



# Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

### Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Estonia\*

1. The Committee considered the seventh periodic report of Estonia (CEDAW/C/EST/7) at its 2067th and 2068th meetings (see CEDAW/C/SR.2067 and CEDAW/C/SR.2068), held on 17 May 2024.

#### A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its seventh periodic report, which was prepared in response to the list of issues and questions prior to reporting (CEDAW/C/EST/QPR/7). It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the previous concluding observations of the Committee (CEDAW/C/EST/CO/5-6/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 high-level delegation, which was headed by the Deputy Secretary-General of Labour, Ulla Saar, and included representatives of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Justice, in addition to the Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Riia Salsa-Audiffren, and other members of the Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

#### B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since its consideration in 2016 of the State party's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CEDAW/C/EST/5-6) in undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

(a) Victim Support Act, which entered into force on 1 April 2023, ensuring the availability and quality of victim assistance services provided to victims of violence, crime or crisis incidents and making the system of compensation for victims of crime more victim friendly;

\* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-eighth session (13–31 May 2024).



(b) Amendment to the Penal Code, setting the minimum age of sexual self-determination at 16 years, except when the age difference between the adult person and the person aged 14 to 16 is not greater than five years, in 2022;

(c) Amendment to the Family Law Act, setting the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both women and men, without exceptions, in 2022;

(d) Amendments to the Social Welfare Act and the Family Law Act, to provide for long-term care and strengthen support for caregivers, in 2022;

(e) Amendment to the Employment Contracts Act, ensuring that employees and officials with caring responsibilities have the right to apply for flexible working conditions and providing for additional protection for employees and officials with caring responsibilities;

(f) Amendments to the Gender Equality Act, restricting the authority of the employment agency to enquire about pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, performance of family obligations or other circumstances related to gender.

5. The Committee welcomes the State party's efforts to improve its institutional and policy framework, such as the adoption or establishment of the following:

(a) Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030, extending the first Plan (2016–2023) and defining gender equality and equal opportunities as one of its five sub-goals;

(b) Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic Violence 2024–2027, recognizing and condemning domestic violence and providing systematic, needs-based assistance to individuals affected by such violence;

(c) Violence Prevention Agreement 2021–2025, providing measures on the prevention of all forms of gender-based violence;

(d) Human Rights Diplomacy Action Plan, prioritizing the protection of the human rights of women and girls among its thematic areas, in 2021;

(e) Third National Action Plan on Women and Peace and Security 2021–2025, focusing on the improvement of the situation of women during and after conflict;

(f) Sixth Gender Equality Monitor 2021–2022, mapping gender equality-related experiences and attitudes;

(g) Support of the State party for the proposed European Union Pay Transparency Directive, with the aim of increasing pay transparency, since 2021;

(h) “Integrating Estonia 2020”, an integration policy development plan that provides for measures to raise awareness of the need to reduce ethnic segregation in the labour market;

(i) Cohesive Estonia Strategy 2021–2030, supporting the adaptation and integration of women and men from different backgrounds;

(j) National Health Plan 2020–2030, providing measures for prevention, treatment and harm reduction in respect of alcohol and drug abuse;

(k) Web application “the Tree of Truth”, launched in 2019 (on the basis of three national strategic documents: “Sustainable Estonia 21” strategy, “Estonia 2035” strategy and Governmental Action Plan), including indicators such as gender pay gap, female managers and gender equality index.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State party ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), on 26 October 2017.

## 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 the State party 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 Riigikogu, 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

### Visibility of the Convention, the Optional Protocol thereto and the Committee's general recommendations

9. The Committee notes with appreciation that the State party is in the process of preparing its accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention. However, recalling the previous concluding observations of 2016 ([CEDAW/C/EST/CO/5-6](#)), it reiterates its concern about the lack of knowledge of the Convention among judges and lawyers, within society and among women themselves, as reflected by the absence of court decisions referring to the Convention. The Committee also notes with concern:

(a) The lack of specific and systematic training for the judiciary, prosecutors, law enforcement officers and lawyers on the application of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations;

(b) The lack of court decisions making direct reference to the Convention;

(c) The limited funding available to civil society organizations, in particular women's rights organizations, for awareness-raising and capacity-building activities on the Convention.

