



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Sixty-fifth session**

**Summary record of the 1450th meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 4 November 2016, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Hayashi

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(continued)

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia (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)*

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia (continued)*  
(CEDAW/C/ARM/5-6; CEDAW/C/ARM/Q/5-6 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Armenia took places at the Committee table.*

*Articles 10 to 14 (continued)*

2. **Mr. Stepanyan** (Armenia) said that, while the number of women choosing non-traditional career paths had increased in recent years, the issue of the feminization of certain professions remained largely unresolved. Women accounted for almost 50 per cent of persons choosing to pursue studies in economics and management. The share of women who took courses in construction and architecture had increased significantly since 2011. In 2016, just over 50 per cent of all doctoral students were women. All schools and higher education institutions were equipped with a careers centre and, in schools, students received careers guidance. However, there was a need to devote greater efforts to breaking down gender stereotypes and enhancing the prospects of young women.
3. In Armenia, the highest dropout rates were recorded at the end of compulsory secondary education. With a view to reducing dropout rates, the Education Act had been amended to extend the length of compulsory education from 9 to 12 years. Once the relevant amendments had entered into force, students who had completed nine years of secondary education would be required to continue their studies in a school or in a vocational training institution.
4. Although statistical data on ethnic minorities was not collected in Armenia, general statistical data disaggregated by sex was available. A number of household surveys indicated that fewer students were dropping out of school to perform household tasks or to marry and that students who did drop out were only absent for certain periods of the year.
5. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that the Government had made women's sexual and reproductive health a major priority and had adopted a number of strategies in that area. Armenia had given effect to all the World Health Organization guidelines on maternal, reproductive and women's health. Rural women benefited from all the new services put in place following the overhaul of the maternal and child health system. Under the new system, all women were entitled to receive obstetric care that was tailored to their needs and could be referred to more specialized health-care facilities to receive it. The Demographic and Health Survey, which served to supplement the statistics collected by government agencies, confirmed that the vast majority of pregnant women living in urban and rural areas received antenatal health care. Most women made four or more antenatal visits. The Survey proved useful in identifying regions in which those services were not being provided consistently, which enabled the Government to take remedial action. Given that large swathes of the country became inaccessible in winter, an emergency response service whereby pregnant women could be transported to a nearby health-care facility to receive maternity care had been put in place.
6. All the Government's programmes and strategies related to abortion were aimed at reducing the number of abortions being performed and making the conditions in which they were conducted safer. Women could have medical abortion methods as an alternative to surgical procedures if they so wished. A new law on controlled medication had been adopted to ensure that medication such as that prescribed to induce an abortion was not widely distributed or abused. Regrettably, women continued to resort to abortion as a

method of family planning. However, the Demographic and Health Survey pointed to an overall decrease in the number of abortions being performed for that purpose. There were still more cases of abortion being used as a method of family planning in rural areas than in urban areas.

7. Armenian civil society was actively involved in raising public awareness of the need to eradicate the practice of sex-selective abortion. A study conducted on the root causes of sex-selective abortion revealed that many of the reasons why parents preferred sons to daughters were psychological, stemming from the desire to perpetuate the family name and the misconception that sons would take better care of them in their old age. The efforts made to dispel such misconceptions had proved effective, as confirmed by the reduction in the number of sex-selective abortions being performed.

8. The media and Armenian civil society were actively engaged in raising women's awareness of the different modern methods of contraception available to them. The Demographic and Health Survey showed that, despite every woman in the country being familiar with at least one modern method of contraception, less than 30 per cent of those women actually made use of such methods, preferring to use traditional methods instead. In 2014, a separate budget line for the provision of modern contraceptives had been introduced as a means of guaranteeing poor women access to free birth control.

9. Persons with disabilities were entitled to free State health care and received all the medication that they needed, provided that it was prescribed by a doctor. The World Health Organization had certified the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Armenia in 2016. The vast majority of pregnant women were tested for HIV and those who were found to be infected received counselling and antiretroviral treatment.

