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Summary record of the 16th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 22 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Abdel-Moneim

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The meeting was called to order at 2.55 p.m.

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

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

Third periodic report of Lithuania (E/C.12/LTU/3; E/C.12/LTU/Q/3; E/C.12/LTU/RQ/3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Lithuania joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania), introducing the third periodic report of Lithuania, said that the war in Ukraine and inflation were the greatest short-term challenges his country faced, while transitioning to a high added-value economy, increasing the quality of education and health-care services and reducing income inequality were its long-term challenges. Despite those issues, much progress had been made in economic, social and cultural rights since the previous periodic report.
3. The institutional protection of human rights in Lithuania had been strengthened, with increasing funding for the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Seimas (parliament) Ombudsmen's Office. Lawyers and judges participated in more than 50 seminars on various human rights issues annually. Citizens had won more than half of the cases brought to the Constitutional Court relating to individual constitutional complaints.
4. Considerable headway had been made in the integration of the Roma community, and efforts to further improve their living conditions were ongoing. The per capita income of members of the Roma community had almost doubled over the previous five years.
5. Lithuania was also committed to equal opportunities and gender equality. The gender pay gap had shrunk to 11 per cent. The Government continued to combat discrimination in an effort to make society more inclusive. The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men had been amended to offer greater protection against harassment, sexual harassment and victimization, and families with same-sex parents were now protected from discrimination. Transgender persons could change their identity documents without having undergone gender-affirming surgical procedures, and the Minister of Health had adopted an order to provide health services for adults with a gender identity disorder.
6. The introduction of protection orders had bolstered existing legislation to help protect persons at risk of violence, and stalking had been criminalized in 2021. Meanwhile, additional funding had strengthened the emotional, psychological and counselling support available to victims of domestic violence.
7. In the area of poverty reduction, basic social benefits had risen 42 per cent between 2018 and 2023. The non-taxable income threshold had also been increased to assist those efforts, and the minimum monthly wage had more than doubled to €840 between 2017 and 2023. Boosting employment levels was an essential tool in combating poverty. The employment rate had reached a record 80 per cent in the third quarter of 2022. More than half of Ukrainian refugees of working age had successfully entered the labour market. Recent reforms had removed obstacles to employment and improved the employment prospects of persons with disabilities.
8. Protecting the rights of children was a major priority. A 2018 reform to the child rights protection system had introduced round-the-clock urgent response services to ensure child safety, and awareness-raising campaigns were organized to help reduce violence against children. In 2022, Lithuania had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure.
9. Health-care reform was under way and focused on day-hospital services, assertive community treatment teams and primary mental health-care centres. Innovative community-based measures had also been designed to address the long-term negative impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on mental health.

