



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 1820th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 22 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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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)*

Tenth periodic report of Sweden (continued) (CEDAW/C/SWE/10 and CEDAW/C/SWE/QPR/10)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Sweden took places at the Committee table.*
2. **The Chair** said that, at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the delegation would be speaking via video link.

Articles 7–9 (continued)

3. **Ms. Roth Olanders** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that, following amendments to the Citizenship Act in June 2021, stateless children and young adults born in Sweden and having lived in the country for a certain number of years were now exempt from the previous requirement of having a permanent residence permit in order to obtain Swedish citizenship. Statelessness was determined as part of the asylum procedure. In 2020, more than 3,200 stateless persons had been granted Swedish citizenship, while more than 26,700 had acquired citizenship since 2015. An inquiry had been initiated to investigate whether automatic acquisition of citizenship should be introduced for stateless children born in Sweden to a parent who had permanent residence status or another connection to Sweden. In its final report of July 2021, the inquiry committee had concluded that such a system should not be introduced, as it was difficult to design a system that addressed the correct category of stateless children, namely those who became stateless over time.
4. Legislative amendments made to bring the Aliens Act into line with the country's international human rights obligations had entered into force in July 2021. The Government's bill had contained an analysis of the effects of the proposed amendments on gender equality. Under the amended Act, residence permits granted to persons in need of protection were temporary at the time of the initial decision, as a general rule. Permanent residence permits could only be granted if the applicant had had a temporary residence permit for at least three years and if specific requirements were met, including a maintenance requirement. There was a strict maintenance requirement for family member immigration, to which there were some exceptions. Permits would continue to be granted on humanitarian grounds; amendments had been made to enable certain adults who had had a temporary residence permit in Sweden and who had developed special ties to the country to be granted a permit if their circumstances were particularly distressing. It had been stated in the government bill that the amendments might have some negative effects on asylum-seeking women and women applying for residence permits and therefore affect gender equality compared with the previous rules, but they would in any case be an improvement over the temporary legislation.

Articles 10–14

5. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that the State party was to be commended on the ease of access to education-based statistics disaggregated by gender collected annually by the Higher Education Authority and the strategy for global gender equality and the rights of women and girls, among other positive developments. Nonetheless, reports suggested that women and girls continued to face some challenges in the education sector. She would be interested to hear about the steps taken to modernize the comprehensive sex education curriculum and to ensure that educators were trained in up-to-date best practice and received regular skills updates to teach sex education. She wished to know whether the curriculum covered topics such as sexual harassment and assault, domestic violence, online sexual violence and sexual abuse and whether there was an effective zero-tolerance policy towards sexual violence in all schools and appropriate services available to all students, including reporting mechanisms and counselling.
6. She wished to know how the State party was addressing increased mental health concerns among schoolgirls, which had been exacerbated during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and whether all girls had access to appropriate and effective

mechanisms to support their mental health in school, including counselling and psychological services. Given that the Swedish Disability Movement reported that no data were available on students with disabilities, including absenteeism rates, she would like to know what measures were taken to ensure that girls with disabilities were monitored and supported in their learning and to train or retrain educators on the needs of women and girls with disabilities.

7. Lastly, she would be interested to hear what steps were being taken to increase the number of women granted professorships and to ensure that more women were appointed to high-level decision-making positions in academia and how conditions would be improved for women when pursuing research careers, including when it came to access to grants or funding.

8. **Mr. Wester** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that one of the subgoals of the gender equality policy was gender-equal education. The national curriculum for sex education, which was introduced to children at an early age and continued at all levels, had recently been revised and now included such topics as trusting relationships, consent and a critical view on pornography. Under the Education Act, all those working in schools were obliged to take action to combat and prevent all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, for which there was zero tolerance. The National Agency for Education and other government entities worked to prevent mental illness among schoolgirls and provide early intervention and support. Schoolchildren learned about human rights, including gender equality and active citizenship.

9. **Ms. Hellberg** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the percentage of women in all categories of employment and fields of research in higher education had increased in recent years, and the gender distribution was now relatively even in most categories. Although the number of female professors had increased by 66 per cent between 2010 and 2020, they still made up only 31 per cent of the total. The Government had set the target that, by 2030, half of all newly recruited professors should be women. Since 2016, higher education institutions had been working on gender mainstreaming, and the Swedish Research Council aimed to ensure that a sex and gender perspective was included where applicable in the research it funded.

