



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

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

### Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Albania\*

1. The Committee considered the fifth periodic report of Albania (CEDAW/C/ALB/5) at its 2013th and 2014th meetings (see CEDAW/C/SR.2013 and CEDAW/C/SR.2014), held on 18 October 2023. The list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group is contained in CEDAW/C/ALB/Q/5, and the responses of Albania are contained in CEDAW/C/ALB/RQ/5.

#### A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its fifth periodic report. It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the previous concluding observations of the Committee (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4/Add.1) and its written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group on the fifth periodic report. It welcomes the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its high-level delegation, which was headed by the Deputy Minister of Health and Social Protection, Denada Seferi, and included representatives of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Parliament of Albania, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, the Ministry of State for the Protection of Entrepreneurship, the National Agency for Employment and Skills and the Permanent Mission of Albania to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, as well as interpreters.

#### B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2016 of the State party's fourth periodic report (CEDAW/C/ALB/4) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

\* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-sixth session (9–27 October 2023).



(a) Law No. 22/2018 on social housing, prioritizing access by victims of domestic violence, victims of trafficking and adolescent mothers to social housing services;

(b) Law No. 57/2019 on social assistance, defining victims of domestic violence and victims of trafficking as categories benefiting from economic assistance;

(c) Law No. 35/2020 amending the Criminal Code, criminalizing psychological violence and protecting women from gender-based violence by intimate partners or former intimate partners;

(d) Law No. 125/2020 amending Law No. 9669/ 2006 on measures against domestic violence, establishing coordinated referral mechanisms at the local level for the management of cases of domestic violence;

(e) The 2020 amendments to the law on measures against domestic violence, addressing discrimination against women in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic;

(f) Law No. 79/2021 on foreigners, which includes gender-responsive provisions;

(g) The Transmission Code for Audiovisual Media, which seeks to ensure gender equality and the elimination of gender-based discrimination and combat sexism in audiovisual media, in 2023.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption and establishment of the following:

(a) National Strategy on Gender Equality and Action Plan, 2021–2030;

(b) National Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2021–2025;

(c) National Action Plan on LGBTI+ persons, 2021–2027;

(d) National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons, 2021–2023;

(e) Rural Gender Equality and Tourism project, aimed at empowering rural women, in 2021;

(f) Business and Investment Development Strategy, 2021–2027, which provides that at least 30 per cent of beneficiaries of funds must be women;

(g) National Employment and Skills Strategy, 2023–2030, which includes gender equality indicators for the employment of women.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State party has acceded to the Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organization.

### **C. Sustainable Development Goals**

7. **The Committee welcomes the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and calls for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination**

throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of the State party and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.

#### **D. Parliament**

8. The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites the parliament, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.

#### **E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations**

##### **Status and visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations**

9. The Committee notes the training and awareness-raising activities for women and capacity-building for the judiciary on the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto. It is concerned that women, especially rural women, women belonging to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women are often not aware of their rights under the Convention and the remedies available to claim them.

10. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Raise awareness among women of their rights under the Convention and the legal remedies available to them to claim violations of such rights and ensure that information on the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations is accessible to all women;**

(b) **Consider establishing a comprehensive mechanism for the implementation of the present concluding observations and involve non-governmental organizations promoting women's rights and gender equality in the work of the mechanism, taking into account the four key capacities of a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up, namely, engagement, coordination, consultation and information management;**

(c) **Ensure that the Convention, the Committee's jurisprudence and its general recommendations are made an integral part of systematic capacity-building for all judges, with a view to enabling them to directly apply the provisions of the Convention or interpret national legal provisions in the light of the Convention, and of training for government officials, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officials, as well as lawyers.**

##### **Legislative framework**

11. The Committee notes that the State party has adopted a framework of laws and policies to achieve substantive equality of women and men. However, it is concerned about the limited effectiveness and the need for monitoring and evaluation of those laws. The Committee is further concerned about the lack of effective application of the principle of intersectionality to ensure gender equality for women who are victims of intersectional discrimination.

12. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Consider revising Law No. 9970/2008 on gender equality in society, in accordance with the commitment made in the National Strategy on Gender Equality, 2021–2030, to accelerate the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality;**

(b) **Apply the principle of intersectionality in order to ensure access to public services for women who are victims of intersecting forms of discrimination.**

#### **Women's access to justice**

13. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The insufficient resources allocated to the implementation of Law No. 111/2017 on legal aid guaranteed by the State, in particular in relation to victims of gender-based violence, and the poor infrastructure and lack of specialized gender-based violence units in courts, in the Office of the Public Prosecutor and within the police, resulting in an overall culture of impunity;

(b) The lack of proper investigation, evidence collection and forensic facilities and capacities, which results in lengthy delays in legal proceedings and revictimization of women;

(c) Legal illiteracy among many women and girls and the persistent reluctance of women to file complaints owing to judicial gender bias and discriminatory attitudes among law enforcement personnel.

14. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Allocate sufficient human, technical and financial resources to the implementation of Law No. 111/2017 on legal aid guaranteed by the State, with a view to ensuring access to free legal aid services for women without sufficient means in criminal, civil and administrative proceedings relating to gender-based violence and discrimination against women;**

(b) **Strengthen awareness-raising and capacity-building on women's rights and gender equality for judges, prosecutors and police officers to eliminate gender bias and stereotyping and on gender-sensitive investigation and interrogation methods and include gender-responsiveness in their performance evaluations;**

(c) **Enhance the knowledge of women and girls of their rights and of the available remedies to enforce them, placing particular emphasis on the integration of women's rights and gender equality in curricula at all levels of education and in legal literacy programmes.**

#### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

15. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That the National Council on Gender Equality, which acts as the national machinery for the advancement of women, lacks sustainable funding and sufficient human resources to effectively discharge its mandate;

(b) The lack of systematic gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgeting across all government departments;

(c) The absence of a clear division of responsibilities among gender equality officers, social workers and domestic violence coordinators at the local level, which may lead to duplication, gaps and ineffective use of resources.

16. **Recalling the guidance provided in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in particular regarding the conditions necessary for the effective functioning of national machineries, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the independence of and increase the human, technical and financial resources allocated to the National Council on Gender Equality and enhance the gender-specific expertise among its staff to enable it to effectively coordinate efforts to promote gender equality;**

(b) **Adopt an integrated gender-responsive budgeting process and allocate sufficient budgetary resources for the advancement of women's rights, ensure the application of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms across all government departments and improve the system for tracking budgetary allocations for the advancement of women;**

(c) **Enhance coordination among the different entities of the national machinery for the advancement of women and ensure a clear division of tasks, defining priorities and cooperation areas;**

(d) **Ensure the systematic collection of disaggregated data in the context of the ongoing census on the participation of women in all areas covered by the Convention to inform the formulation of gender-equality legislation and policies.**

#### **National human rights institution**

17. The Committee welcomes the reaccreditation of the People's Advocate with "A" status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in 2020. However, it notes that the Subcommittee on Accreditation encouraged the People's Advocate to: (a) advocate for a broader mandate that includes the ability to address all human rights violations resulting from the acts and omissions of private entities; (b) continue to advocate for adequate funding, including to ensure full-time staff in its regional offices; and (c) continue to interpret its mandate in a broad manner and to advocate for appropriate amendments to its enabling law to provide it with an explicit mandate to encourage ratification or accession to regional and international human rights instruments.

18. **The Committee recommends that the State party implement the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Accreditation to strengthen the People's Advocate and ensure that it has an effective and independent mandate, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles, annexed to General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993), and seek the advice and technical support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that regard.**

#### **Temporary special measures**

19. The Committee recognizes the temporary special measures in place to ensure the equal participation of women in political and public life. The Committee remains concerned, however, that the information provided by the State party indicates a lack of adequate understanding of the nature, scope and necessity of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating substantive equality of women and men, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention. It also notes with concern the absence of temporary special measures other than electoral quotas, such as temporary measures to address intersecting forms of discrimination against rural women, women belonging to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

20. **Recalling its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, para. 19), the Committee recommends that the State party adopt temporary special measures, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, to accelerate substantive equality of women and men, in particular in respect of rural women, women belonging to ethnic minorities, older women, women with disabilities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, in all areas under the Convention in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, including in political and public life, education, employment and health.**

#### **Stereotypes and harmful practices**

21. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to combat discriminatory gender stereotypes and harmful practices by launching awareness-raising campaigns. However, it remains concerned about the persistence of deep-rooted stereotypes, including as a consequence of *kanun*, concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, which overemphasize the traditional role of women as mothers and wives, thereby undermining women's social status, autonomy and educational and professional opportunities and exacerbating gender-based violence against women.

