



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of Latvia*

1. The Committee considered the combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of Latvia ([CEDAW/C/LVA/4-7](#)) at its 1749th and 1750th meetings (see [CEDAW/C/SR.1749](#) and [CEDAW/C/SR.1750](#)), held on 11 February 2020. The list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group is contained in [CEDAW/C/LVA/Q/4-7](#), and the responses of Latvia are contained in [CEDAW/C/LVA/Q/4-7/Add.1](#).

A. Introduction

2. While the Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its combined fourth to seventh periodic reports, it regrets the delay of more than 10 years in submitting the document. It also appreciates the State party's written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group. It welcomes the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue and in writing after the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its multisectoral delegation, which was headed by the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Inese Lībiņa-Egnere, and included representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, the State police and the Permanent Mission of Latvia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2004 of the State party's combined initial, second and third periodic reports in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

- (a) Law on the Discontinuation of Non-citizen's Status for Children, in 2019;

* Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-fifth session (10-28 February 2020).



- (b) Ombudsman Law, establishing the Office of the Ombudsperson, in 2006;
 - (c) Amendments to the Criminal Law and the Law on the Procedures for the Entry into Force and Application of the Criminal Law:
 - (i) Strengthening protection against gender-based violence against women and girls, including sexual violence and domestic violence, and establishing criminal liability for female genital mutilation, persecution (stalking) and psychological violence, in 2017 and 2018, respectively;
 - (ii) Criminalizing forced marriages and marriages of convenience, to combat trafficking, in 2013;
 - (iii) Combating forced prostitution, from 2007 to 2014;
 - (d) Amendments to the Criminal Procedure Law aimed at facilitating the involvement of victims, including victims of gender-based violence against women, in criminal proceedings and introducing *ex officio* prosecution of rape, sexual violence and deliberate slight bodily injury, as well as a new category of “specially protected victims”, including children, victims of sexual or domestic violence or intimate partner violence and victims of trafficking, in 2016;
 - (e) Amendments to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance, providing for State-funded social rehabilitation services for adults and children, including refugees and “persons of alternative status”, having suffered violence, including domestic violence, as well as perpetrators of such violence, in 2015;
 - (f) Amendments to the Civil Law, the Civil Procedure Law, the Criminal Law, the Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights, the Law on Orphans and Custody Courts, the Law on Police and the Code of Administrative Violations, requiring courts and the police to take temporary protection measures for victims of violence, including domestic violence, and requiring the police to initiate criminal proceedings against the perpetrator in cases of violation of a court protection order, in 2014;
 - (g) Amendments to provisions of the Law on the Protection of Children’s Rights, specifying that the abuse of a relative of a child in the presence of the child constitutes emotional violence against the child, in 2013;
 - (h) Amendments to the Law on Pornography Restrictions, broadening the definition of child pornography so as to include pornographic performance involving a girl or boy, in 2013;
 - (i) Amendments to provisions of the Civil Law, authorizing courts to dissolve a marriage if the reason for its breakdown is physical, sexual, psychological or economical violence of a spouse against the other spouse, who has requested the dissolution of the marriage, or against their child, in 2012;
 - (j) Amendments to the Labour Law, strengthening the equal treatment of women and men in employment, from 2006 to 2018.
5. The Committee welcomes the State party’s efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption of the following:
- (a) Plan for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period 2018–2020, in 2017;
 - (b) Maternal and child health improvement plan for the period 2018–2020, in 2017, and the previous plan for the period 2012–2014, in 2011;
 - (c) Plan for the improvement of health-care services in oncology for the period 2017–2020, in 2017;

(d) Action plan for the elimination of HIV infection, sexually transmitted infections and the hepatitis B and C viruses for the period 2018–2020, in 2017, and related programmes and guidelines;

(e) National strategy for the prevention of trafficking in persons for the period 2014–2020, in 2013.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous reports, the State party has ratified or acceded to the following international and regional instruments:

(a) Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, in 2014;

(b) Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, in 2013;

(c) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto, in 2010;

(d) Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, in 2008;

(e) Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, in 2006;

(f) Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, in 2005.

