



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child Fifty-fourth session

Summary record of the 1523rd (Chamber A) meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 2 June 2010, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Lee

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The meeting was called to order at 3.00 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Third and fourth periodic reports of Belgium (continued) (CRC/C/BEL/3-4; CRC/C/BEL/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Belgium resumed places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Puras** asked for information about the integration of children with disabilities within the educational system, citing reports from certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that the mix of specialized and mainstream schooling available for those children was unsatisfactory. Although families should be free to choose either specialist or inclusive education for their child, the Committee firmly supported inclusion as the preferred option, provided that it was well managed and properly resourced. Noting that a 2009 Decree of the Government of the French Community supporting integration and inclusion had apparently met with resistance, he requested information on basic trends in that area and measures adopted to ensure that the needs and rights of children with disabilities were fully met in Belgium.

3. He also wished to know how the Government was addressing the reported shortage of residential psychiatric care places for children: was it simply aiming to increase the number of inpatient places or was it also considering the development of outpatient, outreach and day care alternatives? He emphasized the need for a balanced spectrum of child mental health-care options to counter the excessive reliance on inpatient treatment. Since certain NGOs had expressed concern that children in psychiatric care might be denied privacy and other basic rights, such as access to education, he also wondered what kind of monitoring system was in place to guarantee that their rights were respected. Reports that drugs were being prescribed to treat attention deficit disorder with increasing frequency were another matter of concern, and he would appreciate confirmation that all possible educational, psychological and therapeutic alternatives were adequately explored before medication was administered.

4. A recent European Union (EU) Daphne project ranked Belgium among the five European countries with the highest number of children under 3 in institutional care, alongside Bulgaria, Latvia, Montenegro and Romania. Given that periods of more than three months in care were detrimental to a child's development, he would appreciate an explanation for that high rate of institutionalization. The measures to enhance parenting skills described in the report were commendable, but there was a lack of information about their sustainability and geographical scope, which should be addressed. He was also interested to know how the authorities secured the participation of less advantaged families.

5. **The Chairperson** said that she had been concerned to hear that demand for day care services outstripped supply and that such services were usually available to working parents only. She would therefore like to know what options were available to non-working parents. She also sought statistical data on breastfeeding. Citing reports that the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes had been frequently violated in Belgium, she urged the Government to work at all levels to ensure its enforcement.

6. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that the Belgian delegation would first respond to the questions raised during the morning session.

7. **Mr. Van Haelst** (Belgium), responding to a question concerning the integration of French-speaking children in Flemish schools, explained that there were three alternatives available for children who spoke a language other than the principal language of tuition in their homes: (i) educational programmes incorporating tuition in the family's language of

origin; (ii) year-long reception programmes providing tuition in Flemish to prepare children for integration within the regular school programme; and, (iii) placement in either a Flemish or French school in exercise of the freedom of choice that gave all Belgian parents the right to select either a French or a Flemish education for their child irrespective of where they lived in the country.

8. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) added that in the French-speaking education system there were 136 primary schools and 78 secondary schools offering French/English and French/Flemish language immersion tuition. That tuition was available to all children and there were no registration prerequisites.

9. **Ms. Somers** (Belgium), responding to concerns raised about the application of criminal law to juvenile offenders, said that it was important to emphasize that minors were tried as adults only in very exceptional circumstances, when the offence was particularly serious and the minor had reached the age of 16 and had already been subject to disciplinary sanctions. Such decisions could be taken only by a judge with special training in youth matters and subject to satisfactory completion of a medical and psychosociological assessment that took the defendant's maturity and social environment into account. Even if deemed able to stand trial as an adult, minors were always heard in a special chamber for young people before specially trained judges. It was also important to emphasize that convicted minors were no longer placed in prisons but would in future be accommodated in a new young offenders institute in Saint-Hubert.

10. **Mr. Kotrane** said that, although the Committee was aware that only a very small number of 16–18 year olds were tried as adults, it did not accept such exceptions. Under article 40 of the Convention and other pertinent texts, all minors were entitled to be judged as minors, to have access to restorative justice and to have their sentence adjusted to their circumstances; they should never be judged on the merits of the case as was customary in adult criminal procedure.

