

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Twenty-third session
12-30 June 2000

Consideration of reports of States parties
Lithuania

Initial report and second periodic report

1. The Committee considered the initial report and the second periodic report of the Republic of Lithuania (CEDAW/C/LTU/1 and CEDAW/C/LTU/2) at its 472nd and 473rd meetings, on 16 June 2000.

(a) Introduction by the State party

2. In introducing the report, the representative of Lithuania informed the Committee that the priority of State policy was to ensure equal opportunities for men and women. The principle of equality was based on respecting all the fundamental human rights of men and women irrespective of gender, race, nationality, language, religion, or social status. All fundamental human rights were provided for in the Constitution, which also guaranteed fundamental civil rights. He indicated that being a member of the Council of Europe and an applicant for membership of the European Union, Lithuania was in the process of bringing its national legislation into compliance with that of the European Union Directives. Lithuania had also acceded to a whole range of other international human rights instruments and had completed all necessary internal legal procedures for the signature of the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

3. The representative informed the Committee that the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men had come into force on 1 March 1999. The definition of discrimination in the Law fully corresponded to the definition in article 1 of the Convention. The Law had also introduced the concepts of "positive discrimination", "equal opportunities" and "sexual harassment". He noted that the monitoring of the implementation of the Law had been delegated to the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, which had been established by the Parliament on 25 May 1999.

4. The representative informed the Committee about the institutional structures that existed to address women's issues. They included the Office of Adviser to the Government on the issues of equal opportunities, a subdivision on women's issues within the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, a gender statistics section established in the Department of Statistics, as well as a group of women parliamentarians and the Commission of the Parliament on Family and Children. In addition, in March 2000, the Government had established a permanent Inter-Ministerial Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The representative further emphasized the important role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were playing concerning women's issues. The number of women's NGOs had expanded to 63 in 1999 from 50 in 1997. He noted that the Information Centre on Women's Issues was the most active women's organization that collected and studied statistical data on women in the areas of education, health, and employment, among others.

5. The representative informed the Committee about the increase of women's participation in political life. Women currently constituted 18 per cent of all members of the Parliament in comparison with 7 per cent in 1992. Women were also taking a more active part in local elections to municipalities. In 2000 women made up 30 per cent of all nominees, in comparison to 24 per cent in 1995.

6. The representative informed the Committee about the situation of women in the areas of education, employment and health. He noted that in Lithuania, women and men had equal access to education and attained high educational qualifications. Women constituted 58.6 per cent of university and 70 per cent of high school graduates. Women's share in the labour force continued to rise: in 1998 women made up 48.5 per cent of the total number of the employed population. However, women had been negatively affected by the economic and financial difficulties in the country, which had led, in many cases, to a change of the nature of employment or loss of jobs. Many women had entered the informal sector or had started their own business. The Government was trying to address the concerns and needs of women in the labour market, including the needs of rural women and women entrepreneurs. In 2000, for instance, the Credit Line was established to assist women in small business. The Law on the National Health System provided for free health care and services for everyone in the national network of health care. All women had free access to maternity and child health care and were entitled to paid ante-natal and post-natal maternity leave. In addition, either parent was entitled to childcare allowance until the child reached his or her first birthday.

7. The representative informed the Committee that the Government was paying serious attention to the issue of violence against women, especially domestic violence. The Government was working in close collaboration with the local authorities, police and NGOs to prevent violence against women and to provide comprehensive assistance to the victims of violence. In 1999, the Government, with the support of UNDP, had launched a project on training police officials to deal with those issues. The Police Department had established a special course on preventive measures on violence against women and children in the Academy of Law. In addition, the Government had translated the United Nations *Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual*¹ into Lithuanian, and distributed it in secondary schools.

8. The representative informed the Committee that the mass media had started to pay more serious attention to women's issues. To further raise the awareness of the media regarding gender issues, the Office of the Ombudsman, together with UNDP, was organizing a conference "Men and Women: creation of negative stereotypes by mass media", which would take place on 30 June 2000.

9. The representative informed the Committee that since 1997 Lithuania had started to compile all statistical data disaggregated by sex in order to show the de facto situation of women and men in all areas of life. Two annual statistical compendiums *Women and Men in Lithuania* were published in 1997 and 1998. The 1999 edition was also complete and ready for publication.

10. The representative noted that Lithuania was making steady progress towards achieving gender equality and advancing the status of women. The Government was committed to continuing its work in that area and to overcoming the obstacles that women of Lithuania were still encountering.

(b) Concluding comments of the Committee

Introduction

11. The Committee expresses its appreciation to the Government of Lithuania for submitting its initial and second periodic reports, and for engaging in a frank and constructive dialogue with the Committee. The reports follow the guidelines of the Committee and contain good statistical data disaggregated by sex. The Committee also commends the Government's efforts to produce, in a short period of time, qualitative and informative responses to the questions posed by the Committee.

12. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Lithuanian Government followed the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action and approved two National Action Plans for 1996-1997 and 1998-2000, respectively, which are in accordance with the priorities of the Platform for Action.

