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

Summary record (partial)* of the 43rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 17 September 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

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

Seventh periodic report of Cyprus ([E/C.12/CYP/7](#); [E/C.12/CYP/Q/7](#);
[E/C.12/CYP/RQ/7](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Cyprus joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Cyprus**, introducing her country's seventh periodic report ([E/C.12/CYP/7](#)), said that the major impediment in ensuring the effective protection and promotion of human rights throughout Cyprus remained the 50-year long de facto division of the country. People living on either side of the ceasefire line continued to suffer gross human rights violations as a result of the 1974 military invasion and the continuing military occupation of more than one third of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus.
3. As a result, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus was not in a position to apply the provisions of the Covenant nor ensure their implementation in the whole of its territory. Thus, the information provided by the Government referred solely to the areas where it exercised full and effective control.
4. Cyprus had considerably strengthened its institutional framework in recent years. In October 2022, its national human rights institution, the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, had been accredited with A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles). The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, created in 2021, played a crucial role in ensuring equitable access to social services, promoting social cohesion and improving quality of life for all citizens. The establishment of the Deputy Ministry of Culture in 2022 had underscored the value of cultural rights in Cyprus and signified a recognition that culture was a driving force for social progress and economic development. In June 2024, the Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection had been established with the task of formulating and implementing a comprehensive strategy on asylum and migration management and taking action to ensure effective access by migrants, asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection to essential services such as healthcare, employment and education, while also promoting their economic and social integration.
5. Cyprus had made significant progress in promoting gender equality and empowering women. In July 2024, the Law on the Commissioner for Gender Equality had been enacted to strengthen and ensure equal rights for women, men, boys and girls; to provide equal visibility, access to opportunities, and participation in all areas of public and private life; and to ensure equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men. The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2024–2026 had been adopted in January 2024. Drafted by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with all ministries and deputy ministries, it had also benefited from extensive public consultation with local administrations, the National Machinery for Women's Rights, women's organizations and civil society organizations, research and academic bodies and other organizations active in promoting gender equality.
6. The national minimum wage had been introduced in 2023 and subsequently raised in 2024, benefiting many low-income workers. Through an amendment of the social insurance legislation, in May 2024, the right to parental leave benefit had been extended to the self-employed, whose lost income could now be compensated during periods of parental leave.
7. Cyprus was committed to safeguarding the rights of the child through a systematic, multidimensional approach. The 2024–2026 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, for example, ensured that all pupils had access to learning opportunities by virtue of educational policies embodying the values of equality, inclusiveness, creativity and innovation. In line with a recent reform introduced under the Recovery and Resilience Plan,

free compulsory pre-primary education was to be extended, to begin at the age of 4 years. The objective of the reform was to enhance the availability and affordability of early childhood education and care, ensure equal opportunities by reducing financial barriers to education, encourage families to enrol their younger children in kindergartens and facilitate the entry or re-entry into the labour market of individuals with childcare responsibilities, particularly women.

8. In January 2021, in line with its commitment to the principles and obligations of the Covenant, Cyprus had signed the Optional Protocol thereto, and the ratification process was under way. Cyprus had also recently presented its first candidature for membership of the Human Rights Council for the period 2025–2027, running on a platform of priorities, voluntary pledges and commitments covering an array of human rights policy areas, including social, economic and cultural rights.

9. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to know whether, in coordinating the drafting of the State party's report, the Office of the Law Commissioner of Cyprus had consulted with any other State bodies from the judiciary or the legislature and whether the report had been shared with civil society organizations or national human rights institutions before submission to the Committee. In general, was there a specific lead agency or inter-institutional mechanism with responsibility for the monitoring and follow-up of the implementation of international human rights recommendations?

10. The Committee would be interested to learn what measures had been taken to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Covenant had constitutional status and were fully incorporated in the domestic legal order and what laws to protect vulnerable groups or specific individual rights had been adopted in recent years, in addition to the legislation described in the report and in the replies to the list of issues ([E/C.12/CYP/RQ/7](#)).

11. He would be interested to know the number and frequency of human rights awareness-raising and training seminars held over the past three years for prosecutors and lawyers, and particularly any that had dealt with economic, social and cultural rights. He would like to know how many justice officials had received such training and whether the delegation could provide examples to show to what extent such sessions contributed to the implementation of the Covenant.

