



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Distr.: General
26 June 2024

Original: English

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Eighty-eighth session

Summary record of the 2067th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 17 May 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Bethel (Rapporteur)

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In the absence of Ms. Peláez Narváez, Ms. Bethel (Rapporteur) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Seventh periodic report of Estonia (CEDAW/C/EST/7; CEDAW/C/EST/QPR/7)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Estonia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications had prepared a bill for the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. Public consultations on the matter were scheduled to be held in the coming months, after which the draft legislation would be submitted for approval. Ratification could therefore potentially take place as early as the first half of 2025.
3. In 2023, the Government had adopted the Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030. One of its goals was to achieve gender equality by enhancing economic equality, increasing women’s participation in decision-making processes, transforming societal attitudes and strengthening institutional capacities. The working programmes set out in the plan would be reviewed and updated on an annual basis to ensure effective implementation. Work was under way to incorporate the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act into a single new law. Under the proposed legislation, the scope of protection against discrimination on certain grounds, including disability, would be expanded to the same level of protection as that enjoyed by women against gender discrimination. The new law would also strengthen the functions of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment and set out new gender mainstreaming obligations in the areas of education, employment and policymaking. With regard to the latter, online courses for policymakers on gender equality and gender mainstreaming had been launched in 2023, and the Government planned to supplement those sessions with in-person seminars exploring ways to incorporate the gender equality perspective into policies on the environment, digital technologies and economic development. Efforts to implement gender mainstreaming would continue in the coming years.
4. Under recent amendments to the Family Law Act and other legislation, two adults were permitted to marry regardless of their sex or gender, and registered partners enjoyed the same rights as married couples. In 2023, following the reform of the parental leave and benefit system, 19 per cent of new fathers had taken shared parental leave and 91 per cent had taken paternity leave. The percentage of parents working during shared parental leave had also increased, and the parliament was currently reviewing a new early childhood education bill designed to make it easier for parents to find a place for their children at kindergarten after they turned 3 years old. The Government had introduced a new allowance for families with three or more children and had increased its single parent allowance, and the Ministry of Social Affairs planned to carry out a comprehensive review of the family and parental benefit system in the coming years. Under long-term care reforms that had entered into force in July 2023, local governments had been allocated additional resources to contribute to the payment of nursing home fees for older persons.
5. In 2023, the Government had adopted a National Action Plan on Domestic Violence for the period 2024–2027. The reform of the Victim Support Act described in the periodic report had also entered into force. Under the reform, psychological services had been made more accessible for victims of domestic and sexual violence, and it was no longer necessary to initiate criminal proceedings before claiming such support. Two free online courses on domestic violence had been launched in 2023, and studies had been carried out into general awareness of gender-based violence and human trafficking, and also into the attitudes of emergency responders and police officers when they dealt with cases of intimate partner violence. Consultations were currently being held with civil society, medical specialists and the public on the drafting of a new law to bring domestic legislation on crimes against sexual self-determination, including rape, into line with the standards set out in the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

6. In 2023, the gender pay gap had stood at 13.1 per cent in Estonia and the gender employment gap had been 1.5 per cent. A digital tool had recently been introduced to allow employers to monitor the gender pay gap and other gender equality indicators in their organizations. The Government also planned to provide training and issue guidelines to help employers bring their practices into line with new European Union rules on pay transparency, which were scheduled to enter into force in Estonia by June 2026. Under the new rules, employers would be obliged to publish gender pay gap indicators and employees would be entitled to request information concerning the pay received by colleagues doing work of equal value. The Government also planned to take further legislative measures to reduce gender imbalance on the boards of State-owned companies. Work had started in 2023 on a set of European Union-supported initiatives to address gender segregation in the education and labour markets, including research projects, training modules for career counsellors and awareness-raising campaigns on the influence of gender stereotypes on education and career decisions.

7. Estonia had been confronted with several crises during the reporting period. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had served to highlight the critical role of workers in the health-care, education and care sectors, the majority of whom were women. Accordingly, since the pandemic, pay increases had been announced for employees in each of those sectors. Since February 2022, Estonia had provided Ukraine with political, economic and military support in the context of its war with the Russian Federation. Estonia had received Ukrainian citizens fleeing the conflict, and the Estonian Government had launched projects to rebuild kindergartens and family homes for orphaned Ukrainian children in their homeland. Nearly 40,000 Ukrainian refugees had been granted temporary protection and temporary residence permits in Estonia. They were entitled to receive subsistence benefits, family benefits and social benefits and enjoyed the same access to labour market services and support as the rest of population. The State, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were working together to provide them with services in areas such as education, employment and social and psychological support, including special entrepreneurship initiatives for women.

