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in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Replies of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the list of issues in relation to its seventh periodic report^{*}, ^{**}

[Date received: 30 August 2024]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Introduction

1. The UK Government is grateful to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for its List of Issues Report (LoIR). In preparing this response, the UK Government has considered views expressed by National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organisations.

2. The response is informed by various Government departments, the Devolved Governments, Crown Dependencies (CDs) and British Overseas Territories (OTs), with the UK Government noting the challenge of reflecting the full territorial extent of the UK within the word limit.

3. The UK Government is committed to protecting and respecting human rights and has strong human rights protections within a comprehensive and well-established constitutional and legal system, and a strong track record of ensuring rights and liberties are protected domestically, and of fulfilling our international human rights obligations. The UK Government strongly supports the work of the United Nations treaty bodies and regards them as central to the broader human rights system.

4. Following the 4 July 2024 General Election, the UK elected a new Government led by the Labour Party.

5. Whilst the majority of this report provides factual or historic information unaffected by the election, areas of policy are subject to review and change and we look forward to updating the Committee at the dialogue.

6. We would however like to bring to the Committee's attention to the below manifesto commitments and recent legislative announcements of relevance to the Covenant:

- Britain will unequivocally remain a member of the European Convention on Human Rights;
- At the King's Speech on 17 July 2024, legislation was announced to introduce a new deal for working people to ban exploitative practices and enhance employment rights (the Employment Rights Bill);
- The Plan to Make Work Pay sets out a significant and ambitious agenda to ensure workplace rights are fit for a modern economy, empower working people and deliver economic growth. This is a core part of the Government's mission to grow the economy and raise living standards across the country;
- Rights to equal pay and protections from maternity and menopause discrimination and sexual harassment will be strengthened;
- The Government will introduce the full right to equal pay for disabled people;
- The Government wants to ensure that all citizens can thrive, whatever their background, so will enact the socio-economic duty in s.1 of the Equality Act 2010;
- The Government will publish a draft Equality (Race and Disability) Bill. This will enshrine in law the full right to equal pay for ethnic minorities and disabled people and introduce mandatory ethnicity and disability pay reporting.

A. General Information

1. July 2024 General Election

7. On 4 July 2024 the UK held a General Election to determine the composition of the next parliament and government. The new UK Government has considered this report carefully, although having limited time to review it. In cases where policy has not yet been decided, the report indicates this clearly.

2. Justiciability of economic, social and cultural rights

8. The UK has implemented a combination of policies and legislation to give effect to the UN human rights treaties it has ratified. The same approach is followed by the OTs and the CDs to which those treaties have been extended. We note the recommendation on the need to give effect to our obligations and to provide effective legal remedy. The UK is confident that it is fully compliant with its UN treaty obligations including ensuring effective remedies where required for any breaches.

R (SC & Others) v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

9. The case of *R (SC & Others)* recognised the long-standing constitutional position that domestic courts cannot enforce unincorporated treaties.¹ The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) gives further domestic effect to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, the Supreme Court also recognised that the UK intends to be bound when it enters into international treaties and that the European Court of Human Rights can have regard to international law in interpreting the ECHR and establishing consensus amongst States.

The Bill of Rights

10. The UK government is fully committed to the protection of human rights both domestically and internationally. As the Prime Minister has made clear, the United Kingdom is unequivocally committed to the European Convention on Human Rights. Specifically on the Bill of Rights Bill - under the previous Government, the then Lord Chancellor informed the House of Commons on 27 June 2023 that the UK Government would not be proceeding with the Bill of Rights Bill. The new Government made no commitment in its manifesto to bring forward this or any other comparable change to the UK's human rights framework.

Scotland

11. The Scottish Government (SG) proposes to incorporate, within the limits of devolved competence, four UN treaties into Scots law, as well as recognising and including the right to a healthy environment, via a new Human Rights Bill. ICESCR will be central to this.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Bill

12. The UK Government is firmly committed to upholding the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in all its parts. This includes provision for a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland (NI).

13. New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) committed the parties to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights through the work of an Assembly Ad Hoc Committee. The Committee's report was approved by the Assembly on 14 February 2022. However, further consensus in NI is needed for the Bill of Rights to progress. A consensus approach was always envisaged in the GFA.

3. Covenant provisions and environmental standards under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 and the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill 2022, and measures taken to assess and address the impact of the loss of funding from the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund

14. European Social Funding was replaced by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) from April 2023. This is managed centrally by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

15. With a focus on addressing rates of economic inactivity, NI was awarded £57m of UKSPF funding across 2023/24 and 2024/25 to support 18 projects. Article 2 of the Windsor

¹ Treaties which the UK is bound by as a matter of international law but has not given domestic legal effect through domestic legislation.

Framework² ensures no diminution of rights, safeguards or equality of opportunity – as set out in the GFA – results from withdrawal from the European Union, including protection against discrimination.

16. In addition to the range of labour market provision available, and the introduction of UKSPF, the NI Department for Communities introduced Labour Market Partnerships (LMP) from April 2022/23. During 2023/24, LMP commissioned £4.7m in labour market interventions.

4. Measures regarding official development assistance (ODA)

17. The International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015 enshrines in law the UK's commitment to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on ODA each calendar year. Given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy and public finances, in 2021 ODA spending was reduced to 0.5% of GNI and has remained around that level since then. The UK is committed to restoring ODA spending to 0.7% of GNI as soon as fiscal circumstances allow.

18. The UK's country-specific bilateral ODA³ to Least Development Countries since 2016 is as follows:

Year	Volume of country-specific bilateral ODA provided to LDCs (£m)	Percentage of country-specific bilateral ODA provided to LDCs (%)	Change from previous year	
			Volume change (£m)	Percentage change (%)
2016	2 353	48.6	-	-
2017	2 577	54.1	+224	+9.5
2018	2 389	53.1	-188	-7.3
2019	2 711	54.3	+322	+13.5
2020	2 295	54.2	-416	-15.3
2021	1 379	49.2	-916	-39.9
2022	1 197	50.6	-182	-13.2

19. £100m of ODA funding is provided to ODA-eligible Overseas Territories (Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha) to support infrastructure programmes, marine conservation, and financial aid. Financial Aid, funded by ODA, accounts for approximately 65% of recurrent budget on both Montserrat and St Helena.

