



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
26 September 2024

Original: English

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Seventy-sixth session

Summary record of the 42nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 17 September 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunecan-Tatu

Contents

Consideration of reports:

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

Fourth periodic report of Albania (continued)

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports:

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

Fourth periodic report of Albania (continued) (E/C.12/ALB/4; E/C.12/ALB/Q/4; E/C.12/ALB/RQ/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Albania joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Albania**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the principle of equality was central to the Albanian Constitution and legal framework. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection had recently organized consultations with civil society and established a working group with a view to drafting amendments to the Law on Gender Equality in Albania, taking into account the findings of all relevant reports. It was worth noting that many members of the Government, including the Deputy Prime Minister, were women. Albania was involved in the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).
3. The National Strategy for Gender Equality included a specific objective relating to employment, while the National Strategy for Employment and Skills covered measures to promote gender equality and support women in the world of work. Parental leave was provided for by law. Efforts were being made to identify areas in which further measures could be taken to increase women's participation in the labour market. The review of the Law on Gender Equality in Albania would focus partly on the issue of employment.
4. There was a national centre dedicated to combating domestic violence, and victims of domestic violence had access to shelters, specialized services and 24-hour hotlines. Support for victims and potential victims of trafficking in persons was provided by a national reception centre and by three specialized centres at the regional level financed by the Social Fund. The staff of those centres had been trained to ensure the safety of victims and to provide rehabilitation and integration services such as psychological support and legal assistance. The establishment of the Social Fund in 2019 had helped to increase social service coverage through an innovative financing model that involved the central government, local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
5. The Government was working to develop social care services for persons with disabilities and to improve the assessment of disabilities in accordance with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health. New legislation on official translations included a legal definition of the role of sign language interpreters. Anti-discrimination legislation had been amended to include definitions of concepts such as multiple discrimination and segregation, in compliance with international standards. All the ministries worked together to support vulnerable groups, including the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Under the National Action Plan for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian Minorities 2021–2025, steps had been taken to increase access to comprehensive quality education and create equal employment opportunities for Roma. By law, 5 per cent of all social housing must be allocated to members of the Roma and Egyptian communities, and that quota had been greatly exceeded. Legislation recognizing those communities as national minorities had recently been passed.
6. The National Action Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Persons for 2021–2027, which included measures to prevent and combat hate speech and hate crimes, was being implemented by the relevant ministries in consultation with local governments and civil society organizations. There was a dedicated budget for its implementation, as well as extensive interaction with donors to mobilize support for capacity-building, awareness-raising and training in that area.
7. The health budget had risen by 106 per cent since 2013. The law had recently been amended to ensure that everyone had access to free primary and secondary healthcare regardless of whether they had health insurance. The National Health Strategy for 2021–2030

provided for measures relating to equality, universal health coverage and social health. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection worked to ensure equal access to health services for all, including the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Sexual and reproductive health awareness campaigns were conducted to ensure that vulnerable groups were aware of their rights and the services available to them. A national action plan on the prevention of HIV, with a special focus on at-risk populations such as sex workers, had recently been approved. HIV testing was provided free of charge in all public health units.

8. **A representative of Albania** said that reception and reintegration services were provided to victims and potential victims of trafficking in persons through four dedicated centres. Reintegration services included medical and psychosocial assistance, social activities and financial support. Assisted voluntary return services were provided to foreign nationals. After leaving the reception centres, victims continued to receive support from various bodies, such as the National Employment and Skills Agency. They also received financial assistance of 9,000 leks per month, and their healthcare costs were covered by the State. Textbooks were provided to child victims free of charge.

9. A six-member advisory board composed of victims and potential victims of trafficking in persons had been established in May 2019 with a view to consolidating cooperation with civil society on the prevention of trafficking and increasing the involvement of victims in the development of anti-trafficking policies. The recent agreement on the National Referral Mechanism for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking stipulated that the advisory board's recommendations must be taken into account.