C. Sustainable Development Goals

7. **The Committee welcomes the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and calls for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of the State party and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.**

D. Parliament

8. **The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites Parliament, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.**

E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol and the Committee's general recommendations

9. The Committee notes that the Convention has been invoked in court proceedings related to family relations, namely divorce, claims for maintenance payments, return

of a child and custody rights, and considered in judgments of the Constitutional Court. However, it notes with concern the following:

(a) That the general public lacks awareness about the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations and jurisprudence;

(b) That there is a lack of involvement on the part of civil society, in particular women's rights organizations, in systematic awareness-raising and training for judges, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officials and lawyers, as well as public institutions, on the implementation of the Convention;

(c) That the State party has still not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

10. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Disseminate and give more publicity to the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations and jurisprudence and raise awareness among women of their rights under the Convention and of the legal remedies available to them to claim those rights;**

(b) **Strengthen capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, police officers, other law enforcement officials, lawyers and public institutions and ensure the involvement of civil society, in particular women's rights organizations, in the design and provision of such training;**

(c) **Expedite the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention as a matter of priority in order to facilitate the full enjoyment by women in the State party of the rights enshrined in the Convention.**

Definition of discrimination against women

11. The Committee recognizes the amendments to the legislative framework in the State party aimed at ensuring the equality of women and men and prohibiting gender-based discrimination, including direct and indirect discrimination on various grounds. However, it notes with concern the absence of a comprehensive stand-alone legal definition of discrimination against women and the principle of equality of women and men in the legislative framework and the absence of a comprehensive gender equality law.

12. Reiterating its previous concluding observations (A/59/38, part two, paras. 46 and 52), the Committee recommends that the State party include a definition of discrimination against women, including intersecting forms of discrimination in both the public and private spheres, and the principle of equality of women and men in its Constitution or other appropriate legislation, and adopt a comprehensive gender equality law.

Women's access to justice

13. The Committee welcomes the fact that the State party provides State-funded legal aid to all applicants below the income or assets threshold. In particular, it welcomes the fact that, since 2018, women in special circumstances, including victims of gender-based violence seeking temporary protection orders, are exempted from the threshold requirement regardless of their residential status. The Committee is nevertheless concerned that women who are victims of multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination are unable to gain access to justice owing to barriers related to accessibility, the absence of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, the existence of temporary guardianship and partial legal capacity regimes and a lack of awareness of the legal remedies and compensation mechanisms available to them.

14. **In the light of its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Continue its efforts to ensure effective access to justice, full inclusion and accessibility for disadvantaged or marginalized women, such as women belonging to ethnic minority groups, in particular Roma women, women who are non-citizens, refugee, asylum-seeking, migrant, rural and older women, women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons;**

(b) **Repeal the legal provisions concerning substituted decision-making in order to restore the full legal capacity of all women through a supported decision-making regime and ensure the provision of judicial, procedural and age-appropriate accommodations;**

(c) **Raise awareness among women of the remedies available to them to claim violations of their rights, including before the Office of the Ombudsperson.**

National machinery for the advancement of women and gender mainstreaming

15. The Committee welcomes the establishment by the Ministry of Welfare, in 2010, of the Gender Equality Committee to coordinate the implementation of gender equality policies by the ministries and the State Chancellery in consultation with civil society. The Committee notes with concern, however, the following:

(a) That the State party lacks a comprehensive gender equality strategy;

(b) That the coordination of the implementation of gender equality policies falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Welfare and its Department of Social Policy Planning and Development rather than a separate political and executive entity;

(c) That there is strong reliance on an integrated approach to gender equality and general social policies, including in the plan for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period 2018–2020 and the national development plan for the period 2014–2020, and that shortcomings in gender impact assessments of laws have been reported;

(d) That there is a lack of comprehensive gender-based budgeting strategies and budgetary allocations;

(e) That non-governmental organizations advocating women's rights and gender equality receive insufficient support from the State party to perform their functions.