5. Measures taken to collect data relevant to assessing the extent to which Covenant rights are realised in the UK

20. With reference to paragraphs 7 and 8 in the Concluding Observations of the 6th Periodic Report, this document includes a comprehensive response from all jurisdictions of the State Party (including NI, the CDs and the OTs). Noting the guidance on word count, the report draws upon key evidence and information as appropriate.

² The Windsor Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

³ Bilateral spend which can be attributed to a specific recipient country. This does not include other forms of spending that also contributes to the development of LDCs such as regional multilateral spend. Country level ODA data for 2023 is not yet available but will be published in the UK's Statistics on International Development publication in autumn 2024.

6. 2016 National Action Plan on implementing the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

21. In response to the UN Guiding Principles (UNGP), the UK was the first State to produce a National Action Plan and we continue to develop our approach in line with the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Under Section 54 of the Act, commercial businesses with a turnover of £36m+ are required to report annually on the steps they have taken to prevent modern slavery. The UK works through several international mechanisms to promote responsible business practice to reduce and prevent conflict and protect human rights. This includes supporting the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Mineral Supply Chains and the Kimberley Process, to help stem the flow of conflict diamonds.

22. The UK has a range of judicial and state-based non judicial mechanisms that help to support access to remedy for human rights abuses by business enterprises. The UK operates a National Contact Point (UK NCP) to promote the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct (the Guidelines).

Other jurisdictions

23. SG actions can be found in the SG's position statement on ICESCR.⁴

7. Mitigating and adapting to climate change

Mitigation of climate change

24. In December 2020, the UK communicated its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement; an at least 68% reduction in Green House Gas emissions by 2030, on 1990 levels. The UK's NDC requires the fastest rate of reduction in greenhouse gases between 1990 and 2030 of all major economies.

25. In September 2022, the UK updated its NDC. The UK's ratification of the Paris Agreement was also extended to the Bailiwick of Jersey and Gibraltar in 2022 and to the Isle of Man and Guernsey in 2023.

26. With the Climate Change Act 2008, the UK became the first country to set a legally binding emissions reduction target. This was a reduction of at least 80% by 2050 relative to 1990 levels. In 2019 it was amended to at least 100% (the "net zero" target).

27. The 2008 Act also established the Committee on Climate Change to provide independent expert advice.

28. The UK has set six carbon budgets, covering 2008 to 2037. In October 2021 the Government published the Net Zero Strategy which set out how the UK will meet its carbon budgets, NDC and net zero targets. It includes policies and proposals to reduce emissions for each sector of the economy, as well as cross-cutting action. These policies were updated in March 2023 with a suite of publications under the policy paper, Powering Up Britain that included the Powering Up Britain: Net Zero Growth Plan and the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan. Other policy documents include:

- Energy White Paper;
- North Sea Transition Deal;
- Industrial Decarbonisation Strategy;
- Transport Decarbonisation Plan;
- Hydrogen Strategy;
- Heat and Buildings Strategy;

⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: position statement - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

- British Energy Security Strategy.

29. The UK over-achieved against the first (2008-12), second (2013-17) and third (2018-22) carbon budgets.

30. Taken together, the policies and proposals set out in the Net Zero Strategy (as updated by the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan) for every sector of the UK economy show how the UK intends to meet Carbon Budgets 4 (2023-27), 5 (2028-32) and 6 (2033-37), our 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution, and ultimately net zero by 2050.

31. The UK has halved its emissions, ahead of every other major economy and we have one of the most ambitious decarbonisation targets in the world. We have grown our economy by nearly 80% since 1990.

Climate change adaptation

32. The Climate Change Act 2008 requires the government to complete a Climate Change Risk Assessment (the CCRA) every 5 years, followed by a National Adaptation Programme setting out how the government will address the risks identified in the CCRA.

33. The government published its third CCRA in January 2022, informed by an independent assessment undertaken by the Climate Change Committee. The technical report for the independent assessment identified 61 climate risks and opportunities impacting multiple sectors of society, including risks to businesses, health and livelihoods, buildings and communities, infrastructure and the natural environment.

34. The third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3) was published in July 2023 and covers areas falling within scope of the UK Government's responsibilities in relation to England, and its non-devolved functions in relation to the rest of the UK. NAP3 addresses all 61 climate change risks and opportunities facing the UK.⁵

35. The third National Adaptation Programme includes a chapter dedicated to the role that different institutions play in adapting to climate change in the UK.

36. The Climate Change Act 2008 also established an Adaptation Reporting Power (ARP) that enables the government to require (or invite) infrastructure providers and bodies with functions of a 'public nature' to provide reports on how they manage climate risk. The third National Adaptation Programme includes the strategy for the fourth round of climate adaptation reporting under ARP. Organisations from the energy, transport, water, environment, land, food, finance, heritage, and health sectors asked to report on how climate change will impact their organisations and work, the action they are taking to adapt, and the progress they are making.

B. Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant (arts. 1-5)

Maximum available resources (art. 2 (1))

8. Information on the evolution of the following

The proportion of the population living below the nationally defined poverty line

37. The latest available Households Below Average Income data, covering 2022/23 shows that 21% of individuals were in relative poverty (after housing costs – see Annex [8a]).

Tax

38. Between 2013-14:

⁵ [The Third National Adaptation Programme \(NAP3\) and the Fourth Strategy for Climate Adaptation Reporting \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

- The average proportion of Public Sector Cash Receipts accounted for by National Account taxes was 89.5%, accounting for 33.8% of GDP on average;
- Direct taxes accounted for an average of 69.3%, and indirect taxes accounted for 30.7% of total receipts.

39. Between 2013-14 and 2022-23, onshore and offshore corporation tax raised £553.9bn of receipts.

40. As of 1 April 2023, the headline rate of corporation tax is 25% with a small profits rate introduced at 19% for companies with profits under £50,000.

Public expenditure as a percentage of GDP

41. In 2022/23 Total Managed Expenditure (Public Expenditure) was 45.6% of GDP. Within this:

- Expenditure on Social Protection was 12.6% of GDP;
- Expenditure on Health was 8.4% of GDP;
- Expenditure on Education was 4.2% of GDP;
- Expenditure on Housing and Community Amenities was 0.7% of GDP;
- Expenditure on Agriculture, fisheries and forestry was 0.3% of GDP.

