



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1886th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 16 June 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair)

Contents

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

Sixth periodic report of Azerbaijan (continued)

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Ms. Peláez Narváez (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

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

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

Sixth periodic report of Azerbaijan (continued) (CEDAW/C/AZE/6; CEDAW/C/AZE/Q/6; CEDAW/C/AZE/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Azerbaijan joined the meeting.*

Articles 10–14

2. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she wished to know what timeline had been envisaged for removing gender stereotypes from school textbooks and ensuring equal representation of males and females in such resources. She would be interested to hear what repercussions the fact that women were barred from hundreds of types of employment would have on education, since girls were unlikely to pursue subjects in which they had no employment prospects. It would be useful to know what measures had been taken to ensure that education was gender-transformative and what studies had been carried out to assess the impact of such measures. She would appreciate data on the number of girls who dropped out of school. Given the impact of early marriage on education, she wondered how provisions under the Criminal Code prohibiting forced marriage of young girls were enforced and how many prosecutions there had been.

3. She would be interested to learn what measures had been adopted to ensure that all girls in rural areas attended school and to overcome obstacles, such as large distances and safety concerns, that prevented them from doing so. Did the Government clear mines in remote areas to keep children safe? Information about initiatives to engage parents, teachers and community leaders in providing services to schoolchildren, including transport, would be appreciated. Noting rising costs related to education, she wondered whether any social support programmes such as free school meals, cash transfers or temporary special measures existed to ensure that girls had full access to free education. She wished to know whether the State party would consider offering education to bolster peace in the post-conflict era as one of the proposed new subjects to be taught in schools.

4. She wondered what plans the Government had to improve information and technology infrastructure in schools in remote areas and to improve girls' computing skills, especially in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had negatively impacted girls' education. Did such plans include temporary special measures? Noting that female university professors had released fewer publications than their male counterparts during the pandemic, she wished to know what steps had been taken to ensure that women did not face any discrimination in the higher education system.

5. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the Institute of Education had conducted a survey in cooperation with international partners on measures to encourage girls to study subjects and enter professions such as engineering, and that it had issued recommendations for improvement. The Ministry of Education was working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on a joint project to encourage schoolchildren to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, with special emphasis on modern technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics. As part of the project, 15 laboratories had been established around the country. Teknofest, an aerospace and technology festival which allowed young people to display their projects in various fields of technology, had been held in May 2022, and half of the participants had been girls.

6. Since the 2018/19 academic year, the number of female rectors and deans in higher education institutions had increased by approximately 50 per cent. There had also been a rise in the proportion of women in the Ministry of Education and across all universities and colleges as a whole, and the proportions of female and male students engaged in all university-level studies were approximately equal.

7. Distance learning had been introduced one week after schools had closed in the wake of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and remote learning tools had

been made available to students and teachers throughout the country, in cooperation with Microsoft. Azercell, a mobile telecommunications company, offered a special package to ensure that teachers had access to the necessary teaching tools.

8. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the general education system scored highly in the gender equality index. In vocational training institutions, however, the number of male students far exceeded that of female students. Data pertaining to gender in the education system were publicly available on the State Statistical Committee's website.

9. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population had decreased the number of professions from which women were barred to just over 200. The very small size of rural villages and poor weather conditions in winter made it difficult to guarantee access to schools in all parts of the country.

10. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that since 2016 a project had been in place to install modular school buildings to facilitate access to education for children in remote communities across the country.

11. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would be interested to hear exactly how the positive developments brought about through the Employment Strategy for the period 2019–2030, the State programme on regional socioeconomic development for the same period and the amendment of the labour law had boosted employment opportunities in the formal economy for women in urban and rural areas of the country. She wondered what the outcome of the evaluation of those initiatives had been and what measurable targets had been set for women's employment. It would be helpful to know what measures the State party had taken to address the serious impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic and employment opportunities, given that women were twice as likely as men to have been required to take leave without pay during the pandemic. She asked what steps the Government had taken to increase the availability of childcare facilities to meet the needs of working mothers and to eliminate obstacles to women's advancement, for example in education and in their careers.