10. **Mr. Florin** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the Government was conscious that further action must be taken to improve data on living conditions for persons with disabilities in general. In line with the budget bill for 2022, the Government intended to commission pertinent government agencies to develop indicators and key figures for assessing quality and goal attainment in the care of persons with disabilities. Statistics Sweden, which had recently been commissioned by the Government to develop and publish statistics on living conditions for persons with disabilities, had proposed a definition of disability that was being tested for the first time in the 2021 survey on national living conditions. Statistics Sweden was expected to evaluate functionality of the definition with the aim of developing a national standard that could be used in other studies, including on female students.

11. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would welcome clarification of the role of teachers in providing sex education and more information on absenteeism among students with disabilities.

12. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen**, noting that all teachers had an obligation to teach sex education, asked whether consideration was given to the fact that approximately one in every four or five women had been the victim of sexual violence before the age of 18, which meant that some female teachers who had themselves been victims might find that task painful and difficult.

13. **Ms. Manalo** said that she would be interested to know whether there were any education programmes to prepare women with and without disabilities to join the Armed Forces.

14. **Ms. Wester** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the National Agency for Education provided in-service training for teachers and school staff on the new sex education curriculum and such issues as the prevention of sexual harassment.

15. **Ms. Strandås** (Sweden) said that women could choose to undergo voluntary military training and join the defence forces.

16. **Ms. Akizuki** said that, although the State party was among the top-ranked countries in the world when it came to the participation of women in the labour force, there was still room for improvement. She would welcome clarification of recent trends concerning the proportion of women on the management teams and boards of listed companies and data on the number of women employed in male-dominated fields. She would be interested to know the findings of the annual salary mapping exercise carried out for companies with at least 10 employees, whether the gender pay gap was narrowing and whether detailed data on annual salaries were available, disaggregated by gender, industry, career and position. She wished to know what measures the State party was taking to address stereotypes and unconscious bias concerning the role of women with a view to increasing the proportion of women in full-time employment. She would appreciate information on the work of the newly established commission to examine gender equality with respect to lifetime earnings. She would also welcome details of the findings of the study by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency on sexual harassment in the workplace. She wondered whether there were any data on harassment disaggregated by gender, age, ethnic background, disability and type of working environment and whether online sexual harassment was also taken into account. Lastly, she wished to know whether the State party planned to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

17. **Ms. Karlström Mitt** (Sweden) said that the proportion of women in male-dominated occupations had gradually but clearly increased in the past decade. The share of men in female-dominated occupations had also increased, albeit not as markedly. With regard to salary mapping, the National Mediation Office promoted an efficient wage formation process and oversaw the provision of public statistics on wages and salaries. Official wage structure statistics did not show whether or to what extent discrimination occurred in accordance with the Discrimination Act. The commission for gender equal lifetime earnings, which was tasked with submitting proposals for measures that would contribute to equal pay, equal living income, equal distribution of public support measures and equal workplaces, would submit its report by February 2022. The committee of inquiry appointed to examine possible ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 and the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206) was due to report back in the coming month. As to the proportion of women in full-time employment, under an agreement negotiated by the social partners on employment protection and reskilling, there was a suggestion that full-time work should be the norm.

18. **Ms. Rönnblom** (Sweden) said that the Government had planned to introduce mandatory quotas for women on corporate boards but the parliament had rejected that plan in 2017 on the grounds that shareholders should make such decisions. Although women's representation on company boards was not regulated by law, that issue was addressed by the Swedish Corporate Governance Code, which was applied by all companies whose shares or depository receipts were traded on a regulated market in Sweden. The Code was part of a self-regulatory system that was based on the "comply or explain" principle. Responsibility for the implementation of the Code did not fall to the Government but to the Swedish Corporate Governance Board, which was a non-governmental organization.

19. **Ms. Akizuki** said that she wished to know how the Government could ensure women's equal representation on company boards if no quotas for such representation were established in law.

20. **Ms. Ameline**, noting that women accounted for only 23 per cent of the directors of start-up companies in Europe, said that she wished to know whether the Government had established a policy to ensure women's equal representation in information and technology companies.

21. **Ms. Strandås** (Sweden) said that steps were being taken to break down traditional stereotypes surrounding the types of job that were considered appropriate for men or women. The issue was discussed in schools and was addressed by the Swedish Public Employment Service, which encouraged its clients to consider sectors of employment that were not traditionally associated with their sex.

22. **Ms. Schölin** (Sweden) said that the Discrimination Act provided that all employers were required to promote gender balance for all types of job and at all levels. Measures taken in that regard were monitored by the Equality Ombudsman.

