
Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women
Ninth session
22 January - 2 February 1990
Excerpted from: Supplement No. 38 (A/45/38)

Concluding comments of the Committee on the Elimination of
Discrimination against Women: Ukrainian Soviet Socialist
Republic

Second periodic report

327. The Committee considered the second periodic report of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (CEDAW/C/13/Add.8 and Amend.1) at its 162nd meeting on 30 January 1990 (CEDAW/C/SR.162).

328. The representative of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic stated, in response to a question about why the second periodic report had begun with article 7, that the report was intended to update information based on developments subsequent to the initial report and that there had been no substantial change in the information under the earlier articles. The information contained in the second periodic report and, particularly, in the amendment to it, showed the effects of the vigorous renewal of society implied by perestroika and glasnost. The critical analysis that was part of that process had identified a number of problems for women requiring solution, including the situation of employment of women, women's work-load, the division of labour in the home between women and men and the related problem of underdevelopment in the necessary elements of the social infrastructure, and the participation of women in decision-making. Of particular importance was the probable effect of the process of economic reform on women.

329. The representative noted that as part of its reconsideration of the role of the International Court of Justice, the Government had in March 1989 withdrawn its reservation to article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

330. In response to a question on the changes in the status of women that had taken place as a result of perestroika and glasnost, the representative stated that the major achievement was a change in the socio-political atmosphere of the country, both at the all-Union and republic levels, as a result of the election of peoples' deputies, the active role now being played by the Supreme Soviet in developing legislation that aimed at creating a state of law. There had been increasing democratization at the republic and local levels and elections in the republic

would be held on 4 March 1990 on the basis of a new law. On the basis of that law, the new Parliament of the Republic would not have quotas for public organizations and although those organizations, including the Communist Party, could nominate candidates, voting was by district. In addition, a new all-Union law governing relations between the centre and the republics substantially expanded the rights of the Union Republics. The main issue was the radical economic reform to make the economy more responsive and, although it had not had the intended effect, as shown by the unbalanced market and shortages of goods, it was expected to increase the output of consumer goods and services.

331. Among the major developments for women at the Union level was the establishment of national machinery for the advancement of women, consisting of a committee of the Supreme Soviet and the new Department of Women's Affairs, Family Protection and Motherhood in the Council of Ministers. Similar changes were expected at the republic level after the forthcoming election. A second development was that, as a result of changes whereby enterprise managers were elected by work collectives, the proportion of women managers had increased and was 26 per cent of the total, ranging from 70 per cent in communications to 28 per cent in services and 23 per cent in industry. A number of enterprises, having shifted to cost-accounting, had more resources available for social benefits and improving maternity leave provisions. A solution to the food problem was being promoted by the development of the co-operative movement, family brigades and later, perhaps, family-owned farms; corresponding changes in the law were also under consideration. Housing was being expanded with a view to assuring, that by the year 2000, each family owned a separate apartment or house. There were efforts under way to convert defence industries to civilian production and initial efforts had dealt with the production of medical equipment. A demographic decline had been noted, prompting action to deal with a sharp fall in the birth rate, which was now below a level necessary to replace the population. Decentralization in foreign economic relations, which had come about when Ukrainian enterprises were allowed direct access to their partners abroad, had led to the establishment of joint ventures producing goods in high demand. There was an increased understanding and improvement in international relations, including peoples' diplomacy of which women were a part, and an increase in the involvement of non-State organizations in charitable work. Finally, many hospitals and clinics previously reserved for government functionaries had been turned into facilities for children.

332. A question was posed about the problems women faced and the conditions that needed improving. In reply, it was noted that 92 per cent of women who could work or study did so. There were imbalances in employment in the sense that many women worked in hazardous occupations, on night shifts or other disadvantageous conditions. There were divergences in practice from the principle of equal pay for equal work since, although the principle was set in law, comparisons across individual economic sectors showed male to female wages to be in the ratio of 3:2. Women's high educational qualifications were not matched by their participation in decision-making, a fact that reflected the lack of professional training caused by the need to maintain the double burden. Measures being taken to correct that imbalance included special training programmes, evening and correspondence courses. The underlying problem was the lack of sharing of domestic responsibilities as women, on the average, were engaged in domestic work two to two and a half times more than men. Given the inadequate social infrastructure and lingering outmoded attitudes and stereotypes, women had to choose between a home and a career.

333. Regarding the Committee's question on violence against women and measures taken in that regard by the Government, it was noted that all forms of violence were punishable by law under the criminal code, including such crimes as illegal abortions, sexual assaults and rape, which was considered very serious and was punishable by 3 to 15 years in prison or worse. The Government was taking measures against all forms of crime, but the crime situation was alarming and 730 acts of violence against women had been recorded in 1989. There had been insufficient preventive work among persons with prior records.

