



Comments to the reply by the Norwegian Government of
30th of April 2014 to the Questionnaire 2013 On
Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform
for Action

Norges kvinneobby
The Women's Lobby of Norway
10 September 2014

Foreword

On behalf of our member organizations, the Women's Lobby of Norway would like to present the following comments to the reply by the Norwegian Government of 30th of April 2014 to the Questionnaire 2013 On Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) and in preparation for the 2015 global regional review and appraisal in the context of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Women's Lobby of Norway (The Lobby) is an umbrella organization founded in January 2014. The following organizations are presently members of the Lobby: Sámi NissonForum, The Norwegian Association for Women's Rights, The MiRA Resource Centre for Black, Immigrant and Refugee Women, Nordic Women's University, Feminist Group Ottar, Kvinnefronten, Krisesentersekretariatet and Legal Advice for Women, Kvinnelige jurister forening.

The Women's Lobby of Norway has chosen to submit its comments directly to UN Women. We found that our wish to present our views, was not attended through the option of giving written comments to the state on the draft for their report, without any assurance that these comments would uphold a change of the final report. The Lobby found it preferable to produce an independent shadow report on behalf of women's organizations in Norway, to be sent directly to UN Women.

The present report has been produced by voluntary efforts of the member organizations, coordinated by Frøydis Paturson, Legal Advice for Women and Karin Bruzelius, The Norwegian Association for Women's Rights. Neither the Lobby, nor the member organizations have had any funding for the preparation of the report.

Generally speaking, the Lobby would like to express its concern about recent developments in Norway with respect to the development of women's rights and will revert to this in our remarks.

The Lobby would like the following comments to be taken into consideration when UN Women studies the report submitted by the Norwegian Government.

Oslo 10 September 2014
Margunn Bjørnholt, Chair
The Women's Lobby of Norway

Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

1 Directorates under the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

Norwegian women were granted the right to vote in all elections in 1913. This was celebrated in 2013. However, both in 2013 as well as in the present year, we have seen backlashes with respect to the equality of women with men.

A discussion paper proposed to Parliament by the previous government on possible steps to enhance the equality of women and men was cancelled by the new Government together with the withdrawal of a proposal of economic support to work by the labor unions, the employer's organizations and the government on equality of men and women at the workplace. The withdrawal of these proposals will in our opinion both have a negative effect on the equality of women with men, especially with regard to women's claim for equal pay.

1.1.2 Grant to the centers for gender equality and the Reform Resource Center for Men

The Lobby would like to point out that the Centres for gender equality and Reform Resource Center for Men are not independent NGOs, but trusts that have been given a role as part of public gender equality structure. They are thus not part of the civil society. In contrast to the women's organizations, these organizations receive substantial and stable funding.

Independent women's organizations, by contrast, have to compete for very scarce funding. According to the governmental commission on gender equality, the insufficient funding of women's organizations prevent them from playing a role as a partner in influencing policies.

The Lobby would also like to point out that women's organizations have been marginalized in decision making in Norway not only due to the insufficient funding, but also due to a lack of involvement and dialogue on political reform process at an early stage, both of which create a serious democratic problem.

The Nordic Women's University, established in 2011 as a centre for research and education on women's issues, lost its funding after two years.

Sámi NissonForum (Sami Women's Forum) has for more than 10 years tried to get funding to establish a Sami Women's Resource Centre to work on Sami women's situation, but neither the State Parliaments nor the Sami Parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland have prioritized organizational support to the organization.

1.1.3 County governors

The Lobby remarks that in spite of the fact that several women are, and have served as, county governors the title for the office in Norwegian still maintains the word for man: "Fylkesmann". This could easily have been changed, if there had been political will.

Legislation

It is our experience that the Government and the Parliament did not fully understand and live up to Norway's duties as party to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women when new statutes on discrimination on all forms of discrimination were adopted in 2013.

1.2.1 Enforcement system

Norwegian Women's organizations have, due to the limited powers granted The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud and Tribunal, repeatedly proposed a change in the statute on legal aid in order to make it affordable for those that the special enforcement system have been found discriminated, to bring their case to the courts. However, the relevant statute has not been changed.

1.3.4 More equal parenthood

In connection with statement that women and men share the right to be at home with sick children, the Lobby would like to stress that the statute does not allow days to be transferred from one parent to the other.

