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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-seventh session

Summary record of the 7th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-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

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The meeting was called to order at 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 ([E/C.12/GBR/7](#); [E/C.12/GBR/Q/7](#); [E/C.12/GBR/RQ/7](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the United Kingdom joined the meeting.*

2. **A representative of the United Kingdom**, introducing his country's seventh periodic report ([E/C.12/GBR/7](#)), said that the administrative structure of the United Kingdom, with 4 nations, 3 Crown dependencies and 14 British overseas territories, although complicated, gave it strength in its diversity. Different parts of the United Kingdom addressed matters differently. For example, the Scottish government, if re-elected, intended to incorporate the provisions of international treaties into its legislation and bring a Human Rights Bill before the Scottish Parliament, but that was not the case in other parts of the country.

3. There were particular challenges in Northern Ireland but, with the restoration of its political institutions in February 2024, new initiatives representing an investment of £25 million had been introduced to support work in areas such as early childhood education and care, the provision of free menstrual hygiene products and a strategy to end violence against women and girls.

4. Since the United Kingdom had submitted its replies to the Committee's list of issues, there had been a change of national Government with a resulting adjustment of priorities. Proposals to get people back into work and create an inclusive labour market were backed by £240 million in investment, and the Employment Rights Bill, put before Parliament in October 2024, was aimed at creating better conditions for workers and improving industrial relations. In the Crown dependency of Guernsey, recent legislation prohibited discrimination on grounds including race, disability and sexual orientation. In England, the Core20PLUS5 approach was aimed at reducing health inequalities among the most deprived 20 per cent of the population by halving the gap in healthy life expectancy between the richest and poorest regions, which had stood at 10.8 years for women in 2020. The Mental Health Bill, currently under parliamentary consideration, was intended to improve care for autistic people and people with learning disabilities, and reduce their unnecessary detention. With the goal of eradicating child poverty, the Scottish Government had introduced payments for some families to help them provide their children with healthy food and other supplies. The Welsh government had made school meals free to all primary-aged children in State schools.

5. The United Kingdom had ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the principles of which underpinned its celebration of the diversity of cultural expression and identity across the nations. It had also extended the Paris Agreement on climate change to the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey, each of which had set a range of environmental targets that contributed to the country's nationally determined contribution. The Government was thus committed to upholding the rights set out in the Covenant and the delegation looked forward to learning and engaging openly and constructively with the Committee members.

6. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Rapporteur) said that, although there was alignment between the State party's 1998 Human Rights Act and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights), he understood that it was not possible to invoke the Covenant provisions directly in the State party's domestic courts. The Committee would welcome clarification of how the State party, with its complex administrative structure, could ensure uniform application of the Covenant, and particularly whether the Covenant was applicable in Anguilla and Northern Ireland. It would also like to ascertain whether the State party was considering withdrawing the reservations it had deposited at the time of its ratification of the Covenant, according to which the territorial application of the Covenant varied considerably. It would be useful to learn

when it planned to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant, on which point it seemed unconvinced of the benefits.

7. The Committee would welcome clarification as to whether the State party was considering adopting a legal framework requiring businesses to exercise human rights due diligence, in line with its general comment No. 24 (2017). It wished to learn when further amendments would be made to the national action plan on business and human rights, last updated in 2016, which a parliamentary committee had found to be modest in scope and lacking in terms of measurable objectives. Consideration might usefully be given to introducing key performance indicators for specific sectors such as finance, retail, construction and health.

8. The Committee would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the findings highlighted by the Climate Change Committee in its 2024 progress report to Parliament, according to which the State party had credible plans for only one third of the emissions reductions needed to achieve the 2030 target set as its nationally determined contribution. It would like to hear what the State party was doing in response to the actions suggested by that committee, particularly in respect of home decarbonization and adaptation and how it would ensure that the Paris Agreement had full coverage and effect throughout its territory.

9. Noting that fiscal policy could have a diminishing effect on resources and their maximum allocation required under the Covenant, he said that he would be interested to learn how the State party was endeavouring to eliminate the negative impacts of the tax system on vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as low-income households and persons with disabilities. He would welcome an assessment of how the country's high level of public debt was affecting social budget programmes and how that debt was being managed to sustain basic public service investment and maintenance. Reports indicated that tax evasion and cross-border tax avoidance persisted, especially in the overseas territories and Crown dependencies, with the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda sitting at the top of the Corporate Tax Haven Index; what was the State party doing to tackle that situation?

10. Recognizing the State party's efforts to address regional disparity and inequality, he said he would appreciate the delegation's assessment of the State party's implementation of the policy laid out in the 2022 policy paper entitled "Levelling Up the United Kingdom". He would also like to know whether the United Kingdom Shared Prosperity Fund fully replaced the grants previously received under the European Structural and Investment Funds and was effective in addressing disparities.

11. Referring to one of the recommendations made in the Committee's previous concluding observations (E/C.12/GBR/CO/6, para. 19), he said that a comprehensive assessment of the cumulative impact of the State party's 2010–2019 and 2021–2024 austerity programmes would be welcome, especially with regard to local government funding, health, education and social housing.