10. **Ms. Hofmeister** asked whether there was an equivalent of the English term "gender" in the Armenian language and, if so, whether the exact meaning of the term was immediately clear. She also wished to know how the English term "gender" was translated into Russian.

11. **Mr. Bruun** said that the shortcomings in the statistical data on employment provided by the delegation only served to underscore the need for the State party to improve its existing data-collection methodology. He asked when the State party might begin that process. In view of the disproportionate number of women working in the informal sector, where incomes were lower and access to social security was limited, he would like to hear more about the strategies in place to bring those women into the formal sector. Lastly, despite the delegation's assertion that the labour inspectorate was not needed to crack down on sexual harassment in the workplace, experience in other countries suggested that criminal sanctions alone were not sufficient and that a robust complaints mechanism was the key to addressing the phenomenon of sexual harassment effectively. He asked whether the State party had taken steps to establish such a mechanism.

12. **Ms. Gbedemah** asked whether the training on gender issues dispensed to teachers could be easily applied to the different subjects that they taught, including religious education, and what steps had been taken to prevent religious education from being used to reinforce gender stereotypes. It would also be useful to know the outcome of the gender analysis conducted as part of the review of national education policy and whether there were any plans to adopt temporary special measures to increase women's representation in non-traditional career areas and in management posts within the education sector. She would also appreciate more information on the measures taken to address the problem of seasonal dropouts and to increase the enrolment rate of women in vocational training courses. She wished to know how students' progress on the healthy lifestyle course was monitored. Was the content of the course vetted for gender bias? Did the textbooks used as part of the course explain gender concepts in a comprehensible fashion?

13. **Ms. Chalal** asked whether the share of the State budget allocated to health care had been raised to 5 per cent in keeping with the recommendation made by the World Health Organization to that effect.

14. **Mr. Stepanyan** (Armenia) said that, once every five years, teachers in Armenia were required to attend a training programme which included modules on gender education. Teachers whose subject dealt with gender issues directly received practical training on how to deliver the content of the syllabus in a gender-sensitive manner, while the remainder were provided with a general introduction to gender issues and guidance on how to guarantee the equal treatment of male and female students. In Armenia, students studied different world religions from a historical perspective and did not normally encounter gender-sensitive issues in that context.

15. Many women occupied administrative posts within the education sector, including within the Ministry of Education and Science, schools and vocational training institutions. However, despite the progress achieved at the higher education level, the majority of girls in secondary schools and vocational training institutions still chose to study subjects that would lead to traditional careers. It was hoped that extending the length of compulsory education from 9 to 12 years would help to remedy that situation.

16. The aims of the curriculum for gender education were to promote the legal and social equality of men and women and to eliminate gender stereotypes. The ongoing review of the national education policy focused on the progress made in mainstreaming gender issues in the national curriculum and would help to guide the Government's future gender mainstreaming efforts. There were also plans to develop gender guidelines for textbooks and to include gender issues in the syllabi of individual subjects.

17. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that, in 2015, 9 billion Armenian drams, or 11 per cent of the total health-care budget of 80 billion Armenian drams, had been allocated to antenatal care. Around 20 per cent of the total health-care budget had been allocated to maternal and childcare. Victims of trafficking now enjoyed access to free State health care as a result of recently enacted legislative amendments. Furthermore, guidelines for the provision of medical and preventive care services to women who were victims of sexual violence had been introduced. Women in that situation could avail themselves of those services free of charge.

18. **Ms. Mirzakhanyan** (Armenia), responding to the question on the use of the term "gender", said that the country's language academy took pains to ensure that all foreign words were translated into Armenian. The term had been rendered as the Armenian word for "sex". However, given the structure of the Armenian language, the use of the Armenian equivalent of "gender" as an adjective gave rise to misunderstandings and confusion among parliamentarians. For terms such as "gender mainstreaming" were misleading and sounded awful when translated into Armenian. It had therefore been decided to use the international loan translation "gender" rather than its Armenian equivalent in phrases such as "gender equality" and others.

