



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

Distr.: General  
30 October 2024

Original: English

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## Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

### Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Saudi Arabia\*

1. The Committee considered the fifth periodic report of Saudi Arabia (CEDAW/C/SAU/5) at its 2093rd and 2094th meetings (see [CEDAW/C/SR.2093](#) and [CEDAW/C/SR.2094](#)), held on 9 October 2024. The list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group is contained in [CEDAW/C/SAU/Q/5](#), and the responses of Saudi Arabia are contained in [CEDAW/C/SAU/RQ/5](#).

#### A. Introduction

2. The Committee appreciates the submission by the State party of its fifth periodic report. It also appreciates the State party's follow-up report to the previous concluding observations of the Committee ([CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4](#)) and its written replies to the list of issues and questions raised by the pre-sessional working group. 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 President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission, Hala bint Mazyad al-Tuwaijri, and included representatives of the Shura Council, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance, the Ministry of Media, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Economy and Planning, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, the Family Affairs Council, the Quality of Life Program, the National Transformation Program, the Public Prosecution, the Bureau of Experts at the Council of Ministers, the General Authority for Statistics, the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre and the National Observatory for Women, the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia, Abdulmohsen Majed Binkhonthaila, and other representatives of the Permanent Mission of Saudi Arabia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva.

#### B. Positive aspects

4. The Committee welcomes the progress achieved since the consideration in 2018 of the State party's previous report ([CEDAW/C/SAU/3-4](#)) in increasing women's

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\* Adopted by the Committee at its eighty-ninth session (7–25 October 2024).



representation at all levels of decision-making and undertaking legislative reforms, in particular the adoption of the following:

- (a) Personal Status Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 73, which sets the minimum age of marriage for both sexes at 18 years, in 2022;
- (b) Amendment to the Law on Protection from Abuse (2013), promulgated by Royal Decree No. 52, in 2022;
- (c) Amendment to the Law on Travel Documents (2000) by Royal Decree No. 134, providing for equality of women and men with regard to the requirements to issue a passport and to travel outside of the State party, in 2020;
- (d) Amendment to the Civil Status Law (1986), granting equal rights to the husband and wife to request the family record from the Civil Status Department and to declare birth, in 2019;
- (e) Social Insurance Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 134, to ensure equality of women and men by setting the retirement age at 60 years for both sexes, in 2019;
- (f) Anti-Harassment Law, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 96, in 2018;
- (g) Law on Juveniles, replacing the death penalty for juveniles with imprisonment, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 113, in 2018.

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

- (a) National policy to encourage equal opportunity and equal treatment in employment and occupation, in 2023;
- (b) Royal Order No. 1414 to require parity on the Board of the Human Rights Commission, in 2020;
- (c) National Centre for the Promotion of Mental Health, in 2019;
- (d) Authority for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities, in 2018.

6. The Committee welcomes the fact that, in the period since the consideration of the previous report, the State party has ratified the Protection of Wages Convention, 1949 (No. 95) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187), of the International Labour Organization, in 2020 and 2024 respectively.

## **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 Shura Council, 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

### General context

9. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's significant policy changes and legal advancements to mainstream gender equality and women's rights in its legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks, and the nomination of the State party to chair the sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2025. It is, however, concerned about the persistence of discriminatory stereotypes against women and girls, reports on harassment and reprisals against women human rights defenders and activists, the maintenance of the death penalty, the persistence of the male guardianship system and the reluctance of the State party to withdraw its reservations to the Convention and to ratify the Optional Protocol thereto. The Committee notes with concern the limited progress made in addressing the situation of disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women and girls, who are facing historical and intersecting forms of discrimination, namely women migrant domestic workers, women human rights defenders and activists, women in detention, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities and refugee, asylum-seeking and stateless women.

10. The Committee urges the State party to uphold its commitment to women's human rights, including the right to life, access to justice and the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, as well as equality in marriage and family relations. It calls upon the State party to strengthen the application of the Convention in legal proceedings in the State party for the benefit of all women, in particular women migrant domestic workers, women human rights defenders and activists, women in detention, women with disabilities, women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities and refugee, asylum-seeking and stateless women. The Committee also recommends that the State party ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

### Reservations

11. The Committee remains concerned that the State party maintains its general reservation and its reservations to articles 9 (2) and 29 (1) of the Convention, which constitute an obstacle to the implementation of the Convention as a whole. Notwithstanding the fact that reservations are a sovereign matter for a State party, the Committee reminds the State party that, in accordance with article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties of 1969, a party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty. The Committee notes the information provided by the delegation that the reservation made at the time of ratification was precautionary but had not been an obstacle to the State party's compliance with its obligations under the Convention. However, it notes with concern the lack of clarity as to the extent to which the Convention applies in the State party, which may undermine the principle of legal certainty and adversely affect the enjoyment by women of their rights.