11. **Ms Somers** (Belgium), turning to the issue of adoption, said that there had been 451 intercountry and 51 national adoptions in 2009. Under Belgian law, a distinction was made between “conventional” adoptions, where the adoptee's country of origin was a signatory of the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption, and “non-conventional” adoptions. The guiding principles of the Convention had been transposed into Belgian legislation in order to prevent adoption shopping and discourage potential adopters from pursuing “non-conventional” adoptions as a potentially easier route. Accordingly, no adoptions were carried out in contravention of international law, public order, the best interests of the child and the principle of subsidiarity. All adoptions were registered with a central federal authority, and a record of the child's original name was always maintained even if the adoptive parents selected a new one.

12. **Ms. Ortiz** requested clarification on two points: firstly, the reason for the two forms of adoption and, secondly, the assistance and counselling offered to birth parents mentioned in paragraph 374 of the report. In particular, she sought confirmation as to whether the aim of that assistance was, wherever possible, to enable children to remain with their birth parents. She would also appreciate an explanation of the low number of national adoptions: were there really so few children available for adoption in Belgium, or did that situation indicate that prospective adopters were only interested in very young children with no apparent health problems? She wondered what steps the Government was taking to promote the adoption of older children and children with disabilities.

13. **Ms. Somers** (Belgium) explained that Belgian law recognized two forms of adoption because the Federal Government had elected to authorize adoptions of children from outside Belgium even if the adoptee's country of origin was not a Hague Convention signatory, as, for example, in the case of Kazakhstan. The aim of the specific provisions

applying to those adoptions was to ensure that the Hague principles were respected in all cases.

14. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium), responding to Ms. Ortiz's second query, explained that the approved procedure for both national and intercountry adoptions included an examination of the reasons for adoption and research to identify any financial aid or social or psychological assistance available to birth families that might enable them to reconsider their decision. All possible alternatives were examined and prospective adoptions were sometimes postponed or even abandoned. Decisions were taken in consultation with the birth family, taking any financial or psychological obstacles into account, and every effort was made to find the best solution for the child.

15. **Mr. Van Haelst** (Belgium), speaking about preventive health initiatives in the Flemish Community, reported that a total subsidy of €2.3 million had been granted to the Sensoa centre for sexual health to fund preventive campaigns targeting high-risk groups – specifically gay men and young Africans. Youth support centres ran preventive campaigns targeting young people in general, and provided support and advice on AIDS/HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and contraception, as well as medical care. To combat obesity, in 2009 his Government had launched an action plan to raise awareness of the importance of exercise and a healthy diet among schoolchildren, which was linked to a broader pan-European healthy-eating initiative. Smoking in schools was prohibited by legal decree, including for teachers. There were also action plans to combat child drug use and smoking, and to prevent suicides among young people. Components of the former included a smoke-free classroom campaign and an assertiveness programme to encourage young people to say no to drugs. The latter consisted of four components: (i) mental health coaching in secondary schools; (ii) online and telephone support; (iii) a rapid detection and intervention mechanism enabling mental health professionals to take immediate action in the young person's place of residence; and, (iv) a web-based preventive support programme for the children of parents with psychiatric illnesses.

16. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) added that similar prevention, treatment and follow-up programmes were available in the French Community.

17. **Ms. Goossens** (Belgium) said that female genital mutilation was a problem of which the Federal Government was very much aware and which it was taking comprehensive steps to eradicate. For example, in April 2008 the asylum authorities had introduced a follow-up procedure involving annual checks of families including girls under the age of 16. When applying for refugee status, parents were asked to sign a declaration confirming their awareness of the risks inherent in such practices and of the criminal liability that they would incur were they to inflict them upon their children. Every year thereafter, they were required to present a medical certificate confirming the absence of excision. Follow-up to date had been positive and parental cooperation good.

18. The eradication of female genital mutilation was also one of the objectives of the national action plan to combat domestic violence and the Federal Government had plans to set up a working group to examine the issues surrounding gender-based violence. The representatives of the Flemish Community wished to add that excision was not a large-scale problem in Belgium and that girls deemed to be at risk were screened in special pupil support centres – the only programme of its kind in Europe.

