
**Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Twenty-third session
12 – 30 June 2000**

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**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Austria**

Combined third and fourth periodic reports and fifth periodic reports

211. The Committee considered the combined third and fourth reports and the fifth periodic reports of Austria (CEDAW/C/AUT/3-4 and 5) at its 470th and 471st meetings, on 15 June 2000 (see CEDAW/C/SR.470 and 471).

Introduction by the State party

212. In introducing the reports, the representative of Austria informed the Committee that as a result of restructuring following the formation of Austria's new coalition government in February 2000, the Ministry for Social Security and Generations had been assigned responsibility for the development of women's policy, which had been previously within the framework of the Federal Chancellery. The new Austrian Federal Government emphasized that it considered women's policy to be an integral part of its overall policy and had committed itself to an ambitious women's policy programme. In this regard, the law on equal treatment applicable to the public sector had been amended, inter alia, to shift the burden of proof in sexual harassment cases and to enhance the enforceability and monitoring of the equal treatment obligation. A regional office of the ombudsman's office for equal treatment had been established (the central office had been founded in Vienna in 1991), and further regional offices were planned. Beginning on 1 January 2002 a childcare allowance would be paid to each parent, irrespective of whether they were employed.

213. The representative drew attention to the many initiatives introduced to address violence against women, including information campaigns and the federal law on the protection against family violence, providing for exclusion orders, which had entered into force on 1 May 1997. Seven intervention centres against domestic violence, functioning as contact centres for victims and coordinating bodies with regard to all organizations concerned with the problem, had been established, and an advisory committee on the prevention of violence had also been set up within the Federal Ministry of the Interior. A series of large-scale training courses had been conducted during the past three years to sensitize all those concerned with domestic violence, and measures were being introduced to support sexually abused children and young people with regard to court proceedings.

214. Measures had also been introduced with regard to trafficking in women, including the creation in Vienna in 1998 of an intervention centre for women victims of trafficking and the introduction of a "humanitarian visa" to allow them to remain in Austria. Austria supported the ongoing negotiations relating to the revised draft Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (A/AC.254/4/Add.3/Rev.7).

215. The representative indicated that an inter-ministerial working group for gender mainstreaming had been established, comprising representatives of all ministries, which would develop and monitor the implementation of strategies for gender mainstreaming. She also noted that Austria had introduced several initiatives to make women aware of the opportunities and risks related to new technology. These included a project to encourage women to take up non-traditional technical professions, especially in regard to technology, and the development of a manual providing practical guidelines for the implementation of measures to increase the participation of women in technical fields.

216. In concluding, the representative informed the Committee that Austria had signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention and would soon be in a position to ratify the instrument, as well as to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention relating to the time of meetings of the Committee. Austria would also shortly remove its reservation to article 7, subparagraph (b), of the Convention in the light of the introduction of the 1998 women's education act providing for access by women to the army.

Concluding comments of the Committee

217. The Committee commends the Government of Austria for the high quality of the written and oral presentation of the combined third and fourth periodic reports and the fifth periodic report.

218. The Committee is gratified that the Government of Austria had sent a large, high-level inter-ministerial delegation headed by the Federal Minister for Social Security and Generations, which established a frank and highly constructive dialogue with the members of the Committee.

219. The Committee commends the Government for announcing its intention to accept the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention in respect of the time of meetings of the Committee. It also welcomes the imminent withdrawal of the reservation to article 7 of the Convention in respect of women and the military. At the same time, it appeals to the Government to make efforts also to withdraw the reservation to article 11 of the Convention in respect of night work.

220. The Committee commends the Government for the central role played by Austria in the elaboration of the Optional Protocol and for having expressed its intention to ratify it in the coming months.

Positive aspects

221. The Committee notes with satisfaction the measures undertaken by Austria to combat violence against women. The Committee commends the federal law on the protection against family violence, which entered into force on 1 May 1997, and created a legal basis for the speedy and efficient protection of victims of domestic violence. It also appreciates in particular the programmes relating to sexual violence against persons with disabilities.

222. The Committee notes with appreciation the various measures of the Government to combat trafficking in women, including the apprehension, prosecution and punishment of perpetrators. It also appreciates Austria's efforts to increase international cooperation in order to address this transnational issue.

223. The Committee welcomes the initiative of the Government to promote the participation of women in the field of the new information and communication technologies, as both consumers and entrepreneurs.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

224. The Committee considers that persisting cultural stereotypes of women as homemakers and child-rearers constitute an impediment to the full implementation of the Convention.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

225. The Committee expresses its concern at the abolition of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. While acknowledging that the new Government has transferred the responsibility for women's and gender issues from the Ministry within the framework of the Federal Chancellery to the Ministry of Social Security and Generations and that it has set up an inter-ministerial coordinating committee on gender mainstreaming, it is concerned that the broad scope of the responsibilities of the latter Ministry will result in giving lesser priority to the elimination of discrimination against women and obstruct the visibility of government policy in that respect.

