



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

List of issues and questions in relation to the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Cook Islands*

General

1. Please provide information and statistics, disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, disability, geographical location, minority status and socioeconomic background, on the current situation of women and girls in the State Party to enable monitoring of the implementation of the Convention. In accordance with the State Party's obligations under articles 1 and 2 of the Convention and in line with target 5.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, please indicate how the State Party intends to improve the collection and analysis of data pertaining to the areas covered by the Convention, so as to support policymaking and programme development and to measure progress towards the implementation of the Convention and the promotion of substantive gender equality, including with regard to the specific areas covered in the present document.

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

2. Recalling paragraph 12 of the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/COK/CO/2-3) and noting that the incorporation of the provisions of the Convention into national law has not yet taken place (para. 45),¹ please provide information on, and a clear timeline for:

(a) Incorporating the provisions of the Convention into national law and completing legislative reforms to ensure compliance with the Convention;

(b) Awareness-raising on the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations among the judiciary, prosecutors, lawyers, law enforcement officials and the general public using all appropriate means, including media, such as radio and the Internet, oral traditions and other culturally appropriate methods, to ensure that information reaches all areas, including the outer islands (Pa Enea);

* Adopted by the Committee at its ninety-second session (2–20 February 2026).

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, paragraph numbers refer to the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of the State Party (CEDAW/C/COK/4-5).



(c) Whether the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and concluding observations have been invoked in court decisions.

Legislative framework

3. Recalling paragraph 10 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting that a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women is still lacking (para. 43), please provide information on:

(a) Steps taken to adopt a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in line with article 1 of the Convention;

(b) Measures taken to eliminate discrimination against migrant women workers and their children in access to maternity benefits, child welfare benefits and paid parental leave under the Employment Relations Act 2012 and social welfare policies;

(c) Whether gender impact assessment mechanisms have been established for proposed legislation, policies and programmes, including major development projects such as deep-sea mining, and whether the Crown Law Office reviews draft legislation for consistency with the Convention.

National machinery for the advancement of women

4. Recalling paragraph 18 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting that insufficient dedicated financial resources have hindered the effective implementation of gender equality programmes (para. 29), please provide information on:

(a) Resources allocated to the Social Policy and Services Division, review outcomes for the National Policy on Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment 2019–2024, and measures to ensure meaningful and inclusive consultation with diverse stakeholders in developing policies and action plans;

(b) Timeline and resources allocated to the Gender-Based Violence Unit, and mechanisms to strengthen coordination between all stakeholders implementing gender equality policies, particularly with civil society organizations;

(c) Measures to establish dedicated, sustainable government budget allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment programmes beyond short-term external funding and the Social Impact Fund;

(d) Feasibility of establishing a dedicated, adequately resourced national body to coordinate gender policies in close collaboration with women's civil society organizations.

National human rights institution

5. Recalling paragraph 16 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting that a national human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles, annexed to General Assembly resolution [48/134](#)) has not yet been established (para. 53), please provide information and a timeline for:

(a) Finalizing the review of the Ombudsman Act 1984 to incorporate the functions of the national human rights institution, ensuring meaningful public consultation with Pa Enea communities and awareness-raising;

(b) Measures to raise awareness of available complaint mechanisms and to ensure access for women, including migrant women and those in Pa Enea communities, noting that no complaints of discrimination based on sex or gender have been filed to date (para. 56), and ensuring consideration of complaints regarding media that portray gender-discriminatory images, objectify or demean women or promote violent masculinities.

Temporary special measures

6. Recalling paragraph 20 of the Committee's previous concluding observations, and noting that the State Party has not adopted temporary special measures to accelerate substantive equality of women and men, please provide a timeline and concrete steps for introducing temporary special measures, including quotas and reserved seats, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, to increase women's representation in all areas in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, including in political life, education and the labour market, particularly in male-dominated fields. Please also indicate measures taken to raise awareness among government officials, policymakers, political parties and the general public on the non-discriminatory nature and importance of temporary special measures.

Access to justice

7. Recalling paragraph 14 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting the State Party's indication that this recommendation has not yet been implemented (para. 51), please clarify the timeline for extending legal aid to women who are victims of discrimination on the basis of sex or gender. Please also provide information on measures to ensure that women in the Pa Enea have access to legal services, courts and justice mechanisms and on barriers preventing women, including women with disabilities and migrant women, from obtaining access to justice, as well as measures to strengthen the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes and gender-based violence against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

Gender stereotypes and harmful practices

8. Please provide information on:

(a) Resources allocated and measurable targets established to implement strategies eliminating patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory gender stereotypes, including specific measures targeting communities in the Pa Enea, programmes engaging men and boys in combating gender-based violence and promoting shared domestic and care responsibilities, and mechanisms to assess the impact and effectiveness of such measures;

(b) Measures to support the Media Council in adopting a gender-specific code of ethics that promotes positive, non-stereotypical portrayals of women and girls, including measures to address harmful gender stereotypes perpetuated through social media and technology-facilitated gender-based violence;

(c) Timeline for completing the review of the Marriage Act 1973 to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18 years irrespective of gender and without exceptions, and steps taken to address traditional practices such as bride price to ensure that they do not contribute to the commodification of women.

