



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

Distr.: General
26 February 2013

English only

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Fifty-fourth session**

Summary record of the 1108th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 15 February 2013, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Ameline

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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)*

*Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the Republic of Cyprus (continued)
(CEDAW/C/CYP/6-7; CEDAW/C/CYP/Q/6-7 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Cyprus took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 10 to 14

2. **Ms. Bailey** asked what results had been achieved by the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2007–2013. It was not clear from the report whether the enrolment rate of girls in primary and secondary schools was as high among Turkish Cypriots and children from migrant worker families as it was among Greek Cypriots. How did students from minority backgrounds perform in school in comparison with the Greek-speaking majority and what was being done to help those students to overcome challenges such as language barriers? She would welcome information on the outcome of the programmes mentioned in the written replies to raise awareness about gender stereotypes and encourage girls and young women to enrol in technical schools and pursue fields of study and professions traditionally reserved for men. More information was needed on the State party's programme to prevent violence and delinquency in schools and the extent to which girls were affected by such violence, particularly by sexual violence. Lastly, it would be useful to have further details of the dropout rates of girls and women at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

3. **Ms. Patten** would appreciate more information on the project to reduce the gender pay gap and the project on flexible forms of employment referred to in the report. How effective were the Government's training programmes for unemployed women in promoting equal opportunities? What measures had been taken to ensure access to a wider range of occupations and posts of responsibility among women? How far had schemes aimed at increasing the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises under the project to reduce the gender pay gap succeeded in mitigating the impact of the debt crisis on the labour market? Had the schemes given rise to lasting employment opportunities for women?

4. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** (Country Rapporteur) wished to know what steps had been taken to ensure that vulnerable women, such as migrant women or women with disabilities, had equal access to maternal and child health care and family planning services given the financial, geographical and physical barriers that they faced. Was there a comprehensive national health policy on breast cancer, cervical cancer, sexual and reproductive health and age-related health problems?

5. Were contraceptives provided free of charge only when used for medical reasons and did they require prescriptions? She observed that the lack of choice, accessibility and affordability of contraceptives was likely to result in unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and unsafe abortions. Were there any studies assessing the impact of the Government's contraceptives policy on women's health? She urged the Government to collect data on abortions. Although Cyprus had recognized in its previous report (CEDAW/C/CYP/3-5, para. 171) the urgent need for an evaluation of the situation with regard to abortions, there were no available relevant statistics to date.

6. She would appreciate information on women's access to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit. What measures had been taken to address the fact that the

poverty risk among women pensioners above the age of 65 years in Cyprus was the highest in the European Union?

7. **Ms. Gabr** said that more information was needed about the Rural Development Programme for 2007–2013, in particular the measures taken to increase rural women's access to education, health, housing and basic infrastructure and banking services, loans and credit. What services and facilities were available to refugee and displaced women? Did rural women actively participate in political life and were they represented at the local level?

8. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that education was free for all, including non-citizens, at all levels, and primary and secondary education was compulsory. Parents who did not send their children to school were prosecuted. There were programmes for the integration of Turkish-speaking and other students with mother tongues other than Greek. Turkish Cypriots who chose to study in the south of the country, the majority of whom studied in English-speaking schools, were provided subsidized education. There were higher Government subsidies for schools taught in minority languages, such as Armenian, than for Greek Cypriot schools. Special language lessons were offered to children from migrant families to further their integration. She added that incidents of violence and sexual violence were not specific to schools and bullying was being dealt with.

9. **Ms. Petrides** (Cyprus) said that free education was provided to all children, regardless of whether or not their parents were residing lawfully in Cyprus. Her Government planned to reform education, modernize schools and make them more democratic under a programme aimed at addressing student's individual needs and fulfilling their potential. To address the issue of gender stereotyping, political parties and non-governmental organizations and student and parent associations had participated in developing new national curricula for elementary and secondary education. The new curricula had been assessed for gender and cultural stereotypes including derogatory language, before they were introduced in 2011.

10. Turkish Cypriot students could choose between public and private schools. Tuition, miscellaneous fees and the cost of educational materials, uniforms and books were subsidized for Turkish Cypriot students attending public schools in Government-controlled areas. Private school tuition was partially subsidized by the Government. Special programmes, run in collaboration with embassies and NGOs, were developed to respond to the specific educational needs of minorities.