Military expenses as a percentage of GDP and of the public budget

42. The percentage of GDP the UK is spending on defence for 2023/24 is estimated at 2.28%.⁶

Fiscal policies adopted in response to the coronavirus pandemic

43. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) estimates total expenditure was in the region of £100 billion.

£20 Uplift

44. Universal Credit (UC) provided a safety net for six million people during the pandemic. A temporary uplift of £20 a week was applied to UC as part of the COVID-19 support package, worth £407 billion in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

45. From April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic LHA rates were increased to the 30th percentile of local market rates meaning 1.5 million Housing Benefit and UC claimants gained around £600 in 2020/21.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme (CWGS) and COVID Local Support Grant (CLSG)

46. The COVID Winter Grant scheme was announced on 9 November 2020. It was extended and eventually replaced by several versions of the COVID Local Support Grant.

47. These schemes provided £429.1 million to Local Authorities (LAs) to support vulnerable households during the pandemic. At least 80% of this funding had to be spent on households with children, and at least 80% had to be spent on support for food, energy and water costs.

Debt Recovery

48. The UK Government temporarily paused the recovery of benefit overpayments, Social Fund loans and Tax Credit debts. Increasing the amount of money individuals received in benefits during the outbreak.

⁶ https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2024/3/pdf/sgar23-en.pdf#page=49 – see page 50.

Tax avoidance and illicit financial flows

49. The Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Act 2014,⁷ which applies to taxes fully devolved to Scotland, contains a general anti-avoidance rule (GAAR) to enable Revenue Scotland to counteract tax avoidance arrangements considered to be artificial, even if they otherwise operate within the letter of the law. The legislation for each of the devolved taxes also contain a number of Targeted Anti-Avoidance Rules, working in tandem with the GAAR to reduce scope for avoidance activity.

50. Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man are all active participants in the work of the OECD's Global Forum, which supports its members in tackling tax evasion by working to secure the effective implementation of tax transparency and exchange of information standards. The islands are also members of the OECD BEPS Inclusive Framework which works to tackle tax avoidance and ensure a more transparent tax environment. Notably, the islands have published a joint commitment to increase transparency and accessibility to information held on their registers of beneficial ownership.

Funding of overseas development programmes over the past ten years and the conditionality or requirements for the receiving countries

51. The UK's ODA spend over the past ten years is set out in the table on p.3 of the Annex.

52. The FCDO attaches terms and conditions to all the aid it provides, with careful monitoring and evaluation, so that stated objectives are achieved. For example, all agreements include conditions to provide assurance that funds are effectively managed, people are safeguarded, and delivery is monitored and reported. Some FCDO ODA funding arrangements will seek policy or reform objectives linked to the purpose of the funding.

53. Terms and conditions can be used to promote and underline UK values, such as action on sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment; and put in place appropriate financial and fiduciary safeguards to ensure UK cash is well spent.

Non-discrimination (art. 2 (2))

9. Measures taken to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law

54. Under the Equality Act 2010, protection from direct and indirect discrimination continues to apply for 9 protected characteristics (age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity and religion or belief).

55. The UK Government will enact the socio-economic duty in England. The dual discrimination provision in the Act has not been commenced. The UK Government will strengthen protections against dual discrimination.

Other jurisdictions

56. The SG is proposing a Human Rights Bill that will incorporate into Scots Law, within the limits of devolved competence, ICESCR and three other UN treaties:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD);
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);

⁷ [Revenue Scotland and Tax Powers Act 2014 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk).

57. In NI, the law provides a range of statutory protections from discrimination. Article 2 of the Windsor Framework provides a UK Government commitment to the non-diminution of rights and safeguards in NI as a result of exit from the EU.

Guernsey

58. The Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance, 2022 entered into force on 1 October 2023. Under the Ordinance, various forms of discrimination are unlawful in the fields of employment, the provision of goods and services, accommodation, and membership of clubs and associations on the grounds of race, disability, carer status, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

59. Subject to the approval of Guernsey's parliament, it is currently intended that a second phase of the legislation will add additional protection.

Jersey

60. Jersey continues to be bound by international non-discrimination instruments, specifically the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

10. Refugees and asylum seekers

Nationality and Borders Act 2022

61. Individuals granted refugee and humanitarian protection status are eligible to access benefits and services on an equivalent basis to UK nationals.

62. The UK Government is committed to monitoring and evaluating the implementation and impact of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022 ('the 2022 Act') policies. The Home Office (HO) has ongoing dialogue with stakeholders where issues can be brought to its attention.

63. As part of the implementation of the 2022 Act, the HO:

- Worked with stakeholders on creating and updating policy guidance;
- Delivered training to relevant teams, including on matters concerning safeguarding, vulnerabilities and equalities;
- Considered any safeguarding and assurance requirements, so they can protect the vulnerable, identify issues – including unintended consequences – and address these where appropriate.

Economic, social and cultural rights

64. In 2022, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) spent £163.6 million on social security benefits for Afghans and Ukrainians who arrived in the UK in the last year under dedicated humanitarian resettlement schemes. Under OECD guidance this is classed as ODA.

65. The HO has a legal obligation to provide support under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 to asylum-seekers if they appear to be destitute or are likely to become destitute.

66. Support provided under Section 95 is usually provided in the form of free, furnished accommodation (with no utility bills or Council Tax to pay) and a weekly cash allowance to cover essential living needs. Free access to healthcare and schooling, plus free school meals are also available.

Access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, protection against refoulement and access to independent appeal mechanisms

Refoulement

67. The UK will not remove individuals where they are at risk of persecution or where removal breaches the UK's obligations under Article 3 of the ECHR. This is consistent with our obligations to ensure individuals are not onward refouled and will not result in increased likelihood of individuals being refouled.

Statutory Framework for Claims

68. Part 11 of the Immigration Rules⁸ sets out provisions for the consideration of asylum claims and reflects the UK's obligations under the Refugee Convention (RC).

69. Protection is normally granted where a claimant has a well-founded fear of persecution under the RC or faces a real risk of serious harm. Those who qualify are normally granted five years' limited leave and can access the labour market and welfare support.

