



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Ninety-second session

### Summary record of the 2197th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 13 February 2026, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Akia (Rapporteur)

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

*Combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of Lesotho (continued)*

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*In the absence of Ms. Haidar, Ms. Akia (Rapporteur) took the Chair.*

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

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

*Combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of Lesotho (continued)*  
(CEDAW/C/LSO/5-7; CEDAW/C/LSO/Q/5-7; CEDAW/C/LSO/RQ/5-7)

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

*Articles 10–14*

2. **A representative of Lesotho**, responding to questions raised at the previous meeting (CEDAW/C/SR.2196), said that the Government provided free and compulsory basic education for girls and boys. Having achieved parity in enrolment, the Government now focused on targeted measures to maintain the progress for girls and improve retention of boys. Under the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy Policy, the expulsion of pregnant students was prohibited. Re-entry policies, counselling and community awareness-raising programmes had been put in place to support pregnant students in continuing and completing their education without stigmatization. The Ministry of Education and Training collaborated with the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation and other stakeholders to ensure that learners in rural areas and vulnerable situations had access to scholarships from the Ministry of Education and Training and the National Manpower Development Secretariat; scholarships were also available from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the country's development partners. School feeding programmes, inclusive education programmes and appropriate sanitation facilities had also been established and provided to learners in vulnerable situations in rural areas, including children with disabilities and children from low-income households, with a view to reducing structural barriers to education.

3. Skills training programmes, mentoring and career guidance aimed at promoting girls' participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and vocational subjects had been incorporated into the curriculum with a view to facilitating their transition to decent employment. Pursuant to the Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021, the Government ensured access to inclusive education, in collaboration with civil society organizations, with which it conducted campaigns to improve access to and retention in education among children with disabilities. The police and NGOs promoted the use of child helplines, which were now widely used. Gender-responsive curricula, teacher training initiatives and community dialogues had been introduced to challenge norms that restricted girls' subject choices and leadership opportunities. Laws ensuring women's representation in educational governance structures were in place and were strengthening gender-responsive decision-making. However, the lack of a data management system limited the availability of disaggregated data and, in turn, the Government's ability to allocate resources in an informed manner and conduct targeted interventions to improve retention, completion and learning outcomes.

4. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, in Lesotho, as in most States, socioeconomic rights were not subject to the jurisdiction of the courts and were realized progressively in accordance with available resources. Despite other priorities, the Government had achieved significant progress in providing free secondary education to children from disadvantaged families. Efforts would be made to ensure that women and men could benefit equally from technical and vocational education and training courses.

5. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, despite the country's small, developing economy, the Government was committed to fulfilling its obligations under articles 10 and 11 of the Convention, including by contributing to scholarship and other programmes for its people in collaboration with development partners.

6. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether mechanisms were in place to ensure public awareness, including in rural areas, of laws and initiatives aimed at preventing pregnant girls from dropping out of school.

7. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, in the light of the high rate of unemployment among young women, she wondered what measures the State Party would take to increase women's labour force participation and address the gender wage gap. She wished to know whether the State Party would enact laws to extend social protection to the many women in the country's informal economy. It would be useful to know what steps would be taken to support women in the garment-making industry who had lost their jobs and social protection as a result of the uncertain future of the United States African Growth and Opportunity Act.

8. **A representative of Lesotho** said that it was standard practice for representatives of relevant ministries to appear on national television and radio broadcasts to raise public awareness of recently adopted laws. The Government also worked with civil society organizations to raise awareness of new laws in targeted communities, including, in some cases, by translating them into local languages. Such efforts had proved effective in raising awareness of laws among women and girls.

9. **A representative of Lesotho** said that Development for Peace Education was an example of an NGO that independently raised awareness of newly adopted laws among communities with a view to helping them to support government initiatives. It was desirable for more NGOs to engage in such efforts.

10. **Ms. Tisheva** said that, given that the adolescent birth rate was 94 births per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19, that 60.5% of them were mothers or pregnant and that they tended to hide pregnancies and were reportedly reluctant to talk about pregnancy with their families and use contraception, she wondered what steps had been taken to prevent early pregnancies, including measures to prevent rape and increase the provision of comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education and access to contraception, such as information about sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV. She wished to know what steps had been taken to provide the necessary support to ensure that early pregnancies and parenthood did not result in girls' dropping out of school. It would be useful to know what concrete measures were in place to further reduce maternal and infant mortality.