12. The Committee would like to know whether the State party was considering reinstating overseas development assistance, currently set at 0.5 per cent of gross national income as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, at its previous level of 0.7 per cent. The delegation might also respond to allegations that funds provided by the State party had been used in schools run on a for-profit basis. In view of reports received that United Kingdom development assistance had a negative impact on key sectors, such as health and education, that were closely tied to human rights, the State party might consider integrating human rights due diligence or human rights impact assessment into the planning and implementation of such assistance programmes in the future.

13. The Committee was concerned that non-discrimination provisions were scattered across legislation, and the Equality Act of 2010 did not appear to cover Northern Ireland. It would like to know if any such legislation applied to the Crown dependencies and overseas territories and why the provisions in the Equality Act requiring authorities to consider the impact of their decisions on reducing inequalities of outcome resulting from socioeconomic disadvantage had not come into force in all jurisdictions. While the State party had made good progress towards gender equality on the whole, women still experienced violence, underrepresentation and barriers to employment, particularly in Northern Ireland, the overseas territories and the Crown dependencies, where. The delegation might usefully

comment on that situation, as well as on the media reports of sexual exploitation of young girls and women by gangs in certain places, indicating what had been done to address that issue.

14. The Committee had received reports of the discriminatory effects of some recent legislation, such as the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, the Illegal Migration Act 2023 and the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024, which had prevented migrants in an irregular situation and asylum-seekers from benefiting from social protection. What was the State party doing to address that situation?

15. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the national Government was of the view that, given the complexity of the administrative structure of the United Kingdom, its adoption and implementation of the Human Rights Act and the fact that there was no obligation under the Covenant for States parties to incorporate its provisions into domestic law, there would be no value in doing so. Successive Governments had considered the possibility of ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant but had found that, where optional protocols to other treaties had been ratified, they had brought little benefit to the population beyond the protection that was already available.

16. The devolved nature of the State party's administrative structure was very important, as it allowed the different nations to decide on their own destiny and policy choices, while still retaining responsibility for compliance with international obligations at the national level. Some of the reservations initially made in respect of the Covenant were no longer valid, as the Solomon Islands and Tuvalu had acquired sovereign status in the meantime.

17. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, if the Scottish government was re-elected, and legislation was then adopted to incorporate the Covenant rights into the Scottish legal framework, public service providers would have duties, such as the progressive realization of those rights, and minimum core obligations. Duty bearers, courts and tribunals would also be empowered to read, apply and interpret Covenant rights in line with international human rights law and the Committee's general comments, recommendations and concluding observations. The Scottish government would seek to deliver a clear and workable law; to that end it would further strengthen proposals for the incorporation and justiciability of Covenant rights.

18. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Prime Minister had recently announced the State party's 2035 nationally determined contribution headline target, which covered all sectors, greenhouse gases and categories and committed it to reducing emissions by at least 81 per cent compared to 1990 levels by 2035. The figure was in line with the 1.5 degree target of the Paris Agreement and the recommendations of the Climate Change Committee, and covered all four nations, the three Crown dependencies and the overseas territory of Gibraltar; the authorities of the other overseas territories could, if they so decided, request its extension to their lands.

19. Under its Warm Homes Plan, the Government had committed an initial sum of £3.4 billion over three years to household heat decarbonization and energy efficiency projects. Its aim, in addition to decarbonization, was to cut utilities bills through investment in technologies such as solar panels and properly installed insulation; part of the sum allocated would be used to support fuel poverty schemes.

20. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government recognized that, in the context of a changing climate, its action on climate mitigation must be underpinned by effective action on climate adaptation. Through the National Adaptation Programme, it was taking comprehensive action on all 61 risks highlighted in the climate change risk assessment produced by the Adaptation Committee of the Climate Change Committee. For example, on flooding, it had announced £2.6 million in investment over two years, which would help protect more than 52,000 properties, and £140 million to boost flood defences.

21. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government ensured that working people were largely protected from recent tax increases. Public spending and tax paid by households in the United Kingdom continued to be highly redistributive. In the period from 2025 to 2026, for instance, 60 per cent of all households, would, on the whole, receive

more in public spending than they contributed in tax. On average, households in the lowest income decile would receive four times as much in public spending as they paid in tax.

22. A new fiscal rule had been introduced to reduce net financial debt as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) and to keep debt on a sustainable path while protecting investment in public services. Significant additional day-to-day funding had been set aside for public services. Day-to-day departmental spending would now grow at an average of 3.3 per cent in real terms in 2025 and 2026, and over the entire parliamentary term it would grow at an average of 2.1 per cent a year. The increased spending included an additional £25 billion for health services and an additional £2.3 billion for education.

23. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that Jersey, like the other Crown dependencies, had demonstrated its long-standing commitment to global standards on transparency and combating harmful tax practices. It adhered to the Standard for Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information in Tax Matters and was an active participant in global efforts to tackle tax evasion.

