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Summary record of the 9th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 14 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunecan-Tatu

Contents

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
(*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (continued) (E/C.12/GBR/7; E/C.12/GBR/Q/7; E/C.12/GBR/RQ/7)

1. **The Chair** invited the delegation to continue replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.

2. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that a new strategy to tackle child poverty, which would be published in spring 2025, was aimed at achieving a lasting reduction in child poverty during the current parliamentary session. It would focus on four key themes – increasing incomes, reducing essential costs, increasing financial resilience and providing better local support, especially in the early years of a child’s life. While the Government had committed to ending reliance on emergency food parcels, the related policy response was still at the development stage. Consultations were being held with several stakeholders, including charities and civil society organizations, to better understand the situation on the ground and to explore appropriate policy options. Persons who were struggling to cover the cost of essential items could request support from the Household Support Fund operated by their local council.

3. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, in 2023, the Department for Education had published a strategy in response to the 2022 independent review of children’s social care entitled “Children’s Social Care: Stable Homes, Built on Love”, which set out key ambitions for improving the children’s social care system. That strategy had been followed up by a plan published in 2024 entitled “Keeping children safe, helping families thrive”, which was aimed at shifting the focus of the children’s social care system away from crisis intervention towards providing families with early help in order to avoid having to place children in care. To that end, a series of reforms were being carried out under the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme to strengthen multi-agency child protection, promote wider family decision-making and provide local family help services. From April 2025, over £500 million would be made available to help local authorities to introduce those reforms.

4. Provided that it was in their best interests, children who could not remain with their immediate families were sent to live with kinship carers – friends or family who agreed to raise a child when their parents were not able to – or with foster families, thereby reducing demand for places in residential care facilities. In England, the Government had earmarked £40 million for trialling a new kinship carer allowance to encourage more family members and friends to take in children who could not remain in their family home. Additional funds had also been invested to recruit and retain foster carers.

5. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, since 2022, a social supermarket programme had been operating across Northern Ireland to offer a long-term sustainable response to food poverty. A number of services designed to address the issues placing a financial strain on families were also available; they included advice on managing debt, applying for benefits and managing household finances, as well as on training and volunteering opportunities that could enhance future employability. Individuals facing severe financial hardship could request financial assistance to cover short-term living expenses from a discretionary support fund.

6. The Minister for Communities worked closely with ministerial colleagues and leaders from across the political spectrum to tackle hate crime against ethnic minority groups. Over the 12-month period preceding August 2024, 131 hate crime incidents had been reported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The attacks had targeted Housing Executive staff and people living peacefully in their homes. Victims of such attacks were received support from the Department for Communities and the Department of Justice.

7. A programme to combat paramilitarism and organized crime, which was funded jointly by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of the United Kingdom, had been adopted in 2016 and had subsequently been extended to March 2027. It provided for over 100 innovative evidence-based interventions designed to reduce and prevent all types of violence, harm and coercive control of individuals and communities.

8. Sexual and reproductive health services were commissioned and provided in all health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland. The Sexual Health Action Plan 2023–2026 of the Department of Health was currently being implemented. Although the Department acknowledged the existence of workforce shortages and the need for further investment, it was also facing a £400 million deficit in the coming financial year.

9. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, to address the ongoing housing crisis in England, the Government had committed to building 1.5 million new homes, including social and affordable housing, over the next five years and to providing more support to first-time buyers through a comprehensive mortgage guarantee scheme. Some £12 billion had been invested in the Affordable Homes Programme 2021–2026, under which 110,000 to 140,000 new social housing units would be built in England. Private property developers were required to contribute a portion of all new homes built to the national affordable housing stock. Through government funding and subsidies from developers, around 60,000 new social or affordable housing units had been built over the previous three years.

10. When allocating social housing, local authorities had a legal duty to give priority to persons who were homeless or living in overcrowded or insalubrious accommodation or who had medical conditions or disabilities. Currently, 64 per cent of the total number of new social housing leases based on general needs had been signed to female lead tenants. In the 16–35 age group, 73 per cent of lead tenants were women, which reflected the fact that priority was given to single parents, who were likely to be single mothers.

11. Under the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021, local authorities in England were required to ensure that victims of domestic abuse and their children had access to safe accommodation. Some £160 million would be invested in accommodation services for victims in the next financial year.

12. The Government had committed to investing nearly £1 billion in homelessness services over the next financial year with the aim of curbing the number of families living in temporary accommodation. Local authorities had a duty to ensure that temporary accommodation met the needs of the household in question. In 2025, local authorities across England had received £30 million specifically to prevent homelessness.

13. The Government was committed to ensuring fair and equal treatment for Travellers in a way that facilitated their traditional and nomadic way of life. The revised planning policy for Traveller sites published in December 2024 required local authorities to assess and take steps to meet travellers' accommodation needs.

14. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act of 2017 set a series of targets relating to the eradication of child poverty that must be met by the 2030/31 financial year. Every four years, Scottish ministers were required to prepare a delivery plan setting out the measures that would be taken to meet those targets and to publish annual progress reports. According to the 2024 annual report, 60 of the 108 measures envisaged had been implemented and a further 34 measures were in the process of being implemented. It was estimated that expenditure on supporting children and low-income families had increased from £1.25 billion in 2022/23 to £1.4 billion in 2023/24 and that the Scottish government's policies would help to keep some 100,000 children from falling into relative poverty in 2024/25.

15. The measures taken to address food insecurity in the country included the adoption, in 2023, of a plan entitled "Cash-First: Towards Ending the Need for Food Banks in Scotland", which was underpinned by £1.8 million of funding. The plan, which set out actions to reduce the need for emergency food parcels over the period from 2023 to 2026, tackled food insecurity by prioritizing income-focused crisis support in the form of cash payments

or vouchers. Independent data indicated that, in 2024, 7,230 fewer food parcels had been distributed across Scotland than over the same period the previous year.

16. To reduce remote rural and island health inequalities, the Scottish government had committed to investing over £3 million over the period from 2023 to 2026 to strengthen the services provided by the National Centre for Remote and Rural Health and Care. A task force had been set up to consider ways to improve the delivery of quality services to remote rural and island populations. Three new hospital facilities serving those populations had been opened over the previous six years. Progress had been made in restoring access to obstetric maternity care in the rural far north of Scotland through the implementation by two healthcare boards of a £6 million delivery plan for the period from 2024 to 2027.

17. Under the Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Action Plan 2023–2026, £1.7 million in additional funding per year was allocated for the provision of sexual health services. The Scottish government acknowledged that the number of drug-related deaths in Scotland remained much too high and, in 2021, had launched a five-year national mission to reduce such deaths and improve the lives of those affected by drug use. From 2021 to 2025, an additional £250 million had been disbursed to facilitate the achievement of the mission's objectives. In January 2025, the first safer drug consumption facility in the United Kingdom had been opened in Glasgow. The facility would receive £2 million of funding annually until the 2026/27 financial year. There were also plans to open drug checking facilities, widen access to naloxone, a life-saving opioid overdose reversal medication, and involve more persons with lived experience of drug use in the design of drug-related services. In December 2024, a charter of rights for persons affected by substance abuse had been published by the National Collaborative, a network of individuals with lived experience of drug use and service providers.

18. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government was committed to clearing the backlog of asylum claims and to ensuring that claimants received an initial decision on their claim as quickly as possible. Once the backlog had been cleared, asylum-seekers would no longer need to stay in hotels and could be housed in more cost-effective and suitable accommodation.

19. All local authorities across the United Kingdom had a duty to provide safe and secure accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Due to the exceptional situation that had arisen in the summer of 2020, the Home Office had been obliged to house unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in hotels from July 2021 until January 2024. Every hotel had a dedicated multidisciplinary team of professionals trained to meet the complex needs of each child. Since the closure of the last hotel in January 2024, all unaccompanied children who had arrived in the United Kingdom had been placed directly into the care of local authorities. The Home Office continued to apply a national protocol for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, under which a mechanism allowed such children to be safely transferred from one local authority to another.

20. The Government had no plans to legalize or decriminalize drugs. The legislative framework in force struck a balance between controls to reduce the availability of dangerous drugs to criminals who could supply them for misuse and appropriate regulations to ensure their availability for legitimate use in medicine, research and industry.

21. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, in England, the Government was focused on narrowing the gap in life expectancy between people living in the richest and those living in the poorest regions of the country. Its aim was to bring care services closer to the community in order to reach underserved populations and to intervene earlier to ensure that children lived the healthiest lives possible. A 10-year health plan, which was being developed on the basis of an engagement exercise launched in October 2024, would set out the measures to be taken to that end. Principles to guide the design of care services with a view to improving equity in access to healthcare were being developed by a dedicated working group.

22. Action was already being taken to address the issues raised in Lord Darzi's independent review of the National Health Service in England regarding access to care. The new 2025 plan for reforming elective care for patients set the target of ensuring that most patients waited no longer than 18 weeks from being referred to receiving treatment. That

target could be achieved by, *inter alia*, making greater use of community diagnostic centres and by increasing the availability of surgical hubs.

23. The purpose of the Mental Health Bill of 2025 was to modernize the Mental Health Act of 1983 to give patients greater choice, autonomy and enhanced rights, and to ensure that everyone was treated with dignity and respect throughout their course of treatment by avoiding unnecessary deprivation of liberty, which was sometimes driven by racial disparities. Models of culturally appropriate advocacy to help members of ethnic minorities to better understand their rights when they were detained under the Act were being trialled.