10. Quality was the focus where education was concerned. The 2022 Millennium Schools Programme aimed to create high-quality conditions for education in every municipality by 2030.
11. European Union membership had greatly helped improve enjoyment of the rights enshrined by the Covenant in Lithuania. Looking to the future, the most recent Recovery and Resilience Plan would allocate more than €2 billion (approximately 3 per cent of gross domestic product) to addressing the country's long-term challenges. Investments should be focused on digitalization and the green transition, the health service, social protection, education, innovation and increasing public-sector efficiency. While many challenges remained, Lithuania was proud to have escaped the Russian sphere of influence.
12. **Ms. Saran** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee was glad to note that the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office, which was the State party's national human rights institution, had been granted category A status. She would like to know what steps the State party had taken to address the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Accreditation. It would also be interesting to know of any measures taken to enable the Office to operate more effectively and independently in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).
13. She would appreciate details of how awareness of the rights enshrined in the Covenant was being raised among lawmakers, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, national civil society organizations and the general public, as well as of any relevant training that was provided to lawmakers, the judiciary and administrators of justice. In the light of concerning reports of racial prejudice influencing some court judgments, the Committee would welcome information on the steps taken to ensure that judges worked independently and without prejudice. It was unclear whether it was compulsory to be a member of the Lithuanian Bar Association in order to practise law, and whether human rights defenders were allowed to practise the profession.
14. Data relating to changes in the ethnic composition of the State party's population over the previous decade would be welcome. It would be interesting to know why certain national minorities, including the Polish, Belarusian, Russian and Jewish communities, had reduced in size. It would be useful to learn about any legislation prohibiting discrimination against citizens belonging to national and ethnic minorities on the basis of culture, language and religion. It was unclear whether the State party distinguished between ethnic minorities and national minorities. It would be interesting to know of any further measures proposed to improve the integration of the Roma community into mainstream society in order to protect them from prejudice, social exclusion and discrimination.
15. While some positive measures had been taken to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, concerns persisted with regard to discrimination, violence and stigma faced by those groups. She would be interested to know whether the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men covered gender minorities and whether the Criminal Code defined violence towards them as hate crime or hate speech. Details of any steps taken to protect same-sex partnerships and prohibit discrimination based on gender expression would be appreciated.
16. In the area of gender equality, she would be grateful for information on any specific steps the State party had taken to improve the treatment of women as equal members of society and to close the income gap between women and men.
17. She would welcome an account of how the State party proposed to improve the situation of those groups most affected by income inequality, namely unemployed persons, single persons, single parents, pensioners and persons with disabilities.
18. The Committee would like to know what steps the State party had taken to improve asylum reception conditions and protect the lives and health of asylum-seekers, particularly children, in line with international human rights standards and obligations. She would be grateful for details of any plans to update the legislation governing the legal status of foreign nationals, and confirmation of whether it would grant equal status to all refugees and asylum-seekers and give equal consideration to their cases.

19. Information would be welcome on the steps being taken to adhere to the State party's nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement on climate change, as well as on any specific climate change measures designed to achieve full enjoyment of the rights enshrined by the Covenant and ensure that businesses addressed the environmental impact of their operations.

20. With regard to article 2 (1) of the Covenant, on maximum available resources, the Committee would like to receive detailed disaggregated data on allocations relevant to the rights enshrined by the Covenant, notably those pertaining to social security, housing, food, water and sanitation, health and education.

21. She would also like to receive information, supported by data, on best practices adopted by the State party during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to ensure full enjoyment of the Covenant rights, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized in society. Given the urgent need for funding and international cooperation to help the post-COVID-19 recovery effort, was the State party considering increasing the amount of gross national income earmarked for official development assistance from 0.33 to 0.7 per cent, as agreed internationally?

22. Although the State party had taken some steps to combat corruption, there were concerns that the practice persisted in the public sector, particularly in procurement and health services. There was also a lack of information about sentences handed down to those involved in corruption. Meanwhile, the informal economy had also grown. Up-to-date information about those areas would be gratefully received.

The meeting was suspended at 3.30 p.m. and resumed at 3.40 p.m.

23. **A representative of Lithuania** said that census statistics gathered in 2011 and 2021 showed that, over that period, the Polish minority had dropped from 6.58 to 6.53 per cent of the national population, the Russian minority from 5.81 to 5.02 per cent and the Belarusian minority from 1.11 to 1 per cent. One reason for the decrease was that not all census respondents had indicated their ethnicity. Other factors included migration and voluntary assimilation.

24. With regard to the rights of national minorities, Lithuania had an extensive network of schools teaching in Russian, Polish and Belarusian, which allowed children from those communities to receive their education in their mother tongue. Legislation was now also in force enshrining the right to lodge requests or complaints with the public administration in a national minority language, and a bill on national minorities was being drawn up at the Ministry of Justice. The right of national minorities to practise their religion was also fully assured, and children from those communities could choose religion as a subject at school. Legally, ethnic minorities and national minorities were covered by the term "national minority".

25. Integration of the Roma community had seen progress in recent years. The number of Roma children in preschool education had increased from 33 per cent to 50 per cent since 2015, and numbers in secondary education had also increased markedly. Teachers and social workers were provided with training to prevent discrimination against the community.

26. The housing conditions of the Roma community had also seen significant progress over the previous 10 years, with 87 per cent of homes now having access to a bath, toilet and hot water, and 100 per cent having electricity. Furthermore, 96 per cent of Roma now had health insurance coverage, up from 76 per cent 10 years previously. Unemployment among members of the Roma community had decreased from 33 per cent to 27 per cent, and employment levels among younger age groups showed positive signs, with 42 per cent of persons aged between 20 and 28 years currently in work. The Government reached out to employers to raise awareness of discrimination.

