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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. The Committee's list of issues and questions is contained in CEDAW/C/BGR/Q/8 and the responses of Bulgaria are contained in CEDAW/C/BGR/Q/8/Add.1.

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 and questions prior to reporting (CEDAW/C/BGR/QPR/8). It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the previous periodic report (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 Mr. Georg Georgiev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and included representatives of the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior, 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 (CEDAW/C/BGR/4-7) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

- (a) The Law on Equality between Women and Men, in 2016;
- (b) The amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code incorporating Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, in 2017;
- (c) The Law on Social Services, 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:

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

- (a) The National Strategy for Promoting Equality between Women and Men for 2016 – 2020;
- (b) The National Programme to Improve Maternal and Child Health for 2014 – 2020;
- (c) The Rural Development Programme for 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 Convention No. 131 on Minimum Wages, on the International Labour Convention, 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 (Narodno sabranie), 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 discrimination based on gender and intersecting forms of discrimination, as required by 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 about the limited access to justice for women and girls in the State party, in particular those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, due to pervasive corruption, social stigma, 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 of the Convention, the Optional Protocol and the Committee's general recommendations among judges and law-enforcement officials.

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 to women's and girls' access to justice, in particular for women and girls facing intersecting forms of discrimination, and take effective measures to remove those barriers, including awareness raising about women's rights and to improve the accessibility of the judicial system;**

(b) **Create supportive environments that encourage women to claim their rights, report crimes committed against them and actively participate in criminal justice processes, and prevent re-victimization of women in their interactions with the judiciary and law enforcement authorities;**

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

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

National machinery for the advancement of women

13. The Committee notes the establishment of the National Council on Equality between Women and Men within the Council of Ministers. It also commends the State party for the establishment of the National Coordination Mechanism on 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) Gender-responsive budgeting is absent from the national and municipal budgets.

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

(a) **Strengthen its national machinery for the advancement of women by providing it with a clearly defined mandate and responsibilities and with adequate human, technical and financial resources to coordinate and effectively 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 those mechanisms and other parts of the national machinery for the advancement of women;**

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

(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 the civil society in implementing policies and programmes in the State party. It is, however, concerned at restrictions on the activities of some non-governmental organizations, and the suspension or closure of several such organizations working in the fields of women's rights and gender equality.

16. **The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen collaboration with civil society organizations working on women's rights and gender equality, and**

support their initiatives towards the implementation of the Convention. It calls upon the State party to:

(a) **Ensure and secure de jure and de facto safe environment in which women's organizations working on women's rights and gender equality participate systematically in the development and implementation of relevant legislation and policies;**

(b) **Financially support civil society organizations that provide assistance to women facing discrimination, gender-based violence and violation of rights, while ensuring that the State party retains its primary responsibility to provide protection, rehabilitation, reintegration and relevant services to these women.**

National human rights institution

17. The Committee welcomes the accreditation in March 2019 of the Bulgarian Ombudsman with A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles; General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993). It also welcomes the Ombudsman's valuable contribution to the constructive dialogue with the State party. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned at the insufficient technical and financial resources of the Ombudsman's Office for effectively carrying out its mandate to promote and protect women's rights and gender equality.

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

Temporary special measures

19. The Committee is concerned that the State party has not adopted any temporary special measures to achieve substantive equality of women and men and that it has not implemented its 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 where 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, migrant and refugee women and women with disabilities in the decision-making positions;**

(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 of women and men in all areas where 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 at:

(a) **Increased instances of anti-gender discourse in the public domain, and the 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, confining women solely to the role of mothers and 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, despite legislation prohibiting marriage under the age of 16, in particular affecting Roma girls;

(d) The increasing level of hate speech and sexism in the media, in particular on-line social media.

22. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations (see 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 targeting women and men at all levels of society, including relevant ministries, civil society, community and religious leaders, academic institutions, the business sector and the media, 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 use the educational system to promote positive and non-stereotypical portrayals of women;

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

(d) Provide training to journalists on the gender equality, women rights protection and the forms of the press coverage of the gender-based violence and gender stereotyping;

(e) Introduce in the administrative legislation specific sanctions or responsibility for the repeatedly stereotyped and sexist behavior.