12. He would welcome recent examples of cases in the national courts in which the Covenant had been specifically invoked. He would also appreciate an account of the progress made towards ratification of the Optional Protocol.

13. It would be useful to know the reasons why the State party had not signed or acceded to the International Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Did Cyprus plan to become a party to that Convention?

14. With regard to article 2 of the Covenant, on the allocation of the maximum available resources to guarantee the economic, social and cultural rights of all persons residing in the territory under the State's administration, he wished to know whether Cypriot law contained any definition of statelessness or set forth any procedure to establish the status of stateless persons, thereby guaranteeing enjoyment of those rights. In particular, it would be important to know what measures the State party had taken to prevent statelessness among children born in Cyprus to migrants and refugees. He would be interested to know whether the State party intended to accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

15. Recalling that Cyprus was a State party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, he said that he would appreciate information on the number of migrants who had applied for asylum in the past five years and on the number who had been granted refugee status. Where refugee status had been denied, he would be grateful if the delegation would explain the main reasons.

16. The Committee would like to know what specific measures the State party had in place to ensure the integration into Cypriot society of persons granted refugee status, over and above the monthly subsidies paid out for basic needs, rent and expenses. Were they entitled to a work permit as well as a residence permit?

17. The Committee had received information concerning the Pournara reception centre for migrants applying for asylum. Although the centre was not intended for long-term stay, it appeared that some people had spent months in that facility and that there were currently around 1,000 people there, living in unsanitary and sometimes violent conditions, with no possibility of finding work or integrating socially. He would therefore like to know what steps the State was taking to improve the standard of the infrastructure in reception facilities and whether it could guarantee freedom of movement and the provision of essential services, with due regard for gender, age and security considerations.

18. It would be useful to know what time frame was established in law for the refugee determination process, to what extent the deadlines were met, particularly in view of the enormous increase in asylum applications in recent years, and what investment was planned to ensure that the process was speedy and efficient. He would also like to know what measures the State party had in place to facilitate migrants' integration into Cypriot society and the economy: had the Government requested international cooperation from the United Nations system or the European Union, for example, with a view to conducting integration activities that might help ensure economic, social and cultural rights for refugees?

19. He wished to know whether Cypriot law included comprehensive provisions on non-discrimination, including definitions of direct and indirect discrimination and a framework whereby individuals could file complaints and seek appropriate reparations and, if not, whether such legislation was in the pipeline. During the 2019 universal periodic review, Cyprus had supported recommendations for the adoption of legislation to combat discrimination against minorities and vulnerable groups but had only taken note of other recommendations for the adoption of a comprehensive law dealing with all forms of discrimination and guaranteeing redress and reparations through judicial and administrative channels. He would like to know whether the State party's lack of support for the latter recommendations represented its definitive position on the adoption of such legislation based on the Committee's recommendations.

20. He would appreciate an explanation of the specific goals of the Cyprus Roma National Strategic Framework for 2021 to 2030 as it related to the Roma population's enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. He would like the delegation to give examples of activities in that context, or preliminary results, for the period 2021–2024. Noting that the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare were cooperating with the Cyprus Roma Association in implementing the Strategic Framework, he said that the Committee would like to know if representatives of that association or other relevant actors had been consulted or involved in the drafting process of the Framework.

21. Lastly, could the delegation tell the Committee about developments in inflation in the State party and its impact on purchasing power?

22. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the provisions of the Covenant were reflected in many articles of the Constitution. In addition, in accordance with the legislation under which the Covenant had been ratified, it had been incorporated into domestic law and took precedence over all domestic legislation. In general, once international and European human rights instruments had been ratified, the provisions formed part of the domestic legal order.

23. Efforts were being made in collaboration with the Cyprus Bar Association to raise awareness and improve training on human rights instruments among the legal profession, with a view to encouraging a more consistent application of such instruments, including the Covenant. The Judicial Training School also held regular sessions aimed at enhancing the understanding of emerging legal issues, including economic, social and cultural rights. Such efforts were bearing fruit, as exemplified in recent court rulings, and notably certain decisions of the Administrative Court of International Protection that cited the Covenant in legal arguments. Details of such cases would be provided in writing.

24. The ratification of the Optional Protocol was proceeding. The relevant bill was being drafted and would be forwarded to the appropriate ministry and parliament in the next few months.

25. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Roma National Strategic Framework had been drawn up in consultation with competent government ministries and departments, under

the coordination of the Social Welfare Services, as the national contact point for Roma. The consultation process had begun in June 2021 following the adoption of a road map in accordance with the European Union Roma Strategic Framework. Numerous stakeholders had submitted a series of positions, suggestions and proposals, on the basis of which a first draft had been prepared. Another round of consultations with the relevant ministries had led to the development of the Roma National Strategic Framework. While there had been no collaboration with civil society at that stage, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were represented on the monitoring committee subsequently set up by the Social Welfare Services, alongside other competent ministries, departments and services. The Framework would be updated every five years to address new issues arising. It could be consulted on the European Commission website.

26. **A representative of Cyprus** said that there were currently no plans to sign the International Convention on the Protection of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Issues relating to migrant workers fell under European Union competence, and the relevant European Union provisions on the rights of migrants and their families had been transposed into domestic law.

27. Asylum-seekers were allowed access to the labour market nine months after the date of submission of their application for international protection. They could work in specific sectors and occupations as determined according to criteria such as the state of the labour market, unemployment levels and skills required, and in particular in areas where the supply of Cypriot and European Union citizen workers was limited. Employment policy was regularly reviewed in the light of changes in the labour market, most recently in September 2023, and the list of occupations was constantly supplemented. The procedure had been simplified in 2023 and now permitted asylum-seekers to access employment at the request of an employer and subject to approval by the Department of Labour.

28. Migrants received information and guidance from Public Employment Service officers in applying for basic Greek language programmes, which facilitated integration, while other skills-acquisition programmes were implemented by the Human Resources Development Authority and other bodies such as private organizations, municipalities, employers' organizations and unions or NGOs, in cooperation with the Public Employment Service. The Department of Labour had posted 10 temporary labour officers to the employment offices in all districts of Cyprus to provide services to asylum-seekers and to employers wishing to employ non-European Union nationals.

29. Asylum applications were dealt with within a maximum period of three to six months. While that meant that asylum-seekers were not restricted to particular sectors for an extended period of time, such restriction was believed to be necessary to prevent abuse of the asylum system. However, once granted refugee or subsidiary protection status, a person automatically gained unlimited access to the labour market.

30. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, according to the available data, in 2024, 5,346 asylum applications had been received up to August. In the same period, 4,372 negative decisions and 1,079 positive decisions granting refugee status had been issued, with a further 2,331 positive decisions granting subsidiary protection status. As to the request for specific examples of protection being denied to third-country nationals, she wished to point out that the consideration of applications was carried out in accordance with the international legal framework provided for by the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and all relevant European Union directives such as the Asylum Procedures Directive, which was directly applicable in such cases.

31. Under current legislation, consideration of applications should take place within six months, and the Asylum Service could extend that period for a further six months subject to certain legal requirements; the maximum duration of consideration was 21 months. Those provisions reflected the Asylum Procedures Directive, as transposed into national law. Because of the increase in inflows in recent years, special teams had been created to handle asylum applications from those nationalities that tended to submit the largest number of applications.

32. In 2022, with European Union funding and in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Greece, the Asylum Service had launched a project to

upgrade and renovate all reception and accommodation centres. One of those was Pournara, which had been designed to host persons arriving in Cyprus in an irregular manner for a specific period to allow entry procedures to be completed. Construction work was now going on there in order to upgrade the facilities and expand capacity to cater for 2,000 persons, with extra provision in case of an unexpected influx.

33. The State cooperated closely with European Union institutions and agencies, such as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) on issues pertaining to border management and the European Union Agency for Asylum on issues pertaining to asylum matters from reception up to appeal, and with United Nations bodies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in respect of humanitarian aid and asylum management.

34. Lastly, on migrant integration, she wished to inform the Committee that the national strategy and action plan on the integration of migrants legally residing in Cyprus was being finalized and would probably be implemented by the end of the first quarter of 2025.

35. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Government had taken steps to address the high cost of living and inflationary pressures in the context of the energy crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine. In June 2023, following a collaborative effort between trade unions, employers and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, a new transitional agreement had been signed to raise the cost-of-living adjustment allowance from 50 per cent of the previous year's inflation to 66.7 per cent. Other specific measures to protect households and companies from rising energy costs included an extension of the electricity subsidy to cover residential, commercial and industrial bills until 31 October 2024, benefiting 400,000 households and 100,000 businesses. In addition, vulnerable consumers were eligible for a 100 per cent subsidy on any increase in the basic tariff.

