



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

Distr.: General  
26 October 2023

Original: English

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-sixth session

### Summary record of the 2014th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 18 October 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Peláez Narváez

## Contents

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

*Fifth periodic report of Albania (continued)*

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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)**

*Fifth periodic report of Albania (continued) (CEDAW/C/ALB/5; CEDAW/C/ALB/Q/5; CEDAW/C/ALB/RQ/5)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Albania joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Albania** said that all ninth grade students were provided with free textbooks. Furthermore, free transport was provided to all students who met certain criteria, with priority given to Roma and Egyptian children. Measures had been taken to facilitate enrolment at certain school levels for children who had been unable to progress through the system or who had dropped out of school. Girls who had not completed compulsory education in a mainstream establishment were able to do so by studying part-time. Steps had been taken to improve school infrastructure, especially in rural areas. The Ministry of Education and Sports had increased the number of psychosocial workers in schools. Psychosocial workers acted as a liaison between the school and the community.
3. Under the “Let’s Do Homework Together” programme, children had the option of completing their homework after school with the assistance of their teachers. Parents could help to organize after-school leisure activities for children. Parents and teachers cooperated to organize educational sessions in which they discussed a wide range of issues with children, including women’s rights. Under another programme, schools were used as community centres, where children tried out artistic and sporting activities with the assistance of members of the community. Every child in the country had the right to compulsory education, even if he or she was the only student in the class. If no classroom was available, a teacher travelled to the student’s home. In collaboration with the World Bank, steps were being taken to introduce an educational tool known as SmartLab HQ into classrooms, including classrooms with mixed aged groups.
4. **A representative of Albania** said that efforts had been made to encourage girls to enrol in vocational education courses. Following a decision of the Council of Ministers taken in 2019, all girls who enrolled in such courses automatically received a half-scholarship. Free transport was also provided to girls enrolled in vocational education courses. Officials conducted outreach work with the families of ninth grade students and visited schools to inform children and parents about the full range of vocational courses available. In vocational education, the dropout rate for boys was higher than the rate for girls.
5. The National Agency for Employment and Skills had recently launched a computer coding course to teach coding skills to young persons. Half of the course fees were subsidized for employed young persons who wished to retrain, while all of the fees were subsidized for unemployed young persons. Girls accounted for around 40 per cent of the students.
6. Teachers and psychosocial workers in schools organized extracurricular activities, including workshops and seminars, to raise children’s awareness of subjects such as early marriage. Inclusion was one of the key themes of the National Education Strategy for 2021–2026, and the school curriculum was based on the principles of human rights and non-discrimination. Students studied civics, where they learned about the importance of equality and combating discrimination.
7. **A representative of Albania** said that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had four agencies that provided services and information to rural areas by engaging directly with farmers and holding meetings, training sessions and other events. The number of women who had benefited from such services had increased in recent years. Applied science centres were used to provide training to women farmers.
8. **A representative of Albania** said that the National Agency for Employment and Skills operated 11 training centres, one of which was a mobile centre capable of reaching remote and rural areas. The number of women who had received vocational training had increased in recent years.

9. Although the employment rate for men was higher than the rate for women, measures were being taken to narrow the gap. For instance, employment offices provided guidance services and training to enable unemployed persons to find work. Over the previous five years, more women than men had found employment through such services. Over the same period, women had also constituted the majority of persons who had benefited from employment promotion programmes. Follow-up studies showed that women were more likely than men to retain jobs found through such programmes. Employment agencies were now able to provide more personalized assistance to jobseekers.

10. Employment promotion programmes provided special bonuses to particular categories of women, including women who cared for young children or older persons. In cooperation with a French Government programme, targeted support was provided to women in rural areas, including to help them find employment. Currently, the main focus of the new National Skills and Employment Strategy, which covered the period from 2023 to 2030, was on developing digital skills. Under the Youth Guarantee Programme, all young people aged 29 years or under would be required to participate in a specific programme within four months of registering as unemployed.

11. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that the Constitution and a number of national laws provided that employers should pay their staff equal pay for equal work. The Law on Gender Equality in Society contained a specific article that addressed employment relations, while the Law on Protection against Discrimination provided for protection in the area of employment. The gender pay gap had decreased from 6.5 per cent to 4.45 percent between 2020 and 2022. The average monthly wage for women had risen since the previous year. The highest gender pay gaps were found in banking and insurance, information and communications technology and manufacturing. The gender pay gap in the public sector stood at over 9 per cent.

12. According to the Institute of Statistics, over 30 per cent of companies in Albania were led by women. The Government was working with the State labour inspectorates to promote greater transparency in the area of wages. Plans were in place to require employers to publish employees' salaries as a means of tackling the gender pay gap. Labour inspectors were being trained to identify significant gender pay gaps, especially in the private sector. The Government and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination were developing publications to raise awareness of legislation on women's rights, including women's right to equal pay for equal work.

13. Women bore the brunt of unpaid care work, and caring duties often prevented them from finding paid work. In order to address that situation, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection had begun implementing a project to subsidize the social and health insurance contributions paid by mothers with three or more children if the youngest child was under 5 years of age. Currently, around 8,900 mothers were benefiting from the policy, which also provided for subsidized contributions to their State pension funds. The new social protection strategy, which would cover the period from 2024 to 2030, provided for the allocation of funding for social services for older persons as well as children. In line with the strategy, some older persons and other vulnerable persons would be entitled to receive health care and alternative care in their homes.

14. **Ms. Mikko** said that she would welcome information on any measures taken to facilitate access to schooling for children with disabilities, especially outside the capital city. She wondered what the State party would do to reduce the gender pay gap in sectors where it was particularly high, such as manufacturing, and whether new fathers in Albania took parental leave.

15. **Ms. Manalo**, noting that relatively few young people of either sex studied science, engineering, technology or mathematics (STEM), said that she wished to know what measures would be taken to attract more students to those subjects.

16. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to know whether the new National Skills and Employment Strategy had drawn on assessments of earlier strategies or on gender-disaggregated data relating to skills and employment. Given that some women might find it difficult to meet the entry requirements for vocational training, particularly the requirement that applicants must have completed nine years of formal education, she wondered whether those requirements might be relaxed for Roma women and rural women.

17. **A representative of Albania** said that, in 2022, the Council of Ministers had issued a decision establishing that financial support would be provided to students studying certain subjects, including STEM subjects. Students studying those subjects paid lower fees and also received a small payment. Owing to the special status of STEM subjects, students who opted to study them could usually do so at a university located near their home.

18. A post of State-funded mediator had been established at the level of secondary education. The role, which was normally performed by a civics teacher, involved working with the parents and other family members of students from poor and marginalized groups, in particular the Roma and Egyptian communities, in order to increase their awareness of and help them gain access to educational scholarships and transport options.

19. Preschool education was provided for children between 3 and 6 years of age but was not compulsory. For children who were unable to attend, including those whose families had recently moved to Albania, preparatory classes were provided to help prepare them for enrolment in primary school.

20. **A representative of Albania** said that legislative changes introduced in 2015 had improved the country's parental leave provisions. Mothers were now entitled to one year of paid maternity leave, and leave for the first 63 days after birth was mandatory. Fathers benefited from three days of paid paternity leave at the time of birth. Upon expiration of the mandatory period of maternity leave, the father could take the mother's unused leave as paternity leave, provided the mother returned to work. Since 2015, upon returning to work, nursing mothers could opt to work an eight-hour day with a two-hour break or a six-hour day without breaks. More than 15,000 women and approximately 700 men currently took advantage of the leave to which they were entitled, with an increase in the number of fathers benefiting from parental leave in recent years reflecting a growing awareness of their responsibilities as parents.

21. The Government was aware of the fact that some earnings went unreported, and it had been monitoring the situation. Measures it had taken to address the problem in recent years had had some impact.