Gender-based violence against women

23. The Committee notes at the 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 (the Istanbul Convention), with the State party's Constitution, and is concerned because it impedes its ratification. The Committee also remains concerned at:

(a) The fact that the current legislation does not define and criminalize all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, as well as the absence of ex officio prosecution for acts of gender-based violence against women;

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

(c) The high rates of withdrawal of complaints by victims of gender-based violence, as well as the one-month time limit for filing protection order petitions (article 10 (1) of the Protection against Domestic Violence Act) 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 in social protection centres;

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

(f) The lack of awareness among and training for judges, prosecutors, police officers and medical personnel on gender-based violence against women and girls, which 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 and the sanctions imposed on the perpetrators, as well as on the remedies provided to victims;

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

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

(a) 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) Amend the current legislation, including the Protection against Domestic Violence Law, to recognize all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, ensure that it can be prosecuted ex officio and punished with appropriate penalties commensurate with the gravity of the abuse;

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

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

(e) Amend article 10 (1) of the Protection against Domestic Violence Law to remove the one-month time limit to file for a protection order, ensure access to free legal aid in proceedings relating to gender-based violence against women, prevent stigmatization of and ease the burden of proof on victims applying for protection orders, and impose effective penalties for non-compliance with such orders;

(f) 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) 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 investigation procedures, as well as systematic training on gender-sensitive treatment of victims for medical personnel;

(h) Allocate adequate funding to civil society organizations that provide accessible shelters and support services to victims of gender-based violence against women and enhance cooperation with such organizations, while ensuring that the State party retains its primary responsibility to oversight the provision of such services;

(i) 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 Bulgarian National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and of the National Mechanism for Referral and Support of Victims of Trafficking, however it is concerned at the lack of coordination, as well as the lack of human, technical and financial resources allocated to the Commission. It also remains concerned:

(a) 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) About the reports of 64 cases in 2018 of sale of children and organs abroad among young women belonging to some vulnerable Roma communities due to poverty and lack of economic opportunities;

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

(d) The lack of information on rehabilitation and reintegration services for women and girls who are victims of trafficking, including shelters and psychological assistance, in particular for women belonging to disadvantaged groups, 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 for Combating 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 of sale of children and organs abroad, punish the perpetrators, provide rehabilitation and assistance for victims, and provide the 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 in prostitution, address the root causes of exploitation of women and girls in prostitution, introduce measures in order to reduce the demand side of 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) That women, in particular women with disabilities and Roma women, continue to be under-represented in Parliament, ministerial positions, decision-making positions at the municipal level and in high-ranking posts in the foreign service;

(b) The lack of programmes and strategies to ensure the participation of Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities in political and public life;

(c) The lack of training on political leadership, negotiation and campaigning skills for women candidates.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Accelerate women's participation in political and public life, in particular at the decision-making level, including of Roma women, rural women and women with disabilities;

(b) **Take temporary special measures, such as statutory quotas and a gender parity system in the public and foreign service, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No.25 (2004), to increase women's representation in Parliament, ministerial positions, the judiciary and in the public and foreign service;**

(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 on the fact that the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life is a requirement for the full implementation of the human rights of women.**

Education

29. The Committee takes note of the educational reform in the State party, in particular the adoption of the new Preschool and School Education Law in 2015, which introduces inclusive education in all kindergartens and schools, as well as the National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving (2013-2020), the National Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (2015-2020), the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning (2014-2020), the National Strategy for Improving and Promoting Literacy (2014-2020). However, the Committee remains concerned:

(a) That no mid-term impact assessment of all the different policies and strategies was undertaken;

(b) That despite the adoption of the Science and Education for Smart Growth Programme for 2014 – 2020, women and girls are concentrated in traditionally female-dominated fields of study and underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which reduces their employment prospects;

(c) At the reinforcement of gender stereotypes through school curricula, in the absence of education on gender equality and systematic education on sexual and reproductive health and rights;

(d) At disparities between urban and rural areas and the 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 rights of girls and women to education, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Undertake an impact assessment of all the different policies and strategies in the area of education and adopt targeted measures to combat school dropout, 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: (i) inclusive and accessible content on gender equality, including women's rights, portrayals of outstanding women in public life and prevention of gender stereotyping and gender-based discrimination, and (ii) age-appropriate education on sexual and reproductive**

health and rights, including comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent boys and girls, paying particular attention to responsible sexual behaviour;

(f) Consider abolishing taxes and additional payments for kindergartens and pre-school education to reduce the burden on rural, Roma and migrant households.