11. The Government had a policy of zero tolerance towards violence. A study to collect data on and analyse the nature of violent incidents, including verbal abuse and bullying, had been conducted. The dropout rates of students over the age of 15 was higher among boys than girls, standing at 11.2 per cent overall and 4 per cent for girls. Vocational education was not popular in Cyprus, as 82 per cent of students opted for higher education. The Government was therefore seeking to encourage girls to take up apprenticeships and become familiar with occupations not traditionally chosen by women and pursue vocational education. There had been a successful Government programme to provide 16-year-old girls with professional experience in the field. The Government had also set up a national forum to inform young women of vocational opportunities and provide counselling for retraining.

12. **Mr. Michaelides** (Cyprus) said that despite the reduction in the gender pay gap in Cyprus, it remained, at 18.3 per cent, one of the widest in the European Union. A project subsidized by the European Union had been introduced to promote the principle of equal pay and accredit companies that applied it. In addition, a conference had been held during the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union to present best practices regarding equal pay. Other activities included the training of managerial staff, careers

advisers and teachers and seminars with trade unions and employers' organizations for the incorporation of the equal pay principle in collective bargaining.

13. The current unemployment rate of women was only slightly higher than that of men, since the crisis had had an impact on both male- and female-dominated sectors. Schemes to stimulate women's employment had been introduced, such as a programme by the Cyprus Productivity Centre to promote flexible forms of employment, a project in place until 2015 to encourage part-time work, job sharing and flexible hours, among other forms of work, a scheme run by the Human Resource Development Authority from 2010 to 2012, which had included subsidizing women's training and encouraging work experience and a scheme under the Department of Labour to foster equal employment opportunities for women. Maternity legislation was also being revised and labour inspection was being enhanced to enforce legislation on sexual harassment and equal conditions of employment. Budget funds had been allocated to local authorities and non-governmental organizations to further reconcile work and family life by providing more facilities for the care of older persons and children, thereby making it easier for women to take up employment. Lastly, a department had been set up under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance to promote the social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

14. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the law permitted the termination of pregnancy if, in the view of two medical practitioners, there was a risk of harm to the mother or any of her children or a risk that the child would be born with disabilities, or if the pregnancy had resulted from rape.

15. **Ms. Azina-Chronides** (Cyprus) said that health care was available to all, regardless of income. Subsidies were available for vulnerable groups such as families with more than three children, single parents, migrants and asylum seekers, and migrant women who were pregnant received free prenatal and postnatal services. Certain screening programmes for breast and cervical cancer were in place and the national strategic plan for the prevention and control of cancer included the provision of nationwide Pap smears and vaccinations, however the lack of funds was currently impeding its implementation. Through a joint programme with the Cyprus Federation of Business and Professional Women, the Government offered Pap smears free of charge to some rural women. While oral contraceptives were available in pharmacies only by prescription, all other methods were accessible to the public. However, not all contraceptive methods were available as some contraceptives were not imported into the country. Her delegation could provide further information on them.

16. There were no official statistics available on abortions. It was difficult to collect information on the number of abortions, including among minority women, as health professionals were reluctant to report unlawful abortions to the authorities. However, more needed to be done in that area.

17. Adequate services, including home visits, were offered to women with disabilities and mobility problems. Initiatives aimed at improving services and facilities for persons with disabilities had also been introduced under the national strategic plan for rare diseases.

18. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that self-employed rural women were no longer excluded from the social insurance scheme. Furthermore, women who had not been economically active were entitled to a social pension from the age of 36. A programme to increase rural women's participation in decision-making had been set up and a follow-up assessment of the programme would be conducted. The status and education of rural women had nevertheless changed significantly in recent years, with more and more women involved in agritourism and small-scale farming.

19. A plan to integrate migrants into society had been introduced in the area of education, health, housing and awareness-raising, with specific measures for women and

children. The plan incorporated training, including a programme for journalists on the portrayal of migrant women in the media.

20. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that, as Cyprus was an island State, rural women had ready access to urban centres. It was also important to note that both men and women enjoyed equal access to bank loans.

