



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
19 October 2022

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-third session

Summary record of the 1911th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 11 October 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Safarov (Vice-Chair)

Contents

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

Eighth periodic report of Finland

* No summary record was issued for the 1910th meeting.

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



Mr. Safarov (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

Eighth periodic report of Finland ([CEDAW/C/FIN/8](#); [CEDAW/C/Q/8](#); [CEDAW/C/FIN/RQ/8](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Finland joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the Government Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's administration, which was aimed at achieving a socially, economically and ecologically sustainable Finland, had set very ambitious gender equality goals. In 2022 work had begun to compile a report on gender equality, in accordance with the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2020–2023. In the report, which covered seven strategic objectives based on an assessment of the current state of gender equality, an attempt was made to anticipate future issues.
3. All the powers invoked under the Emergency Powers Act had been subject to scrutiny by the parliament and, in addition, the public authorities had studied their impact on the Roma population. The effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on gender equality had been researched by a project funded by the Prime Minister's Office. The study had shown that the pandemic had affected different genders and population groups in dissimilar ways, mainly in terms of segregation in the labour market and the unequal sharing of care responsibilities. While most of the negative repercussions on gender equality had been relatively short-lived, the pandemic had had longer term consequences in respect of equality in working life, in particular owing to the strain placed on the health-care and social welfare sectors. The initial effects on employment had hit the female-dominated service sector worst. There had been no indication of a general upsurge of domestic violence during the pandemic, but it did appear to have worsened and taken on a different form in some population groups. The findings of the study would help to prepare for and manage the impact on gender equality of any future crises.
4. The gender gap in the employment rate had recently narrowed, on the strength of growth in employment, after a dip in 2020. The employment rate for women currently stood at 74 per cent. However, part-time employment had increased more than permanent employment, a trend that might weaken gender equality in the long term if it persisted. On the other hand, satisfaction with the work-life balance had improved, as remote work had become more common. Studies showed that among adults, students in higher education, and especially women, had faced more mental strain, anxiety and depression than others had experienced during the pandemic.
5. The women and peace and security agenda remained a priority of the country's foreign and security policy. Under the aegis of UN-Women, Finland had supported work on that subject in many countries. As the first country in the world to publish a Youth Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, it paid particular attention to the specific needs of young women and their role in respect of peace and security. In 2020 it had set up a Centre for Peace Mediation at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, one of whose priorities was to increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes, for example through women mediators' networks such as the Nordic Women Mediators. A national network for Finland had been established in 2015. Commitment 2025 on Women's Inclusion in Peace Processes, a joint initiative launched by Finland and Spain, deserved particular mention in that context. For many years, Finland had been making a substantial contribution to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). In its role as a partner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization it paid special attention to the subject of women and peace and security in military crisis management and operational planning. As a result of a recognition of the importance of gender equality in civilian crisis management, 53 per cent of the Finnish experts serving in the European Union's civil crisis management operations were women. Her country had also sent gender advisers to work in several international organizations.

6. The Minister for Foreign Affairs would be convening a high-level conference on advancing gender equality through foreign policy in November 2022. Finland was committed to gradually ensuring that 85 per cent of its development cooperation funds included the promotion of gender equality as a significant objective. It was one of the largest donors to the core funding of UN-Women.

7. Comprehensive new legislation on sexual offences, which would enter into force at the beginning of 2023, would strengthen the right to physical integrity and sexual self-determination and introduce a definition of rape that would henceforth be based on the absence of consent. The law on restraining orders would give greater protection to victims' rights and enhance the safety of victims of violence who were living in close relationships. A working group under the aegis of the Ministry of Justice had prepared an Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women, including digital and honour-based violence. Another key aspect of that plan was the training of staff of agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of cases of violence against women.

8. The first national plan to implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) had been evaluated by external experts. The second plan had been published in 2022. It was hoped that by 2024 the country would have at least 240 places in shelters available for victims of such violence. In the long term, securing sufficient places would require more funding. The northernmost shelter was in Rovaniemi. It was therefore a matter of priority to expand such services in the Sami homeland.