16. **Reiterating its previous concluding observations (A/59/38, part two, paras. 50 and 52) and recalling its general recommendation No. 6 (1988) on effective national machinery and publicity and the guidance provided in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a comprehensive gender equality strategy and involve women's organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation phases thereof;**

(b) **Strengthen its national machinery for the advancement of women at the national and municipal levels, including by providing adequate human, technical and financial resources to ensure its effective functioning, and consider establishing a ministry for the advancement of women and gender equality;**

(c) **Adopt a comprehensive approach to the design, implementation and evaluation of stand-alone gender equality policies, ensure that gender impact assessments systematically form an integral part of the legislative process and carry out a gender impact assessment of existing legislation;**

(d) **Adopt comprehensive gender-based budgeting strategies at the national and local levels that provide for specific budgetary allocations for the implementation of policies, strategies and programmes on gender equality and the advancement of women, and ensure the effective implementation of the amended instructions of the Cabinet of Ministers on the analysis of the State party's budget in relation to gender performance indicators;**

(e) **Institutionalize the dialogue with women's organizations and consider entering into standing collaboration agreements with them, including on the provision of State funding for their activities.**

National human rights institution

17. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Ombudsman Law in 2006 followed by the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsperson in 2007 and its accreditation, in 2015, with A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). However, it is concerned about the following:

(a) The lack of a specific mandate to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality;

(b) The underfunding of the Office of the Ombudsperson.

18. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Extend the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsperson to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality;**

(b) **Increase the human, technical and financial resources of the Office of the Ombudsperson so as to enable it to effectively carry out its mandate.**

Temporary special measures

19. The Committee remains concerned that the State party has not adopted temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality of women and men. The Committee also notes the lack of understanding of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures in the State party.

20. **In line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, and reiterating its previous recommendations (A/59/38, part two, paras. 52 and 62), the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt and apply temporary special measures to promote the substantive equality of women and men in all areas in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, such as participation in political and public life, education and employment, and to overcome historic disadvantages experienced by specific groups of women who have suffered from multiple forms of discrimination, and establish a mechanism for monitoring their implementation;**

(b) **Raise awareness among the legislature, policymakers, the judiciary, other law enforcement officials and civil society, as well as the private sector, on the use of temporary special measures as a critical tool for addressing discrimination in all spheres and achieving the substantive equality of women and men.**

Discriminatory stereotypes

21. The Committee welcomes the efforts by the State party to combat discriminatory gender stereotypes in education to encourage the diversification of the educational choices of boys and girls, including the training of almost 4,000 educators on gender equality principles. It also welcomes the awareness-raising and information campaigns encouraging fathers to make use of their paternity and parental leave entitlements. The Committee is nevertheless concerned:

(a) At the fact that discriminatory gender stereotypes and patriarchal and sexist messaging in the media and by politicians, as well as calls for adherence to traditional roles and values for women, persist in the State party;

(b) At the 2015 amendments to the Education Law providing for the moral upbringing of pupils, including in conformity with the constitutionally protected values of marriage and family, which may perpetuate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society.

22. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, with the involvement of women's organizations;**

(b) **Raise awareness among media enterprises of the need to combat gender stereotyping and encourage them to portray positive images of women as active participants in political and economic life, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged groups of women;**

(c) **Strengthen the implementation of measures to address stereotypes in the education system, including in school curricula, and conduct a study on the impact of the 2015 amendments to the Education Law and provide information on the results thereof in its next periodic report;**

(d) **Consider adopting a policy on equal treatment and non-discrimination in the media and establishing a related monitoring mechanism.**

Gender-based violence against women

23. The Committee welcomes the legislative measures adopted by the State party to combat gender-based violence against women. It also welcomes the fact that women who are victims of domestic violence who seek temporary protection orders are exempted from court fees. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The fact that the State party has yet to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention);

(b) The absence of a comprehensive law on gender-based violence against women;

(c) The lack of a specific criminal offence of marital rape, which is covered only as an aggravating circumstance in article 48 of the Criminal Law;

(d) The high rate of gender-based violence against women, in particular the high numbers of cases of rape and intentional homicide;