21. **Ms. Petrides** (Cyprus) said that the budget for education, including programmes that targeted specific student needs and promoted gender equality, would be kept at its current level and cover all students.

22. **Ms. Zou Xiaojiao** said that Cyprus was still considered to have one of the highest proportions of children from internally displaced families. While such children from households headed by women had the right to State services, they still suffered discrimination and were not afforded the status of an internally displaced person, unlike the children from households headed by men. Further clarification in that regard would be appreciated. The situation of domestic workers was a matter of concern, as they were not recognized in trade unions, were not entitled to overtime pay and often endured abuse. What measures had been adopted to address that situation?

23. **Ms. Jahan** asked what concrete steps had been taken to integrate women into the labour market; what safeguards had been established to ensure non-discrimination in employment; whether comparative data could be provided on migrant women and majority communities in the field of employment; whether mechanisms were in place to protect migrant worker rights; whether the Government intended to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177); and what measures had been taken and sentences handed down following the numerous complaints made by migrant workers.

24. **Ms. Bailey** requested clarification of the school dropout rate of girls. She would also welcome further information on measures to address gender segregation in fields of study at the tertiary level of education and the occupational segregation that ensued.

25. **Mr. Bruun** asked what action was being taken regarding the pay gap and the minimum wage in the light of the current climate of economic austerity.

26. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether there was a range of specific services available for elderly people.

27. **The Chairperson**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, said that, in the course of her work in the French Government, she had set up a fund that offered special loan guarantees to women in an effort to encourage female entrepreneurship. Such special measures could be implemented for defined periods of time or for designated economic activities, and had the added benefit of acting as an economic stimulus.

28. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the Government of Cyprus also carried out programmes to encourage female entrepreneurship, but they operated through the use of grant schemes. Responding to a question concerning internally displaced persons, she recalled that, in 1974, following the Turkish invasion and the subsequent division of the island, one third of the total population of the island had been displaced from their homes. The authorities had decided that only the children from displaced households headed by men, and not those headed by women, were entitled to a refugee identity card and the benefits deriving from it. When confronted by groups calling for an end to such discrimination, the State had argued that it could not afford to assist all internally displaced persons and that if it granted the benefits also to children of displaced women, soon the entire population would be receiving them. A bill put forward in 2010, which had called for equal entitlements to the children of both displaced women and men, had failed on the

grounds that it amounted to an increase in the general budget expenditure and therefore fell under the remit of the executive branch. The issue currently remained unresolved.

29. **Mr. Michaelides** (Cyprus) said that, as a general rule, the terms and conditions of employment for migrant workers — understood as referring to migrants who were not European Union nationals — were the same as those for Cypriots. Domestic workers, who accounted for the largest percentage of migrants workers in Cyprus, received a net salary of €331, as well as free room and board. The terms and conditions of their employment were set out in a model contract prepared by the Department of Labour Relations, which provided for a 7-hour workday, a 6-day work week, 24 days of paid annual leave and 9 official holidays. It also provided for health and accident insurance and 30 days of sick leave a year. Migrant workers could submit complaints to the Department of Labour Relations. The statutory minimum wage, which applied only to certain low-paid professions, such as office clerks, sales assistants, cleaners and caretakers, started at €870 a month and rose to €924 a month after six months of employment.

30. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that Cyprus, like all other European Union member States, had not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, as European Union regulations and directives covered many of the same areas as the Convention.

31. **Ms. Varnavidou** (Cyprus) said that women and men had equal access to banking, insurance and other financial services, in keeping with the Equal Treatment of Men and Women (Access to and Supply of Good and Services) Law. In addition, a women's cooperative bank, funded by the European Union, targeted women as potential entrepreneurs.

32. **Ms. Petrides** (Cyprus) said that the dropout rate, which had been calculated by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, had taken into account all persons residing in Cyprus at that time of the survey. Consequently, it included migrant domestic workers who had not completed compulsory education in their country of origin. Young men completing mandatory military service and university students studying abroad were not included in the calculation.

33. There was no gender segregation implicit in school curricula; rather, female students themselves tended not to pursue vocational training. The Government was endeavouring to reverse that trend by raising awareness about vocational training opportunities among girls and encouraging their participation in such training.