27. Negative stereotypes of the Roma community were slowly decreasing, helped in part by positive reporting in the media. For example, in 2020, 31 per cent of the general population had reported that they would not want to work with a Roma colleague, compared to 48 per cent in 2017. The country placed a strong emphasis on empowering the Roma community and had been commemorating European Roma Holocaust Memorial Day since 2019.

28. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson was empowered to investigate complaints of harassment or of direct or indirect discrimination on grounds such as faith, religion or sexual orientation, within public services, education and the workplace. A plan for action to reduce inequality had been adopted for the period up to 2030, which tackled discrimination of various kinds by means of awareness-raising measures, training for public-sector workers and further improvements in legal protection. In addition, the Action Plan to Promote Non-Discrimination was still being implemented.

29. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour was cooperating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on projects to encourage women to play a greater part in political life, including in elected office.

30. The Ministry was also looking at ways of preventing domestic violence and providing more support to victims, particularly women with disabilities, in close cooperation with specialized centres. It planned to conduct activities for persons with disabilities to raise their awareness of domestic violence and the services available.

31. **A representative of Lithuania** said that lawyers were expected to attend regular in-service training. The Lithuanian Bar Association offered more than 50 seminars each year, including on human rights and the protection and defence of individual rights. As to compulsory membership of the Bar Association, the Government was not aware of any failure to comply with international standards. Certain legal services could be provided only by lawyers who were members of the Bar, while others, such as legal advice or the preparation of legal documents, could be provided by any suitably qualified individual.

32. With regard to the rights of LGBTQ persons, the bill on civil union had now completed the parliamentary committee stages and was expected to move forward. It was an important piece of legislation not only for same-sex couples but also for heterosexual couples, for whom there was currently no alternative to marriage. The Ministry of Justice was considering drafting a bill on a simplified procedure allowing individuals to change their registered gender. The Criminal Code established criminal liability for both discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender identity or sexual orientation.

33. In April 2022, the Ministry of Justice had made changes to the regulations governing the allocation of court cases to permit a better distribution of the workload and help prevent corruption.

34. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the measures taken by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour to raise incomes in the groups most affected by poverty were expected to also narrow the gap between men and women, as well as reduce differences between urban and rural areas.

35. In terms of correcting poverty disparities, the most important measure had been to increase the social benefit bases used to determine the allowances to be paid. Those basic rates had gone up twice in 2022. The social assistance pension base used to calculate benefits for persons with disabilities and for pensioners without the required social insurance contributions – in many cases women who had cared for family members – had also been increased.

36. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that, in terms of the treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers, his Government had at times been forced to choose between bad decisions and worse ones. Ukrainian nationals fleeing the war had been welcomed and many of them had found shelter with ordinary individuals. Persons fleeing the dictatorship in Belarus had also been accepted.

37. However, the situation with regard to other asylum-seekers arriving from Belarus had amounted to a weaponization of immigration. In many cases, they had obtained visas for Belarus, arrived by air and then made their way to the Lithuanian border. In video footage he had seen, Belarusian officials had then attempted to push them across into Lithuania. To accept entry in that manner could have encouraged others to try to enter, possibly resulting in the kind of deadly situation that could still be observed in the Mediterranean. The alternative had been to adopt a policy of turning away anyone attempting to enter in an irregular manner. Nevertheless, those who had crossed the border, particularly vulnerable

persons, women and children, had been duly taken care of by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Ultimately, 90 per cent of those pushed into Lithuania from Belarus had subsequently left, as their goal had been to settle elsewhere in the European Union.

38. **A representative of Lithuania** said that it had been thanks to the strength of the country's national institutions and support from its international allies and NGOs that Lithuania had come through the attempt by a third country to overwhelm its asylum and reception systems. It had been able to adapt its procedures, and the asylum system was now functioning properly and in accordance with the State's obligations under international law.