### 10. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Disseminate and give more publicity to the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations and jurisprudence, and raise awareness among women of their rights under the Convention and of the legal remedies available to them to claim those rights;

(b) Strengthen capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, police officers, other law enforcement officials and lawyers and promote an enabling environment, including adequate funding, for the involvement of civil society organizations, in particular women's rights organizations, in the provision of such training;

(c) Expedite the accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention during the first half of 2025, as indicated by the State party, in order to facilitate the full enjoyment by women in the State party of the rights enshrined in the Convention.

**Legislative framework**

11. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the State party to strengthen its legislative and institutional framework on gender equality and to eliminate discrimination against women, in particular the adoption of the Victim Support Act, the amendments to the Penal Code, the Family Law Act and the Code of Civil Procedure, and the preparation of a draft law to integrate the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The limited scope of the prohibition on discrimination in the Equal Treatment Act, which applies only to the context of employment and vocational training and does not cover discrimination outside the field of employment;

(b) The lack of legal provisions in the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act prohibiting intersecting forms of discrimination, in particular against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women;

(c) The inadequacy of resources to ensure the independence and work of the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner;

(d) The lack of disaggregated data on the number of complaints concerning discrimination against women and their outcome, including reparation provided.

**12. Recalling articles 1 and 2 of the Convention and target 5.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Adopt, without delay, legislation that includes a comprehensive definition of discrimination covering all internationally recognized prohibited grounds of discrimination, including family or personal status, and encompassing direct and indirect discrimination in both the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, such as discrimination against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women;**

**(b) Strengthen the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner by providing it with adequate human, technical and financial resources to effectively and independently discharge its mandate to protect women's rights and address complaints from women and girls in a confidential and gender-sensitive manner;**

**(c) Devise a comprehensive system to collect data on the number and outcome of complaints about discrimination against women, including on the reparation provided to victims, disaggregated by age, nationality, disability and socioeconomic status.**

**Access to justice and legal complaint mechanisms**

13. The Committee notes the development of a curriculum for training on gender-sensitive treatment of victims of crime for judges, prosecutors, police officers, victim support staff and other persons who come into contact with women and girl victims of gender-based violence and discrimination. The Committee, however, notes with concern:

(a) The lack of adequate mobilization of the funds of the Recovery Plan funded by the European Union in the area of access to justice for women;

(b) The lack of capacity-building for the judiciary and law enforcement officials on gender-sensitive complaint handling and investigation and the insufficient measures to prevent revictimization in criminal proceedings;

(c) The barriers to access to justice and redress faced by women victims of gender-based violence, disadvantaged groups of women, such as migrant women, older women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women, women with disabilities and women belonging to ethnic minority groups.

**14. In the light of its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that women have access to effective remedies in cases of violations of their rights and:**

(a) **Adequately fund legal aid schemes, in particular in cases of gender-based violence against women, including women facing intersecting forms of discrimination;**

(b) **Ensure the mobilization of resources under the Recovery Plan funded by the European Union to strengthen access to justice for women;**

(c) **Strengthen capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, other law enforcement officers, lawyers and victim service support professionals on gender-sensitive investigation and interrogation methods and court procedures to prevent the revictimization of women;**

(d) **Ensure access to justice and redress for disadvantaged groups of women, such as women with disabilities, migrant or refugee women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and women from ethnic minority groups, including through the collection of data and regular monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of the provision of services for access to justice and redress.**

#### **National machinery for the advancement of women**

15. The Committee welcomes the adoption of the Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030, which outlines gender equality and equal opportunities as one of the five sub-goals. The Committee also notes the “Estonia 2035” strategy, which is monitored using nine indicators, including the gender equality index. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The limited results achieved through the gender equality strategies and the lack of gender-responsive budgeting in the State party;

(b) The lack of institutional coordination and collaboration between the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and other relevant entities working on the rights of women.