36. In June 2024, the zero rate of value added tax (VAT) on certain basic goods such as bread, milk, eggs, meat and vegetables had been extended until the end of September 2024. In general, the Government systematically monitored the economic needs of citizens and took corrective action whenever necessary, as exemplified by the recent introduction, for four months, of monthly support for households in receipt of welfare benefits and, for three months, of a monthly lump sum to pensioners whose income was below the guaranteed minimum, as well as a 5 per cent increase in the allowance for low-income pensioners.

37. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the mission of the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality was to promote gender equality by coordinating strategy and implementing measures, advising the Government, monitoring policy implementation and working with ministries and deputy ministries to promote gender equality in government policies.

38. Gender equality officers provided liaison between the Commissioner and the ministries and were expected to contribute to the mainstreaming of gender in public policies. The Law on the Commissioner for Gender Equality also institutionalized the National Machinery for Women's Rights, which cooperated with the Commissioner.

39. Measures taken to date included the signature, by the President, ministers and deputy ministers, of a policy statement on gender equality and zero tolerance for sexist behaviour and harassment, an annual action plan for local government and the creation of specific facilities for pregnant women and families in certain municipalities, including the installation of baby-changing tables in men's restrooms. A memorandum of cooperation on gender equality had been signed with the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and guidelines had been produced for personnel serving in military and political missions.

40. The annual budget for the Office for 2023 and 2024 was €90,000, together with an annual amount for implementation of specific measures, which for 2024 amounted to €200,000.

41. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, in the context of international cooperation on migration, she wished to draw attention to the European Union New Pact on Migration and Asylum setting forth legislative, infrastructure and investment measures to be taken by member States by June 2026. Accordingly, in cooperation with the European Commission, Cyprus would be revising its legislation and investing in additional capacity. The Pournara

centre upgrade was being carried out with the cooperation of IOM, and there would be closer collaboration with IOM generally and with UNHCR in view of the increased number of arrivals. There had been no new developments with respect to the instruments on statelessness.

42. **A representative of Cyprus** said that she wished to recall that, under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the situation of statelessness was taken into consideration in refugee status determination, insofar as a refugee was defined as a person with a well-founded fear of persecution and who was outside his or her country of citizenship or of habitual residence. It was with reference to the latter part of the definition that protection could be granted to persons who had no nationality but were habitually resident in a given country. Accordingly, during the initial consideration of an application, due account was taken of the applicant's background, personal history and individual circumstances, including the country of habitual residence, in order to determine whether to grant or deny refugee status or grant subsidiary protection.

43. **A representative of Cyprus** said that Cyprus complied with its obligations under European and international law to provide asylum-seekers with necessary medical care, especially in humanitarian cases, and that that included psychological support and counselling, which were provided by the Ministry of Health.

44. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, with regard to the cost of living, vulnerable groups of people such as those affected by poverty, poor health and disabilities tended to be disproportionately affected by climate change. Several European Union funds and instruments were available and would be utilized by Cyprus to ensure that vulnerable groups would not be left behind in the green transition. The funds included the Social Climate Fund and the Just Transition Fund, while revenues from emissions trading could also be used.

45. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken**, referring to the discussion of poverty and inequality in paragraphs 12 and 13 of the replies to the list of issues, said that he would be interested to know what concepts of poverty and extreme poverty the State party currently applied. He would like to know what percentage of the population had been at risk of poverty in 2023 or 2024 and what main causes of poverty the State had identified. Was there a reason why the State party had not yet carried out a multidimensional poverty assessment and did it intend to do so?

46. Noting that three major pieces of legislation on corruption had been adopted in 2022, he would like to know whether they had yet been applied and whether any case law had been created. He would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that individuals found guilty of corruption had been pardoned. Had there been a breakdown of coordination in the Independent Authority Against Corruption?

47. In the context of the economic recovery following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had had a huge impact on tourism, one of the mainstays of the economy, in particular, he would be interested to know what steps had been taken to mitigate the impact on economic, social and cultural rights of the austerity measures imposed at the time.

48. In the area of gender equality, what steps had been taken, in addition to those outlined in the report, to address the gender wage gap and the relatively low number of women in senior and decision-making positions in the public sector?

49. He would appreciate an explanation of how the State party's obligations under the Covenant were incorporated into the peace process.