19. On the question of statistical data on employment, the Government published reliable official statistics on the basis of its annual labour force surveys that constituted a primary source of information for international experts, non-governmental and civil society organizations and State institutions. While not actually used for the allocation of benefits, those statistics were useful for targeting assistance to people registered as unemployed.

20. **Ms. Virapyan** (Armenia) said that national, regional and local educational authorities cooperated in addressing the problem of children not in school, including child victims of trafficking. Where those problems could not be addressed at the community level, solutions were provided at the regional and national levels.

21. The Criminal Code did not have a specific article on sexual harassment and only contained provisions on rape. However, trade unions could provide assistance towards the resolution of sexual harassment complaints in companies and organizations. Victims of harassment could also take their case to the courts, although no such precedents had been set in Armenia. The term “gender” had entered the Armenian language and was widely used and accepted in the country, including in the text of the Act on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

22. **Ms. Gabr**, noting that the Social Assistance Act contained provisions on maternal and child welfare, said that it was unclear what social support and protection was afforded to female heads of household in cases of divorce, widowhood and the migration of their husbands. Further clarification was needed regarding the pensions and social benefits available to rural women, pregnant women and women with disabilities and on State efforts to tackle poverty in light of the pay gap between women and men. There was a need for further details of how the State party was implementing the Committee’s general recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women (CEDAW/C/GC/34) considering the high proportion of employed women engaged in agricultural activities and of rural households headed by women. Specific figures should be provided to support the State party’s mention of improved productivity and working conditions in small enterprises in view of the array of negative factors affecting rural women, such as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the earthquake of 1988, land privatization, the migration of male family members, infrastructure deficiencies and the remoteness of markets. The delegation should also comment on reports of increased numbers of women living in poverty, together with a decrease in the number of women property owners.

23. Concerning vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as women in border areas, the Committee would appreciate an update on the progress of the bill on the protection of rights and social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Information was also needed in respect of efforts to assist vulnerable ethnic and religious minorities, such as Yazidi and Molokan women, who faced difficulties such as early marriage and early school leaving. The Committee also wished to learn how the Government intended to support Armenian women who had returned to the country after migrating and who were not always welcomed. While the State party was to be commended for hosting and supporting Syrian refugees and asylum seekers of Armenian origin, it should nevertheless indicate how it intended to combat sexual and gender violence against those women.

24. **Ms. Virapyan** (Armenia), referring to the Committee’s concerns about childcare and single mothers, said that the benefits provided to families under the Social Assistance Act included a lump sum for the family and a benefit for each child. Social support was available to urban and rural women alike. One problem was that the time that women took off work to care for their children was not counted towards their length of service, and they thus lost their entitlement to certain social benefits. However, benefits were provided to women and their children who fell into the poverty-level category. Support was available for children without one or both parents, including cash or even housing assistance, if needed, when they reached a certain age.

25. As regards ethnic minorities and early marriage, the Family Code set the minimum age for marriage at 18 years for both men and women. Cultural and ethnic specificities were taken into account so that marriage was permitted at 17 in certain circumstances. The Code aimed to ensure that children could lead normal lives. The delegation was not aware of cases of sexual violence against Syrian refugee women, but was willing to investigate any such reports.

26. The Government operated several programmes for persons with disabilities, including social adaptation services, the provision of equipment and care centres for adults and children with autism. It had also proposed to introduce alternative support services for

the families of children with disabilities. Persons with disabilities received a small pension and free medical care, with workers receiving certain social services and benefits.