10. In the fight against trafficking in persons, there was a particular focus on providing the necessary legal, health and other services to women and child victims. Individual support plans were developed for all victims on the basis of a needs assessment. Victims underwent health checks for sexually transmitted infections and other communicable diseases. Foreign victims and potential victims were granted type A temporary resident permits. Since 2019, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had been implementing a programme to improve the national response to trafficking in persons, taking into account the principles of non-discrimination, gender sensitivity, the best interests of the child and the participation of children in decision-making.

11. Various measures had been taken to improve the legal and institutional anti-trafficking framework, such as the expansion of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims and Potential Victims of Trafficking to include police officers specializing in cybercrime, the development of training for law enforcement officers on the challenges of investigating and prosecuting cases of trafficking in persons, and the revision of standard operating procedures.

12. A data-based approach to combating domestic and cross-border trafficking had been developed. The majority of victims identified in Albania were victims of domestic trafficking. Victims were identified at the country's borders in accordance with standard operating procedures. Mobile units had been set up in various municipalities to identify victims, hold information sessions for the local community and run focus groups involving representatives of State and municipal social services. Those units worked primarily in areas with large Roma and Egyptian communities. Since their establishment, a greater number of victims and potential victims had been identified.

13. Agreements and additional protocols had been signed with Kosovo, Montenegro and North Macedonia on identifying victims of trafficking and returning them to their country of origin. Standard operating procedures had been developed for the assisted voluntary return of victims from and to Albania. Lastly, there were plans to finalize a memorandum of cooperation with Greece on combating trafficking in persons, protecting unaccompanied minors and improving the identification, referral and assisted voluntary return of victims and potential victims.

14. **A representative of Albania** said that residence and work permits for foreign nationals had been merged into a single permit under a new law enacted in 2021. Foreign nationals could apply for the permit online and could do so from outside the country. Applications were processed first by the National Employment and Skills Agency, then by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and lastly by the border authorities.

15. The birth registration procedure for children born to foreign nationals in Albania was the same as the procedure for children born to Albanians. All new parents, whether Albanian or foreign, had access to the same birth registration services and to immediate financial assistance. Registration procedures linked to nationality had been abolished to prevent discrimination against foreign nationals. The assignment of a birth registrar to each maternity ward had significantly reduced statelessness, especially among the Roma and Egyptian communities. Regulations on the creation, administration and updating of a temporary register of reported births had been approved.

16. Unaccompanied child migrants were housed separately from adults in migrant reception centres. The new immigration strategy approved in May 2024 included measures to increase reception capacity for unaccompanied minors and to provide training for border police on the treatment of vulnerable migrants. A national review of the measures in place for the integration of foreign nationals would be carried out with a view to developing new integration programmes.

17. **A representative of Albania** said that a high-level technical committee was drafting a revised version of the Criminal Code that would then be subject to public consultation. The revised version built on amendments to the Code made in 2021 in order to provide increased protection for women and other vulnerable groups. Although the Code did not currently define femicide as a specific offence, it did establish gender-based discrimination as an aggravating circumstance in such cases as, for example, sex-selective abortion.

18. **A representative of Albania** said that a proposal to amend the Criminal Code provisions on child sexual abuse had been submitted to the Parliament in January 2024 by the “Friends of Children” parliamentary group. A proposal to amend the law on domestic violence had been submitted to the Parliament in late 2022. In addition, two legislative proposals regarding the establishment of a minimum living wage had been submitted to the Parliament in 2023, the first by a group of at least 20,000 members of the electorate and the second by Members of Parliament. All the proposals mentioned had been added to the Parliament’s programme of work, but the time frame for their consideration remained unclear.

19. **A representative of Albania** said that trade unions had the right to create and join trade union federations. Retired and unemployed persons were also entitled to be members of trade unions. Eighteen collective bargaining agreements had been signed at the branch level and a large number at the company level in sectors such as electric power and agrifood. Around 75 per cent of employees were covered by such agreements in the public sector, compared with 25 per cent of employees in the private sector. Collective bargaining was more common in urban areas than in rural areas owing to the higher concentration of large companies in urban areas. The State mediation network, which had three mediators on staff, had dealt with 80 labour disputes at the request of trade unions since 2022. Only five of those cases had been successfully resolved, however.