24. Companies registered in Jersey were required to prove that they were engaged in commercial activity. As a result, entities without real operations were prevented from artificially reporting profits, and the Jersey authorities could notify their counterparts elsewhere of any failure to provide the required proof. A comprehensive register of beneficial company owners, in addition to a public-facing register of significant persons, was managed by Jersey financial services regulator. The authorities thus had access to reliable information that they readily shared. According to a July 2024 report of the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL), the efforts of Jersey to prevent financial crime were among the most effective of those of any of the jurisdictions that MONEYVAL had evaluated.

25. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the rights enshrined in the Covenant had been extended to all British overseas territories but Anguilla, which nonetheless had no objection to such an extension. Work on the extension of those rights, which was under way, had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. His country kept its reservations to international human rights instruments under close review. The reservations to the Covenant provisions on social security would be discussed in detail with the authorities of the territories concerned.

26. Tackling illicit finance had been made an immediate priority by the new Government. The Foreign Secretary had, for example, launched a campaign to combat illicit finance and was taking up the issue of public registers of beneficial ownership, which were an effective means of combating money-laundering, sanctions and tax evasion and other such activities. Fully public registers, which the Government expected all the territories to establish, were already being maintained in Montserrat and Gibraltar. Saint Helena and the Falkland Islands had committed to introducing them by April 2025. Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands and Turks and Caicos had, for their part, committed to maintaining registers of beneficial ownership accessible to those with a legitimate interest.

27. Businesses in the United Kingdom were expected, in line with relevant international guidelines and principles, to undertake human rights due diligence in respect of their operations and global supply chains. A national baseline assessment of his country's efforts to implement the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights was set to take place later in the year. The results of the assessment would inform the Government's approach to tackling business-related human rights abuses. Relevant developments at the international level, including the entry into force of a European directive on corporate sustainability due diligence, were kept under review.

28. The Government's international development mission was to help create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. Development spending was used to achieve better development outcomes with a strong focus on reducing poverty and accelerating progress towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Two fiscal conditions – an end to borrowing for day-to-day spending and a fall in underlying debt levels – would have to be met before spending on overseas development assistance could be brought back to its previous level of 0.7 per cent of gross national income. The primary aim of overseas development assistance for education programmes was to ensure that as many children as

possible, particularly the most marginalized, had access to high-quality education. To that end, partner Governments had received assistance to improve regulation of non-State-run schools. Strong policies were in place to monitor the impact of development assistance. Organizations working in partnership with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office were expected to adhere to the highest standards.

29. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government had made plans to bring section 14 of the Equality Act, under which intersectional or dual discrimination would be prohibited, into force. In respect of gender equality in particular, progress, as the Committee had noted, had indeed been made. There had, for example, been significant increases in the political representation of women and in their representation in positions of leadership, including on corporate boards, in the private sector. Reporting on the gender pay gap, which had narrowed in recent years, had been mandatory for years, and the Government had introduced a bill that, when it was made law, would require employers to publish action plans on how they intended to close the gap altogether.

30. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, although no agreement on an equality bill had been reached in Northern Ireland, a number of statutes had been adopted in recent decades, and as a result there were legal protections from discrimination on grounds of age, disability, race, religion and political opinion, sex and sexual orientation.

31. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that a £10 million action plan had been developed to facilitate a review of the closed cases of the victims of grooming gangs, whose suffering had been ignored for too long. The development of the plan was part of the Government's mission to halt violence against women and girls, make the victims of such violence whole and ensure that more perpetrators ended up behind bars. In addition to the action plan, national backing for locally led inquiries, for which £5 million had been set aside, would help ensure that victims had access to justice. A national audit, set to begin shortly, would be undertaken to uncover the scale and drivers of the sexual exploitation of children.

32. In January 2025, the Government had introduced a bill that provided for the repeal of the Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act 2024. In 2024, shortly after taking power, the Government had also removed retrospective elements of the Illegal Migration Act 2023. Under the Nationality and Borders Act 2022, which remained in place, all applications for asylum were considered on their individual merits. Individual assessments were made against the backdrop of relevant case law and the latest available information on the applicant's country of origin. A decision to reject an application could be challenged. In short, the new Government was determined to restore order to the asylum system. It had the resources it needed to clear the backlog of applications and prevent the build-up of a new backlog.

33. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Shared Prosperity Fund was a successor to the European Union structural funds, not a direct replacement thereof. Annual spending had been ramped up, and as a result the amounts drawn on the Fund were now roughly equal to the average annual disbursement of European structural funds.

34. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, one of the specific objectives of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act of 2018, which had been adopted to address the underrepresentation of women in public life, was to ensure that half the non-executive members of public boards were women. By December 2022, 68 per cent of the listed public authorities in Scotland had achieved that objective. Forty-six per cent of the Members of the Scottish parliament were women; currently, more than a third of local councillors were women, up from 29 per cent before the 2022 elections.

35. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that the status of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was at risk of being downgraded by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. The Scottish approach to the transposition into local law of international human rights instruments was commendable, and he wondered why the State party as a whole did not take a similar approach.

36. It would be interesting to learn whether the State party intended to withdraw its outdated reservations to the Covenant, what debt-to-GDP ratio the Government was aiming

for and whether, like Jersey, the State party intended to adhere to the Standard for Automatic Exchange of Financial Account Information in Tax Matters. It would be useful to learn, too, how often the conditions for bringing overseas development assistance back up to its previous level would be assessed.

37. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what measures the Government was taking to give full legal effect to the Covenant and ensure that the victims of violations of rights enshrined therein had access to effective legal remedies. She wished to know, too, whether progress had been made towards the drafting of bills of rights in Wales and Northern Ireland.

38. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wondered whether the State party was exploring opportunities to make its efforts to transition to a green economy socially and economically beneficial.

39. **Mr. Palmisano** asked whether the State party intended to ratify the European Social Charter (Revised) and, if not, whether the delegation could point to other evidence of a greater willingness on the part of the State party to be bound by international and regional monitoring instruments for the protection of economic and social rights.

40. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, as historic concerns about its funding had been addressed, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission had been reaccredited with category A status in 2023. Careful consideration was being given to the recommendations made in the context of a baseline budget review for the Commission in 2024.

41. One of the benefits of devolution was that different parts of the United Kingdom could – as Scotland was doing in incorporating the Covenant into its legal order – take different approaches. Previous Governments had made efforts to incorporate Covenant rights into the legal system, but since the country as a whole had no codified constitution or constitutional court, those efforts had not borne fruit. A combination of policies and legislation made it possible for his country to fulfil its obligations under the Covenant.

42. In all likelihood, it had simply never been thought necessary to withdraw the reservations that concerned territories for which the United Kingdom was no longer responsible. No plans had been made to ratify the European Social Charter (Revised).

43. A pledge to adopt a bill of rights for Northern Ireland had indeed been made. The consensus needed to adopt such a bill had never been reached, however.

44. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that one of the aims of efforts to incorporate Covenant rights in the Scottish legal order was to make it possible for individuals and organizations affected by violations of those rights to bring or intervene in proceedings in courts or tribunals. The changes would maximize the ability of bodies such as the Office of the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to contribute to embedding a human rights culture across public services in Scotland.

45. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that an advisory committee oversaw ongoing efforts to incorporate the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women into the Welsh legal order. That work, which was complex, had not previously been attempted in Wales. Recommendations involving both legislative and non-legislative options for incorporation would ultimately be made.

46. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the debt-to-GDP ratio was forecast to fall by 2029/30. Public debt was expected to be equivalent to 85 per cent of GDP over the next five years. Fiscal tests to determine whether the conditions for the restoration of overseas development assistance funding had been met were conducted annually.

47. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the transition to a net zero economy would be an excellent opportunity for jobs and growth. The Warm Homes Plan, for example, would help people save money on energy bills while transforming the country's ageing housing stock into comfortable, low-carbon homes. More than half of the £3.4 billion that had been set aside to support action during the Plan's first three years would go towards alleviating household energy insecurity.

48. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that an assessment of the risks that climate change posed to the health and social care sector, environmental services, the availability of food and water and working conditions had informed the development of the National Adaptation Programme. The next such risk assessment, planned for 2026, would build on efforts to ensure that the economic and social benefits of the transition to carbon neutrality were maximized. Efforts were being made to gain a better understanding of where and by whom the impact of adaptation measures would be felt most acutely. There was also a closer focus on the societal and behavioural barriers to the transition.

49. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Government was working with local authorities on a new cross-government strategy to reduce the levels of homelessness in England, which were far too high.

50. In October 2024, the Government had unveiled plans to invest an additional £233 million over the next financial year in services for homeless persons. It was also committed to increasing the national housing stock, having undertaken to build 1.5 million new homes, including social and affordable housing. Action was likewise being taken to address some of the root causes of homelessness in the United Kingdom by abolishing “no-fault” evictions, preventing the exploitation and discrimination of renters in the private market and empowering renters to challenge unreasonable rent increases.

51. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, in 2024, the Government had announced a cross-government approach to tackling violence against women and girls as part of its pledge to halve cases of such violence within the next decade.

52. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Isle of Man government considered the reservation in respect of article 7 (a) (i) of the Covenant regarding the provision of equal pay to men and women for equal work in the private sector to be obsolete and would not object to its withdrawal.

53. **Ms. Lee** said that the Committee had received information to the effect that, despite the measures taken by the State party to promote access to employment for ethnic minorities, women, young people and persons with disabilities, persons belonging to those groups were still more likely to be unemployed or to be in low-paid jobs. It would be useful to know whether the State party had analysed the underlying causes of the high unemployment rates and income disparities among those groups and how it intended to help more of their members to gain access to decent work.