(e) The inadequate handling of cases of gender-based violence against women, in particular sexual and domestic violence, by the police and investigating

authorities, such as failure to interview victims and perpetrators separately, complete investigations or refer cases for criminal prosecution;

(f) The very low numbers of restraining or separation orders for victims of domestic violence issued by the police and of temporary protection orders issued by the courts in such cases, and the ineffective enforcement or monitoring of compliance with those orders, which leaves women who are victims of such violence at risk of revictimization;

(g) The fact that services for victims of gender-based violence are neither inclusive of nor accessible by women from the most disadvantaged groups and are available only in urban areas.

24. In line with its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, and reiterating its previous concluding observations (A/59/38, part two, para. 56), the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ratify the Istanbul Convention;

(b) Adopt a comprehensive law on gender-based violence against women;

(c) Define marital rape as a separate criminal offence;

(d) Continue to prioritize efforts to combat gender-based violence against women, including under the plan for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period 2018–2020 and its successor plan, focusing on prevention, the identification of the root causes of violence, the provision of support services to victims and the swift introduction of mandatory rehabilitation programmes for all perpetrators of domestic violence;

(e) Monitor and assess the responsiveness of the judiciary and the police in cases of gender-based violence, including sexual violence and domestic violence, ensure systematic capacity-building for judges, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officers on the strict application of criminal law provisions on gender-based violence against women and on gender-sensitive investigation methods and effectively prosecute and punish perpetrators of gender-based violence;

(f) Ensure the effective implementation of legislative amendments authorizing the police to issue restraining or separation orders and the courts to issue temporary protection orders, and strengthen the enforcement of such orders;

(g) Ensure that all services for victims of gender-based violence are inclusive of and accessible by women belonging to the most disadvantaged groups and are available in rural areas.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

25. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the State party to combat trafficking in persons, in particular women and girls, including through international cooperation, and the availability of comprehensive State-funded assistance and support services for victims of trafficking. The Committee is concerned, however, that:

(a) The State party has not enacted specific legislation on trafficking;

(b) Official statistics lead the State party to conclude that it is primarily a country of origin for trafficking in persons, in particular women and girls, whereas there are reports that foreign victims of trafficking have not been recognized as such

and have been denied entry into the State party and returned as irregular migrant women;

(c) The number of investigations, prosecutions and convictions of perpetrators of trafficking is extremely low.

26. Recalling its previous recommendations (A/59/38, part two, para. 58), the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Adopt comprehensive legislation to combat trafficking;**

(b) **Improve procedures for the early identification, in particular at State borders, and referral to appropriate services of victims of trafficking, in particular girls, and enhance victim and witness protection and support services, including by extending the current maximum protection period of 180 days, regardless of a victim's ability or willingness to cooperate with the prosecutorial authorities;**

(c) **Effectively prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators of acts of trafficking and provide relevant statistical data, disaggregated by sex, age, national origin, employment and social status, in its next periodic report.**

27. The Committee notes that prostitution is legal in the State party, but regulated by regulation No. 32 regarding the restriction of prostitution, and that a draft law on prostitution restriction is still under consideration. It is concerned by:

(a) The lack of information on exit programmes for women who wish to leave prostitution;

(b) The conflation of the concepts of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution in the Criminal Law,¹ which may in practice lead to the revictimization of women who are victims of trafficking, rendering them even more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Design and implement exit programmes for women who wish to leave prostitution, including by providing them with alternative income-generating opportunities;**

(b) **Clarify the terms "vulnerability" and "consent" in the Criminal Law,² if necessary by legislative amendment, and ensure that women exploited in prostitution are recognized as victims and that engagement in prostitution is not subject to administrative fines, in particular by adopting the draft law on prostitution restriction, and take measures to address the demand side of prostitution in order to reduce it.**

Equal participation in political and public life

29. The Committee welcomes the progress made by the State party in promoting women's participation, including at the decision-making level, in, among others, the civil service, the judicial system, elected posts at the local, national and European levels and the diplomatic corps. However, the Committee is concerned that women's participation in political and public life and decision-making remains insufficient, in particular with regard to the most disadvantaged groups of women, and that vertical gender segregation persists in many areas.