19. **Ms. Joosten** (Belgium) said that combating harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and all forms of gender-based violence in general was a core element of the Belgian Government's external policy for promoting gender equality and equal opportunities, the rights of the child, and reproductive and sexual health. The 18 partner countries with which it had bilateral cooperation agreements included African nations where female genital mutilation was a continuing practice – most notably Mali, but also

Senegal, Benin and Niger. Belgian cooperation with those countries consisted of support in promoting health, gender equality and respect for the rights of the child rather than direct funding. The Government did, however, contribute financially to multilateral cooperation programmes run by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other international organizations. In addition, it ran awareness-raising campaigns in Belgium, supported international conferences and was organizing a series of events to spotlight the issue during its forthcoming European Union presidency.

20. **Mr. Citarella** (Country Rapporteur) asked the delegation if Belgium's domestic legislation contained specific provisions criminalizing female genital mutilation.

21. **Ms. Joosten** (Belgium) confirmed that the Criminal Code contained a specific article criminalizing such practices.

22. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium), speaking with regard to children's right to privacy, confirmed that the family planning units that dealt with emotional and sexual health care, education and well-being in the French Community, providing contraception and information on issues including termination of pregnancy, were required to adhere to a very strict code of ethics and to maintain absolute medical confidentiality in respect of the minors who used their services.

23. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) added that the confidentiality requirement incumbent on all persons working in those areas, including in a volunteer capacity, was also expressly set forth in a specific article of the Criminal Code.

24. **Mr. Van Haelst** (Belgium) said that the Flemish Community had subsidized a study to determine how disadvantaged children made use of their leisure time and what they thought of the options available to them. With regard to childcare, the standards set by the Barcelona European Council to provide childcare to 33 per cent of children under 3 years of age were respected throughout Flemish territory, but in some cities those standards had not been achieved. The Flemish Community therefore had a new plan to increase the number of places available in childcare centres, and for 2010 an additional budget of €5.5 million was provided for preschool and €9.5 million for after school care. The Triple P Positive Parenting Program had proven to be very advantageous for disadvantaged children, and the community government was considering expanding it throughout Flemish territory.

25. With regard to juvenile delinquency, a recent study had confirmed NGO reports stating that juvenile offenders placed in institutions were more likely to come from a disadvantaged environment. The Government was looking into what lessons could be drawn from that, and an additional budget of €1.5 million had been allocated for alternatives to placement in institutions.

26. Policies on poverty in the Flemish Community included measures to protect poor people's right to energy, such as regulations stating that gas and electricity services could not be cut off in winter.

27. **Ms. Aidoo** wondered whether the programmes currently in place to reduce poverty were protected from budget cuts during times of financial difficulty. She understood that primary education was free of charge, but she wished to know whether related costs such as textbooks and transport to school were also provided.

28. **Ms. Ortiz** said that according to information before the Committee it took some children up to two hours to reach school, and she asked what the Government was doing to solve such difficulties in school transport.

29. **Ms. Villaran de la Puente** said that the Committee had received information that there was a system in place to punish children who missed school, and she asked whether those children were reported to the authorities. She also wished to know whether there were any initiatives in the Flemish Community to cut subsidies for families whose children did not attend school.

30. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) said that there was political will within the French Community to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of society. The plans for social cohesion in the community were based on the exercise of fundamental rights and access to social services. The budgets for those plans had been retained during the economic crisis, and there was a legal framework to ensure that they could not be cut.

31. **Mr. Van Haelst** (Belgium) said that all the new initiatives he had mentioned had been taken during the financial crisis and those programmes would not be reduced.

32. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that in the course of the preparation of the report, both communities had made commitments to carry out many different initiatives. In the Flemish Community, for example, 60 per cent of places in childcare for small children were linked to family income, with low-income families paying less. There were also initiatives to enable low-income families to go on holiday or attend sporting or cultural events.

33. With regard to unaccompanied foreign minors, it was true that only non-European unaccompanied minors were placed in the care of the Guardianship Service. However, in 2007 a provision had been adopted whereby unaccompanied minors from the European Union who had significant needs were to be referred by the Guardianship Service to competent institutions that could house them and provide them with the necessary social assistance.

