
**Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Nineteenth session
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**Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Slovakia**

Initial report

59. The Committee considered the initial report of Slovakia (CEDAW/C/SVK/1 and CEDAW/C/SVK/1/Add.1) at its 385th, 386th and 389th meetings, on 23 and 30 June 1998 (see CEDAW/C/SR.385, 386 and 389).

Introduction by the State party

60. In introducing the report, the representative emphasized human rights and their importance for all individual members of society and their quality of life. She informed the Committee that one of the essential tasks of the State was to ensure the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens through, *inter alia*, the adherence to international treaties and the realization of the rights espoused in those instruments at the national level.

61. The representative informed the Committee that Slovakia had adopted essential guarantees of democracy, human rights and civil liberties, as well as the international agreements to which Czechoslovakia had been party. At its independence in January 1993, Slovakia succeeded to various United Nations human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

62. The representative informed the Committee that Slovakia had been actively involved in international activities relating to women's rights and equal rights for women and men. It had participated in the major United Nations world conferences, including the Fourth World Conference on Women, and had organized a world conference to evaluate the International Year of the Family in 1995.

63. Slovakia has been actively implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, including through the establishment, in March 1996, of the Coordination Committee for the Problems of Women, consisting, *inter alia*, of representatives of the Slovak Republic National Council, various ministries, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, churches and experts. In 1997, the Coordination Committee for the Problems of Women elaborated the National Action Plan for Women in Slovakia, which was then approved by the Government and submitted to the secretariat of the Commission on the Status of Women. The representative also informed the Committee that Slovakia had been elected to the Commission on the Status of Women through 1999 and that its representative was currently a vice-chairperson of the Commission.

64. Based on the results of demographic and sociological research, the representative informed the Committee that matrimony and parenthood were important values in Slovak society. She indicated that, owing to their greater responsibilities, women considered their status to be less advantageous than that of men's, but that they did not perceive themselves to belong to the "weaker sex". Women derived their status and identity from their societal roles, including maternity.

65. The representative noted that equality was guaranteed in the social security system, including with respect to pensions, health insurance, State-provided social benefits and social care. The prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex and the principle of equality were explicitly expressed in the Labour Code and women workers were protected from termination of employment as a result of pregnancy or when involved in the continuous care of a child up to three years of age. Slovakia had a high employment rate for women, and the labour law was above the standard of many other advanced countries. However, women experienced inequality in employment, including with regard to reduced hiring opportunities and unequal pay for work of equal value. Notably, new legislation, such as the amended Labour Code, the Civil Act and the State Service Act, which are currently under preparation, emphasized pay equality.

66. The representative indicated that domestic violence was a growing focus of attention, although it was likely to be hidden from public attention. Crime prevention measures played a major role in combating all forms of violence against women and a special council to act as an advisory body to the Government on this issue had been established. The council had reviewed crime prevention proposals prepared by the Ministry of Interior and other departments and regional offices, and was expected to encourage cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations. Also, institutional frameworks for crime prevention were broadened in 1997 through an increase in the number of police specializing in juvenile crime. Positions for crime prevention specialists were also established at all district and regional directorates of the Slovak constabulary.

67. In concluding her presentation, the representative emphasized that Slovakia had taken the preparation of its initial report to the Committee very seriously and stressed that Slovakia considered the thorough implementation of human rights treaties to be an essential condition for a modern democratic society and the rule of the law.

Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

68. The Committee welcomes the submission of the initial report of Slovakia. It also expresses its appreciation to the delegation for the comprehensive nature of the report, especially the addendum, and for the provision of extensive information in response to the Committee's questions on such short notice. The Committee welcomes the identification of the numerous legal provisions relevant to women's advancement in the report.

69. The Committee welcomes the high-level delegation, including the State Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic.

Positive aspects

70. The Committee is pleased to note that, according to the legal system of Slovakia, international treaties, including the Convention, have been promulgated in Parliament and take precedence over domestic legislation.

71. The Committee welcomes the establishment of the Coordination Committee for the Problems of Women and the Gender Centre. The Committee expresses its satisfaction that the national machinery provides a strong framework for the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women, essential in minimizing the structural adjustment experienced during the transition. The Committee is pleased to note that Slovakia has submitted a national plan of action in compliance with the Beijing Platform for Action.

72. The Committee expresses its satisfaction with the general standard of women's health and education in Slovakia.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

73. The Committee notes that Slovakia is undergoing a difficult transition from a centrally controlled economy to a democracy and a social market-oriented economy, albeit with consideration for social factors. The Committee observes that, in the absence of gender-sensitive policies and measures to counteract negative effects, these changes can have a negative effect on women's enjoyment of their human rights and impede the implementation of the Convention.

74. The Committee expresses its concern at the overemphasis on legislative protection of and cultural promotion of motherhood and family roles for women, rather than on women as individuals in their own right. The traditional, stereotyped view of women as mothers is thereby reinforced and negates the participation of fathers in child care. That perception reflects a misunderstanding of such critical concepts as gender roles, indirect discrimination and de facto inequality.

Principal subjects of concern and the Committee's recommendations

75. The Committee is concerned that the definitions of affirmative action and temporary special measures as outlined in the Convention have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by the Government to be protective measures. While legislation and institutional structures are essential to the advancement of women's status, they are not sufficient to address the ongoing preference for men in employment and politics. While the Committee recognizes that the establishment of quotas and other temporary special measures to promote women are often controversial, they have been shown to address effectively structural discrimination against women in politics and employment and to accelerate de facto equality of women.

76. The Committee recommends that the Government reconsider its position on temporary special measures and take note of the information and practice developed internationally in structural discrimination. Such discrimination can be eliminated through temporary special measures. The Committee therefore recommends the provision of such measures, combined with numerical goals of a minimum of 30 per cent presence of women, as well as timetables to ensure women's increased presence in political parties, as well as in all sectors, segments and at all levels of employment.