24. The suicide prevention strategy for England made early intervention a priority and paid particular attention to groups with high suicide rates such as persons with autism, ethnic minority groups, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, refugees, asylum-seekers and LGBT+ persons. In England, the National Health Service was currently piloting neighbourhood-based open access community mental health centres in six areas. Anyone who was experiencing a mental health crisis could speak to a trained professional at any time by calling the NHS 111 helpline. Persons in that situation could be assessed over the telephone and be referred to community support or other mental health services such as crisis cafés or safe havens, which served as an alternative to hospitalization. Over the previous two years, an additional £150 million had been invested to strengthen mental health services, £143 million of which had been used to fund crisis support services.

25. In England, £25 million had been invested to support the establishment of women's health hubs. The plan to deliver maternity and neonatal services in England included actions to reduce inequalities in access to maternity care and related outcomes. All local services had adopted an equity and equality action plan to address the inequalities experienced by women and babies from ethnic minority backgrounds and those living in the most deprived areas. All maternity units were implementing the "Saving Babies' Lives Care Bundle" programme, which provided guidance on interventions to reduce still births, neonatal brain injury, neonatal deaths and preterm births. Some £50 million were being invested in research over a five-year period with the aim of further improving maternity services.

26. Local authorities were required to have a plan for understanding and preventing deaths related to the misuse of drugs and alcohol. The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities had designed a toolkit to help local authorities to identify unmet needs and other gaps among priority and underserved groups. The Office's commissioning quality standard provided local authorities with guidance on how to commission effective alcohol and drug treatment and recovery systems that catered to the needs of underserved groups.

27. In the 2024/25 financial year, the Government had allocated an additional £257 million to local authorities to help them to improve their drug treatment services. To curb the number of drug-related deaths, the Human Medicines Regulations of 2012 had been amended to expand access to naloxone, and outreach, early intervention and harm reduction programmes had been implemented in town centre hotspots and in community spaces. Harm reduction activities such as needle and syringe exchanges and blood-borne virus testing were also taking place.

28. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that Welsh ministers had a duty to set objectives for reducing child poverty and to report on the progress made every three years. The Welsh government continued to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on vulnerable households by providing targeted support to those most in need through, *inter alia*, the Discretionary Assistance Fund and the "Help to Stay" scheme. All primary school children and eligible secondary school children could avail themselves of free school meals. Lower-income families could request a grant to cover the cost of school essentials and apply for funded childcare.

29. The Welsh government had set itself the target of providing 20,000 affordable homes for rent in the social housing sector. A total of 3,158 affordable housing units had been supplied across Wales in 2023/24, bringing the total number of units provided since 2021 to almost 9,000. The Disabled Facilities Grant funded around 45,000 home adaptations each year at a cost of more than £60 million. In 2024/25, over £60 million had been disbursed from the Housing with Care Fund to increase the stock of housing suitable for persons with special care and support needs.

30. All local authorities in Wales had a legal duty to assess and meet the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. In the current financial year, over £3.4 million had been made available to local authorities as a capital grant fund, which could be used to fund residential or transit sites, refurbish existing accommodation or construct new pitches. Over 40 funding applications had been received from 14 local authorities, all of which had been approved.

31. Supporting children and young people in leading healthier, more active lives was an essential tenet of the plan to implement the “Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales” strategy to prevent and reduce obesity. A total of £600,000 had been invested in weight management pilot programmes for children and families. The Welsh government was supporting local health boards in developing maternity weight management services and implementing the All Wales Breastfeeding Five Year Action Plan. Wales also had the highest number of participants in the “Healthy Start” scheme, which helped eligible families to buy healthy foods in the United Kingdom.

32. The Welsh government was finalizing a new mental health and well-being strategy and a suicide and self-harm prevention strategy. To help to ensure equity in access to healthcare for all persons living in Wales, health boards had been provided with guidance on working effectively with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in 2015, which was currently being updated, and with guidance on the provision of services to asylum-seekers and refugees in 2018.

33. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, following the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive in 2024, work had restarted on the anti-poverty strategy, which would tackle the root causes of poverty and address the barriers and inequalities faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, including children who were experiencing or were at risk of poverty. In developing the draft strategy, care had been taken to consult key stakeholders and to ensure that it was evidence-based and addressed objective needs. The draft strategy would be submitted to the Executive for consideration by the end of March 2025.

34. **Ms. Saran** said that she wished to know what steps the State party had taken to cancel the debt owed to it by countries experiencing debt crises and help to ensure the development of lending policies in which priority was given to human rights. She wished to know, too, whether the Government intended to support the Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill, which was set to undergo a second reading in the coming weeks.

35. She would welcome clarification of the State party’s views on the promotion of access, in accordance with the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement), to affordable health products in poorer countries. A comment on its views on the intellectual property frameworks that enabled extreme control and concentration of technological investments that led to soaring prices and the unavailability of essential life-saving treatments in poorer countries would likewise be welcome.