39. Asylum applications were considered on a case-by-case basis, asylum-seekers had access to legal aid, asylum procedures had been drafted into law, accommodation was constantly being improved and access to essentials such as water, food, schooling and medical and social services was guaranteed. Applications from members of vulnerable groups were given priority, and families, minors and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons were placed in separate accommodation. Unaccompanied minors were covered by health insurance, and representatives of the child rights protection system were always involved in any action concerning them.

40. The placing of foreign nationals in temporary accommodation, with restrictions on the right to freedom of movement in Lithuania, did not amount to detention, because they were not held in isolation. The majority of foreign nationals already had the right to freedom of movement and a considerable number had obtained work.

41. Amendments to the legislation governing the legal status of aliens, aiming to facilitate asylum applications, were due to be debated in the forthcoming session of the Seimas.

42. **A representative of Lithuania** said that, in order to attain its current climate change goals, Lithuania was updating its national energy and climate action plans. The Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Energy had set up a decarbonization working group for each of the five economic sectors, namely, agriculture and forestry, energy, industry, transport and waste, or the circular economy, where representatives of business, science and NGOs could debate suggestions for greenhouse gas reduction measures. More than 500 proposals for decarbonization measures had been received, and an evaluation of the investment needs and the potential impact on employment, air pollution and social indicators was under way. In 2021, the Ministry of the Environment had proposed measures for marginalized or poor groups funded by the Climate Change Programme to encourage the use of solar energy to meet their electricity needs or to help in the replacement of fossil fuel heating. In addition, a carbon-based vehicle registration tax had been introduced, along with financial support for the purchase of low-carbon vehicles or bicycles, public transport tickets and car-sharing. Existing policy measures were focused mainly on three factors affecting household energy efficiency, namely, buildings, technological equipment and appliances and consumer behaviour.

43. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that the Government had originally set a target of 50 per cent green energy production by 2030 but the Ministry of Energy now believed it would be possible to attain between 90 and 100 per cent by that date.

44. **The Chair** said that he found the concept of "illegal immigration" problematic. The migrants who were dying in the Mediterranean were well aware of the risk but were impelled to try their luck by their dire living conditions. Had the requirement to seek international cooperation under article 2 of the Covenant been duly met, such tragedies could be avoided.

45. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he would appreciate the delegation's analysis of the outstanding problems and challenges faced by the State party in bringing its legislation fully into line with the Covenant. He would also like to hear of any progress made in implementing reforms necessitated by rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, for example the modification of official documents in order to accommodate rulings relating to issues such as gender identity.

46. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that, in terms of best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, apart from the provision of additional support to the most needy, the most successful measure had been to continue to pay employees' wages even when there had been no work to do. The result had been that, once restrictions had been lifted, the economy had

taken off very quickly; indeed, Lithuania had seen the second-fastest recovery in the European Union. Another extremely important measure had been to give financial support to parents who had been obliged to stay at home to look after school-age children .

47. **A representative of Lithuania** said that, during the pandemic, support had been provided to nearly everyone in the country, including through payments for reduced working hours and other subsidies for employed and self-employed persons. In addition, in order to reduce poverty, or at least not to increase it, job-seekers' allowances had been paid to all persons who were unemployed during the pandemic. Once the restrictions had been lifted, support had continued for the self-employed and had also been provided to those sectors, such as hotels and the hospitality industry, that had been closed for the longest period and needed more time for recovery.

48. **A representative of Lithuania** said that further changes in the law were still needed in order to bring provisions on equal opportunities into line with the Covenant. In addition, new grounds for discrimination needed to be defined in law. Lastly, the mandate of the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson needed to be duly enshrined in the legislation in order to properly empower it to take part in relevant meetings or suggest that the Seimas should seek a ruling by the Constitutional Court, for example.

49. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the necessary steps to implement European Court of Human Rights opinions, including those relating to gender identity, were under consideration. Meanwhile, one recent successful change in the law had given persons serving a life sentence in prison the right to apply for re-evaluation of their term of imprisonment.

50. **A representative of Lithuania** said that her Government was stepping up its development cooperation activities with the aim of attaining its target ratio of official development assistance to gross national income of 0.33 per cent by 2030. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lithuania had been providing assistance on a bilateral and multilateral basis since early 2020. It had provided more than 1.5 million vaccine doses through the COVAX mechanism and 1.12 million on a bilateral basis. More than €57 million had been allocated in humanitarian and financial aid to Ukraine in 2022.