9. A new Act on gender recognition would promote the realization of the rights to self-determination, personal integrity, non-discrimination and private life. The legal recognition of gender would no longer involve medical examinations or treatment. The aim of the parental leave reform which had entered into force in 2022 was to enhance gender equality at home and at work by dividing family leave equally between parents, thereby improving the situation of women on the labour market. There was a legislative initiative to implement the Government's programme for victims of human trafficking, and one of its aims was to ensure that people working in the criminal justice system would be more aware of victims' needs for assistance. Amendments to the Act on Equality between Women and Men (the Equality Act) and the Non-Discrimination Act were being considered by the parliament. The legislative provisions preventing discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression would be extended to the sphere of early childhood education.

10. Although traditionally most asylum-seekers had been men, the war in Ukraine had prompted a rise in female applicants. Information on residence formalities, employment and various services had been specially prepared for Ukrainian refugees. There were proposals to amend the law addressing the integration of immigrants. Their aims included ensuring that immigrants were treated equally and without discrimination and enhancing gender equality by improving the possibilities for immigrant women to integrate in society and the labour market.

11. Finland welcomed the simplified procedure for reporting on the implementation of the Convention.

12. **A representative of the Finnish Human Rights Centre** said that measures were needed to stem the prevalence of violence against women and girls in Finland and to improve services for victims. Acts of violence often went unrecorded, for instance when they were related to family honour or if they involved female genital mutilation, or if they were committed against women with disabilities. Complaints were not treated seriously and support was unavailable. No comprehensive studies had been conducted of gender-based violence within cultural or religious minorities. Roma and Sami women in traditional clothing were often subjected to harassment and discrimination, as were Muslim women who wore headscarves. Women in public positions and the media encountered hate speech or hurtful comments in the media and in public discourse. As a result, women were reluctant to stand as candidates for public office or to participate in public debates or discussions on social media. Many women with disabilities faced discrimination in their role as parents or with regard to family planning; they also faced violence and poverty in their everyday lives. Discrimination at work translated into a risk of poverty in old age. Women's pensions were

on average 20 per cent lower than men's, and women earned approximately 16 per cent less than men. That gap was exacerbated by the unequal sharing of parental leave and the long periods women spent caring for children or relatives. The pandemic had worsened mental health problems, especially among girls, while access to mental health care had worsened, and support group activities had been suspended.

Articles 1–6

13. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she wished to commend the State party on its substantial efforts towards achieving equality and promoting the rights of women and girls. Finland ranked second in the world for gender equality. That notwithstanding, the Committee had concerns about the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence, the persistent gender pay gap and the lack of women in senior business management. Another worry was the underfunding of services for victims of gender-based violence. The Committee would also like to hear how the new definition of rape would help to reduce violence against women.

14. The Committee would be grateful for information on any activities undertaken to ensure that women in Finland were aware of their rights under the Convention and of the communications and inquiry procedures under its Optional Protocol. She would like to know how such information was disseminated and how women who had no access to the online webpage where such information was provided could obtain such guidance. It would be helpful to receive data on the number of complaints and prosecutions related to gender inequality and discrimination and on sentences handed down to perpetrators of offences covered by the Equality Act and the Non-Discrimination Act. The Committee would appreciate it if the delegation could provide such information while distinguishing between cases brought by the Ombudsman for Equality, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman or directly by the victims of the offences. She wished to know whether the State party would consider altering the terms of reference of the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal to enable it to issue decisions awarding compensation so that victims would no longer have to resort to the courts for that purpose. Would the State party consider allowing the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman to supervise the Non-Discrimination Act in employment cases? Lastly, the Committee would like to hear what outcomes the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2020–2023 had achieved to date.

15. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that, although the Convention was well integrated in Finnish legislation and policies, the courts made scant reference to it. As the domestic legislation was extremely detailed, the Finnish legal culture tended to rely on it instead of international instruments. However, the provisions of the Istanbul Convention were gradually being cited more often in case law. Still, human rights conventions always had the status of constitutional acts and were binding in domestic law. The Convention could be consulted free of charge in the FINLEX database and was available in Finnish, Swedish and English on the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Committee's concluding observations were immediately translated into all the country's official languages and were widely disseminated. The Government could, however, do better in making the Convention accessible to women who did not speak any of those languages.

16. **A representative of Finland** said that 35 per cent of the written complaints submitted to the Ombudsman for Equality in 2021 concerned discrimination and 45 per cent had related to discrimination at work. Of the complaints made by telephone, 50 per cent had concerned discrimination, 80 per cent of which had related to discrimination in employment, with many of them relating to discrimination owing to pregnancy or parental leave. In 2021, 623 discrimination cases had been completed under a written procedure, and 36 per cent of those cases had been related to the prohibition of discrimination as defined in the Equality Act. More than 40 per cent had been related to discrimination at work. Eight cases had dealt with suspected discrimination in education, 45 had pertained to discrimination in the pricing and availability of goods and services and 75 had been covered by the general prohibition of discrimination. In 2021, 47 applications had been decided by a judicial division that heard cases involving allegations of gender-based discrimination in public office.