20. The National Labour Council was the highest consultative body regarding issues relating to social dialogue and had met three times since 2022 to discuss matters pertaining to labour legislation. There were six specialized permanent tripartite commissions operating within the Council. In September 2024, the Council of Ministers had adopted a decision on the organization and operation of the tripartite Regional Consultative Council and on the representation of local governing bodies on that Council. Civil servants responsible for providing vital public services did not have the right to strike. A mandatory conciliation procedure was followed to pre-empt strikes whenever possible.

21. The number of women entering the labour market through employment placement services had increased from around 11,000 in 2016 to almost 15,000 in 2023. Over the same period, the female employment rate had risen from 49.7 per cent to 61.8 per cent. Awareness-raising campaigns had been launched to encourage the equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities. A total of 3,001 individuals, including 1,080 women, had found work thanks to employment promotion programmes. The youth unemployment rate had fallen from 34.5 per cent in 2014 to 24.6 per cent in 2023, in part thanks to the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which was designed to provide young people with opportunities for employment, further or higher education or vocational training. Over the previous year, 1,032 members of the Roma

and Egyptian minorities and 266 persons with disabilities had been hired, thereby far exceeding the established targets of 900 and 100 individuals, respectively. The Employment Promotion Law set disability employment quotas. The Social Employment Fund, which was to facilitate compliance with such quotas, was in the process of being established. In the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government had adopted two financial packages. The first had enabled over 30,000 enterprises to continue to pay their employees' wages, while the second had consisted of lump-sum payments to workers directly affected by company closures.

22. **A representative of Albania** said that the objectives of the National Agenda for Children's Rights 2021–2026 included good governance, protecting children from all forms of violence, establishing child- and adolescent-friendly systems and services, promoting children's rights in the digital environment and creating the conditions that would allow children to fulfil their physical and psychosocial potential. Children had contributed a chapter of the Agenda and had been invited to participate in meetings of the National Council for the Rights and Protection of the Child. Furthermore, steps had been taken to promote preschool education, new social protection packages had been approved for mothers with young children, a scholarship scheme had been introduced in cooperation with local government units to reduce the number of school dropouts, various programmes were being implemented to improve children's health, and infrastructure works had been carried out at around 400 health facilities. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection and the State Agency for Child Rights and Protection were responsible for monitoring the observance of children's rights at the national level. Child protection units had been set up in all 61 municipalities to identify and assist child victims of violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect. Efforts were being made to improve the distribution of child protection workers throughout the country. The State Agency cooperated with the State Inspectorate for Labour and Social Services to combat child labour. Emergency centres had been created to provide children with psychological support and other services to meet their basic needs. On 12 April 2024, to mark the International Day for Street Children, coordination and awareness-raising meetings had been held with representatives of municipal authorities and the State Police. On 12 June 2024, the World Day against Child Labour, activities had been organized with the participation of child protection units to raise awareness of child labour and exploitation. The National Helpline for Children offered psychosocial counselling, including to victims of cyberbullying, and made referrals for onward treatment. In an effort to boost the birth rate, one-time payments were made to the families of newborns through what was known as the “baby cheque” programme. The programme had so far proved a success, particularly in the Roma and Egyptian communities.

23. The specialized national shelter for victims of domestic violence provided various residential services. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection was working to strengthen the Coordinated Mechanism for the Referral of Domestic Violence Cases, case management protocols and data collection systems. Through the Social Fund, measures were taken to raise awareness of women's rights at the local level. A network of gender specialists had been established that provided coverage for all ministries and municipalities. The implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030 was having a positive impact on women's lives. Unlike previous iterations, the National Strategy for Social Protection 2024–2030 included a gender lens.