51. **Mr. Adilov** (Country Task Force) asked whether the provisions of article 6 of the Covenant, on the right to freely choose one's occupation, applied to all citizens of the State party. He said that the State party appeared to apply certain limitations to the choice of profession for persons deprived of their liberty; in particular, they were unable to work online as they were banned from using the Internet.

52. He would appreciate the delegation's explanation of the significant difference in the employment rates of persons with and without disabilities in the labour market, as well as any information it could provide on the measures being taken to reduce the gap, including statistics for 2021 to 2022.

53. He would like to know what measures the State party had taken to ensure that migrant workers had access to fair and favourable working conditions without discrimination. He also wondered what steps had been taken to address the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers. He understood that the State party was preparing a new strategy document on the integration of migrants; could the delegation say when it would be ready and what specific actions it included?

54. He would like to know what results the 2020–2022 plan of action to combat trafficking in persons had achieved and what measures had been taken to inform migrant workers of their rights, with a view to reducing labour exploitation and trafficking for labour purposes.

55. He would appreciate information on measures taken to guarantee the right to form and join trade unions, the right to collective bargaining and the right to strike by migrant workers. From the information available, it appeared that the right to strike was not recognized in practice if there was no collective agreement between the union and the employer; he would therefore welcome clarification as to whether the Law on Trade Unions was in compliance with international legal standards in that regard.

56. He wished to receive statistics for 2022 on the number of people and categories of citizens receiving social financial support. He would also be interested to know what

measures were taken to inform the public about the benefits available, given that in many cases individuals reportedly encountered various obstacles to claiming benefits. He would also like to know the outcome of the revision of the Law on Unemployment Social Insurance in 2022.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

57. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the law prohibited persons who had a criminal record for serious or premeditated offences from working in legal professions. The European Court of Human Rights had found those provisions to be compliant with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

58. Persons held in open penitentiary facilities had unlimited access to the Internet, whereas those in semi-open or closed prisons were limited to specific websites that would support their rehabilitation. The Lithuanian Prison Service had drawn up a list of 108 websites that must be made available to prisoners, which included websites hosted by the State, the United Nations and the European Union.

59. **A representative of Lithuania** said that, in 2022, the Government had adopted the Law on Employment, with a focus on integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market. Persons with disabilities were eligible for wage subsidies, and funding was available to help employers make workplace accommodations and hire assistants. Mentoring support was also available for persons with disabilities in employment, and the Government was conducting awareness-raising campaigns for employers. The Employment Service was working with NGOs, municipal authorities and organizations of persons with disabilities to overcome the challenges identified. Since 2018, the number of persons with disabilities in employment had increased by 5 per cent. In 2022, more than 13,000 persons with disabilities had registered with the employment services; more than half of them had entered employment or self-employment. The Employment Service also provided professional rehabilitation, funded by the State and the European Union, for persons with disabilities who were seeking work, with a success rate of more than 65 per cent.

60. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, all employees had been entitled to the same social security benefits, regardless of their nationality. In 2022, the Government had adopted a plan to facilitate the integration of foreign nationals, which included measures regarding data collection, legislative amendments, service improvements and training for persons who worked with migrants.

61. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the second action plan on trafficking in persons, covering the period 2020–2022, contained 48 measures for coordinating national and international activities across the areas of cooperation, prevention, assistance for victims and professional development for specialists. That plan was currently being implemented, and the third action plan would be drafted in March 2023. In 2021, the Ministry had conducted 7 pretrial investigations, investigated 19 criminal cases and charged 10 individuals in relation to trafficking in persons. It provided continuous training to trafficking specialists and ensured that victims were always interviewed by a specialist of the same gender as them. The Ministry had also launched a mobile application to raise awareness of trafficking in persons among teachers and students.

62. **A representative of Lithuania** said that two anti-trafficking pilot groups had been established within the State Labour Inspectorate. Since 2020, the groups had identified seven cases of suspected exploitation, which it had referred to the police. To prevent trafficking in persons, information was provided to migrants in Ukrainian at migration centres and in Russian, Ukrainian and English on the website of the Inspectorate.