34. **Ms. Ortiz** said that according to information before the Committee, there was a crisis within the reception centres and those centres were unable to care for many unaccompanied foreign minors. There were reports that those children were often detained by the police, and she wondered whether the State party could create alternative solutions instead of detaining the children.

35. **Ms. Goossens** (Belgium) said that the overcrowding crisis within the reception centres was due to a 40 per cent increase in requests for asylum. The Agency for the Reception of Asylum-seekers (FEDASIL) was working to process asylum applications more quickly. Additional budgetary allocations had been granted to FEDASIL, and 2,720 additional places had been created within the reception centres between March 2009 and March 2010. In March 2010, a special delegate had been appointed to facilitate the opening of more places for asylum-seekers. With regard to the detention of unaccompanied minors, the information that Ms. Ortiz had cited was not correct; minors were no longer detained in closed centres.

36. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) added that unaccompanied minors seeking asylum were referred to the Guardianship Service and were placed in Observation and Guidance Centres.

37. **Ms. Villaran de la Puente** wished to know exactly how much of the demand for places in reception centres was being met in absolute terms and why the Committee was still receiving information that asylum-seeking families with children were living on the street.

38. **Ms. Goossens** (Belgium) clarified that the figures she had given earlier were for the total number of asylum-seekers and not just children.

39. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that there were plans to repeal the law by which young people could be conscripted into the army from the age of 17, but that had not yet been

done. In practice, though, that law was only applied to those who had been conscripted prior to 1993, so that there were currently no minors serving in the Belgian army.

40. **Ms. Joosten** (Belgium) said that Belgium attached great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of children involved in armed conflict and that the country was working closely with NGOs to rehabilitate child soldiers in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

41. **Ms. Goossens** (Belgium), regarding the introduction of provisions on stateless persons in Belgian legislation, said that a draft bill was being prepared but had not yet been finalized. It was expected to be passed into law once the new government took office.

42. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) said that, though the export of arms fell under the competence of the regional authorities, State bodies were not excluded from the process. Belgium respected the European Union Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, particularly criterion two concerning the respect for human rights in the country of final destination. An additional provision was also applied throughout the country prohibiting the export of arms to countries with child soldiers.

43. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) added that in the Walloon Region it was prohibited for destination countries to resell arms to third countries, to recruit children under 16 years of age or to involve children under 18 years of age in armed conflict.

44. **Mr. Van Haelst** (Belgium) said that the same standards were applied in the Flemish Region. There was also a Flemish institute for peace that monitored issues such as arms exports and children in armed conflict.

45. Children's participation in the Flemish Community was assured through the youth council, which provided the authorities with children's opinions on issues affecting them. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had been one of the fundamental texts used to prepare the decree that formed the legal basis for the Flemish youth council. At the local level, municipal councils were obliged to listen to local youth councils. Grants were available for projects that aimed to raise awareness of children's rights.

46. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) said that children's participation in decisions affecting them and in terms of hearing children was one of the top priorities of the Government of the French-speaking community. Child-centred research into all areas of children's lives had shown that they did not play a full part in decisions affecting them at school. Tools had been designed for teachers to remedy that, and would be implemented in the near future. In addition, efforts were being made to ensure that children enjoyed the right to information. A handbook had been published on translating documents into child-friendly language. As a test case, a brochure had been produced for children explaining the contents of the periodic report currently before the Committee.

47. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that several child-friendly versions of the Convention were available. The Committee's concluding observations would be translated into child-friendly language once they had been received.

48. **Mr. Citarella** (Country Rapporteur) said that the constructive dialogue with the delegation had confirmed that the State party was implementing many measures to uphold the rights of children. However, it was difficult to gain an accurate understanding of the level of enjoyment of those rights by all children nationwide given that coordination between the different regions, bodies and authorities was extremely complex. The State party should ensure it made progress in several areas, such as juvenile justice and the use of different languages in education, which the Committee had already raised as concerns in its 2002 concluding observations.