Employment

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

(a) That despite a decrease in recent years, the gender pay gap persists (13,5%) and adversely affects women throughout their working lives in the State party;

(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 sex-based discrimination in the work place investigated between 2014 and 2018, despite the Law 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 impact on women's pension benefits, resulting in a gender pension gap of 28%.

(e) That domestic workers are often hired outside the formal labour registration process and thus lack access to benefits such as healthcare coverage and pensions.

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, conducting regular labour inspections and conducting regular pay surveys;

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

(c) Ratify the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190), of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and create central 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 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 against women during delivery, as well as the 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 the school curricula and the lack of training of teachers in this field;

(c) Women's and girls' limited access to affordable modern contraceptives, in particular in rural areas, and the barriers that adolescent girls face in accessing information on sexual and reproductive health services;

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

34. **The Committee, 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), recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Criminalize obstetric violence and other forms of violence during the 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 National Health Strategy 2020 and the National Action Plan 2015 – 2020 and introduce mandatory age-appropriate and inclusive education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in school curricula, including education on modern forms of contraception and 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 adequate safeguards to ensure adequate standards of care, including accessibility and respect for women's autonomy and the requirement of free, prior and informed consent by all women, introduce complaint mechanism for women who suffered ill treatment during delivery,;**

(e) **Develop and implement a rights-based health-care protocol for intersex women, and 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 European Gender Equality Index, 24% of women are at risk of poverty in the State party, in particular Roma women, single women and women with disabilities. 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 the economic empowerment of women;

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

(c) The lack of information on low-income households headed by women and on the concrete impact of social programmes to improve 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 facilitating women's access to loans and other forms of financial credit,**

to support and stimulate women's entrepreneurship and promote the economic empowerment of women, in particular in the regions;

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

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

Rural women, migrant and asylum-seeking women

37. The Committee notes the development of a National Rural Development Strategy in the State party, however, it is concerned that it does not include a focus on women or gender equality. The Committee is concerned that rural women, migrant and asylum-seeking women continue to face intersecting forms of discrimination, in particular:

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

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

(c) At the limited access of migrant and asylum-seeking women to government-run reception centres due to strict requirements of eligibility and lack of efficient coordination, as well as the absence of UN-compliant, gender-sensitive reception conditions 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, transportation, infrastructure, and other basic services 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 and asylum-seeking women access to social, health, transportation, infrastructure and other basic services;

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

Women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination

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

40. The Committee recommends that the State party urgently implement specifically targeted measures to achieve substantive equality for women and girls at all spheres of life who face intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities and LBTI women.

Roma women

41. The Committee notes the measures taken by the State party under the National Strategy for Roma Integration for 2012–2020. It is, however, concerned that such measures have not resulted in changed perceptions or circumstances of Roma women and girls, who are frequently exposed to intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization and who 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 in access to education, employment, health care, housing and other social services;**

(b) **Strengthen and implement gender equality, poverty alleviation and social inclusion programmes 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 equal participation of Roma women in all areas of life.**

(d) **Carry out a multi-sectoral and gender assessment of the National Strategy for Roma Integration 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 despite the provisions of the Family Code, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both girls and boys, as well as the prohibition of cohabitation with a person under 16, child marriage and cohabitation with children remains prevalent among the Roma population;

(b) The lack of enforcement of alimony payments;

(c) The use of mediation in the 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 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 child and forced marriages;**

(iii) **Ensuring all cases of child and/or forced marriage are investigated and that those responsible are prosecuted and adequately punished;**

(iv) **Systematically collecting data on the number of cases reported, investigations, prosecutions, convictions and 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 alimony obligations, and that alimony is provided by the State whenever the parent is at default;**

(c) **Repeal any requirement of mediation in divorce proceedings under the Family Law;**

(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 (Narodno sabranie) 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 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 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, b), 24 (c), 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).**

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.