**16. Recalling its general recommendation No. 6 (1988) on effective national machinery and publicity and the guidance provided in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a comprehensive national strategy on gender equality and involve women's organizations in the design, implementation, data analysis, monitoring and evaluation of its impact on a regular basis;**

(b) **Further strengthen the machinery for the advancement of women by providing adequate human, technical and financial resources at both the central and municipal levels and by strengthening the mandate and political authority of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications.**

#### **Temporary special measures**

17. The Committee notes with concern that the State party has not adopted any temporary special measures for the advancement of women, as well as the limited understanding in the State party of the non-discriminatory nature and importance of temporary special measures.

18. **The Committee recommends that the State party carry out awareness-raising campaigns to promote understanding of the importance and non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures and that it put in place temporary special measures, such as quotas, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004), to accelerate the achievement of substantive gender equality in the areas of decision-making, education and employment, where women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, in particular rural women, migrant or refugee women, women with disabilities and women from ethnic minority groups.**

#### **Stereotypes and harmful practices**

19. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes through the implementation of various projects and campaigns in the education system and in the field of employment. However, the Committee is concerned that these initiatives have not had an adequate impact and that sexist messages, hate speech and negative portrayals of women and girls on television, the Internet and social media are persistent. In addition, the Committee is concerned by the lack of a comprehensive plan or strategy to combat gender stereotypes in the State party.

20. **The Committee recommends that the State party undertake impact assessments of the effectiveness of the initiatives and programmes being undertaken across various sectors in relation to the elimination of gender stereotypes and establish a comprehensive strategy to counter gender stereotyping and sexism more effectively in all spheres, in cooperation with the media and using social media.**

#### **Gender-based violence against women**

21. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The requirement of use of force in article 141 of the Penal Code for non-consensual sexual behaviour to constitute rape;

(b) The absence of a legal definition of gender-based hate crimes, underreporting of rape owing to lack of trust in the police and revictimization of survivors of sexual violence in criminal proceedings;

(c) Reports of femicides, domestic violence and high levels of intimate partner violence in the State party;

(d) The gaps in disaggregated statistical data on gender-based domestic violence, online violence and on the prevalence of the different forms of violence committed in close relationships or by intimate or former partners, including through coercive control and psychological and economic abuse;

(e) The low number of protection orders issued in cases of gender-based violence against women;

(f) The lack of adequate funding for comprehensive access to victim support services for survivors of gender-based violence;

(g) The lack of adequate law enforcement capacities to combat online violence against women and girls effectively;

(h) The delays in amending the Family Law Act to ensure that domestic violence is taken into account in court decisions on child custody and visitation rights.

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

(a) **Amend article 141 of the Penal Code to introduce a definition of rape that is based on lack of consent rather than use of force, in line with the Istanbul Convention;**

(b) **Strengthen capacity-building for the police and other law enforcement officers on the prompt and gender-sensitive investigation of complaints about gender-based violence, address victim-blaming beliefs and judicial gender bias and equip law enforcement personnel with the necessary skills to deal with all women victims of gender-based violence, including women with disabilities, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and women belonging to ethnic minorities;**

(c) **Identify shortcomings in the criminal justice response to crimes related to gender-based violence and adopt legislation to separately and specifically criminalize femicide and intimate partner violence;**

(d) **Ensure the systematic collection of data on the number of complaints regarding and types of domestic violence against women, including psychological and economic violence, disaggregated by age and relationship between the victim and perpetrator;**

(e) **Ensure that women victims of domestic violence have effective access to protection orders and effectively enforce and monitor compliance with protection orders, impose adequate penalties in cases of non-compliance and provide capacity-building for judges and court clerks on the issuance of protection orders, including emergency protection orders;**