11. Given that the rate of maternal deaths resulting from unsafe terminations of pregnancies remained high, with most cases occurring in public hospitals, that abortion-related complications were the main reason for admissions to hospital among women and that more than 35% of gynaecological and obstetric admissions among girls aged 10 to 14 were abortion-related, she would welcome details of the plans and timeline in place, if any, for the decriminalization of abortion in all cases and the safeguarding of access to safe abortion and post-abortion care services throughout the country. She wished to know whether the State Party had made it obligatory for medical professionals who refused to provide sexual and reproductive health services on grounds of conscientious objection to refer women to alternative healthcare providers and what penalties were imposed for misuse of conscientious objection. She wondered what policies and mechanisms were in place to ensure that rural women, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women had unrestricted access to all physical and mental healthcare services.

12. In the light of information that HIV prevalence remained high among adults, with women disproportionately affected, it would be useful to know what specialized education and awareness programmes on contraception, sexuality, mental health, HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment were in place that targeted rural women and girls and what steps were being taken to expand HIV education, treatment and prevention among lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and girls. In the light of the international reduction in donor funding, she wished to know what policies and programmes were being developed and implemented to ensure national funding for HIV/AIDS and women's health and reproductive rights.

13. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government was prioritizing efforts to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, improve healthcare outcomes and promote gender equality, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. In recognition of the need to transform laws and policies surrounding abortion to reduce risks posed to women and girls, in addition to the Penal Code of 2010, which permitted abortion on medical grounds, the country had passed the Domestic Violence Act of 2022, which permitted the termination of pregnancies resulting from incest or rape. Awareness-raising campaigns on

sexual and reproductive health and rights were currently being held for young women and girls, parents and communities with a view to preventing factors that led to early pregnancies and abortions, including early sexual activity. The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation and civil society organizations also conducted awareness-raising campaigns for young women and girls on the use of and issues surrounding contraceptives.

14. In November 2025, the Government, with support from development partners, particularly the United Nations Population Fund, had undertaken to encourage girls and young women to continue their education by launching a menstrual health and hygiene initiative under which girls and young women aged 10 to 24 – or, in the case of young women with disabilities, 10 to 27 – were provided with sanitary towels. The initiative was currently being piloted in Mokhotlong and Maseru Districts and would be piloted in Mafeteng District from February 2026 onward. Approximately 600 girls and young women had benefited from the initiative thus far. The Government provided young people with education on sexual and reproductive health issues at adolescent health corners. Free sexual and reproductive healthcare services were provided by 57% of health clinics, while 68% of facilities were within 10 km of villages. In addition, 86% of young people had received relevant information, which would help to ensure that they received quality healthcare. Lesotho had 25 hospitals and 251 other healthcare facilities, including private clinics and mobile clinics that served remote and rural communities. The Ministry of Health implemented the “M-Mama” programme in collaboration with the private sector and civil society.

15. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know what steps were being taken to expand HIV education, treatment and prevention to lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and girls, including in rural areas. It would be useful to hear what policies and mechanisms were in place to ensure that rural women, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women had unrestricted access to all physical and mental healthcare services. She wondered whether the State Party was making provision in the national budget to sustain its progress in combating HIV/AIDS and whether it was making similar provision for other reproductive healthcare services for women and girls.

16. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, given that, even in the very restricted circumstances in which they were permitted, abortions could be complicated, humiliating procedures that were often hampered by conscientious objections on the part of medical and judicial personnel, she wondered whether the State Party had put in place a timeline for the issuance of clear guidance and the establishment of agile procedures and pathways to ensure women’s rapid access to legal abortion, including in cases of rape and incest. She wished to know what steps the State Party would take to reduce its current reliance on non-State partners for the provision of healthcare services.

17. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Government was engaging with alternative partners in civil society and the private sector to ensure the ongoing accessibility of healthcare services in the face of reduced donor funding. Work was being done with civil society organizations, including women’s groups, the media and communities, to ensure that HIV-related information and services were received by the people who needed them. The Government planned to gradually absorb into the national budget HIV-related programmes that were receiving reduced support from development partners, extending their implementation periods in the process.

