



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Ninetieth session

Summary record of the 2125th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 6 February 2025, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Haidar

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

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

Ninth periodic report of Belarus (continued) (CEDAW/C/BLR/9;
CEDAW/C/BLR/QPR/9)

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

Articles 10–14

2. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that the Education Code established that family and gender education would address the role and purpose of men and women according to the traditional values of Belarusian society. Given that education could reproduce harmful gender stereotypes, she wondered whether the Code might be amended to promote egalitarian values, emphasizing that men and women were equally responsible for care duties within the family and that men and boys played a vital role in preventing domestic violence. The Code might also be amended to stress that women should play an equal role in decision-making in public life, foreign policy and business. Given that women students were underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses, she would welcome information on any measures being taken to encourage women and girls to study those subjects.

3. It would be interesting to hear about any measures being taken to ensure gender parity among academic staff at all levels of seniority and in all subjects, including the natural sciences. Information on the proportion of Roma women and women with disabilities who attended university would also be welcome. She would be grateful to learn about the status of women students and academic staff who had been expelled from their courses, dismissed from their jobs or imprisoned because they had exercised their right to the freedom of assembly.

4. **A representative of Belarus** said that traditional values in Belarus accorded great importance to strong families with children. Such values were a historical characteristic of Belarusian society and would not be abandoned merely because people in other parts of the world had different ideas about the role of men and women and the value of strong families. While more could be done to establish gender equality in Belarus, it would not be achieved at the expense of the country's traditional values. The promotion of the family was also important for economic reasons as the trend towards smaller families adversely affected economic growth.

5. **A representative of Belarus** said that over 52 per cent of students in higher education were women. In the information technology sector, women played an important role in developing products and applications for the benefit of the economy. In the High-Tech Park, which was the country's equivalent of Silicon Valley, 15 per cent of the companies were headed by women and 40 per cent of information technology staff were women. The high quality of education in Belarus attracted girls to the information technology sector. A number of universities and colleges offered courses in cybersecurity and other areas of technology and an advanced school for programming had been established.

6. International Girls in ICT Day was celebrated in Belarus to raise girls' awareness of the opportunities available in the field of information and communication technology. In 2024, when the theme of the Day had been leadership, the activities organized in Belarus had emphasized that leadership was not dependent on gender. The Government organized special days on which girls could meet women in leadership roles in order to break down the barriers that prevented girls from progressing.

7. **A representative of Belarus** said that, although the majority of university students were women, only a small proportion of them studied science. In general, women and girls believed that it would be more advantageous for them to study subjects in practical, hands-on sectors of the economy that offered broader employment opportunities. However, the Government was making efforts to encourage young people, including women and girls, to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

8. Students were not persecuted simply for exercising their freedom of expression or freedom of assembly. The students and academics who had been arrested had broken the law. Student demonstrations also occurred in other parts of the world, such as Europe and north Africa. Only a small proportion of the students who had participated in demonstrations in Belarus had been prevented from continuing with their studies.

9. It was the Government's view that all children in Belarus, including Roma children, must receive an education. While almost all children attended primary and secondary school, Roma children were less likely to attend university than the rest of the population, partly because the pursuit of higher education was not a priority for Roma communities. If young Roma people did not wish to attend university, they could not be compelled to do so.

10. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wished to know whether the notion of traditional values could be interpreted in a way that was consistent with egalitarian values and whether the education system might promote the idea that men and women should play an equal role in family and public life.

11. **A representative of Belarus** said that studies showed that there was not much difference in the roles that men and women played in the family in Belarus. It was not clear what the Committee meant by asking whether traditional values might be replaced by egalitarian values. No one working in the education sector had ever said that men should be the heads of their families. On the contrary, the Government's goal was to promote gender parity. However, the Government acknowledged that women bore a particular responsibility for raising children and it sought to support them in that role.

