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

Second periodic report

250. The Committee considered the second periodic report of Denmark (CEDAW/C/13/Add.14) at its 182nd meeting, on 28 January (see CEDAW/C/SR.182).

251. The representative of Denmark gave details on the progress that had been made to achieve equality in her country since the completion of the second periodic report in 1988. Denmark had celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of the right of women to vote in 1990. She reported that 33 per cent of the Danish parliament (the Folketing) were women and, at the municipal elections in 1989, the percentage of seats held by women had increased from 23.8 per cent to 26.2 per cent.

252. Responding to general questions posed by the members, the representative reported that the Equal Status Act of 1988 had strengthened the Equal Status Council (ESC). ESC could request information from employers, employees and their organizations, which had proved particularly useful, for example, in the effort to achieve equal pay. She said that, in Denmark, equality work at the official level was a very important issue on the political agenda. New goals would be set once the Folketing had discussed the report that ESC had prepared on equality. In the plan of action for equality in the administration, as contained in that report, important goals had been set, such as finding ways of successfully combining work and family life, improving the qualifications of clerical personnel and appointing more women as managers. She added that a project on equal pay would be continued.

253. Since 1986, when Denmark had presented its initial report, research on women's issues had improved and much knowledge had been obtained by female researchers. In the Nordic countries, research on women was a very important

issue. The birth rate had decreased from 70,802 live births per year in 1970 to 61,467 in 1989. The number of marriages was reported as 36,376 in 1970, 26,448 in 1980 and 32,080 in 1989. The number of divorces had increased slightly from 9,524 in 1970 to 14,717 in 1989, which represented a rate of 13.7 per 1,000 married couples in 1989. Data on the number of reported offences of violence were not disaggregated by gender, but had shown a gradual increase from 5,719 in 1980 to 10,291 in 1989.

254. In response to a question as to whether there were any plans to amend the Constitution to include entrenched equality provisions, the representative stated that no plans were envisaged further to those described in the second periodic report. The budget of ESC had been increased by 3 million Danish kroner, which had enabled ESC to make special efforts in selected areas, such as women in the decision-making process, equal pay, the possibility of combining work and family life, equality in education and improving equality in the public sector. For the years 1990 and 1991, DKr 1.8 million had been allotted to ESC for special projects. The representative reported that the second periodic report had been prepared by the Government of Denmark, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and ESC; the entire government administration had also been involved. Women's organizations had not been consulted directly but they were aware of the report and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The report had been discussed at a meeting of an international Equality Committee, held on 23 January 1991, at which both women's organizations and the Folketing had been represented. The report was being used to provide information on the work of ESC, and other organizations were using it too. When the Convention had been ratified by Denmark, it had been published in the same way as all legislation and, in addition, in the annual report of ESC, together with the work of the Committee. The tenth anniversary of the Convention had been mentioned in the newsletter of ESC.

255. Women's organizations in Denmark, the representative reported, were very interested in international work in EEC, particularly in the European women's lobby. She also mentioned a growing interest in, and concern for, the conditions of women in Eastern Europe. A Nordic forum had been held in 1988 and another was planned for 1994. She said that, nationally and internationally, the main concerns of the women's organizations were the promotion of research on women, the study of women in the decision-making process, the economic empowerment of women, the issue of equal pay and the provision of day-care facilities. The umbrella organization of the Danish Women's National Council received a subsidy from the Government of DKr 300,000 a year. The Government provided funds for one employee of the Danish Women's Society and, in addition, gave subsidies to the women's organizations on an irregular basis.

256. In response to a follow-up question on the membership of women's organizations, the representative said that few young women had participated in the Nordic forum in 1988, but she considered that the lack of participation had not been caused by a lack of interest but by the fact that women did not feel affected by discrimination.

257. In response to another question, the representative said that the 150 cases of positive discrimination that had been referred to ESC had been initiated by central government (specifically, the Ministry of Education),

local government, enterprises and different institutions, such as employment centres; none of the cases had been initiated by the trade unions.

