



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
10 March 2020

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Bulgaria*

1. The Committee considered the eighth periodic report of Bulgaria (CEDAW/C/BGR/8) at its 1761st and 1762nd meetings (see CEDAW/C/SR.1761 and CEDAW/C/SR.1762), held on 19 February 2020.

A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its eighth periodic report, which was prepared in response to the list of issues prior to reporting (CEDAW/C/BGR/QPR/8). It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the previous concluding observations of the Committee (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4-7/Add.1). It welcomes the oral presentation by the delegation and the further clarifications provided in response to the questions posed orally by the Committee during the dialogue.

3. The Committee commends the State party on its delegation, which was headed by the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Georg Georgiev, and included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior, the Council of Ministers and the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2012 of the State party's combined fourth to seventh periodic reports in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the following:

(a) Adoption of the Equality between Women and Men Act, in 2016;

(b) Amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code to incorporate Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, in 2017;

* Adopted by the Committee at its seventy-fifth session (10–28 February 2020).



(c) Adoption of a new Social Services Act, in 2019.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the adoption of the following:

(a) National strategy for promoting equality between women and men for the period 2016–2020;

(b) National programme to improve maternal and child health for the period 2014–2020;

(c) Rural development programme for the period 2014–2020.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State party has ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), in 2018.

C. Sustainable Development Goals

7. **The Committee welcomes the international support for the Sustainable Development Goals and calls for the realization of de jure (legal) and de facto (substantive) gender equality, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee recalls the importance of Goal 5 and of the mainstreaming of the principles of equality and non-discrimination throughout all 17 Goals. It urges the State party to recognize women as the driving force of the sustainable development of Bulgaria and to adopt relevant policies and strategies to that effect.**

D. Parliament

8. **The Committee stresses the crucial role of the legislative power in ensuring the full implementation of the Convention (see [A/65/38](#), part two, annex VI). It invites the National Assembly, in line with its mandate, to take the necessary steps regarding the implementation of the present concluding observations between now and the submission of the next periodic report under the Convention.**

E. Principal areas of concern and recommendations

Definition of discrimination against women

9. The Committee notes that the principle of direct and indirect discrimination against women is enshrined in the State party's legislation. It remains concerned, however, that this definition does not include gender-based discrimination and intersecting forms of discrimination, as required in article 1 of the Convention.

10. **Recalling its previous concluding observations ([CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4–7](#), para. 12) and the links between articles 1 and 2 of the Convention and target 5.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt a definition of discrimination against women that is in accordance with article 1 of the Convention, encompassing direct and indirect discrimination, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in both the public and private spheres.**

Access to justice

11. The Committee is concerned that women and girls in the State party, in particular those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, have limited access to justice owing to pervasive corruption, social stigma, the inaccessibility of the judicial system, gender bias among law enforcement officers, including the police, the priority given to mediation and reconciliation procedures in cases involving gender-based violence against women, women's limited awareness of their rights and limited knowledge among judges and law enforcement officials of the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations.

12. Recalling its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Conduct a study to identify barriers faced by women and girls, in particular those who experience intersecting forms of discrimination, in terms of access to justice, and take effective measures to remove those barriers, including by raising the awareness of women of their rights and improving the accessibility of the judicial system;

(b) Create supportive environments in which women are encouraged to exercise their rights, to report crimes committed against them and to actively participate in criminal justice processes, and prevent the revictimization of women in their interactions with the judicial and law enforcement authorities;

(c) Combat corruption and build the capacity of judges, prosecutors, lawyers and police officers, including by making training on the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's jurisprudence and general recommendations a mandatory part of their professional training;

(d) Create a database and provide statistical data and information on cases in which the Convention and the Optional Protocol have been invoked before the national courts.

National machinery for the advancement of women

13. The Committee notes the establishment of the National Council on Gender Equality within the Council of Ministers. It also commends the State party for the establishment of the National Coordination Mechanism for Human Rights, in 2013. However, the Committee is concerned that:

(a) The National Council lacks adequate human, technical and financial resources to ensure its effective operation and sustainability;

(b) Local mechanisms for gender equality do not exist in all municipalities;

(c) National and municipal budgets do not incorporate gender-responsive budgeting principles.

14. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen its national machinery for the advancement of women by clearly defining its mandate and responsibilities and providing it with adequate human, technical and financial resources to coordinate and work effectively to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming;

(b) Establish gender equality mechanisms at the local level, equip them with adequate human, technical and financial resources and ensure coordination between those mechanisms and other parts of the national machinery;

(c) **Ensure the allocation of adequate funding from the State budget for national and local entities of the national machinery;**

(d) **Strengthen impact assessment mechanisms to ensure that gender equality policies are properly monitored and evaluated and that their implementation is regularly assessed.**

Civil society organizations

15. The Committee notes the strong role of civil society in implementing policies and programmes in the State party. The Committee is concerned, however, by restrictions on the activities of some non-governmental organizations and the suspension or closure of several such organizations that work for women's rights and gender equality.

16. **The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen collaboration with civil society organizations working for women's rights and gender equality, and support their initiatives towards the implementation of the Convention. The Committee also calls upon the State party:**

(a) **To ensure an environment that is, de jure and de facto, safe and in which organizations working for women's rights and gender equality participate systematically in the development and implementation of relevant legislation and policies;**

(b) **To financially support civil society organizations that provide assistance to women facing discrimination, gender-based violence and the violation of their rights, while ensuring that the State party retains the primary responsibility for providing those women with protection, rehabilitation, reintegration and other relevant services.**

National human rights institution

17. The Committee welcomes the awarding of A status to the Ombudsman by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions in March 2019, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). It also welcomes the Ombudsman's valuable contribution to the constructive dialogue with the State party. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned by the insufficient technical and financial resources provided to the Ombudsman to effectively carry out its mandate relating to the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality.

18. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure that the Ombudsman has sufficient technical and financial resources and strengthen its mandate regarding the promotion and protection of women's rights and gender equality.**

Temporary special measures

19. The Committee is concerned that the State party has not adopted temporary special measures to achieve substantive equality between women and men and has not implemented quota systems for the public and private sectors.

20. **In line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and recalling its general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt and implement temporary special measures and establish time-bound targets to accelerate the realization of substantive equality of women and men in all areas in which women continue to be disadvantaged or**

underrepresented, such as in political and public life, education and employment;

(b) **Increase the level of participation of women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as Roma women, migrant women, refugee women and women with disabilities, in decision-making;**

(c) **Undertake capacity-building programmes, targeting all relevant State officials and employers, on the non-discriminatory nature and importance of temporary special measures for achieving substantive equality between women and men in all areas in which progress is slow or absent.**

Stereotypes and harmful practices

21. The Committee remains concerned by the State party's limited commitment to combating persistent gender stereotypes affecting the educational and career choices of women and girls. The Committee is particularly concerned by:

(a) Increases in cases of anti-gender discourse in the public domain, public backlash in the perception of gender equality and misogynistic statements in the media, including by high-ranking politicians;

(b) The promotion of a concept of traditional family values that confines women solely to the role of mothers with domestic responsibilities and the lack of a comprehensive strategy for the elimination of discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society;

(c) The persistence of child and/or forced marriages, in particular among Roma girls, despite the existence of legislation prohibiting marriage for persons under 16 years of age;

(d) The increasing occurrence of hate speech and sexism in the media, in particular in online social media.

22. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4–7, para. 22) and urges the State party:**

(a) **To put in place a specific strategy and conduct large-scale public campaigns for women and men at all levels of society, including among relevant ministries, civil society, community and religious leaders, academic institutions, the business sector and the media, in order to reaffirm the notion of gender equality and promote positive images of women as active participants in economic, social and political life;**

(b) **To monitor the use of misogynistic language in public statements by politicians and in media reporting, encourage the media to institute an effective self-regulatory mechanism to address the use of such language and promote positive and non-stereotypical portrayals of women in the education system;**

(c) **To ensure that cases of child and/or forced marriage are investigated effectively, that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished appropriately and that women and girls in such marriages have access to protection, including accessible shelters and support services;**

(d) **To provide training to journalists on gender equality, the protection of women's rights and the forms of coverage of gender-based violence and gender stereotyping by the press;**

(e) **To introduce specific sanctions or establish responsibility in administrative legislation for repeated stereotypes or sexist behaviour.**

Violence against women

23. The Committee takes note of Constitutional Court decision No. 13/2018 of 27 July 2018 on the incompatibility of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) with the Constitution and is concerned that the decision impedes the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. The Committee also remains concerned by:

(a) The fact that all forms of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, against women and girls are not defined and criminalized in the current legislation, nor is there provision for ex officio prosecution of acts of gender-based violence against women;