22. **A representative of Albania** said that for children with special needs, mainstream schools throughout the country provided access to special education teachers and classes. Psychologists advised parents of children with disabilities to help them decide whether to enrol them in those establishments or alternatively in special needs schools, which offered additional services such as meals, transport and physiotherapy. There were also two institutions catering for blind and deaf children, respectively. They accepted pupils from the whole of Albania and taught a specialized syllabus which, since 2022, had been extended to cover high school education, including information technology courses.

23. **A representative of Albania** said that the new National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023–2030 was a logical continuation of the previous strategy. However, it also contained new components, relating to digital skills and the implementation of the Youth Guarantee programme, which were designed to respond to developments in the labour market. The monitoring reports relating to the previous strategy could be accessed on the website of the Ministry of Finance and Economy.

24. The criteria required to enrol in most vocational training courses included a compulsory level of education. The qualification level reflected not only the skills and knowledge that persons studying those courses needed at the outset, but also the fact that the Albanian qualification framework had been brought in line with European Union standards. Additionally, two short-term training courses, a course entitled "Start Smart" and a digital skills course, were provided for all unemployed jobseekers, regardless of their level of education, in order to help them gain basic skills to facilitate finding placements.

25. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she wished to know when the State party had begun vaccinations against human papillomavirus (HPV), how many girls had already benefited, how effective the associated information campaign had been and why the minimum vaccination age was 13 years instead of 9 or 10 years. She would also like the delegation to clarify how the State party ensured information about cervical and other cancers reached all women in order to combat prejudice in certain communities, including among rural women.

She wished to know how access to health care in rural areas would be improved for women and girls, including those belonging to the Roma and Egyptian communities, women with disabilities and women from other vulnerable groups. Were specialized health-care centres needed for that purpose, in addition to integrated health-care centres?

26. She would like to know about any proposed measures to improve access to family planning services and affordable and modern contraceptives for women and girls, and to curb the early pregnancy rate and associated high rate of abortion among girls. She would also like the delegation to comment on how effective the State party's Life Skills and Sex Education Programme had been in addressing those issues, including in terms of raising awareness about them and in preventing violence and discrimination against women and girls, including gender stereotyping.

27. The Committee would welcome information about how the State party intended to tackle the important issue of prenatal sex selection through research, monitoring, data collection, legislation and policy measures, and at what levels, in both the public and private health-care systems and in society, through prevention and communication strategies. Would specialized advice, counselling and protection be provided for women who were forced to undergo a sex-selective abortion?

28. **Ms. de Silva de Alwis** said that she wished to know how the Government planned to play a more active role in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental, social and governance reporting through implementation of the Law on Accounting and Financial Statements and how it might foster synergy between the influence of the Convention, the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental and social governance. The social component was of particular importance, as it included the presence of women on boards of directors and economic benefits for women in corporate value chains and supply chains.

29. She wondered how the Law on Social Assistance was being implemented and with what benefits. In the light of the Law on Social Housing, whose provisions prioritized housing for teenage mothers, victims of domestic violence and victims of trafficking in persons, she wished to know how the access to housing of older women, single mothers and women in rural areas was safeguarded.

30. She would be grateful for information about any support that might be provided to women in rural areas to help them gain access to credit and subsidy schemes, and she wished to know how they could be assisted in completing bureaucratic procedures and paperwork relating to loans and collateral. The Committee would also like to find out whether the State party had conducted an impact assessment into the Business and Investment Development Strategy 2021–2027, especially regarding women entrepreneurs in STEM subjects and other non-traditional fields.

31. The Committee would like to hear about any lingering discriminatory effects of the customary law known as Kanun of Lek Dukagjini. It would also like to know whether the Government had an action plan to dismantle stereotypes in sports, and it would like to find out what action would be taken to address the fact that professional female footballers earned half as much as their male counterparts. She would welcome current data on the number of female presidents and vice-presidents in the State party's sports federations and wished to know how it could be ensured that all federations had written policies combating gender-based violence and addressing the subjects of gender equality and non-discrimination.