50. Lastly, he wished to clarify whether he had understood correctly that asylum-seekers had to wait nine months from the date of their asylum application before they were able to access the labour market. With regard to the time frame of three to six months, mentioned by the delegation in its comments on the refugee determination procedure, he would appreciate clarification as to whether that was the average time for receiving refugee status or the average time frame as set forth in the regulations or the law.

51. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that she would welcome information on the measures being taken to guarantee marriage for all regardless of gender and to remove legal

restrictions on adoption and social security entitlements. She would also be interested to know about the progress of the bill on the recognition of gender identity, which was currently before parliament.

52. With regard to business and human rights, she would appreciate information on the application of the legislative and regulatory framework governing tax evasion, which was reportedly inadequately implemented. In the area of climate change, was the State party meeting its commitments under the Paris Agreement? Could the delegation give an estimate of the impact of the Rural Development Programme on emissions reductions?

53. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would be interested to know what the State party's perspective on climate change was and what it expected from the European Union, given its small size and its particular vulnerability due to its location in the eastern Mediterranean. From what he had read, climate change would have an enormous impact on Cyprus, notably in terms of drought, rising sea levels and heatwaves. He would like to hear about the State party's plans to deal with the problems that would cause in terms of adaptation, spatial planning and housing.

54. He understood that the State party had just adopted an action plan on business and human rights; it would be interesting for the Committee to know what areas the State party intended to prioritize in its actions and where due diligence was most needed from companies based or working in Cyprus.

55. The Committee had received reports about legislative measures to deregister civil society organizations working on issues relating to the human rights of migrants. He would appreciate the delegation's comments.

56. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome clarification of the State party's jurisdiction: did the Government have no control or responsibility whatsoever in respect of the human rights of the population living in the northern part of the island, or was it rather that its responsibility was limited because it lacked effective control?

57. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, under the National Horizontal Action Plan against Corruption, full-time staff had been assigned to ministries' internal audit units, and an anti-corruption task force had been established under the auspices of the Attorney General's Office to oversee the investigation and prosecution of corruption cases. An electronic register was maintained of all cases under investigation or pending trial and was updated on a weekly basis. The task force directly communicated with the police, and timelines had been set to ensure that investigations were carried out in a prompt and efficient manner. A specialized unit had been established within the police force to investigate economic crimes, and an incentivization scheme had been launched within the public and private sectors to implement the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 37001 international standard on anti-bribery management systems, which required organizations to build an anti-corruption culture and take appropriate measures to combat corruption.

58. All five members of the Independent Authority against Corruption were appointed by the President based on the recommendation of an advisory council, which put forward a list of three qualified candidates for each position. The Authority had its own budget and staff and did not receive instructions from any government body. The grounds for dismissal of its members were the same as for Supreme Court judges. It was responsible for ensuring the coherence and effectiveness of action to combat and prevent corruption and for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy. The Authority's preventive role involved training public and private sector workers on corruption issues, managing risks and making recommendations to improve anti-corruption laws and procedures, and the investigative aspects of its work included receiving complaints regarding corruption and conducting the necessary assessments and investigations. It had received more than 200 reports of corruption in the two years since its establishment, including complaints against a former President, ministers and representatives of local authorities. The Authority's 2024 budget amounted to approximately €2 million.

59. The purpose of the law on the protection of whistle-blowers was to encourage employees to report potential violations of European Union and national anti-corruption

legislation through reporting channels and procedures that respected the right to privacy and confidentiality. The law protected whistle-blowers from retaliation from their employers, and public and private entities were required to establish reporting mechanisms for employees. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order had drafted explanatory guides and had circulated letters to public sector entities to raise awareness of the law. The guides were published on the Ministry's website in Greek and English, and the Ministry had prepared a list of the authorities that were competent to receive and examine external reports.

60. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, in 2020, Cyprus had committed to halving its net greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels by 2030, and a revised target had been enshrined in law under the European Union's "Fit for 55" legislative framework. In accordance with its obligations under European Union regulations, Cyprus had submitted a draft update of its National Energy and Climate Plan in July 2023. Under the updated Plan, Cyprus would cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 32 per cent compared to 2005 levels by 2030 through a series of specific measures in sectors such as agriculture, energy and transport. Within the agricultural sector, measures had been adopted to promote sustainable food production and farm management, encourage environmentally friendly farming practices and land use, and improve forestry methods to boost carbon absorption. With regard to energy, steps had been taken to increase the use of renewable energy sources for electricity generation, heating, cooling and transportation, and to enhance energy efficiency in all sectors, including housing. In the transport sector, infrastructure was being developed for electrification and improvements were being made to promote sustainable forms of transport.