(f) **Ensure adequate resources for survivors of gender-based violence to have access to victim support services, including shelters, legal aid, forensic evidence, medical assistance and psychosocial support;**

(g) **Equip law enforcement agencies with the necessary knowledge and resources to respond effectively to online violence against women and girls;**

(h) **Amend the Family Law Act to ensure that incidents of domestic violence are adequately taken into consideration in court decisions on child custody and visitation rights.**

**Trafficking and exploitation of prostitution**

23. The Committee notes with appreciation the provisions in the Violence Prevention Agreement 2021–2025 to combat trafficking, including through preventive measures and capacity-building. However, the Committee notes with concern that:

(a) The State party continues to be a source, transit and destination country for trafficking in women and girls for purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour, and victims may lack alternative livelihoods to exit from vicious cycles of exploitation;

(b) There is limited visibility of and access to helplines and victim support services such as shelters, particularly for migrants and other disadvantaged groups of women and girls who are victims of or at risk of trafficking;

(c) There is a lack of human, technical and financial resources to ensure the early identification and referral to appropriate services of women and girls who are victims of trafficking;

(d) There is a lack of awareness-raising regarding the risks of trafficking and a lack of legal aid, financial support to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and counselling services for victims of trafficking, in particular women and girls;

(e) Legal procedures to establish the identity of trafficking victims are inadequate, as are measures to compensate, reintegrate and rehabilitate victims.

**24. The Committee recommends that the State party continue its efforts to combat trafficking in persons, in particular women and girls, by:**

(a) **Ensuring that cases of trafficking are effectively investigated and perpetrators prosecuted and adequately punished;**

(b) **Reducing the demand for prostitution and providing exit programmes, including alternative income-generating opportunities, for women who wish to leave prostitution;**

(c) **Promoting intensively the visibility of and access to helplines and victim support services such as shelters, strengthening early identification and referral to appropriate services of victims of trafficking in persons, including migrant women and girls, and providing training and adequate human, technical, and financial resources for the police, immigration officers and other law enforcement officers and social workers on early identification, gender-responsive protocols and support for victims of trafficking in persons;**

(d) **Adequately funding State and NGO shelters and medical, psychological and social reintegration services for victims of trafficking;**

(e) **Intensifying efforts aimed at bilateral, regional and international cooperation to prevent trafficking, including by exchanging information and harmonizing legal procedures to prosecute traffickers;**

(f) **Collecting disaggregated data on the number of prosecutions and convictions, the sentences imposed on perpetrators and the reparations provided to victims in cases of trafficking in women and girls.**

#### **Equal participation in political and public life**

25. The Committee welcomes the election of the first woman President (2016–2021) and the first woman Prime Minister (since 2021) of the State party. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The overall decrease in the representation of women in decision-making positions in the State party;

(b) The absence of targeted measures, including temporary special measures, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention, to accelerate the achievement of parity in political and public life;

(c) The lack of data on the representation of women, including disadvantaged groups of women such as rural women and women with disabilities, in the judiciary, State-owned companies and the media, especially at decision-making levels;

(d) Reports of online violence, hate speech and harassment on social media against women in political and public life.

**26. In the light of its general recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, the Committee recommends that the State party adopt targeted measures, including temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4 (1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, and that it:**



(a) **Appoint equal numbers of women and men to leadership positions, including in the foreign service as ambassadors or diplomats, and in all spheres of the Government, local administrative bodies, the judiciary and State-owned companies, and increase the representation of women, in particular rural women, women belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities and women with disabilities, in political and public life;**

(b) **Introduce incentives, such as party financing and tax exemptions, to encourage political parties to nominate equal numbers of women and men as candidates on their electoral lists, including women with diverse backgrounds and disadvantaged groups of women, and to promote women's equal representation in senior positions within their party structures;**

(c) **Provide campaign funding and capacity-building on leadership skills and political campaigning to women candidates;**