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8. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would like to know what awareness-raising and training activities on the Convention the Government planned to put in place, including for judges and law enforcement personnel. It would also be useful to know whether the Convention was invoked in case law in Estonia. More generally, she would be interested to know what plans had been made to increase the visibility of the Convention in Estonian society.

9. The legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion, age, disability and sexual orientation was currently applicable only in the area of employment. She wished to know what time frame had been set for the adoption of new legislation that would ensure that people could not be subjected to discrimination on such grounds in any area of their lives. It would also be interesting to hear when the Government intended to include gender identity, migrant status and refugee status as prohibited grounds for discrimination, and whether it planned to pass legislation explicitly addressing intersectional and multiple forms of discrimination.

10. She would like to know what steps were planned in order to allocate more resources to policies and measures aimed at achieving gender equality. Information on any plans that might have been made to strengthen the independence of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment would be of particular interest.

11. It would be useful to know how the different national complaint mechanisms were coordinated. Since the number of complaints that had been filed concerning gender equality was relatively low, she would also like to know what support was given to women who wished to file a complaint. The Committee would welcome further information on the measures taken to guarantee effective access to justice and redress for victims, including particularly vulnerable women and girls, such as women with disabilities, women members of ethnic minorities, migrant women, older women and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons. The delegation might also like to explain how it monitored the implementation of those measures and evaluated their outcomes.

12. **A representative of Estonia** said that the adoption of a single comprehensive law updating and harmonizing the existing legislation on gender equality and equal treatment was one of the objectives set out in the coalition agreement that would form the basis for government action until 2027. The main objective of the new bill was to promote gender equality in all areas of social life and to eliminate the societal barriers that prevented specific groups of people from enjoying equal opportunities and equal treatment.

13. Although gender discrimination was fully prohibited in Estonia, people were only protected against discrimination on other grounds in certain spheres of life. For example, the Equal Treatment Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion or views, age, disability and sexual orientation only in areas relating to working life and vocational training. Under the new law, the scope of the prohibition of discrimination on those grounds – and new ones, including language, origin, property status and social status – would be extended to all areas of public life. The draft law would develop the existing legislation on gender discrimination so that it would include three new specifically protected grounds, namely gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. The list of protected grounds for discrimination in the new law remained open and subject to amendment in the future so that it could potentially integrate other personal characteristics that might be the subject of societal prejudice, exclusion or stigmatization.

14. The Government recognized the importance of strengthening the budget of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment, particularly since the Commissioner's workload was expected to increase to cover the extended reach of the new law on gender equality and equal treatment. The Commissioner would be granted new powers under the new legislation, such as the right to appear in court on behalf of and with the consent of a presumed victim of discrimination. It was also foreseen that the Commissioner would play an active role in collecting statistical data on implementation of the law and making recommendations on measures and activities to be carried out to strengthen its application.

15. **A representative of Estonia** said that, in 2025, the Ministry of Social Affairs would issue another call for strategic partnership proposals aimed at supporting the implementation of the gender equality goals set out in the Welfare Development Plan 2023–2030. Although a total of €1.5 million of public funds had been allocated to gender equality and equal rights partnerships with civil society organizations, it was important to ensure that civil society did not depend entirely on State funding. NGOs and women's rights organizations therefore also had access to other sources of financial assistance, such as funding from the European Commission and the Active Citizens Fund, an initiative financed by the Norway Financial Mechanism.

16. The Convention formed the basis for the national Estonia 2035 umbrella strategy, the Welfare Development Plan and the national gender strategy. Information on the Convention's provisions was disseminated through online courses aimed at policymakers and other stakeholders that addressed the topics of gender equality, equal treatment and accessibility. The visibility of the Convention would be further increased as Estonia prepared to ratify the Optional Protocol.

17. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment supported women when they filed all types of discrimination complaints and strived to raise public awareness about all forms of discrimination. Increased awareness was considered a key prerequisite for the protection of women's rights.

18. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Government upheld the principle that everyone should have access to justice, which included the availability of the necessary legal aid. The partners contracted by the Ministry of Justice through a public competition provided quick, high quality and affordable legal advice to low-income and other vulnerable groups.