334. Concerning a question about the problem of women abandoning their children to orphanages in order to enable them to pursue their careers and about the causes of that problem, the representative stated that some 70,000 children were orphaned or left without care, of which 34,000 remained in institutions. They included children born out of wedlock, children of alcoholics and some - very few - abandoned by their mothers. Besides family placement, new approaches were being sought.

335. On article 2, regarding a series of questions dealing with how women could use the courts to find remedies for discrimination, it was stated that full equality was set out in the Constitution and, additionally, there were benefits set out in the labour code. In terms of cases of discrimination in labour relations, recourse could be had to the courts and legal assistance was provided, among others, through the public prosecutor's office and from trade unions and workers' councils. Although the basis for litigation was legislation adopted by the republic itself, the provisions of the Convention could also be used.

336. Regarding the jurisdiction and structure of the committees and commissions on the status of women established in the republic and the Union, the representative stated that the Standing Commission on Women, Motherhood and Children had been established in 1976 with functions deriving from the Constitution, including preparation of State policy affecting women's daily life and draft legislation, considering draft plans to ascertain their effect on women and to review regulations from individual ministries on their effect on women's daily life, as well as the consideration of complaints from individual women. Recommendations of the commission had to be considered by the appropriate organization. The commission had an elected chair and vice-chair and consisted of 33 deputies, both women and men.

337. On the Committee's question about the incidence of prostitution in the light of article 6, it was stated that it was not a widespread problem. In the 1920s, prostitution had been a reflection of poverty; in the present, it was undertaken for profit. The Government believed in dealing with it as a social problem, like alcoholism, with an emphasis on education and rehabilitation. Criminal penalties existed for cases of promoting prostitution of minors and maintaining a house of prostitution. In 1989, 152 people had been prosecuted for prostitution.

338. Concerning changes in the number and participation of women in the legislative bodies at various levels since the initial report, it was noted that measures to promote women's participation had to be linked with social protection. In practice, there had been no substantive changes in the level of participation, and the proportion was the same (36 per cent) at the level of the Supreme Soviet, but there had been qualitative improvement and a number of women occupied high posts, including the Chair of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. About one third of the members of the Communist Party were women and on the Central Committee, women made

up about 10 per cent, at oblast level secretaries, 7 per cent, and one woman was a member of the Politburo. At the 27th Party Congress, 27.2 per cent of the delegates were women. Women participated in a wide range of activities, going beyond those that were traditionally women's preserve, and occupied many posts, although there were some spheres of competence where women were particularly involved. With regard to a question about whether women deputies could be nominated through the Ukrainian Republic Women's Council or whether they could present themselves as candidates in other ways, it was explained that the new law on people's deputies specified equal rights of both women and men and accordingly women could be nominated by the Women's Council, or from their place of work or their place of residence.

339. More information concerning the functioning of the Department of Affairs of Women at the Republic-wide level and the proposed national machinery was requested by the Committee and in response, it was noted that the policy was to improve the efficiency of the State machinery and for that reason, the Union-level Department on Women, Family Protection and Children had been created based on comments by people's deputies. It was expected to enhance women's participation. Although there was currently no equivalent in the Ukrainian SSR, it was believed that one might be considered following the forthcoming republic elections.

340. Concerning questions about the characteristics of the system of women's councils, it was stated that they were public organizations of women in their place of work or residence. The 27th Party Congress in 1986 had adopted measures to strengthen their traditional role as advocates for women's advancement. There were 57,000 councils (of which 24,000 were in labour collectives) and the membership at all levels included 500,000 women. The councils conducted seminars, created consciousness, participated in drafting legislation, helped liaise with the government bodies. They dealt with population policy through special programmes, and participated with other institutions.

341. Referring to a question under article 8 on the specific number, proportions and levels of women representing the Republic in international forums, the representative stated that 40 per cent of the members of delegations to other socialist countries on questions of economic co-operation were women, as well as 21.4 per cent of such delegations to Western countries, 4.2 per cent of delegations to international organizations and 10 per cent of the persons sent to work in the secretariats of international organizations.

342. A question about the areas in which there had been an increase in the percentage of women in institutions of higher education, relevant to article 10, was answered by noting that there had been no change from the previous report, although there had been a slight increase in the percentage of male students in teacher training and that was considered a positive development as the teaching profession had been considerably feminized. Regarding several questions about sex stereotyping in textbooks and curricula and the existence of sex education, it was stated that a reform of the education system was under way, including an expansion of the rights of individual schools and their students to select textbooks. The curricula of both primary and secondary schools included material on the family and sharing of responsibilities and efforts were being made to re-orient teachers with a view to eradicating outmoded stereotypes. Responding to a question about why there had been an increase in college students with families, it was noted that the legal age for marriage was 18 for men and 17 for women and that there was a tendency towards earlier marriage, which was related to a more open view of sexual

relations and improved social protection for married students, for whom housing was provided.