(d) **Collect disaggregated data on the representation of women, including disadvantaged groups of women such as rural women and women with disabilities, in the judiciary, State-owned companies and the media, especially at decision-making levels;**

(e) **Adopt and enforce stricter penalties for all forms of gender-based violence, hate speech and harassment, including online, in particular on social media, against women politicians and candidates, prosecute and adequately punish those responsible and provide effective redress, including compensation and public apologies, to victims.**

#### **Nationality**

27. The Committee notes with appreciation that the State party is hosting and supporting refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, including a considerable number of refugee women and children who have fled Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022. However, the Committee notes with concern that:

(a) The State party has not acceded to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 1954 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961;

(b) There is a lack of measures in place to prevent statelessness of women born in the former Soviet Union and their children;

(c) There is a lack of guarantees in relation to the continuous and long-term protection of Ukrainian women and children.

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

(a) **Accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness;**

(b) **Establish a statelessness determination procedure, in line with articles 2 and 9 of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, in order to expedite naturalization;**

(c) **Ensure, as a matter of priority, durable solutions for Ukrainian women and children, including their integration in the labour market and the education system, respectively.**

**Education**

29. The Committee welcomes the efforts of the State party to support career choices free from gender stereotypes, such as the project “Nudging to Support Stereotype-free Career Choices and Working Conditions”. However, it notes with concern:

(a) The limited educational opportunities for older women owing to age restrictions;

(b) The traditional educational choices of girls and women, who are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and information and communications technology (ICT);

(c) The persistence of stereotypes in textbooks;

(d) The very low proportion of pre-primary schoolteachers who are men, at around 1 per cent, which reinforces gender stereotypes in the educational system;

(e) The gender bias in favour of boys in the selection of subjects for secondary school entrance exams;

(f) Retrogressive trends in the provision of sexuality education at all levels of education;

(g) The high incidence of online sexual harassment of girls in the school environment;

(h) The need to strengthen the collection of disaggregated data on the representation of girls and women in higher education.

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

(a) **Repeal any unnecessary age restrictions precluding older women’s access to educational opportunities and disseminate information on relevant educational programmes;**

(b) **Provide incentives, such as quotas and scholarships, to promote non-traditional educational choices and career paths for girls and women, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics and ICT;**

(c) **Expedite efforts to review school curricula and textbooks at all levels of education to eliminate discriminatory gender stereotypes;**

(d) **Introduce sensitization campaigns targeting male teacher trainees, the education system and teacher training institutions with time frames to increase the participation of male teachers at the pre-primary and primary levels;**

(e) **Ensure that the selection of subjects for secondary school entrance exams is free from any gender bias and discriminatory algorithms to guarantee equal educational opportunities to girls and boys and women and men;**

(f) **Ensure that comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality education, including education on responsible sexual behaviour to prevent early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, forms part of curricula at all levels of education, and raise awareness among parents of the importance of sexuality education for the healthy development of their children;**

(g) **Conduct campaigns to sensitize girls and boys as well as young women and men regarding the criminal nature and harmful psychological effects of online sexual harassment, in particular in the school environment;**

(h) **Systematically collect data on the access of women and girls to education at all levels, disaggregated by age, nationality, geographical location**

**and socioeconomic background, to enable the design and implementation of tailored and gender-responsive legislation, policies, programmes and budgets.**

### **Employment**

31. The Committee welcomes the legislative amendments adopted by the State party to allow for more flexible work arrangements to reconcile professional and family life, including through increased parental leave. The Committee, however, notes with concern:

- (a) The persistent gender pay gap in the State party;
- (b) The lack of measures to facilitate the reinsertion of women in the labour market following child-rearing periods or engagement in other unpaid work, and to compensate the impact of such periods on women's career development prospects, salaries and pension benefits;
- (c) Regional disparities in women's access to childcare facilities, including the lack of adequate kindergarten places, in certain rural areas, placing the burden of childcare on mothers;
- (d) Women's severe underrepresentation in managerial positions, innovative digital governance and artificial intelligence;
- (e) The reportedly high incidence of sexual harassment in the workplace in the State party;
- (f) The limited access to adequate employment owing to job mismatch and deskilling of migrant women.