61. The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment was in charge of coordinating all policymaking processes under the National Adaptation Strategy adopted in 2017. Particular attention was paid to groups that were especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change owing to factors such as poverty, poor health and disability. An assessment was being conducted and information was being compiled with a view to drafting a new adaptation strategy that would be more focused and efficient, and which would be allocated a larger budget. Completion of the new strategy was expected in 2025.

62. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, following labour inspections, employers were provided with specific recommendations to remedy any problems associated with their recruitment procedures, pay structures or promotion policies that gave rise to gender pay discrimination. They were also encouraged to review the representation of men and women within the company, particularly at the higher managerial levels. The Government, in cooperation with its social partners, had conducted activities, including online campaigns, to raise awareness of the gender pay gap and its detrimental consequences for women's economic and social life. Steps had been taken to ensure that women had continued access to employment opportunities throughout their lives and to ensure that men assumed their share of care responsibilities.

63. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance was currently considering the practical implications of introducing new legislation to promote pay transparency, which was expected to be in place by 2026. The planned legislation would require employers to publish gender pay gap statistics and conduct pay audits in cooperation with employees' representatives in case of a large pay gap. A tripartite technical committee involving employers' and employees' organizations had been set up to help draft the legislation. Under the National Gender Equality Strategy, a qualitative study would be carried out in cooperation with the social partners to determine why the gender pay gap persisted in certain economic sectors.

64. **A representative of Cyprus** said that enhancing women's representation in decision-making and promoting gender equality in public life stood at the forefront of policy debates in the country. Upon his election in February 2023, the President had prioritized the promotion of women's rights and gender equality within the Government's agenda. The Council of Ministers had its highest ever proportion of female ministers and had appointed women to 40 per cent of all presidential and vice-presidential positions in public entities, despite the fact that only a quarter of applicants had been women.

65. The Commissioner for Gender Equality had been entrusted with formulating the new National Gender Equality Strategy that had been approved by the Council of Ministers in January 2024. The Strategy took a holistic approach to achieving equal participation of

women and men at high-level positions in public and political life. Measures under the Strategy included empowering women in politics, establishing a digital databank on women's participation in positions of political responsibility, incorporating the gender dimension into State budgets, addressing the gender pay gap and expanding childcare services to help reconcile family and professional life. The Government was considering temporary special measures to increase women's representation in decision-making positions and had taken steps to raise public awareness of the benefits of leveraging the knowledge, abilities and skills of the entire workforce.

66. The bill on gender recognition had been before parliament for over a year and was currently being discussed by various parliamentary committees. Public consultations were under way on the new adoption bill, which would be brought before the Council of Ministers, and subsequently parliament, in due course.

67. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the rule allowing asylum-seekers to join specific sectors of the labour market nine months after submitting their asylum applications was set out in Ministerial Decree 312/2023, in implementation of article 15 of Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council. The average processing time for applications for refugee status was six months. Each case was examined on its individual merits, and more time might be required owing to the complexity of the case or to external factors, such as surges in migrant numbers.

68. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the cost-of-living crisis had prompted structural reforms to make the economy more resilient. The tax system had been modernized, and a more disciplined fiscal policy had been established. Financial and administrative measures, such as a guaranteed minimum income and support for pensioners, had been introduced to assist vulnerable groups. According to a survey on economic and living conditions, the poverty rate for 2023 was lower than the 2015 rate, and Cyprus was close to achieving its 2030 target for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion. While the income inequality index had remained largely unchanged in recent years, it was lower than it had been a decade earlier.

69. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Cypriot Government was not involved in the peace process. The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities had established technical committees to address problems and difficulties arising from the division of the island, maintain a dialogue and contribute to future reunification. The committees discussed issues related to economic and commercial matters, healthcare, gender equality, humanitarian affairs, the environment, culture and cultural heritage.

70. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know whether the minimum wage was adjusted in accordance with changes in the consumer price index to reflect the cost of living, and whether persons who had met the minimum 780 weeks of social insurance contributions were entitled to a pension for the rest of their lives. Did the pension amount increase over time? He wondered whether persons who lived in Cyprus and worked at the British military bases came under the jurisdiction of the Government of Cyprus, and what authority was responsible for adjudicating labour disputes involving such persons.

The meeting was suspended at 4.50 p.m. and resumed at 5 p.m.

71. **A representative of Cyprus** said that around 25,000 workers currently received the statutory minimum wage, which was adjusted in accordance with the consumer price index. Once individuals became eligible for the statutory pension at the age of 65 years, they were entitled to receive it for the rest of their lives.

72. **A representative of Cyprus** said that human rights defenders and NGOs working in the area of migration should be registered with the Ministry of Interior in accordance with the 2017 Act on Associations and Foundations and Other Related Issues. The Government was firmly committed to including NGOs and civil society in laws and policies and applied due diligence in protecting open civic spaces and promoting the participation of civil society in a meaningful and inclusive manner, in accordance with the rule of law.

73. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he would appreciate further information on unemployment rates among women, young people and persons with disabilities. He would

be grateful for details of best practices, policies and programmes adopted by the State party to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment.

74. **Ms. Rossi** said that the Committee had received reports of the inadequate application of legislation governing the working conditions of domestic workers and would welcome the delegation's remarks on the matter. She would like to know whether it was true that legislation providing for remedies for anti-trade union discrimination was inconsistently enforced and whether the State party had considered adopting measures to address the situation. She was interested in hearing about how the State party planned to address the structural challenges posed by the low birth rate and the ageing population, in particular with regard to the sustainability of public pension schemes. Were there any plans to bring generous government pensions into line with those available to the general population?

75. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that it would be helpful to hear the delegation's comments on reports received by the Committee regarding apparent inconsistencies in the implementation of legislation on the functioning of trade unions. He would like to know whether measures were being taken to address discrimination experienced by Turkish Cypriots in the labour market.

76. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had been incorporated into domestic law. The Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities was the focal point for the implementation of the Convention at the national level and had worked with other State bodies to develop the First National Disability Strategy (2018–2028) and the National Action Plan for Disability (2021–2023). Measures taken to promote equality in employment for persons with disabilities included a scheme providing financial assistance to such persons to help them to establish small businesses. Another scheme allocated subsidies of up to €13,000 per year to organizations implementing supported employment programmes; 28 such programmes had been rolled out between 2021 and 2024, enabling more than 400 persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with psychosocial disabilities to participate in the labour market. Persons with disabilities had access to a scheme providing up to €1,708 for participation in vocational training courses. The Law for the Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities in the Wider Public Sector provided for a 10 per cent quota for the recruitment of such persons to public sector positions.

77. **A representative of Cyprus** said that 184,833 workers in Cyprus belonged to trade unions, representing 44 per cent of the workforce. The country had a strong culture of unionization and social dialogue. During the reporting period, the only change made to rights and conditions relating to fair remuneration had been the introduction of the statutory minimum wage through the Minimum Wage Decree in January 2023, which had replaced all previous orders on specific minimum wages for a limited number of occupations. There had been no restrictions on the exercise of trade union rights, including the right to strike, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and 21 new trade unions had been registered during that period. Measures had been taken to enable trade unions to carry out essential functions online to support them in continuing their normal operations during the pandemic; permission to do so had been granted on a case-by-case basis.

78. Labour inspection functions had been reorganized over the previous decade. Legislative measures taken in that regard had included the establishment of the Labour Inspectorate, the definition of undeclared work and the introduction of administrative fines. To combat undeclared work, a digital platform had been launched to simplify the employee registration process for employers. Labour inspectors were responsible for monitoring the enforcement of 33 laws covering a range of employment issues. Inspections were conducted regularly by teams of inspectors and assistant inspectors in accordance with inspection manuals specific to each economic sector. The working conditions of domestic workers were not inspected because the Constitution prohibited inspections in private properties. Foreign workers could submit complaints through a mechanism operated by the Department of Labour Relations. Complaints resolution procedures had been established at district labour offices, facilitating access among migrant workers living in different parts of the country, and the complaints mechanism had been redesigned so that all complaints could be examined within three weeks of receipt.

79. The Government was working with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to reform the national social protection system. In the scope of that project, an actuarial study was being conducted to determine how to improve the financial governance of the general social insurance system to ensure its long-term financial sustainability. A study analysing the performance of the existing social security pension system was being carried out to inform the development of a robust framework for reform of the general social insurance system and to generate broad policy reform solutions.

80. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to receive information on the implementation and outcomes of policies on trafficking in persons. She wondered whether the State party had adopted a specific national action plan on child victims of trafficking and, if so, how much funding had been allocated for its implementation and what impact it had had to date. Information on measures taken to combat child labour among children aged 15 years and younger would be welcome.

81. She wished to know how the State party ensured that unaccompanied migrant children and children seeking asylum were accommodated in high-quality facilities with access to basic services, healthcare, education and recreational activities, especially during extended stays. It would be helpful to hear about any independent living programmes and personalized reintegration plans in place to support unaccompanied children in living independently once they reached adulthood. Information on steps taken to prevent forced returns at the border and family separations would be appreciated. She would like to know whether beneficiaries of complementary protection enjoyed the right to family reunification and whether beneficiaries of international protection had the right to obtain family residence permits for their spouses and children when starting families in Cyprus. She wondered whether the requirements for obtaining Cypriot nationality for children born in Cyprus were being reviewed to guarantee nationality for children who would otherwise be stateless. In the light of concerns raised by the Turkish Cypriot community regarding obstacles to citizenship faced by children of mixed marriages, she would welcome information on steps taken to eliminate birth registration fees with a view to preventing statelessness.

82. She would welcome details of the impact of the implementation of legislation relating to parental leave in facilitating the redistribution of domestic tasks among the State, families and the private sector.

83. It would be useful to hear about steps taken to address the high rates of institutionalization among children with disabilities and the lack of support provided to parents. She wished to know how the State party ensured that children with disabilities could be raised in family environments, including any measures adopted to increase the availability of early intervention and socioeconomic support services and access to information on such services.

84. She was interested in hearing about the results of the implementation of the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the law introducing the crime of femicide as a separate offence and the National Strategy and National Action Plan (2023–2028) on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. She would be grateful to receive information on steps taken to investigate cases of violence against women promptly and effectively, prosecute and punish perpetrators and ensure access to remedies for victims. She was keen to hear about measures taken to increase the number and geographic coverage of shelters and provide victims with free legal aid and specialist psychosocial, rehabilitation and reintegration services.

85. It would be helpful if the delegation could indicate whether persons living below the poverty line were covered by welfare benefits and whether the amounts paid were sufficient to ensure an adequate standard of living. Did groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities and asylum-seekers have access to social welfare programmes on an equal footing without discrimination?

86. Information on measures taken to improve living conditions would be welcome, as would details regarding the availability of social housing among disadvantaged groups. She would find it useful to hear about the implementation and results of the new Housing Policy Framework. She wished to know what percentage of the population currently lacked access to adequate housing and which groups were most affected by that problem. She would

appreciate information on whether adequate and affordable housing was accessible to the Roma population.

87. The Committee would like to hear how the State party had worked to improve the public health system and eliminate disparities in access by increasing public health funding. It would be helpful to know what percentage of the State budget was spent on health and whether that figure had increased in recent years. The delegation might wish to explain how the State party guaranteed equal and universal access to the health service without discrimination and what measures were taken to register asylum-seekers in the General Health System and include them among the groups entitled to benefits for specific needs. How did the State party assist Roma in registering with the health system, and how did it ensure access for persons living with HIV, including children?

88. She wished to know how the State party ensured that clear guidance was provided on the implementation of the 2018 Abortion Act and that abortion services, including pre- and post-abortion counselling, were available at public hospitals. She wondered whether modern and affordable contraception and reproductive health services were accessible to all women and girls and what measures had been taken to ensure that sexual and reproductive education was incorporated into mandatory curricula for adolescent boys and girls.

89. It would be useful to hear about community-based measures taken to ensure that persons with psychosocial disabilities and persons with impaired mental health could enjoy the right to independent living. An update on the deinstitutionalization process would be welcome, as would information on the availability, accessibility and quality of mental health services for older adults. The delegation might wish to provide information on the availability, accessibility and quality of programmes and services promoting independent and autonomous living among older adults.

90. She would like to learn more about efforts to prevent and combat substance abuse among adolescents, including awareness-raising campaigns and specialist treatment and harm reduction services. Information on the country's drug policy and the National Strategy for Addressing Addictions 2021–2028 would be appreciated.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 5.35 p.m.