
Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Seventh session

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

Second periodic report

720. The Committee considered the second periodic report of Sweden (CEDAW/C/13/Add.6 and Corr.1) at its 125th and 127th meetings, held on 1 and 2 March 1988 (CEDAW/C/SR.125 and 127).

721. The representative of Sweden, in introducing the second periodic report, informed the Committee that the report had been prepared by the Equality Affairs Division of the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with other authorities, women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations.

722. Since the second report had been prepared, a woman Minister of Justice had been appointed. The cabinet was now composed of 6 women and 15 men.

723. In Sweden, equality in the labour market was considered to be one of the most important paths to overall equality in society. The Government had become more aware of the close relationship between family policy, labour-market policy and policy for equality between women and men. Therefore, family policy aimed at creating a good environment for children to grow up in and at providing economic support for families with children. Another important aspect was to give children and parents time for each other. It was essential to have the possibility to combine parenthood with gainful employment.

724. The above principles were fundamental to the equal opportunities policy to be presented in Parliament on 8 March 1988 by the Minister of Equality Affairs.

725. The representative explained that the policy was in fact a five-year plan of action covering the subjects of women in the economy, equality in the labour market, in the educational system and in the family, and women's representation in the decision-making and advisory assemblies.

726. The Government had announced a target of 30 per cent for women's representation in governmental decision-making bodies. The current percentage was only 16 per cent.

727. The fulfilment of Sweden's commitment to the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 7/ remained a priority.

728. Developments over the last eight years, since the adoption of the Swedish Equal Opportunities Act, had been encouraging. The equal opportunities ombudsman had successfully followed the implementation of the Act and had also made recommendations to amend it. The Labour Court and the political parties had also agreed that it might be appropriate to evaluate the Act.

729. The parental insurance scheme would be increased from 12 to 18 months. It was expected that child-care facilities would be available from 1991 on for all children from 18 months of age whose parents worked or studied.

730. Equality depended upon choices by individuals and their decisions regarding education, profession or the division of work at home between the spouses. Therefore, equality between men and women could not be the subject of political decisions. Governments should strive to provide the framework within which each single person could make his or her own choices. It had to be constantly examined to keep prevailing circumstances under review, which would benefit not only women but society as a whole.

731. In her reply to questions regarding what progress or changes had occurred since the presentation of the initial report and what obstacles remained to the achievement of equality between women and men, the representative said that the policy on equality was an integrated part of a policy for full employment. In 1987, 90 per cent of women, aged 25 to 55 years, were in the labour force compared to 93 per cent of men. There was only 1.9 per cent unemployment in Sweden. The trade unions had actively fought for reduced wage differentials and women had increased their participation in the work of trade unions. Women were exercising their political rights by voting in larger numbers than men, and women made up

about one third of the members of Parliament and of elected municipal decision-making bodies. Regarding the obstacles encountered, she mentioned the sex-segregated labour market and the uneven sharing of responsibility for unremunerated housework, which accounted for the high number of women in decision-making bodies both in the private and public sectors. One expert raised the question of the regulation of the labour market, which, in her opinion, was not yet promoting equality of opportunities between men and women, since 38 professions were occupied by women and 134 by men; 88 per cent of the active female population was in teaching and the majority of women worked part time.

732. Regarding the question of which new legal remedies were available to women in courts or other tribunals in cases of discrimination in employment, in the public or in the private sphere, such as the provision of goods and services, the representative stated that there were no legal differences in the way men and women were treated in any area. A new law on legal support for victims of sexual offences had been introduced and would enter into force in July 1988.

733. Regarding the publicizing of the translation and distribution of the Convention and the question whether women's organizations had been involved in the preparation of the initial and second reports of Sweden, the representative said that the Convention before ratification had been sent for comments to authorities and organizations. Therefore, it had also been translated and further distributed to authorities, political parties, labour-market organizations, women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations. In addition, wide publicity had been given especially to the second report.

734. As to whether there were any disadvantaged groups in regard to the enjoyment of equal rights, and whether any special measures had been introduced to remedy this, the representative replied that it remained the legal provision concerning reinowers which would be revised within a year. Legally, she explained, there were no disadvantaged groups in Sweden.

735. In reply to the question whether the Commission on Equality between men and women was independent or attached to the Government, how it obtained its operational funds and how the members were appointed, she replied that the Commission was an independent authority, its budget was decided annually and all members were appointed by the Government.

736. With regard to rights for fathers to transfer their parental leave to the mother, the representative said that there were no plans to preclude fathers from this possibility. The question of introducing quotas had been discussed but deferred.