27. **Mr. Stepanyan** (Armenia) said that the adoption of the law on the minimum age for marriage had contributed to resolving the problem of early school leaving. The main contributing factor to school dropout rates was now the temporary migration of families. The National Statistical Institute and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) were working to develop statistics that would establish whether those children continued their studies given that international reports did not take into account the migration of school-age persons. Extramural and distance-learning modes of education had been introduced to facilitate the resumption of education after the interruption of studies. Moreover, in 2015, a law had been adopted on the transition to inclusive education, which was gradually bringing children with special needs into the general education system. A cooperation mechanism was being developed in coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) so that the authorities might identify children at risk of dropping out of school, while a pilot project had shown that children often started school a year later than they ordinarily would as a result of poverty.

28. **Ms. Viryapan** (Armenia) said that the State provided mothers with a sum of about US\$ 100 upon the birth of the first and second child, and a higher sum for every child born thereafter. That initiative, while providing significant financial assistance to families, had also helped to address the country's demographic problem by providing an additional incentive to have children.

29. **Ms. Sujayan** (Armenia) said that Armenia continued to meet its commitments under the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and granted asylum to all those who met the legal requirements. There had been no cases of asylum being refused on religious, ethnic, national or gender grounds. The State Migration Service was responsible for reintegration programmes for returning women migrants and published special information to assist that group on its website.

30. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would be interested to learn about the outcomes of partnerships established with international organizations to improve women's entrepreneurial capacity, access to finance and economic empowerment. The delegation should also provide a description of the draft law on disability. Lastly, while she acknowledged that Armenia was abiding by the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, she wished to point out that the information regarding the plight of Syrian refugee women in Armenia had come from an Armenian source.

31. **Ms. Mirzakhanyan** (Armenia) said that the Government had recently adopted the draft law on persons with disabilities and would shortly submit it to the National Assembly. While conflict and earthquakes meant that there were higher rates of disability in border areas, such specific issues were not taken into account in the draft law, which was a broad, universal instrument that covered all aspects of disability, including how annual programmes of support should be organized, how budget resources should be allocated and how work should be conducted with financial and non-governmental organizations. Those programmes aimed to provide genuine support for persons with disabilities in all parts of the country.

32. The question of pensions and social support for rural women was relevant not only in Armenia, but in many parts of the world. The introduction of a mandatory pension scheme was a sensitive issue that had not been fully resolved by the pension reform undertaken in Armenia in 2014, owing to the lack of an international mechanism for the inclusion of informal workers in private pension funds. Several scholars and experts had been invited to help the Government design a system for the inclusion of agricultural and rural workers; however, their recommendations were of limited use because agricultural

workers were exempt from taxation, making it difficult to include them in a pension system. However, those workers did benefit from the universal social pension, which could be taken at the age of 65 years.

33. Regarding women's economic empowerment, a development centre for small and medium-sized enterprises, working under the auspices of the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments and in cooperation with international partners, including the Asian Development Bank, had developed strategic programmes for women entrepreneurs and also provided loans for start-ups and existing businesses headed by women.

34. **Ms. Gabr** said that the State party should give due consideration to the Committee's general recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women when developing policies in that connection. She asked whether the bill on the protection of persons with disabilities contained any specific provisions on women with disabilities and whether the State party had acted upon the Committee's general recommendation No. 27 on older woman and protection of their rights. She would welcome information in general on the status of older women in Armenia.

35. **Ms. Mirzakhanyan** (Armenia) said that, although the bill on the protection of persons with disabilities itself contained no provisions relating to particular groups, the programmes to be developed under that legislation would target specific areas.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

36. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that, while the State party was to be commended on enshrining the right to equality before the law and the right to judicial protection in the Constitution, the Judicial Code and other laws, the Committee was concerned that legislation governing the relationship of citizens with administrative bodies contained provisions setting forth grounds for differentiated treatment that might give rise to abuse by administrative officers who were not gender sensitive. She would therefore like to know how those provisions were applied in practice. She would also appreciate clarification as to whether a government proposal to remove gender-related definitions from the Act on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was still being considered by the National Assembly and, if so, what outcome the Government expected and whether any mechanism had been established to monitor and assess the implementation of the Act.