12. Recalling its previous recommendations ([CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4](#), para. 10, and [CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/2](#), para. 10), the Committee recommends that the State party withdraw its general reservation and its reservations to articles 9 (2) and 29 (1). It recommends that the State party engage in discussions with leaders of religious communities, religious scholars and women's rights groups, taking into consideration best practices in the region and in member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, with a view to overcoming resistance to the withdrawal of these reservations.

### **Constitutional and legislative framework**

13. While welcoming several legal reforms and improvements in recent years, the Committee remains concerned at the absence in the State party's legislation of a definition of discrimination against women, covering both direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention.

14. The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations ([CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4](#), para. 14) and recommends that the State party amend its Basic Law of Governance and include a definition of discrimination against women, covering direct and indirect discrimination in the public and private spheres, as well as intersecting forms of discrimination, in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention, the Committee's general recommendation No. 28 (2010) on the core obligations of States parties under article 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.

### **Women's access to justice**

15. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That the State party retains the death penalty in its laws and applies it in practice, and that from January 2020 to July 2024, the State party executed 11 women of different nationalities;

(b) The absence of official data on women on death row and that often their families are unaware of the circumstances of their conviction and detention;

(c) The lack of application of fair trial guarantees and that the courts of the State party reportedly often fail to consider gender-related aspects and mitigating factors in criminal proceedings against women, including women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and in capital punishment cases, or in decisions on child custody following divorce, such as evidence of trauma, economic pressure, child marriage and domestic and gender-based violence;

(d) The absence of women judges in the State party, despite an increase in the number of women lawyers.

16. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Issue a moratorium on the death penalty, halt the execution of all women on death row and consider commuting all death sentences into prison sentences;

(b) Ensure that women sentenced to death, including non-nationals, have adequate time and resources to prepare their resentencing applications and access to medical, psychiatric and psychological evaluations, where relevant, including by cooperating with civil society organizations providing free legal assistance, psychosocial evaluation services and assistance to women on death row;

(c) Ensure the right of women to a fair trial and gender-responsive application of the law so that evidence of trauma, economic pressure, child marriage and domestic and gender-based violence, as well as intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, are adequately taken into consideration in criminal and civil proceedings, including in capital cases;

(d) Protect women in detention, including women political prisoners and women facing the death penalty, discontinue the excessive use of solitary confinement and set up independent and confidential complaint procedures that are easily accessible for women in detention, in line with the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), adopted by the General Assembly in its resolutions [65/229](#) and [70/175](#), respectively;

(e) Ensure that women have access to affordable and, if necessary, free legal aid and interpretation and provide training for the judiciary and law enforcement officials on women's human rights and gender-sensitive interrogation and investigation methods;

(f) Address judicial gender bias, appoint women judges and strengthen systematic capacity-building on gender-sensitive investigation and interrogation methods for judges, prosecutors, lawyers, police officers and other law enforcement officials.

### **Women human rights defenders and activists**

17. The Committee is concerned about the State party's reliance on the Counter-Terrorism Law (2017) and the Anti-Cyber Crime Law (2007) to target human rights defenders and activists, leading to intimidation, hate speech, threats, harassment, arrest, detention and travel bans on women human rights defenders and activists, in particular those advocating the abolition of the male guardianship system and travel bans.

18. Recalling its general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice, the Committee recalls that any erosion of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly constitutes a violation of the Convention and other human rights treaties, and recommends that the State party:

(a) Lift the travel bans currently imposed on women human rights defenders and activists and ensure that women human rights defenders and women activists, in particular those advocating the abolition of the male guardianship system and travel bans, can freely carry out their legitimate work and exercise their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, free from harassment, surveillance or undue restrictions, including arbitrary arrest and arbitrary prosecution, as well as from reprisals for engaging or seeking to engage with the Committee;

(b) Investigate and prosecute all acts of harassment, gender-based violence and discrimination and intimidation and reprisals against women human rights defenders, including online, and ensure their rights to personal liberty and security and equality before the law and equal protection of the law, provide remedies and reparations to victims and establish a public registry of such incidents;

(c) Raise awareness of the contribution of women human rights defenders, women activists, journalists and non-governmental organizations,

**especially those headed by women, to the advancement of women's rights in the State party.**

#### **Women and peace and security**

19. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's participation and its leading role in the Jeddah peace processes mediating between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces to reach a ceasefire in the Sudan. However, it notes with concern the lack of information on the number and roles of women participating in its delegations to peace negotiations, in particular at decision-making levels. It is also concerned that the State party has not adopted a national action plan on women and peace and security.