36. **Ms. Nonthasoot** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wondered why the development of facilities for the safe consumption of illegal drugs – in Scotland, for example – was not accompanied by efforts to decriminalize the consumption of such drugs. He wondered, too, whether the State party intended to adopt a single drug policy for the entirety of its territory.

37. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what was being done to reduce inequality of access to healthcare, whether steps were being taken to make gender identity health services more widely available and why life expectancy varied so widely from one part of the State party to another. In addition, she asked whether plans had been made to review the exemption from corporation tax enjoyed by the State party’s real estate investment trusts.

38. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) asked what measures the State party was taking to ensure that rent rises, combined with the freeze of the housing benefit, did not have an adverse impact on the right to housing.

39. **Ms. Lemos de Vásquez** said that it would be helpful to learn what measures the State was taking or had taken to promote healthy eating and lower rising levels of childhood obesity.

40. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he, too, would welcome further information on the steps taken by the State party to ensure that children had access to healthy food. He wondered in particular whether the State party had considered the possible links between malnutrition and childhood obesity and whether the right to food was viewed within the context of other components of the right to an adequate standard of living.

41. According to a report of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 188 homeless people had died in one year in Northern Ireland alone. What emergency measures was the State party taking in response to those deaths?

42. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know how poverty was defined in the State party, whether England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales used the same definition and what indicators were used to measure poverty. He wondered whether the authorities used the multidimensional poverty index developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.

43. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, although the child poverty strategy would not be published until later in the year, measures were already being taken to alleviate child poverty. In late 2024, for instance, the fair repayment rate – the rate by which the universal credit allowance received by families that owed money to the Government could be reduced – had been reduced from 25 to 15 per cent. As a result, 1.2 million households would receive an average of an additional £420 per year.

44. The Department for Work and Pensions had a variety of data-sharing arrangements with energy companies, which could contact the Department for information about whether a person was living in an energy-poor household. If necessary, steps were taken to enable the person concerned to find the help he or she needed. Local housing allowance rates had been raised in April 2024. Food poverty was indeed, as had been suggested, an issue to which greater attention should be paid. In the United Kingdom, anyone who, after housing costs, earned less than 60 per cent of the median income, was considered to be living in poverty. That measure of relative poverty was the international standard.

45. **A representative of the United Kingdom**, noting that there was clear evidence that controlled drugs were harmful, reiterated that his country had no plans to change its drug policy or set up more safe consumption facilities. There were also no plans, however, to limit prosecutorial discretion in connection with the activities of such facilities in Glasgow. The drug laws of the United Kingdom would not be extended to the overseas territories.

46. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the United Kingdom had shaped access to vaccines the world over, including through COVAX, the vaccines pillar of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. Tens of millions of doses of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines had been donated to more than 40 countries. What was more, her country had committed £1.65 billion to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, over the period 2021–2025, making it the Alliance’s second-largest donor.

47. The National Health Service was a residency-based system, so people not lawfully resident in the United Kingdom had to contribute to the cost of their care. Some of the most vulnerable people arriving in the country, however, including refugees and asylum-seekers, did not pay for treatment. The health needs of new immigration cohorts were assessed, and the assessments, along with country-specific advice, were shared with primary healthcare staff. Specific schemes had been put in place to support refugees from Ukraine and Afghanistan.

48. Investment in gender dysphoria services in England had more than doubled in recent years. The additional investment was helping bring down waiting times that had increased as a result of a shortage of clinical staff and rapidly rising demand. The National Health Service in England was conducting a review of the adult gender services on offer. The review’s findings would inform an updated service specification for adult gender services.

49. Healthy life expectancy could indeed vary greatly from one part of England to another. The Government intended to look at the social determinants of health and halve the gap – approximately 18 years – between the parts of England with the highest health life expectancy and those with the lowest.

50. Government actions to address childhood obesity, which was particularly acute in the most deprived areas, included the introduction of restrictions on advertising less healthy food and drinks on television and online and plans to prohibit the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children under the age of 16. Three healthy food schemes, which helped more than 3 million children, were still being implemented.

51. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that his country, which was committing to working with its international partners to help ease the unsustainable debt burdens borne by lower-middle-income countries, coordinated with other official creditors on any necessary debt restructuring. It also engaged with borrower countries, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and private creditors to strengthen the global sovereign debt architecture and promote debt sustainability for developing countries. Although developing countries were not experiencing a debt crisis such as that of the 1990s, measures to help the countries that were facing high short-term debt-servicing costs were being considered. The situation and policy options were kept under review. Note had been taken of the Debt Relief (Developing Countries) Bill.

52. The TRIPS Agreement struck the proper balance between providing access and incentivizing innovation. Changes to the intellectual property framework, which must always be evidence-based, should be made only if they continued to provide incentives for investment and innovation.

53. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, under the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act of 2022, the relevant Scottish authorities were required to have regard to the right to food, a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, as they prepared “Good Food Nation” plans. A public body, the Scottish Food Commission, would review progress towards the goals set out in the plans. A draft of the national “Good Food Nation” plan had been published in January 2024.