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

- (a) **Enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, regularly review wages and benefits and further strengthen measures to close the gender pay gap, including by means of gender-inclusive job classification and evaluation methods and regular pay surveys, and provide information on the impact of legal amendments on the gender pay gap and women's career development in both the public and private sectors in its next periodic report;**
- (b) **Ensure women's access to affordable quality childcare facilities in all regions of the State party and their reinsertion in the labour market following child-rearing periods or engagement in other unpaid work and adopt measures to compensate for the impact of such periods on women's career development prospects, salaries and pension benefits;**
- (c) **Ensure the availability of sufficient numbers of municipal kindergarten places in all regions of the State party to facilitate the reconciliation of professional and family life and ease women's disproportionate care burden;**
- (d) **Promote the representation of women in managerial positions, in innovative digital governance and in the artificial intelligence sector;**
- (e) **Strengthen the mandate and role of the Labour Inspectorate and provide it with adequate human, technical and financial resources to detect discriminatory practices against women in the workplace;**
- (f) **Ratify Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), of the International Labour Organization, establish effective independent complaints mechanisms for women to complain about sexual harassment in the workplace and protect them from retaliation;**

(g) **Take measures to combat the structural barriers faced by disadvantaged groups of women, such as migrant women, and ensure that they have access to job placements matching their skills and enjoy decent conditions of work.**

### **Health**

33. The Committee takes note of the regional disparities in the access of women and girls to health services in the State party. It further notes with concern:

(a) The lack of a strong gender perspective in the health strategies and plans adopted by the State party;

(b) The insufficient measures taken to address the specific health needs of older women, such as specialized health services for dementia, Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune diseases and mental health;

(c) The lack of general practitioners and long waiting lists for women to access health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, in rural areas, where public transport is often inadequate;

(d) The persistently high rates of drug and alcohol abuse among women and the lack of gender-responsive interventions in this regard;

(e) The limited access of lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women to health services due to stigmatization, bias and lack of specific training of health personnel;

(f) The lack of coverage of home births in the health insurance plan, which may result in home births without skilled birth assistance.

34. **In the light of its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Integrate a gender perspective and regularly assess, monitor and evaluate the gender-specific impact and outcomes of health policies and strategies and ensure equal access for women and girls to health services across all regions of the State party;**

(b) **Ensure that older women have affordable access to specialized health services addressing their specific health needs, including dementia, Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune diseases and mental health;**

(c) **Ease the entry requirements for medical studies, strengthen incentives for general practitioners to practise in rural areas and ensure that adequate public transport is available to improve the access of women and girls to health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, in particular in rural areas;**

(d) **Strengthen preventive and rehabilitative measures to address alcohol and drug abuse among women;**

(e) **Ensure that lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women have adequate access to a consent-based gender-affirming health-care system free from discrimination and stigmatization and provide professional training to health professionals on the health rights and needs of women in all their diversity;**

(f) **Amend the health insurance plan to ensure reimbursement of the costs of midwives and other skilled birth attendants for home births.**

### **Economic and social benefits and economic empowerment of women**

35. The Committee notes the State party's considerable economic and technological progress and that the strategic priorities for the period 2021–2027 are aimed at ensuring diverse and competitive start-ups through greater diversity in gender, age, and cultural or geographic background. However, the Committee notes with concern:

(a) The low number of women entrepreneurs in the State party and their limited access to loans for start-ups, venture capital and social protection, in particular among rural women and women with disabilities;

(b) The increased poverty among older women due to, inter alia, disproportionately low pension benefits.