34. With regard to the availability of educational opportunities for migrants, a system of educational priority areas, modelled on a French system, channelled additional resources to schools in disadvantaged areas. Special arrangements to accommodate pupils from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds included bilingual teachers, the inclusion of intercultural subjects in the curriculum, smaller class sizes and free school breakfasts and lunches.

35. **Mr. Pantelides** (Cyprus) said that Cyprus welcomed the recommendation of the Secretary-General on the involvement of women in the Cyprus peace process put forward in a recent letter addressed to both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community leaders. As a follow-up to that letter, focal points from the two communities and one from the United Nations had been appointed and were currently engaged in talks on how to implement the recommendation. There had been face-to-face negotiations between the two community leaders with facilitation provided by the United Nations. Women had participated in the negotiations as advisers to the two leaders and as heads or members of committees assisting the efforts. However, the most significant role played by women in the negotiation process had been as participants in civil society initiatives to promote reconciliation and dialogue between the two Cypriot communities.

Articles 15 and 16

36. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said it was regrettable that the periodic report contained no information on family law, especially given that the Constitution had originally stipulated that divorce and family matters should be governed by the laws of the various recognized religious groups and adjudicated in the corresponding courts. The Constitution had been amended to introduce civil marriage only as recently as 1999 and mixed marriages between Greek and Turkish Cypriots only in 2003. She requested clarification of the current situation in the light of those historical developments. Specifically, she wished to know which courts had jurisdiction to hear family matters, whether the substantive law changed according to the religious affiliation of the parties and which law governed mixed marriages.

37. With regard to the civil law, she requested additional information on the matrimonial property regime in Cyprus. The method used for the division of marital assets, which took into account each spouse's contribution to the increased value of the other spouse's property, seemed cumbersome and potentially discriminatory to divorced women. She asked whether contributions to the increase in the other spouse's property included non-monetary contributions, such as caring for the home and family, and whether the definition of property included tangible and non-tangible assets. She enquired as to whether fault in the breakdown of the marriage was taken into consideration in such calculations. Had the Government conducted studies of the economic consequences of divorce on women, bearing in mind that divorce was a probable cause of the feminization of poverty? She would appreciate receiving information on the status of de facto unions, and what rights were granted to the partners in the event of separation.

38. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that the history of marriage laws in Cyprus had to be viewed against the background of the birth of the Republic in 1960. The Constitution drawn up at that time had taken into account the coexistence of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and their distinct languages and religions. Laws relating to marriage had therefore reflected the prevailing attitude in both communities that marriage should be governed by religious authorities. The introduction of the first legislation on civil marriage had met with resistance from religious groups and society, whose members at the time failed to regard civil marriage as a human right or even as an option. For many years, the partition of the island had thwarted the development of relationships between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which could explain why it had taken so long for mixed marriages to be socially acceptable and authorized by law. Attitudes were changing very gradually.

39. Some criteria for matrimonial property were set out in the law, and the rest was left up to the court, as was often the case in common law jurisdictions. Issues relating to cohabitation were new and were currently a topic of public discussion in Cyprus. The Ombudsman had drafted a report on the subject, which contained several recommendations, some of which also related to same-sex relationships. The report was currently under consideration by the Government.

40. **Ms. Petrides** (Cyprus) said that, in divorce cases, where the property of one spouse had increased during marriage, the other spouse was entitled to the part of the increase that was attributable to his or her contribution. The figure of one third of the total property had been established as a standard share in order to facilitate the division of marital assets. A special provision in the law stipulated that child-rearing and caring for elderly relatives was a non-monetary contribution that could be taken into account in court decisions.

41. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked whether property relations, alimony and inheritance were governed by religious law or whether they were universally accepted as civil law matters.

42. **Ms. Koursoumba** (Cyprus) said that all those matters were covered by civil law, and that couples wishing to divorce, for example, had to obtain a divorce under both civil law and the relevant religious authority.

43. **The Chairperson** said that she hoped that the achievements of the Cyprus Presidency of the European Union in 2012 would give impetus to the State party's efforts to bring its laws fully into line with the Convention.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.