54. According to the 2022 report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Poverty on in-work poverty, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, in-work poverty rates, driven by low pay and job insecurity, had been on the rise, despite the overall increase in employment levels. The Committee had been informed that, despite the fact that the national minimum wage and the national living wage had increased, they remained insufficient to ensure an adequate standard of living for workers, as they failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living in the State party. The Committee welcomed the State party’s intention to set the minimum living wage for 2025 at a level not below two thirds of the median salary and to take the cost of living into account in that process. She would like to know whether a methodology for determining national minimum wages that were indexed to the cost of living had been adopted.

55. The Committee had received reports that several forms of precarious and exploitative labour practices, such as temporary employment, “zero-hour contracts” and firing and rehiring, were prevalent in the State party. The delegation might describe the measures taken to address those practices and to enhance employment security.

56. As she understood it, migrant workers on a temporary work visa, in particular the health and care worker visa, the seasonal worker visa and the overseas domestic worker visa, were vulnerable to exploitative labour practices, such as the charging of unlawful recruitment fees and the underpayment of wages. She would be interested to hear about the measures taken to protect migrant workers from labour exploitation and to punish those responsible for abusive acts.

57. According to information in the Committee’s possession, the enforcement of labour standards in the State party was uneven. The delegation might outline the steps taken to

ensure that the Fair Work Agency, once operational, would have the powers and resources necessary to effectively monitor working conditions and to protect workers. Information on the measures taken to ensure that migrant workers were able to report abuse and exploitation without fear of their immigration status' being adversely affected would also be appreciated.

58. The Committee had been informed that the Trade Union Act of 2016 and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act of 2023 effectively undermined the right to strike by imposing prohibitive restrictions on industrial action, and that workers in the State party did not enjoy adequate protection against dismissal for taking industrial action. She would welcome an update on the progress made towards repealing those two laws and ensuring workers' right to strike.

59. According to alternative sources, the current level of social security benefits was not sufficient to provide claimants with a decent standard of living and adequate social protection. Moreover, measures such as the benefit cap, the two-child policy, cuts to housing benefits, the so-called bedroom tax and the enforced five-week waiting period for the first-time payment of universal credit were reportedly exacerbating the already precarious situation of disadvantaged individuals and families. The strict conditionality of benefits and disproportionately harsh sanctions only served to further stigmatize claimants. The delegation might indicate what was being done to ensure that the level of social security benefits was adequate and was determined by an independent and transparent assessment of the real cost of living in the State party; whether the impact on claimants of the specific measures mentioned previously had been independently assessed and, if so, what steps were being taken to mitigate their effects; and what measures were being taken to ensure that the conditions that must be met to gain access to benefits were proportionate and did not stigmatize claimants.

60. The Committee had been given to understand that the availability of childcare had decreased and that the cost of that service had increased. A significant proportion of parents reported that they simply could not afford childcare. She wished to know what measures the State party was taking to ensure the availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of childcare, including for children with disabilities. It also appeared that older persons and persons with long-term health conditions struggled to gain access to social care and support owing to the limited availability of those services and staff shortages. What had the State party done to ensure that quality social care was available, accessible and affordable for those persons?

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

61. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the creation of the national minimum wage had been one of the most successful economic policy interventions in the United Kingdom over the previous 25 years. The Government was determined to deliver a genuine living wage and, to that end, had asked the Low Pay Commission to take into account the cost of living when it recommended the appropriate rates for the national minimum wage and the national living wage for 2025 onward. Over 3 million low-paid workers were expected to receive a pay rise in 2025. The Government had also asked the Low Pay Commission to continue to narrow the gap between the national minimum wage for workers between 18 and 20 years of age and the national living wage for workers who were 21 years of age and over each year with a view to achieving a single adult rate, and to recommend the highest possible rates for workers under 18 years of age and those eligible for the apprentice rate.

62. The Employment Rights Bill would end the one-sided flexibility associated with "zero-hour contracts", ensuring that jobs provided a baseline of security and predictability. Under the bill, workers on such contracts would acquire a right to guaranteed hours, where the number of hours offered would reflect the hours worked by the worker during a reference period. Workers would also acquire the right to be notified within a reasonable time frame of shift cancellations and to receive proportionate payments for shifts cancelled, moved or curtailed at short notice. The legal loopholes that allowed firms to engage in unscrupulous fire and rehire or fire and replace practices would likewise be closed.

63. Strike action was currently regulated by the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Additional restrictions had been

introduced through the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, which required important public services to continue to provide a minimum level of service during industrial action. However, the current Government recognized that they unnecessarily impeded trade union activity and undermined the key role played by trade unions in negotiations and dispute resolution. The Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 and most provisions of the Trade Union Act 2016 would therefore be repealed by the new Employment Rights Bill. The qualifying conditions for strike action would be simplified, as would the process for legally recognizing trade unions.

64. The Government recognized that the current system for enforcing labour legislation was fragmented and had committed to establishing the Fair Work Agency to better protect workers from unscrupulous employers and to strengthen the enforcement of their rights. The Employment Rights Bill was the first step towards operationalizing the Fair Work Agency.

65. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, on the Isle of Man, a minimum wage had been on the statute books for well over 20 years. A living wage rate, which had been calculated by the Isle of Man government based on the cost of living, had been in force since 2017, although employers were not currently obliged to pay that rate. The Isle of Man government was continuing to work to close the gap between the living wage and the mandatory minimum wage. Following discussions in early 2025, the matter had been referred for further analysis. The findings would be shared with the parliament of the Isle of Man later in 2025. Work was also under way to close the gap between the living wage and the mandatory minimum wage in the Bailiwick of Jersey.

66. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, in the United Kingdom, migrant workers enjoyed the same employment rights and protections as other workers, including the national minimum wage and protection against discrimination. The immigration sponsorship system ensured that migrant workers were recruited by a genuine employer who abided by all relevant legislation.

67. Since April 2023, all seasonal workers were guaranteed 32 hours of pay per week. Moreover, the minimum hourly rate for those workers had been raised in keeping with the new national living wage. Seasonal workers who had concerns about their pay, employment rights or working hours could raise them via the pay and work rights helpline and complaints section of the Government's website, and could contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service for help and advice on work and pay rights. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority operated a national licensing scheme in certain high-risk sectors in order to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation.

68. Workers whose employer's sponsor licence had been revoked were free to seek alternative employment on the condition that they obtained a new certificate of sponsorship. Government officials were working to address non-compliance and exploitation in the care sector, and endeavoured to find care workers who had lost their jobs as a result of enforcement action a suitable sponsor who could offer them secure employment.

69. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, although some progress had been made in reducing the disparities between the employment rates and pay levels of persons from an ethnic minority background, women and persons with disabilities and those of the mainstream population, more remained to be done. Encouragingly, the employment rate of persons of Bangladeshi or Pakistani origin, which had been historically low, had increased from 56 per cent to 61 per cent in recent years.

70. The causes underlying the disparities in employment rates for different population groups included the low level of qualifications often obtained by members of ethnic minority groups and their reduced employment prospects, the barriers encountered by some population groups in the labour market and the lack of well-paid jobs in the regions where ethnic minority groups tended to live. The Equality (Race and Disability) Bill would introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay gap reporting for large employers.

71. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that a range of social security and employment provisions had been introduced to address the barriers preventing members of certain groups from gaining access to employment. The Get Britain Working White Paper, which had been published in the autumn of 2024, set out the Government's plans to increase

employment levels across the United Kingdom and included a guarantee to help young people between 18 and 21 years of age to undertake training or apprenticeships or to find work. The White Paper also set out the Government's intention to reform the system of health and disability benefits to help persons with a health condition or a disability to enter and remain in work. A further paper detailing the reforms to be carried out in that connection was expected to be published in the coming months. A range of mechanisms had been put in place to help members of ethnic minorities to gain access to the labour market, including peer mentoring schemes and support funds that were disbursed at the discretion of Jobcenter Plus advisers.

72. The rates of different income-related benefits, such as universal credit, were set by the Government and could vary according to claimants' circumstances. The rates of such benefits were not based on the personal expenditure of individual recipients. The Government had committed to reviewing the adequacy of universal credit over the coming months.

73. The impact of the benefit cap and the two-child policy on the situation of impoverished children would be assessed as part of the new strategy to tackle child poverty. The Department for Work and Pensions published independent evaluations of a wide range of social policy issues that fell within its remit and yearly statistics on households with a below average income.

74. While a balance must be struck between rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis universal credit, the Government recognized that it had placed too much focus on benefit receipt and compliance, which was deterring individuals from requesting the support that they might need. The Get Britain Working White Paper also stated the Government's intention to create a new national jobs and career service focused on employment support rather than benefit compliance.

75. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, while the United Kingdom had achieved near universal enrolment in education and care for children between 3 and 5 years of age, it was true that the costs to be borne by parents were above the average recorded in other member States of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Since 2017, the Government had increased spending on early childhood education and care. Some government funding for early education and childcare was delivered through the nationwide benefits and tax system. Although different jurisdictions had taken different approaches, some common practices had emerged, including the implementation of early education and childcare programmes aimed at working families, impoverished families, families with children who had special educational needs or disabilities and/or families with children who were in contact with social care services.

76. In England, entitlements to government-funded early education had been expanded gradually since 1997. In the 2025/26 financial year, the Department for Education planned to allocate over £8 billion for the provision of early education services, which represented an increase of more than 30 per cent compared to the previous financial year. Eligible working parents were currently entitled to 15 hours of free childcare per week from when the child turned 9 months. That entitlement was set to increase to 30 hours per week from September 2025. Most working parents could also benefit from additional funding through tax-free childcare or universal credit childcare programmes. All children between 3 and 4 years of age were currently eligible for 15 hours of free childcare per week, regardless of the circumstances of their parents. Families with 2-year-olds who received additional support because they were classed as a low-income household, had children with special educational needs or disabilities or had adopted children were also eligible for 15 hours of free childcare per week. In addition, providers of early childhood education could claim the early years pupil premium for disadvantaged children, which was set to rise to up to £570 per eligible child per year from 2025/26, and request funding from the disability access fund, which was worth £938 per year, to support the children with disabilities in their care. For children with more complex needs and children who had been placed on an education, health and care plan, providers of early childhood education could receive funding via the high needs component of the dedicated schools grant.