20. **The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 30 (2013) on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, and recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, which takes into consideration the full spectrum of the Council agenda on women and peace and security, as reflected in Council resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions, and incorporates a model of substantive equality that addresses gender-based violence against women and discrimination against women in all spheres of women's lives, including intersecting forms of discrimination;**

(b) **Ensure the meaningful and inclusive participation of women in all processes related to women and peace and security, in particular with regard to the adoption, implementation and assessment of the national action plan on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, and ensure the equal representation of women on the State party's delegations to peace negotiations, in particular at decision-making levels, and collect disaggregated statistical data in that regard;**

(c) **Introduce gender-responsive budgeting, set out indicators for the regular monitoring of the implementation of national and regional action plans on women and peace and security, and establish accountability mechanisms.**

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

21. The Committee notes the establishment of a Department for Women's Empowerment at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the launch in 2023 of the Women Empowerment Initiative by the Ministry of Finance to give due consideration to women's empowerment when making fiscal decisions. However, it notes with concern the lack of information on measures taken to strengthen the mandate of the Family Affairs Council, the use of gender-responsive budgeting as a tool for more effective and transparent implementation of gender policies and gender mainstreaming across all government departments.

22. **The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen the mandate of the Family Affairs Council, explicitly integrate gender-responsive budgeting into all chapters of the State budget and include monitoring and accountability mechanisms to ensure the effective and transparent implementation of gender policies and gender mainstreaming across all sectors and levels of government.**

#### **National human rights institution**

23. The Committee welcomes the appointment of Hala bint Mazyad al-Tuwaijri as President of the Saudi Human Rights Commission. However, it regrets that the State party has not enabled the Commission to evolve into a fully independent national

human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

**24. The Committee urges the State party to ensure the independence of the Saudi Human Rights Commission, giving it a broad mandate to promote and protect human rights, including women's rights, in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 48/134). It also recommends that the State party seek technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in that regard.**

### **Temporary special measures**

**25. The Committee notes with concern the lack of temporary special measures to accelerate women's equal representation in ministerial posts, the judiciary, the police and the foreign service, in particular at decision-making levels. It is also concerned about the absence of temporary special measures to promote disadvantaged groups of women, such as Bidoon, stateless and migrant women and girls, women domestic workers, women and girls with disabilities, rural women and girls, older women, women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities and women and girls victims of gender-based violence, who continue to face many obstacles to the full enjoyment of their rights. The Committee is further concerned about the limited understanding in the State party of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures.**

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

**(a) Adopt temporary special measures, such as quotas, special scholarships, affirmative procurement and financial incentives for hiring women, and establish time-bound targets to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality of women and men in all areas covered by the Convention where women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, including in political and public life, especially in ministerial posts, the judiciary, the police and the foreign service, at decision-making levels;**

**(b) In adopting and implementing temporary special measures, pay special attention to disadvantaged groups of women, such as Bidoon, stateless and migrant women and girls, women domestic workers, women and girls with disabilities, rural women and girls, older women, women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities and women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence;**

**(c) Take measures, including capacity-building and awareness-raising, to promote understanding among State officials and the general public of the non-discriminatory nature and importance of temporary special measures as a tool to advance women's empowerment and national development;**

**(d) Systematically collect data on the impact of temporary special measures and include such data in its next periodic report.**

### **Gender stereotypes**

**27. The Committee notes the State party's commitment to changing sociocultural patterns and patriarchal attitudes that discriminate against women in society, including through the implementation of national legislation and policies to this effect. However, it remains concerned that women are not considered as full rights**

holders but primarily as caregivers for children and older family members due to the persistence of stereotypes on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society.