19. To qualify for the service, a person must have an average gross monthly income below an established threshold, and adult beneficiaries were required to make a small copayment. Two hours of legal aid were provided free of charge and a subsequent three hours could be obtained for €45.75 per hour. The discounted rate was available for up to 10 hours in cases of family law concerning children. Legal advice was available to all persons with disabilities and older persons, regardless of their income, as well as to family members or representatives seeking advice about the rights of individuals with disabilities.

20. Comprehensive legal counselling was available at support centres for women across Estonia for victims of gender-based violence. Such assistance included initial legal counselling, help with document preparation and support with court proceedings.

21. One of the Ministry's contractors had provided legal counselling to over 46,000 individuals since 2017, and almost 90 per cent had expressed satisfaction or high satisfaction with the service. The majority of cases had been resolved within the free two-hour window. In 2023, over 9,000 people had received legal counselling, which was 7.5 per cent more than the previous year. The Estonian Chamber of Disabled People and the Estonian Association of Pensioners had also provided assistance to more people in 2023.

22. Under the State Legal Aid Act, low-income and other vulnerable persons could apply for State legal aid, which included representation by a lawyer in court and other proceedings, assistance with drafting legal documents and legal counselling. State legal aid was provided at a low cost and was unlimited.

23. **A representative of Estonia** said that there were currently 10 people working in the Equality Policy Department and that its budget for 2024 was approximately €2.3 million, nearly €500,000 of which was dedicated to administrative costs. Its funding was provided by the Government and the European Union.

24. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would like to know how visibility and knowledge of the Convention would be enhanced in the online and in-person training of magistrates, judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers. It would perhaps be advisable for the Optional Protocol to be translated into Estonian to maximize its visibility and accessibility.

25. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Optional Protocol had already been translated into Estonian. A review of the translation of the Convention was being considered to ensure the language would be up-to-date. An answer to the question on ways of increasing magistrates' awareness of the Convention would be submitted in writing.

26. **Ms. Xia** said that she would like to know why proposals to introduce zipped electoral lists and to increase women's representation on the boards of State-owned enterprises had not been adopted. It would be of interest to obtain further information on the role played by women parliamentarians in the formulation of national policies and laws, on the measures taken by the Government to promote women's participation in decision-making and on the progress and achievements of the Nudging Women to Power project, including the number of female beneficiaries.

27. She would be curious to know what measures were in place to support women's participation in politics at the grass-roots level and whether women who took up positions in public office were provided with family care, capacity-building training and the chance to work in multiple positions. She wondered whether the Government planned to adopt temporary special measures to promote equal access to civil service jobs for women from disadvantaged groups such as women from ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and women in rural areas.

28. **Ms. Morsy** said that, following the incorporation of the Equality Policy Department into the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, she wished to know what measures were taken to continue the department's coordination with other line ministries to promote gender mainstreaming at the central and local levels and across all sectors of policymaking. She would also welcome information on the mechanisms in place to involve women's organizations in the adoption and implementation of public policies and programmes. It would be of interest to hear what the expected timeline was for the introduction of a separate gender equality strategy and whether there were any benchmarks or indicators to measure the effectiveness of existing strategies and plans. What measures were taken to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to identify disparities and inform decision-making on gender equality?

29. She would be grateful for further information on how the State party planned to integrate a clear process for gender budgeting into its Activity-Based Budgeting in Estonia, and whether clear guidelines or financial orders were in place. She wondered if the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Centres were wholly dependent on funding from the European Union and whether they would be forced to close if such funding was discontinued. She

would like to have further information on the state of the Ministry's web application that was used for the collection of gender disaggregated data. She wondered what kind of institutional partnership existed between the Chancellor of Justice, an independent institution working in accordance with the Paris Principles, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, how the State party guaranteed the rights of women and girls with disabilities and how individuals could file complaints through the Chancellor of Justice.

30. **A representative of Estonia** said that the decision to change the ministry to which the Equality Policy Department belonged did not affect its ability to coordinate with and consult other ministries, NGOs and the public on policymaking matters.

31. **A representative of Estonia** said that the change of ministry had been successful for the Equality Policy Department from the point of view of gender mainstreaming. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications worked closely with the Chancellor of Justice, for example by co-organizing awareness-raising days in collaboration with NGOs. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Centres were funded by the European Union, and no funding issues were anticipated. Members of the Equality Policy Department were already in consultation with the European Union regarding the new budget.