37. In view of reports of the sexist treatment of women, in particular victims of domestic violence, by law enforcement officials, she would like to know whether police officers received gender-sensitivity training and whether there were any plans to establish special units to ensure that women victims of violence were treated with the sensitivity that they deserved. She further enquired whether the Government was intending to provide legal aid to women victims of violence and what the authorities were doing to ensure that court decisions awarding custody of children to the mother were enforced.

38. **Ms. Leinarte** said that it appeared that the very low — and declining — divorce rate in Armenia could be attributed in part to the stigma attached to divorce, which even prevented some women from leaving violent relationships. She would therefore welcome information on how the Government intended to change negative perceptions of divorce. She would also welcome the delegation's comments on reports that courts were sometimes slow to rule on divorce proceedings. She enquired whether any legislation had been put in place to protect women in de facto unions, in particular their custody, property and economic rights, in the event of the dissolution of the relationship. While it was commendable that the minimum age for marriage had been raised to 18 for both men and women, it was nonetheless still possible for minors aged 16 or 17 to marry with the approval of a parent or guardian. She would therefore like to know whether the authorities would consider adopting legislation requiring court approval for marriages involving a

minor. She asked what strategy the Government had to remedy the situation of the large number of families made homeless by the 1988 earthquake who were still living in metal shelters made from shipping containers.

39. **Mr. Kocharyan** (Armenia) said that provisions on differential treatment contained in legislation relating to administrative bodies had been designed to take into account the possibility of adopting special protection measures. He was not aware of any instances of those provisions being applied to the detriment of the rights of women or of any other group; if any such infringement were to occur, it would be the result of a violation of those provisions and the principles underlying them. The Government had no current plans to review the wording of the Act on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. As to sexist behaviour by law enforcement officials, much work had been done in recent years to bring about a change in attitude towards women within the police force, including the recruitment of more women police officers and the provision of training on women's rights. Furthermore, new draft legislation set out clearly the responsibilities of the police in combating domestic violence. Any failure to enforce court decisions, including those relating to women's rights, amounted to a denial of justice and should be investigated properly.

40. **Ms. Virapyan** (Armenia) said that, although some earthquake victims continued to live in metal shelters, most had been rehoused in accordance with allocation criteria, such as the number of family members to be accommodated. The delegation would be happy to provide written information on the number of outstanding cases. A special unit had been set up within the police service to combat domestic violence; the unit, which was headed by a woman, was working very actively in that area, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, other government departments and international organizations. Any police officer found to have engaged in improper behaviour would be punished.

41. **Ms. Mirzakhanyan** (Armenia) said that, as many couples who married in church did not register their marriages with the civil registration service, the Government had provided financial incentives for them to do so. However, as far as she was aware, women's property rights, for example, were not affected by whether or not a marriage was registered.

42. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that she had not received a reply to her question about the establishment of a mechanism to monitor and assess the implementation of the Act on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

43. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would appreciate an answer to her question regarding consent for marriages of minors.

44. **The Chair**, speaking in her capacity as an expert, asked the delegation to clarify whether the term "gender equality" appeared in the Act on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

45. **Ms. Virapyan** (Armenia) said that the Act contained many gender-related terms, including gender equality and gender discrimination. Although no specific mechanism had been established to monitor the Act, an assessment of its provisions had in fact been conducted under two strategic programmes, the outcomes of which would be taken into account in developing new strategies.

46. **Ms. Avagyan** (Armenia) said that she had no data on attitudes to divorced women in society. In certain specific circumstances, for example in cases of pregnancy, it was possible for minors to marry, subject to court approval.

47. **Mr. Kocharyan** (Armenia) said that he would like to thank the members of the Committee for their thorough consideration of the issues facing Armenia. The discussion that had taken place had been an excellent exercise that would support his country's ongoing efforts to protect the rights of women.

*The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.*