18. **The Chair** said that, given that, in 2019, non-communicable diseases had reportedly accounted for 45% of deaths in the country, she wished to know how that State Party intended to reduce that burden, particularly in the case of women and girls.

19. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that, given that the State Party’s macroeconomic policies did not fully address the gendered nature of economic inequality, thereby limiting women’s ability to scale their businesses, transition into the formal economy and benefit from growth-oriented economic policies, she wished to know how the State Party incorporated a gender-equality perspective into the design, implementation and evaluation of its macroeconomic policies, particularly its fiscal, budgetary, and economic growth policies, including by assigning value to women’s unpaid work. She wondered what concrete gender-responsive elements and indicators had been included in the National Strategic

Development Plan for the period 2018–2023 to monitor and evaluate progress in women’s economic empowerment and participation.

20. She would welcome data, disaggregated by age and location, if available, on the effectiveness of the coverage provided by the State Party’s non-contributory old age pension scheme, particularly with respect to women aged 70 and older, including information on access gaps, disparities between urban and rural areas and efforts to ensure income security and social protection for women aged 60 to 69 who were currently excluded from the scheme. She wondered what steps the State Party had taken to address gaps related to coverage, the adequacy of benefits, issues faced by women over the course of their lives and the realities faced by rural women, women with disabilities and women with discontinuous work histories, employment in the informal sector or interruptions related to unpaid care work. It would be useful to know what economic inclusion measures had been prioritized under the Productive Safety Net and Livelihoods Project to address gender-specific constraints faced by women from all categories and what proportion of beneficiaries were female-headed households.

21. She would appreciate details of regulatory and other measures taken by the Central Bank to promote gender-responsive financial inclusion and women’s access to credit, savings and other financial services. She wished to know whether the State Party had put in place gender-specific guidelines, capacity-building initiatives or incentives for commercial banks and microfinance institutions to support the effective implementation of existing policies. She would welcome publicly available data, disaggregated by sex, sector and location, on public procurement awards made under the Public Procurement Act of 2023 that had been systematically collected to monitor women’s participation in, and the success rate of, inclusive public procurement processes.

22. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the Law Reform Commission would conduct a review of the country’s laws on economic matters with a view to progressively achieving gender parity in that area. The Government promoted women’s access to credit and financial services through inclusive financial policies and supported women-led cooperatives and partnerships with financial institutions. It remained committed to implementing a programme on business, health and horticulture that had formerly received funding from the Millennium Challenge Account and was restructuring the programme to assume full responsibility for it. In addition, the Government was collaborating with the private sector on a programme that had increased women’s participation in the economy by providing them with access to credit and reducing their financial transaction costs.

23. **Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia** said that she would welcome more data on the “Her Empire” project, including whether it included mentorship schemes and covered access to finance and the digital economy. She wondered how the Government was ensuring that women were being provided with employment opportunities under the Digital Transformation Policy for 2025 and whether the Policy was effectively reaching rural areas.

24. She wished to know how much the State Party had invested in increasing women’s participation and leadership in sports management to encourage women to participate in sport professionally and engage in physical activity without being restricted by cultural norms.

25. **The Chair** asked whether the State Party had conducted a study to understand why women preferred to use the informal banking sector despite the risks stemming from the lack of transparency in that sector and what steps it was taking to enhance equal access for women and girls to sufficient, reliable electricity to support their economic empowerment.

26. **A representative of Lesotho** said that both men and women tended to turn to the informal banking sector because the response was faster and more frequently positive. Nevertheless, the Government was striving to ensure that the formal banking sector accommodated all types of customers.

27. **Ms. Mu** said that the Committee noted with concern that, despite proactive policy measures to promote their development, rural women continued to face higher rates of poverty, limited access to education, healthcare, water, sanitation, electricity and transport and lower participation in decision-making processes. Women’s control over land and productive resources was restricted by traditional land tenure systems. Their capacity to

engage in sustainable agricultural practices was constrained by gender segregation in informal, low-income employment and lack of access to credit and appropriate technologies. The adverse effects of climate change were exacerbating their difficulties. Against that backdrop, she wished to know what measures the State Party had taken to empower rural women to participate in local development planning, access financial services and acquire applicable skills and technologies, what percentage of rural households had access to social welfare services, piped water supply and sanitation facilities, and what disaster mitigation plans had been developed to support rural women in coping with the existential threats posed by climate change and to alleviate poverty and care burdens.