12. **Ms. Mikko** said that the employment rate for women was lower than that for men, women were prevented from undertaking certain professions and the gender pay gap had risen between 2016 and 2023. Women had the right to take three years of maternity leave, which exacerbated the gender pay gap, and were insufficiently protected against harassment in the workplace. Women who committed three minor offences, or who abused drugs or alcohol, could be sentenced to forced labour in compulsory rehabilitation centres. Furthermore, reforms of the State pension system undertaken in recent years had had adverse consequences for women.

13. She wished to know what mechanisms were in place to protect women against sexual harassment in the workplace and what was being done to ensure that women were able to file complaints of such harassment. She wondered whether a national action plan for reducing the gender pay gap had been established and whether any specific measures were being taken to close the gap. It would be interesting to know whether any amendments had been made to Presidential Decree No. 3, which addressed the prevention of social dependency, to ensure that women on maternity leave were not subjected to discrimination. She would welcome an explanation of why different State pension ages had been established for men and women and why, as a result, women were being forced to stop working at an earlier age than men. It would be interesting to know whether the State party would cease handing down sentences of forced labour to prisoners and persons who had abused alcohol and drugs.

14. **A representative of Belarus** said that the employment rate was 63 per cent for women aged between 15 and 74 years but over 84 per cent for women of working age. Women worked in many sectors of the economy although they were more likely to be employed in some sectors than in others. National law provided that men and women should receive equal pay for work of equal value. Quality and quantity parameters were used to assess work performance, irrespective of whether the worker was a man or a woman.

15. The gender pay gap could be explained by the fact that men were more likely than women to be employed in harmful and dangerous work, for which the wages were higher. As women were mothers, they took advantage of their right to work in less arduous conditions. Women were also more likely than men to exercise their right to work part-time rather than full-time, which affected their wages.

16. The gender pay gap varied from sector to sector. Annual measures were taken to boost wages in the State sector, which employed a large number of women, taking into account the basic salary and the various incentives made available. The National Statistics Office had conducted an experimental accounting exercise in which it had calculated the gender pay gap

without taking into account certain extraneous factors, such as the number of hours that a person worked. The Office had found that the real gender pay gap was only 5.8 per cent, which was negligible.

17. The Government had drawn up a list of dangerous occupations in which women were prohibited to work. In recent years, over 90 jobs had been removed from the list because employers had taken measures to improve working conditions. Women benefited from additional protections because they were mothers but they were now able to work as heavy goods vehicle drivers, bus drivers and in other roles for which they had previously been ineligible.

18. The Government acknowledged that fathers tended not to use all the parental leave to which they were entitled during the first three years of their children's lives. The State benefits that were granted during that three-year period were based on the national average wage rather than on parents' incomes. Efforts were being made to encourage men to take greater advantage of their parental leave entitlements. Fathers could now take paternity leave during the first six months of their child's life.

19. The general human rights standards established in the Criminal Code protected women against sexual harassment in the workplace. Victims of such harassment could file a complaint with the courts or with the local authorities in the area where they worked.

20. State pensions were calculated on the basis of the number of years that a person had worked. For women, that period included any time, up to a maximum of 12 years, that they had spent looking after children under 3 years of age. Women who had raised four or more children, and women who had cared for children with disabilities, benefited from a reduction in the number of years for which they were required to work. In general, women were not required to work for as many years as men but the pensions that they received were generally not much lower than those that men received.

21. Fewer than 1 per cent of older persons had an income below the subsistence level. Older women were supported by the State, irrespective of the number of years that they had worked. In 2022, the Government had introduced a new programme whereby persons could supplement their State pensions by making additional, voluntary contributions to their pension funds. Under the programme, the State matched the contributions made by participants in the scheme. About 70 per cent of the persons benefiting from the programme were women.

22. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions had ceased operating in accordance with a decision taken by the Supreme Court. A law governing trade unions provided that a trade union could be ordered to cease its operations if its activities were in violation of the Constitution or were harmful to the State or the public interest. The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, which coordinated the activities of trade unions around the country, was currently operating and had around 4 million members. The Federation upheld workers' social and employment rights through the establishment of general and collective agreements.