32. **A representative of Estonia** said that the strategic goals outlined in the Welfare Development Plan included the need to increase the gender balance in decision-making processes and in politics. The latest gender equality survey had shown that 80 per cent of the Estonian population believed it was important for women to participate in politics. However, no mandatory quota such as gender quotas for political parties was envisioned for women. Women already made up around 50 per cent of party members, but they rarely reached the top positions and did not stand for election as frequently as men. In the 2023 elections, a third of the candidates had been women. While some political parties had voluntarily introduced measures such as zipper lists, more needed to be done to tackle the specific obstacles faced by women in politics, promote gender quotas and empower women to reach high-level political positions.

33. A website called Women in Politics provided advice on questions such as how to increase women's political participation and how to portray women in a stereotype-free manner in the media. Furthermore, Praxis, a think tank, was conducting a study on gender stereotypes of female politicians in traditional and social media, misogyny and anti-gender rhetoric. At the end of the study, it would provide a report with recommendations, in addition to educational material for teachers and youth workers on how to discuss the topics of women and politics.

34. **A representative of Estonia** said that the relatively low cost of childcare in Estonia made it very accessible. However work still needed to be done to ensure that men and women shared the childcare burden equally.

35. **A representative of Estonia** said that there was no separate gender equality strategy, but rather a comprehensive gender policy under the Welfare Development Plan and the Estonia 2035 umbrella strategy. The Government aimed to take gender into account in all policy areas and to avoid seeing gender as a stand-alone issue.

36. **Ms. Morsy** said that she would be grateful for further information on how the State party monitored the effectiveness of its gender mainstreaming efforts across ministries and how it collected and analysed data disaggregated by gender.

37. **A representative of Estonia** said that the national statistics office had robust gender disaggregated data covering all areas of life. Relevant data on gender were always taken into account to inform discussions concerning new policies and policy reviews.

38. **A representative of Estonia** said that it could be difficult to obtain a consistent level of information from different ministries with regard to gender mainstreaming. However, a proposal was under discussion to include gender mainstreaming issues in the annual performance reports submitted by each ministry.

39. **The Chair** said that she wished to hear what the impact assessment was of the initiatives conducted to address gender stereotyping across various sectors, such as in education, employment and the media, with regard to migrants, ethnic minorities and women

and girls with disabilities. How did the Government measure the effectiveness of such initiatives?

40. The Committee would like to hear whether the Government would consider establishing comprehensive legislative, policy and sustainable programmatic measures based on a national action plan to counter gender stereotyping and sexism more effectively at all levels and in all spheres, including in the family.

41. She wondered whether the Government had the political will to fully harmonize the country's national legislation with the provisions of the Convention and the Istanbul Convention, in particular by introducing a consent-based definition of rape.

42. It would be of interest to the Committee to obtain further details on how the Government was developing judges' and law enforcement staff's understanding of gender-based violence, its root causes and link with gender stereotyping. The Committee would like to hear about the steps taken to develop or revise binding guidelines and training programmes to improve the effectiveness of investigations. What steps had been taken to equip law enforcement agencies with the necessary skills to support all female victims of violence, women with disabilities, ethnic minority women and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and intersex persons, while applying a victim-centred and gender-sensitive approach?

43. She would welcome a response from the delegation concerning the qualitative difference that specific support services had made to the lives of survivors of sexual violence.

44. It would be interesting to know what measures were in place to prevent murders of women by their current or former husbands or partners and what the most recent assessments and findings were in regard to the number of gender-based killings of women, the relationships between perpetrators and victims and the age range of those involved. She wondered whether any shortcomings had been identified in the response of institutions to such crimes, for example when victims had reported violence prior to being murdered, and whether any steps had been taken to address such failings.

45. She wished to know the protocol for collecting data on the types of violence related to domestic violence, for example of a physical, psychological and economic nature, and the prevalence of violence committed in close relationships or by intimate or former partners. The Committee would appreciate it if the delegation could explain more about the initiative to make information on intimate partner violence a part of the school curriculum and to detail the outcomes it expected from doing so.