(b) The fact that the definition of rape in the Criminal Code does not include marital rape;

(c) The high rates at which complaints by victims of gender-based violence are withdrawn, the one-month time limit for filing protection orders (see the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, art. 10, para. 1) and the failure to shift the burden of proof in favour of the victim in civil proceedings concerning protection orders;

(d) Cases of death, abuse and ill-treatment in psychiatric and mental health institutions and social protection centres;

(e) The lack of specialized State victim support services, including shelters for victims of gender-based violence, despite the high incidence in the State party of gender-based violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, which remains largely underreported owing to social stigma and victims' lack of trust in the law enforcement authorities;

(f) The lack of awareness about and training on gender-based violence against women and girls among judges, prosecutors, police officers and medical personnel that would enable them to respond effectively to such cases in a gender-sensitive manner;

(g) The absence of comprehensive data on gender-based violence against women and girls, disaggregated by age and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, including on the number of complaints, prosecutions and convictions, the sanctions imposed against the perpetrators and the remedies provided to victims;

(h) The insufficient financial support for civil society organizations that provide specialized support services to women who are victims of gender-based violence.

24. Recalling its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee calls upon the State party:

(a) To expedite the continuing harmonization of national legislation to eliminate gender-based violence against women, in accordance with the Convention, and ratify the Istanbul Convention;

(b) To amend current legislation, including the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, to recognize all forms of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, against women and girls and ensure that such violence can be prosecuted ex officio and punished with appropriate penalties commensurate with the gravity of the offence;

(c) To amend the Criminal Code to specifically criminalize marital rape as aggravating circumstances;

(d) To ensure that efficient independent complaints mechanisms are introduced for women living in psychiatric and mental health institutions and social protection centres and that all deaths and cases of abuse and ill-treatment are effectively investigated and sanctioned, with the establishment of criminal liability, where appropriate;

(e) To amend article 10, paragraph 1, of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act to remove the one-month time limit for filing protection orders, ensure access to free legal aid in proceedings related to gender-based violence against women, prevent the stigmatization of and ease the burden of proof on victims who apply for protection orders and impose effective penalties for non-compliance with such orders;

(f) To increase the number of accessible State shelters in urban and rural areas and of counselling and rehabilitation services across the State party and ensure that women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence, including those belonging to the most disadvantaged groups, have full and barrier-free access to medical and psychological support;

(g) To introduce systematic capacity-building for judges, prosecutors, the police and other law enforcement officers on the strict application of criminal law provisions on gender-based violence against women and on gender-sensitive investigative procedures, as well as systematic training for medical personnel on gender-sensitive treatment of victims;

(h) To allocate adequate funding to civil society organizations that provide accessible shelters and support services to women who are victims of gender-based violence and enhance cooperation with such organizations, while ensuring that the State party retains the primary responsibility for overseeing the provision of such services;

(i) To create a database and systematically collect statistical data on all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual violence, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, nationality and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution

25. The Committee acknowledges the work of the National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and the National Mechanism for the Referral and Support of Victims of Trafficking, however, it is concerned by the lack of coordination between the two bodies and the lack of human, technical and financial resources allocated to the Commission. It also remains concerned:

(a) By the fact that the State party is a source and destination country for trafficking in women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour;

(b) By reports in 2018 of 64 cases of children and organs being sold abroad by young women belonging to vulnerable Roma communities, owing to poverty and a lack of economic opportunities;

(c) By the lack of protection and adequately funded support services for victims of trafficking, including women and girls, and the lack of knowledge and understanding among public officials of indicators pertaining to such trafficking;

(d) By the lack of information on rehabilitation and reintegration services, including shelters and psychological assistance, for women and girls, in particular women belonging to disadvantaged groups, who are victims of trafficking, as well as the lack of information on exit programmes for women in prostitution.

26. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Allocate appropriate human, technical and financial resources to the National Commission to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings;**
- (b) **Ensure the effective enforcement of legislation to combat trafficking in persons, including by providing judges, prosecutors, border police, immigration authorities and other law enforcement officials with systematic training on the early identification and referral of trafficking victims to appropriate services and gender-sensitive interrogation methods;**
- (c) **Investigate cases involving the sale of children and organs abroad, punish the perpetrators, provide rehabilitation and assistance for victims and provide disadvantaged Roma communities with protection and economic opportunities;**
- (d) **Ensure that effective and accessible services and compensation are provided to victims of trafficking;**
- (e) **Collect information and data on women forced into prostitution, address the root causes of the exploitation of women and girls in prostitution, introduce measures to reduce the demand for prostitution and provide exit programmes and alternative income-generating opportunities to women in prostitution.**

Equal participation of women in political and public life

27. The Committee notes with concern:

- (a) The fact that women, in particular women with disabilities and Roma women, continue to be underrepresented in the parliament, ministerial positions, decision-making positions at the municipal level and high-ranking posts in the foreign service;
- (b) The lack of programmes and strategies to ensure the participation in political and public life of Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities;
- (c) The lack of training on political leadership, negotiation and campaigning skills for women candidates for public office.

28. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Accelerate the participation of women, including Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities, in political and public life, in particular at the decision-making level;**
- (b) **Take temporary special measures, such as statutory quotas and a gender parity system in the public and foreign services, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25, to increase the representation of women in the parliament, ministerial positions, the judiciary and the public and foreign services;**
- (c) **Provide capacity-building on campaigning and political leadership skills, in particular for women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities, and raise awareness among political leaders and the public about the fact that the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women in political and public life on an equal basis with men is required for the full implementation of the human rights of women.**

Education

29. The Committee takes note of the education reforms in the State party, in particular the adoption of the new Preschool and School Education Act in 2015, by which inclusive education was introduced in all kindergartens and schools, as well as the national strategy for reducing early school leaving for the period 2013–2020, the national strategy for the integration of children and students from ethnic minorities into education for the period 2015–2020, the national strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014–2020 and the national strategy for improving and promoting literacy 2014–2020. However, the Committee remains concerned that:

(a) No midterm impact assessment of the various policies and strategies has been undertaken;

(b) Despite the adoption of the science and education for smart growth programme for the period 2014–2020, women and girls tend to be concentrated in traditionally female-dominated fields of study and are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which reduces their employment prospects;

(c) Gender stereotypes are reinforced through school curricula owing to the absence of education on gender equality and systematic education on sexual and reproductive health and rights;

(d) Disparities exist between urban and rural areas and there are comparatively low retention rates of girls and women, including Roma girls and women, at all levels of education.

30. Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Undertake an impact assessment of the various policies and strategies in the area of education and adopt targeted measures to reduce school dropout rates, focusing on measures to retain girls in rural areas, girls with disabilities and Roma girls, as well as migrant and refugee girls, in school and increase their enrolment at all levels of education;

(b) Address discriminatory stereotypes and structural barriers that may deter girls from enrolling in traditionally male-dominated fields of study and career paths, such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics and information technology, and assess the impact of existing programmes to diversify educational choices;

(c) Take coordinated measures to encourage further diversification of the educational and vocational choices of boys and girls and the increased participation of girls in apprenticeships, crafts, science and technology;

(d) Ensure that gender-sensitive teaching materials are used at all levels of education;

(e) Develop and integrate into school curricula inclusive and accessible content on gender equality, including on women's rights, outstanding women in public life and the prevention of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination, as well as age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including comprehensive sexual education for adolescent boys and girls, with particular attention paid to responsible sexual behaviour;

(f) Consider abolishing taxes and additional payments for kindergartens and preschool education in order to reduce the burden on rural, Roma and migrant households.

Employment

31. The Committee remains concerned that, despite the ratification of the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), the State party is not fully applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. The Committee also notes with concern:

(a) That, despite decreases in recent years, the gender pay gap persists in the State party (13.5 per cent) and adversely affects women throughout their working lives;

(b) Vertical and horizontal occupational segregation and the difficulties of integrating migrant women, Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities into the formal labour market;

(c) The very low number of cases of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the workplace investigated between 2014 and 2018, despite the existence of legislation on workplace discrimination based on sex and sexual harassment;

(d) The difference between the maximum retirement age for women and men, which has a detrimental effect on women's pension benefits, resulting in a gender pension gap of 28 per cent;

(e) That domestic workers are often hired outside the formal labour registration process and thus lack access to benefits such as health-care coverage and a pension.

32. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4–7, para. 34) and recommends that the State party:

(a) Effectively enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in order to narrow and ultimately close the gender pay gap by regularly reviewing wages in all sectors, applying gender-sensitive analytical job classification and evaluation methods and conducting regular labour inspections and pay surveys;

(b) Strengthen measures to eliminate horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and enhance the access of women, including migrant women, Roma women and women with disabilities, to the formal labour market, encourage women and girls to select non-traditional career paths and prioritize the transition of women from part-time to full-time work, with the support of adequate, high-quality and accessible childcare facilities;

(c) Ratify the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), and arrange for centralized registration of all sexual harassment complaints;

(d) Amend the Labour Code to harmonize the retirement age, with a view to narrowing and closing the gender pension gap;

(e) Ratify the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and secure the rights of domestic workers.

Health

33. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) Reports of gender-based violence committed against women during delivery and a lack of oversight procedures and mechanisms for ensuring adequate standards of care in maternity wings of hospitals;

(b) The high number of early pregnancies, the absence of mandatory age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula and the lack of training provided to teachers in that field;

(c) The limited access of women and girls to affordable modern contraceptives, in particular in rural areas, and the barriers that adolescent girls face in gaining access to information on sexual and reproductive health services;

(d) Reports of largely irreversible medical surgery performed on intersex women.

34. Recalling its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health and target 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, with the aim of ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, as well as its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4-7, para. 36), the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) **Criminalize obstetric violence and other forms of violence during delivery and ensure adequate and accessible standards of care in all maternity wings of hospitals;**

(b) **Take adequate measures to carry out a national survey on reproductive health, implement the 2020 national health strategy and the national action plan for the period 2015–2020 and introduce mandatory age-appropriate and inclusive education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula, including on modern forms of contraception, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and the risks of unsafe abortion;**

(c) **Intensify the implementation of health programmes, including inclusive awareness-raising programmes, to ensure the availability of affordable modern contraceptives to all women and girls, including those belonging to disadvantaged groups and in rural areas;**

(d) **Establish appropriate safeguards to ensure adequate standards of care, including accessibility and respect for women's autonomy and requirements for the free, prior and informed consent of all women, and introduce complaints mechanisms for women who suffered ill-treatment during delivery;**

(e) **Develop and implement a rights-based health-care protocol for intersex women and ensure that intersex women are not subjected to surgery or treatment without their free, informed and prior consent.**

Economic and social benefits and economic empowerment of women

35. The Committee is concerned that, according to the Gender Equality Index of the European Institute for Gender Equality, 24 per cent of women, in particular Roma women, single women and women with disabilities, are at risk of poverty in the State party. It also notes the following with concern:

(a) The absence of measures, including temporary special measures and targeted programmes, to support women's entrepreneurship and promote their economic empowerment;

(b) The lack of information on loan schemes and other forms of financial credit for women and the lack of specific training on entrepreneurial skills;

(c) The lack of information on low-income households headed by women and on the specific contribution of social programmes to improving the economic situation of women with low incomes.

36. The Committee draws attention to target 5.a of the Sustainable Development Goals, reiterates its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/BGR/CO/4–7, para. 40) and recommends that the State party:

(a) Adopt targeted measures, including skills training and technical education, and facilitate women's access to loans and other forms of financial credit, in order to support and stimulate women's entrepreneurship and promote their economic empowerment, in particular in rural areas;

(b) Collect statistical data on low-income households headed by women and strengthen programmes to combat the feminization of poverty;

(c) Design specific strategies and programmes to leverage opportunities for the economic empowerment of women, ensuring that women are involved in the design of those interventions, and focus on women not only as victims or beneficiaries but also as active participants in the formulation and implementation of such policies.

Rural women, migrant women and asylum-seeking women

37. The Committee takes note of the development of a national rural development programme in the State party, but is concerned that the programme is not focused on women or gender equality. The Committee is also concerned that rural women, migrant women and asylum-seeking women continue to face intersecting forms of discrimination, and in particular that:

(a) Rural women lack access to infrastructure, transportation and financial and other support for agricultural and economic activities, which results in the large-scale migration of younger women to urban areas or out of the country;

(b) Migrant women and asylum-seeking women, who may have lived in the country for many years, have limited access to services available to Bulgarian citizens, in particular education, health and social services;

(c) Migrant women and asylum-seeking women have limited access to government-run reception centres owing to strict eligibility requirements and a lack of efficient coordination, as well as the absence of gender-sensitive conditions, compliant with United Nations standards, in those centres.

38. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Enhance efforts to ensure that rural women have adequate access to social, health and other basic services, transportation and infrastructure, and develop income-generating activities aimed specifically at women in rural areas, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women;

(b) Provide migrant women and asylum-seeking women with better access to social, health and other basic services, transportation and infrastructure;

(c) Implement a gender-sensitive approach at State-run reception centres, recognizing the specific needs of migrant women and asylum-seeking women, in particular pregnant women, women with disabilities, single women and older women.

Women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination

39. The Committee is concerned that women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons continue to face intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence.

40. **The Committee recommends that the State party urgently implement targeted measures to achieve substantive equality for women and girls in all stages of life who face intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons.**

Roma women

41. The Committee takes note of the measures implemented by the State party under the national Roma inclusion strategy for the period 2012–2020. However, the Committee is concerned that those measures have not resulted in changes to the perceptions or circumstances of Roma women and girls, who are frequently exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization and continue to face stigmatization and harmful practices.

42. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt targeted measures to combat intersecting forms of discrimination against Roma women and girls, including with regard to access to education, employment, health care, housing and other social services;**

(b) **Strengthen and implement programmes on gender equality, poverty alleviation and social inclusion for Roma women and girls;**

(c) **Engage with national educational institutions and civil society organizations representing Roma women to coordinate action to reduce prejudice, combat ethnic stereotypes and discrimination and promote the equal participation of Roma women in all areas of life.**

(d) **Carry out a multisectoral gender assessment of the national Roma inclusion strategy for the period 2012–2020 with a focus on its impact on Roma women and girls.**

Marriage and family relations

43. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That, notwithstanding the provisions of the Family Code, in which the minimum age of marriage is set at 18 years for both girls and boys and cohabitation with persons under 16 years of age is prohibited, child marriage and cohabitation with children remain prevalent among the Roma population;

(b) The lack of enforcement of alimony payments;

(c) The use of mediation in divorce proceedings in cases of domestic violence;

(d) The lack of protection from abuse for children, in particular girls, whose parents work abroad.

44. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Prevent and eradicate child and/or forced marriage through coordinated action by the competent authorities, non-governmental organizations and Roma community leaders, in particular by:**

(i) **Strengthening awareness-raising campaigns on the criminal nature and adverse impact of such marriages on the education, health and well-being of women and girls;**

(ii) **Establishing mechanisms to detect cases of such marriages;**

(iii) **Ensuring that all such cases are investigated and that those responsible are prosecuted and adequately punished;**

- (iv) **Systematically collecting data on the number of cases reported, investigations, prosecutions and convictions, as well as on the penalties imposed in cases of forced marriage and cohabitation with a minor;**
- (b) **Ensure the strict enforcement of alimony obligations, including by reinforcing penalties for non-compliance with those obligations, and the provision of alimony by the State whenever the parent is in default;**
- (c) **Repeal requirements under the Family Code for mediation in divorce proceedings;**
- (d) **Ensure the protection of girls and boys whose parents work abroad from sexual abuse and exploitation.**

Data collection and analysis

45. The Committee regrets the limited availability of statistical data, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, migration status, disability and other relevant factors, that would enable the State party to determine the magnitude and nature of discrimination against women and girls, develop informed and targeted policies and systematically monitor and evaluate progress achieved towards the realization of substantive equality between women and men in all areas covered by the Convention and the gender-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

46. **The Committee recommends that the State party enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive data, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, migration status, disability and other relevant factors, and use measurable indicators to assess trends in the situation of women and the progress made towards the realization of substantive equality for women in all areas covered by the Convention and the gender-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

47. **The Committee calls upon the State party to use the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to further evaluate the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention in the context of the 25-year review of the implementation of the Declaration and Platform in order to achieve substantive equality between women and men.**

Dissemination

48. **The Committee requests the State party to ensure the timely dissemination of the present concluding observations, in the official language of the State party, to the relevant State institutions at all levels (national, regional and local), in particular to the Government, the ministries, the National Assembly and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.**

Ratification of other treaties

49. **The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments¹ would enhance the enjoyment by**

¹ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families; the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of life. The Committee therefore encourages the State party to ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, to which it is not yet a party.

Follow-up to the concluding observations

50. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 16 (a) and (b), 24 (c) and 34 (c) above.

Preparation of the next report

51. The Committee requests the State party to submit its ninth periodic report, which is due in February 2024. The report should be submitted on time and cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.

52. The Committee requests the State party to follow the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties, including guidelines on a common core document and treaty-specific documents ([HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).