23. **A representative of Belarus** said that, as a result of legislative initiatives on the part of trade unions, pensions and benefits for working pensioners had been preserved and university graduates paid reduced taxes in their first jobs. A network of specialized labour inspectorates that operated throughout the country under the auspices of the trade unions had carried out some 8,000 inspections in 2024 and, in approximately 1,000 cases, had put a stop to the operation of machinery that posed a health and safety risk to workers. During the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, a special fund established under the Federation had been used to provide healthcare personnel with financial assistance and to finance the implementation of protective measures in healthcare establishments.

24. Under the recently amended law on the procedure and conditions for the referral of citizens to compulsory rehabilitation centres and conditions of stay therein, persons who had been prosecuted on several occasions for administrative offences committed under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and who had previously been warned about their antisocial behaviour, could be referred to such centres by the courts. No such referrals were made for persons under the age of 18 years or of pension age, women who were pregnant or had a child

under the age of 1 year, or persons with category I or II disabilities or illnesses that precluded their placement in such centres. People placed in the centres performed rehabilitative work and received psychological and other medical care, vocational training and guidance, and support in restoring and maintaining family ties.

25. **Ms. Mikko** said that she wished to know whether the State party had a national plan for reducing the gender pay gap. She wondered why women and men in Belarus had different pension ages. She would also be grateful to know when forced labour would be abolished in the country.

26. **A representative of Belarus** said that the work carried out in compulsory rehabilitation centres did not contravene international conventions and was permitted under the Labour Code, which was itself based on such conventions.

27. **A representative of Belarus** said that women who had reached pension age were entitled to continue working without fear of dismissal if they so wished and held the necessary qualifications; approximately 20 per cent of such women were still in employment. Among the protections provided to women was the obligation to extend the contracts of those who were approaching pension age and wished to continue working. The presidential decree on the promotion of employment was not intended to punish individuals of working age who were not employed, but simply to repeal a State subsidy on housing and communal services. Women raising three or more children or one or two children under 7 together with a child with disabilities under 18 were classified as employed.

28. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Government was working to reduce the gender pay gap.

29. **A representative of Belarus** said that the National Action Plan for Gender Equality, which had been developed on the basis of recommendations previously issued by the Committee, included measures for achieving equal economic opportunities for men and women such as skills development training to help women increase their earnings and subsidies for women starting businesses.

30. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that she wished to know how the Government was using available resources to increase the number of qualified medical personnel and improve access to and the quality and affordability of medical care, including maternity care, at the local level, particularly in rural areas and for women from vulnerable groups. She wondered whether the delegation could provide details of the planned timetable for providing free vaccinations against human papillomavirus (HPV) in 2025 and could guarantee that all population groups, including women living in rural and remote areas, would be reached. It would be useful to know how the State party planned to remove obstacles to abortion, including a time limit of 12 weeks, compulsory pre-abortion counselling in State healthcare institutions, mainly provided by members of religious groups who tried to dissuade women from having an abortion, and designated days on which doctors could refuse to perform the procedure. It would be helpful to hear whether there was a plan for making voluntary terminations of pregnancy free of charge and accessible to all women who wished to undergo them.

31. She would be grateful to learn how much progress had been made adapting medical and sexual and reproductive health services to the needs of women and girls with disabilities, especially in rural areas. Given that such women had also come under pressure to surrender their children to the State, she wondered what steps the State party would take to safeguard the health rights of women with disabilities and to provide them with more effective legal protections against the multiple discrimination that they faced.

32. She would welcome information on steps taken to prevent the discrimination that women living with HIV reportedly faced in maternity care especially, including being prosecuted under article 157 of the Criminal Code for the transmission of HIV. She would welcome more information about the need for women who were seeking to obtain or renew a driving licence to present a certificate from an obstetrician or gynaecologist as part of that process. What was the status of sexual and reproductive health education in the country?