22. **Recalling its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, para. 21) and drawing attention to joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt a comprehensive strategy to eliminate patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society. Such measures should include efforts at all levels, in collaboration with civil society, to educate the public and raise awareness of the negative impact of stereotypes on the enjoyment by women of their human rights.**

#### **Gender-based violence against women**

23. While taking note of the range of measures introduced by Law No. 125/2020 amending Law No. 9669/2006 on measures against domestic violence, the Committee remains concerned at the prevalence of gender-based violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, in the State party. It also notes with concern:

(a) That cyberviolence and femicide are not defined as specific criminal offences;

(b) That the definition of rape in the Criminal Code is still based on the use of force or threat by the perpetrator rather than lack of consent;

(c) The underreporting of domestic violence against women and girls owing to victims' fear of stigmatization or reprisals, their economic dependence on abusive partners, legal illiteracy, linguistic barriers and lack of trust in the law enforcement authorities;

(d) The lack of information on the effective enforcement and monitoring of compliance with protection orders, in particular restraining and separation orders, for victims of domestic violence, which exposes women who are victims of such violence to a risk of revictimization;

(e) The lack of adequate victim support services for women seeking to escape violent relationships and the insufficient number of adequate shelters across the State party.

24. In line with its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, and with Sustainable Development Goal 5.2 on the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, the Committee recommends that the State party strictly enforce legislation criminalizing gender-based violence against women, including in sports. It also recommends that the State party:

(a) Amend the Criminal Code to specifically criminalize femicide and cyberviolence and define all forms of gender-based violence against women, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic and domestic violence, as criminal offences;

(b) Amend the Criminal Code to incorporate a definition of rape based on lack of consent that covers any non-consensual sexual act and takes into account all coercive circumstances, in line with international human rights standards;

(c) Encourage reporting of domestic violence against women and girls by raising awareness among women and men, including through educational and media campaigns, with the active participation of women's organizations, on the criminal nature of gender-based violence against women, challenge its social legitimization and destigmatize and protect women from reprisals for reporting incidents of gender-based violence;

(d) Ensure, through mandatory and continuous capacity-building for judges, prosecutors, police officers and other law enforcement officials, that gender-based violence, including sexual violence against women, is effectively investigated and prosecuted, that perpetrators are adequately punished and that protection orders are effectively enforced, with sanctions in case of non-compliance;

(e) Adequately fund victim support services by establishing a sufficient number of shelters, subsidizing shelters run by non-governmental organizations and expanding the network of specialized, inclusive and accessible shelters for women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence, taking into account their specific needs, and provide women and girls who cannot safely return to their homes with psychosocial counselling, financial support, education, professional training, income-generating activities, shelter or affordable housing and, if necessary to ensure their safety, a changed identity;

(f) Adopt harmonized protocols for the collection of data on incidents of gender-based violence against women, disaggregated by form of violence, age, region, disability and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

#### **Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

25. The Committee commends the State party on its efforts to strengthen its legal and policy framework to combat trafficking in women and girls, including the establishment of the National Coalition of Anti-Trafficking Shelters and the adoption of Law 111/2017 on legal aid guaranteed by the State, which removes the requirement of cooperation with authorities for victims to access assistance and protection. However, the Committee notes with concern that in addition to internal trafficking, the State party remains a country of origin and destination for trafficking in women and girls for purposes of sexual and labour exploitation. It also notes with concern:

(a) That refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls are at a higher risk of trafficking for purposes of sexual or labour exploitation owing to lack of victim identification;

- (b) The high number of girls exploited in prostitution in the State party;
- (c) The lack of adequately funded inclusive and accessible shelters for victims of trafficking.