17. **A representative of Finland** said that the Government's proposals for the partial amendment of the Non-Discrimination Act submitted to the parliament in September 2022 included, for example, an extension of the supervisory functions of the Non-Discrimination

Ombudsman in the field of employment. It had also been suggested that the tasks and mandate of the occupational health and safety authorities should be clarified and that the National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal might issue non-binding recommendations for the payment of compensation to victims of discrimination. There was a proposal for the Tribunal's consideration of a case to have suspensive effect on the time limit for compensation claims.

18. The possibility of empowering the Tribunal to issue binding decisions on compensation had been discussed but discarded, *inter alia* on grounds of potential issues of constitutionality. During the preparation of the proposals, the possibility of extending the mandate of the Tribunal to allow it to hear cases of employment-related discrimination that fell within the scope of the Non-Discrimination Act had also been discussed briefly. However, given that the Tribunal was competent to issue binding decisions, the relationship with other procedures would need to be examined closely prior to any extension of its mandate. The impact of the partial amendment of the Non-Discrimination Act would need to be assessed in depth. Discussions on the matter would continue.

19. **A representative of Finland** said that the final report on the outcome of the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2020–2023, was currently being prepared and that no data had been released yet. It was clear, however, that the reforms undertaken by the current Government, including changes to the family leave policy and the amendment of the Criminal Code, had greatly contributed to enhancing gender equality. The Action Plan provided for broad gender mainstreaming efforts across all ministries and State institutions. The interministerial working group that had designed it also oversaw its implementation. A gender mainstreaming network had been set up as a platform for ministries to share best practices and discuss challenges in implementation.

20. **Ms. Rana** said that the State party's excellent track record when it came to bridging the gender gap set a high benchmark. She was gratified to learn of the adoption of the third National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2020–2023, the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2020–2023 and the new Non-Discrimination Act, as well as the inclusion of provisions on multiple and intersectional discrimination in the Equality Act.

21. Given the State party's commitment to leadership in gender equality, she wondered whether there were any plans to establish a separate ministry specifically dedicated to the advancement of women. It would also be useful to know how the Government planned to advance the objectives identified in the 2020 report on gender equality planning. She would appreciate clarification with regard to the "worrying developments" related to the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality referred to in paragraph 37 of the State party's replies to the list of issues ([CEDAW/C/FIN/RQ/8](#)) and any action taken to address them.

22. She was curious to find out whether the Government intended to act on the findings of a study conducted by the Finnish Human Rights Centre on the State party's human rights structures, which had identified options for a more holistic approach while calling for the strengthening of existing institutions. She also wondered whether any measures would be taken in response to the recommendations by the Sub-Committee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) to formalize and apply an open and transparent selection process for the Director of the Human Rights Centre, to make available adequate funding to enable its effective functioning and to ensure that its annual report was presented and discussed in the parliament.

23. Acknowledging the State party's leading role in advancing the women and peace and security agenda globally, she said that she would like to know whether any arrangements had been made to develop a successor to the third Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security 2018–2021. Given the impact of conflict on women and girls in Ukraine and Afghanistan, she wondered whether the State party provided any support to women human rights defenders in those two countries. It would also be helpful to learn about the way in which the State party would step up its efforts to promote the participation of women in peace negotiations, rebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction.

24. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that, while she acknowledged the State party's commendable global leadership in promoting the advancement of women, she wished to emphasize that temporary special measures remained a critical tool to further accelerate

progress towards de facto gender equality. It would be useful to know by which means the State party expected to increase the representation of women on the boards of large and medium-sized listed companies to reach the legally prescribed 40 per cent quota. The delegation might wish to clarify the precise nature of the “special exceptional circumstances” that companies under majority municipal ownership could invoke to justify non-compliance with the equal representation requirement on their boards and in their management. Given the persistently low proportion of women chief executive officers, she wondered whether the State party planned to adopt any temporary special measures to increase the number of women in corporate leadership. She also wished to know whether there were any plans to extend the quota requirement to small, unlisted companies. It would be interesting to find out about any temporary special measures in place to accelerate the equal participation of women from disadvantaged groups in the areas specified in paragraph 9 (c) of the list of issues (CEDAW/C/FIN/Q/8).

25. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the Government Programme referred to important legislative tools, plans, strategies and measures related to human rights structures, most notably the creation of the post of a national rapporteur on violence against women. In light of the forthcoming parliamentary elections in 2023, the decision to establish a separate ministry dedicated to the advancement of women was out of the current Government’s hands.

26. A successor document to the Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security 2018–2021 was currently being drafted, in collaboration with all entities responsible for the domestic implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security. The new national action plan would promote, among other things, putting women’s participation at the heart of action on climate change, new technologies and conflict-related sexual violence.

27. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs was currently considering a new type of humanitarian visa which would recognize the specific needs of women human rights defenders. A decision on its establishment was expected within the forthcoming biennium. The study conducted by the Human Rights Centre was currently being examined. The functioning of the country’s human rights structures was monitored constantly, and the findings and recommendations of the study would provide useful input.

28. **A representative of Finland** said that some of the recommendations emerging from the Human Rights Centre’s study were reflected in the proposals for the partial amendment of the Non-Discrimination Act.

29. **A representative of Finland** said that there were no plans to introduce gender quotas in the electoral system. Gender quotas were nevertheless applied when establishing government committees and working groups, at both the municipal and State levels.

30. **A representative of Finland** said that the representation of women on the boards of listed companies had increased in the past two decades. At present, an average of 29 per cent of board members were women: 32 per cent in large and medium-sized listed companies and 24 per cent in small companies. In 2020, women had accounted for 27 per cent of management teams in listed companies, but only 8 per cent of chief executives were women.

31. Several ministries were currently assessing the impact of temporary special measures on women’s participation. The Government also engaged with the country’s largest listed companies to identify challenges to women’s career development, in order to inform future action.

32. **A representative of Finland** said that the implementation of the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality was overshadowed by high levels of violence against women and slow progress in gender mainstreaming. The latter was partially attributable to the diversion of attention and resources towards the COVID-19 response. New actions on gender mainstreaming were in the pipeline. The outcome of parliamentary discussions on the Government report on gender equality policy would guide the way forward. The period covered in that report extended beyond the current Government’s term and would thus be an important instrument for future action.

33. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the Centre for Peace Mediation provided new opportunities for work on conflict prevention and mediation, including by enabling the

systematization and intensification of mediation efforts and increasing the meaningful participation of women.

34. As part of its efforts to promote the participation of women in peace processes, the Government provided support *inter alia* in the form of meeting facilitation and training for the Syrian Women's Advisory Board, which acted as an adviser to the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. At a meeting hosted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2021, members of the Board had exchanged views with Finnish partners on the role of women and education in conflict resolution.

35. **Ms. Tisheva** said that the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Children, the new consent-based definition of rape in the Criminal Code, the Action Plan for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the appointment of a national rapporteur on violence against women were truly commendable. However, discriminatory gender stereotyping, sexualized portrayal of women in advertising and the media, sexist hate speech and harmful practices continued to hamper further progress towards gender equality. It would be useful to know when the State party intended to ban sexist and gender-related hate speech, both online and offline, and when it would adopt provisions for the adequate punishment of perpetrators and redress and remedies for victims. Given the absence of clear legal definitions of female genital mutilation and other harmful practices such as forced marriage and forced sterilization, it would be helpful to hear about any plans to amend the Criminal Code to provide for clear regulations, adequate punishment and redress, compensation and reparation for such crimes.

36. She wondered whether the proposal to update the legislation on transgender rights that was currently under discussion would address the situation of intersex children and protect them against unnecessary "sex normalization" procedures.

37. The Committee was concerned that the State party's efforts to combat gender-based violence had thus far yielded unsatisfactory results. It would be useful to find out how the Government intended to remedy funding shortages, infrastructure gaps and uneven geographical distribution of women's shelters and other services, and to learn about the financial resources committed to the implementation of the action plan for combating violence against women. She wondered what measures were in place to ensure gender- and culture-sensitive services and whether there were any special services already in place for women belonging to minorities and women with disabilities. Information on the budget allocated to increase the number of shelters and other services for victims of violence in 2023 would also be appreciated.