Initial report of Belgium under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/BEL/1; CRC/C/OPSC/BEL/Q/1 and Add.1)

49. **The Chairperson** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said that the Committee would go on to consider Belgium's report on the Optional Protocol and that from that point on she would be speaking in her capacity as Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol.

50. She welcomed the State party's ratification of the Optional Protocol and several relevant international instruments, its adoption of several laws on human trafficking and its implementation of awareness campaigns on sexual exploitation, but she noted that the report did not follow the Committee's revised guidelines regarding initial reports to be submitted under the Optional Protocol.

51. She wondered what the involvement of civil society and children had been in the preparation of the report. She asked which of the federal, regional or community governments were responsible for monitoring and implementing the Optional Protocol. She wished to know whether the national plan of action against trafficking in persons covered all measures necessary for the implementation of the Optional Protocol. She also wondered whether the 2001 national plan of action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children still existed and how effective it had been. She asked for an update on the deliberation of the judiciary to determine whether the Optional Protocol had a direct effect on national law in cases where the two conflicted.

52. She wished to know whether the National Commission for the Rights of the Child would be responsible for managing the "domino" database and whether that database was fully operational. She asked if there was a budget allocated especially for the implementation of the Optional Protocol. She wondered what was meant by the statement in paragraph 30 of the State party's report saying that victims of trafficking in persons could be granted a special residence permit provided that they cooperated with the judicial authorities. The annex of the report showed that at least 240 children registered as unaccompanied minors had not been handled by the Agency for the Reception of Asylum-seekers (FEDASIL), and she wished to know who was taking care of those children. The same question applied to the children who had been registered by the Guardianship Service but had not ended up in the FEDASIL network.

53. **Mr. Citarella** asked whether the State party envisaged adopting legislation explicitly to criminalize and punish the sale of children as defined in the Optional Protocol. He wondered what measures the Government was taking to help minors who were victims of prostitution and to reduce the phenomenon of prostitution among adolescents.

54. **Mr. Kotrane** said that it was not clear from the State party's OPSC report what precisely constituted the sale of children. Thus paragraphs 198 ff. dealt with economic exploitation; but he wondered whether a case in which a child was forced to work was treated as constituting the sale of children. The same applied to adoption through an intermediary. In both cases, if such cases were regarded as the sale of children, they would presumably be subject to harsher sanctions.

55. Paragraph 28 of the report stated that no figures were available for child prostitution linked to sex tourism. He therefore asked under what legal provisions a Belgian who went abroad as a sex tourist could be prosecuted as well as specific examples of convictions for sex tourism in Belgian courts.

56. Paragraph 20 of the report stated that the definition of child pornography was restricted to the visual representation of children for sexual purposes, on the grounds that Belgium did not want to censor the written word. Under the Optional Protocol, however,

any form of representation, visual or otherwise, was prohibited. Freedom of the printed word must be restricted in order to ensure the protection of children and he hoped that the Government would change the law to that effect. The Protocol also prohibited the ownership of child pornography, but paragraph 215 of the report suggested that only the commercial aspects of child pornography were punishable under Belgian law. He requested clarification.

57. **Mr. Puras** said that independent sources indicated a persistent failure by Belgium to protect children from exploitation and forced begging, whether trafficking was involved or not. He understood that studies had been carried out, but he wondered whether any specific measures had been taken. He also wondered by what criteria the Government defined vulnerable groups of children that should be targeted for prevention and protection programmes and how it prevented the identification of children in such groups, who might otherwise be stigmatized. Lastly, he wondered what action was taken to prevent institutional violence against children who had been caught up in child prostitution and pornography.

58. **Ms. Ortiz** asked how knowledge of the Optional Protocol, and the new measures adopted on the basis of the Protocol, particularly those relating to the sale of children, was disseminated in Belgium. She was particularly interested in the role of the mass media in that regard. Secondly, she wondered what steps the Government was taking to protect children from offences under the Protocol committed through the use of such technology as the Internet and mobile phones, which professional groups were given training in such matters and what such training consisted of.