**26. With reference to its general recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Promptly investigate, prosecute and adequately sentence those responsible for trafficking, ensure the implementation of the instructions for the police on early identification of trafficking victims and conduct a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the process of early identification of victims of trafficking, in particular women and girls, and their referral to appropriate services and protection;**

(b) **Address the exploitation of women and girls in prostitution and domestic servitude, decriminalize women in prostitution, prosecute and punish perpetrators, reduce the demand for prostitution and provide exit programmes for women wishing to leave prostitution, including alternative income-generating opportunities;**

(c) **Significantly increase the number and funding for inclusive and accessible shelters for victims of trafficking in both urban and rural areas and ensure free legal aid, interpretation, adequate medical assistance, psychosocial counselling, financial support, education, professional training and access to income-generating opportunities to women and girls who are victims of trafficking.**

#### **Equal participation in political and public life**

27. The Committee notes with appreciation that the representation of women in Parliament has increased to 36 per cent and that during the campaign for the 2021 general national elections, the mandatory quota for women was exceeded in the majority of candidate lists. It also notes with appreciation that 66.7 per cent of ministers are women and, following the 2019 local elections, 44 per cent of local council seats are held by women. However, the Committee notes with concern:

- (a) That only 13 per cent of municipalities are headed by women;
- (b) The persistence of structural barriers to the participation of women in political and public life, in particular in respect of rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women;
- (c) Hate speech and harassment against women politicians and candidates in political discourse, which hamper the participation of women in political and public life.

**28. Recalling its general recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, as well as target 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Provide capacity-building in political leadership and campaigning skills as well as access to campaign financing for women candidates;**

(b) **Adopt temporary special measures, such as statutory quotas and a gender parity system, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, to ensure the equal representation of women, including rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, in**

**Parliament and municipal legislative bodies, the Government, the civil service and the foreign service, in particular at decision-making levels;**

**(c) Strengthen mechanisms to prevent hate speech against women politicians and women candidates in political and public discourse, including online, and prevent harassment and threats against them, including by strengthening reporting and monitoring mechanisms, requiring all political parties to adopt codes of conduct to promote gender equality and combat harassment against women candidates and activists and holding social media companies accountable for discriminatory user-generated content.**

### **Nationality**

29. The Committee notes the measures taken by the State party to prevent and reduce statelessness, including of women and girls, and its commitment to end statelessness by 2024. The Committee also notes that the Law on Citizenship includes safeguards that protect children against statelessness. The Committee further notes with concern flaws and delays in birth registrations and in the registration, issuance and renewal of identity cards for refugee women and girls in the State party.

**30. Recalling its general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Amend the Law on Citizenship to allow for the automatic transfer of nationality from mothers to their children, including children born to Albanian women living abroad;**

**(b) Strengthen the National Civil Registry by providing it with adequate human, technical and financial resources, facilitate birth registration procedures and registration of refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls through online procedures, minimize the fees for birth registration and deploy mobile civil registration units to issue birth certificates in border, rural and remote areas;**

**(c) Ensure that girls and boys born in the territory of the State party are registered at birth and have access to Albanian nationality and identity documents.**

### **Education**

31. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The disproportionately high levels of illiteracy among rural women, women with disabilities, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and women belonging to ethnic minorities, including Roma and Balkan Egyptians;

(b) That women remain underrepresented in non-traditional fields of study, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT), owing in part to the persistence of gender stereotypes;

(c) The lack of age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education at all levels of education;

(d) Barriers preventing rural women, women with disabilities and women belonging to ethnic minorities from accessing online education programmes during the period of confinement in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular owing to the lack of technological equipment;

(e) Harassment and bullying of girls and women, in particular lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, in educational environments and the

limited information on the number of complaints and investigations in such cases and on the penalties imposed.