28. While she welcomed the adoption of the Persons with Disabilities Equity Act of 2021, she noted that it did not contain specific provisions for women and girls with disabilities, that it permitted institutionalization and residential care and that it failed to safeguard the right of women and girls with disabilities to social participation and to sexual and reproductive health. She urged the State Party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and would welcome information on the measures taken to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women with disabilities in public life and to promote their self-reliance through guaranteed equal access to income-generating opportunities, credit and employment. She would also welcome information on measures to promote the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities and to safeguard their sexual and reproductive rights. Disaggregated data on the impact of the Environmental Health Policy and subsidized primary healthcare on access to health services for rural women and girls and those with disabilities would also be welcome.

29. **Ms. Barriteau** said that, notwithstanding commendable developments, notably in the area of healthcare, violence, harassment and discrimination by State and non-State actors against women based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression still occurred, and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women did not enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other women. Moreover, the Constitution did not include sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression among banned grounds for discrimination, even after the adoption of the Tenth Amendment, and the relevant legal framework contained inconsistencies and outdated terminology and lacked guidelines, making it difficult to successfully apply for legal gender recognition. The Committee was concerned that discrimination, violence and abuse against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women were widespread.

30. Accordingly, it would be interesting to know what measures had been taken to put an end to discrimination by State and non-State actors against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, particularly in the areas of health, access to justice, protection from violence and legal gender recognition and whether there were plans for constitutional reform or the introduction of a comprehensive anti-discrimination law to provide protections concerning sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. She also wondered what measures had been taken to change negative stereotypes and convey positive images of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women as active participants in all aspects of society. Information on prosecutions and convictions for hate crimes, violence, harassment and intimidation against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and girls would also be of interest.

31. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, owing to weak monitoring and evaluation systems, the Government often failed to meaningfully track progress on its various interventions and was unable to provide much of the statistical information requested by the Committee.

32. The Government acknowledged the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and was implementing, in collaboration with development partners, programmes to address the negative impact of climate change through resilience, with a focus on land reclamation and the promotion of climate-smart, sustainable forms of agriculture, the beneficiaries of which were primarily women. The Government also promoted self-help groups in rural communities and community-based microfinancing groups.

33. The previously mentioned measures to promote the sexual health and reproductive rights of women also encompassed women with disabilities; however, the minimal

institutional capacity to include persons with disabilities meant that not all women with disabilities benefited from the measures. Efforts were under way to increase that capacity. For instance, the Lesotho Mounted Police Services had established a disability unit to address disability inclusion, and some healthcare institutions had begun engaging the services of sign language interpreters.

34. For the first time, Lesotho had accepted – and widely disseminated – recommendations emanating from the universal periodic review concerning enhanced protection and equal recognition of the rights of members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, including women. Furthermore, the Government, in partnership with the community’s representative organizations, was conducting nationwide awareness-raising campaigns to inform those women of their rights and empower them to engage in self-advocacy. With regard to the question raised concerning constitutional reform, while section 18 did not expressly prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, it included the phrase “and others”, which the judiciary had interpreted expansively to cover grounds not expressly mentioned, such as disability and HIV status. She trusted that the courts would extend that interpretation to cover sexual orientation.

35. **A representative of Lesotho** said that, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 6, the Government provided potable water and sanitation services in rural areas. In 2025, 2.2 billion maloti had been allocated to policies and programmes designed to ensure a sustainable water supply in rural communities and protect water resources. During the 2025/26 financial year, the Government would be examining the infrastructure to be built in additional areas, eventually providing more than 550,000 individuals with a dependable and sustainable potable water supply. Currently, slightly over 72% of the population had access to water and 50% to basic sanitation.

36. In acknowledgement of the fact that rural women faced inequalities, efforts were being made to expand services, including healthcare, transportation, water, sanitation and electricity, to rural areas. Under rural electrification initiatives, women would be eligible for subsidized rates, thus helping them set up income-generating activities and, more generally, reducing structural rural-urban disparities. In addition, steps were being taken to correct the situation whereby most micro and small enterprises were women-owned but tended to be concentrated in low-income and informal sectors, with a focus on improving women’s access to credit and training, including through the “Her Empire” campaign.