46. **Ms. Reddock** said that she would like to know what measures were taken to ensure that support services for victims of crime were accessible to vulnerable and marginalized groups. She wondered whether the activities undertaken in partnership with NGOs to combat trafficking in persons and exploitation were provided with adequate funding, for example in order to operate shelters. It would be helpful to know what preventive actions, legislative measures and structures were in place to combat trafficking and exploitation of women and girls; how many shelters, including those with counselling services, existed for migrant women victims of trafficking; whether funds were available to assist trafficking victims; and what measures were in place for their compensation, reparation and rehabilitation. She wished to know what steps had been taken to remedy problems affecting the anti-trafficking hotline, which included its low level of visibility and the problems it faced for the reporting of domestic and international trafficking.

47. She would like to learn about any innovative tools created by the Government to prevent trafficking in persons and to combat forced labour and any actions it had conducted for the development of a victim identification procedure. She would be grateful to receive information about convictions of persons found guilty of trafficking in persons, including the number of criminal cases registered, the number of criminal decisions adopted in the courts, the average penalty and the duration of the procedure. Lastly, she would like to receive information about the system used to compensate victims.

48. **A representative of Estonia** said that the impact of initiatives and programmes intended to address gender stereotyping was monitored using national statistics and occasional specific analyses. The Government's comprehensive policy in that area was

provided by the Estonia 2035 umbrella strategy; the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030; and an annual action plan that identified ongoing issues and set out the steps to take to resolve them.

49. **A representative of Estonia** said that the country's periodic Gender Equality Monitoring Survey, which provided indicators for its gender equality programme, helped to monitor and measure changing societal attitudes towards gender stereotypes. Members of the public were asked about their views on topics including women in politics and leadership positions; the gender-based division of domestic and caregiving work; and the gender wage gap.

50. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Labour Inspectorate made efforts to ensure fair and just working conditions, including freedom from forced labour, and a safe working environment. It reported suspected cases of forced labour and trafficking in persons to the police. The Inspectorate's staff would receive further training under new European Union regulations on forced labour that were expected to come into force later in 2024.

51. **A representative of Estonia** said that there was strong political will to amend the definition of rape in the country's Penal Code to bring it into line with the definition in the Istanbul Convention. The police and prosecutors agreed that the existing legislation was insufficiently supportive of victims of rape. The introduction of rape legislation based on the criterion of consent was being accompanied by efforts to change public attitudes, including the problem of victim blaming.

52. The new Victim Support Act had been drawn up over a three-year period involving extensive discussions with NGOs, the police, prosecutors, the Child Protection Union and other stakeholders. It addressed the issue of data exchange for the purpose of supporting victims of crime, and it also included a paragraph on the treatment of victims, for example outlining how to respect their rights and involve them in all the aspects of victim support work and how to take into consideration gender and the relationship between victims and perpetrators of crimes. Unlike its predecessor, the new Act also listed all of the services available to victims. Victims of sexual violence were provided with high quality, State-funded services that had been developed and were managed by gynaecologists. Future doctors and nurses were taught about sexual violence as part of their university education. Qualified doctors and nurses received further training annually.

53. Measures to prevent femicide and bring down relatively high levels of domestic violence in Estonia were developed by an anti-violence network. The network included ministers and civil servants who worked to draw up strategic plans and smaller groups of experts who met fortnightly to discuss more immediate needs. The country also had an action plan to combat domestic violence, which had been signed off by the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, Social Affairs and Education and Research. In order to combat alarming attitudes on domestic violence and victim blaming among police officers and emergency dispatchers, a working group had been set up at the initiative of the Ministry of the Interior, with the involvement of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Social Insurance Board (SIB). A module on domestic violence was to become a mandatory part of the initial training received by police officials and emergency dispatchers. While that was in preparation, information days were held for the police, during which victim support officials spoke about their work. Future social workers were trained in the areas of victim support and domestic violence as part of their higher education.

54. The Government ran campaigns to raise awareness of gender-based violence, domestic violence and the services it provided to address them. Articles about those issues in the media routinely included contact information, such as a hotline number and other support services for victims. A public opinion survey published in 2024 indicated that the proportion of respondents who knew of at least one victim support service had increased since a previous study and now stood at 82 per cent. There had also been a positive shift in attitudes and awareness relating to domestic violence and sexual violence. For example, there was now a greater tendency to view any child who lived in a domestic setting in which violence was present as victims. In the past, only children who had suffered direct physical violence had been considered to be victims. It was also now less likely for victims of sexual violence to

be blamed on account of their choice of clothing. Special services were now provided for women in prostitution, and public awareness had risen in that area as well.

55. The Government was working to address the discrepancy between domestic violence statistics reported in public opinion surveys and the numbers reflected in official crime statistics. It was taking steps to inform people about the services available to them.