70. Those found not to need protection are refused. Once appeal rights, if exercised, are exhausted, unsuccessful claimants are expected to leave the UK.

71. The 2022 Act defines what it means for a claimant to have a well-founded fear of persecution and creates a new statutory framework for the HO to follow when assessing whether a claimant has such, in accordance with Article 1(A) (2) of the RC.

Appeal

72. There is a right of appeal under Section 82 of the 2002 Act against a decision to refuse a human rights claim (namely the rights under the ECHR as reflected in the HRA) and to refuse a protection claim or revoke protection status.

Legal Aid

73. Legal aid is available for asylum cases, for victims of domestic abuse and modern slavery, for separated migrant children and for immigration cases where someone is challenging a detention decision.

74. Where an issue falls outside this scope, funding may be available through the Exceptional Case Funding (ECF) Scheme, where there is a risk that not providing legal aid could result in a breach of human rights or retained enforceable EU law.

Statistical information

75. The HO publishes data on asylum claims in the 'Immigration System Statistics Quarterly Release'.⁹

Equal rights of men and women (art. 3)

11. Information covering

Results and impact of initiatives mentioned in paragraphs 46-51 of State party's report on equality between women and men

Statistical data on the representation of women

76. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) regularly publishes data on employment, broken down by sex:

⁸ Immigration Rules - Guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

⁹ Immigration system statistics quarterly release - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes>.

77. In Scotland, there have been positive increases in women's representation over recent years, notably in relation to Scottish public appointments, many of which are subject to the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018.

78. The percentage of women applying for Public Appointments in NI was approximately 35%–39% between 2019–2022 and the percentage of women appointed was approximately 34%–46% during the same period. (Source: Public Appointments Report for Northern Ireland 2019–2022).

Measures taken to address and monitor occupational segregation

79. The refreshed Fair Work Action Plan (FWAP) sets out the SG's intersectional approach to creating a Fair Work nation by 2025 (including commitments aimed at tackling structural barriers experienced in the labour market by disabled people, racialised minorities and women) and steps to address and monitor occupational segregation and pay gaps. It builds on the progress made through our original A Fairer Scotland for Women: gender pay gap action plan (2019).

Statistical data on the evolution of the gender pay gap

80. Data on the UK gender pay gap, including disaggregation by age, employment sector, and region is collected by the ONS and published on an annual basis. In 2023 their release showed the gap among all employees had fallen by approximately a quarter over the last decade: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2023>

81. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is responsible for enforcing the Gender Pay Gap reporting regulations introduced in 2017. Their Litigation and Enforcement Policy outlines how they decide what action to take against non-compliant organisations.

82. The Isle of Man Government has powers similar to the UK to introduce gender pay gap reporting – however they have not yet been brought into force. Jersey continues to publish public sector gender pay gap data and keeps under review the issue of reporting in the private sector.

Issues relating to the specific provisions of the Covenant (arts. 6–15)

Right to work (art. 6)

12. Information covering

COVID-19 pandemic

83. The UK Government introduced two employment support schemes to support the labour market in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). The CJRS enabled employers to furlough employees and claim a grant to cover up to 80% of their wages. This ensured employees could retain their job and the majority of their salary. A total of 1.3 million employers and 11.7 million employees were supported by the CJRS, with claims totalling £70 billion.

84. The SEISS supported self-employed individuals whose businesses had been adversely affected by COVID-19 restrictions, enabling them to remain in business. A total of 2.9 million eligible self-employed individuals claimed SEISS grants, totalling £28.1 billion.

85. The UK Government has published comprehensive evaluations of CJRS and SEISS, assessing the delivery of the schemes, their impacts and value for money. The schemes:

- Supported 14.6 million jobs and prevented 250,000 businesses from closing;
- Kept unemployment down, peaking at 5.2% instead of reaching nearly 12% as the OBR expected;
- Helped to accelerate the UK's recovery from the pandemic by preventing long-term economic scarring, with output 1.8% higher in 2021 than it would have been without the schemes and a tapered end to support preventing a spike in unemployment;
- Balanced the need for rapid support with minimising fraud and ensuring value for taxpayers.

Plan for Jobs

86. Throughout the pandemic, the UK Government provided unprecedented levels of support to the economy. The Plan for Jobs also included key DWP programmes, such as Restart and Kickstart, alongside other measures to boost work searches, skills, and apprenticeships.

Refugees and asylum seekers

87. DWP provides support to help refugees access benefits, find work and integrate into society, including:

- Exemption from the usual DWP habitual residency tests which means individuals can claim income-based, disability and carers benefits, straight away once their positive asylum decision has been made;
- Access to mainstream Jobcentre services, including individually tailored benefit and work support;
- Access to DWP employment programmes including Restart, Sector Based Work Academies and early access to the Work and Health Programme; National Employer and Partnership teams (NEPT) work with around 500 national employers, trade associations and partners across a range of labour market sectors, to support refugees into work;
- NEPT share job vacancies with the Refugee Employment Network, a UK wide charity with a membership of over 200 refugee employment organisations.

13. Information covering

Youth employment

88. The UK is committed to meeting the G20 Antalya 2015 goal, to reduce the share of youth Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) rate by 15% by 2025.

89. The Kickstart Scheme provided grant-funded jobs for a period of six months with participating employers for 16 to 24-year-olds on UC and at risk of long-term unemployment. Funding applied to jobs starting between September 2020-end of March 2022. Over 163,000 jobs were started by young people since its launch.

90. The aim of the Kickstart Scheme was to fund the direct creation of additional jobs for young people at risk of long-term unemployment giving them the chance to build their confidence and skills in the workplace, and to gain experience that would improve their chances of progressing to find long-term, sustainable work.

91. The Kickstart Scheme evaluation was published in July 2023.

92. The DWP Youth Offer launched on 20 September 2020 and provides young people claiming UC with specialised support to help them move into work. It is subject to a Process Evaluation which concluded in Spring 2024. We aim to publish the findings in due course.

93. A key focus of the SG Fair Work Action Plan (FWAP) is youth employment and transitions towards and into employment. For example, Skills Development Scotland¹⁰ are working to improve careers advice, support and guidance. No One Left Behind¹¹ is an all-age programme of support which focuses also on young people, especially those who are disabled, care-experienced and others at risk of finding themselves at some distance from accessing the labour market. See Tables 1 and 2 at Annex I.