¹ Sections 154.¹, 154.² and 165.¹.

² Section 154.², paragraph 4, and section 165.¹, respectively.

30. **Reiterating its previous recommendations (A/59/38, part two, para. 62), the Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to increase the representation of women in political life at the decision-making level in both elected and appointed governmental bodies and adopt temporary special measures, including requiring political parties to introduce quotas for women candidates, to increase the participation of women, in particular rural women, women belonging to ethnic minority groups and women with disabilities, in political and public life, in line with its general recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life.**

Nationality

31. The Committee welcomes the adoption in 2019 of the Law on the Discontinuation of Non-citizen's Status for Children, establishing that all children born in the State party after 1 January 2020 automatically obtain Latvian citizenship. It is concerned, however, at the potential gender impact of current legislation and policies regarding citizenship, in particular on the most disadvantaged groups of women, owing to the lack of statistical data disaggregated by sex, age and other relevant factors.

32. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure an analysis of the potential gender impact of current legislation and policies regarding citizenship by developing data collection systems that capture information disaggregated by sex, age, linguistic minority, ethnic origin and disability, among other relevant factors, both on those requesting and on those obtaining citizenship, and report on progress in that regard in its next periodic report.**

Education

33. The Committee welcomes the comprehensive education reform to develop new, competency-based education content that includes respect for gender equality pursuant to the general basic education standard and general secondary education standard for 2020–2021 and the preschool education guidelines for 2019–2020. It notes the increasing number of women and girls enrolling in previously male-dominated fields of study. However, the Committee regrets the lack of information on women in leading academic positions. It also notes with concern:

- (a) The high dropout rates among girls;
- (b) The fact that, despite the efforts undertaken by the State party to increase school enrolment among girls belonging to minority groups, in particular Roma girls, their numbers are stagnating;
- (c) The majority of girls with disabilities attend special schools or are encouraged to receive home-based education;
- (d) The education reform led to a reduction of teaching of minority languages for girls and boys in public and private secondary-level education institutions.

34. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee recommends that the State party raise awareness among girls and boys, parents, teachers and political leaders about the importance of the education of girls at all levels as a basis for their empowerment and that it:**

- (a) **Increase its efforts to reduce and prevent pupils from dropping out of school, paying particular attention to girls;**

(b) **Continue to take measures to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes and structural barriers that may deter girls from choosing non-traditional fields of study and career paths at all levels of education;**

(c) **Provide information in its next periodic report on the number of women appointed to high academic management positions;**

(d) **Strengthen its measures to include Roma girls in the mainstream education system and collect data on dropout rates, and provide information, disaggregated by sex and age, among other relevant factors, in its next periodic report on school attendance and dropout rates among Roma girls;**

(e) **Strengthen its efforts to improve the inclusion of girls and boys with disabilities in the mainstream education system, rather than placing them in schools with classes for children with special needs or encouraging home-based education, and provide the resources necessary to ensure the reasonable accommodation of women and girls with disabilities in high-quality, inclusive education, including in preschool, tertiary and lifelong learning institutions;**

(f) **Ensure that the amendments to the Education Law do not create undue restrictions on access to education in minority languages by girls and boys.**

Employment

35. The Committee welcomes the amendments to the Labour Law to strengthen the equal treatment of women and men in employment and consider harassment as a form of discrimination. It also takes note of the inclusive employment guidelines for the period 2015–2020, which are aimed at promoting equal opportunities in the labour market for all persons, regardless of age, gender or disability, and have overcoming the gender pay gap as one of the key priorities. The Committee nevertheless remains concerned about the following:

(a) The persistent gender pay gap, which also results in lower pension benefits, in traditionally female-dominated occupations;

(b) The ongoing vertical and horizontal gender occupational segregation;

(c) The difficulties encountered by the State party in including Roma women and women belonging to other ethnic minority groups, migrant women, rural women, older women and women with disabilities in the labour market;

(d) The unequal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men;

(e) The fact that the State Labour Inspectorate has not received any complaints about sexual harassment in the workplace;

(f) The fact that the State party has not ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of ILO or the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), of ILO.

36. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in order to narrow and ultimately close the gender pay gap by, among other things, undertaking regular gender pay reviews in all occupational sectors, including the public service, in cooperation with employers' associations and trade unions, applying gender-sensitive analytical job classification and evaluation methods, conducting regular labour inspections and awareness-raising campaigns and encouraging the conclusion of more collective bargaining schemes;**

- (b) **Strengthen measures to address horizontal and vertical occupational segregation;**
- (c) **Enhance access to the labour market for women, including disadvantaged groups of women, such as Roma women and women belonging to other ethnic minority groups, migrant women, rural women, older women and women with disabilities;**
- (d) **Swiftly implement the envisaged reform to the maternity, paternity and parental leave scheme to make the parental leave quotas non-transferable;**
- (e) **Carry out comprehensive research on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace and adopt measures to combat that practice;**
- (f) **Ratify the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), of ILO, the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of ILO and the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), of ILO.**

Health

37. The Committee welcomes the fact that the State party's health-care system is based on the principle of universal coverage. It also welcomes the fact that the State party promotes healthy lifestyles for women and girls and that the implementation of the maternal and child health improvement plan for the period 2018–2020 and of the public health guidelines for the period 2014–2020 has resulted in the improvement of a number of indicators in the area of maternal and child health, including the reduction of infant mortality. The Committee further welcomes the fact that the State party introduced, in 2019, additional support services for persons, including women, living with HIV to ensure early and effective access to treatment and that the services provided at HIV prevention points are free of charge and anonymous. The Committee nevertheless notes with concern the following:

- (a) The financial resources allocated to health care, which are equivalent to 3.7 per cent of the gross national product of the State party, are comparatively low;
- (b) The limited access, despite the existing universal health coverage system, of women to basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health services and modern contraceptives, in particular for girls and young women, including girls and women in rural areas, Roma girls and women, older women, girls and women with disabilities;
- (c) The limited access to high-quality maternal health care throughout pregnancy and delivery for undocumented migrant women, who are ineligible for the State party's compulsory health insurance, and to high-quality mental health care services;
- (d) The high rates of early pregnancy and the fact that the medical costs for termination of pregnancy for girls under 16 years of age have to be paid by the girl or her parents and that the girl's views do not take precedence over those of her parents or guardians;
- (e) The high prevalence of HIV in the State party and the increasing HIV infection rate among women.

38. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Significantly increase the proportion of the State budget allocated to the health sector in order to provide for truly universal health coverage, in particular for women and girls;**

(b) **Ensure access for all women and girls to inclusive and accessible basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health services and affordable modern contraceptives, especially in rural areas, and improve the availability and quality of the mental health-care system, in line with the mental health-care plan for the period 2018–2020;**

(c) **Ensure affordable, and, if necessary, free, access for undocumented migrant women to maternal health care throughout pregnancy and delivery, including antenatal care;**

(d) **Ensure that education on sexual and reproductive health and rights at all levels of education is mandatory, gender-sensitive, age-appropriate and fosters responsible sexual behaviour, with a view to preventing early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, that free abortion services are available to all girls and that girls' views are always heard and respected in decisions on abortion;**

(e) **Continue to strengthen its measures, including strong preventive measures, to combat the spread of HIV and ensure that women and girls living with HIV are not stigmatized or discriminated against.**

Economic and social benefits and economic empowerment of women

39. The Committee welcomes the fact that pensions increase every year and notes that women benefit proportionately more in that regard than men, in particular because there are more female than male recipients of low pensions, and recipients of low pensions are often also entitled to receive additional social benefits. The Committee also welcomes the increase in social benefits for women with disabilities. The Committee notes the initiatives by the State party and civil society to economically empower women, such as a business start-up programme, a microcredit programme for rural women and the rural women entrepreneurship support fund set up by the Latvian Rural Women's Association. The Committee also notes that around one third of businesses are owned by women, but that those are mainly micro and small businesses. The Committee is concerned that:

(a) A total of 31.1 per cent of women, in particular disadvantaged or marginalized women, such as women belonging to ethnic minority groups, in particular Roma women, rural women, older women and women with disabilities, were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2018;

(b) The shrinking and ageing of the population, in particular in rural areas, has had a negative impact on the social protection of women.

40. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Swiftly implement the envisaged income support system, paying particular attention to women living in poverty, including those belonging to disadvantaged or marginalized groups, and improve access to education, employment and services in rural areas for those women;**

(b) **Develop policies and programmes designed to ensure that women benefit from the economic development of the State party and to mitigate the negative impact of the shrinking and ageing of the population, including by creating more job and entrepreneurship opportunities and improving access to higher education, information and communications technology and subsidized transportation for rural and older women, and ensure that they are involved in the design of those policies and programmes, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women;**

(c) **Ratify the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), of ILO.**

Disadvantaged groups of women

41. The Committee is concerned that the State party has not introduced any specific policy or programme to address the situation of disadvantaged groups of women and lacks disaggregated statistical data regarding those populations and that the plan for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period 2018–2020, which includes references to young people, older persons and disability, does not contemplate specific measures aimed at women from those groups. More specifically, the Committee is concerned that:

(a) Women and girls with disabilities are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, institutionalization and the withdrawal of parental rights and suffer from far lower participation levels in education, employment, health, social protection and access to justice as they are not considered specifically either in gender policies or in policies related to disability;

(b) Roma women and women from other ethnic minorities face multiple forms of discrimination in access to basic services, education, employment and health services and in participating in public and political life, owing to deeply rooted social stereotypes;

(c) Older women, in particular those from linguistic minorities, face multiple barriers owing to requirements with regard to knowledge of the Latvian language.

42. The Committee recommends that the State party introduce policies and programmes to eliminate the multiple forms of discrimination faced by disadvantaged groups of women. More specifically, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Ensure that women and girls with disabilities are specifically included in all laws, policies and programmes related to gender equality and to disability and that affirmative action measures are incorporated, in consultation with the representative organizations of women and girls with disabilities, into all such laws, policies and programmes;**

(b) **Intensify its efforts to ensure that Roma women and women from other ethnic minorities enjoy equal access to basic services, education, employment and health services, as well as to participation in public and political life;**

(c) **Ensure that adequate support is provided to members of linguistic minorities, especially older persons, including the provision of translators and interpreters in State and municipal offices, in particular in regions that have a high concentration of minority language speakers, in line with article 10 of the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, to which Latvia is a party.**

Marriage and family relations

43. The Committee is concerned that:

(a) The non-recognition of some forms of family may cause discrimination against women;

(b) Under articles 32 and 33 of the Civil Law persons who are 16 years of age may marry with the consent of their parents or guardians if they marry a person of the age of majority;

(c) Women with disabilities who are married and living in institutions are often forced to live separately from their spouse, either in the same or in a different institution if one of the spouses is transferred.

44. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Ensure the legal protection of women in all forms of family, including the enjoyment of their economic rights;**

(b) **Amend the Civil Code and raise the minimum age of marriage for women and men to 18 years of age, without exception;**

(c) **Ensure the right to marriage, family and parenthood for all persons with disabilities, providing them with inclusive support services.**

Optional Protocol to the Convention and amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention

45. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify, as soon as possible, the Optional Protocol to the Convention and to accept the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

46. The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to further evaluate the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention in the context of the 25-year review of the implementation of the Declaration and Platform in order to achieve substantive equality between women and men.

Dissemination

47. The Committee requests the State party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the official language of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the Government, the ministries, Parliament and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.

Ratification of other treaties

48. The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments³ would enhance the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which it is not yet a party.

³ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Follow-up to the concluding observations

49. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 16 (a), 24 (b), 26 (b) and 42 (a) above.

Preparation of the next report

50. The Committee invites the State party to submit its eighth periodic report, which is due in February 2024. The report should be submitted on time and cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.

51. The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).