59. **Mr. Gurán** asked who was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Optional Protocol and he wondered whether the federal Ombudsman played the same role for the Protocol as for the Convention itself in that regard. Secondly, he asked whether there were special programmes to deal with the problem of unaccompanied foreign minors, especially those from Eastern European countries, many of whom were Roma. Lastly, he wondered whether Belgium was as active in countering sex tourism as the Scandinavian countries were, where travel agencies cooperated with the Government. He wondered whether any special measures had been taken on the prevention of organized sex tourism trips outside Europe.

60. **Ms. Aidoo** said that, in its reply to paragraph 6 of the list of issues, the Government referred to practical measures taken by the Flemish Government to prevent the sexual exploitation of children whereas the French Community appeared to rely on moral education. It was crucial to protect the moral fabric of society, but she wondered whether the action taken by the French Community was effective and whether it provided adequate preventive preparation or protection for children. She asked whether sexual abuse, too, was treated as a moral issue. She endorsed the suggestion by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that Belgium should categorize sexual abuse as a crime of violence against children, which would make it subject to heavier penalties than currently obtained.

61. She noted that, according to paragraphs 120 ff. of the OPSC report, Flanders was devising a code of conduct for the use of travel agencies, which included a clause on sex tourism. She wondered whether there were similar codes of conduct in other communities or regions. It was important that there should be legislation to ensure that the travel industry was aware of the phenomenon of sex tourism directed at children.

62. **The Chairperson**, (Country Rapporteur for OPSC) noted that, in the reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues, it was stated that it was impossible for the Statistics Department to disaggregate extraditions by type of offence. She wondered whether that was because the federal Government did not keep such data or whether no cases of extradition

had been reported. She wondered whether either of the communities kept records of their own.

The meeting was suspended at 4.40 p.m and resumed at 5.05 p.m.

63. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that the report on the Optional Protocol had been drafted by the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, which had set up a working group to examine priority issues. There had been extensive cooperation from NGOs, including Ecpat Belgium, Child Focus and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) office for Belgium, but the final result was an official document. With regard to the division of powers, the federal authorities were responsible for the protection of children through the courts, while the communities were involved more in prevention and victim protection. With regard to statistics, she said that the goal was to involve the communities and regions more widely. At the federal level, the Government obtained data from the criminal protection service, the police — which held a national database — and the Aliens' Office. The Flemish Community also had its own source of statistics, the domino database. The National Commission had recommended that the data should be pooled in a national information centre, but no action had yet been taken. With regard to the implementation of the OPSC Protocol, she said that, at the federal level, there was a coordination unit that oversaw action countrywide, while the communities and regions had their own action plans on such issues as child prostitution.

64. **Ms. Somers** (Belgium) said that various provisions under Belgian legislation outlawed begging, trafficking in organs, work in conditions contrary to human dignity and coercion to commit a crime. All those offences came under the category of trafficking in children. The same applied to any action that ran counter to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption. As for child pornography, any person in possession of the visual representation of children for sexual purposes was liable to a prison sentence ranging from one month to one year or a fine of between €100 and €1,000. With regard to prosecution in cases of sex tourism, she assured the Committee that there had been such cases, but government data on sexual offences were not disaggregated, so there was no specific category for sex tourism. The reason for restricting the criteria for child pornography to visual representation was that Belgium did not want to criminalize victims for any account of their experiences that they might subsequently write.

65. **Ms. de Craim** (Belgium) said that child victims were interviewed by specially trained police officers in customized premises. They could be accompanied by a person whom they trusted. A psychologist could also assist but could not attend the actual interview.

66. **Ms. D'hondt** said, with regard to the exploitation of adolescents by adolescents, that the law on the protection of young people would be applicable in such a case and a whole range of penalties was available. There were also programmes of social reintegration for offenders in that field.

67. **Ms. Goossens** (Belgium) said that unaccompanied foreign minors were expected to cooperate with the justice system, but their age was taken into account, particularly since they often lacked the necessary information. Consideration was being given to making the system more flexible.

68. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that no specific budget was allocated to the Optional Protocol. However, the many projects, initiatives and services dedicated to preventing and punishing the crimes listed under the Optional Protocol attracted a significant proportion of the overall budget. At the federal level, a dedicated unit ensured coordination between the police and the justice system on those crimes, and the police maintained a database collating data from several sources.