77. The Committee is unclear as to whether the Coordinating Committee for the Problems of Women is provided with adequate resources, personnel and authority.

78. The Committee requests in the next report detailed information on the status and function of the Coordinating Committee for the Problems of Women, its programmes and their impact, with a special focus on the use of temporary measures and their effect. The Committee also recommends that the Government secure sufficient funds to enable the Coordinating Committee for the Problems of Women to guarantee the full implementation of the national plan of action. The Committee further recommends that the Government reconsider the name of the Coordinating Committee for the Problems of Women in order to reflect the view that "women's problems" as they are currently understood in Slovakia are in fact challenges faced by society and require a change to the current theoretical framework of dealing with them.

79. The Committee expresses alarm at the high rates of domestic violence against women, including murder in the home. The Committee is also concerned that charges cannot be brought against an abuser by the police independent of the victim and that securing a conviction often requires the corroboration of independent witnesses. Furthermore, there are no emergency or protective shelters available to victims of domestic violence.

80. The Committee recommends that the Government of Slovakia implement procedures designed to permit prosecution of violence against women independent of victim testimony and omitting the requirement that the complainant's evidence be corroborated; establish crisis centre hotlines and victim support centres equipped with medical, psychological and emotional support; and, in order to raise public awareness, disseminate information through the media, on this issue.

81. The Committee is concerned that information has not been provided or compiled on the actual situation regarding trafficking in women. The Committee notes that trafficking is an international crime and therefore not only concerns women trafficked out of Slovakia, but also those being trafficked into Slovakia from neighbouring countries.

82. The Committee requests that Slovakia pay particular attention to safeguarding the human rights of women and take all necessary measures to monitor and eradicate trafficking in women in Slovakia, including the sensitization of police, border officials and non-governmental organizations working in that area. The Committee encourages Slovakia to continue its cooperative efforts with border States to eliminate trafficking across national borders. The Committee also requests the Government to provide, in the next report, detailed information on the number of women who have been trafficked into Slovakia and those returned to their country of origin, as well as statistics on the number of individuals arrested, prosecuted and sentenced as a result of their involvement in trafficking.

83. The Committee notes with concern the limited involvement of non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the initial report.

84. The Committee recommends that the Government encourage the participation of women's non-governmental organizations in the drafting of national policy and in following up its implementation. The Committee also recommends that the Government take note of the importance of non-governmental organizations in increasing public awareness and countering traditional stereotypes of women.

85. The Committee expresses concern regarding the establishment of and increase in 'household management schools', which cater to female students and train them for traditional roles, thus promoting gender stereotyping.

86. Stressing the importance of encouraging girls and boys to choose non-traditional fields of study in order to promote equal opportunity, the Committee requests further information, in the next report, on the purpose and composition of these schools as well as how the curricula differ from those in other schools.

87. The Committee is concerned with the highly segregated labour market which is accompanied by low pay for women. The segregation of women and men into different employment sectors is not a valid justification for unequal pay between women and men. The Committee is concerned that job descriptions that link 'physically demanding' elements to male physical strength and to higher pay for men may be based on a one-sided understanding of those elements. These descriptions may underestimate other physically demanding elements found in women's work, thereby discriminating against women in terms of pay.

88. The Committee requests the Government to avail itself of the existing body of research and practice on equal pay for work of equal and comparable value in order to overcome pay inequity. The Committee also recommends that the Government use temporary special measures to break through the sex segregation of the labour market.

89. The Committee is concerned that the Government did not answer the Committee's question as to why women in Slovakia are faced with the dilemma of choosing between work and raising a family. Although social services are available for children aged two years and above, there are no social services available for women with children under the age of two years. Furthermore, the decrease in pre-school childcare is particularly detrimental to women's equal opportunity in the employment market since, owing to lack of childcare, they have to interrupt their employment career, which again has negative effects on their employment status, pay and promotion.

90. The Committee recommends that the Government of Slovakia provide options to women who have children and choose to work, including establishment of and access to public day-care facilities. The Committee further recommends the funding and support of pre-school child-care centres at both the local and national levels to ensure women the opportunity to work.

91. The Committee expresses deep concern at the high rate of abortions among Slovak women. The Committee is concerned that abortion is being used as a form of family planning.

92. The Committee strongly recommends an increase in family planning education and accessibility to affordable and safe contraception in order to reduce the number of abortions carried out.

93. The Committee is concerned about the absence of development programmes for rural women to assist them in obtaining the skills and resources necessary to become competitive in the labour market.

94. The Committee recommends that the Government provide information on the measures undertaken to empower rural women and to encourage economic self-sufficiency.

95. The Committee is concerned that inadequate information was provided to the Committee on minority women in Slovakia.

96. The Committee recommends that the Government of Slovakia collect and make available statistical information pertaining to the social, economic and political status of minority women, with a view to developing specific policies to respond to the needs of different groups. The Committee also urges the Government to address the high rate of unemployment among Roma women and to provide further information on assistance programmes in the next report.

97. The Committee expresses regret that the report did not comply fully with its guidelines on the form and content of initial reports and that its general recommendations were not taken into account in the report.

98. The Committee requests that the next report follow the guidelines provided by the Committee in order to improve the presentation of information. It also recommends the serious consideration of the Committee's general recommendations during the creation of legislative measures and when drafting the next report.

99. The Committee requests the wide dissemination in Slovakia of the present concluding comments in order to make the people of Slovakia, and particularly government administrators and politicians, aware of the steps that have been taken to ensure de facto equality for women and the further steps required in that regard. The Committee also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention, the Committee's general recommendations and the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.