38. It would be useful to learn of any plans to review the legislation on sexual assault, for example in order to classify crimes committed in circumstances of abuse of authority and vulnerability of the victim and sexual abuse of minors as rape or as aggravated rape. It would also be helpful to find out about measures taken to protect women victims of violence from revictimization in court proceedings and to eliminate judicial gender stereotyping. She wondered whether the State party would be willing to review its current approach, whereby a large proportion of cases involving interpersonal violence, even in cases involving serious and repeated acts of violence, were addressed through mediation, so as to ensure that all incidents of domestic violence were investigated and prosecuted promptly and thoroughly.

39. She would be grateful to hear about awareness campaigns and capacity building for professionals and the general public on issues related to gender stereotypes, harmful practices and gender-based violence, including efforts to make the new rape provisions better known. She would also appreciate an account of the specific measures taken to implement the Views adopted by the Committee under article 7 (3) of the Optional Protocol concerning communication No. 103/2016, *J.I. v. Finland* (CEDAW/C/69/D/103/2016). Had the State party acted on the recommendation to grant the author appropriate reparation and compensation and to reopen judicial proceedings concerning custody of her son?

40. **Ms. Dettmeijer Vermeulen** said that, while the Finnish legislation had been amended and training was being provided to enable the prosecution of human trafficking and to protect victims, trafficking crimes continued to be processed as other types of crimes, and the victims of trafficking remained unidentified. Against that background, it would be interesting to find out about the purpose and status of the proposal for further amendments to the relevant

legislation. In particular, she wished to know how the State party planned to improve the standing of victims and to strengthen criminal liability, in line with the strategic objectives in the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings 2021–2023. While the Committee welcomed the adoption of the Plan and its strategic objectives, there was some concern about the time frame for its application. She wondered whether its implementation was going according to plan.

41. She was curious to find out about steps taken to implement the recommendations of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings regarding the State party's legislation and practice concerning residence permits for trafficking victims, including the recommendation to better secure their right of temporary residence and related rights for the entire duration of the traffickers' criminal proceedings. The fact that residence permits were only granted once trafficking charges had been laid, and not during pretrial investigations, was apparently inconsistent with the strategic objective to improve the standing of victims, as set forth in the in the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings. She wondered whether the State party intended to harmonize the practices employed to assess the vulnerability of trafficking victims in the context of residence proceedings and whether there were any relevant guidelines. It would also be useful to find out about any measures taken to ensure that a standard level of assistance was provided for trafficking victims, regardless of the institutions providing such assistance.

42. It would be useful to know whether the State party intended to implement the recommendation by the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings to draw up guidelines and provide training to ensure the proper application of the principle of non-punishment of trafficking victims. She was curious whether the police, prosecutors and judges received any training in that regard and, if not, how the State party made sure that trafficking victims were properly identified and exempt from punishment in criminal proceedings. The Committee would also welcome information on prosecutions conducted under the Criminal Code's provisions criminalizing abuse of a victim of the sex trade, and on their outcomes.

43. **Ms. Oinonen** said that the Government had considered the Committee's Views regarding communication No. 103/2016, which had also been jointly discussed and examined by all the relevant authorities. With respect to the recommendation to reopen the judicial proceedings, the Government's stance was that the domestic authorities had duly considered the case. Moreover, the Committee had not allowed the other party to the domestic proceedings or any witnesses to be heard, and the Committee had not had access to all the evidence on which the domestic courts had based their rulings. The Government also wished to highlight that, since the Act on Child Custody and Right of Access required that matters concerning child custody and rights of access should be determined in accordance with the best interests of the child, violent incidents had to be taken into account in the decision-making process. The domestic law established a right to petition a district court for the amendment of a child-custody decision.

44. **A representative of Finland** said that the Act on Legal Recognition of the Gender of Transsexuals (the Trans Act) was currently being examined by the parliament, and the Government hoped that its new provisions would come into force in January 2023. A working group had been established to prepare best practice guidance to help health-care professionals advise parents of babies with an ambiguous gender. The aim was inter alia to protect the children's rights to the best possible health and welfare and to self-determination, in particular by making them and their parents able to decide to postpone non-urgent medical procedures until the children became able to take decisions on their gender.