32. **A representative of Albania** said that the 2021–2030 National Health Strategy had been approved on 6 April 2022. It was intended to improve the quality of and access to health care by: increasing the number of healthy life years enjoyed by the population, *inter alia* by modernizing health infrastructures; improving the safety and quality of hospital care; improving medicine quality and safety, in line with European Union standards; improving emergency preparedness; developing an integrated and better-coordinated approach to health care; and enhancing transparency and accountability in order to restore public confidence in the health system.

33. The country's health screening offering was composed of a national check-up programme to detect and prevent non-communicable diseases, breast and cervical cancer

screening programmes and dental care and eyesight check-ups for children up to 16 years of age. The National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania 2021–2025 included measures to improve the overall access of those communities to health and social services.

34. There was neither a minimum age requirement nor a need for parental approval in order for teenagers to access contraceptives. However, unmarried girls under 16 years of age required the approval of a parent or legal guardian in order to undergo an abortion. The legal age of marriage was set out in the Family Code.

35. The provisions of the National Action Plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health 2022–2030 included antenatal and postnatal health care for mother and child; improved HIV prevention and treatment measures; fertility advice and assistance; measures to prevent certain reproductive cancers; family support; free contraceptives; comprehensive sexual health education in all schools; reproductive health education at the primary education level; and early intervention and action to address sexual and gender-based violence.

36. **A representative of Albania** said that public health care was provided free of charge to the country's population and that persons between 30 and 70 years of age were entitled to an annual check-up to screen for chronic illnesses. Women were the main beneficiaries of the programme.

37. One of the measures of the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma Persons and Egyptians 2021–2025 involved making health-care services available and accessible to those communities. Roma girls and women could attend a maternity hospital or a family planning clinic to undergo health check-ups. A campaign to raise awareness about family planning and healthy lifestyles was under way.

38. As part of the current Breast Cancer Awareness Month, mammogram screenings were being offered to women all over Albania. An awareness-raising campaign was taking place with the participation of politicians and other national figures, and female police officers had been provided with free mammograms. Screenings would remain available after the current campaign drew to a close. Women in prisons were also screened, as part of a multidisciplinary approach to health care that included visits by social workers.

39. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that 74,000 women between 50 and 65 years of age had undergone free mammograms in two specially adapted vehicles and in hospitals since the beginning of 2020. The vehicles had recently brought screening services to women in the most remote parts of the country. In the previous year, more than 15,000 girls had benefited from the HPV vaccination, the cost of which was fully covered by the State.

40. The current legislation prohibited gender-based discrimination in sports. None of the country's 42 recognized sports federations were led by a woman, but 10 of them had female general secretaries. The federations' access to funding from the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth was partly conditional on the number of women in their leadership bodies, and all sports activities scheduled by the Ministry and federations for male participants had corresponding activities for females.

41. Nearly all aspects of Kanun of Lek Dukagjini customary law had been superseded. Football, volleyball and basketball classes were now given to both boys and girls in secondary education, and there had been an increase in physical education classes from the first year of compulsory education.

42. Social assistance provision for the victims of trafficking and violence against women had increased threefold in recent years. New programmes had been put in place for women victims with three or more children, who received special social and health allowances because they could not take paid employment while caring for their children. Under the baby bonus scheme, young families received cash payments of up to \$400 for the first child, rising to \$1,200 for the third and subsequent children. For the victims of physical and psychological violence, under the social assistance programme psychological and social counselling helplines had been set up, together with a referral mechanism to enable victims to obtain treatment.

43. **A representative of Albania** said that, in accordance with the Law on Social Housing, the country's housing programme benefited members of vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, teenage mothers and victims of domestic violence. Older persons received a government pension and could be accommodated in homes funded and run by the social services.

44. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that, with regard to counselling for women, young mothers and older persons, there were already 100 health-care centres which not only provided primary health care and psychological and social counselling, but also gave access to all other social assistance programmes. A further 100 centres would be in operation by the end of 2023, providing similar services.