23. **Ms. Rönnblom** (Sweden) said that, although the Government was not responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Swedish Corporate Governance Code, the European Union had adopted regulations on the make-up of company boards, including Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council, which required certain large companies to disclose information on diversity policies with regard to aspects such as the age, gender and educational and professional backgrounds of board members. Sweden had implemented that Directive and had also lent its support to the European Commission's proposal for a new directive on corporate sustainability reporting.

24. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that many developing countries were unable to afford enough vaccines to protect their population against COVID-19, which had a disproportionate effect on women and girls. Through its membership of the European Union, Sweden had opposed a proposal to waive the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, which would have increased the availability of vaccines in countries unable to afford them. Given that the Government's implicit opposition to the proposed waiver might constitute a violation of the Convention, she wondered whether it would consider taking any measures to make vaccines more widely available in low-income countries that had no other way of obtaining them.

25. She would be interested to hear why the average life expectancy of women with low levels of education was falling for the first time in 200 years and why working women took almost twice as much sick leave as working men. She would welcome an explanation of why over half of women on long-term sick leave were suffering from severe stress, why a significantly higher proportion of women than men reported that they suffered from anxiety and why the number of young women and girls with a mental illness had risen significantly. In that connection, it would be interesting to know the outcome of the report on sick leave among women that had been issued on 31 May 2020. The delegation might comment on the observation, made by alternative sources, that the health-care reimbursement system discriminated against women given that hospitals received lower payments for treating women. Lastly, she wondered what steps were being taken to address the fact that homeless migrants from Eastern Europe, most of whom were Roma, were falling between the cracks of the health-care system and were sometimes denied access to contraception and abortion services.

26. **Ms. Calltorp** (Sweden) said that, although the Government recognized the need to scale up the production and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, it was convinced that the intellectual property system, in particular the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, played a key role in ensuring universal and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and that waiving the Agreement could undermine collaboration and hamper research and innovation. The Agreement permitted some degree of flexibility in that it provided for the issuance of compulsory licenses to allow generic versions of patented medical products to be produced or imported without the prior consent of the patent holder. Furthermore, voluntary licensing agreements had expedited the production of vaccines.

27. In the Government's view, the proposed waiver failed to address the issues hampering vaccine production that the World Trade Organization had identified in July, which included limited manufacturing capacity, restricted access to raw materials, complex supply chains and the lack of adequate know-how for producing and distributing vaccines. The Government was open to considering the proposal concerning the compulsory licensing system that had been put forward by the European Union at the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

28. **Mr. Florin** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the study on sick leave referred to by the Committee showed that, from 2020, women were generally 25 per cent more likely than men to require sickness benefits, 31 per cent more likely to require such benefits for a psychiatric disorder and 41 per cent more likely to require them for a stress-related illness. Women working in public-facing roles in the social, health-care and education sectors were particularly likely to require sick leave. In the light of that information, the

Government would be conducting a follow-up investigation into the issuance of medical certificates by doctors and any possible differences in the approach that doctors took to issuing such certificates to women and men. The follow-up investigation would involve enhanced collaboration between the Swedish Social Insurance Agency and health-care units and would complement the follow-up studies on health-care quality conducted in the regions.

29. **Ms. Larsson** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that it was not known why the life expectancy of women with a low level of education was falling. In April 2018, the Government had presented a bill on good and equitable public health that was intended to enhance public health-care services at all levels of society. Increased responsibility for public health had been granted to the Public Health Agency of Sweden, enabling it to coordinate health-care services at the national level and monitor the provision of health care, including by paying particular attention to groups that faced a higher risk of falling ill. The Agency continuously monitored changes in life expectancy among women and men and submitted annual reports on its findings to the Government.

30. The design of the health-care compensation system was a key factor in ensuring that all persons had access to quality, equitable health care. An inquiry conducted into the provision of health care indicated that introducing a more standardized compensation system would make health-care provision more responsive to the needs of citizens. Under an agreement established between the Government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Association would support the regional and local governance of health-care services.

31. Although the Government supported European Union policies on social security systems, which facilitated freedom of movement, those policies should not result in the overburdening of the social security system of a particular member State. Nationals of European Union member States who were resident in Sweden were required to hold the European Health Insurance Card in order to be entitled to use the public health-care system. Otherwise, they must pay the full cost of the care received. To be eligible for the card, they must be covered by the State insurance system of their home country. The type of health care received depended, among other things, on the right to reside in the country. However, there was nothing preventing municipalities and regions from making their own determination of the legal situation of a person seeking medical attention and persons residing in Sweden without a residence permit were not prevented under national health legislation from having access to care.

32. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know why the increase in the proportion of women in full-time employment and the measures taken to improve citizens' work-life balance had not reduced the gap between men's and women's disposable incomes. She wondered what structural barriers were hampering efforts to reduce the gender income gap and how the State party intended to overcome them. In view of the fact that significantly fewer women than men defined themselves as entrepreneurs, it would be interesting to learn what measures were being taken to improve the regulatory and economic framework governing women's entrepreneurship and to motivate women to become entrepreneurs. She asked how the Government would promote women's participation in innovative businesses and whether temporary special measures would be taken to make loans more easily available to women entrepreneurs.

33. The Committee would welcome information on the measures taken to monitor the gender-discriminatory effects of reforms of the benefits and social insurance system and to ensure that women who had been in part-time unemployment would have access to adequate unemployment benefit if they lost their jobs. The delegation might describe any steps being taken to prevent algorithmic discrimination and bias, including in connection with hiring practices and access to social security.

34. Women belonging to the most vulnerable groups, including women from ethnic minority backgrounds, women with disabilities and migrant women, were underrepresented in the labour market and were more likely than men to claim State benefits. As such benefits had not risen in line with real increases in income, a growing proportion of vulnerable women were living below the poverty line. In view of that situation, she asked whether the

Government would consider enhancing its support for the most vulnerable and deprived women, including through a review of its taxation and redistribution mechanisms.

35. **Ms. Strandås** (Sweden) said that information on the distribution of financial resources between women and men had been included in the so-called gender-equality annex of the budget bill every year since 1988. The annex also contained information on the economic effects of the Government's policies and proposed reforms and how those effects differed for women and men.

36. **Mr. Florin** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the Government's analysis indicated that transfer payments and taxation had an overall balancing or equalizing effect on men's and women's incomes. In 2019, the average income of women aged from 20 to 64 years had stood at 72 per cent of the average income for men in the same age group. However, when the effects of transfers and taxation were taken into account, women's average disposable income had stood at 80 per cent of men's.

37. **Ms. Seidefors** (Sweden) said that the number of women entrepreneurs had increased over time but the rate of increase has been quite slow. A recently presented study showed that the proportion of companies run by a woman has increased from 25 per cent in 1980 to 28 per cent in 2020. The Government acknowledged that action must be taken to remove barriers to women's entrepreneurship so that women and men had equal opportunities to become entrepreneurs.

38. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she wished to know whether the State party's rural development policy sought to address the circumstances that placed rural women and girls in a disadvantaged situation and how they participated in the drafting of the policy. She would be interested to hear about the status of implementation of the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, especially as regards the resolution of issues related to the rights to land and resources of the Sami people and provision of legal assistance to enable them to defend those rights. She wondered what measures the State party had taken to revise the Minerals Act to ensure that it respected human rights and that women had equal access to the profits from mineral extraction. It would be helpful to know whether the State party intended to ratify the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). She would like to know what measures had been taken or considered to keep Roma girls in the education system, prevent early marriage and ensure that they did not become victims of trafficking.

39. She wondered what measures the State party was taking to address the negative impact on women of the requirement for applicants for permanent residence permits to show that had been able to support themselves with their own resources for at least three years, and to ensure that women refugees and asylum seekers in reception centres were protected from violence. She would like to know what action the Government had taken to provide equal job opportunities for woman with disabilities and to mitigate the effects of climate change and environmental degradation on disadvantaged women. She asked how the State guaranteed the participation of women from disadvantaged groups in the development and drafting of laws and policies related to climate change.

40. **Ms. Helldén** (Sweden) said that a national strategy for regional development for 2021–2030 currently before the parliament stressed the fundamental importance of gender equality, integration and diversity for growth throughout the country. The Government's regional development policy stated that women and men should have the same opportunities in regional development work and equal access to development resources. A law had been passed in 2018 to ensure that men and women in rural areas had the same conditions for starting and running companies. Her Government recognized the importance of diversity in companies and among entrepreneurs for their competitiveness and sustainability. The State-owned enterprise Almi, for instance, offered advice and venture capital to businesses throughout the country, with additional support specifically for women and persons with foreign backgrounds.

41. Her Government also placed particular emphasis on equal educational opportunities, regardless of where people lived, especially for women and vulnerable groups in rural areas, so that they could more easily enter the labour market both in Sweden and globally. Distance

education opportunities decreased the likelihood of an exodus of women from rural to urban areas after completing their studies.

42. The Swedish Forest Agency had taken a range of measures to increase gender equality in the forest industry, including improvements to the collection of statistics.