94. Skills for Life and Work is a training programme in Northern Ireland, aimed at Entry Level and Level 1, enabling participants to gain professional and technical qualifications alongside essential skills, employability and personal development. It is available for 16- and 17-year-olds, with extended age eligibility for those with a disability (up to under age 22) or care-experienced (up to under age 24).

Labour market insertion and retention of disabled people

95. The UK Government has a range of support available so individuals can stay in work and get back into work, including those that join up employment and health systems.

96. These include, but are not limited to:

- The Work and Health Programme providing tailored and personalised support for disabled people:
 - The total number of starts on the Work and Health Programme to the end of February 2024 is 320,000, with 130,000 participants achieving first earnings from employment and 85,000 participants have reached the job outcome earnings threshold or six months of being in self-employment;
- Access to Work (AtW) grants helping towards extra costs of working beyond standard reasonable adjustments:
 - In 2022/23, Access to Work (AtW) provision was approved for 49,820 people, 47,230 people were in receipt of Access to Work payments and total nominal expenditure on Access to Work was £182.9 million;
- Intensive Personalised Employment Support (IPES) is a voluntary programme for unemployed and inactive disabled people with complex barriers to employment, who are motivated to work, but are more than twelve months from the labour market without intensive support. IPES is a trial and took its last referrals on 1st December 2023. The last participants will finish the programme on 21 September 2025:
 - Between December 2019 and January 2023 there had been 8,815 programme starts.

97. In 2021/2022 disability employment rates were: 29.9% for disabled people who reported autism as a main or secondary condition and 28.0% for those who reported severe or specific learning difficulties as a main or secondary condition. The Annual Population Survey reports that in 2022/23 30.8% of disabled people who reported severe or specific learning difficulties as a main or secondary condition were in work, compared to 2013/14 where 19.0% were in work.

98. The Local Supported Employment (LSE) programme supports people with learning difficulties and/or autism to find and retain work through intensive one-to-one support based on an evidence-based approach to Supported Employment. LSE is being delivered across 28 LAs in England and Wales from November 2022 to May 2026 to help around 3,500 individuals to get into work.

Ethnic minorities

99. As well as the national employment offer, the UK government has been taking action in 20 local authority areas with high ethnic minority populations and a high ethnic minority employment gap, representing over half of the national ethnic minority employment gap.

¹⁰ Corporate - Skills Development Scotland.

¹¹ No One Left Behind: delivery plan - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Jobcentres in these areas have been taking a three-tiered approach to increase ethnic minority employment:

- Ensuring Jobcentre staff are equipped with skills and support through training materials and guidance;
- Influencing the behaviour of ethnic minority jobseekers, by joining up with the Department for Education (DfE) to increase apprenticeship and traineeship take-up, and by working with employers;
- Influencing the behaviour of employers through targeted engagement via Strategic Relationship Team, promoting guidance produced by the Race Disparity Unit including on ethnicity pay reporting and positive action in the workplace and working with external organisations such as the Youth Futures Foundation.

100. Additionally, the Government offered support to those in inactivity through their work in communities and through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment in measures to enable adults to join and progress within the labour market.

101. For the year ending December 2023 the ethnic minority employment rate was at 69%, compared to 63% in 2015 and 59% in 2010.

102. Following the July 2024 General Election, the UK Government is yet to consider the direction of this policy area in the future. The UK hopes to be able to update the Committee at the interactive dialogue.

Middle-income employment opportunities

103. A voluntary In-Work Progression offer was rolled-out in April 2022 and since March 2023 all UC claimants in the Light Touch or Working Enough groups have been eligible for the voluntary support offer to help all working claimants progress by providing individual and tailored progression support.

104. UC seeks to ensure that claimants are better off working more hours and earning more money, helping them to become financially independent.

105. The In-Work Progression Randomised Control Trial (RCT), in 2015–2018 tested whether using conditionality requirements was effective in supporting working UC claimants to increase their earnings. Evidence from the trial found progression support delivered by Jobcentre work coaches helped claimants increase earnings.

14. Information covering

Practices regarding recruitment, retention, promotions, salaries and other conditions of employment

106. Fair Work First¹² is the SG's main lever, in the absence of legislative powers over employment, for promoting Fair Work practices in Scotland. The Fair Work First approach levers change through applying criteria to public sector spend, including asking employers to 'tackle gender pay gaps' and since October 2021 to 'offer flexible working from day one of employment'.

107. The SG's Anti-Racist Employment Strategy¹³ supports and encourages employers through guidance, case studies and advice to address racial inequality and racism in the workplace, including occupational segregation and under-representation of ethnic minorities at senior level.

¹² Fair Work First: the approach and what it aims to achieve - Fair Work First guidance - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

¹³ Anti-racist employment strategy - A Fairer Scotland for All - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Right to just and favourable conditions of work (art. 7)

15. National minimum wage

108. Through the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and the National Living Wage (NLW) the UK Government protects the lowest paid within our society. In April 2023, around 4.9% of jobs were covered by the NLW.

109. On 1 April 2024, the NLW for workers aged 21 years and over increased by 9.8% to £11.44 an hour.

110. There are separate age rates for younger workers and apprentices. From April 2024, the age threshold for the NLW was lowered from 23 to 21, and the other ‘youth rates’ increased significantly to lessen the gap between them and the NLW:

- For those aged 18–20, NMW increased to £8.60 an hour, an increase of 14.8%;
- For those aged under 18, NMW increased to £6.40 an hour, an increase of 21.2%;
- The NMW for an apprentice under the age of 19 or in the first year of their apprenticeship increased to £6.40 an hour, an increase of 21.2%.

111. When setting the April 2025 rates, the Government is determined to deliver a genuine living wage and asked the Low Pay Commission (LPC) to ensure that the rate does not drop below two-thirds of UK median earnings for workers aged 21 and over, a recognised measure of low hourly pay defined by the OECD. In addition, for the first time, the Government has asked the LPC to take account of the cost of living in deciding the appropriate rates to recommend for 2025.

112. The Government has also asked the LPC to:

- Make progress in extending the National Living Wage to more adults than ever before, by continuing to narrow the gap between the 18–20 minimum wage rate and National Living Wage, on a year-by-year path towards achieving a single adult rate;
- Recommend rates for under-18 years, and those eligible for the apprentice rate, are as high as possible without damaging employment prospects for these workers.