226. The Committee requests the Government to ensure, on a regular basis, the evaluation and assessment of the gender impact of the federal budget as well as governmental policies and programmes affecting women. It also urges the national machinery for women to increase its cooperation with non-governmental organizations.

227. The Committee is concerned about the situation of migrant women. The Committee urges the Government to facilitate the attainment of work permits by migrant women on an equal basis with migrant men and to establish the conditions needed for their integration into the economic and social life of Austrian society.

228. The Committee is also concerned about the situation of trafficked women. The Committee requests the Government to take responsibility in caring for the human rights of all trafficked women and girls. It also urges the Government to increase its cooperation with countries of origin and other countries of destination so as to prevent trafficking and penalize those who facilitate trafficking.

229. The Committee expresses its concern at women seeking asylum in Austria, and in particular about human rights violations by State officials. The Committee recommends that the Government adopt policies that acknowledge gender-specific grounds for women seeking asylum in Austria, including gender violence and persecution and female genital mutilation.

230. With respect to violence against women, notwithstanding the extensive measures already undertaken by the Government, the Committee urges the Government to ensure ongoing education for law enforcement officials and the judiciary, including their sensitization to violence against women in migrant communities, and to extend such programmes to health professionals. It also recommends that the Government pay particular attention to the physical, emotional and financial abuse of elderly women. It suggests further that programmes of therapy for male offenders be instituted.

231. The Committee expresses concern at the high percentage of the female population in Austria which has no education beyond the compulsory level. It is also concerned with the continuing gender role stereotyping in the area of education and vocational training for girls and boys.

232. The Committee urges the Government to take measures to encourage girls to continue their education beyond compulsory level and particularly in the areas of science and technology. The Committee also calls upon the Government to

introduce affirmative action to increase the appointment of women to academic posts at all levels and to integrate gender studies and feminist research in university curricula and research programmes.

233. In the area of women's employment, the Committee is concerned that women continue to remain segregated in low-paid jobs in the labour market.

234. The Committee requests the Government to take action in order to decrease the wage discrepancy between female-dominated jobs and male-dominated jobs, especially in the private sector. It also urges the Federal Government to adopt a proactive comprehensive policy, with appropriate budgetary allocations as incentives to provincial and local authorities, so as to develop childcare facilities that enable women's equal participation in the labour force.

235. The Committee urges the Government to strengthen the powers of the Equal Treatment Commission in order to allow it to be more effective in its efforts to combat discriminatory practices and to guarantee equal opportunity and treatment for women in the workplace.

236. The Committee is concerned about the situation of single women and, in particular, the disadvantages suffered by never-married and divorced elderly women in terms of retirement pensions and social security benefits. The Committee urges the Government to take into consideration current social trends when designing policies so as to meet the needs of the increasing number of single women in the country.

237. The Committee recommends that the Government replicate, at the federal level, the Vienna programme on women's health and intensify efforts to apply a gender perspective in health care by, inter alia, initiating and sponsoring relevant research, taking into account the Committee's General Recommendation 24 on article 12, relating to women and health.

238. The Committee is concerned at the decrease in women's representation in the legislature in the recent elections. The Committee recommends that the Government undertake in this respect temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and consider, inter alia, the use of federal funding for political parties as an incentive for the increased representation of women in Parliament, as well as the application of quotas and numerical goals and measurable targets aimed at increasing women's political participation.

239. The Committee is concerned at the lack of data disaggregated by sex on the impact of policies and programmes. The Committee urges the Government, inter alia, to improve the collection of data on criminal proceedings related to violence against women, to evaluate policy as regards victims of trafficking, to assess the nature and outcome of equal treatment cases in the labour courts and to integrate gender perspectives into health care, taking into account sex-disaggregated data on causes of morbidity and mortality.

240. The Committee commends governmental initiatives to assess gender policies through pilot projects, but is concerned that such initiatives do not go beyond the pilot stage. The Committee urges the Government to apply the results of the projects in ongoing law, policy and programming.

241. The Committee requests the Government to introduce human rights education, and in particular women's human rights education on the basis of the Convention, into school curricula.

242. The Committee calls upon the Government of Austria to include information on the concerns raised in these concluding comments in the next periodic report.

243. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Austria of the present concluding comments so that the people, and, in particular administrators and politicians, are made aware of the steps to be taken to ensure de jure and de facto equality for women, and the further steps required in that regard. It also requests the Government to disseminate widely, in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the further actions and initiatives adopted by the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".