12. The gender pay gap was a major issue in employment. As women earned on average just over half a man's monthly wage in 2018, they were likely to have less financial stability throughout their life cycle, particularly after retirement, despite the equalization of the retirement age at 65. Gender stereotyping in education and employment was partly responsible for the persistent horizontal and vertical segregation faced by women in the labour market; a very small minority of women occupied managerial positions, and women faced difficulties in obtaining promotions even in female-dominated sectors. In that regard, she wished to know whether the State party had considered taking temporary special measures to enhance de facto equal opportunities for women in the labour market and to address the elimination of horizontal and vertical segregation. She would also like to hear of any measures taken to address women's underrepresentation in certain sectors and their overrepresentation in informal and vulnerable employment, for example through skills-building, as well as partnerships with employers in both the public and private sectors to recruit and retain women, including those with intersecting identities and disabilities.

13. The over 200 professions prohibited for women under the Labour Code included jobs that were well-paid and in high demand, and the prohibitions affected women's employment choices and economic well-being. She wondered whether the State party had considered simply repealing the discriminatory list of prohibited professions, and if not, why. Since the educational choices that women and girls could make in schools were being diversified, with greater opportunities in the area of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects for example, the prohibited list should be changed accordingly. While the Labour Code provided adequate guarantees for the protection of maternal and newborn health, women still faced institutional discrimination. She had received information that some employers attempted to avoid the statutory obligations likely to be incurred when hiring a woman of childbearing age. She wished to know whether the State party would consider adding a provision to the Code of Administrative Offences on employers' accountability for discrimination in career development, recruitment, job promotion and vocational training.

14. Despite the provision in the 2006 Act of the Republic of Azerbaijan on gender equality (equality between men and women) prohibiting sexual harassment, the Code of

Administrative Offences did not provide for legal accountability for sexual harassment in the workplace and included no provisions for bringing perpetrators to justice, and the 1999 Labour Code did not provide for the full responsibility of employers for sexual harassment. She wondered whether the State party would consider introducing amendments to the national legislation to ensure legal accountability for sexual harassment in the workplace, to establish employers' responsibility for preventing sexual harassment and to ensure effective investigation and redress of complaints.

15. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that, while victims of sexual harassment could initiate court proceedings and obtain compensation, it was true that there were currently no specific legal provisions in either the Criminal Code or the Code of Administrative Offences on the prohibition, prevention and investigation of sexual harassment, which was a shortcoming in the law. The State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs had started work on an investigation in that area, the results of which would be published at the end of 2022.

16. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that in October 2018 a presidential decree had amended the national Employment Strategy for the period from 2019 to 2030, one of the aims of which was to reduce unemployment. In 2021, programmes coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population had led to 31,000 women securing jobs, 4,400 of whom were self-employed. In the post-COVID period, the Ministry, in conjunction with United Nations partners, had implemented a programme to increase employment for women with disabilities and to improve the social protection of war veterans. In addition, day-care centres had been set up to provide childcare for working mothers. The centres operated in a number of districts, especially in remote areas, and would be replicated elsewhere. Amendments were currently being made to the Labour Code with the aim of increasing employment opportunities for women, especially pregnant women and mothers of children with disabilities, for whom provisions on paid leave had been incorporated. When it came to promotions, discrimination against women was prohibited by law, and the State labour inspectorate investigated complaints.

17. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the State Statistical Committee had conducted a survey on informal employment and had ascertained that women accounted for 37 per cent of persons engaged in informal employment. In highly paid sectors of the economy, such as mining and construction, women accounted for only 13 per cent.

18. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that one of the targets of the defined national priorities was the gradual bridging of the gender pay gap. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had prepared a generous assistance package and had introduced specific programmes to assist businesses and the population in general. Businesses had been fully compensated for the salaries of their entire staff, and minimum-wage stipends had been paid to women entrepreneurs whose activities had been shut down. Training courses were being run to address the lack of women in managerial positions; while the number of women business managers was still modest, it had more than doubled since 2015 and would continue to increase.

19. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would be grateful for information on the status of the draft law on the protection of reproductive health and family planning and the new draft national reproductive health strategy. While she had been pleased to note the reduction of maternal mortality rates in recent years, the current rate was still a matter of concern, and she would appreciate updated statistics. She had been surprised to see that maternal mortality rates were higher in urban areas than in villages, where health protection was considered to be worse; she would appreciate clarification. Internally displaced women reportedly had limited access to maternal health services and care for newborns. She wished to know how health services were ensured for those women. According to the most recent survey on gender attitudes, nearly two thirds of women reported that they had undergone at least one abortion. She would like to know what measures existed to promote the use of contraception, including the introduction of modern contraceptives that were affordable for women of all ages.

20. COVID-19 had disproportionately affected women's health. The findings of a recent survey had shown that among persons who claimed that they had forgone medical care during the pandemic, women were more numerous than men. She had been concerned to learn that

a very low percentage of the population was covered by health insurance, with most people paying for their own health care out of pocket. COVID-19 had disproportionately affected women's mental health compared with that of men across all age groups. She would be interested to know the State party's views on that matter, and whether it was possible to address the root causes of the disparity.

21. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the draft law on reproductive health and family planning had been submitted to the parliament and would be debated shortly. One factor explaining the higher maternal mortality rates in urban areas was that many internally displaced persons were concentrated in Baku. To address the insufficient number of gynaecologists in villages, the Ministry of Health was conducting courses for family doctors. In remote areas, a special project was being conducted, on the basis of experience in Türkiye, whereby four weeks prior to delivery, pregnant women were transported to hospital and their health was monitored.

22. An e-health platform had been set up, based on a centralized health database, with individual electronic cards issued containing data on many aspects of a person's health. The health insurance scheme was available to all, irrespective of place of residence or internally displaced status. During the COVID-19 pandemic, well-staffed modular hospitals had been set up around the country to provide the necessary care, and awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted to increase the take-up of vaccinations.

23. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that all citizens, irrespective of their income or employment status, had been covered by health insurance since the entry into force on 1 January 2022 of a law on mandatory health insurance. Employed persons paid a monthly contribution of 2 per cent of income for health coverage, while self-employed persons paid an amount that depended on the nature of their business activities.

24. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the maternal mortality rate stood at 20 deaths per 100,000 live births. Over 50 per cent of the population had received two doses of a vaccine against COVID-19. When data on maternal health had not been collected by State agencies, the Government was obligated to use different sources, which meant that data sets were not always complete or compatible. However, better data would be available for 2022, as a survey on maternal and child health was currently being conducted.

25. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that she had a good understanding of the issues facing internally displaced persons, as her own family had been in that situation for many years. The war had had a very significant impact on the mental and physical health of internally displaced women. Although it was now over, internally displaced women retained their status, giving them access to free education and health care. The Government acknowledged that not all internally displaced persons enjoyed the same access to basic services and decent living conditions. United Nations agencies had contributed significantly to the Government's efforts to support refugees and internally displaced persons. Despite those efforts, a great deal of work remained to be done. In certain liberated areas, everything had been razed to the ground. The Government had called on international organizations to support its efforts to rebuild the affected areas and promote the return of internally displaced persons to their towns and villages.

26. **Ms. Leinarte** said that it was not always clear whether the statistics provided by the State party, including the data on the maternal mortality rate, applied only to internally displaced persons or to the population as a whole. That distinction should always be made whenever the State party provided statistics to international organizations.

27. **Ms. Bethel** said that she wished to know why only 4.5 per cent of persons who had received low-interest credit through the National Fund for Entrepreneurship Assistance had been women between 2012 and 2017. She wondered whether the measures taken to increase women's economic and social empowerment through the Fund had been assessed, whether the Fund contained an in-built assessment mechanism and what the outcome of any assessments had been. The State party might explain how it facilitated women's access to knowledge, technology, financial resources and information about business development programmes.