737. In reply to the information requested on pornography laws and on whether any guidelines had been issued in relation to the representation of women by the media, the representative said that a bill was pending in Parliament prohibiting the representation of sexual violence in printed material and films. The question of compulsory censorship for video films sold or hired for private use was also being considered.

738. With regard to the question whether prostitution had abated and whether rehabilitation programmes existed for prostitutes, she replied that, since 1980, there had been no survey on prostitution. Existing prostitutes were often alcoholics or drug abusers living in the large urban areas. An AIDS campaign had

been launched, including specific measures for prostitutes. There were a few treatment centres for prostitutes in Stockholm and some more were planned.

739. On the request for information on the number and proportion of women in policy-making positions, the representative stated that, in 1986, 6 per cent (or 112) of all persons in senior ministerial and executive posts were women. In the government office, 16 per cent of the higher executive staff were women; there were 108 women (31 per cent) in Parliament; 23 per cent of the judges were women; all 29 judges in the housing courts were men. In the legal aid offices, 30 per cent of the lawyers were women; however, 45 per cent of law trainees were women. No significant changes had been noticed at ambassadorial or trade union levels.

740. As to whether there had been any change in the participation of Swedish women in international organizations and international delegations, the representative replied that decisions made by the Government were based on merit alone.

741. With regard to the programmes introduced by the Equal Opportunities Commission, no formal evaluation had been carried out.

742. As to details requested on any change in the proportion of women at each level of education, including testing education, the representative replied that no significant change had been noted and added that, as to tertiary education, 63 per cent of all new students in culture and information were women; 54 per cent of all new students in administrative, economic and social studies were women; and 86 per cent of health students and 23 per cent of technical students were women. There had not been any significant change in the proportion of women entering vocational training in traditionally male areas since 1985. In labour-market training, 4,218 women had begun untraditional vocational training during the last year, which represented 16.5 per cent of the total of women in labour-market training. In 1987, a quota had been introduced in the vocational training for production and maintenance engineering.

743. As to whether there had been any increase in the number of women appointed to high-level teaching positions, the representative replied that only 5 per cent of the professors were women. A study was being undertaken on the procedures concerning the appointments of professors taking the question of equality into account.

744. Several questions dealt with matters of employment, salaries, hiring practices and statistical information, as well as eventual changes in the proportion of women or of married women in the work-place and in different sectors of employment. It was also asked whether goals of equal pay were being achieved and if average wages of women were between 70 and 90 per cent of men's. The differences were due to different occupations and working hours. The goal of equal pay was almost achieved but the segregation of the labour market made the wage-gap persistent. There were no new affirmative action programmes to ensure that a minimum proportion of women were employed in each sector. There were no special labour statistics by marital status but by age. Recently, the Central Bureau of Statistics had been asked by the Minister of Labour to devise a programme of persons entering the labour market by occupational groups. The Equal Opportunities Act provided the legal framework to appeal cases on grounds of discrimination. The normal procedure was to enter into mediation or conciliation before taking action in Labour Court. A total of 32 cases had been brought to Labour Court, out of which 23 had been dismissed. The

Act had been in force for eight years and the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman had successfully seen to it that the Act was observed.

745. Several questions were raised regarding part-time employment and the representative answered that through the Parental Leave Act, parents could work six hours a day if they had children under 8 years of age. A problem, however, was that an increasing number of women were working part-time on an involuntary basis. Measures to reduce this increase were being undertaken by the Labour Market Board. One million individuals were working 34 hours or less; out of these 260,000 were men and 800,000 were women. Of all employed persons, 209,000 worked less than they wanted and 75 per cent of these were women. Benefits to workers were regulated through collective bargaining. Normally a person working 17 hours a week had the same rights as full-time workers. Very few part-time workers worked less than 17 hours.

746. With regard to the question whether the target to have child-care facilities for all who needed it by 1991 would be reached, she answered positively and stated that 80 per cent of all pre-school children had access to child-care facilities.

747. In reply to the questions whether women had the same pension entitlements as men, were the entitlements linked to earning levels and how were women who worked part-time affected, the representative answered that women and men had the same entitlements. Explanations on Sweden's pension scheme could be found in the report. If there was a difference in the supplementary pension for women, it was due to the fact that women on an average contributed less and for a shorter period to the supplementary pension fund than an average man. The pension scheme was in fact distributing resources from men to women.

748. The experts thanked the representative for a splendid and detailed report and for all the answers provided both in her introduction and to the questions asked. It was felt, however, that the format of the report showed that guidelines for periodical reports had to be elaborated by the Committee and there were areas where additional information and clarification was needed. Compliments were presented on the results that Sweden had achieved which could set precedents and become a model for many countries. It was impressive how legislative provisions were followed by concrete action.