33. **A representative of Belarus** said that medical care was provided to patients with HIV in strict compliance with a clinical protocol on preventing mother-to-child transmission of

HIV, adopted in 2018, and a clinical protocol on providing medical care to patients with HIV, adopted in 2022. In 2016, Belarus had received certification from the World Health Organization (WHO) that it had eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. The Government worked closely with non-governmental organizations to combat the spread of the virus. As a result of efforts to meet the 95-95-95 targets set under the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, as at the end of 2024, 94.7 per cent of persons living with HIV knew their HIV status, 93.4 per cent were receiving antiretroviral therapy and 87 per cent had an undetectable viral load; the Government acknowledged that there was more to be done to reach the targets. Medical care was available to all without restriction, in strict compliance with WHO protocols.

34. The requirement for women wishing to obtain a non-professional driver's licence to undergo a gynaecological examination had been abolished in 2022. The examination for women seeking professional licences was carried out with a view to determining not only whether they were pregnant, but also whether they had any health issues.

35. Protecting maternal and child health was a priority – particularly in the context of a declining birth rate – that was being addressed through the Family and Childhood Programme and other State programmes. Under article 27 of the Healthcare Act, women had the right to decide for themselves whether or not they wished to become mothers. In compliance with Mental Health Care Act, psychological counselling was provided to women wishing to terminate a pregnancy only with their consent. It was intended to provide them with relevant information and help them to understand why they wished to undergo the procedure; efforts were made to assist women with any issues that were identified. Such counselling had resulted in women not undergoing the procedure in 13.8 per cent of cases in 2017 and 32.7 per cent of cases in 2024; in the course of the previous five years, 23,838 pregnancies had been saved. A list of medical grounds for the termination of pregnancy had been established by law; married couples were informed when such grounds existed, but they decided whether or not to terminate the pregnancy. Cases of suspected fetal malformations were referred to a national board of doctors specialized in perinatal care, which had access to leading-edge technologies. The field of fetal surgery was developing rapidly in Belarus and advanced procedures such as fetoscopic endotracheal occlusion were helping to keep fetuses alive. All persons, including women and persons with disabilities, had equal access to healthcare services without discrimination.

36. The Government prioritized and devoted considerable resources to providing quality medical care in rural areas of the country. A network of healthcare institutions had been established that included obstetric units and general practitioners' clinics and local hospitals. Where necessary, arrangements were made for specialists to visit rural areas to perform surgery and provide other care.

37. **A representative of Belarus** said that, under proposed amendments to the relevant laws, which were gradually being liberalized, cases of unintentional transmission of HIV would only be investigated if a complaint was made by an aggrieved party. While intentional transmission of the virus was still prosecuted, few such cases occurred.

38. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that the Committee had received reports that the country's Mental Health Care Act permitted the sterilization of women and girls with psychosocial disabilities without their consent. She therefore wondered whether the State party would consider amending the Act to remedy that situation. She would be interested to know whether both men and women wishing to obtain a professional driving licence were required to undergo a medical examination.

39. **A representative of Belarus** said that there were no reports of forced sterilizations. The law required the consent of the person concerned for any medical intervention, including abortion. The consent of a legal guardian was required if the person lacked dispositive capacity. In the case of residential care facilities, the guardian was often the facility director.

40. Screening for breast and cervical cancer had been added to a programme of mandatory public health examinations. Women underwent the Pap smear up to the age of 29 years and an HPV test every 5 or 6 years from the age of 30 years. Women between the ages of 49 and 58 years underwent a mandatory mammogram once every three years. In 2024, more than

92 per cent of the population had undergone public health examinations, which had exceeded the set target of 90 per cent.

41. **A representative of Belarus** said that it was not the case that provision of healthcare to the public in Belarus had worsened; a number of aspects of healthcare development in the country had received very good ratings from the WHO Regional Office for Europe and it occupied a leading position in its region and, with respect to some areas of medicine, in the world. Older persons, including those in rural areas, were increasingly able to receive healthcare services at home. Although, like many countries, Belarus suffered from a shortage of mid-level medical personnel in particular, the State was taking steps to resolve that problem and maintain access to services. Although sanctions imposed by Western countries had resulted in difficulties obtaining certain medications, the Government was working closely to address such issues, including by developing the country's pharmaceuticals industry.

42. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to know whether there were any policy or regulatory measures that governed pension schemes in the informal sector. Information on the number of women working in the informal sector and micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises who were beneficiaries of the targeted social assistance programme would be welcome. It would be useful to know what steps had been taken to introduce a more gender-responsive tax system and to reduce the economic and social gender gap. She wondered what percentage of the total number of grants awarded had gone to women-owned businesses and female entrepreneurs at all levels. Further examples of how private-sector operations in banking, finance, energy and technology were fulfilling their business and human rights principles and obligations under the Convention would be appreciated. She would welcome information on the percentage of total loan and credit disbursements that had been made to women annually over the past five years and the percentage of the wealth investment fund that was earmarked for expanding women's economic opportunities. She wondered how the State party had addressed gender stereotypes and biases that had allegedly contributed to higher risks of failure of women-owned businesses compared to businesses owned by men.

43. The State party might comment on how effectively technical training for women and girls had helped to bridge gender digital gaps in e-commerce, fintech and robotics. She wondered whether women and girls were fully equipped for future jobs, technological solutions and innovations, and what percentage of State funding for digital inclusion was dedicated to strengthening women's competencies in information technology.

44. She wished to know what steps were being taken to boost female representation in leadership positions in sports and cultural organizations and support programmes focused on women. Was the State party addressing societal norms that restricted women's involvement in sports, recreation and cultural activities, especially in fields traditionally dominated by men?

45. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would like to hear about safeguards preventing misuse of the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime against women human rights defenders. Given the high mortality rates among men, leading to high rates of widowhood, it would be interesting to learn about the social security policies adopted to protect the rights of older women. She wondered whether the State party would review the criminal provision outlawing the deliberate or negligent infection of another person with HIV, in view of evidence that such laws disproportionately affected marginalized groups, including women. Further examples of any steps taken to allow women with disabilities to fully exercise their right to work, including by reviewing the requirement to be examined by a medical expert, would be appreciated.

46. She would like to know what the State party was doing to comply with international standards such as the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, especially with regard to the provision of menstrual products and the use of video surveillance of women prisoners. She wondered how the expansion of the definition of pornography to encompass portrayals of non-traditional sexual relations would affect the community of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. She wished to know whether the State party's nuclear power plant was compliant with the

protocols of the International Atomic Energy Agency and whether the human rights of women, including women with disabilities, had been considered in plans for a second power plant.

47. **A representative of Belarus** said that women accounted for 40 per cent of the country's 240,000 sole traders. Women's entrepreneurship, including in rural areas, was promoted under a number of laws and policies, including the Strategy for the Development of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises and the National Action Plan for Gender Equality. In 2024, a simplified taxation policy had been introduced for many types of self-employment. Self-employed persons were entitled to social benefits, including pensions. The measures taken had led to an increase in the proportion of female entrepreneurs from 31 to 40 per cent over four years. Businesses, including banks, and voluntary organizations like the Belarusian Women's Union contributed to supporting female entrepreneurship. Women accounted for 44 per cent of the unemployed persons who had received grants to set up their own business since 2016.

48. **A representative of Belarus** said that the Personal Data Protection Act of 2021 had introduced protection for special categories of personal data, including biometric or genetic data and information on race, ethnicity, political views, religious beliefs, trade union membership, health and sexuality, which could not generally be processed without the person's consent.

49. **A representative of Belarus** said that the legal provision criminalizing the infection of another person with HIV did not have a major impact, as it had resulted in only 9 prosecutions of women in 2023, down from 12 in 2022. The Office of the Procurator General was responsible for monitoring compliance with the law on detention conditions. In addition, public monitoring commissions, whose membership included representatives of voluntary associations, were responsible for overseeing respect for the rights of inmates, including those held in women's prisons, and their living and working conditions. Women inmates usually received medical care in prison but were referred to specialized facilities when necessary.