113. The minimum wage in the UK applies in England, Wales, Scotland and NI. Minimum wage legislation is in force in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The Overseas Territories are responsible for their own employment law.

114. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) enforces the NMW and NLW. The budget for minimum wage enforcement and compliance has more than doubled since the introduction of the NLW, increasing from £13.2m in 2015/16 to £27.8m in 2022/23. In 2021/22, HMRC identified £16.3m in arrears owed to more than 120,000 workers and issued 696 penalties totalling £13.2 million to non-compliant employers.

16. Temporary employment, precarious self-employment and “zero-hour contracts”

115. The UK Government has set out an ambitious agenda on employment rights in the Plan to Make Work Pay. This includes banning exploitative zero hours contracts. We will deliver this commitment through two measures:

- We will ensure that everyone has the right to have a contract that reflects the number of hours they regularly work, based on a twelve-week reference period;
- We will ensure that workers get a reasonable notice of their shift patterns, and of any changes in their shift patterns, with compensation for shifts cancelled at short notice.

116. The Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023 amended the right to request flexible working to encourage better dialogue between employers and employees about the benefits of flexible working opportunities, increase the possible frequency of requests and

speed up the administrative process. In parallel, regulations were introduced to allow people to make a statutory flexible working request from their first day of employment.

17. Disability workforce Reporting Consultation and Voluntary Ethnicity Pay Reporting Guidelines

117. In 2021, the UK Government published a consultation to consider whether employers with over 250 employees should be required to report the number of disabled people they employ, the response to which was delayed by legal action.

118. Following winning an appeal that allowed work on this area to progress, we have restarted analysis of the consultation responses.

119. Building on this work, it is now the intention of the UK Government to go even further, introducing Disability Pay Gap reporting as an important measure to improve disability inclusion in the workplace. The Fair Work Action Plan (FWAP) and Anti-Racist Employment Strategy set out how the SG aim to tackle pay gaps, including undertaking an equal pay audit examining pay gaps by disability, gender, race and age by March 2024. The FWAP strategy outlines a series of commitments for the SG to work with partners to target areas of focus, including data, employment policies and workplace culture, to support recruitment, retention and progression of racialised minorities.

120. The gender pay gap for full-time employees is continuing the longer-term downward trend seen prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (1.7% in 2023 compared to 7.2 per cent in 2019), and for all employees in Scotland (including both part-time and full-time employees) is 8.7% in Scotland.

121. Statistical information regarding disability and ethnicity income gaps can be located here: Labour Market Statistics for Scotland by Disability: January to December 2022 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot) and here Labour Market Statistics for Scotland by Ethnicity, January to December 2021 – gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

18. Physical and mental harassment, including sexual harassment, and its means of enforcement

122. Strong laws against workplace harassment are set out in the Equality Act 2010.

123. In July 2019, the UK Government held a consultation on sexual harassment in the workplace to ensure laws protecting people from harassment at work were operating effectively.

124. In response, the Government committed to strengthen the protections against sexual harassment in the workplace. As part of this, the Government supported the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 which contains a duty on employers to take ‘reasonable steps’ to prevent sexual harassment of their employees. The employer duty will come into force on 26 October 2024 to ensure sufficient time for employers to prepare for the change.

125. A breach of the employer duty is enforceable in two ways:

- A standalone breach may be enforced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission under their existing enforcement powers;
- A breach may also be enforced by an employment tribunal where the tribunal has first found a breach of the Equality Act which involved, to any extent, sexual harassment.

126. The UK Government will require employers to create and maintain workplaces and working conditions free from harassment, including by third parties, as well as strengthen the legal duty for employers to take all reasonable steps to stop sexual harassment before it starts.

19. Modern Slavery Act 2015

127. Under Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, commercial businesses operating in the UK with a turnover of £36m or more are required to report annually on steps taken to prevent modern slavery in their operations and supply chains. Businesses must ensure their statement has been approved by the Board and is available on their website.

128. The purpose of these provisions is to provide transparency for consumers, investors and civil society. To enhance transparency further, in March 2021 the Government launched the modern slavery statement registry to bring modern slavery statements together on a single platform. Since launch, over 13,000 statements covering around 45,000 organisations have been submitted to the registry on a voluntary basis.

129. The public sector is not required to produce modern slavery statements but began voluntarily doing so in 2020. Government officials take a risk-based and proportionate approach to working with suppliers to tackle modern slavery in their supply chains. In 2019, the Government launched the Modern Slavery Assessment Tool (MSAT) which supports public bodies to assess their own supply base for modern slavery risks.

130. The Procurement Act 2023 provides contracting authorities with stronger powers to exclude suppliers from public procurements where there is compelling evidence of modern slavery within their supply chains and allows Ministers to put a supplier on a published debarment list where they consider the supplier should be excluded, or considered for exclusion, from procurements.

131. The Government remains committed to ensuring genuine victims are identified promptly and is focused on improving National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decision-making timescales. An unprecedented increase in the volume of referrals in the NRM (628% between 2014 and 2023) has presented significant challenges in resourcing and workflow. To address these, the Government has made policy changes, and drastically increased staffing for the competent authorities. Since the first quarter of 2023 the number of decisions outstanding has been coming down.

132. The Home Office publishes quarterly and annual statistics on the National Referral Mechanism and Duty to Notify.

20. Enforcement of employment rights

133. The UK Government remains committed to effective enforcement of employment rights. This includes providing funding of over £35 million for the existing dedicated labour market enforcement bodies (a 121% increase since 2010). This is on top of funding provided to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas – over £50 million p.a.) and to support Employment Tribunals.

134. In addition, the UK Government will be creating a single enforcement body. Creating and implementing the Fair Work Agency is a significant organisational change that requires primary legislation. The UK hopes to be able to update the committee at the interactive dialogue.

135. Seasonal Workers must be paid a minimum of 32 hours per week, at NLW. We would therefore not expect to see a seasonal worker out of work during their 6-month sponsorship. Charging excessive fees is not permitted – if the sponsor fails to comply with these requirements, licence action, rather than legal, could be taken.