43. **Ms. Schölin** (Sweden) said that the Government had earmarked significant funding for Roma inclusion in recent years and a permanent budget allocation would be made from 2022, with a particular focus on women and girls. In January 2019, legislation had been amended to provide additional support to all national minorities, including the introduction of a requirement for all municipal and regional authorities to adopt policy goals and guidelines that centred on the protection of minority languages and cultures.

44. **Ms. Roth Olanders** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the Swedish Migration Agency had created a compulsory introductory course on Swedish society and civics for asylum seekers in October 2021. The course was taught early on in the asylum process. The section of the course on life in Sweden covered issues such as gender and racial equality, the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, children's rights, violence against women and domestic violence, honour-related crime and abuse, female genital mutilation and child marriage. Health and medical care was also a component of the course and it stressed the importance of undergoing the medical examination that was offered free of charge to all asylum seekers.

45. **Mr. Florin** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the purpose of the disability policy was to improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities, promote gender equality and ensure respect for children's rights. The policy covered four priorities, including measures to promote independent living. As of October 2020, 26,000 people had received services under the Act on Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments, of whom 41 per cent were women. Girls tended to be diagnosed later in life and the difference in the proportion of men and women diminished among those over 30 years of age. In recent years, the Government had taken several initiatives to strengthen the right to personal assistance of people with considerable care needs in later life. An assistance allowance was provided to parents of children with disabilities to enable them to work. A committee of inquiry had submitted its final report containing proposals that were currently under consideration by the Government, including a 700 million kronor (SKr) increase in the budget allocation for the assistance allowance. Of the 60,000 people with disabilities up to 64 years of age who received care services, 51 per cent were women.

46. **Ms. Rönnblom** (Sweden) said that was working towards ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 to strengthen the rights of Sami people.

47. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** said that she wondered whether measures were in place to support people who looked after dependents and to ensure that they did not suffer economically as a result of providing care. She wished to know whether women deprived of legal capacity had access to justice on their own if they had been victims of discrimination or abuse or whether they had to act through their guardian.

48. **Ms. Dettmeijer-Vermeulen** said that she would be interested to know how the State party kept Roma girls in education and prevented early marriage.

49. **Mr. Florin** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that the Government had set up the Family Care Competence Centre under the National Board of Health and Welfare to support family carers. A new national strategy for such carers was being planned and in 2020, the Government had proposed increasing funding for the Centre to SKr 5 billion. A number of initiatives had been devised to improve care for older persons.

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50. **Ms. Narain** said that she would like to know to what extent gender-based and domestic violence were taken into account by the courts when deciding on visitation rights and whether the risk of psychological harm to victims of domestic violence was also considered. She would appreciate an update of the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the 2017 report of a public inquiry into the 2006 reform of the Swedish Parental Code. She would be interested to hear whether studies had been conducted

on the economic consequences of divorce for both spouses, with specific attention to the enhanced human capital and earning potential of male spouses on the basis of their full-time and uninterrupted career patterns, in line with the Committee's recommendation in its previous set of concluding observations (CEDAW/C/SWE/CO/8-9, para. 39). She would appreciate an update on the status of the inquiry into the policy of not recognizing polygamous marriages that had been entered into abroad. She asked what measures were in place to alleviate the difficulties faced by persons who had married abroad while they were underage, such as those related to marital property, inheritance and tax and welfare benefits, in the light of the fact that Sweden did not recognize child marriages.

51. **Ms. Roth Olanders** (Sweden), speaking via video link, said that a recommendation had been made in the report on the inquiry on citizenship to require the child's consent for parents to renounce his or her citizenship and such renunciation must not conflict with the child's best interest. The inquiry had proposed that an application for renouncing citizenship should also be refused if there was reason to believe that the applicant did not wish to relinquish his or her nationality. Another proposal was intended to protect persons who had been threatened or forced to renounce their Swedish citizenship or whose application had been forged. The report on the inquiry was being circulated for formal consultation.

52. **Ms. Rönnblom** (Sweden) said that the law related to child marriage had been strengthened in 2019. Since then, the ban on marriage for all persons under 18 years of age applied regardless of their connection to Sweden at the time of marriage or the spouses' age at the time of their application for recognition of the marriage in Sweden. Exceptions to the ban could not be made if one of the parties was still under 18 years of age.

53. **Ms. Strandås** (Sweden) said she was proud that the Government regarded itself as feminist but realized that much had to be done in order to live up to its words. She valued the important work of the Committee and the Government remained committed to making progress in its implementation of the Convention.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.