56. A nine-module mandatory training course was provided to persons applying to work in women's shelters or with victims of violence against women. It covered stereotypes, violence and specific case management training, and most enrolees attended in person. SIB had also developed a course on domestic violence, which was mandatory for persons wishing to work in victim support and was strongly recommended for police officers.

57. She had not seen evidence of widespread sex trafficking. As Estonia was a small country, it was difficult to conceal such activities from the authorities. The Ministry of Social Affairs cooperated with police officers working on cases involving trafficking in persons and pimping, and the anti-trafficking network included a State-funded NGO specialized in supporting persons working in prostitution.

58. The Government did all that it reasonably could to assist in the rehabilitation of victims of trafficking, many of whom suffered deep trauma. The services it provided could be accessed from a very low threshold and were actively publicized by case managers, who visited bars and nightclubs for that purpose. They also sought to track trafficking activities by maintaining telephone contact with women. It was necessary to respect the free choice of individuals when it came to accessing the services provided for them. National funding for victim support services, though insufficient, had been consistently rising in recent years. Victims of trafficking, including non-nationals, were eligible for State-funded medical help. The Government also had a periodically reviewed official procedure for identifying and treating victims, which set out the services provided for them.

59. Crime victim compensation, which complied with Council Directive 2004/80/EC of 29 April 2004 relating to compensation to crime victims and the European Convention on the Compensation of Victims of Violent Crimes, could be accessed by victims of trafficking in Estonia even if they did not have a permit to remain in the country.

60. In 2023, eight persons had been convicted on charges of trafficking in persons. The average sentence handed down had been 2.5 years' imprisonment. Fines had also been imposed, along with a requirement to compensate victims. In 2022, 46 cases had been registered. That number had risen to 84 in 2023. The crime of trafficking was viewed from a broad perspective that also included the crimes of pimping, aiding prostitution and other activities.

61. The anti-trafficking hotline cooperated with the police and the prosecutor's office and provided information and counselling for victims and persons who suspected that they were being exploited. Many of the calls it received related not to trafficking but to labour market violations such as unpaid salaries. Callers were given counselling and, in more complex cases, were assigned an SIB case manager.

62. **The Chair** asked how the Government dealt with cyberviolence against women and girls and how law enforcement officers were trained to deal with digital violence online.

63. **Ms. Tisheva** said that she would be very interested to know more about the obstacle to the adoption of a definition of rape based on the lack of consent. She noted that it was important for the continuous training of the judiciary to include mandatory training on gender-based violence and pointed out that stipulating such a requirement did not threaten the judiciary's independence. In the light of the relatively low ratio of applications for protection orders to reports of violent incidents, she wished to know whether the State party had a civil law procedure that could provide urgent protection swiftly enough for victims not to be deterred from making use of it.

64. **A representative of Estonia** said that an analysis concluded in early 2024 by the Ministry of Justice had indicated that the country's legal provisions criminalizing acts that restricted women's self-determination were not in line with the Istanbul Convention. To remedy that, the Government had decided to amend the Penal Code and was working with

stakeholders, including professionals, ministers and non-profit organizations. Two events had been scheduled later in 2024 for specialists, including judges and police representatives, to air their views on the topic and discuss the best new legal wording. A web platform would also be launched in June 2024 for specialists to express their opinions and ideas and cooperate in drafting the new legislation.

65. The question of alignment of the Penal Code with the Istanbul Convention had been openly and widely discussed in the media, including in articles, social media posts, radio broadcasts, podcasts and television programmes, and would be the subject of a discussion group at the well-publicized and routinely well-attended Opinion Festival, held in May 2024, and another large-scale event to be held in August 2024. Both of those events served as additional opportunities for public awareness-raising and for the expression and sharing of views on the matter. The current plan was for a draft law to be submitted to the parliament in spring 2025.

66. An elective three-credit course on gender-based violence was available to students of the social sciences at universities. The course covered the topics of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment and the relevant legal provisions and criminal proceedings. Each year, some 40 students took the course.