**32. In the light of its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education and recalling its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, para. 29), the Committee recommends that the State party promote the importance of the education of girls at all levels, as a basis for their empowerment, and:**

(a) **Reduce illiteracy rates among women and girls, with a focus on rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities, including Roma and Balkan Egyptians, and refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, and take targeted measures, including awareness-raising and special scholarships to increase enrolment, retention and completion rates among girls and women in secondary and higher education, in particular in non-traditional fields of study, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics and ICT;**

(b) **Include comprehensive, age-appropriate and accessible education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula, including education on responsible sexual behaviour to prevent early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, and provide systematic training on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls to teachers;**

(c) **Adopt and implement a strategy to ensure that rural women and girls, women and girls with disabilities and women and girls belonging to ethnic minorities have adequate access to ICT to enable them to benefit from distance learning and enrol in Internet-based education programmes, and provide additional learning opportunities to compensate for interruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic;**

(d) **Develop a national anti-bullying policy to provide safe and inclusive educational environments free from discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence against women and girls, including through safe transportation to and from schools, and investigate, prosecute and adequately punish all cases of harassment and gender-based violence against girls and women in educational institutions.**

### **Employment**

33. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to strengthen employment policies, including several positive legislative measures improving labour standards and aligning them with international and European Union standards. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) That the 6.6 per cent gender pay gap, albeit lower than the European Union average, is a result of the lower participation of women in the formal labour market and amounts to 27 per cent in the industry sector, in which women are concentrated;

(b) The concentration of women in lower-paid jobs in the informal economy, where they are exposed to exploitation and excluded from social security coverage;

(c) The large number of women engaged in unpaid care work or work in family businesses;

(d) That women working in certain industrial sectors are often paid below the legal minimum wage, deprived of paid annual and sick leave and given inadequate equipment to work in unsafe working environments;

(e) The high unemployment rates among rural women, women with disabilities, and women belonging to ethnic minorities, including Roma and Balkan Egyptians.

**34. In line with target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals on the promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men and recalling its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, para. 31), the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Effectively enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, in order to narrow and eventually close the gender pay gap, by (i) conducting regular labour inspections; (ii) applying gender-neutral analytical job classification and evaluation methods; (iii) conducting regular pay surveys; and (iv) encouraging employers to publish a narrative with their gender pay gap data, with a view to better understanding the reasons behind the gender wage gap, and to take appropriate remedial measures;**

(b) **Enhance the access of women to formal employment, especially for disadvantaged groups of women, and extend social protection schemes to women employed in the informal economy;**

(c) **Recognize, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work on women by providing affordable child-care facilities and care services for older persons and promoting equal sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between women and men, and ensure that women employed in family businesses are adequately remunerated and have access to social protection schemes;**

(d) **Reinforce monitoring mechanisms, including regular labour inspections, and strengthen the access of women to confidential and independent complaint mechanisms, to address employment discrimination against women;**

(e) **Improve access to employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged groups of women, such as women belonging to ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and migrant women;**

(f) **Ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) of the International Labour Organization.**

## **Health**

35. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The persistently high rates of maternal mortality, owing to women's limited access to antenatal and postnatal services, and the low rate of births attended by skilled health personnel, in particular in rural areas;

(b) The persistently high percentage of women testing positive for the human papillomavirus;

(c) The limited access for women and girls to sexual and reproductive health-care services and information, including information on responsible sexual behaviour, as well as to family planning and modern contraceptives, especially in rural areas;

(d) Allegations of coercive family planning practices, including prenatal sex-selective abortion, which may in certain cases amount to inhuman and degrading treatment of women and which are reportedly one of the causes of lower female birth rates in the State party.

**36. In line with its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health and targets 3.1 and 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to reduce global maternal mortality and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive**

health-care services, the Committee recommends that the State party, including through its Primary Health-care Strategy, 2020–2025 and National Action Plan on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2022–2030, strengthen the access of women to quality health-care services, in particular for rural and older women, including by improving the health-care infrastructure, increasing budgetary allocations for the health sector and conducting informational campaigns on women’s health. In particular, it recommends that the State party:

(a) Improve the access of women to antenatal, perinatal and postnatal services to reduce the high rates of maternal mortality, including by training midwives and other relevant health professionals, especially in rural areas;

