
Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Fifth session

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Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Czechoslovakia

Initial report

149. The Committee considered the initial report of Czechoslovakia (CEDAW/C/5/Add.26 and Amend.1) at its 69th and 75th meetings, on 12 March and 17 March 1986 (CEDAW/C/SR.69 and 75).

150. In his introduction, the representative of the State Party explained that there was a long historical tradition for women's rights in Czechoslovakia, which dated to the fifteenth century. Moreover, he added, equality had been enshrined in

the Constitution of the Republic in 1920 and, after the victory of the working class in 1948, more dynamic steps had been taken to fulfil the objective of the full emancipation of women.

151. The representative explained that the Czechoslovak Union of Women played a major role in securing the involvement of women in public activities, in expanding their possibilities for self-education and in allowing them more time for the education of their children. The full integration of women in the work force was one of the main prerequisites that the Government was pursuing through the creation of jobs suitable for women, by improving their living conditions and by guiding public opinion towards a proper understanding of the position of women in the family and in social life.

152. Women represented 51.4 per cent of the population, and 80.9 per cent of all women of working age were engaged in social work. This constituted 48.1 per cent of the total work force, the representative pointed out. Simultaneously, he added, conditions had been constantly improved to enable women to combine better and more easily their triple duty as mothers, employees and active citizens.

153. The representative also stated that a dense network of pre-school facilities was being built to accommodate children of working mothers. In addition, after-school child care, school clubs and canteens had also been established, together with communal services to facilitate household care. None of these services had been available 40 years earlier, the representative added. Women were pursuing active careers in highly sophisticated branches of science and research, and carrying out professional tasks in pharmaceuticals, biology, chemistry, architecture, law, international relations, medicine and other spheres.

154. In his introduction, the representative also noted that it was not uncommon for women to hold senior posts at different levels of management in industry, agriculture, scientific institutions and administrative bodies, especially in the fields that had been women's traditional domain. He added that at the present time, the number of women who held positions in management and public life was twice as high as it had been 10 years previously.

155. The representative concluded by saying that neither professional activity nor public work was pushing back the fundamental mission of women as mothers and for that reason the Government had declared that it had to continue to create ever more favourable conditions to enable women to discharge their maternal and educational mission.

156. Some experts commended the representative of Czechoslovakia on the efforts made by the State to improve the working and social conditions of women, especially in view of the fact that paternal authority had been changed to parental authority, giving both sexes the same rights and responsibilities in raising their children. One expert noted that work at home was evaluated on the same basis as work performed outside the home, and another expert asked whether that had had national economic repercussions (i.e., whether salaries were paid for housework) and whether men shared fully in the performance of housework.

157. Other experts pointed out that the report succeeded in conveying how fundamental changes in the socio-political life of a country could make a difference in favour of women. Some experts mentioned that the percentage of employed women was very high and that they were in many different professional fields. One expert noted, however, that the responsibility for change was still

carried by women as reproducers, since they performed the multiple duties of mothers, professionals or workers and citizens. It was asked whether the Government was taking any steps to ensure that women moved to leadership and policy-making positions, such as affirmative action or the setting of targets.

158. Still on the general nature of the report, one expert asked how and in what particular areas had the spiritual and material life of Czechoslovakia evolved beyond the objectives established by the Convention, as was stated in the initial report.

159. Another expert remarked that, as could be seen in the report, the social roles of the two sexes were still different, as well as the sexual division of labour. This indicated that traditional cultural views were still prevalent. It was asked whether, in accordance with article 5 of the Convention, educational efforts were being contemplated to correct stereotyped assumptions on gender role and the role of women in society and in the family.

160. Some experts recognized that, according to information provided in the report, many of the provisions contained in article 2 of the Convention were reflected in the State Party legislation, and other experts remarked that efforts on the part of the Government had to be continued in order to see those provisions implemented, such as equal pay for equal work, men's participation in child-rearing and housework, and training. It was asked if the Government was contemplating any specific measures to correct the still existing imbalances.