45. **Ms. Stott Despoja**, recalling that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to development had stated in 2022 that the development of rural and remote communities in Albania was lagging behind, said that she would like to ask the delegation to explain the tangible measures taken to address the economic and social issues faced by women in those communities. She would appreciate information on steps taken to specifically address the barriers to rural women's access to employment programmes, including the lack of childcare and transport.

46. Noting that, according to a 2020 report by UN-Women, more than 80 per cent of land titles were in men's names, and that in 2018 women had accounted for only 8 per cent of landowners, she said that she would be interested to hear about any mechanisms the State party planned to introduce in order to increase women's access to land rights and ensure equality in issues of informal settlement and inheritance. Given the vulnerability of rural women to climate-related issues, she would like to know what measures the State party was taking to tackle the impact of climate change on the agricultural sector. She asked the delegation to explain how the State party was working to improve access to information and health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health services and family planning, for rural women, women with disabilities and Roma women.

47. Noting that only 2 per cent of the large and growing population of older persons received long-term formal care, the majority being cared for by families or unpaid carers, she said that the Committee would appreciate information on the measures taken to increase the availability of affordable, appropriate long-term care for older women, particularly in rural areas. Lastly, she asked the delegation to clarify whether its programmes to increase rural women's access to paid employment opportunities extended to the private sector as well as the public sector.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

48. **Ms. Hacker** said that, in the light of a judicial reform that had apparently reduced the number of courts and increased the number of obstacles to access to justice, she would like to know what the State party was doing to secure access to justice for all women. She asked the delegation to say whether women involved in divorce proceedings were offered free legal representation throughout the procedure and, if not, why not. When fathers did not comply with court orders to pay child support, did the mothers receive any financial support from the State?

49. The Committee had received alarming reports that family court judges did not deal properly with divorce cases involving domestic violence. They had reportedly granted custody or visitation rights without providing safeguards for the mother and children. She would like to know whether the State party had conducted any studies on such proceedings, what training family court judges received regarding domestic violence and whether safe places existed where violent fathers could see their children under supervision. What was done in cases where a mother was in prison and, in defiance of a court order, a father refused to take a child to see her?

50. Noting that the law did not recognize cohabitation or parental rights for same-sex couples and parents and that lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex women who separated from their partners were exposed to discrimination in respect of property and inheritance rights, tax benefits and their relationship with their non-biological children, she asked whether the State party planned to rectify that situation.

51. **A representative of Albania** said that the Strategy for Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries 2021–2027 included several actions to support women in rural areas. Grants were available, for example, for investment in agricultural equipment and for marketing. Beneficiaries received direct payments and were required to show that their produce was local and that the projects observed the principles of gender equality and involved women and young people. Grants were also available for the acquisition of fixed assets and for marketing measures for rural businesses or start-ups run by women and young people, particularly in non-traditional sectors. As to the impact of climate change on rural women, direct financial support was available to enable farmers to obtain advisory services in relation to issues involving the rights of women and young people, climate change and ecosystems.

52. **A representative of Albania** said that under the 2016 Law on Social Care Services, protection against discrimination was provided for women migrants or refugees or other groups coming into the country. In addition, training was provided to the members of the mechanism for referral of cases of domestic violence in order to enable them to provide services to those vulnerable groups. A considerable number of women from Afghanistan had been accommodated in the north-east of the country and had been provided not only with health care, housing and food services, but also education for school-aged children, including lessons in their mother tongue. They had also been informed about the services available under the law and made aware of how to report cases of violence and discrimination. A number of Afghan refugees had now integrated into Albanian society and were either employed or had set up their own businesses, with local government support.

53. The Action Plan of the National Strategy for Gender Equality contained measures to promote rural women's participation in public and political life. State institutions and also civil society organizations worked to raise awareness and create the conditions for their participation.

54. One means of promoting rural women's economic empowerment was the organization of agricultural and craft fairs and exhibitions. They were able to brand their products, which opened up prospects for contracts both within Albania and abroad.

55. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that older women were covered not only by the universal primary health-care system, but also by the psychosocial services provided through health centres. In addition, a new mobile home help scheme was now available in rural areas; it aimed to provide daily assistance and also to help empower beneficiaries and avoid institutionalization. The services were fully funded by the State, through the Social Fund.

56. **A representative of Albania** said that, under the law on guaranteed legal aid, 20 centres had been set up across the country, as well as clinics that worked with universities to provide free assistance. Awareness raising had been carried out among all categories of beneficiaries. The legal aid centres were also duly monitored on a regular basis.

57. **A representative of Albania** said that, based on the legislation on domestic violence and violence in the family, the Minister of Internal Affairs and the Minister of Health and Social Protection had issued a joint instruction in 2018 on a procedure for conducting risk assessments and on preliminary measures of immediate protection. In accordance with that instruction, a police officer analysed the level of risk to the victim's life, health and liberty in the short term and assessed the need for immediate protection measures and measures to prevent a further escalation of violence. The domestic violence unit of the municipality and the child protection officer were also notified and took part in the risk assessment. When children were victims of both trafficking and domestic violence, a psychologist was brought in.

58. A court could order preliminary protective measures such as the immediate removal of the perpetrator from the residence, an injunction to prevent the perpetrator from going to the victim's workplace, residence or shelter or a police escort to accompany the victim to the residence to collect personal belongings. If necessary, weapons could be seized.

59. **A representative of Albania** said that under the Family Code, only marriages between a man and a woman were recognized. Recommendations made by the Ombudsperson and by civil society organizations to amend the Code were being considered

by various groups of experts. The rights of the children of same-sex couples were protected under the law in the same way as those of any other children.

60. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would appreciate more specific details on the question of access to sexual and reproductive health services for rural women, particularly those with disabilities and older women. She wondered whether the State party had considered introducing specific legislation with regard to older persons or the “third age”.

61. **Ms. Hacker** said that she would appreciate answers to her questions on the enforcement of child support, on the degree to which a father’s violence was taken into account in custody decisions and on the situation of children whose mothers were in prison. Could the delegation also clarify whether divorcing mothers who were poor had legal representation throughout the divorce proceedings, including during litigation? In same-sex couples, could a non-biological mother adopt the biological children of her spouse?

62. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that the Government was currently drafting a policy document covering all stages of the life cycle, including the third age, and detailing the responsibilities of the various ministries for providing services and administering social assistance programmes and policies. The document would become part of the National Strategy for Development and Integration 2024–2030, and the Committee would be informed about its implementation.

63. **A representative of Albania** said that, with regard to visitation rights and custody of children where the father had perpetrated domestic violence, under the amended legislation, the responsible authority was required to take steps to protect children from violent parents or legal guardians by placing them in alternative care or arranging for emergency protection measures. The law also provided for the perpetrator to be relieved of parental responsibility or guardianship of juveniles, children or persons with disabilities. Where it was believed that meetings with the perpetrator would not be in the best interests of a child or a person with a disability, legal guardianship could be revoked.

64. Primary legal aid was available to women free of charge at legal clinics, civil society organizations and higher education institutions across the country, and also from the legal aid offices of the Ministry of Justice. Secondary legal aid was provided by various civil society organizations. In all, 170 lawyers had been providing free legal aid in 2023. In divorce cases, free legal aid was provided up to the end of the proceedings.

65. The judicial reform had only recently come into effect and it was not yet possible to assess the implications of the reduction in the number of courts. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection was working on a new law on reproductive and sexual health that would contain a series of new measures.

66. **Ms. Seferi** (Albania) said that the primary health-care centres and the four family health centres provided special services for reproductive and sexual health. As to the question about adoption, Albanian law made provision for consensual adoption. Lastly, she wished to say that her Government was committed to implementing any recommendations made by the Committee as part of its action plans and strategies to promote gender equality, protect the rights of women and combat domestic violence.

67. **The Chair**, thanking the delegation for the constructive dialogue, which had provided further insight into the situation of women in Albania, said that the Committee commended the State party on its efforts and encouraged it to take all necessary measures to address the various recommendations that would be issued.

*The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.*