24. Under the National Health Strategy 2021–2030, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection had approved an action plan for the prevention of drug-related harm and the treatment of drug users for 2023–2026. The plan, which was being implemented with the support of psychosocial workers in 55 health centres, provided for measures to prevent drug abuse and enhance coordination among relevant stakeholders. Municipal authorities wishing to receive support from the Social Fund were required to identify the needs of priority groups, including persons with disabilities, women and members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Those needs were addressed through the social plans that had been finalized for all 61 municipalities.

25. The National Action Plan for the Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian Minorities 2021–2025 sought to combat health inequalities through the establishment of mobile health services in rural areas, among other measures. The

Government had adopted a multisectoral approach to the provision of support to Roma and Egyptian families which involved extensive coordination between the employment and social protection sectors. Individual plans had been drawn up to help families get out of benefit dependency and into training and work.

26. Blood glucose test strips were available free of charge to persons aged 65 years and over. Cochlear implants would also be fully funded by the State through a programme that was expected to be rolled out nationwide by 2025. A national screening programme for scoliosis would be launched in December 2024, and breast and cervical cancer screening programmes were already in place.

27. **A representative of Albania** said that the Labour Code had been amended in 2015 to provide for paternity leave, while approximately 15,000 women had taken maternity leave in 2023. Pursuant to legal provisions adopted in July 2023, at least 5 per cent of the beneficiaries of social housing programmes had to belong to the Roma or Egyptian communities. In 2024, a total of 45 members of those communities had benefited from investment programmes.

28. **A representative of Albania** said that article 52 of Law No. 79/2021 provided for the issuance of temporary residence permits to foreign nationals on humanitarian grounds if they were applicants for international protection, victims of labour exploitation in Albania who were cooperating in criminal proceedings against their employer, individuals who complied with requests for collaboration with the judiciary, persons recognized as stateless by the competent authorities, abandoned minors, women who were over six months pregnant and seriously ill persons who could not be treated in the proposed country of return. Articles 41 and 43 of that law established a right to family reunification for holders of residence permits under certain conditions. An instruction had been issued detailing the procedures to be followed in that regard. Since 2023, no requests for family reunification had been received by the asylum authorities.

29. **A representative of Albania** said that the objectives of the National Strategy for Social Protection 2024–2030 were aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and strategic European Union instruments. Around 9 per cent of the population were beneficiaries of the Economic Assistance Programme, while 6 per cent were in receipt of local government funds. The results of the Income and Living Conditions Survey indicated that the granting of social benefits had led to a 16.1 per cent decrease in the at-risk-of-poverty rate. Social Assistance Law No. 57/2019, which was aligned with the Strategy and had been amended recently, was the main domestic legal instrument regulating the payment of benefits. Categories of the population in need of support were specified in that and other national laws, including Social Housing Law No. 22/2018.

30. **Ms. Saran** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate a description of the main focus of measures to promote gender equality and women's employment and an indication of whether one of the aims of such measures was to reduce the gender pay gap. She wished to know whether the State party intended to amend its legislation to recognize same-sex unions and extend spousal benefits to same-sex couples, what specific measures had been taken to match up school curricula with labour market needs and what was being done to stem the brain drain that had been affecting the country in recent years. She would also be grateful for details of any steps taken to improve the availability of sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion, contraception and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, and to address geographically unequal access to healthcare services and free legal aid.

31. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Task Force) said that he would appreciate a response to the questions he had put to the delegation at the previous meeting regarding measures taken by the State party to support orphans in their transition from public institutions to an independent adult life; the number of months of social security contributions that had to have been paid before a woman became pregnant in order for her to qualify for maternity services; and any plans to expand eligibility for social housing and employment promotion programmes by including informal revenue in the income verification process. He would also be grateful for a response to his questions regarding the issues of forced evictions, access to water and sanitation services, and the current drug policy.

32. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to know whether the State party planned to introduce a legal framework to allow trans people to change their gender identity in official public registers and whether people who wished to alter their bodies in line with their self-identified gender had access to the necessary treatment under the current framework for healthcare access.

33. It would be useful to learn whether refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants, especially those in an irregular situation, had the same access to healthcare services as Albanian citizens. Lastly, she would like to know whether the 5 per cent quota of accessible housing for members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities had in fact been achieved.

34. **A representative of Albania** said that, in answer to the question on access to sexual and reproductive health services, there was an action plan for the provision of contraceptives that covered the period 2023–2026.

35. Social housing was provided to many categories of vulnerable groups, including the Roma and Egyptian minorities, for whom the 5 per cent quota had in fact been achieved. Social housing support was allocated by the municipalities, which were responsible for reviewing the situation of applicants.

36. One of the most important measures taken in terms of the transformation of primary care was the establishment of public family medicine centres that were open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and that provided high-quality healthcare services for vulnerable groups, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, older women and persons with disabilities.

37. According to the national employment agency, women accounted for more than 65 per cent of all participants in employment promotion programmes. The Government had taken steps to prevent a youth brain drain, including by increasing wages in the public sector, which in turn had driven up wages in the private sector. It had also developed joint programmes with universities in other countries and helped young people to change career paths by paying for them to take short-term computer programming courses. Any university graduate could apply for a three-month internship in the civil service, at the end of which a one-year contract was offered with the same department. Lastly, the Youth Guarantee Scheme, which had been formally approved by the Council of Ministers, was aimed at helping young people find employment or further educational opportunities within four months of leaving school; it had been piloted in three cities in 2024 and would be extended to the entire country in 2025.

38. **A representative of Albania** said that the Government planned to make the necessary amendments to the nation’s laws, including the Family Code, in order to legally recognize same-sex partnerships by 2028, and it had developed a road map to that end. There were 20 legal aid centres scattered throughout the country, in larger and smaller cities, as well as 12 local legal aid clinics in higher education institutions. In addition, 15 NGOs had been accredited and granted funds to provide legal aid in particularly remote areas; one of the main criteria in selecting the NGOs in question had been their representation of marginalized communities, such as the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Lastly, the Association of Women provided women and girls in rural areas with information on their legal rights.

39. **A representative of Albania** said that legislative amendments had been introduced in an effort to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by vulnerable groups. The recommendations made by independent bodies, such as the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and the People’s Advocate, were incorporated into the policies rolled out by the Government. Asylum-seekers benefited from housing assistance and healthcare services. Social protection services were administered by local self-government units, and, at the central level, the Government monitored those units’ compliance with national standards. The national reception centre for victims and potential victims of trafficking offered psychosocial services, including specialized programmes for the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficking victims, and any other services required.

40. **A representative of Albania** said that hate speech had been defined in the law on protection from discrimination. The National Action Plan for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Persons covered social services, awareness-raising in

municipalities and cooperation with the line ministries to enforce the rights of such persons to housing, community integration and other public services. Workshops had been organized by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, together with the United Nations Development Programme and other partner organizations, to promote diversity in the workplace and eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. A working group had recently been set up to draft a transgender medical protocol, with inputs from representatives of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community and civil society.

41. **A representative of Albania** said that, under the Civil Registry Act, a person's gender identity could be changed by a court decision. There had been two cases of gender identity change, both of which concerned intersex children; a civil society organization had provided legal aid in those cases.

42. **A representative of Albania** said that maternity leave was paid for by the social insurance fund and all women were eligible for it. All pregnant women received healthcare free of charge.

43. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that, according to the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), student performance in the State party was well below the OECD average; any insights from the delegation into the results would be welcome. She would like to know what measures the State party was taking to address the low scores of students in mathematics, reading and science and how those measures were tailored to each of the subjects of concern and for boys and girls, respectively.