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

- (a) **Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy, including for the online domain, targeting community and religious leaders, teachers, girls and boys and women and men, to eliminate gender stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, affecting the rights and capacity of women and girls to develop their personal abilities and make free choices about their lives and life plans, and develop and introduce a set of targets and indicators to systematically measure the impact of the strategic interventions undertaken;**
- (b) **Provide capacity-building for relevant public officials and the media, as well as private sector representatives, to enable them to address gender stereotypes, including through gender-responsive language, and promote positive media portrayals of women as active drivers of development.**

**Gender-based violence against women**

**29. The Committee remains concerned:**

- (a) **That the persistence of a de facto male guardianship system facilitates domestic violence and limits women's access to justice and victim support services, or their possibility to be released from a domestic violence shelter, as any such actions require the male guardian's consent, in particular if a woman wants to file a complaint against an abusive guardian;**
- (b) **About reports indicating that the draft Penal Code does not adequately protect women from gender-based violence, including harassment, domestic violence or marital rape, as well as the delays in the adoption of the draft Penal Code;**
- (c) **About the increasing online violence involving cyberattacks or cyberbullying, including synthetic media, deep-fake, doxing and other new technologies that facilitate gender-based violence against women.**

**30. Recalling its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Amend the definition of abuse and violence in the Protection from Abuse Law and other relevant legislation, to cover all forms of gender-based violence, regardless of guardianship, dependency, sponsorship, trusteeship or livelihood relationship, and specifically criminalize marital rape and all other forms of gender-based violence against women;**
- (b) **Expedite the review and the adoption of the draft Penal Code and ensure its full compliance with the Convention;**
- (c) **Strengthen the implementation of national regulatory procedures and due diligence mechanisms to prevent cyberattacks and cyberbullying, including synthetic media, deep-fake, doxing and other new technologies that facilitate gender-based violence, and ensure that there are mechanisms in place for the State party to hold social media platforms accountable for user-generated content and bring perpetrators of online violence and harassment to justice;**
- (d) **Intensify awareness-raising for the general public on the criminal nature of all forms of gender-based violence, including domestic and sexual**

**violence, and on the need to enable women to report such cases without fear of reprisals, stigmatization or revictimization;**

(e) **Ensure that women and girls who are survivors of gender-based violence have access to affordable and, if necessary, free legal aid, ease the burden of proof on complainants, ensure affordable access to forensic evidence and continue to build the capacity of judges, prosecutors, the police and other law enforcement officers on gender-sensitive investigation and interrogation methods in cases of gender-based violence against women;**

(f) **Strengthen victim support services and protection, including by providing a hotline available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, adequate and accessible shelters, medical treatment, psychosocial counselling and economic support to women and girls victims of gender-based violence across the State party.**

#### **Trafficking in women and exploitation of prostitution**

31. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to strengthen its legal and policy framework to combat trafficking in women and girls. However, it notes with concern:

(a) The lack of effective procedures for early identification of victims of trafficking, case management and victim protection, limited awareness among the police and other law enforcement officers about trafficking indicators, including signs of coercion, such as passport retention, debt bondage, non-payment of wages and forced confinement, as well as the lack of gender-sensitive protocols for dealing with victims of trafficking, including trafficking for purposes of exploitation of prostitution;

(b) That the hotlines of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking and of the Human Rights Commission are available only in English and Arabic, making them inaccessible to many migrant women in the State party;

(c) The limited number of homes and shelters for victims of trafficking and the lack of support services tailored to the needs of trafficking victims, as well as the limited cooperation with civil society organizations on victim identification and referral to support services.

32. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Provide capacity-building for the judiciary, law enforcement officials, immigration officers, border guards and social workers to ensure that victims of trafficking, including women migrant domestic workers, are not inadvertently placed in detention or subject to removal procedures, or exploited in prostitution, and on the application of the national legal and policy framework to combat trafficking in women and girls and gender-sensitive procedures for the early identification and referral of victims to appropriate services;**

(b) **Strengthen capacity-building for law enforcement officials, in cooperation with civil society organizations, and strengthen the human, technical and financial resources to ensure that victims of trafficking are identified, assisted and protected at an early stage, including through the provision of safe disclosure procedures and safe spaces, and monitor sites where displaced and migrant women and girls are accommodated, registered or detained;**

(c) **Ensure the availability of a dedicated, toll-free, multilingual hotline available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for victims of trafficking;**

(d) **Ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data on trafficking, disaggregated by age, sex, nationality of victims and forms of trafficking.**

**Participation in political and public life**

33. The Committee notes the State party's efforts to increase the representation of women in political and public life and the information provided by the State party's delegation that the Government aims at reaching parity in the Shura Council. However, it notes with concern:

- (a) Women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions in the Government, the judiciary, the public service, the foreign service, academia and international organizations;
- (b) Women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions in the private sector, including on boards of directors, in the State party;
- (c) The absence of a clear strategy to address the underlying causes of women's underrepresentation and the barriers to their equal access to decision-making, with a view to reaching parity in political and public life;
- (d) Limited opportunities for women to participate in civil society organizations, including women's organizations, due to the existing restrictions.