136. Seasonal Workers are covered by the same protections under UK law as resident workers – including the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) Modern Slavery protections. A protective feature ensures sponsors guidance prevents Operators from passing costs onto workers (for example the cost of a Certificate of Sponsorship).

Trade union rights (art. 8)

21. Trade Union Act 2016, Employment Relations Act 1999 and Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill

137. The UK Government has set out a significant and ambitious agenda to pave the way for a new Future of Work, which will include significant changes to this area. The UK will continue to work internationally to strengthen workers' rights and enhance labour standards globally.

Trade unions rights (Report issue 21. Trade Union Act 2016, Employment Relations Act 1999 and Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill)

138. The UK Government is committed to repealing both the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Strikes (Minimum Services Levels) Act 2023 to give trade unions the freedom to organize, represent and negotiate on behalf of their workers. This includes removing prohibitive restrictions on trade union activity and on the right of unions to take industrial action. The government will engage with trade unions and employer groups as we progress the repeal of this legislation.

Electronic balloting for industrial action

139. The government is committed to introducing electronic balloting for industrial action ballots. We are taking steps to support the introduction of this method to all trade unions to make it easier and cheaper for trade unions to obtain the views of their members.

140. We are doing this through two methods. Firstly, Section 54 of the Employment Rights Act 2004 empowers the UK Government to allow electronic balloting under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 subject to certain requirements. Going forward the Government will publish the necessary parliamentary order, as set out under the Statutory Instrument, along with detailed guidance to aid trade unions in introducing this method.

141. Secondly, to ensure e-balloting becomes the default method for how unions secure their members views on industrial action the government will put it on a statutory footing. We will achieve this by enshrining Section 54 of the Employment Rights Act in our new Employment Rights Legislation which will shortly be introduced to the UK parliament.

142. In NI, matters relating to e-balloting form part of the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill Consultation, which is running from 1st July 2024 to 30th September 2024. Right to social security (art. 9).

22. Welfare Reform Act 2012 and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016

143. For 2013-14, the main rates of most working age benefits, statutory payments, and some tax credits and Child Benefit were up-rated by 1%. This was followed by the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Act 2013, which required the Secretary of State to up-rate these benefit rates by 1% for 2014-15 and 2015-16, and between 2016 and 2020 they were frozen by the Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016.

144. From April 2016, the four-year benefit freeze was implemented to working age benefits. Benefits for the additional costs of disability, and for carers, were exempt from the benefit freeze and during the period 2016-17 to 2019-20 benefits such as DLA, PIP and Attendance Allowance continued to be up-rated in line with the rise in prices.

145. Since 2020, benefits have been up-rated annually in line with inflation. Benefits increased by 6.7% in April 2024, in line with inflation. This includes working-age benefits, benefits to help with additional needs arising from disability, carers' benefits, pensioner premiums in income-related benefits, statutory payments, and Additional State Pension.

146. The Basic and New State Pensions were uprated by 8.5% in line with earnings, as part of the ‘triple lock’.

Uprating of State Pensions and Benefits

147. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is required by law to review benefit and pension rates each year to see if they have retained their value in relation to the general level of prices or earnings.

148. Extra-costs disability benefits must by law be increased at least in line with prices. Since 2011 the index used for this purpose has been the increase in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI).

149. The new and basic State Pensions, the Standard Minimum Guarantee in Pension Credit and survivors’ benefits in Industrial Death Benefit, must by law be increased at least in line with earnings growth. The index used for this is the growth in Average Weekly Earnings, including bonuses, in the year to May–July.

150. In practice, the basic and new State Pensions have increased with the highest of prices, earnings growth or 2.5% in line with the Triple Lock commitment. Other working age benefits such as Universal Credit are up-rated at the Secretary of State’s discretion but by convention are up-rated in line with CPI.

Benefit cap

151. There was an increase in the benefit cap levels from April 2023 (10.1%) following a review in November 2022. There is a statutory obligation to review cap levels at least once every five years, which is currently by November 2027.

152. Benefit cap statistics are published quarterly, showing the number of households capped and the number of households that were previously capped but have moved off the cap. Statistics can be found on Benefit cap statistics – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Two child policy

153. Since 6 April 2017, families can claim support for up to two children, and there may be further entitlement for other children if they were born before 6 April 2017 or if an exception applies.

154. Statistics relating to the two-child policy can be found on gov.uk, Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit claimants: statistics related to the policy to provide support for a maximum of two children, April 2024 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Removal of the limited capability for work element

155. The change to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) from April 2017 – the removal of the work-related activity component – was replicated in UC by the removal of the limited capability for work (LCW) element. This was to align the ESA Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG) component and the UC Limited Capability for Work (LCW) element with Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for new claims and the standard rate of UC for those without limited capability for work.

156. This measure, and the new funding of up to £100 million per year announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 8 July 2015, was intended to provide incentives and support to help those with limited capability, but have potential to prepare for work, to move closer to the labour market, and when they are ready, back into work.

157. There are no plans to review the decision to remove LCW element from the UC.

Social sector support: Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

158. The removal of the spare room subsidy (RSRS) policy, sometimes known as the bedroom tax, applies to claims for housing support – either Housing Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit.

159. The deductions are based on the claimant's eligible rent. There is a 14% reduction for those with one extra bedroom and a 25% reduction for those with two or more extra bedrooms.

160. Easements are available to support disabled people and carers, the families of disabled children, foster carers, parents who adopt, parents of service personnel and people who have suffered a bereavement.

161. The deduction does not apply to pensioners in receipt of Housing Benefit.

162. Those unable to meet the shortfall in their rent can seek a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHPs) from their local authority. DHPs can be paid to those in receipt of qualifying housing support who face a shortfall in meeting their rental housing costs.

23. Universal Credit scheme

163. UC now receives on average around 280,000 new claims each month (Feb 2024–April 2024).

164. In February 2024 there were 5.6 million households on UC, of which 5 million (91%) were receiving a payment. There are around 2 million households on legacy benefits and tax credits.

165. In April 2024 there were 6.7 million people on UC, of which 2.5 million (38%) were in employment.

166. In May 2024 there were 6.8 million people on UC (Male – 2.9 million; female – 3.9 million).

167. UC is being implemented in NI as agreed by the NI Executive. The latest published statistics in relation to the UC scheme here show that there are (August 2023) 155,550 individual claimants on UC, or 136,520 households.