45. The northernmost shelter for domestic violence victims was in Rovaniemi, but her Government was prioritizing expansion further north into the Sami homeland; the process of finding new shelter providers would start in early 2023. Shelters were State-funded, so clients could travel to any shelter in Finland, regardless of their home municipality. The client bore the travel costs, but shelters could reimburse them when necessary. The Government conducted research on violence against women belonging to vulnerable groups. For instance, it had published a study on domestic violence against persons with disabilities in March 2022 and it had conducted research on the cost of violence over the course of 2021 and 2022. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare worked with non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) to hold training sessions for the staff of shelters on the provision of support for Roma women. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health funded the NGO Romano Missio to help it provide domestic violence prevention and early intervention services in several cities; it had also conducted a survey to discover possible obstacles faced by Roma women in relation to shelter services. Any victims of domestic violence could access shelters by calling the national helpline, which had received over €700,000 in funding in 2020 and had operated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the accessibility of shelters had been improved with a view to making them available to persons with disabilities. While the number of places in shelters had grown and shelter funding had also increased, from €11.5 million to €24.55 million, the funding available still fell short of the €26.65 million cost of maintaining the current shelter network.

46. The Government had provided online training for over 8,000 health-care professionals to help them support domestic violence victims. No type of crime had been excluded from the legislation on mediation, but its use in cases involving intimate partner or domestic violence was always voluntary; only the police and prosecutors could refer crimes involving intimate partner violence for mediation. The Committee for Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was the coordinating body that had been set up pursuant to the Istanbul Convention; it had since 2020 received funding specifically allocated to it and had had a permanent secretary-general responsible for its administration.

47. **A representative of Finland** said that the Ministry of the Interior had in February 2022 proposed legislation to amend the Act on the Reception of Persons Seeking International Protection and on the Identification and Assistance of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (the Reception Act) to weaken the link between the prosecution of crimes relating to trafficking in persons, on the one hand, and help for the victims of such crimes, on the other. The goal was to increase the likelihood that offences related to trafficking in persons would be discovered and that the perpetrators would be held accountable, by moving the focus onto the victims' need for help. The Government's bill would be presented to the parliament in late 2022.

48. While the police had a specialist anti-trafficking unit, all local police departments were involved in combating trafficking in persons and included experts in investigating such offences and in dealing with victims. The National Bureau of Investigation produced monthly reports on trafficking in persons; they were intended mainly for internal police use, but a version for the general public was also produced.

49. Assessment criteria were applied in determining whether victims of human trafficking were vulnerable and could receive residence permits, and the Finnish Immigration Service and the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman had determined that the criteria did not need to be changed. A provision of the Aliens Act had been designed to make recognition as a victim difficult, and that approach had been confirmed by a Supreme Administrative Court decision. On the other hand, such persons were likely to be able to be granted residence permits by claiming asylum instead. The Ministry of the Interior had noted that women forced into prostitution were no longer the only victims of trafficking in persons. The third largest group in the assistance system now comprised victims of forced marriage. Relevant personnel were trained in the identification of trafficking victims, and police officers received training in the non-punishment principle.

50. **A representative of Finland** said that the entire chapter of the Criminal Code on sexual offences had been updated. It included a new definition of rape and addressed children's vulnerability online and offline, with it fully recognized in the definitions of sexual offences and with more severe penalties for such offences. The police, prosecutors and judges would all receive training on the new provisions, and the Ministry of Justice was preparing awareness-raising campaigns for the general public. In addition, the Action Plan for Combating Violence against Women incorporated training on various types of violence, including honour-based and domestic violence, for police officers, prosecutors, judges and public defenders.

51. The working group on clarification of the Criminal Code in respect of female genital mutilation was scheduled to publish its suggestions in November 2022, after which public comments would be sought and, ultimately, the suggestions would go before the parliament.

In a similar vein, proposals for the criminalization of forced marriage had completed the public consultation stage, and the Ministry was preparing to establish a working group to consider possible legislative changes on that subject as well.

52. In addition to its consideration of a number of other measures in respect of hate speech, the parliament was discussing the Government's proposal that gender factors should be considered as an aggravating circumstance in prosecutions for hate speech offences. The Government supported a European Commission initiative for hate speech and hate crimes to be considered crimes in European Union law, among other things in order to improve the protection of women, but the proposal had stalled, owing to opposition from other European Union member States. In recent years, the Ministry of Justice had coordinated European Union-funded projects relating to hate crime and hate speech in areas such as data collection and the development and testing of a concept for a national centre of expertise to combat discrimination and hate crime.

53. Implementation of the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings was monitored by, among other bodies, a group chaired by the Minister of Justice. In addition, the Ministry ensured a consistent approach to trafficking in persons, by having two officials permanently assigned to related issues. While she had no information on any verdicts handed down in respect of the offence of purchasing of sexual services from persons under 18 years of age, she could report that 40 victims of such offences had been officially recognized in 2020.