34. **Recalling its general recommendation No. 23 (1997) on women in political and public life, and general recommendation No. 40 (2024) on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Introduce targeted measures, including temporary special measures, in line with article 4 (1) of the Convention and general recommendation No. 25 (2004) on temporary special measures, to reach parity in the Shura Council and introduce preferential recruitment of women to the judiciary, the public service, the foreign service, including in diplomatic missions, and academia, in particular at decision-making levels, and support women candidates applying to international organizations, in particular at senior levels;**
- (b) **Provide capacity-building and training to women managers in the private sector, sensitize private sector entities on the importance of women's equal representation in leadership positions, and incentivize public and private listed companies to increase the number of women in decision-making positions and on boards of directors;**
- (c) **Identify the underlying causes of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions in higher educational institutions and use temporary special measures and other specific measures to address this disparity;**
- (d) **Create an enabling environment for civil society, in particular women's organizations, cooperate with women's organizations of pluralistic backgrounds in the implementation of the present recommendations, and ensure the systematic and meaningful participation of independent women's human rights organizations in the formulation and implementation of legislative and policy initiatives affecting women.**

**Nationality**

35. The Committee remains concerned:

- (a) That Saudi mothers married to a foreigner cannot pass their nationality to their children and foreign spouses;

(b) That foreign mothers of Saudi children still face challenges to register births or obtain documents for their children;

(c) About the lack of measures taken by the State party to address the situation of stateless (Bidoon) women and girls, who remain deprived of their right to a nationality.

**36. With reference to its general recommendation No. 32 (2014) on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, and recalling its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4, para. 42), the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Amend the Nationality Law to recognize the right of Saudi women to transmit their nationality to their children and non-Saudi spouses on equal terms with Saudi men;**

(b) **Enforce its legislation allowing foreign mothers of Saudi children to register births and obtain documents for their children;**

(c) **Regularize the situation of stateless women and girls and facilitate their access to Saudi nationality without discrimination;**

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

### **Education**

37. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's significant efforts in the field of education and that girls' enrolment in primary education is at 98 per cent. However, it notes with concern:

(a) The lack of information on measures taken to prevent sex-based discrimination in the provision of facilities in view of gender segregation in public schools and universities;

(b) That women and girls remain underrepresented in non-traditional fields of study, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), information and communications technology (ICT) and fossil energies, as well as other sectors of energy, gas and oil, in particular at the tertiary level, owing in part to the persistence of gender stereotypes;

(c) That the high achievement of girls in education does not translate into labour market access, as in 2021 only 36.8 per cent of women graduates in STEM subjects found employment in the Saudi labour market;

(d) The increasing number of cases of cyberviolence and cyberbullying in schools, often targeting girls, in the State party;

(e) The lack of access to inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities, as well as Bidoon women and girls.

**38. Recalling its general recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education, the Committee recommends that the State party raise awareness of the importance of girls' education as a basis for their empowerment, and:**

(a) **Ensure that women and girls enrolled in the gender-segregated education system at public schools and universities have equal access to that of men and boys to networks, collaborations, free exchange of ideas, debates and the development of critical thinking, which constitute key aims of education;**

- (b) **Raise awareness among parents, teachers, traditional and religious leaders, women, men, girls and boys of the importance of girls' and women's education for their economic empowerment, personal development and autonomy, and combat structural barriers that deter girls from choosing non-traditional fields of study, such as STEM, ICT and fossil energies, to enable their equal participation in the energy sector, particularly the oil and gas sector;**
- (c) **Ensure that women's and girls' high educational attainment translates into equal employment prospects for them, promote and encourage girls and women to enrol in non-traditional fields of study, such as STEM, ICT and fossil energies, including through orientation programmes and career counselling in secondary and higher education, and the development of leadership skills, critical thinking and the ability to lead and take decisions;**
- (d) **Urgently introduce new regulations on the protection of students, including girls, from harassment, disinformation, cyberviolence and cyberbullying, raise awareness of those risks among students, parents, teachers and the general public and monitor the adoption of zero-tolerance policies in cases of harassment and cyberbullying of students, including girls;**
- (e) **Allocate the necessary human, technical and financial resources to provide full access to inclusive education for women and girls with disabilities and Bidoon women and girls.**