50. A new remand centre constructed near Minsk would lead to improved detention conditions. All inmates, including women, were entitled to challenge the legality of their detention or complain about their detention conditions, including in court. Such complaints were transferred without censorship within 24 hours. All inmates could receive visits, unless they were restricted as a disciplinary measure. Pregnant women and those with children were held in special units with better conditions.

51. **A representative of Belarus** said that 300,000 of the country's 550,000 persons with disabilities were female, including 16,500 girls. Measures taken under the action plan on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities covered all areas of women's lives. Women with disabilities were helped to find employment, including in specially reserved jobs, and supported in entrepreneurship, self-employment and vocational training, in line with their individualized rehabilitation plans. Employers received financial incentives to employ, provide work experience or create jobs for persons with disabilities, including women. A law on quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities had been developed. Organizations of persons with disabilities had established 78 companies employing 8,000 persons with disabilities.

52. **A representative of Belarus** said that the legislative amendments on the definition of pornography served only to restrict the trade in materials posing a danger to public health and morals or child development. The commission established to identify such materials had found only 38 instances in the first nine months of 2024. The law had not led to stigmatization of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, who remained free to enter into any relationship of their choice.

53. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she would appreciate a response to her concerns about the safeguards for current and planned nuclear power plants, ensuring the protection of women, especially women with disabilities.

54. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she wished to receive responses to her questions about the stereotypes causing higher rates of failure for female-owned businesses and the

effectiveness of training in preparing women and girls for future jobs and technological innovations. She would like to know how the State party was addressing bias and stereotyping in sports and recreation, how women were represented in the leadership of sporting federations and what government funding was available for women's and girls' sport.

55. **A representative of Belarus** said that none of the international partners of Belarus had raised any concerns over the nuclear power plant, which had undergone peer review by European partners some years previously. The only exception was Lithuania, which took a politicized approach. The highest nuclear safety standards were observed.

56. Her Government promoted women's participation in all types of sports, including those traditionally preferred by men. Statistics on such participation and on women's leadership in sporting federations would be provided in writing. Girls faced no restrictions on the subjects they could study. Although boys were more interested in mathematics, while girls usually preferred the humanities, any girls interested in technology were supported.

Articles 15 and 16

57. **Mr. Safarov** said that he would like to know how women's ownership of land and property was regulated in practice, especially with regard to inheritance, and to receive relevant statistics. He would like to understand how the courts resolved custody issues and the division of assets in divorce cases and upheld the best interests of the child and the mother. He wondered how single mothers were supported. It would be interesting to learn about national legislation on international adoption and the application of the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

58. **A representative of Belarus** said that judges made custody decisions in divorce cases based on the best interest of the child. Mediation was increasingly used as an alternative to the courts. In most cases, children remained with their mother while the father was also given court-ordered access. Lawyers ensured that both parents' rights were respected in line with the law. Fathers were typically ordered to pay child support; law enforcement agencies and social services cooperated to address non-payment. Single mothers were entitled to all financial and non-financial social benefits available to families. Women in Belarus did not face issues with access to property ownership or inheritance.

59. **A representative of Belarus** said that 58 per cent of rural women were either landowners or had the right to use the land.

60. **A representative of Belarus** said that her Government cooperated with a number of other States to ensure that intercountry adoption was carried out in accordance with the law of both countries. The consular service visited families who had adopted Belarusian children several times a year to assess their living conditions and ensure they were not victims of abuse.

61. **A representative of Belarus** said that her Government had made progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. However, it would continue to work to address the remaining challenges and unfulfilled potential. Women and girls in Belarus greatly appreciated the outcomes of national gender policy, which enjoyed widespread support according to sociological research. The Committee's recommendations would be considered by the Government's National Council on Gender Policy and used in preparation of the next national plan on gender equality.

62. **The Chair** thanked the delegation for a constructive dialogue, in the interest of the collective benefit of women and girls in Belarus.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.