44. As the data available indicated that 60 per cent of Roma and Egyptian children were not in school, she would like to know whether that percentage applied to each of the two minorities, or whether it was a percentage that reflected a conflation of the data on the two minorities. In that connection, while Roma and Egyptians were recognized in the law on national minorities as two distinct minorities, the Government's policy documents tended to conflate the two. She would welcome the delegation's views on the matter, especially in the light of the concerns expressed by persons belonging to those minorities about being treated as a homogenous group. She would also be grateful for disaggregated data on access to education for boys and girls from the Roma and Egyptian communities. Lastly, she would like to know what steps the State party had taken to address the fact that such a high percentage of pupils belonging to the Roma and Egyptian communities were not in school.

45. With reference to the high dropout rates in the State party, the Committee would welcome disaggregated information on the dropout rates for the Roma and Egyptian communities specifically. It would appreciate a clarification on whether the free meals programme in some schools had been discontinued and, if so, why. It would be interesting to have a full account of the role of Roma mediators in the country's schools and, more specifically, to learn whether they were remunerated and whether their activities had contributed to improving the situation of Roma and Egyptian students overall.

46. While it was clear from its replies to the list of issues that the State party wished to resolve the problem of the school segregation of Roma and Egyptian children, a more coordinated, systemic approach was needed. She wished to know what measures the State party had in place to address not only the issue of school segregation, but also the closely linked issues of housing segregation and widespread discrimination against the two minorities. She would also like to know what practical steps had been taken to implement the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *X and others v. Albania* and to desegregate the schools in Korçë, as well as in Fier, Shkodra and Elbasan.

47. She would like to know what steps had been taken to make school more accessible for children with disabilities. She would also appreciate any updates on instruction in and of minority languages in the State party, as well as with regard to the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Lastly, she would like to know whether the State party had any data on investment in scientific research and associated measures.

48. **A representative of Albania** said that the Ministry of Education and Sport periodically monitored school enrolment and attendance rates nationwide and had, jointly

with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, instituted procedures to facilitate the enrolment of students lacking the required documents, such as proof of identity or vaccination records. The number of students who had dropped out of primary and lower secondary school had decreased by 6 per cent between the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years. With the aim of reducing the dropout rate, local education offices had worked with local governments to assess dropout risks for the 2023/24 school year; groups comprising teachers, parents, local government officials and psychosocial service providers had been formed to conduct awareness-raising activities on the importance of education; school leaders had established working groups to design measures to encourage dropouts to return to school; schools offered students individual and group counselling sessions; and members of local and regional education offices and school leaders met periodically with the staff of local social services departments and child protection units. The Ministry of Education and Sport had also taken steps to improve the quality of education. It had, for example, invested in the construction and renovation of schools, equipped schools with science and digital laboratories and sports facilities, and trained teachers how to work with students at risk of dropping out and keep them engaged in school. A social support programme helped reduce the economic burden on students and their families by providing free textbooks and free transportation, and, at some schools, Roma and Egyptian students could stay after school to get help with their homework. In addition, art- and sports-related extracurricular activities were offered in order to make school more appealing.

49. Factors that had contributed to the decline in student performance in the 2022 PISA exercise as compared to the 2018 results included the effects of the 2019 earthquake, which had caused significant damage to schools and homes, and the COVID-19 pandemic, during which schools had closed and classes had been conducted online. The Ministry of Education and Sport had assembled a working group to develop recommendations for improving future performance. It also planned to address the situation through teacher training and by preparing an information packet on PISA for teachers and students.

50. **A representative of Albania** said that children with disabilities were educated in either special or mainstream schools. Nine special schools, in addition to an institute for blind children and an institute for deaf children, had been in place during the 2023/24 school year and had served some 500 students. Of the 4,507 students with disabilities in kindergarten or in mainstream schools, 78 per cent were in the basic education system, 11 per cent were in preschool and the remainder were in upper secondary schools. Ninety per cent of students with disabilities were in inclusive education, up from 75 per cent in 2014. Most assistant teachers appointed since 2019 had special education qualifications. The number of assistant teachers in the public pre-university education system had risen from 1,723 to 1,950 since the previous year. Under the National Strategy on Education, special schools would be transformed into resource centres. Three such centres were already in place. Classes at the upper secondary level focusing on information technology had been introduced at the institute that served deaf children.