Articles 7–9

67. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she wished to know how the Government intended to further the progress made in advancing women's participation in public life and politics. More specifically, she wished to know how much funding would be dedicated to the measures already outlined by the delegation to address the decline in the representation of women in decision-making bodies. She also wished to know whether the Government would consider using quotas to boost women's representation in politics or if it had ruled them out entirely as an option. Observing that women represented 63 per cent of the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but only 31 per cent of the country's ambassadors and 18 per cent of members on the decision-making committees, she said that she would be interested to know about the measures taken to increase women's representation in those roles. In the light of reports by NGOs that data on women's representation lacked public accountability, she wished to know how the Government planned to make data more transparent and accessible to the public. The delegation might also provide data on the representation of women in the judiciary, in the media and in State-owned companies.

68. In view of the prevalence and intensity of cyber harassment in Estonia, particularly against women in public life, she wondered whether there were plans to increase penalties for such acts and whether hate speech had been discussed in that context. Noting the achievements of the Cohesive Estonia Strategy in the recruitment of employees with different native languages in national and local government agencies, she said that she would be interested to know whether the delegation could provide any data or evidence that the Strategy had promoted the representation of disadvantaged groups of women in political office. The delegation might also outline plans for increasing the representation in politics of women from rural backgrounds and women with disabilities.

69. **Ms. Tisheva** said that the country's laws provided for equality for all persons – foreign nationals, beneficiaries of international protection and stateless persons alike – in the application for and acquisition of Estonian citizenship. However, the majority of stateless persons in Estonia were former citizens of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics who had not acquired Estonian or any other nationality following the resumption of Estonian independence in 1991. Such persons were reportedly referred to by the authorities as having “undermined” citizenship. They were able to obtain long-term residence permits and allowed to vote in municipal elections but faced restrictions on other rights, including those relating to employment. She would therefore be grateful if the delegation would outline the timeline envisaged for accession to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. She would also be interested to learn about the gender aspects of statelessness in Estonia and about any measures taken to prevent statelessness at birth.

70. The majority of refugees currently in Estonia were Ukrainian, and most of them were women and children. She wished to know about the guarantees provided in the national legislation and in government policies to ensure continuous and long-term protections for them. She would be particularly interested to learn about the priority measures in place for integrating Ukrainian women into the country's labour market and for providing them with education and vocational training.

71. **A representative of Estonia** said that two Ukrainian women had been hired by the Labour Inspectorate to provide information to Ukrainian refugees in Estonia, including through social media platforms, about the labour market and their legal rights as workers. The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund also provided such information, including specifics about how to apply for unemployment status and what benefits were available, such as financial support and career advice. Language courses were provided for those who could not yet speak Estonian. The employment rate among the Ukrainian refugee community was currently more than 50 per cent, which was one of the highest rates among European Union member States hosting Ukrainian refugees and a level typically reached after 10 to 20 years of residence in a host country. The Government would endeavour to further increase that participation rate through the activities of the Labour Inspectorate and the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.

72. **A representative of Estonia** said that the representation of women on the boards of the country's largest listed companies stood at 10 per cent, that of women on the boards of State-owned companies stood at 25 per cent, and that 6 of the 19 judges on the Supreme Court were women. The percentage of women in management roles in State administration bodies, such as ministries, was higher, at 51.9 per cent. Women held 11 per cent of leadership roles in the public broadcasting organizations and 16.7 per cent of the leadership and deputy leadership roles in the country's major political parties. There was much room for improvement, but action was already under way: a draft law was under consideration to transpose into national law Directive 2022/2381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures. The Government had committed to a voluntary target of achieving gender balance in listed companies, and that objective went beyond the targets in the Directive. The delegation could not confirm whether the Government would consider quotas in politics, as the matter lay in the hands of the major political parties. Currently, quotas were not being discussed.

73. One goal under the Government's gender equality strategy was to reduce horizontal and vertical segregation, particular in industries requiring studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects), in which women were underrepresented. For instance, women comprised just 30 per cent of information technology specialists in Estonia. Several measures to achieve that goal were being funded by the European Social Fund. One such measure was aimed at raising awareness about women in leadership positions, including in politics. Plans were currently under way to launch other awareness-raising campaigns and to open calls for stakeholders wishing to fund projects aimed at achieving gender balance in leadership roles and at decreasing gender segregation in the industries in question. Details on the funding for each individual activity were unavailable, but the total budget for measures funded by the European Social Fund to decrease segregation for 2023–2029 amounted to some €3.5 million.

74. **A representative of Estonia** said that the Council of the European Union had recently approved a directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence. The directive, which covered cyberharassment, would soon enter into force, and Estonia would then be obliged to transpose the directive into its national laws. To do so, an analysis would be done of all relevant national legislation, and all of the relevant changes would be made at once. The possibility of criminalizing hate speech against women politicians had not been discussed.