28. Given that women were more likely than men to be unemployed or in low-paid employment, she asked whether the State party had adopted a minimum social protection floor that was gender-responsive and whether it had established a separate body to coordinate and monitor social protection programmes, particularly those related to women's social and economic empowerment. The Committee would be interested to learn how the Government ensured that vulnerable and non-contributing women had adequate access to social benefits, including pensions.

29. According to the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, women in Azerbaijan faced a significant gender gap in the area of empowerment, including in relation to their participation in decision-making processes and the economic life of the country. In view of that situation, she asked whether any policies or programmes had been established to help women in small businesses to overcome the gender gap and whether any steps were being taken to facilitate women's participation in decision-making and improve their access to land, credit and assets. What measures were being taken to reduce the burden of unpaid domestic work on women?

30. **Ms. Gabr** said that women in rural areas faced gender-based restrictions and discrimination that adversely affected their access to education, employment, technology and information. In the light of that situation, she asked whether the Government planned to fully implement the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women. She wondered what was being done to ensure that development programmes benefited all rural women, guaranteeing their access to health services, education and other basic services, and whether any measures were being taken to increase their access to land and credit. In particular, she wondered why only a quarter of farmers who received bank loans were women and why only a quarter of women farmers had access to fertilizers. The Committee would be grateful to learn whether rural women had the right to inherit assets and land when their husbands died and whether women who divorced were allocated a fair share of the marital assets. The delegation might also describe any measures taken to ensure access to social security and medical insurance for women working in the informal sector.

31. She asked whether female genital mutilation was practised anywhere in the country and whether an internally displaced woman would retain her status and privileges if she married a man who was not internally displaced. It would be interesting to know whether the children of refugees were entitled to register with refugee status and thus obtain access to education and health services.

32. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that the Government was trying to institutionalize actions to promote women's empowerment. In that regard, the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Association and the Rural Women's Entrepreneurship Association had been established in 2018 and 2019, respectively. Such associations facilitated the transfer of knowledge between women and allowed them to present a united front in their interactions with the Government. The Public Council attached to the Ministry of Economic Affairs was currently chaired by a woman. As part of the Government's efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, strategic documents on priority actions had been drafted, in collaboration with the Public Council. An agency for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, the Small and Medium-sized Business Development Agency, had been established with a view to coordinating the Government's efforts to promote entrepreneurship. As representatives of the agency sat on the Public Council, members of the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Association were able to interact with them directly. The State programme for the socioeconomic development of the regions of Azerbaijan addressed issues related to women's employment and the establishment of infrastructure necessary for development; its implementation was evaluated on an annual basis.

33. The Government had adopted strategic plans and road maps to promote women's entrepreneurship and reduce the economic inequality between men and women. In that connection, day-care centres had been set up to make it easier for mothers to work, and efforts were being made to improve the infrastructure on which businesses depended. Plans were in place to improve rural roads, protect forests, and improve access to drinking water and natural gas. Every year, a significant amount of funding was allocated to improving infrastructure, including in liberated areas. Industrial parks were being created and tax privileges were

granted to entrepreneurs. A support fund for entrepreneurs had been set up and women's access to credit had been enhanced. The proportion of entrepreneurs who were women remained relatively low but had risen from 15 per cent to over 21 per cent between 2015 and 2021. Micro-entrepreneurs were granted tax privileges and other forms of support. Priority was given to women's applications for public tenders valued at less than \$3 million.

34. The Government was also committed to strengthening the leadership and managerial skills of women. Over 450 managers, of whom around 30 per cent were women, had received training on professional development as part of a capacity-building programme organized jointly, with German participation. In Azerbaijan, women currently accounted for around 39 per cent of persons engaged in paid work. However, they also represented only 25 per cent of farmers, which was why women had received only a small amount of the loan credit that had been made available for the agricultural sector.

35. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that 50 types of social assistance were paid to members of vulnerable groups, benefiting around half a million people. Most of the benefits were administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, which regularly reviewed the level of support offered. In addition, approximately 1.3 million people were paid a public pension, which was indexed to the average monthly salary and reviewed on an annual basis.

36. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that 18 resource centres had been set up to increase the economic potential of women in rural areas by providing training in entrepreneurial and professional skills. Around 8,000 women had benefited from those services, 500 of whom had started their own entrepreneurial activities with the skills that they had acquired. In addition, the Easy Support to Family Business project provided female farmers in rural areas with logistical support and assistance with the certification and sale of their goods. The level of support offered to women in rural areas had been strengthened across the board during the COVID-19 pandemic.

37. The Government was aware of the accusations disseminated via social media concerning the practice of female circumcision in the Zaqatala district. Those accusations, which had been made by someone who no longer lived in Azerbaijan, had been investigated by the local authorities, in cooperation with the district's Child and Family Support Centres. Around 50 people had responded to a survey conducted in the village in question, and they had denied that such an act had taken place and had expressed their shock at the allegation.

38. **The Chair** said that she wished to know whether non-consensual sterilization was considered a criminal offence under national law.

Articles 15 and 16

39. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, under the Constitution, women and men enjoyed the right to property on an equal basis. In reality, however, there appeared to be various obstacles preventing women from becoming landowners. For example, parents generally still preferred to register their family properties in the name of their sons. Women who engaged in unregistered religious marriages received no rights to real estate or movable property, while any property or land owned by officially married couples often remained unregistered, meaning that it was difficult for the wives to lay claim to those holdings in the event of a divorce. She invited the delegation to comment on those matters and to inform the Committee of any steps that had been taken to uphold the constitutional rights of women in relation to property. On a related matter, she also wished to know whether divorced husbands were obliged to pay alimony to their former wives and, if so, how the amount of alimony was calculated.

40. Lastly, it appeared that the practice of unregistered religious marriages (*kabin*) was still very widespread in Azerbaijan. As a result, in 2018, one in every six children had been born officially out of wedlock. She invited the delegation to explain why unregistered religious marriages were so commonplace and to inform the Committee of any measures taken to eliminate that practice.

41. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that she would welcome clarification as to the source of the statistic that Ms. Leinarte had quoted in relation to the number of children born

out of wedlock in 2018, as the number seemed to be much higher than the official figure provided by the State Statistical Committee. In 2019, the President had decreed that reforms should be brought about to improve the way divorce cases were processed by the judiciary. As a result, the level of any alimony payment was now set as a matter of priority, and the alimony became payable immediately following the court's order. A mediation council had also been formed to receive appeals concerning disputes arising from the dissolution of marriages, including in relation to alimony payments.

42. **A representative of Azerbaijan** said that improving access to information technology for rural women was a priority for the Government. Over 600,000 farmers, around 25 per cent of whom were women, had registered accounts on a new electronic system for farmers that had been launched in 2019. They could use the system to access general services and information related to the agricultural sector and to apply for farming subsidies. Among other things, the system therefore served as a tool to facilitate the transition of female farmers from informal to formal labour. A new round of training had been scheduled to raise awareness among women of the system and its uses. Another of the aims of the electronic system was to make it easier for farmers to document their holdings of property or land. In order to encourage more women to become landowners, the President had decreed that women would be able to submit an application to register their property with the applicable administration fees waived.

43. **Ms. Leinarte** said that, according to the statistics she had received, about 20,000 children out of a total of nearly 120,000 had been born out of official wedlock in 2018. She invited the delegation to verify whether that figure was in line with the State party's official statistics. In any case, the number seemed very high and the Committee would welcome further information, which could be submitted in writing, on any measures that the Government was taking to address the situation.

44. **Ms. Muradova** (Azerbaijan) said that she wished to thank the Committee for its questions and its recommendations regarding her country's implementation of the Convention. Her delegation had appreciated the constructive spirit in which the meetings had been held, which had facilitated an enlightening dialogue. She assured the Committee and all the civil society organizations in attendance that the Government would make every effort to continue ensuring the full advancement of women in Azerbaijan.

45. **The Chair** said that the Committee was grateful to the delegation for the answers it had provided to its questions. She urged the State party to take the measures necessary to give effect to the recommendations that the Committee would make in its concluding observations.

The meeting rose at 5.10 p.m.