The negative impact of motherhood on wages, the "motherhood penalty," has been eliminated in Norway, but at the same time, the positive impact of fatherhood on wages, the "fatherhood premium" has sharply increased. The dynamics between parenting, gender, work and wages are not fully understood, and the measures taken seem inadequate.

1.5.1 The gender-segregated labour market

In our opinion the government has not done enough so far to promote gender equality and equal pay in the work place. The gender pay gap remains largely unchanged. Women make up the main work-force in healthcare and teaching, and women predominantly work in the public sector, as well as in low paid service jobs in the private sector, while men to a larger extent work in the private sector. There has been a lack of political will to change the structural gender pay gap between male dominated and female dominated sectors. A governmental commission on equal pay in 2008 suggested allotting 3 billion NOK to female dominated professions in order to change the gender pay gap. This proposal was rejected and few other steps have been taken.

1.5.2 Large proportion of part-time workers

As mentioned in the government's report about 40 % of women work part time. Some do it voluntarily due to care obligations. But especially in the healthcare sector many women do this involuntarily.

In the healthcare sector there is also a great use of part-time contracts. Often this result in a situation where the contracts offered to the employees is not corresponding to the need for personnel. The system then relies on these part-time employed women to take on extra shifts. This leads to a work environment where the employees work up to full-time or more, but with shifts that are more scattered and irregular than on full-time contracts. This helps to wear out women in the healthcare sector.

Also, a large number of ethnic minority women involuntarily work part-time. The choice is being unemployed or take a low paid part-time job with minimum labour rights. These women face gender and ethnic discrimination within the labour market and their situation has to be addressed within the framework of intersectionality.

1.5.2.1 Measures to reduce involuntary part-time employment

The government reply does not mention the ongoing debate and proposals in Norway to introduce a shorter working day for all, alternatively for those who care for children or elderly relatives.

1.5.4 D - Violence against women

Violence against women in our society is a clear indication of the failure of the gender equal policy of Norway. Violence against women in Norway deletes the illusion of Norway as a gender equal society. A recent report from NKVTS (Norwegian Center for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies) showed that as many girls and women raped today as previously, every 10th woman. The report also revealed that every 5th woman has experienced some kind of violence from her partner. In most cases, the rapist is somebody the woman knows. Only about 10 % of the reported rapes end with a conviction in the courts. There has not been initiated any training of neither professional nor lay judges on the consequences of a rape to the victim. Nor has the judiciary received any training on professional obligations inherent in the CEDAW, or on the way prejudices and gender stereotypes present in the public discourse on rape may influence the courts consideration of rape cases.

Violence against women and girls is a consequence of the patriarchal structures of power, which reflect fundamental views of femininity and masculinity and sexuality overall. We are concerned about the fact that Norway have moved towards the use of terminologies and approaches that are gender neutral. Preventing violence before it occurs, has not received enough attention. The authorities need to focus on the root causes of violence and abuse. We propose a national strategy that includes campaigns with a preventive focus, whereby the society address harmful gender stereotypes, the subordination of women, and work to counteract blame and shame. The fundamental causes of violence and abuse and the reasons why women enter prostitution must be integral parts of the campaign. Information on human rights and support structures must be guaranteed to women subjected to violence. Rape need to be defined as the absence of consent.

The disparity between ambitious political goals and the structure for implementation is cause for concern. Many perpetrators escape without punishment while the society's help and protection for victims of violence are lacking. There is still a lack of expertise and priorities within the public support- and healthcare services, police, prosecuting authorities and the courts. It is a challenge of how women exposed to violence are met and it may seem that the understanding and help you get as a victim of violence, largely is random and personal- and place dependent. Police and judiciary personnel need to be educated on violence against women, and resources be allocated to crime prevention and prosecution.

From 1991 until 2013 170 women have been murdered by their male partner or ex-partner (KRIPOS 2012) The statistic does not include sexual relation/girlfriend/boyfriend. The victim's contact with the support- and healthcare services is of importance. Thus, the structuring and systematization of risk assessment and risk management are necessary, also within the public support- and healthcare services, and not only within the police. In addition, the civil society recommends that a commission should be established to investigate all murders of women committed by their partner or ex-partner.