77. Tax-free childcare was available nationwide to help eligible working parents cover their childcare costs and to help parents to return to work or to work more when they wished

or needed to. For every £8 paid by parents, the Government paid £2, up to a total of £2,000 per child per year. That entitlement increased to £4,000 per child in the case of young people with disabilities.

78. In England, a programme was being implemented to increase the availability of school-based nursery places, as schools had capacity to care for a greater number of children with special educational needs compared to private providers and offered more places in the most deprived areas of the country. Since the autumn of 2024, government-funded primary schools had been able to request funding to refurbish spaces in order to create or expand school-based nurseries. That initiative was part of an overarching plan to open 3,000 additional school-based nurseries.

79. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that an independent commission tasked with transforming adult social care had been set up as a first step towards introducing a national care service. In the meantime, the Government was focusing on improving access to social care. Over the 2024/25 financial year, local authorities had received more than £1 billion from the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund to increase the availability of adult social care based on the needs of the areas for which they were responsible. The funding awarded could be used to increase the rates paid to adult social care providers, to recruit and retain more carers and to reduce waiting times for adult social care. However they used the funding, local authorities were required to report on the progress made. Under the Care Act of 2014, local authorities were responsible for ensuring that their respective care markets met the diverse needs of the local community, which could be achieved by drawing on local population and market data and involving those with lived experiences in decisions on the services to be commissioned.

80. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Scottish government had published an updated version of its Fair Work Action Plan in 2022, which envisaged action to address workplace issues related to gender, race and disability. In carrying out the Plan, the government employed its devolved powers to promote fair and inclusive workplaces across Scotland, notably by reducing the gender pay gap and the disability employment gap. The median gender pay gap had, in fact, decreased from 15.6 per cent in 2016 to 9.2 per cent in 2024, while the disability employment gap had been reduced to its lowest level since 2016.

81. The 2018 Social Security (Scotland) Act envisioned social security as a human right essential to the realization of other human rights. Between 2025 and 2026, the Scottish government would be investing around £6.9 billion in social security payments, thereby providing support for around 2 million people, or one third of the country's population. A total of £644 million was to be disbursed in benefits that were available exclusively in Scotland while £3 million had been earmarked for persons who had been negatively affected by the two-child limit on child tax credits and universal credit.

82. The Scottish government continued to provide affordable, high-quality childcare services for all 3- and 4-year-olds and eligible 2-year-olds, equivalent to 30 hours per week during the school year. Eligibility requirements took no account of parents' working status. Nearly £1 billion had been invested in the policy since its launch in 2021. The Scottish government had also invested in childcare for school-age children.

83. **Ms. Lee** said that she wished to know how income-related benefits were calculated, given that they did not appear to be indexed to the cost of living. She wondered whether the proposed review of universal credit would include an assessment of the impact that capping measures such as the two-child limit would have on claimants and on poverty reduction in general. While welcoming the proposal to increase free childcare to 30 hours per week, she was concerned that the entitlement was limited only to parents who were in work.

84. **Mr. Palmisano** said that he would be interested to hear about specific cases in which women's right to equal remuneration for work of equal value had been upheld by the courts and what remedies had been applied. He also wished to know what measures were taken to ensure pay transparency, which was crucial in court proceedings of that kind.

85. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wondered whether the State party had plans to conduct regular poverty assessments with the participation of civil society organizations and human

rights institutions, in order to identify persons who fell below certain thresholds. Often, in fact, it was difficult to identify poverty because those affected were not able to speak out.

86. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he would be interested to hear about any plans for the automatic adjustment of benefits on the basis of the consumer price index. While he appreciated the Scottish government's initiative to invest £3 million to support persons negatively affected by the two-child limit, he wondered whether any thought had been given to scrapping the limit altogether.

87. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate an update on the Government's planned review of parental leave and would like to know how the Government intended to promote shared responsibility of domestic duties between men and women. She wondered what obstacles stood in the way of an immediate suspension of the two-child limit, particularly in view of the fact that child poverty stood as high as 30 per cent in some areas of the State party.

88. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that one overarching issue affecting all the matters raised by the Committee was the availability of resources.

89. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that income-related benefits were reviewed annually on the basis of the consumer price index. Thus, benefits would increase by 1.7 per cent in April 2025, following rises of 10.1 per cent in 2023 and 6.7 per cent in 2024. Child poverty rates were tracked in the annual statistics on households with below average income. The two-child limit had been introduced during a financial crisis some years previously and, although it was undisputedly linked to child poverty, it remained in place. The Government was nonetheless concerned about child poverty and engaged in dialogue with civil society organizations about the best way to tackle it. A child poverty task force had been set up which would be examining the two-child limit alongside other aspects of the social security system.