63. **A representative of Lithuania** said that consultants worked with schools to provide prevention training on trafficking in persons for teachers and students. Materials, such as lesson plans, had also been developed for use by teachers.

64. **A representative of Lithuania** said that migrant workers had the same rights as Lithuanian citizens, including the right to join trade unions, sign collective agreements and take strike action. The State Labour Inspectorate oversaw compliance by employers with the relevant labour laws.

65. Two routes were available for the resolution of labour disputes. Disputes could be brought before the labour dispute commissions within the Inspectorate, and the party found to have broken the law would be instructed to pay up to €3,000 to the injured party. Alternatively, if no collective agreement could be reached, the case could be brought before a labour arbitration board, following which the workers could take strike action if the dispute remained unresolved.

66. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that the existence of a collective agreement was not a prerequisite for strike action.

67. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the Government had taken steps in recent years to improve the social safety net, including by simplifying the eligibility conditions, which had had a positive impact on poverty rates. A significant increase to the heating allowance had also been made to offset rising energy costs. Around 5.5 per cent of the population received the heating allowance, and 2.3 per cent received other social benefits.

68. In 2022, a study had been conducted to assess the minimum income system and produce recommendations. In light of the findings, amendments would be made to ensure the adequacy and accessibility of social support, including by combining certain forms of social benefits and tackling individual reasons for not taking up the support available.

69. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the Law on State Pensions had been amended to provide for a more rapid increase in the pension allowance. In 2022, the average State pension for individuals with the required social insurance record had been increased to €510 per month. Since the start of 2023, it had been raised by a further 12 per cent. A new social benefit for unmarried persons with disabilities and unmarried persons of pension age had also been introduced, from which some 220,000 individuals had benefited in 2022. While poverty remained a challenge in the country, the poverty gap among the elderly was the lowest of all age groups.

70. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the unemployment social insurance provision had remained unchanged throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount of unemployment benefit to which individuals were entitled increased each year, as it was tied in part to the minimum wage. Between 2019 and 2022, the average unemployment benefit had increased from around €326 per month to around €443 per month. The average duration for which a person received unemployment benefits was 4.8 months.

71. **Mr. Šilinskas** (Lithuania) said that the unemployment benefit was quite generous, being only €100 less per month than the minimum wage over the first three months. The amount to which individuals were entitled decreased after that period, however, which led to a lower overall average.

72. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wished to know whether the language barrier issues faced in securing employment for Belarusian migrants had been overcome. He also wondered whether women had the right to transparency regarding the salaries paid to male employees of an equivalent level at the same company. In addition, it would be useful to learn what had been the main impact of the work of the State Labour Inspectorate and which entity was responsible for handling cases of sexual harassment and other forms of harassment in the workplace. He would welcome information on the actions envisaged for the third action plan on trafficking in persons with a view to improving victim support.

73. With regard to social security, he wished to know whether individuals on low pensions and individuals unable to find employment after an extended period were entitled to the basic social benefits calculated according to minimum consumption needs and, if so, how many such persons had received that benefit. As the State pension system did not automatically cover self-employed workers, including those in the platform economy, he wondered how the Government ensured that such workers had adequate health insurance and pensions. He also asked whether workers in the transportation sector were considered self-employed.

74. **Ms. Saran** said that, even where the State party's laws had been found to be compliant with European law, it was the Committee's role to assess whether those same laws aligned with the Covenant. She would welcome information on the steps taken to increase the availability of statistics on the impact of government measures. With regard to occupational health and safety in particular, it would be useful to receive data on the number of labour

inspections performed, complaints received and sanctions imposed, in addition to information regarding the reported increase in occupational accidents since 2021. She wondered whether there had been any reprisals against migrants for exercising their right to work and what had been the impact of legislation to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

75. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to know what was being done to reduce the especially high rate of poverty among persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, and whether any social benefits were available to offset the cost of managing a disability. She wondered whether the challenges facing the social security system were the result of a lack of resources and, if so, whether measures had been considered to improve wealth distribution.

76. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken**, commending the State party for its efforts to assist migrants and migrant workers and bring their rights into step with those of Lithuanian citizens, said that he would like to know whether it had considered acceding to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

77. He wondered whether the Government had implemented a multidimensional poverty eradication strategy that included measures tailored to specific vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, migrants, women and older persons, with a particular focus on employment. Any examples of such measures would be appreciated.

78. **The Chair** said that he would be interested to know how the State party handled situations in which its obligations under the Covenant ran counter to those it had assumed as a member State of the European Union.

79. **Mr. Šilinskis** (Lithuania) said that the lack of statistics provided was due to difficulties in extracting the required information from the systems in place. However, the Government had been implementing reforms to remedy such issues, including by replacing its statistics department with an institution known as the State Data Agency. It was possible that certain information provided in the report was no longer valid, as the Labour Code had been amended and the State Labour Inspectorate had assumed responsibility for addressing sexual harassment, which had led to an increase in the number of complaints filed.

80. **A representative of Lithuania** said that companies with more than 20 employees were required to ensure that their remuneration systems were designed in a way that prevented discrimination on the grounds of gender or any other factor. They were also obliged to provide staff representatives with data on average wages, broken down by role and gender. The State Social Insurance Fund Board published information on the wages paid to men and women in all companies employing more than eight people, and it was a requirement for salary ranges to be specified in job advertisements. In order to identify the causes of the gender pay gap, the State Labour Inspectorate had carried out targeted inspections focusing on remuneration systems and measures implementing equal opportunities policies.

81. The Psychological Violence Prevention Unit had been established by the Inspectorate and was staffed by eight employees who were responsible for registering and investigating complaints concerning workplace violence and harassment, consulting with employers and employees to prepare recommendations and advice and cooperating with social partners to ensure the implementation of legislation designed to tackle psychological violence at work.

82. **Mr. Šilinskis** (Lithuania) said that the issue of platform workers had recently been discussed at the level of the European Union, and its proposed directive should improve their situation. Platform workers in Lithuania had reported an improvement in their working conditions, and statistics from the State Tax Inspectorate showed that increasing numbers were opting to declare their income and pay social security contributions. It had been suggested that many platform workers who were unwilling to declare their income had switched to the taxi sector, which, in contrast to the situation in Western Europe, offered worse conditions than platform work.

83. **A representative of Lithuania** said that platform workers in Lithuania could work on a self-employed basis or under an employment contract. Those who were self-employed and who paid social security contributions were entitled to sickness, maternity and pension benefits. However, they remained unable to access unemployment benefits, and discussions

were therefore under way to expand the scope of unemployment insurance to cover the self-employed.

84. **A representative of Lithuania** said that, in 2022, guaranteed minimum income benefits had averaged €116 per person, while the amount needed to cover minimum consumption needs had been calculated at €267. Although the Government was seeking to reduce the gap between the two amounts, a comprehensive and systematic approach was required to ensure the provision of adequate support while maintaining incentives to work. For example, while the monthly minimum wage and social security benefits remained low, there were limits on how much the guaranteed minimum income could be increased as it was important to ensure that it would not exceed the salary received by a worker paying social security contributions. Efforts were therefore focused on increasing the monthly minimum wage, which was predicted to exceed the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for the first time in 2023, and re-evaluating social security benefits, thereby paving the way for the guaranteed minimum income to be raised.

85. In 2022, a study into the adequacy of the minimum income had been conducted by external experts in order to analyse how the benefits system could more effectively contribute to reducing poverty. The Government was in the process of calculating the funds needed to implement the experts' recommendations and intended to focus its efforts on single parents and persons with disabilities.

86. Integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market was key for improving their situation as it afforded them a sustainable income. Nonetheless, they often required additional support and had therefore benefited from the increase in the social assistance pension base. Following the sharp rise in inflation in 2022, the benefits for persons with disabilities had been increased by 20 per cent, compared to 15 per cent for the rest of the population.

87. **A representative of Lithuania** said that a new model for assessing disability would be implemented from 2024 and would consider factors such as the needs of individuals and the obstacles to their independence, as well as their mobility, communication skills, daily activities and living environment. Upon receiving a diagnosis, persons with disabilities would be encouraged to decide for themselves, with support from local social assistance services, which action should be taken by the relevant institutions to ensure that adequate measures were in place to meet their needs and facilitate their full integration into society and the labour market.