258. Regarding article 5, the representative explained that the goal of the plan of action for children was to improve the conditions of children. The subjects of day-care facilities, the right of parents to stay away from work in order to take care of their children and the possibility of combining family life and work were being examined. The provision of flexible working hours for parents was one of the main issues in the general labour agreements. The labour legislation entitled parents to only one day's leave at a time to care for a sick child, but that period was recognized as too short and an attempt was being made to improve the general agreements to increase such leave to 10 days a year. She said that Denmark had not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex), but that ratification was imminent. In response to a request for further information on the success of endeavours to make equality a topic in the media, she said that in the newspapers and on radio and television, equality was often discussed. There were many female journalists who endeavoured to bring women's issues to the fore, and ESC published results and developments, particularly during conferences and seminars.

259. On article 6, data on the number of prostitutes were not available, but the police did not consider that there had been an increase. Part of the work of the police and social services was concerned with the prevention of prostitution. As in all other countries, there were connections between prostitution and drug addiction, and prostitution and the incidence of HIV infection/AIDS. Several social programmes to deal with the problem of prostitution had been undertaken both by local government and voluntary groups, especially in the larger cities.

260. Responding to a further question on article 6, the representative said that all types of women were involved in prostitution but made particular mention of women from Greenland, who formed the largest single group and experienced difficult social conditions in Denmark.

261. On article 7, the representative explained that the Act on Equality of Men and Women in Appointing Members of Public Committees (1985) had had a great effect, which was reflected in the fact that 38 per cent of State committee members in 1990 were women, compared to 12.7 per cent before the Act had been adopted. A new act on boards, adopted in 1990, required all government services to appoint members of boards in the same way as had been provided for committees in the Act of 1985. She reported that in some areas, especially technical ones, it had been difficult for organizations to appoint women to committees. With the new act, private boards would be forced to involve women when the activities had a public dimension. Some parts of the private sector found compliance difficult as there were not enough women at the senior levels and, therefore, it would take time to educate and to promote them first before the provisions could be implemented. In response to a question concerning the results of medical research on women as fighter pilots and the necessity for such research, the representative said that the research had not been concluded and was still in progress but it had been considered necessary to measure the effects of strong acceleration on women physically. The only area of the defence forces to which women were not admitted was that

of training as fighter pilots but they could train as civil pilots. The representative said, in response to a follow-up question on women's participation in the Folketing and political parties, that women were encouraged to enter politics and to vote for women, which had influenced the inclusion of women in the lists of candidates for political positions. The women who were currently in the Folketing acted as role models for the younger women.

262. On article 8, the representative stated that one woman was an ambassador and some were in senior positions in the United Nations system. No specific details were given on the action taken by the Government to encourage the appointment of women to senior positions in the United Nations.

263. With regard to article 10, she said that the new forms of education and structural reforms had been continued, with the involvement of the teachers' trade unions. ESC would be publishing guidelines for educational institutions to assist the education authorities in their work for equality. In most, if not all, schools, sex education was available but it was not compulsory. The form of the curricula and training of teachers for sex education was being considered. In response to a question on the significant difference in the participation rates of men and women in apprenticeships, the representative said that, to some extent, apprenticeships were available in trades traditionally associated with men. At the university level, special attention had been given to counselling female students on careers that offered good prospects for employment. The representative provided data on the percentage of women in education at various levels and in the labour market in 1988. Women accounted for 51.5 per cent of the students in basic courses and basic vocational training and for 20.1 per cent of the students in apprenticeship courses. Women accounted for 60.3 per cent of the students in courses leading to a basic qualification. While 82.9 per cent of those taking part in short-term advanced education courses were women, only 44.6 per cent of those in medium-term courses and 43.6 per cent of those in long-term advanced courses were women.