(b) Adopt a strategy to prevent and address cervical cancer, including by disseminating information on the linkages between human papillomavirus and cervical cancer, increased education and awareness-raising for both men and women on prevention methods and ensuring that women and girls have access to regular screening and the full vaccination schedule for all women and girls, especially in rural and remote areas;

(c) Ensure the free distribution and commercialization of emergency contraception, in particular for women and girls who are victims of sexual violence, and ensure that women have access to adequate sexual and reproductive health-care services and information, including safe abortion and post-abortion services, to prevent early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;

(d) Strictly enforce the prohibition of sex-selective abortions and establish services, including helplines, for women who are pressured into undergoing sex-selective abortion.

#### **Economic empowerment of women**

37. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The disproportionately high levels of poverty and limited access to economic and social benefits among disadvantaged groups of women, in particular rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women;

(b) The barriers to the full participation of women in economic life in the State party, such as limited access to land ownership, public procurement and financial credit;

(c) That there are still fewer women than men who are chairpersons of sports clubs, especially local clubs, and that there are pay gaps in salaries and contract payments for women on national sports teams and in local sports clubs.

38. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) Strengthen efforts to reduce poverty among women, with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups of women, such as rural women, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic minorities and lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, promote their access to low-interest loans without collateral and participation in entrepreneurial initiatives to empower them economically and provide them with opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to participate in economic life;

(b) Ensure that women have access equal to that of men to land ownership, markets and financial credit, including low-interest loans without collateral, entrepreneurship, independent businesses and public procurement, as

well as ICT, so that women may engage in e-commerce and cross-border trade with regard to their goods and products;

(c) **Redress the unequal representation of women as chairpersons of sports clubs and eliminate the gender pay gap in salaries and contract payments for women in sports, including on national sports teams.**

#### **Rural women**

39. The Committee commends the State party on the progress achieved in improving the situation of rural women since the most recent constructive dialogue, in 2016, including through the adoption of the Business and Investment Development Strategy, 2021–2027 and the Rural Gender Equality and Tourism project. However, the Committee notes with concern that rural women have limited access to health care, social protection and other basic services, and public transportation and are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of inclusion of rural women in climate change and biodiversity and cultural heritage preservation initiatives.

40. **In line with its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and target 5.a of the Sustainable Development Goals, to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure the effective participation of rural women in the adoption, implementation and economic benefits of rural development projects, including at decision-making levels;**

(b) **Ensure that rural women, especially those in remote areas, have adequate access to health care, social protection and other basic services, and public transportation;**

(c) **Ensure the participation of rural women in the design and implementation of national policies, programmes and initiatives concerning climate change, as well as the preservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage;**

(d) **Integrate a gender perspective in the Strategy on Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries, 2021–2027.**

#### **Lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women**

41. The Committee regrets that the National Action Plan for LGBTI+ persons, 2016–2020 did not yield tangible results in eliminating intersecting forms of discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women. The Committee also noted with concern the increasingly hostile environment faced by lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women in the State party.

42. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Protect the human rights of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women in all areas covered by the Convention and conduct awareness-raising campaigns to address their stigmatization, including through the National Action Plan on LGBTI+ persons, 2021–2027;**

(b) **Protect the rights of transgender women;**

(c) **Publicly condemn homophobic discourse and gender-based violence against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and ensure, through mandatory and continuous capacity-building for judges, prosecutors, police**

**officers and other law enforcement officials, that the legal prohibition of hate crimes and hate speech is enforced.**

#### **Women with disabilities**

43. The Committee notes with concern that women with disabilities in the State party often face intersecting forms of discrimination, especially in access to justice, education, employment and health care.

**44. Recalling its general recommendation No. 18 (1991) on disabled women and its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/4, para. 39 (c)), the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that women and girls with disabilities are able to access justice, the labour market, inclusive education, employment and health-care services, including sexual and reproductive health-care services.**

#### **Refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls**

45. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women and girls face intersecting forms of discrimination and disproportionate levels of gender-based violence in the State party, especially in border areas, and that undocumented migrant women are exposed to a high risk of sexual exploitation, forced labour and recruitment by human trafficking networks;

(b) The cumbersome process and onerous fees for recognized refugees to obtain documentation and the centralization of the refugee documentation process, further increasing costs and their risk of detention, extortion and gender-based violence during travel in the State party.

