

Anna Hovhannisyan Women's Resource Center, Armenia

Distinguished representatives of the states, UN bodies, international organizations, and civil society,

My name is Anna Hovhannisyan, and I represent the Women's Resource Center, a feminist organization in Armenia dedicated to advancing gender equality for nearly two decades through direct service provision and advocacy.

As part of our commitment to human rights, we have submitted 4 stakeholder reports in collaboration with local and international partners for the 4th cycle of Armenia review, addressing gender-based violence, labor rights, and sexual and reproductive rights.

I want to inform that the state has engaged in two discussions with civil society organizations and international partners as part of the process of drafting its official report.

In my presentation, I will highlight 3 urgent issues related to women's rights: first, on gender equality strategy, second on labor rights and third on sexual and reproductive rights.

State commitment on Gender equality is missing

In February 2024, the Government presented a draft Gender Equality Strategy for 2024–2028 for public discussion. This draft, developed with input from civil society, aims to address pressing gender equality issues over the next five years. Urgent action is needed for the adoption and implementation of the new Gender Equality Strategy.

Sexual Harassment and Workplace Discrimination in Armenia is still major issues.

During the 3rd UPR cycle, recommendations on labor rights and gender equality in Armenia highlighted barriers to labor market participation, gender pay gaps, and workplace harassment. Countries such as **Luxembourg and Germany** recommended defining and penalizing **sexual harassment, the recommendations were accepted by the state.**

In 2023 **amendment to the Labor Code** were adopted, defining and banning sexual harassment at workplace. While this was a step forward, gaps in enforcement and implementation persist.

The **Labor Code fails to fully incorporate the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.** Additionally, **no government body is designated to enforce gender equality in employment,** creating a systemic failure in addressing labor rights violations. Employers **face minimal penalties** for wage discrimination and unsafe working conditions, reinforcing systemic inequalities.

Recommendations

1. **Amend the Labor Code** to establish mandatory requirements for large employers to implement sexual harassment prevention policies
2. **Designate a state body** responsible for addressing workplace discrimination and harassment and ensure access to legal redress and compensation for victims of workplace harassment.

3. **Guarantee the principle of equal pay for work of equal value** by implementing a state-led job evaluation mechanism.

Lack of Comprehensive Sexuality Education and State Funding of Reproductive Services

During its third UPR cycle in 2020, Armenia accepted **Iceland's recommendation** to introduce comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in schools. However, implementation has been hindered by cultural resistance and lack of political will. The existing "Healthy Lifestyle" course includes some sexual health topics but follows an abstinence-only framework, limiting its effectiveness.

Similarly, despite **Estonia's recommendation**, which was accepted by Armenia, to ensure well-funded and accessible reproductive services, childbirth promotion policies and funding disparities persist. Rather than addressing demographic challenges through comprehensive gender equality policies, the state has allocated state budget support to artificial reproductive technologies while making no investments in family planning policies, including access to contraception and safe abortion services.

Abortion Access

Abortion per request is legal in Armenia till 12 weeks of pregnancy. Meanwhile, access to abortion care is still problematic. Rural women face additional barriers, including limited medical facilities for abortion access and mandatory three-day waiting period which means they must travel to the abortion facilities twice or even more. Some progress has been made in 2024, including the regulation of medical abortions in non-hospital settings for up to eight weeks of pregnancy. However, these provisions are not working on the ground yet.

Recommendations

1. Amend abortion regulations to remove the three-day mandatory waiting period and mandatory counseling and align abortion care services with the WHO standards.
2. Introduce state budget line for modern contraceptives, ensuring full availability within the upcoming two years.
3. Ensure evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education nationwide.

Thank you for your attention.