161. One expert noted that prostitution still appeared to be practised, despite the fact that it was outlawed; other experts asked whether the fact that women still earned less than men was a factor in the persistence of that social behaviour. Another expert asked how much less a woman earned than a man and whether such discriminatory practice could be fought in court, as stated on page 5 of the report. If so, the expert asked how many cases there had been, how they had been resolved and what bodies had received the complaints.

162. It was also asked what co-operation and interaction had been developed between the Czechoslovak Union of Women and the Government to improve the status of women and their living and working conditions.

163. Several experts requested more statistical information on the participation of women at the middle-management and directorship levels, in the trade unions, in the Government and in its enterprises. More information was also requested on demographic and health factors, such as life expectancy, maternal and child mortality rates, pre- and post-natal care centres, medical facilities offered, family planning counselling and abortion.

164. It was remarked that the Czechoslovak Union of Women was known for its international peace and solidarity activities and information was requested on the participation of women in international forums and in the foreign service.

165. Some experts asked what was the reason women were not entering technical and vocational training institutions at the same pace as men and what positive measures was the Government taking to remedy that trend. One expert asked what were the courses and fields of study being chosen by women entering institutions of higher learning. Additional information was requested on women students and maternity provisions granted to them.

166. Many experts referred to the maternity provisions and facilities presently available in the country, and asked whether women availed themselves of the three-year licence offered to raise children, whether men were able to avail themselves of the same and how many had. Another expert asked whether women were given training upon their re-entry to the work force after an extended period of maternity leave. While noting that subsidies were paid upon the birth of a child, the experts requested information on how and whether these subsidies were applied to the salary or paid in addition to the salary.

167. Another expert noted that there had been an increase in the number of jobs with a shorter working day and asked whether that was a temporary measure, why it had been required and how society as a whole had accepted the provision.

168. One expert, noting the statement contained in the initial report that there was no unemployment in the country, asked if the State could guarantee work to women and could they make a choice as to the type of work they wished to do.

169. Additional information was requested on family law, such as the choice of family residence, the rights of natural children, protection of children's rights, the rights of women upon divorce and the incidence of divorce. It was also asked what was being done regarding violence in the family.

170. A list of work forbidden to women was requested as well as information regarding legislation and criteria applied in that regard. One expert also asked in what respect work could be harmful to women and not to men. Another expert asked for clarification on the term "socially useful", which was used in the report.

171. One expert asked about the role of trade unions in the overall policy of work and employment of women in the country.

172. In replying, the representative of the State party emphasized that they did not automatically equate difference and discrimination in those areas where statistics did not show arithmetically equal proportions between men and women.

173. The representative referred to apparent contradictions in the report regarding the attained level of equality of women and men in Czechoslovakia.

174. Several mechanisms existed in Czechoslovakia to ensure that equality between men and women was exercised: through law, which unequivocally gave the conceptual foundation of this principle, through the court system, where both sexes had the same rights and duties, by appealing through higher courts if the first judgement was found discriminatory, by independent women's commissions operating in enterprises and plants, through the Czechoslovak Union of Women already mentioned, by the National Committees, which had the right to inform other competent authorities of discovered violations pertaining to the equality between women and men, and by trade unions, through their influence in examining labour norms.

175. He stated that the difference in the wages of women and men could be favourable as well as unfavourable to women. Salaries were determined on the basis of stipulated criteria with a minimum rate and a maximum limit. The criteria included practical experience, educational background and personal capabilities. Though subjective elements could play a part, ultimately the objective factors were the decisive elements in wage classification. The Government, he added, enforced the principle of equal pay for equal work and more printed information would be made available to the Committee.

176. The number of women holding executive, political and public offices was now twice as high as 10 years before. The Chairperson of the Czechoslovak Union of Women was a Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Women were fairly represented in senior posts at the medium and lower levels of management. In the trade unions, he stated, women constituted 50.1 per cent of functionaries in enterprise committees. In the Central Trade Union Council, 38.5 per cent of the membership was made up of women. As to the judicial system, women were 60 per cent of the judges. Forty to 50 per cent of the Socialist Youth Union was made up of women functionaries.

177. The care of children in kindergartens was financially covered by the State while the parents only contributed to the catering by paying 5.50 or 6.50 koruny per child a day. At this time, existing nursery facilities were not fully utilized due to years with lower birth rates. However, the existing facilities were still being used, giving women more spare and leisure time.