264. On article 11, the representative provided statistics with regard to the conditions of employment and rates of participation in the labour force. The percentages of women in administrative posts at different levels were reported for the public and private sectors. In the central administration, women represented 51 per cent of the personnel at the entry level, 37 per cent at the middle level (academics) and 12 per cent at the leadership level. Corresponding figures for the private sector were 63 per cent, 25 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively. The representative reported that the pay of unskilled women was 89.4 per cent of the amount earned by unskilled men and, at the official level, salaried women earned 71.7 per cent of the amount earned by men. More men occupied managerial positions. She said that there was still a need to find an acceptable definition for "equal pay for work of equal value" and that Denmark was following the code of EEC. The reasons given for the inequality in pay levels were a persisting tendency towards a gender-segregated structure of segments of the labour market, and the fact that women tended to have shorter lengths of service, to have spent less time in education and to be concentrated in greater numbers in part-time jobs. Those issues were main concerns of the Government, and ESC was carrying out projects to identify and overcome the obstacles to achieving equality in pay. The Nordic countries were collaborating to pool their knowledge and experience

in order to overcome the problems, and a project on the gender segregation of the labour market had recently been finished. The project on equal pay was new and, therefore, no results could be reported yet.

265. In response to a question regarding part-time workers, the representative said there was no discrimination against part-time workers and that their working conditions were the same as those of full-time workers except for those who worked less than 15 hours a week. She reported that 36 per cent of the female employees were in part-time employment and most of those were elderly women. Young women could not afford to be in part-time employment because of the high cost of living. The standard working week for full-time employment was 37 hours. The representative informed members that sexual harassment did occur and that it was against the provisions of the Act on Equal Treatment between Men and Women. She said that a victim could claim compensation in cases of harassment. Three cases had been brought before the courts. In Denmark, the proportion of the female population in the labour force aged between 15 and 74 years had increased from 49.1 per cent in 1967 to 68.5 per cent in 1988. During the same period, the percentage of male participation had fallen from 86 per cent in 1967 to 81 per cent in 1988. In 1988, women represented 45.8 per cent of the total labour force. The data on unemployment showed that the average number of unemployed persons had risen over recent years. In 1987, 87,257 men and 126,154 women (representing 5.9 per cent and 9.8 per cent in the labour force, respectively) were unemployed. By 1989, those figures had risen to 120,000 men and 145,000 women (8.0 per cent and 11.1 per cent, respectively). Women's participation in the labour market was increasing, but the risk of unemployment was for women larger than it was for men. Responding to a question on whether any special measures existed to reduce the higher percentage of women who were unemployed, the representative said that several programmes had been set up for both women and men to improve their qualifications in order to reduce the risk of unemployment. Such programmes had had some success but, in general, there was an insufficient number of jobs.

266. Improvements to the Equal Opportunities Act and the Equal Pay Act, in 1988 and 1989 respectively, had been introduced to safeguard the interests of pregnant women employees and to prevent their dismissal solely on the grounds of pregnancy. An important condition of employment for women was the availability of entitlements in connection with confinement. In Denmark, women had the right to a maternity leave of 4 or 8 weeks before childbirth and of 24 weeks afterwards, in accordance with the recommended 6-month breast-feeding period. In addition, a father had the right to a leave of 14 days after the birth of the child; approximately 50 per cent of the fathers took that leave. The last 10 weeks of the leave could be shared between the parents or be taken only by the father; however, the representative reported that only 3 per cent of the fathers took advantage of their right to take such leave. The entitlement to full salary during maternity leave had recently become part of the collective agreement for civil servants and was also the case in several areas in the private sector. Social benefits were available to those who did not have the right to full pay during maternity leave. The provision of full salary during maternity leave was considered a way of encouraging men to take paternal leave and of avoiding a loss of income to the family. The issue of parental leave, in connection with the question of combining work and family life, was very important in Danish society. If women were to obtain equality in the labour market, men had to participate in

the work at home. The representative concluded by stating that great changes, such as the introduction of flexibility, were required in the labour market in order to safeguard the needs of parents and thus achieve progress towards equality in society.