54. The Government had run an extensive and award-winning campaign encouraging bystanders to intervene if they witnessed sexual harassment of young women. Conducted through social media and broadcasts, as well as on billboards and posters, the campaign had featured several Finnish celebrities and social media influencers.

55. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that the Committee had received reports that mediation was sometimes used in cases involving severe and even recurring domestic violence and that the police increasingly encouraged its use. She wished to know whether the State party would consider reforming the legislation on mediation so that where mediation was pursued, prosecution was not necessarily waived.

56. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that, while the State party had sufficient laws and institutions to address human trafficking, problems had apparently arisen in the prosecution of perpetrators and the reception of victims, mainly owing to difficulties in identifying the crime and its victims. Effective prosecution and protection required accurate identification. The assignment of all the monitoring roles to the same government ministries that were responsible for combating trafficking was not ideal. Such monitoring should perhaps be assigned to an independent body, such as the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings.

57. **Ms. Al-Rammah** said that, in view of the prevalence of mental health problems and the high suicide rate in Finland, she wondered whether the victims of violence in the country's shelters were given access to programmes to enable them to re-engage in social and economic life.

58. **A representative of Finland** said that, while civil servants monitored the implementation of programmes and plans that they themselves prepared, the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings performed a supervisory role from a position of full independence.

Articles 7–9

59. **Ms. Stott Despoja**, noting the positive steps taken by the State party to increase women's participation in public life and decision-making, said that she wished to learn about any further measures planned to increase the number of women members of the Sami Parliament and of the Parliament of Åland. She wished to find out what the outcomes of the "Our Elections" campaign had been and what the State party was doing to address the high levels of harassment of and hate speech against women in politics. It would be helpful to know whether the State party planned to impose penalties on companies that did not report the gender composition of their board members. Given the emphasis that the State party

placed on gender equality in its foreign policy, she wondered whether it would consider calling it a feminist foreign policy. She would appreciate information on mechanisms to increase the number of women in leadership positions in the Finnish Defence Forces.

60. **Ms. Narain** said that she wished to know how the naturalization process was used to promote the integration of immigrants, particularly women immigrants who faced a language barrier, into Finnish society; whether the requirement that applicants for citizenship must hold a permanent residence permit had any detrimental effect on applications filed by women, particularly those who were refugees; and to what extent naturalization interviews deterred marginalized or refugee women from seeking citizenship.

61. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that discussions were already under way at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs on the question of whether to characterize the country's foreign policy, which had long prioritized gender equality, as feminist. Regardless of the term used, women would remain at the heart of the policy.

62. **A representative of Finland** said that a working group had been set up under the National Democracy Programme 2025 to examine the barriers to the participation of immigrants and multilingual Finns in democratic processes. The working group had issued a report in June 2022 setting out 11 recommendations for the removal of those barriers, for example by increasing the use of multilingual and easy-to-understand communications. Eight members of the Sami Parliament were women and 13 were men. Proposals to amend the Act on the Sami Parliament to facilitate voting were currently under consideration.

63. **A representative of Finland** said that no specific plans were in place to increase the number of women in high-ranking positions in the Finnish Defence Forces. Women and men were subject to the same promotion criteria. Voluntary military service for women had been instituted in 1995, and the number of women in high-ranking positions had increased over the years since. Among persons serving voluntarily in the military, nearly 70 per cent of the women underwent training for service in higher ranks. For men, the corresponding figure was under 30 per cent.

64. **A representative of Finland** said that one of the aims of the adult education programmes for immigrants that had been running since 2018 was to increase educational opportunities for people outside the labour force, including immigrant women who stayed home to take care of their children. The percentage of students with an immigration background in secondary and tertiary education had risen. The Government had launched new training courses to prepare students with an immigration background for programmes leading to an upper secondary qualification. In 2022, the Government had introduced an additional annual allocation of €5 million specifically for educational programmes that promoted the integration of immigrants. A further €1.5 million had been added to support the education of people who had fled the war in Ukraine.

65. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that the Åland Islands had autonomous status and their own legislative and administrative institutions, and she was unable to reply on their behalf. A response to the Committee's question regarding the composition of the local legislature would subsequently be provided in writing.