Gender-based violence against women

9. Recalling paragraph 24 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, please clarify the measures and timeline for:

(a) Status of the Gender-Based Violence Unit, including sustainable resources allocated, timeline for adopting the national gender-based violence policy, and coordination mechanisms with women's civil society organizations;

(b) Assessing the implementation and effectiveness of the Family Protection and Support Act 2017;

(c) Regular, mandatory training for all relevant professionals, including judges, law enforcement, healthcare providers and social workers, particularly in the Pa Enea, on gender-sensitive approaches to preventing and responding to gender-based violence against women and building sustainable local capacity;

(d) Ensuring that legal responses to domestic violence, stalking, emotional abuse, technology-facilitated gender-based violence and online sexual exploitation of children are comprehensive, providing prevention, protection and reparations for victims/survivors;

(e) Ensuring that any alternative dispute resolution procedures in cases of gender-based violence are used only with the free and informed consent of victims/survivors and when there are no indicators of further risks;

(f) Establishment of dedicated, sustainably resourced shelters across all islands, noting the current reliance on tourist facilities, private homes and churches, particularly in the Pa Enea (para. 120), and ensuring that the confidentiality and security of shelter locations are maintained;

(g) Adoption of clinical guidelines aligned with World Health Organization standards for health sector response to sexual and gender-based violence, provision of comprehensive post-rape care encompassing emergency contraception, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, sexually transmitted infection prophylaxis, forensic care, psychosocial support and access to lawful abortion, and integration of the Minimum Initial Service Package for Sexual and Reproductive Health into disaster preparedness and response frameworks;

(h) Conduct of an updated prevalence survey on gender-based violence against women, noting that the most recent study was conducted in 2014, and establishment of a coordinated data-collection system disaggregated by age, sex, disability and location.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

10. Recalling paragraph 26 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting that the State Party has indicated that those recommendations have not yet been implemented due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and shortage of financial resources (para. 125), please provide a timeline and information on resources allocated for their implementation. Please also provide information on:

(a) Steps taken to amend section 161 of the Crimes Act 1969 to decriminalize prostitution;

(b) Whether a comprehensive study has been undertaken on trafficking in women and girls, including technology-facilitated trafficking, and its connection to

the tourism industry, deep-sea mining and extractive industries and the maritime sector, including foreign fishers and seafarers;

(c) Sex-disaggregated data on trafficking cases investigated and prosecuted, convictions and sentences imposed, victim identification mechanisms, and support and rehabilitation services for trafficking victims, including those trafficked for exploitation of prostitution;

(d) Exit programmes and alternative sustainable income-generating opportunities for women and girls wishing to leave prostitution;

(e) Steps taken towards ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Participation in political and public life

11. In line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, please provide information on the measures to increase women's representation towards parity, in particular:

(a) The Electoral Act 2004 reform to increase women's representation in Parliament;

(b) Measures to increase women's representation in island government councils, particularly in the Pa Enea, and review of the Island Government Act 2012–2013;

(c) Measures to increase women's representation in senior management positions in the civil service and employment sectors, and support for women candidates and resources to the Cook Islands Women Parliamentarians Caucus to promote women's meaningful participation in political life.

12. Noting the absence of women judges on the High Court and the Court of Appeal (para. 132) and women's overall underrepresentation in the judiciary and appointed decision-making bodies, including statutory boards, please provide data on women's representation and trends over time and on measures to address underrepresentation.

Education

13. Recalling the Committee's general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, please provide information on:

(a) Data-collection systems to monitor girls' and women's access to education at all levels, including dropout rates, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and school type;

(b) Status of education programmes to ensure the retention and reintegration of pregnant girls and young mothers, including sanctions for schools that dismiss pregnant girls;

(c) Resources allocated to implement the Inclusive Education Policy (2017), particularly in the Pa Enea, noting challenges to supporting girls with learning and psychosocial disabilities;

(d) Provision of mandatory, comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health rights education, including on consent, bodily autonomy, contraceptives, prevention of early pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and

gender-based violence, mechanisms to monitor for discriminatory gender stereotypes in delivery, and whether it is provided in out-of-school settings;

(e) Measures beyond science expos and Robotics Club to address the underrepresentation of women and girls in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, information and communications technology, artificial intelligence and technical trades;

(f) Measures to promote Māori language instruction and use in education to preserve cultural identity and ensure intergenerational transmission, particularly among girls and young women;

(g) Inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities, including in the Pa Enua, and steps taken to provide reasonable accommodation and accessible facilities and materials.