51. **A representative of Albania** said that four regulations had been issued to fully implement provisions of the 2017 law on national minorities related to instruction in national minority languages for members of those minorities. Those regulations addressed matters such as teacher training; the recognition of the culture, history, language and religious beliefs of national minorities in university studies and research; the preparation and distribution of basic education textbooks; and the establishment of criteria for determining local levels of demand for instruction in a national minority language. In July 2022, the Ministry of Education and Sport had issued directives concerning the subjects to be taught in Albanian and those to be taught in national minority languages. In areas with large Greek and Macedonian minority communities, over 70 per cent of the curriculum was offered in those languages. Instruction in Bosnian had been introduced in the part of the country where the Bosnian national minority was concentrated, and Roma language instruction had been introduced in the city of Elbasan. Nationwide, 983 students in 30 schools were receiving instruction in the language of their national minority community. A national minority language programme covering the Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Roma languages had been opened at Fan S. Noli University in Korçë, and two universities had Greek language departments. Under regulations approved by the Council of Ministers in December 2021 on the procedures for financing projects for the preservation and promotion

of the cultures and traditions of national minorities, the Committee for National Minorities had provided some €120,000 in financing for the implementation of 10 such projects by non-governmental organizations.

52. **A representative of Albania** said that, since 2016, data on the Roma and Egyptian minorities had been collected through the RomAlb system, which involved the participation of over 200 focal points in government bodies and municipalities and included data on indicators relating to inclusive education, the provision of social services, access to social protection, employment, access to justice and civil registration. The Government coordinated with European Union and United Nations entities and civil society organizations representing the Roma and Egyptian communities in its data collection efforts. Albania had signed a regional declaration on Roma integration in Poznań, Poland, in 2019. With assistance from the Albanian School of Public Administration, training sessions on the prevention of discrimination had been held for civil servants and local government officials. Civil society organizations representing the Roma and Egyptian communities had taken part in workshops on a platform for constructive social engagement and social inclusion and in focus groups that had helped set the objectives for the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptian Minorities 2021–2025.

53. **A representative of Albania** said that Albania had been a party to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities since 1999. It was expected that the Government would meet with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to discuss and obtain clarity regarding its plan for implementing the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *X and others v. Albania*.

54. **A representative of Albania** said that a bill on scientific research had been approved by the Government and would be submitted to the Parliament later in the year. The National Strategy for Scientific Research, Technology, and Innovation 2023–2030 was in line with the National Strategy for Development and Integration and was aimed at ensuring that Albania would be producing high-quality scientific research to support sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development by 2030. The Strategy also set out measures designed to provide affordable access to the benefits of research and scientific progress. A network of Albanian women working in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics had been formed in 2021 and sought to increase the representation of women and girls in those fields. Of the 46 proposals that had received awards from the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in 2022, 31 had been led by women and girls. Albania was expanding its participation in Horizon Europe and had become a full member of the organization European Cooperation in Science and Technology.

55. **A representative of Albania** said that, under the law on asylum, asylum applicants and persons granted international protection were entitled to healthcare, and applicants who had been subjected to rape, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or other serious forms of violence received medical treatment meeting their specific needs. The centre for asylum-seekers in Babru coordinated with a health facility in the area for the provision of healthcare services to persons at the centre.

56. **Ms. Saran** said that the delegation members' answers had given the Committee a better understanding of the challenges facing Albania in its implementation of the Covenant. It had been a privilege for her to serve as Country Rapporteur.

57. **A representative of Albania** said that her Government was committed to improving its policies and legal frameworks in order to ensure the well-being of all citizens and to safeguard their rights. Her delegation looked forward to receiving the Committee's concluding observations and the clear guidance that they would provide. Albania fully supported the work of the United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.