178. Replying to questions on maternity provisions, the representative stated that regulations applicable to pregnant women and mothers applied also to pregnant students and student mothers. Regular maternity leave and extended child-care leave was only granted to women. If a man decided to take care of the child, he could put an end to his labour contract or have unpaid leave. Maternity grants were given to single women or women who gave birth to more than one child at a time, equivalent to 90 per cent of the woman's net daily wage for 35 weeks. Maternity allowance might be paid to a man provided he took care of the child or children. A grant of 2,000 koruny was paid upon the birth of every child. The representative explained that, in order to eliminate adverse effects of the utilization of maternity leave by women, a compensation allowance was paid to those who upon re-entry received a lower salary than before. The labour code also stipulated that the employer was under obligation to give a woman, upon re-entry, a job corresponding to her work contract.

179. Regarding work forbidden to women, the representative explained that since 1967, lists had been elaborated and subsequently updated according to the latest developments in science and technology. This measure had had a positive effect in correcting the rate of accidents at work.

180. The rate of women in higher education was considerably higher than men and an increase of women professionals had been noted. While in 1960 women constituted 37.9 per cent of the total number of professionals, by 1983 they were 55.1 per cent. There were no provisions for preferential treatment of women in the educational process.

181. Equitable arrangements of family relations were promoted through mass media. The remnants of the past when men held a preferred position could still be found among older generations. However, a just division of household work, including care of children, was applied in most families. The divorce rate amounted to 35,000 cases in 1984. Property was considered commonly shared but if it needed to be divided, each spouse obtained an equal share of assets brought into the marriage.

182. Family planning education was available through organs of the public health administration. There were 66 guidance centres for women and 1,289 physicians attending them. Abortion was authorized through the recommendation of an authorized physician, a social welfare officer and deputy of the respective national committee and had to be justified by reasons of health or other reasons deserving special consideration. The application for permission was submitted through the woman's personal physician and the fee ranged from 200 to 800 koruny.

183. Replying to another question, he stated that the term "socially useful work" meant work performed by citizens who contributed to the fulfilment of the tasks and realization of the objectives of Czechoslovak society.

184. The Penal Code did not include explicit provisions on prostitution since, in 1961, when the Code had been adopted, the problem did not exist. The representative stated that, with the development of international tourism, prostitution had been brought into Czechoslovakia. Obstacles to this practice were contained in provisions of labour and tax legislation. However, the latter did not apply to foreign nationals and adequate countermeasures were very difficult to formulate.

185. The representative stated that women participated in international activities through their work in the foreign and diplomatic service. Women were being included in special study programmes at universities to gain theoretical and practical experience in international relations.

186. The representative concluded by stating that the experience acquired from the discussion would serve as useful guidance for the elaboration of the next report. Additional information more adapted to the needs of the Committee would also be furnished.

187. Several experts requested additional clarification regarding government measures to avoid work segregation and government efforts to eliminate women being stereotyped as mothers only, as well as in placing women in policy and decision-making positions; whether women were able to make a free choice in the type of work they performed and how it could be termed as favourable to a woman when she earned less than a man while carrying out the same type of work. One expert asked under what conditions was abortion authorized. Another expert pointed out that according to her experience, Czechoslovak women enjoyed full equality with men and that facilities accorded by the Government only facilitated their performance in their dual social role as mothers and active members of society.

188. The representative of the State party replied that the four existing political parties in Czechoslovakia were continuing to examine measures to improve the ratio of women in top-level positions. More progressive norms had to be developed in order to facilitate women's role in society. In this sense, the representative stated that the social philosophy of his country transcended and went beyond the aims of the Convention.

189. No statistical data was available on women working in international organizations and international affairs but, as stated previously, measures were already taken to increase the participation of women in this area. As regards salary levels, he explained that they depended solely on individual qualifications and the job evaluation, and that if a woman was more qualified than a man, she earned more.

190. Finally, abortion was allowed, he explained, with the human interest and human concern in mind, according to the very individual situation of the woman in question. He assured the Committee that more information would be provided in the next report.