66. **Ms. Manalo** said that it would be helpful to have statistical data on the participation of women in the Finnish Defence Forces. She wished to know how many Finnish Prime Ministers had been women and how many women were currently serving in the cabinet. She would be curious to find out whether there had been a consistent policy to improve the participation of women at the cabinet level and, if not, why not. It would also be helpful to know how many women had served as Finnish ambassadors, whether any incentives were in place to encourage young women to go into politics and, if so, how effective those incentives had been.

67. **Ms. Oinonen** (Finland) said that, in the 105 years since Finland had become independent, the country had had one female President and three female Prime Ministers, including the current one. Of the 19 current government ministers, 11 were women. Statistics on the number of women ambassadors would be submitted later.

Articles 10–14

68. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she wished to find out whether the State party would be ready to roll out its equality and non-discrimination plans for childhood education in 2023, as planned, and whether the human rights education provided in schools addressed the issue of violence. She wished to commend the State party for including courses on non-discrimination, equality and intimate partner violence in military academy curricula. It would be important to ensure that those courses covered issues relating to sexism in the military and that their outcomes would be monitored. She wished to know what the State party was doing to address the high levels of bullying in schools; what support was provided to victims; what the impact of bullying was on different minority groups; how many people had been penalized for such conduct under the relevant laws and policies; what sanctions had been imposed; and whether the policies to address bullying provided for inclusivity training.

69. She wished to know whether the measures taken by the State party to encourage girls to enter non-traditional fields had been accompanied by a change in teacher training strategies, what the outcomes of those measures had been and whether the State party would consider the use of temporary special measures to increase the number of girls entering such fields. She would like to learn about any steps taken to ensure that educational materials did not reflect gender stereotypes, to inform students about schools' equality plans and to increase the number of women professors in universities, including through the use of temporary special measures. The Committee would be interested to know whether the generous benefits offered to women staying at home to look after their children encouraged them to stay out of the workforce and how many women took advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the State party.

70. **A representative of Finland** said that the Finnish National Agency for Education had prepared guidance material for education providers on the equality plans that would be introduced in early childhood education and care programmes in 2023. Amendments had been made to a number of laws on education, including the Basic Education Act, to promote timely intervention in cases of bullying, harassment and violence. For example, under some of the amendments, any acts of harassment, bullying, discrimination or violence that took place at school or on the way to or from school must be reported to a parent, guardian or other legal representative of the suspected perpetrator and of the victim. The Agency had prepared guidance for students in secondary education on the prevention of sexual harassment and violence, and the guidance had been made available online in Northern Sami, Inari Sami, Skolt Sami, Arabic, Somali, Kurdish, Farsi and other languages. The Agency planned to launch a website on the prevention of bullying, harassment, discrimination and violence in early 2023.

71. A steering group with a mandate ending in June 2023 had been formed to further the Government's efforts to strengthen education on democracy and human rights. It would develop proposals to ensure the effective implementation of existing measures for such education, for example through in-service training for teachers, or long-term research conducted in cooperation with teacher training schools. Following the reform of the university admissions process that had taken place between 2018 and 2020, women had gained greater access to male-dominated technical fields.

72. **A representative of Finland** said that the Government was aware of the issues that arose when women left the workforce to care for their children, and it was taking steps, in connection with the family leave reform that it had introduced, to encourage fathers to share care responsibilities. The Government had set numerical targets in 2004 for the representation of women on the boards of directors of State-owned companies. At listed companies where the State held a controlling interest, approximately 40 per cent of the board members elected since 2009 had been women. In 2018, women had accounted for 41 per cent of the board members of State-owned enterprises and 38 per cent of the board members of listed companies where the State held a controlling interest. There were no legal penalties for failure to meet the targets for women's representation on boards of directors.

73. **A representative of Finland** said that women held approximately 35 per cent of seats on the boards of directors of large listed companies in Finland. Large listed companies were

required either to comply with the objectives relating to gender distribution or to explain why they failed to do so.

74. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she wished to know whether sex education courses addressed the issue of violence. She would appreciate more detailed information on the steps taken by the State party to prevent acts of bullying and harassment, particularly those targeting minorities and persons with disabilities, on any penalties that had been imposed as a result of such acts and on the use of inclusivity training to prevent them. She wished to know to what extent students were influenced by gender stereotypes when they chose their areas of study and whether the State party had considered using targets and temporary special measures to offset the effect of such stereotypes. She would also be interested to find out to what extent the mental health issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic had had an impact on the role of school counsellors.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.