### **Employment**

39. The Committee welcomes the various programmes and initiatives, such as the introduction of teleworking, self-employment, flexible work arrangements and Qurrah and Wusul programmes for the provision of day-care and transportation services for working women, in order to increase women's participation in the labour force, which is currently around 35 per cent. However, the Committee remains concerned:

- (a) **About the persistent significant gender pay gap in the private and public sectors;**
- (b) **About the vertical and horizontal occupational segregation and the concentration of overqualified women in low-paid jobs;**
- (c) **About women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which constitutes a barrier to their economic participation, and the limited use of paternity leave by fathers;**
- (d) **That women continue to face sexual harassment in the workplace and retaliatory action for filing complaints about workplace discrimination.**

40. **The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 13 (1989) on equal remuneration for work of equal value, and target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on achieving by 2030 full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men and equal pay for work of equal value, and recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Review wages in all sectors, apply gender-sensitive analytical job classification and evaluation methods and enforce the principle of equal pay for work of equal value for women and men;**
- (b) **Take targeted measures to break the glass ceiling and promote women's access to decision-making positions and higher-paid jobs, including in traditionally male-dominated professions, for example by providing incentives for preferential recruitment of women;**

- (c) **Recognize, reduce and redistribute women's burden of unpaid care work by providing affordable childcare facilities and care services for older persons, enable women and men to balance work and family responsibilities, conduct awareness-raising campaigns to promote equal sharing of domestic responsibilities between women and men and provide incentives to encourage more men to avail themselves of paternity leave;**
- (d) **Ensure that women victims of sexual harassment have access to effective remedies, their complaints are effectively investigated, perpetrators are prosecuted and adequately punished and victims are protected from retaliation, and ratify the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organization.**

### **Women migrant workers**

41. The Committee remains concerned:

- (a) That all migrant workers, including women migrant domestic workers, are explicitly excluded from the protection of the Labour Law, and therefore cannot benefit from its limitations on working hours and provisions for overtime pay, annual leave and medical leave;
- (b) That migrant domestic workers, predominantly women, are governed by a system that still links the legal status of migrant workers to their employers, exposing them to a high risk of economic and physical abuse, trafficking and exploitation;
- (c) About the absence of specific legislation regulating domestic employment to protect women migrant domestic workers from abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence and provide for labour inspections of domestic households, and the absence of penalties imposed on employers for withholding the passports of women migrant domestic workers or for failing to provide adequate housing, food, medical expenses, daily breaks and weekly rest days;
- (d) About the lack of effective and confidential mechanisms for migrant domestic workers, including women, to file complaints against employers engaging in abusive practices;
- (e) That pregnant women migrant workers and those living with HIV, including women migrant domestic workers, face detention and deportation if their pregnancy or HIV status are detected.

42. The Committee, recalling target 8.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, on the protection of labour rights and promotion of safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, its general recommendation No. 26 (2008) on women migrant workers and general recommendation No. 38 (2020) on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, and its previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/3-4, para. 38), recommends that the State party:

- (a) **Amend the Labour Law to provide for basic labour rights for all migrant workers, including women migrant workers, such as limitations on working hours, provision of overtime pay, annual leave and medical leave and protection from economic and physical abuse and exploitation;**
- (b) **Adopt legislation regulating domestic employment to protect migrant domestic workers, in particular women migrant domestic workers, from abuse, exploitation and gender-based violence, explicitly prohibit the prolonged detention and withholding of passports of migrant domestic workers and provide for adequate housing, food, medical expenses, daily breaks and weekly rest days as well as free legal aid;**

- (c) Establish effective confidential and independent complaint mechanisms for women migrant workers under abusive employment contracts and conduct regular labour inspections of workplaces and dormitories of women migrant workers;
- (d) Repeal legislation authorizing the detention and deportation of women domestic migrant workers on grounds of pregnancy and HIV status and ensure that women domestic workers have access to adequate health services, especially sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including safe abortion and post-abortion services, and free anti-retroviral medicines for women and girls with HIV, and conduct public awareness campaigns to destigmatize women and girls with HIV;
- (e) Ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of the International Labour Organization.

