers. Stereotypes and statements tantamount to misogyny had been made by the media, senior politicians and academics. There was an obvious link between gender inequality and violence against women, which was why it was crucial for the Government to send a clear message on the issue. Accordingly, she wished to know what measures the State party intended to introduce to tackle those phenomena, hold those who spread such propaganda to account and raise awareness of gender equality and other internationally recognized concepts concerning gender. Were there any plans to strengthen the teaching of human rights and gender equality in schools?

50. She wondered how many cases of domestic violence against women had been investigated and prosecuted in the previous two years and what sentences had been handed down; whether women victims had received legal and other support; how many women victims had received compensation; and why there had been an increase in the number of cases dismissed by the courts. She would welcome data on the number of women victims of violence who had obtained protection orders. In that connection, she wondered whether the data recorded the relationship between perpetrators and victims. It would also be useful to know how victims of gender-based violence were treated during court proceedings; what services – such as counselling, State-funded shelters and crisis centres – were provided to victims of violence; whether any rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of gender-



based violence were available; and whether the law on domestic violence had been assessed to determine its impact on the femicide rate.

51. She wondered whether the legal definition of the offence of rape was fully in line with international standards and the Istanbul Convention, how many crisis centres there were for victims of rape and whether the national helpline for victims of violence was operational and staffed by persons with experience of dealing with victims. Information on the measures in place to protect child witnesses of gender-based violence and to prevent violence against vulnerable women, including older women and women with mental disabilities living in State institutions, would be appreciated.

52. **Ms. Song**, commending the State party's adoption of a strategy and action plan to prevent and eliminate trafficking of persons, particularly women and girls, and the establishment of the country's first shelter for victims of trafficking, said that she wished to know what further measures had been taken or were envisaged to combat the trafficking of women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation, which remained a serious problem. She wondered whether police officers and border officials had received adequate training on identifying potential victims and what specialized support, protection and shelters were available for girl victims of human trafficking. She would also appreciate specific examples of the measures taken and the support provided to victims in cases of trafficking. It would be interesting to hear whether the "Basics of Children's Safety" initiative to raise awareness among primary school pupils of human trafficking had been conducted in rural areas.

53. She invited the delegation to comment on reports that plea bargaining was increasingly being used in prosecutions of perpetrators of trafficking, resulting in offenders pleading guilty to lesser charges. Lastly, she asked whether the State party intended to amend the Criminal Code to make it mandatory for criminal court judges to determine compensation for trafficking victims. As things stood, victims were often referred to the civil courts, which was a lengthy and costly exercise that forced them to relive the trauma they had experienced.

54. **Ms. Popović Ivković** (Serbia) said that the Ministry of the Interior had initiated the process that had led to the enactment of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which the authorities had begun to implement in 2017, placing emphasis on the prohibition of violence and the protection of victims. The Ministry had implemented some 27,000 urgent measures in 2018 aimed at removing perpetrators from their residence and prohibiting them from resuming contact with victims. Women were empowered to report perpetrators and did report them.

55. The Government was taking steps to counter conservative views regarding gender-based violence and to foster a climate of respect for women. It had stated clearly that gender-based violence would not be tolerated. All stakeholders, including civil society, had now joined forces with the aim of eradicating such violence. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior had introduced courses in basic safety and security education for children. The children were alerted to possible security risks, including the threat of human trafficking, and taught how to protect themselves. Children were also taught to respect differences, to refrain from violence and to respect their peers.

56. In August 2017 the Government had adopted the Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Human Trafficking together with a two-year action plan. A National Coordinator for the Fight against Human Trafficking had been established in the Police Directorate. The intersectoral Council for Combating Human Trafficking chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior had been established in October 2017. The Special Working Group for the Implementation and Monitoring of the Strategy for Prevention and Elimination of Human Trafficking had identified additional steps to be taken, such as more proactive identification of victims and potential victims, support for victims, and more effective prosecution of human trafficking perpetrators.

57. Police teams had been established in March 2018 to combat human trafficking throughout the country. Police officers had submitted 27 criminal cases involving trafficking offences in 2018, compared with just 17 cases in 2017. The number of perpetrators prosecuted had totalled 50 in 2018, compared with 24 in 2017, and 32 victims had been identified, compared with 21 in 2017.

58. The Government's official website had a special section on the fight against trafficking. In December 2017, the President of the Council for Combating Human Trafficking had established an intersectoral working group to harmonize existing legislation and activities, which had held four meetings to date. Dutch experts had visited Belgrade in June 2018 to support the Council in conducting a functional analysis of existing mechanisms and developing recommendations on the establishment of a proactive victim detection system.

59. **Ms. Kiurski** (Serbia) said that a number of amendments to the Criminal Code had been adopted to bring it into line with the Istanbul Convention. The penalties for the offences of rape and of sexual intercourse with children or persons with disabilities had been increased, and leniency in such cases had been prohibited. Four new offences, based on articles 32, 34, 38 and 40 of the Istanbul Convention, had been introduced: female genital mutilation, stalking, sexual harassment and forced marriage. Article 186 of the Criminal Code had been deleted, so that rape and intercourse with persons with mental disabilities would now be fully prosecuted *ex officio*. Other pending amendments to the Criminal Code would take into account the provisions of the Convention and requests from civil society organizations.