Employment

14. Please provide information on:

(a) Measures to address women's overrepresentation in informal, part-time and unpaid work and to increase labour force participation and address vertical and horizontal occupational segregation;

(b) Mechanisms to enforce equal pay for work of equal value, including mandatory and regular pay audits, labour inspections, pay transparency, gender-neutral job classification and sanctions for non-compliance, noting that currently wage reviews are conducted only upon complaint;

(c) Survivor-centred protocols for workplace sexual harassment and abuse between the Labour Division, relevant agencies and law enforcement, and whether sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment screening has been established for investors;

(d) Measures to ensure women's inclusion in the pension system and whether child-raising periods count towards pension benefits;

(e) Measures to promote equal sharing of domestic and family responsibilities;

(f) Eliminating barriers to employment for women with disabilities, including vocational training, reasonable accommodation and social protection for those unable to work.

Health

15. Please provide information on:

(a) Root causes of early pregnancy rates and prevention strategies beyond contraceptive provision;

(b) Measures to ensure equitable access to sexual and reproductive health services and safe abortion services in accordance with international human rights standards, and to increase the number and availability of gynaecology and obstetrics specialists, including female doctors, particularly in the Pa Enua;

(c) Timeline for decriminalizing and legalizing abortion, at least in cases of rape, incest and threat to life or health of the pregnant person, criteria for access to abortion services through referral to New Zealand (para. 190), and measures to address financial and geographical barriers;

(d) Timeline for conducting a needs assessment on women's mental health and developing programmes addressing postnatal depression;

(e) Adoption of clinical guidelines for health sector response to sexual and intimate partner violence, including post-rape care protocols, in accordance with World Health Organization standards;

(f) Interventions to address high rates of obesity and gestational diabetes;

(g) Measures to ensure that lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women have access to adequate and unbiased healthcare services, including mental, sexual and reproductive health, and gender-affirming healthcare where applicable, and that healthcare providers are adequately trained;

(h) Measures to ensure supported decision-making, sexual and reproductive rights and autonomy of women with disabilities in the area of health, preventing coercive procedures such as forced sterilization, coercive abortion and institutionalization, and supporting their right to family life.

Economic empowerment

16. Please provide information on:

(a) Data on women's access to credit through the Business Trade and Investment Board, including approval rates and barriers, and whether targeted financial support mechanisms for women-owned businesses are planned;

(b) Whether maternity and paternity leave provisions and childcare subsidies extend to women in informal employment and women migrant workers, and a timeline for extending social welfare benefits to women migrant workers;

(c) Assessment mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of women's economic empowerment programmes;

(d) Concrete measures to value and support women's unpaid labour in agriculture, marine resources, the blue economy and domestic work.

Rural women

17. Recalling paragraph 40 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and the Committee's general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, please provide information on comprehensive strategies to address barriers faced by rural women in the Pa Enua, including limited access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, landownership, safe drinking water, justice mechanisms and decision-making processes, and measures to address transportation and logistical challenges.

Women facing intersecting forms of discrimination

18. Please provide information on:

(a) Timeline for extension of social welfare benefits and employment protections to migrant women workers and their children, noting that they are not currently eligible for social assistance (para. 180);

(b) Ensuring that migrant women and their children have access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services, and whether health insurance coverage extends to refugee and asylum-seeking women;

(c) Ensuring that migrant women experiencing sexual harassment, exploitation or abuse can safely report violations and obtain access to justice and support services without fear of deportation or retaliation;

(d) Access to education for children of migrant women workers and non-discriminatory access to child welfare benefits and social services.

19. Recalling paragraph 44 of the Committee's previous concluding observations and noting the decriminalization of consensual same-sex relationships through the Crimes (Sexual Offences) Amendment Act 2023, please provide information on awareness-raising activities to address stigmatization and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women across all settings, as well as on available studies to understand barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights and ensure adequate protection and support services.

20. Please provide information on:

(a) Assessment of the implementation of the Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2020–2025, including progress, challenges, resources allocated and plans for renewal, as the policy approaches its end date, for women and girls with disabilities;

(b) Ensuring the accessibility of information, communications, public facilities, transportation and services across all islands;

(c) Conducting studies and sex- and disability-disaggregated data collection to understand barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities to the full enjoyment of human rights across education, employment, health, protection from gender-based violence, and political participation and access to justice.

Climate change and disaster risk reduction

21. Recalling the Committee's general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, please provide information on measures to ensure women's meaningful participation in climate change policy development, implementation and monitoring, integrate gender-responsive approaches into the national environment strategic action framework for 2024–2028 and disaster risk reduction strategies, assess intersectional gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, protect women environmental human rights defenders and collect sex-disaggregated data on climate impacts and women's representation in climate-related decision-making, including regarding extractive industries and deep-sea mining.

Marriage and family relations

22. Please provide the timeline and status of the review of the Matrimonial Property Act 1991–92 to ensure equal property rights for women in marriage and upon its dissolution, including in relation to property division, inheritance and child custody, and measures to ensure equal rights for women in de facto relationships, including in relation to property division, child custody and economic protection.

Ratification of other treaties

23. Please provide information on concrete steps taken towards ratifying the nine major international human rights treaties as well as all fundamental International Labour Organization conventions to which it is not yet a Party.