### **Health**

43. The Committee notes the progress made by the State party to improve women's health, including their mental health, by establishing a National Centre for Mental Health in 2019, as well as the implementation of the Health Sector Transformation Strategy as part of the Vision 2030 Strategy. However, it notes with concern that in practice women still require a male guardian's permission to access health services, including sexual and reproductive health services. It is particularly concerned:

- (a) That abortion remains illegal under article 22 of the Law of Practicing Healthcare Professions, except in cases of risks to the pregnant woman's life or health and only during the first four months of pregnancy, contingent upon the male guardian's permission and a decision by a medical committee, which compels many women and girls to resort to unsafe abortion;
- (b) That foreign mothers of Saudi children still face difficulties in accessing health services for their children without the consent of the father, even if they have custody of the child.

44. The Committee recalls its general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health, and targets 3.1 and 3.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to reduce global maternal mortality and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, and recommends that the State party:

- (a) Legalize abortion, within a concrete time frame, at least in cases of rape, incest, foetal impairment and risk to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman, in addition to threats to the life of the mother, and decriminalize it in all other cases, ensure that women and adolescent girls have adequate access to safe abortion and post-abortion services, and remove the requirement of consent by a male guardian and approval by a medical committee for performing an abortion;
- (b) Strengthen the implementation of national legislation to ensure that foreign mothers of Saudi children have access to health services for their children in their own right;
- (c) Include and apply a gender sensitive approach to the programmes of the National Centre for Mental Health in order to address the specific problems and needs of women.

### **Economic and social benefits**

45. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment and support low-income families and provide

buffers and safety nets, as well the Talat Award for Women 2020, providing financial support for female innovation. The Committee is, however, concerned about:

- (a) Persistent gender inequalities in access to socioeconomic benefits;
- (b) Women's limited access to entrepreneurial opportunities and economic resources in the fast-evolving global digital economy, including loans and other forms of financial credit, largely due to gender stereotypes;
- (c) The unequal distribution of wealth in the State party and women's lower investment capacity.

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

- (a) Increase women's access to low interest loans without collateral and other forms of financial credit, expand their access to business networks and resources and provide gender-specific start-up and scale-up funds, venture capital, financial technology and other innovative mechanisms to promote women's economic empowerment and ensure that women have equal access to that of men to social and economic benefits;
- (b) Ensure that algorithms used for loan applications are transparent and free from discrimination and that gender representative data is used in the development of algorithms, with a view to removing and mitigating gender bias in technologies, including machine-learning systems and artificial intelligence, used to determine women's access to financial services;
- (c) Promote gender-responsive private sector investment, in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework ([A/HRC/17/31](#), annex) in sectors such as the oil and gas industry, the blue and green economy, digital technology, artificial intelligence, the sovereign wealth fund, aid and trade relations and other innovative schemes.

47. The Committee regrets that despite the State party's initiatives to promote women's participation in sports and recreational activities as a lever of economic empowerment, women remain underrepresented in sports, both as athletes and policymakers.

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

- (a) Ensure that women and girls can participate in sports at all levels by allocating sufficient resources and strengthening awareness-raising campaigns to encourage their participation in sports, including at school;
- (b) Ensure parity in decision-making in sports.

**Rural women**

49. The Committee commends the State party for hosting the upcoming sixteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa in December 2024, aimed at accelerating actions on land restoration, drought resilience and green transition, and notes different initiatives by the State party, including the sustainable rural agriculture development programme. However, it notes with concern:

- (a) That in 2022, only 0.46 per cent of women compared with 3.49 per cent of men were employed in agriculture and that women face discrimination in the agricultural sector and blue economy that could have an impact on food and water

insecurity and they are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership positions in political, public and economic life;

(b) That rural women, including Bidoon women and women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, lack knowledge and training on agribusiness and value-addition agriculture and have limited access to agricultural technologies, infrastructure, financial support and investment.

**50. Recalling its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women, and target 5.a of the Sustainable Development Goals to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) Ensure that rural women are able to participate effectively in planning and decision-making related to rural infrastructure and services, as well as in the planning, adoption, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural and rural development policies;

(b) Ensure that rural women, including Bidoon women and women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, have access to productive means, education, healthcare and other basic services, as well as to labour-saving technologies, markets and services, innovative agricultural technologies, infrastructure, financial support and investment.

#### **Women and girls with disabilities**

51. The Committee notes with concern that women and girls with disabilities face intersecting forms of discrimination and require the authorization of a male guardian to access justice, education, employment and health services in the State party. It is also concerned that women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities are deprived of equal recognition before the law, as well as about the lack of support to women with disabilities in the exercise of their legal capacity.