749. Experts asked for more details regarding the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Women's Representation, which was to be presented in 1987.

750. The experts had noted the problem of the increase in the number of women choosing part-time employment and had also noted the explanations provided by the representative, but further elaboration was requested regarding measures foreseen to solve the problem, for example, could women be helped to pursue a career while working part-time.

751. The representative was also asked to give additional details on the new policy to deal with sexual harassment at the work-place since many members of the Committee could benefit from criteria and modalities used.

752. The debate regarding sex discrimination in advertising and pornography and sexual violence portrayed in films and videotapes, versus freedom of expression, was a very appropriate and important one. It was stated that the principle of equality could not be undermined by the principle of freedom of expression, as each

freedom had its own particular obligations. With reference to article 16 of the instrument on Government and the Freedom of the Press Act, the representative was asked whether she could enlighten the Committee as to how that debate had proceeded in Sweden.

753. The view was also expressed that the formulation contained in the introduction regarding equality within the family was a very particular and delicate norm to set. It was agreed with the Swedish representative that this pertained to the realm of individual decisions within the family and could not in reality be legislated upon. All that Governments could do was to facilitate the services provided in order to make those decisions a matter of choice and not of obligation. It was also asked if women had to take up gainful employment for economic reasons.

754. Regarding occupational segregation, it was asked what additional measures were foreseen to remedy the low number of women not choosing the technical and scientific fields. Sweden was a very advanced country and it was discouraging to all that there were so few women engineers. These technical careers, it was pointed out, were the most promising at the present time.

755. Additional details were requested on the social insurance schemes, since the number of years at work did not seem to affect the final reimbursement made to pensioners. It was asked what were the widows' benefits.

756. It was noted that the goal of equal pay was allegedly almost achieved. However, it had not been stated whether reference was made to equal pay for equal work or equal pay for work of equal value.

757. The representative agreed with the Committee that there were indeed problems related to the involuntary use of part-time work by women. As a rule part-time workers received less in company training, they were less active in union work and they advanced more slowly than full-time workers. It should be remembered, however, she added, that part-time work for many women was a temporary arrangement and that women increased their working hours once children grew older. Part-time work was for many women a way to combine gainful employment with the care of children.

758. Organizational methods had been devised, especially in the health-sector where a large proportion of the employed worked part-time. It was the opinion of the Swedish Government that it was essential for both women and men to combine parenthood with gainful employment. Family was not the exclusive domain of women, extensive welfare programmes such as the Parental Leave Act made it possible for both women and men to combine parenthood with gainful employment. To obtain full supplementary pension, a minimum of 30 years of work was required.

759. In regard to the question on procedures to investigate sexual harassment, the representative agreed that this was an important and difficult question. The Swedish Work Environment Act stipulated that the working environment should be not only physically but also psychologically sufficient. Sexual harassment was primarily seen as a problem of relations at the work place, which meant that it had to be approached as other working environmental problems.

760. The question of protection against sex discriminatory advertising versus freedom of expression and freedom of the press was vital and much discussed in

Sweden. The National Board for Consumers Policies was currently conducting a special survey on sex discriminatory advertising. The question of establishing quotas in political life was much discussed. Only the new Environmental Party urged quotas. In some municipalities, the question had been raised and a quota system was used on a voluntary basis. Environmental policy was of great interest to the Swedish Society and many women were active in this important movement. Various methods were being used to increase the number of male pre-school teachers. By 1991 it was estimated that a total of 26,000 new teachers would be required if the desired increase in child care facilities was to be met.

761. As to widow's pension a reform was being suggested which will establish that men as well as women will have a right to a pension when their spouse had passed away. This reform had been heavily debated and it would reduce the widow-pensions on the one hand and increase equality on the other.

762. She agreed that segregation in the labour market was a major worry. She admitted that this was a long-term project which could only be solved by a combination of several measures targeting education choices as well as labour market conditions.

763. In cases of discrimination based on sex, a trade union member first had to contact his or her trade union. If the trade union did not want to take action, the complainant could turn to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman who, depending on the merits of the case, could pursue it.

764. Finally, she stated that the question of equal pay for work of equal value remained an unresolved question. Comparative worth was a new instrument for equality and still under discussion in Sweden.

765. It was commented that, according to the experience of one country, men tended to share in household duties and child care in the rural areas more than in the urban areas.

766. The representative was once again congratulated for the detailed replies submitted and for the progress achieved. The Committee looked forward to the receipt of Sweden's third report.