88. While the demand for workers was extremely high in Lithuania, language barriers and differences in labour practices continued to prevent irregular migrants from entering the labour market. The Government had been working with NGOs to address those issues.

89. **A representative of Lithuania** said that the State Labour Inspectorate used a risk-calculation system to help it target its inspections at industries in which the probability of a workplace accident was highest. For example, 40 per cent of inspections were focused on the construction industry as it presented the highest risk, while other risk areas included manufacturing, transport and storage, and agriculture and forestry. Inspections could result in penalties, and the Inspectorate imposed compulsory measures to eliminate unsafe practices in 40 per cent of cases. It had been suggested that the increase in fatal workplace accidents in 2021 had been a consequence of the failure to refresh employees' safe work skills upon their return to the workplace after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government had sought to tackle the issue by creating books and games for children to teach them how to work safely and running campaigns on national television and radio, which had likely contributed to the drop in fatal accidents observed in 2022.

90. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate an update on the status of the amendment to the Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance to introduce non-transferrable parental leave to be taken by each parent or guardian. The delegation might comment on the impact of measures taken to ensure the equitable distribution of family responsibilities, as well as on how the Government assessed whether household duties were shared fairly, and whether it had conducted time-use surveys to ascertain the amount of time spent by men and women on paid employment, family and personal care activities. Furthermore, she would be grateful for information on the outcomes

of any assessments of the impact of the Complex Family Services Action Plan for 2016–2020.

91. Noting the increase in guardians for children in care, she wished to know how the State party worked to improve the qualifications of those guardians and monitored the care they provided to ensure that it was adapted to the specific needs of the child. She wondered whether targeted services were in place for young persons leaving care and how the authorities ensured that they were ready to live independently.

92. She would welcome information on the impact of the Action Plan for Domestic Violence Prevention and Assistance to Victims for 2017–2020 and of the expansion of the scope of secondary legal aid for victims of domestic violence, including the number of women who had received such aid. The delegation might also provide statistics on domestic violence, including cases reported to specialized assistance centres, and the budget allocated to those centres.

93. The Committee had received reports that social services were often ineffective in supporting vulnerable Roma families. She therefore wished to know of any measures taken to improve the quality of social services for such families by improving the skills of the social workers assisting them and ensuring that the services received sufficient funding.

94. It would be useful to hear about the impact of measures taken to reduce the number of homeless persons and ensure access to adequate housing and basic services and amenities. The delegation might also provide data pertaining to the housing situation of low-income families, broken down into categories including single-parent families, families with three or more children and families with children with disabilities.

95. In addition, the Committee was concerned by reports of failures to meet the health needs of certain groups, including older persons and persons with lower levels of education, and of disparities between rural and urban areas in access to emergency health services. She would therefore welcome information on how the 2017–2020 structural reform of the health-care system and the Health Strategy for 2014–2025 had contributed to the provision of accessible and affordable health care, including sexual health and reproductive services, for marginalized groups.

96. She wished to know what measures had been adopted to ensure that the COVID-19 pandemic did not prevent the population from enjoying the highest possible levels of physical and mental health. How had the State party guaranteed State-funded access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines? What steps had been taken to disseminate reliable information on COVID-19, particularly in relation to treatment and vaccination?

97. The delegation might specify the action that it had taken in response to the Committee’s recommendations in paragraph 20 of its previous concluding observations ([E/C.12/LTU/CO/2](#)) with a view to addressing widespread mental health problems. She would like to know whether the State party had made progress in implementing reforms in that area and whether specific measures had been adopted to prohibit the involuntary hospitalization of persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities and the imposition of non-consensual treatment or intrusive medical or surgical procedures on such persons.

98. Lastly, she wished to know how the State party was extending the coverage of HIV treatment; how it was working to meet, by 2030, the 95-95-95 targets for a fast-tracked response to HIV/AIDS; and what measures it was considering to expand services and ensure more effective fulfilment of the needs of persons in communities with a higher HIV burden.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.