**52. In line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 18 (1991) on disabled women, and the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2019 (CRPD/C/SAU/CO/1), the Committee recommends that the State party ensure that women and girls with disabilities are able to access justice, inclusive education, employment and health services, including sexual and reproductive health services without the authorization of a male guardian, and recognize the full legal capacity of women with disabilities, abolish substituted decision-making regimes and introduce supported decision-making regimes that respect the autonomy, will and preferences of women with disabilities in all areas of life.**

#### **Refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls**

53. The Committee is concerned that refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls face administrative detention, prolonged detention, risk of deportation and violations of their rights, including inadequate access to food, water and bedding, as well as excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, denial of medical care and xenophobic attacks.

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

(a) Adopt a specific gender-responsive legal framework to protect the rights of refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls and investigate cases of prolonged detention and penalize perpetrators, as well as adequately punish

**cases of excessive use of force and xenophobic attacks against them, including by law enforcement officials;**

**(b) Accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto.**

#### **Climate change and disaster risk reduction**

55. The Committee notes with appreciation the State party's Green Initiative (2021) focused on combating climate change, improving life quality and protecting the environment for future generations. However, it notes with concern the State party's exposure to climate change and extreme weather conditions, with heatwaves reaching more than 50°C, and that temperatures are likely to rise by 4°C by 2050, which may disproportionately affect women, in particular rural women, Bidoon women, women with disabilities, older women, women belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, women pilgrims and migrant women. It is particularly concerned at the insufficient participation of women in decision-making on climate change and disaster risk reduction, as well as the lack of gender-responsive budgeting in climate-related sectors.

56. The Committee recommends that, in line with its general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, the State party review its climate change and disaster response strategies, taking into account the negative effects of climate change on the livelihoods of women, and ensure that women are as equally represented as men in the development, adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programmes on climate change, disaster response and disaster risk reduction, in particular by:

**(a) Ensuring the incorporation of a gender perspective in climate change and disaster risk reduction legislation, policies, financing and programmes, including economic infrastructure sectors, the green and blue economies, renewable energy and clean technology, and empowering women by equipping them with the knowledge to participate effectively in climate change-related decision-making and the development of adaptation strategies and actions that build women's and girls' resilience to the impacts of climate change;**

**(b) Introducing gender-responsive budgeting for climate financing and climate change adaptation activities, including those aimed at financing and encouraging a sustainable blue economy and support the climate change agenda to help women and girls adapt effectively to climate change and natural disasters;**

**(c) Promoting women's active participation in the creation and operation of new funding arrangements for responding to environmental damage, as decided during the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in 2022.**

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

57. The Committee notes the information provided by the delegation of the State party that the male guardianship regime has been abolished and is now obsolete. However, it notes with concern:

**(a) That the male guardian's permission for a woman continues to be exercised in many public and private entities;**

- (b) That according to article 42 of the Personal Status Law, wives are required to obey their husband in a “reasonable manner” and that a husband can make financial support “contingent on a wife’s ‘obedience’”;
- (c) That polygamy remains legal for Muslim men;
- (d) The persistence of discriminatory provisions relating to divorce and inheritance;
- (e) The persistence of child marriage despite a decrease in the number of child marriages in the State party and exceptions to the legal minimum age of marriage.

**58. Recalling its general recommendation No. 21 (1994) on equality in marriage and family relations and its general recommendation No. 29 (2013) on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) Ensure that women have rights equal to those of men in marriage and family relations by abolishing *de jure* and *de facto* the requirement of permission of a male guardian in marriage and family life, and establish penalties for public or private entities that continue the discriminatory practice of requiring a male guardian’s permission for women to access any service or programme;
- (b) Amend the Personal Status Law to repeal the provision making financial support contingent on a “wife’s obedience”, to ensure equal rights and responsibilities in marriage;
- (c) Explicitly prohibit polygamy and ensure the protection of the economic rights of women in existing polygamous unions;
- (d) Ensure that women have rights equal to those of men to divorce and on inheritance;
- (e) Set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for both women and men, without exceptions, and address the root causes of child marriage, including patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes, encourage reporting and prosecute and adequately punish those responsible, including complicit family members, religious and community leaders or civil registrars, in accordance with joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), as revised, on harmful practices.

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

**59. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 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**

**60. 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, in particular to the Government, Parliament and the judiciary, to enable their full implementation.**

### **Ratification of other treaties**

61. 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 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 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**

62. The Committee requests the State party to provide, within two years, written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations contained in paragraphs 16 (a) on access to justice, 18 (a) on women human rights defenders and activists, 20 (a) on women and peace and security and 42 (b) on women migrant workers above.

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

63. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the sixth 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.

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

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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.