There is a lack of priority, measures and policy for groups of women who are vulnerable to exposure to violence. Women with serious mental health and/or drug problems and who are subjected to abuse lack equal access to women's shelters, and shelters are not sufficiently adapted to women with disabilities. The shelters must be guaranteed stable and predictable funding to enable them to make long-term plans for their work. The grant, which is now included in the framework grant to the municipalities, must be earmarked, or the result will be at costs of the protection and support for women victims of violence.

Sexual harassment is mentioned by the government as an extensive problem both at workplaces and in schools. Sexual harassment in elementary school is trivialized, despite the fact this is sexual violence and can have serious consequences. Even though the government notices this as a problem, there has not been made any greater efforts to combat sexual harassment. There is a need for low threshold services.

Diversities in culture, traditions, ethnicity and collectivity are not very visible in the reports and the work against violence in Norway. Such an approach is needed. The ethnic minority women and young girls are exposed to all type of violence and assault. The Lobby is concerned about the overrepresentation of racialized women in the shelter homes.

We believe that there should be established a strategic plan where existing rights information are mapped and that challenges and needs are documented. It must then be implemented right information based on documented needs, including on the Internet and through brochures in different languages.

Immigrant women, who enter Norway through family reunion, do not get independent legal status before three years of residence in the country. If the marriage breaks during these three years, the women risk deportation. The implication of this legal practice is that many women choose to live within a violent marriage instead of breaking free. The three years rule thereby discriminates against women and contributes in perpetuating violence against women. The CEDAW committee has previously criticized the Norwegian state for practicing three years rule. Despite this, the government is currently considering extending the limit for getting independent legal status to five years. Thus, women with family connection permits need to be granted their own residence permits that are not tied to men. The deportation of victims of abuse is stopped. Also women subjected to trafficking need to be given protection and assistance, whether or not they are able or want to bear witness in criminal proceedings.

There is a lack of verified knowledge and research on violence against Sami women and violence against women living in Sami communities. According to a report by the Norwegian Parliament in 2013, *“The knowledge on domestic violence within the various national minorities is small”*. There is no reason to believe that the incidences are lower in the Sami population, and this situation need to be taken seriously. The Lobby will also put attention to the structural and indirect violence against Sami women and families, committed by the state itself or representatives of state, in order to suppress Sami political demands for their rights as indigenous people, like cultural rights and land rights. Sexual violence seems to be a taboo field to discuss in the Sami community. The taboo also causes the victims to blame themselves. Even the Sami word for rape “rihpan” is taboo, in the news the word “veahkaváldin” is used instead – which means violence in general.

1.6 Recent developments in legislation and policymaking

Purchase of sexual services was made a criminal offence in 2009. There might be changes in this law because the present government has stated that it plans to repeal this piece of legislation. In our view, this will act as an encouragement to the sex-trade industry and reverse the positive development in Norway concerning prostitution and sale of sexual services.

The sex industry’s aggressiveness and organized criminal trafficking in women for sexual exploitation are threats to democracy and the freedom of expression as well as to women’s legal rights. In Norway there are an increasing number of foreign-born

women in prostitution. Thus, there is a need for the development and support of strong exit strategies to enable persons to leave prostitution and reinforce the capacity of the police and the judiciary to prosecute sex purchasers, procurers and members of organised crime.

Norway needs to appoint an independent national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings who works closely with the civil society, particularly with women's organizations.

Norway needs to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). Norway need to strengthen organizations that work for women's right to freedom from violence.

1.6 Recent developments in legislation and policymaking

As mentioned in the government's reply, purchase of sexual services was made a criminal offence in 2009. The Lobby would like to inform the commission that there might be changes in this law because the present government has stated that it plans to repeal this piece of legislation. In our view this will act as an encouragement to the sex-trade industry and reverse the positive development in Norway concerning prostitution and sale of sexual services.

1.7 Funding

The national pension system was revised in 2011. It is the view of the Lobby that the revision has damaged the possibilities of women with low earnings and/or uncertain participation in the paid work market, to retire early. A larger share of women will have to rely on a minimum pension than previously.

The new revised pension system does not take into consideration the specific situation of migrant and refugee women, and these groups are not even mentioned in the documents. The revised system will result in a difficult old age in poverty and dependence on the social welfare system for many migrants and refugees.