37. **Ms. Barriteau** asked what the current availability and geographic coverage of legal aid and survivor support services were in rural areas, what budget was allocated to them, including for capacity-building for local courts and customary authorities intervening in dispute settlement, whether a mechanism was in place to track judicial decisions referring to the Convention and whether there was a system to monitor and address gender bias among the judiciary, including local courts and customary authorities. She also asked what policies and procedures were in place for the recognition of the gender identity of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women on their identity documents.

38. **The Chair** asked what lessons the State Party had learned from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to ensure that, should a similar crisis recur, food insecurity did not reach such heights again and that the gendered impacts of the crisis on women and girls were mitigated.

39. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the local courts were fairly well distributed across the constituencies, but the nature of the terrain in certain areas meant that they were not equally accessible to women with disabilities. Measures to decentralize legal aid services were ongoing, although, again, women with disabilities did not have equal enjoyment of them owing to a lack of institutional capacity to implement disability inclusion. While there was no system to track judicial decisions referring to the Convention, thanks to the digitalization component of the Government’s ongoing justice sector reform, decisions of the High Court and the Appeals Court could be searched and accessed through a website.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

40. **Ms. González Ferrer** said that it would be helpful to know what specific mechanisms had been put in place to ensure the effective and uniform implementation of the Legal

Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2022, particularly in rural areas where customary law tended to predominate, and what steps the State Party was taking to inform women of their inheritance rights and to ensure effective enjoyment of those rights, including through training for public officials and accessible complaints mechanisms. She wondered whether there were plans to abolish all exceptions to the minimum age for marriage and to repeal provisions giving the father the final say over a child's marriage when the parents disagreed. She was interested in hearing about any dissemination and training measures that had been introduced to ensure that the Counter Domestic Violence Act of 2022 was implemented with a gender perspective and any measures to identify cases and punish perpetrators of violence against children committed with the aim of hurting their mothers. She was also interested in hearing how the State Party planned to ensure that the principle of equality always prevailed over discriminatory customary laws, for instance with regard to the rights of widows in matters of burial and inheritance.

41. **A representative of Lesotho** said that child marriage was an ongoing problem, exacerbated by economic factors, that required new solutions. The minimum age for marriage had been raised to 18 years, thus banning child marriage and making it a punishable offence. However, sometimes girls voluntarily chose to marry for financial reasons, which was why the Government was working to empower women economically. In terms of inheritance rights, nationwide campaigns were conducted to raise awareness of relevant laws and women's empowerment activities, legal aid was available to women involved in inheritance disputes, and community dialogues were held to promote gender equality in marriage and family life.

42. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the relevant laws afforded equal inheritance rights to boys and girls and to men and women and empowered widows to exercise burial rights and to administer their estates after the death of their spouse. In practice, however, the laws were not always recognized, especially in rural areas, hence the focus on better disseminating them.

43. **Ms. González Ferrer** asked in what specific ways the State Party was engaging with traditional leaders, men and boys in its attempt to effect a change in mindset.

44. **Ms. Barriteau** asked what measures were in place to remove barriers faced by women in unregistered customary marriages, especially when their validity was contested, and how the Tenth Amendment was reconciled with the Chieftainship Act and existing customary laws that restricted women from becoming principal chiefs in their own right and with the exceptions to non-discrimination rules contained in article 18 of the Constitution.

45. **A representative of Lesotho** said that the dialogue with the Committee had provided an opportunity to carry out a critical self-assessment, to reflect on the meaning of and need for promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls and to identify implementation gaps and challenges. The Government remained dedicated to implementing the Committee's concluding observations, which it awaited with immense positivity. The Government firmly believed that women's economic empowerment depended on equal access to land, property, fair wages and quality education, inclusion in decision-making and leadership roles and the protection of their bodily autonomy through comprehensive sex education. It would continue to value women and girls and foster better understanding of their rights and obligations in a democratic society, as well as create opportunities for women to engage with each other, with leaders and with society.

*The meeting rose at 5 p.m.*