90. **A representative of the United Kingdom**, recalling that the Low Pay Commission had been asked to reflect the cost of living in the recommendations it made to the Government regarding the national minimum wage and the national living wage, said that, by seeking advice from the Commission – an independent public body on which employers' and workers' interests were equally represented – the Government aimed to strike a balance between the needs of workers, affordability for business and economic impact.

91. Work had begun on a review of the system of parental leave with a view to offering the best possible support to working families, and the Government had already introduced policies to support a more equal distribution of childcare. The Employment Rights Bill aimed to align the rules governing paternity leave and unpaid parental leave with those governing maternity leave and other parental leave entitlements.

92. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, although statutory wage-setting powers belonged to the Government of the United Kingdom, the Scottish government used other policies to champion the real living wage, which was an independently calculated hourly rate based on the cost of living. For example, applicants for public sector contracts – worth over £2.6 billion between July 2023 and March 2024 – were required to pay at least the real living wage and to ensure trade union recognition. The number of government-accredited real-living-wage employers had risen from 14 in 2014 to over 3,700 in 2025. The two-child limit was applicable only to benefits disbursed by the Government of the United Kingdom.

93. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, although the entitlement to 30 hours of free childcare per week was specifically intended to support parents who worked, all parents of 3- and 4-year-olds remained eligible for 15 hours of government-funded early childhood education and care per week, irrespective of their income status. Non-working parents of 2-year-olds might also be eligible for the 15-hour entitlement if they were in receipt of certain benefits such as universal credit or child tax credits.

94. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the level of compliance with the law on gender pay gap reporting was extremely high. In the most recent year for which figures were available, just six employers in the whole of the United Kingdom had failed to submit a report within the deadline.

95. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the Education Minister of Northern Ireland had made a commitment to launch an early childhood education and care strategy by the autumn of 2025. Also, in recognition of the fact that certain people required immediate help, the Minister had secured additional funding for a package of childcare measures to be rolled out in the current financial year. Furthermore, the Minister had overseen a major expansion of preschool education, so that an additional 2,500 children would get a full-time place in September 2025.

96. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, while he was not in a position to say whether his Government would engage in regular poverty assessments with civil society groups, he could assure the Committee that his Government was convinced that child poverty strategies needed to reflect the real experience of poverty and to focus on children experiencing the most severe and acute forms of poverty.

97. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that, in Wales, eligible parents of 3- and 4-year-olds were entitled to 30 hours of State-funded childcare per week, for up to 48 weeks a year. From September 2022, eligibility had been extended to parents in education and training. That offer built on the existing commitment to provide all 3- and 4-year-olds with a minimum of 10 hours of childcare per week during the school year.

98. **A representative of the United Kingdom** said that the new Human Rights Bill for Scotland would require bodies delivering public services to meet minimum core standards. Those standards would be set by an inclusive and accessible process.

99. **Ms. Rossi** said that the Committee was concerned about the fact that the United Kingdom, despite having one of the world's richest economies, suffered persistently high levels of poverty affecting more than 20 per cent of the population. It was particularly troubling that 30 per cent of children in the country lived in poverty. She looked forward, then, to hearing details about a strategy for an immediate and drastic reduction in poverty, which prioritized children and other vulnerable groups. The Committee would also be interested to hear about action taken to reform the child social welfare system, following a review that had found it to be excessively focused on crisis situations, which had a disproportionate impact on poor families.

100. She wished to know how the Government intended to respond to the alarming levels of food insecurity in the country. According to reports, in fact, 7.2 million individuals, or 11 per cent of the population, were affected by food insecurity. The Committee also wanted to know what plans the Government had to address the persistent and widespread housing crisis, which disproportionately affected women, persons from ethnic and religious minorities and asylum-seekers. The lack of access to proper accommodation also meant that persons with mental disabilities were often forced to remain in institutionalized care.

101. A recent review had found the National Health Service to be beset by problems including a shortage of staff, inefficient management and chronic underfunding, which meant that it did not have sufficient resources to provide care equitably to the entire population. It would be useful to learn about any long-term plans to address the problems highlighted by the review. She looked forward to hearing more about the forthcoming amendments to the Mental Health Act which, she hoped, would address the increased demand for mental healthcare since 2016, the lack of adequate community services and the worryingly high suicide rates, particularly among men but also in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and among persons with disabilities.

102. The Committee was concerned about the fact that maternal mortality rates were higher in 2020–2022 than they had been in 2003–2005 and wondered if the Government had developed any policies to address that state of affairs. She also wished to know if any action had been taken to address disparities in access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including abortion, in different parts of the country. Lastly, she hoped that the delegation could provide information about strategies to prevent drug-related deaths which, according to information received, were more prevalent in the United Kingdom than anywhere else in Europe. Such strategies needed to take account of the disproportionate effect drugs had on certain ethnic groups and on persons living in situations of poverty.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.