60. Action had been taken to protect children against cybercrime and harassment on the Internet, and ongoing training on the subject was provided by the Judicial Academy. The prosecutor for cybercrime cooperated closely with civil society organizations. Instructions for prosecuting offences related to hate crime had also been developed in collaboration with civil society.

61. Criminal proceedings were regularly instituted in cases of domestic violence. The relevant database had been improved and now contained information concerning the victim's gender and age and whether a familial or other relationship existed between the perpetrator and the victim.

62. **Mr. Vulević** (Serbia) said that the SOS helpline established in early 2019 was licensed and complied with domestic law in terms of its structural and functional standards, staff and equipment. Protocols on cooperation had been signed between the social services and the National Employment Service, as a result of which women victims of violence enjoyed the full support of the Employment Service for their economic empowerment. Amendments to the Family Law were being drafted with a view to mandating treatment for perpetrators of domestic violence as a means of preventing the occurrence of further violence.

63. A centre had been set up within the social protection system to coordinate protections against human trafficking, and a shelter had been established for victims, who were guaranteed health care and psychosocial and legal support. A shelter for child victims had been opened in Novi Sad two years earlier. Child victims were also placed in fostering institutions and provided with support through various programmes. The National Employment Service gave high priority to the prevention of sexual exploitation and the provision of training to facilitate employment.

64. **Ms. Gavrilović** (Serbia) said that awareness-raising campaigns had been organized with a view to combating negative gender stereotypes. International Women's Day and the International Day of Rural Women were celebrated each year, and activities were also organized for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Campaign. Serbia had joined the HeForShe global movement and had released a virtual reality film on domestic violence in 2018. A message that violence against women was unacceptable was also delivered each year during a football match watched by millions of television viewers in Serbia and worldwide. Training courses were provided for media professionals and journalists on gender-sensitive reporting.

#### *Articles 7 to 9*

65. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that the appointment by the National Assembly of the first woman Prime Minister of Serbia in 2017 was a welcome development. In general, however, women were underrepresented in the National Assembly and in the city and municipal assemblies. Although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had committed to

increasing the number of women ambassadors, there were still only 15 heads of diplomatic and consular missions, and there were no women in the military diplomatic corps.

66. The National Gender Equality Strategy and the Action Plan on Gender Equality recognized that Roma women, women with disabilities and women belonging to other vulnerable groups were absent from public and political life. The Government had stated that by 2016 it would ensure the participation of five to eight representatives of women's organizations, including organizations of Roma and women with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations, in the work of governmental councils, but there was no evidence of such measures.

67. The establishment of the Women's Parliamentary Network had facilitated advocacy for gender-related issues in legislative processes and served to encourage more Serbian women to take part in political and public life. However, the Committee had been informed that the Network's activity had slowed down as a result of the inability of diverse parliamentary groups to represent the interests of women rather than those of their political leaders. She would appreciate a comment from the delegation in that regard.

68. The Committee had also been informed that media campaigns against human rights defenders had created an environment that hindered the work of NGOs and other groups. It was important to prosecute perpetrators of attacks on human rights activists and to review the status of civil servants who obstructed their prosecution.

69. **Ms. Peláez Narváez**, said that the State party was to be commended for the actions taken to prevent statelessness among Roma persons. Nevertheless, it was worrying that some 2,200 persons, most of whom were Roma, were still at risk of statelessness and that between 300 and 400 persons still lacked nationality certificates. Internally displaced Roma who lived in informal settlements and were formally registered as residents of Kosovo were particularly vulnerable. If mothers lacked identity documents, it frequently proved impossible to register their children, since it was mandatory for fathers to recognize paternity in order for the children to acquire Serbian nationality.

70. Early and forced marriages, especially among Roma, were frequently due to patriarchal attitudes towards the role of women in the family and society. Girls who were forced to marry faced an increased risk of domestic violence, and their children were likely to become stateless because their minor parents were unable to register them. She would like to hear what measures had been taken to guarantee the immediate registration of the births of all stateless children, regardless of whether the parents possessed identity documents, and to enable children whose parents were stateless or whose nationality was unknown to acquire Serbian nationality.

71. She would also like to know whether the State party had established a system to track all cases involving child marriage among stateless persons, especially Roma girls, in line with the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child ([CRC/C/SRB/CO/203](#)). Did the State party provide housing for such girls and rehabilitation and counselling services for those who were victims of violence?

72. **Ms. Leinarte** said she had been informed that all parties involved in prostitution were liable to prosecution and that women involved in prostitution had reportedly been held in custody for up to 60 days, which was concerning. She would like to know whether women involved in prostitution could be prosecuted under both criminal and administrative law in the State party. She also wondered whether public debates had been held on the #MeToo movement and whether cases of sexual harassment had been brought before the courts or discussed in the media.

73. **Ms. Manalo** asked to what extent women in the State party were encouraged to seek a career in the diplomatic corps. How many women were employed in the international civil service, including in specialized agencies of the United Nations?

74. **Ms. Song** said that she would like further information concerning the prosecution and punishment of traffickers. According to the State party, foreign trafficking victims were guaranteed facilities for their dignified, safe and voluntary return to their countries. If they decided to stay in Serbia, were they provided with support for education and employment?

75. **Ms. Tisheva** asked whether minimum standard services for victims of domestic and gender-based violence were guaranteed and funded by the State. Did the State party intend to adopt a comprehensive strategy for protection against all forms of gender-based violence and to combat gender stereotypes?

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*