75. **A representative of Estonia** said that accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons would be of no benefit to persons in Estonia. Regarding the former, the Government's stance was to encourage, not oblige, persons with undefined citizenship to choose between Estonian nationality and another citizenship. All persons had the right to

choose their nationality; the State should not influence that decision. As to the latter Convention, all of the rights that it set out, including those regarding employment, were already enjoyed by persons with undefined citizenship living in Estonia. In 2015, the procedure for acquiring citizenship had been amended in such a way as to prevent anyone else from becoming a person with undefined citizenship in Estonia. Any child, including a child with undetermined citizenship, had the right to apply for Estonian citizenship upon reaching the age of 15. While there was a small number of children with undetermined citizenship in Estonia, there were no bureaucratic or other obstacles to their application for citizenship.

76. When Ukrainian women refugees had first arrived in Estonia, their basic needs – for shelter, food and clothing – had had to be met. More than two years after the onset of the conflict, their evolving needs continued to be met through various initiatives. For example, an NGO sought to connect Estonian women entrepreneurs with Ukrainian women to support them in starting a business, and skill-specific programmes enabled trained Ukrainian women, such as medical workers, to work in their fields of expertise in Estonia.

77. **A representative of Estonia** said that increasing women's participation in diplomacy was one of the aims of the third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security until 2025, which had been adopted in 2021. Recent data showed that 63 per cent of diplomats were women. The number of women ambassadors had decreased over the previous four years, from 47 per cent of ambassadors' posts in 2020 to just 35 per cent in 2024. However, at the top managerial level in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the proportion of posts filled by women had risen from 20 per cent in 2020 to 50 per cent, and women held 58 per cent of mid-level managerial roles.

78. **Ms. Stott Despoja** said that she would be grateful if the delegation would explain the reason for the sharp drop in the number of women holding ambassadors' posts between 2020 and 2024. A disproportionate number of comments constituting cyberharassment were directed against women in politics, and cyberharassment might therefore act as a disincentive for women to become involved in political and public life. She wondered whether the Government might consider any specific measures to tackle the phenomenon. She would be interested to know whether the Government had considered temporary special measures to increase the number of women in business.

79. **Ms. Ameline** said that, while discussion with political parties was valuable, it was important to recall that the responsibility for ensuring equal representation in the parliament – and creating the conditions necessary to uphold all of the provisions of articles 7 and 8 of the Convention – ultimately lay with the State.

Article 10–14

80. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that she would be grateful if the delegation would outline how the Government would improve the availability of municipal kindergarten places, including details on budgets, training and infrastructure. Ensuring the availability of such places would not only benefit the children, but also afford their mothers the freedom to pursue employment. The Committee had received limited information about educational opportunities for older persons. The delegation might clarify whether the Government intended to improve accessibility of such opportunities, for example by removing age restrictions and increasing the use of digital technologies.

81. Noting that gender stereotypes were formed at an early age and that only 0.5 per cent of teachers in early childhood education were men, she said that she would be interested to learn about measures in place to increase the proportion of male preschool teachers, perhaps drawing on the country's success in achieving gender parity among academic researchers. In that connection, she wondered whether any lessons had been drawn from measures already taken to increase the proportion of women and girls engaged in STEM subjects and activities; whether any action had been taken to prevent girls and boys from being directed into traditionally female and male activities; how exposure to traditional gender activities throughout a child's education was monitored; and how career counselling could help overcome the influence of traditional roles.

82. A lack of data on technical education had prevented the Committee from analysing the impact of gender stereotypes in that area. Regarding gender stereotypes in textbooks and teaching materials, she welcomed the plan outlined in the periodic report to begin conducting research in 2024, but she would be interested to learn about measures currently in place to address such stereotypes. Were any temporary special measures in place to address such issues?

83. Commendably, in 1996, Estonia had been the first country of the former Soviet Union to introduce school-based sexuality education. The delegation might outline how the Government intended to address current levels of pushback from parents and ensure that teachers received training line with the Convention. Information about the mechanisms in place in schools to report online sexual harassment would be gratefully received. She noted with regret that the Committee's engagement on issues related to education had been hampered, as it lacked data on learning progression and attrition, on the proportion of women in higher education and on the situation of women with disabilities and women from ethnic minorities in education. It had also not received educational data disaggregated in tabular format.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.