343. A series of questions on articles 10 and 11 dealt with the Government's approach to women's employment and the educational requisites for it in the context of perestroika. In quantitative terms, women were well represented in all fields of study as well as branches of the economy. A qualitative assessment based on studies suggested that workers' collectives in which there were both women and men were more effective than those having only one sex. The State could use both administrative measures and economic incentives to press for policies of equality. It was noted that a number of fields like the food or textile industries were feminized, but the re-equipping of the textile industry, for example, was leading to a slight increase in the number of men. Health and education were also feminized, but efforts were being made to recruit more male doctors and teachers and it had been noted that an increase in the pay to doctors attracted more men to medicine. Among school directors, women predominated at the primary level and made up 40 per cent at secondary levels. Participation of women in vocational training was high and more women were entering fields like metallurgy and engineering. Restructuring of enterprises was expected to lead to more women in higher positions, but to achieve that, there was still a need to provide social support to women so as to eliminate the double burden. That has been helped by the high representation of women in the Supreme Soviet.

344. Concerning equal pay, in connection with article 11, the representative stated that there had been a general increase in wages over the past several years; some predominantly female fields especially had seen wages rise, and salary scales in all fields were being reviewed. On occupational safety, it was noted that it was government policy to improve working conditions. With regard to the repercussions of government policy to reduce drastically the number of women working in manual labour or in jobs involving harmful working conditions, it was stated that plans were being put into effect. Steps had been taken to ensure that women kept their pay while being retrained or relocated. The advice of trade unions and women's councils on those matters was sought and taken into account. On child-care, including the question of who takes care of children who cannot find places in child-care institutions, it was noted that there was a broad network of pre-schools, especially in urban areas, but that in rural areas only 45 per cent of the needs had been met. Extended paid leave would help. All mothers had the right to maternity and child-care leave. Moreover, as state and collective farms switched to self-financing, they would be able to provide child-care from their own resources. When there were not enough places, other means had to be found, including having the mother work at home, obtaining the help of a relative (like the grandmother) or with help from the women's council.

345. In response to a question about the relatively high infant mortality rate, in relation to article 12, it was stated that new facilities for child health were being developed and, with better facilities and services, infant mortality was decreasing. Outreach health service programmes were designed to help improve services for families and to help protect women. Special efforts had been undertaken in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, including relocation of people away from contaminated areas, provision of preventive services for children, efforts to ensure uncontaminated food and water supplies and other measures. On the question of abortion, it was noted that they were legal when performed in a medical institution under a doctor's supervision, but that it was illegal to force a woman to have an abortion against her will. The figures on abortions were: 1985 - 1,345,475; 1986 - 1,166,039; 1987 - 1,068,000; and 1988 - 733,000.

346. With regard to article 13, on women's economic rights, it was stated that women had equal rights with men. There was a slight difference in that the age for legal marriage was lower for girls than for boys, although local authorities could lower either by one year.

347. A general decline in the size of the rural population was noted in response to a question under article 14 about whether rural women had the same access to health care as urban women. The population plan sought to raise the birth rate and there were efforts to increase the medical services available in rural areas. Construction of new clinics, however, was behind schedule and collective and State farms were investing in health services and infrastructure.

348. A question was posed under article 16 about the legal position of couples living in consensual unions and in reply it was stated that the code on marriage defined that on the basis of formal registration, but that, for children born outside of formal marriage, when family relations could be shown to exist and there was a voluntary recognition of paternity, consensual unions did receive some recognition. Concerning the high divorce rate, it was stated that there had been a sharp drop in family stability and some 36 per cent of marriages ended in divorce, although that seemed to be declining recently. There were some 1.5 million children in those families. The survey undertaken by the Soviet Women's Committee had identified male alcoholism, infidelity, lack of sharing in domestic responsibilities, problems in daily life and lack of mutual understanding as reasons for divorce. Efforts were made to reconcile, but some 96 per cent of the separation cases ended in divorce. A higher proportion of divorced men than divorced women remarried.

349. Members noted the comprehensiveness and frankness of the introduction to the report, hoping that with the advent of glasnost and perestroika, many changes would take place, including those leading to a greater participation by women in political and decision-making. Concern was expressed that economic restructuring could lead to a reduction in essential services, like child-care facilities, and might mean that women would pay the larger cost for the restructuring.