13. The Committee welcomes the fact that Lithuania ratified the Convention without reservations, and that it intends to sign the Optional Protocol and to accept the amendment of article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time.

Positive aspects

14. The Committee welcomes the fact that the Lithuanian Government puts a high priority on a policy to ensure equal opportunities for men and women. It welcomes the revision of various legal provisions, the adoption of the Law on Equal Opportunities and the establishment of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman. The Committee also welcomes the broad mandate of the Ombudsman to monitor the implementation of the Law. It commends the fact that the Law's definition of discrimination fully corresponds to the definition articulated in article 1 of the Convention, that it allows for "positive discrimination" according to article 4.1, prohibits "sexual harassment" and allows for administrative sanctions to be imposed on both private and public persons and institutions. The Committee notes with satisfaction that the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman is well connected with the Lithuanian Parliament, with State institutions and NGOs and that its budget significantly increased in less than a year.

15. The Committee notes with appreciation the incremental development of several components of a national machinery. The Committee commends the creation of a group of women parliamentarians from all political parties, as well as a parliamentary commission on the family and the child. It further welcomes the establishment of a permanent Inter-Ministerial Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and that the meetings of the Commission can be attended by the Ombudsman as well as by representatives of NGOs.

16. The Committee notes with appreciation the efforts by the Government to combat violence against women, especially domestic violence. It commends the creation, with the collaboration of NGOs, of telephone hot lines and crisis centres to provide information and assistance to women victims of violence. It also commends the training of police officials in this regard.

17. The Committee appreciates the willingness of the Government to address the issues of prostitution and trafficking in women and girls, which has resulted in various changes of and amendments to the Criminal Code of Lithuania in this regard, some of which, however, are still to be adopted. It commends the National Programme on Control and Prevention of Prostitution and Trafficking to be launched soon and to be implemented by ministries and governmental and non-governmental institutions.

18. The Committee notes with satisfaction that both the Government and the Parliament of Lithuania recognize the important role of the increasing number of NGOs working on women's issues.

19. The Committee notes with satisfaction the efforts of the Government to collect, and publish annually, all statistical data disaggregated by sex.

Factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Convention

20. The Committee notes that the political and economic transition in the last decade has posed serious challenges to the effective implementation of the Convention as women have been disproportionately affected by the restructuring processes.

Principal areas of concern and recommendations

21. The Committee is concerned about the persistence of traditional stereotypes regarding the role of men and women in the family, in employment and in society which perpetuate discrimination against women. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of targeted educational programmes, mass media campaigns and temporary special measures in education, employment and politics to eliminate these stereotypes. It is also concerned that provisions in the current draft Code of Advertising Ethics may not be sufficient to address the issue that advertisements utilize and support traditional sex-role stereotypes.

22. The Committee urges the Government to design and implement comprehensive programmes in education and the mass media in order to promote non-stereotyped roles and tasks of women and men in all sectors of society. It also recommends that the draft Code of Advertising Ethics be amended in order to cover not only the prohibition of the promotion of discrimination against women and men or of the alleged superiority of one sex over the other, but also of the more subtle utilization and support of traditional role stereotypes in the family, in employment and in society.

23. The Committee is concerned that a clear understanding of temporary special measures according to article 4.1 of the Convention and to the Lithuanian Law on Equal Opportunities as well as the reason for their application seems to be lacking in large parts of Lithuanian society and in the government bureaucracy.

24. The Committee recommends that the Government raise public awareness about the importance of such measures and programmes by pointing to the positive example of Vilnius University and encourage similar programmes in various areas, especially in the area of political decision-making. The Committee also recommends that the Government introduce such special provisions in the educational field, including admission to disciplines in which one sex is under-represented, in government commissions and in public administration. Such provisions should be designed with measurable goals or quotas and time lines in order to accelerate the achievement of de facto equality between women and men in these areas.

25. The Committee is concerned about the situation of women in the labour market, and in particular about the fact that the official unemployment statistics do not take account of the hidden unemployment of women nor of their informal employment and underemployment. While the official overall unemployment rate of women is slightly lower than that of men, such general statistics hide the fact that there tends to be a higher number of women among the long-term and the higher-educated unemployed, and that more women than men in the older age groups are unemployed.

26. The Committee requests the Government to include precise information and data in its next periodic report on women's unemployment rates differentiated according to age groups and educational and professional levels as well as on their representation in the various training programmes. It further recommends that the Government introduce specific targeted programmes for different groups of unemployed women, addressing their training needs in different employment areas with a view to future-oriented jobs. It also recommends the monitoring of the increasing number of women's businesses in regard to their viability.

27. The Committee also notes with concern that the position of women in the labour market is characterized by discrimination, in particular of women with children, and by a strong occupational segregation with a concomitant wage differential. The Committee is also concerned that there may be hidden discrimination against women in the training programmes offered by the Labour Exchange Offices.

28. The Committee recommends that efforts be made to eliminate occupational segregation through efforts in education, training and retraining. There should be additional wage increases in female-dominated sectors of public employment to decrease the wage differential in comparison with male-dominated sectors.