54. A long-term strategy for housing, which addressed issues such as the supply of housing in all parts of Scotland, affordability and housing’s potential contribution to a net-zero economy, had been published in March 2021. A central target was to deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which at least 70 per cent of which should be for social rent and 10 per cent in rural and island communities. Between March 2022 and September 2024, more than 24,000 homes had been delivered towards the target and, in the first eight months of 2024, thousands of households with children had been helped into affordable housing. In all, £600 million had been set aside for investment in affordable housing in Scotland in the 2024/25 fiscal year. The figure proposed for the 2025/26 fiscal year was £768 million.

55. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Northern Ireland Executive was designing a new strategic framework to enable people to improve their diet and participate in more physical activity and reduce the risk of related harm for those living with overweight and obesity. The new framework, which would be in place by March 2025, would take a comprehensive approach to addressing obesity.

56. The approach of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to supporting households that were homeless or threatened with homelessness was outlined in the Homelessness Strategy 2022–2027. The delivery of the Strategy was guided by annual action plans. The Housing Executive had also developed an action plan for temporary accommodation, and in the event of severe weather a newly introduced emergency protocol was followed to help people who were sleeping outside. The complex lives model, in operation since September 2021, set out a comprehensive approach to supporting people caught in a cycle of homelessness, substance misuse, poor physical and mental health and offending behaviour.

57. **A representative of the United Kingdom**, noting that his Government planned to set out details of future investment in social and affordable housing at its multi-year spending review, which would take place later in the year, said that the new investment would be made upon the conclusion of the Affordable Homes Programme 2001–2026. The plan entailed the delivery of a mix of homes for submarket rent or for purchase.

58. Levels of homelessness were much too high. A cross-government strategy to lower them was in development, and funding for homelessness services would increase to nearly £1 billion in the 2025/26 fiscal year, £233 million more than in 2024/2025.

59. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that a levy was applied to pre-packaged soft drinks containing added sugar of at least 5 grams per 100 millilitres. A higher levy was applied to drinks containing added sugar of more than 8 grams per 100 millilitres. Between 2015 and 2020, the average sugar content of the drinks affected by the levy had fallen by 46 per cent, and studies had shown that the application of the levy had led to 5,000 fewer cases of obesity in girls aged between 10 and 11 years, and a 28.6 per cent reduction in hospital admissions for tooth extractions for children under 5.

60. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government recognized the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on least developed and developing States and was committed to improving equitable access to medicines. The TRIPS Agreement had facilitated an effective response to the pandemic by incentivizing research, investment and innovation. The United Kingdom was currently leading discussions at the World Trade Organization on how to facilitate more voluntary licensing and technology transfer partnerships.

61. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the target of 18 weeks between referral and treatment for mental healthcare also applied to consultant-led services. However, anyone in England experiencing a mental health crisis could consult a healthcare professional at any time via the NHS 111 helpline or avail themselves of community services such as crisis cafes or crisis houses. The United Kingdom was committed to enhancing global health security via a new information-sharing system that would strengthen research and development and support the equitable sharing of benefits. The Government would continue to work closely with African and other partners to deliver such a system.

62. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that hundreds of families in Wales had participated in a pilot project to encourage healthy behaviours. An evaluation report on the project was due to be published shortly. The budget for the “Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales” strategy had been maintained at £4 million. Other action to encourage wholesome nutrition included a ban on the advertising of unhealthy foods on government-owned sites and a reduction in the number of new hot-food takeaway outlets. Teams from local health boards were working to prevent obesity and to develop a comprehensive understanding of local challenges and opportunities. It was hoped that those local-level approaches could then be applied at the national level.

63. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the annually published multidimensional poverty index reflected material deprivation alongside a low-income indicator, set at 70 per cent of median income. The Government had set a specific target for increasing living standards across the country but was also aware that the best way to achieve that aim was to pursue economic growth. It therefore had to balance decisions on tax and spending with a view to securing sustainable revenue for key public services and safeguarding rights within the limits of available resources.

64. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that the Committee had received troubling reports about an increasing attainment gap in secondary education between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in England and Wales. In some areas, the gap appeared to be linked to eligibility for free school meals. Other attainment gaps worked to the detriment of children with disabilities or from ethnic minorities, while bullying and the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic were also reportedly hampering educational success. The reports also indicated that government action to address those problems was insufficient and poorly targeted. Schools in Scotland apparently lacked the ability to meet the diverse needs of pupils, and measures to address the poverty-related attainment gap were proving ineffective, while significant gaps persisted for children in care and children with additional support needs. Bullying, sometimes with misogynistic or racist overtones, continued to be prevalent.