267. Denmark had 29 equality consultants who organized courses for the unions and the employers' organizations in order to improve the conditions of women's employment. The work of the consultants was essential to show the consequences of gender-segregation in the labour market and the impact of that segregation on the salary levels of women and men. The representative considered that the change in the way salaries were negotiated in the labour market, for example, the removal of indexing of salaries, had contributed to the increase in the difference between the average incomes of women and of men since the initial report had been considered. The representative said that general recommendation No. 13 (eighth session, 1989) had been used in job evaluation exercises, and the value of qualifications had been carefully studied. The removal of the prejudice that the value of women's work and the qualifications of women were lower than those of men was closely connected with the abolition of the gender-segregated labour market and the achievement of equal pay. The main issues were remuneration as negotiated by the social partner, the way in which the legislation was enacted and the evidence from statistics.

268. Continuing on article 11, the representative reported that there were 271,929 day-care and child-care places available, to which parents contributed approximately 20 per cent of the total expenses. She said that although Denmark had the highest number of day-care places per capita in the world, 6 per cent of the children aged from zero to six years did not have a place.

269. Data were requested for the following report on the number of women who were heads of companies and on the measures to assist women in setting up small businesses.

270. On article 12, data were not available on the incidence of violence between married couples. There were 34 crisis centres, located mainly in the larger cities. The number of reported rape cases had risen slightly from 422 in 1980 to 527 in 1989 but the increase was attributed to the improved treatment of rape victims and the easier access to social services, which had resulted in more cases being reported. The representative said that the increased economic independence of women made them less vulnerable to domestic violence, and they had more opportunity to leave and seek help or to obtain a divorce. The number of HIV-infected persons was about 5,000 and the number of AIDS cases was about 700, of whom 50 were women. The number of abortions had been stable over the last five to six years. Approximately 21,000 abortions were performed in 1988. Research was being undertaken to identify the reasons for the abortions and to attempt to reduce the number that were performed.

271. On article 13, the representative confirmed that the income of married women was taxed independently of that of their husbands. The standard amount of maintenance to be provided for children was the same for either parent. Similarly, if the non-custodial parent earned more than DKr 230,000, he or she had to provide an increased amount of maintenance.

272. In response to a question on a woman's right to own farm land, under article 14, the representative stated that all property, including farm land, could be owned by women.

273. On article 16, she said that partners living together had to support each other as far as social security, but not as far as taxation, was concerned. The allocation of maintenance upon separation depended on the amounts the couples had earned and the length of time for which they had been married. Maintenance was allocated for 10 years; previously it had corresponded to the length of the marriage, which had reflected the greater economic dependence of women. Upon a couple's separation, some pension rights, such as those under personal pension schemes, were shared, while others, such as employment pensions, were usually maintained by the contributor.

274. She said that it was possible that the number of de facto unions had increased. The normal pattern, however, was for partners to live together and then marry immediately before or after the birth of the first child for reasons of custody and their concern to provide the children with role models for both sexes by having both parents share the responsibility of the family. She said that the family unit remained stable as there had been little change in the divorce rate. Care of the children was a priority issue for parents who were striving to increase the time they could spend with their children and improve their standard of living. The Government's priorities were aimed at improving conditions for children.

275. Members commented that much of the progress had taken place in the public sector and asked if as many efforts were being made in the private sector. The representative replied that emphasis had been placed on the public sector and progress had been significant. It was easier to develop legislation in the public sector because of the influence of the female members of the Folketing and the fact that many women were employed in the public sector. The Government hoped that the private sector would follow the example that had been set by the public sector.

276. Members congratulated the Government on their achievements and on the preparation of the second periodic report while noting that efforts were still needed to remove gender-segregation from the labour market and to enable women to combine their work and family life.