1.8 Dialogue with civil society

There are a large number of women's organizations in Norway, representing a diversity of issues and women's interest groups and who represent civil society at all levels. The Women's Lobby of Norway is an umbrella organization representing the grass root women's movement. We urge the government to initiate a dialogue with a broader spectrum of the civil society organizations and to establish a partnership with the Women's Lobby of Norway in the future.

The Women's Lobby of Norway considers both FOKUS and REFORM to be important participants from the civil society, but notes that FOKUS is an umbrella organization working with development aid to women related projects in the south, and REFORM is a trust which works specifically with issues related to men. We find that the government does not present the full picture without also including the grass-root organizations working with the conditions for women in Norway.

For the Sami Land, it is the Nordic State Authorities and Nordic Council who are responsible in preparing and promoting gender equality policies. They refer to "Sámediggi", the Sami Parliament. Sámediggi has no gender politics today that maintains and prioritizes Sami gender and women's issues, and are not generating knowledge. A report about the Sami Parliament's organization and challenges from 2011 recognizes Sámediggi's limited contact with the Sami civil society as a major structural problem. This is not in accordance with the statement from the 13th Session of Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; "Guarantee that Indigenous women

participate in every dialogue and decision-making process regarding the issues that concern them in formal and traditional institutions and political parties”.

Progress since 2009 in implementing the critical areas in the Platform for Action

Women in power and decision making

We agree that it is necessary to increase the number of women participating in many of the elected local political bodies and support the project Local Election Day presented by the Government in the report, but would at the same time like to mention that none of our member organizations had heard about the project previously, even though some of our members have worked in this field in many years.

It should be noted that though the number of female ministers in the government is high, the number of female state secretaries and political advisors in the ministries has gone notably down after the change of government in the fall of 2013.

Women and entrepreneurship

As the proportion of female entrepreneurs remains stable at a low level, it is our concern that the measures introduced to change the situation have not been adequate.

Women in the economy

Despite a high level of participation by women in paid work, and despite the use of quotas that has increased the share of women in company boards, women remain underrepresented at decision making levels and as owners, and in the most profitable sectors of the economy.

The measures to address the gender pay gap as well as consequences over the life course of the gender differences in working hours and unpaid care work are inadequate. There is a lack of valuation of unpaid care work. Although it is being counted in the time use studies, the value of unpaid household work is calculated by Statistics Norway, and although care for young children generates some pension rights for individual care-takers, unpaid household work is not seen as productive in the economy, and it is not reflected in the standard economic models that are used for planning of macro-economic policy.

The Norwegian national budget, and municipal and regional budgets do not systematically integrate a gender equality perspective, so that gender equality is shown in financial documents and decisions, and so that the equality policy goals are systematically followed up and used as a basis for new measures. The lack of visibility of gendered consequences and the lack of participation by civil society in budget processes is a strong impediment to further progress in achieving gender equality.

Feminist economics and gender responsive budgeting are not taught in Norway, and the lack of systematic knowledge production is a problem with regard to implementation of gender responsive budgeting and women's social and economic rights.

Women and poverty

The government has highlighted the advance payments of child support (bidragsforskutteringsordningen) as a solution for single parents who are not receiving child support from the parent not living with the child. The Lobby would

like to point out that the rates are significant lower than what the single parent normally would have received if the other parent were paying child support.

Women and health

The government report does not mention the mental disorders mainly affecting women, like eating disorders and cutting.

Also, the government report does not consider the health of minority women. The health institutions are not equipped with the linguistic and medical competence to meet the needs of minority women. The health facilities do not reflect the existing diversity in society, and the health issues of minority women are often ignored by the mainstream health institutions. A large number of refugee women and young girls are traumatized or have experienced rape and other forms of psychological torture. There is a lack of qualified translators to facilitate women who do not speak Norwegian language while consulting the medical staff.

It is striking for us to observe that the government does not address the challenges met by minority women as an important health issue in the documents reported to the United Nations commissions.

2.5.1 Reproductive health

It is our view that women generally are discharged too early after giving birth from the maternity units, and that the facilities locally to follow up new mothers and children are insufficient. This might be one of the reasons for the increase in post-natal depression, and may negatively affect new mothers ability to breastfeed.

The ethnic minority women who are genitally mutilated face serious health problems during child birth. The government must allocate resources to qualify health workers to meet this need.