69. In addition, several projects aimed to protect children from becoming victims of crime through their use of the Internet. They included the Safer Internet project, which provided information for parents, children and teachers and was coordinated by Child Focus, the European Centre for Missing and Sexually Exploited Children. Another campaign promoted the secure use of the Internet, notably via television advertisements, posters and a dedicated website, www.clicksafe.be. Further details were provided in paragraphs 100 and 110 of the initial report (CRC/C/OPSC/BEL/1). Belgium had a good record of public-private partnership on combating child prostitution and sex tourism, including input from the federal authorities, NGOs, and public and private businesses, among others. Additional information was available in paragraphs 101 and 102 of the initial report. Paragraph 109 provided full details of the identity cards enabling children to check whether the other users of Internet chat rooms were really minors rather than adults trying to contact young people with malicious or deceitful intent. Other initiatives to combat child pornography were detailed in paragraphs 110 to 115.

70. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) said that the French Community had been cooperating with NGOs working with children to formulate recommendations to stop children from begging. The focus had been on integrating or reintegrating Roma children into the school system. In Brussels and Namur, Roma mediators were providing links between Roma children, their families and the school system. In Brussels, the project to prevent students from dropping out had reached an 80 per cent success rate.

71. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that special protection measures were mostly relevant to unaccompanied foreign minors. The federal agency for receiving asylum-seekers in Belgium (FEDASIL) ensured that all unaccompanied foreign minors had no external contact for their first few days in a reception centre, after which any visits and mobile phone communications were carefully monitored. Unaccompanied minors who had been victims of human trafficking were also protected from outside contact that could prove harmful to them.

72. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) added that the Esperanto centre provided care for unaccompanied minors who had been victims of human trafficking. The centre provided a safe environment, where the children were protected from trafficking networks, integrated into their new environment and accompanied at every stage of their application for legal status. The staff at the centre were experts in the field.

73. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that there were currently some 150 places available in hostels for victims of human trafficking. Unoccupied places were attributed to other unaccompanied foreign minors. The federal Ombudsman had no specific competence to act in cases involving crimes under the Optional Protocol. In the Flemish Region, a decree prohibited travel agencies from cooperating in any way with entities involved in sex tourism or prostitution. While no such rules currently existed in the Walloon Region, there were plans to introduce them.

74. **Ms. Govaert** (Belgium) said that, while there were no specific references to the crimes under the Optional Protocol in school curricula or teacher training programmes, significant efforts were made in schools to raise children's awareness of those crimes. In the aftermath of the trial of the paedophile child killer, Marc Dutroux, school staff had been issued with teaching materials and training on how to approach student issues. In addition, a brochure on child prostitution had been widely distributed in order to warn children of the dangers, particularly children believed to be in vulnerable situations.

75. **Ms. D'hondt** (Belgium) said that social workers were conducting a project in Antwerp to ascertain what problems boys working as prostitutes encountered and to suggest other lifestyle choices to them.

76. In the Flemish Community, specific television programmes aimed to warn children about some of the problems they might encounter. The media authorities also strove to protect children from audio-visual material that could be harmful to them, particularly by issuing warnings about potentially harmful programme content and broadcasting such programmes at specific times.

77. **The Chairperson** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said that, while it was a daunting task, it was essential that the State party should map all the policies, national action plans, initiatives, strategies and legislation aimed at promoting children's rights, especially those under the Optional Protocol. That would reveal any lacunae or differences between regions and communities, which could then be filled or remedied, hopefully leading to better coordination in future. She suggested that the State party should conduct child impact assessments to ascertain the extent to which its policies and actions were achieving the desired results in a cost-effective manner.

78. It remained unclear to the Committee what percentage of the State party's total budget was allocated to implementing the Optional Protocol. It was important to be able to provide that data, particularly since research had shown that investment in social services had a direct impact on reducing child poverty. Given that many of the children who fell victim to the crimes under the Optional Protocol did so because of poverty, the State party should make every effort to target its poverty reduction policies. The Committee's concluding observations would focus on the criminalization, prohibition and prevention of the crimes under the Optional Protocol.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.