65. Children in Northern Ireland reportedly also faced bullying, including cyberbullying, on grounds of, *inter alia*, race, sexual orientation, disability and migration status, while Roma and Traveller children had low levels of educational attainment at all stages. The implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) and the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) had apparently stagnated. It was not clear, moreover, how the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) would be enforced following the

departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union, or “Brexit”. In Jersey, the Jersey Premium Policy appeared to have been ineffective in addressing the attainment gap.

66. She would appreciate information on the measures taken to address those issues, how the measures were implemented, what results had been received and what impact assessments had been conducted. Specifically, she hoped to hear about programmes to target bullying and to facilitate access to education for children from migrant families. She wondered whether there were any plans to increase the number of integrated schools in Northern Ireland and whether a report on integrated education was due to be issued, as envisaged under the Integrated Education Act. Where there any plans to secure long-term funding for shared education in Northern Ireland, particularly in the light of Brexit? She would be interested to hear about any assessment of the impact of the Jersey Premium Policy on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap. In the light of concerns raised by the European Committee of Social Rights, she wished to know if the Government had any plans to revisit the Children and Young Persons Act of 1933, specifically with regard to the number of hours of “light work” that school-age children were allowed to perform.

67. She wished to know if the Irish Language Commissioner envisaged in the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act had been appointed. It would be interesting to know what action was taken to ensure that arts and culture across the country received sufficient long-term funding that was proportional to inflation. The Committee was keen to know what measures were in place to ensure access to sport for transgender persons and persons with disabilities. It would be helpful to know if the Government had any plans to review and perhaps repeal the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act which had raised concerns due to its incompatibility with the human rights obligations of the United Kingdom under the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights).

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at noon.

68. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the recently installed Government of the United Kingdom was of the view that the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act was misguided and, in many respects, unlawful. On 4 December 2024, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had laid a draft remedial order before Parliament which, if adopted, would rectify many of the human rights deficiencies identified in the Act. The order was just the first step in the fulfilment of the Government’s commitment to repeal the Act and, when parliamentary time allowed, the Secretary of State would introduce a new bill which envisioned the fulfilment of all the obligations that had been halted under the previous Act, including the restoration of inquests.

69. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government wished to see more people engaging in physical activity irrespective of their age, race or gender identity. Transgender persons benefited on an equal footing with others from the large investments the Government had been making to render sport more accessible across the country. In the case of competitive sport, individual sporting bodies – all of them independent of government – had a responsibility to protect the integrity and fairness of women’s sport and the safety of all participants. The Government worked with those bodies to help them reach decisions that prioritized fairness and integrity while upholding inclusivity.

70. Despite challenging fiscal circumstances, the Government worked hard to ensure that culture and creativity remained at the core of people’s lives. Each part of the United Kingdom had its own arts council. Arts Council England was investing more than £467 million of public funds in the arts between 2023 and 2026, in addition to an annual sum of £250 million from the National Lottery. Many cultural venues were open to the public free of charge, including 45 museum sites across England, which had attracted 40 million visitors in the previous 12 months. Tuition in music, drama and the plastic arts was often available free of charge.

71. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) had come into force in September 2021, and the Department of Education helped schools tackle all forms of bullying, including cyberbullying. Parental preference was at the heart of the system of integrated education, and the authorities regularly approved additional capacity in integrated schools on the basis of demands expressed by

parents through the school admissions process. The Northern Ireland Executive provided schools with additional funding and support for incoming pupils, including Roma and Traveller children. A review of the effect of those measures was currently under way.

72. The Department of Education was working on a plan to deliver services and improve outcomes for children and young persons with special educational needs and to ensure the full implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland). The 2022 Mainstreaming Shared Education Strategy aimed to make shared education a normal and accepted practice across Northern Ireland. The PEACEPLUS cross-border funding programme was another key vehicle for advancing shared education. Preparations for appointing the Irish Language Commissioner and the other figures envisaged under the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act were well advanced.

73. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Scottish Government had updated its action plan for culture in December 2023 to reflect recent challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased cost of living. Government funding for culture in the period 2025–2026 was over £50 million more than it had been in 2023–2024, and the First Minister had made a commitment to boost cultural funding by annual £1 million increments by 2028–2029. Creative Scotland, the body which supported Scottish creative industries, was to receive £20 million for its multi-year funding programme. A review of funding for the cultural sector was due to be conducted shortly.

74. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the authorities in Wales were pursuing a sustained improvement in educational standards, notably by boosting attendance rates and focusing on literacy and numeracy. In the previous year, £2 million had been invested in literacy and £1.6 million in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Key recent improvements included the “Curriculum for Wales” and a new system to support pupils with additional learning needs. Food and drink provided in schools had been shown to make a positive contribution. Around 67 per cent of full-time pupils attending State-run schools in Wales received a free school lunch while 22 per cent of primary school pupils received a free breakfast and 20 million servings of free and subsidised milk were provided annually.