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

(a) **Support women entrepreneurs, including rural women and women with disabilities, through enhanced finance schemes for businesses, including loans for start-ups, venture capital, technology and capacity-building for launching small- and medium-sized enterprises;**

(b) **Adopt targeted measures to address poverty among older women, including by increasing the coefficient for counting periods of child-rearing, unpaid care and domestic work towards women's pension benefits.**

### **Rural women**

37. The Committee notes with concern that rural women, who account for 30 per cent of the female population, face limited access to basic infrastructure, including electricity, water, transport and communications, in the State party. The Committee is also concerned that the closure of schools, recreational facilities, public libraries and community centres disproportionately affects rural women and girls. It also notes with concern that, although a large proportion of agricultural workers in the State party are women, farms are mostly registered under the name of male farmers.

38. **In the light of its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Implement a comprehensive strategy to ensure that rural women and girls have adequate access to basic infrastructure, public transport, recreational facilities, education, employment and health services, and that they are equally represented in decision-making processes on issues of development;**

(b) **Ensure that rural women have equal access as men to land ownership and that farms are registered under the names of both spouses.**

### **Disadvantaged groups of women**

39. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) Reports of intimidation and harassment of women journalists and women human rights defenders in the State party;

(b) The lack of alternatives to detention, including open regimes, for women prisoners;

(c) Stigmatization, sexual harassment and hate crimes against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.

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

(a) **Protect women journalists and women human rights defenders from threats, harassment and reprisals for their legitimate work and ensure that all cases of intimidation and harassment are prosecuted and perpetrators adequately punished, and that victims of such violations have access to effective remedies;**

(b) **Provide alternatives to detention for women prisoners, including open regimes, and ensure that women in detention are not isolated or confined to their cells;**

(c) **Address stigmatization and hate crimes against lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and sexual harassment in the workplace, ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and adequately punished and conduct awareness-raising campaigns to destigmatize lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women.**

#### **Climate change**

41. The Committee notes that the State party aims for 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030. It notes with concern, however, women's underrepresentation in decision-making processes concerning the green transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, and the lack of information on the economic impact of the green transition on rural women, women living in poverty, women with disabilities and single women heads of households.

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

(a) **Ensure the participation of women in decision-making related to the green transition and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, and integrate a strong gender perspective in such policies;**

(b) **Assess the economic impact of the green transition, in particular on rural women, women living in poverty, women with disabilities and single women heads of households, in order to devise measures to compensate for any undue economic hardships.**

#### **Marriage and family relations**

43. The Committee notes that the State party is the first in the Baltic region to recognize same-sex marriage. However, it notes with concern the lack of information on the economic protection of women upon divorce or dissolution of a union. It is also concerned that the existing law does not cover economic protection of women living in de facto unions or women who are victims of domestic violence.

44. **The Committee recommends that the State party systematically collect data on the economic consequences of divorce or dissolution of other recognized unions and adopt adequate measures for the economic protection of women in such unions. The Committee also recommends that the State party ensure that mothers who suffer domestic violence have unconditional access to subsistence benefits, without any requirement for a child maintenance request to be made.**

#### **Optional Protocol to the Convention and amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention**

45. **The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention and to accept, as soon as possible, the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the meeting time of the Committee.**

### **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

46. **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 order to achieve substantive equality between women and men.**

### **Dissemination**

47. **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, Parliament and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.**

### **Ratification of other treaties**

48. **The Committee notes that the adherence of the State party to the nine major international human rights instruments<sup>1</sup> 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 Disappearances, to which it is not yet a party.**

### **Follow-up to the concluding observations**

49. **The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 12 (b), 22 (a), 26 (b) and 32 (b) above.**

### **Preparation of the next report**

50. **The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the eighth periodic report of the State party in line with a future predictable reporting calendar based on an eight-year review cycle and following the adoption of a list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State party. The report should cover the entire period up to the time of its submission.**

51. **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 (see [HRI/GEN/2/Rev.6](#), chap. I).**

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<sup>1</sup> 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.