29. The Committee is concerned at the increase of poverty among various groups of women, in particular of female-headed households.

30. The Committee recommends that the Government closely monitor the poverty situation of women of various groups including those of various ages, and implement effective poverty alleviation programmes.

31. The Committee is concerned that the existing national mechanisms do not have sufficient capacity and funding to promote effectively the advancement of women and gender equality.

32. The Committee requests the Government to consolidate and strengthen the existing governmental national mechanisms for women, including through the provision of financial and human resources to carry out effectively their mandates. It further recommends that the Government continually review the budgetary needs of the office of the Equal Opportunities Ombud.

33. The Committee expresses its concern about violence against women, especially domestic violence.

34. The Committee urges the Government to amend article 118 of the Criminal Code in order explicitly to define rape as sexual intercourse without consent. The Committee also urges the Government to continue to pay serious attention to domestic violence against women, including through ongoing training of police officials, lawyers, judges and health care providers, and to provide easy access to courts for the victims of domestic violence. It recommends the introduction of a specific law prohibiting domestic violence, which would provide for protection and exclusion orders, and access to legal aid and shelters.

35. The Committee recognizes the efforts made by the Government in addressing the issue of trafficking in women and girls, but notes with concern that the gravity of the problem is not reflected in the information provided in the report. The Committee draws attention to article 6 of the Convention and in this regard notes that criminal penalties imposed only

on prostitutes entrenches sexual exploitation against women.

36. The Committee requests the Government to include in its next periodic report detailed information on the impact and on the results of the intended legal changes regarding prostitution as well as of the intended National Programme on Control and Prevention of Prostitution and Trafficking. It also recommends to the Government to increase its collaboration with other countries of origin, transit and destination of trafficked women and girls and to report on the results of such collaboration. It further recommends to create reintegration programmes for victims of prostitution and trafficking in cooperation with and support for NGOs.

37. The Committee notes with concern the insufficient funding of NGOs, including women's NGOs, which makes it difficult for them to build their capacities in order to fulfil their various roles and functions in supporting human rights of women.

38. The Committee recommends that the Government develop clear criteria for rendering and ensuring governmental financial support on the national and local level for the work of women's NGOs. It also recommends that the Government increase awareness among individuals and corporations regarding possible donations to women's organizations.

39. The Committee expresses its concern at the fairly low rate of women holding parliamentary seats and political office at the municipal and national levels.

40. The Committee recommends to the Government to strengthen its efforts in offering or supporting special training programmes for current and future women leaders and to conduct, on a regular basis, awareness-raising campaigns regarding the importance of women's participation in political decision-making. The Committee also recommends to the Government to involve mass media in promoting positive images of women leaders.

41. The Committee is concerned that the Government has not addressed the health needs of Lithuanian women by taking into account the life-cycle approach recommended by the Beijing Platform for Action and as stated in the Committee's general recommendation 24 on article 12, women and health. The Committee also notes with concern the high rate of abortion among women and a lack of access to various methods of family planning, including contraceptives, especially among women in rural areas. The Committee is concerned with the increase of tuberculosis and mental diseases among women as well as with the high rate of anaemia among pregnant women.

42. The Committee recommends to the Government to fully implement a life-cycle approach to women's health. It further recommends comprehensive research of the specific health needs of women, the financial and organizational strengthening of family planning programmes and the provision of wide access to contraceptives for all women, including rural women. The Committee urges the Government to introduce programmes on sexual and reproductive education for both girls and boys as a regular part of the school curriculum.

43. The Committee expresses its concern with the fact that the Government does not have enough information on the situation of rural women, especially older rural women, as concerns their cash income, health situation, access to free health care services and social and cultural opportunities.

44. The Committee requests the Government to provide more information and data on the situation of rural women in its next periodic report. The Committee recommends that the Government monitor existing programmes and develop additional policies and programmes aimed at the economic empowerment of rural women, ensuring their access to productive resources and capital as well as to health care services and to social and cultural opportunities.

45. The Committee is concerned with various aspects of the situation of older women, who constitute a large proportion of the population.

46. The Committee recommends that the Government design and implement gender-sensitive policies and programmes that address specific needs of older women. It also recommends that social workers be provided with gender-sensitive education and training in order to be able to recognize and meet these needs.

47. The Committee urges the Government to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention and to deposit its instrument of acceptance to the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention on the Committee's meeting time as soon as possible.

48. The Committee requests that the Government respond in its next periodic report to the specific issues raised in these concluding comments.

49. The Committee requests the Government to disseminate widely the present concluding comments in Lithuania and to support their public discussion, in order to make politicians and government administrators, women's NGOs as well as the public at large aware of the steps required to ensure *de jure* and *de facto* equality for women. It also requests the Government to continue to disseminate widely, and in particular to women's and human rights organizations, the Convention and its Optional Protocol, the Committee's general recommendations, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action and the results of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century", which took place in June 2000.

Notes

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.IV.1.