2.5.5 Osteoporosis

Considering the number of women, mainly elderly, that suffer from this condition in Norway, research in this field should be increased to find the causes why this is prevalent in Norway, as well as measures of prevention for future generations.

2.7 The girl child

Today, the girl child ~~growing up~~ in Norway has far more legal rights than their mothers used to have. Still, legal rights have not necessarily changed the social structures and sexist attitudes towards young women.

Research has shown that a large number of girls (and a smaller number of boys) are exposed to sexual harassment and sexual abuse. The measures to counteract sexual abuse in schools and elsewhere are inadequate, and so are the support systems.

Norway is a wealthy land and our youth are at the top of mobile Internet usage. We know that approximately one third of the Internet today is consisting of pornography. It is naive to think that this does not affect our youth and their sexuality.

The sexual focus and objectification of the girl child in media is destructive to the girls' self-image. Eating and training disorders are on a rise, and the girls' report that they would prefer to be beautiful rather than being smart, if they had to choose.

The young girls from ethnic minority communities face double pressure both from the society and from the families to conform to certain gender roles. The multiple systems of domination are affecting their possibilities to realise themselves. The intensive focus on the issues of forced marriages and genital mutilation has

overshadowed the need for a holistic policy to meet the needs of young girls with minority backgrounds.

Stress leads to a deterioration of girls' mental health observed in an increase in sales of painkillers for young girls. The emphasis on appearance and self-awareness may make it difficult for young girls to speak out loud with their political opinions.

2.8 Women and the media

Media is still heavily male dominated, and women are much less visible in the media than men. When women are seen as participants in the media, they are quite often given a different role than men. Men are used to represent an objective, knowledge-based view, while women are asked to present their subjective views and not seen as experts. Female journalists, and women and girls who express their view publicly receive threats. Invisibility as well as threats, seriously limits women's freedom of expression in Norway.

2.9 Women and the environment

In our opinion the changes to the climate reported by IPCC in its second report must be taken very seriously and immediate action is required, in particular in the developed countries.

2.10 Women and armed conflict

As a measure to ensure equality between the sexes, the Norwegian Parliament decided in 2013 that girls should also be conscripted. The Lobby does not consider this as a step that will increase equality. Women in Norway have been permitted to join the military forces on a voluntary basis until now. A duty to serve will put an additional burden upon young women.

2.12 Human rights of women

The CEDAW-committee has in their concluding comments to Norway expressed concerns about the insufficient knowledge of the convention, both among government officials, law enforcement officials and among women themselves.

2.12.1 Provision of legal information to women with immigrant background

There is a great need to strengthen the legal rights information for minority immigrant women. The civil society organizations that provide legal assistance and information to empower immigrant and refugee women as well as other women from minority communities must be strengthened and given enough economic support to develop skills to meet this need.

The Lobby stresses the need for a systematic legal empowerment of migrant, refugee and other minority women, so that they are aware of their rights and know when these rights are violated and how to get help.

Emerging priorities

The government's desire to strengthen the anti-discrimination measures in one statute that will encompass all forms of discrimination, will in our opinion have the effect that the statute will be gender-neutral. The strong emphasis on gender neutrality in Norway was criticized by the CEDAW committee's concluding remarks to Norway.

The Lobby appreciates the government's intention to strengthen the legal structure against all forms of discrimination. However, we are concerned that it might reduce the focus on gender equality and thereby weaken the impact of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

The present government has increased the amount of money “cash -for care benefits” paid to the families, for the care of their children at home instead of sending them to day care. This has been introduced to provide more flexibility for the individual families to choose the solutions best suited for them. The result has been the reduction of childcare centers and reduced financial support to public childcare centers around the country. The Lobby finds it alarming and means that it is a step in the wrong direction.

The statement that the government will contribute to closer cooperation between the authorities and the social partners to address gender equality, does not sound trustworthy as the government seems unwilling to provide adequate funding of an independent women’s movement.

4.1 Norway’s priorities in the post-2015 agenda

We support the government in that gender equality should be a stand-alone goal, but it should primarily address furthering women’s rights. It is still necessary that girls and women all over the world are secured access to education, to the work place and safeguarded against sexual abuse and harassment as well as all form for violence whether it be in domestic circumstances or during wars.