75. In addition to the Pupil Development Grant, which was aimed at raising the attainment of children from low-income households, the government made Schools Essentials Grants directly available to parents and carers, making a significant difference to many lower-income families in Wales. The government had published new guidance in December 2023 to help schools support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners, and it provided over £160 million to local authorities to support equity in education. Lastly, the Curriculum for Wales Framework guidance had been developed to be inclusive of all learners. It was thus mandatory to teach ethnic minority histories, including those of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, as part of the history of Wales.

76. The organization Pride Sports Cymru had recently been successful in securing Cardiff as the host city for the EuroGames in 2027. A multi-sport event for LGBTQ+ persons, the EuroGames would attract some 10,000 athletes, visitors and volunteers to Wales. A legacy plan for the Games was expected to be put in place, and was expected to lead to an increase in sport and physical activity among LGBTQ+ people in Wales.

77. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government was in the process of recruiting 6,500 new teachers and had launched an independent, expert-led curriculum and assessment review that would examine the key challenges to attainment, especially for those who were socioeconomically disadvantaged or had special educational needs and disabilities. The pupil premium grant, worth £2.9 billion in 2025, provided direct funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged 5- to 16-year-olds in State-funded schools in England. Schools must spend their pupil premium in line with the guidance provided by the Department for Education on approaches that had the most positive impact on educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. The national funding formula targeted funding to schools that had the greatest numbers of pupils with additional needs. In the 2025/26 academic year, £5.1 billion in funding had been allocated according to deprivation, and £8.6 billion was being allocated for additional needs overall, in the expectation that such funding would help schools to close attainment gaps. In the wake of

the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had established the Oak National Academy, an independent public body that provided free access to resources, thus contributing to closing attainment gaps.

78. Local authorities must provide sufficient school places for all the children within their area. Admission to a school may not be refused based on a child's ethnicity. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children sometimes struggled to secure school places when they relocated during the school year; however, alongside other vulnerable children, they could be allocated a place under a special protocol with the local authority. The Department for Education worked closely with a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller stakeholder group to ensure that the barriers faced by young people from those communities were addressed. In cases where parents had to travel for work, schools were expected to help parents to ensure continuity of education for their child. For example, such children could be registered at one or more schools in England while they were travelling with their parents.

79. In the 2023/24 academic year, there were 1.67 million pupils with special education needs or disabilities, as against 1.37 million in 2019/20. Over the same period, additional funding had increased by over £4 billion, or 60 per cent. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, if passed by Parliament, would give local authorities the tools to improve inclusiveness in mainstream educational settings, and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills made clear that inclusion was a key feature of its school inspections.

80. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Scottish government was aware of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis on child development. In October 2021, it had published an education recovery policy, setting out key actions to be taken within the Scottish education system, taking account of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged children.

81. The Scottish government invested £1 billion in the Attainment Scotland Fund to support education recovery and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. Progress was being made in that regard, with a record low attainment gap in primary school literacy in the 2023/24 academic year. Since 2009, the poverty-related gap had decreased by 60 per cent for young people leaving school and going on to a positive destination such as work or further study.

82. On the issues of bullying and harassment, the development of guidance on how to respond to racist incidents at school was expected to be issued shortly. In addition, the government had published anti-bullying guidance in 2024 that was aimed at helping all adults working with children to create inclusive environments where bullying could not thrive. Later in 2025, guidance would be issued to help schools to develop an approach to preventing and responding to racism. Regarding misogyny in schools, Education Scotland had led a number of programmes for practitioners to help challenge gender stereotypes, address unconscious bias, improve gender balance and update subjects to promote equality. A new tool had been developed for educators to reduce online misogyny and abuse.

83. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that addressing the attainment gap in Jersey remained a priority for the government, which had put in place numerous measures to ensure equal educational access and attainment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such measures included new funding and provisions to support multilingual learners, particularly those with English as an additional language, and focused on assessment of English proficiency, adjusting support and curriculum delivery accordingly. The Jersey Premium Policy was the government's principal measure to address educational disadvantage, and it must remain as effective as possible in enabling educational equality. The government would continue to review policies on an ongoing basis in cooperation with partners, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner for Jersey. In addition to the Jersey Premium Policy, eligible children benefited from a revised school funding formula that was more sensitive to children's needs, including those with special educational needs and disabilities.

84. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that Sport England had long sought to improve access to sport for disabled people, investing around £30 million per year on average. During the period from 2022 to 2027, £6.7 million had been invested in seven

national disability sports organizations that represented groups of people with different impairments. It was as a direct result of such investment over many years that the United Kingdom had finished second in the medal table at the 2024 Paralympic Games in 2024. Those high-profile medal successes would undoubtedly inspire larger numbers of young disabled people in the country to engage in sport.

85. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government aimed to maintain a legislative framework that allowed children to take up opportunities for suitable part time work while ensuring that the proportionate safeguards were in place for their education, health and well-being. Part-time or temporary employment was seen as potentially contributing to a young person's development and a good introduction to the world of work, allowing them to develop important skills for future success in the labour market. Section 18.1 of the Children and Young Persons Act prescribed the hours that a child could work, based on his or her age and other factors, and it also placed limits on the nature and timing of the work. The Government was exploring policy options to determine whether there was any evidence to support changing the restrictions currently in place, but it would not currently accept that its position contravened the Covenant.

86. **Ms. Lee** said that she would appreciate information on the steps taken to ensure that all preschool-age children had access to an affordable, good-quality early childhood education, based on a holistic approach to education and care. Regarding the State party's responses to her questions about articles 6–9 of the Covenant, while both employment and social security were important aspects of an adequate standard of living, the State party appeared to give more priority to improving the employment situation than to ensuring adequate social protection by reviewing and doing away with retrogressive measures such as the benefit cap and the two-child limit. She was concerned that if the State party persisted with that approach, it would fail to address poverty. She wished to recall furthermore that all claimants of social security benefits should be treated with dignity and respect.

87. **Ms. Saran** said that she would like to know why the State party had not signed the communiqué of the recently concluded Artificial Intelligence Action Summit, which had been backed by 60 signatories and which supported reducing digital divides and the gap between the rich and the poor and democratizing artificial intelligence, in keeping with article 15 of the Covenant. She would therefore also welcome the delegation's comments on the State party's position, in that context, on the obligations enshrined in article 15 (1) and (4), the latter of which specifically recognized the benefits to be derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields.

88. **Mr. Palmisano** said that he would like to know in what terms and to what extent corporal punishment at school was prohibited by law and had been effectively punished in case law. In particular, it would be useful to learn whether any form of corporal punishment of children was treated as a criminal offence. He would also like to know what steps had been taken to implement the anti-bullying plans mentioned by the State party and whether they had produced any measurable progress.

89. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to know how the State party was addressing the problem of children who had been born in the State party but were at risk of becoming stateless and could not as a result fully exercise their economic, social and cultural rights. She would also be grateful for information on the State party's efforts to honour its financial commitments in respect of the Green Climate Fund and the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage established under the Paris Agreement, and to promote debt relief strategies for developing countries, in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

90. **Mr. Nonthasoot** asked what measures were being taken to close the attainment gaps of children in foster care and to prevent the bullying of LGBTI+ children.

91. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government took seriously both the need to encourage employment and to provide social security for those who could not work.

92. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government was significantly expanding childcare entitlements and increasing the number of school places throughout

England to ensure access to early childhood education, which it recognized led to better outcomes for all children, but was particularly impactful for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. A large number of educational outcomes programmes were directed specifically at young people in care. In particular, there was a programme of virtual school heads in every local authority in the country, who had a statutory obligation to determine the needs and support better outcomes for young people in the care system.

93. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the United Kingdom had worked closely with France throughout the preparations for the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit and had joined the Coalition for Sustainable AI launched at the Summit. Nevertheless, his Government had not been able to agree to all parts of the declaration issued at the conclusion of the Summit. The United Kingdom had signed the first international treaty addressing the risks of artificial intelligence under the auspices of the Council of Europe and continued to play a key role as an international leader in safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence and was strongly supportive of international cooperation in that area.

94. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Home Office statelessness policy was designed to assist those who were not recognized as a citizen of any country and who were unable to reside any country. In fulfilment of its obligations under the United Nations Conventions on Statelessness, the United Kingdom provided a means for stateless persons living in the United Kingdom to exercise their basic human rights, as part of its efforts to address wider global issues facing stateless persons. In order to stay in the United Kingdom, stateless persons needed to show that they would not be admitted to another country for the purposes of permanent residence or qualify for permission to stay as a stateless person. If eligible, stateless persons were granted permission to stay for five years and had access during that time to employment where appropriate and other benefits. They could apply for settlement after five years and could also become eligible for citizenship.

95. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that all forms of physical punishment of children in all settings were against the law in Scotland. Children had the same legal protection from assault as adults. The Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act of 2019 did not establish a new offence, but, rather, abolished the defence of reasonable chastisement under the existing offence of assault.

96. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that the State party must put in place a robust and systematic legislative framework to protect and promote human rights and use its leverage to ensure a robust human rights legal and policy framework in all its Crown dependencies and overseas territories; it was also hoped that it would one day ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. The Committee did not question the internal structure of the Government of any State party insofar as it did not affect the protection afforded to the people living in that State party. He hoped to see significant, tangible progress both in the growth of the State party's economy and human rights protections in all the dependencies and territories under its control in the next reporting cycle.

97. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, while there may be disagreement on whether there was an obligation for the incorporation of the Covenant into domestic law, he hoped that there was no doubt as to the importance his Government placed on the rights enshrined in the Covenant, as evidenced by the many positive examples given of the work being undertaken throughout the United Kingdom, including in the Crown dependencies and overseas territories, relevant to the Covenant.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.