**46. In line with its general recommendations No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations and No. 26 (2008) on women migrant workers, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Address intersecting forms of discrimination against refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women, prevent and protect them from gender-based violence, especially in border, tourist and mining areas, and prosecute and adequately punish perpetrators;**

(b) **Ensure affordable access to documentation for recognized refugee women in a decentralized manner, with simple administrative procedures and reduced fees, to ensure that they and their children have adequate access to education, employment, health care, housing and social benefits;**

(c) **Ensure the application of a gender-sensitive approach in receiving refugee and asylum-seeking women and in considering asylum claims, including by training immigration officers on gender-sensitive interviewing techniques, and ensure that the protection needs of asylum-seeking and refugee women and girls arriving in the State party are addressed as a priority concern.**

#### **Marriage and family relations**

47. The Committee welcomes the enhancement of free legal aid provided to women in divorce and separation procedures. However, it notes with concern:

(a) That the State party does not recognize same-sex unions and parental rights of same-sex couples and parents, exposing them to discrimination in property

rights, inheritance and tax benefits and in their relations with non-biological children upon separation;

(b) The prevalence of child marriage, especially among the Roma and Balkan Egyptian communities, often authorized by court decisions as an exception to the minimum age of marriage of 18 years on grounds of pregnancy, childbirth and cohabitation;

(c) Reports that family court judges often fail to take domestic violence into account in deciding on child custody and visitation rights in divorce cases and unnecessarily interrogate children who have already testified before a social worker and, in some cases, force the child to be in unprotected contact with the violent parent;

(d) The widespread phenomenon of fathers who do not comply with child support orders.

**48. The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Recognize same-sex unions, marriages and registered unions entered into under private international law and allow the adoption of children by women in same-sex marriages or de facto unions;**

(b) **Review the Civil Code in order to remove all exceptions to the legal minimum age of marriage of 18 years for both women and men and pursue its efforts to combat child and forced marriage, including by addressing the root causes of this harmful practice, encouraging the reporting of cases, punishing complicit family members, religious and community leaders and law enforcement officers and establishing mechanisms to detect such cases, and provide assistance services to girl victims of forced marriage, in accordance with joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee /general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices;**

(c) **Ensure that domestic violence is taken into consideration in judicial decisions on custody and visitation rights and conduct training and awareness-raising activities for judges, mediators, lawyers, law enforcement agencies and local executive bodies to ensure that they are aware of the rights of women and children and of their own role in protecting victims of domestic violence;**

(d) **Adopt civil legal measures to ensure child support payments in cases in which the father fails to comply with court decisions in that regard, including by ensuring public economic support to single mothers and their children, and establishing a state mechanism to redeem the funds from the father.**

**Data collection and analysis**

49. The Committee is concerned about the absence of data collection in many areas relevant to the implementation of the Convention.

**50. The Committee recommends that the State party promote and build capacity for the collection of statistical data, including on the prevalence of gender-based violence, the prevalence of trafficking in persons, access to education and the socioeconomic status of women, disaggregated by sex, age and socioeconomic background, for purposes of planning and for the design and implementation of tailored and gender-sensitive legislation, policies, programmes and budgets.**

**Amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention**

51. The Committee encourages the State party to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.

**Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

52. The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to further evaluate the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention in order to achieve substantive equality between women and men.

**Dissemination**

53. The Committee requests the State party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the official languages of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the Government, the parliament and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.

**Technical assistance**

54. The Committee recommends that the State party link the implementation of the Convention to its development efforts and that it avail itself of regional or international technical assistance in that respect.

**Follow-up to concluding observations**

55. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 12 (a), 24 (b), 28 (b) and 36 (d) above.

**Preparation of the next report**

56. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the sixth periodic report of the State party in line with a future predictable reporting calendar based on an eight-year review cycle and following the adoption of a list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State party. The report should cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.

57. The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).