Taper Rate

168. When the UC earnings taper rate was reduced from 63% to 55% in November 2021, DWP also increased work allowances by £500 per year. Work allowances are the amount of earnings a claimant with children or limited capability for work because of health condition or disability can keep before the taper applies. It was estimated 1.7 million households would keep, on average, an extra £1,000 a year from the two measures and would allow working households to keep more of what they earn, strengthening incentives to move into and progress in work.

24. Indexation between State benefit rates and the cost of living

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) methodology

169. LHA rates are set within Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMAs), determined by rent officers at the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) for England and the Rent Services in Scotland and Wales.

170. For each BRMA, Rent Officers collect local rental data from letting agents which is used to set LHA rates, they are based on private market rents being paid in the BRMA, which can differ from advertised rents.

171. Each BRMA has five LHA rates, ranging from a shared accommodation rate up to the maximum four-bedroom rate. Size criteria are used to determine the number of bedrooms a household requires.

172. From April 2024 LHA rates were increased to the 30th percentile of local market rents. 1.6 million private renters in receipt of Housing Benefit or UC will gain on average, nearly £800 per year in additional help towards rental costs in 2024/25.

173. For those facing a shortfall in meeting housing costs, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available from LAs.

Benefit cap

174. The previous Secretary of State completed a statutory review of the benefit cap levels in November 2022 and in doing so, took into account evidence and statistics held in the department, the views of stakeholders regularly communicated in various ways and the implications of, and for, other policies and decisions.

175. Benefit cap statistics are published quarterly. The published statistics on 19 September 23, showing the number of households capped to May 2023, reflect the increased benefit cap levels introduced from April 2023. Benefit cap: number of households capped to May 2023 – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Adequacy of UC amount

176. The current rates of income-related benefits such as UC do not represent a minimum requirement. The Government specifies the rates applicable to different benefits, and these may vary according to claimants' circumstances.

177. Each claimant's requirements vary; therefore, the benefit system does not attempt to base rates upon personal expenditure of individual recipients.

Cost of Living Payments

178. Cost of living pressures increased across the UK in 2022, caused by domestic and global factors including economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In response, DWP, alongside HMRC and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), has legislated for and delivered Cost of Living Payments at pace, as a temporary measure, to support millions of families across the UK who are most vulnerable to the rising cost of living.

179. In 2022, over 8 million households on eligible means-tested benefits received up to £650 in one-off Cost of Living Payments.

180. In 2023/2024, the Government provided a second round of additional Cost of Living Payments. Over 8 million households on eligible means-tested benefits received up to £900 in one-off Cost of Living Payments.

181. The £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment and the £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment were paid once in 2022/23 and in 2023/24 to eligible households. Over 6 million people received the £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment, and in 23/24 nearly 9 million pensioner households received a £300 Pensioner Cost of Living Payment on top of their Winter Fuel Payment.

182. Overall, the Government made 77 million Cost of Living Payments worth £20 billion. The total support over 2022–2025 to help households and individuals with higher bills, amounts to £108 billion.

Sanction disputes

183. In the UK a social security sanction decision is first reconsidered – known as Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) – by a separate decision maker who will review the evidence afresh. There is no time limit for requesting a reconsideration of a sanction decision. Whilst in law there is no time limit within which an MR must be decided, decisions are made without delay, and we constantly review our processes to ensure we are providing the best possible customer service.

184. The MR decision can be appealed to an independent tribunal (administered by HMCTS).

25. Non-nationals' access to social security services

185. Information on the gov.uk site Claiming Universal Credit and other benefits if you are a refugee sets out the steps and what is needed to make a claim for UC and other benefits. The site references support provided by Migrant Help who receive HO funding to support

with benefit claims, employment and housing when individuals first receive their positive asylum decision.

Protection of the family and children (art. 10)

26. Childcare services, Shared Parental Leave (SPL) and paid maternity leave

186. The SPL Evaluation¹⁴ shows the number of eligible fathers is approximately 275,000 and take-up among fathers was 5% and 1% for mothers in 2019.

187. Starting from 8 March 2024, new changes to Paternity Leave entered into force. These changes:

- Allow fathers and partners to take their leave in non-consecutive blocks (two non-consecutive weeks of leave compared to one block of leave taken as either one or two weeks);
- Allow fathers and partners to take their Paternity Leave and Statutory Paternity Pay (if eligible) at any point in the first year after the birth or adoption of their child, which gives partners more flexibility to take their Paternity Leave at a time that works for their family;
- Shortened the notice period required for each period of leave, requiring an employee to give only four weeks' notice prior to each period of leave.

188. The new Labour Government has committed to completing a review of the parental leave and pay system within the first year. This review will focus on ensuring that parental leave offers the best possible support for working families.

Other jurisdictions

189. The SG's Programme for Government committed to expand its childcare programme, to provide access to funded childcare for 13,000 more children and families.

190. Since August 2021, all three- and four-year olds, and eligible two-year olds have a statutory entitlement of up to 1,140 hours per year of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC). LAs have a duty to make a place available for all eligible children within their area, and in 2023-24, we will be investing £1 billion to provide this. The most recent ELC Census shows over 92,500 children accessed funded ELC in 2022, an increase of 1% from 2021. The estimated proportion of three- and four-year olds registered for funded ELC increased from 97% in 2021 to 99% in 2022.

191. Initial measures to inform the NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy and help address affordability and accessibility of early learning and childcare services for families, including for those facing disadvantage, alongside other issues, is underway.

192. The NI Executive has agreed a budget of £25m for 2024/25 financial year for a package of early learning and childcare measures to stabilise and support expansion of the early learning and childcare sector; to commence standardisation of the current pre-school education programme to offer all children 22.5 hours per week pre-school provision; reduce the costs of childcare for working parents, and build the evidence base necessary to inform development of the longer-term strategy. The focus over the coming months will be on implementation of the early learning and childcare measures announced for 2024/25. Evaluation of these measures and analysis of the data due to be collected from parents and providers in 2024/25 will inform the development of the longer-term Strategy, the budget required and a feasible timeline for delivery. The Isle of Man Government's Childcare Strategy was approved by Parliament, in July 2022 and will be implemented over the next 3 years. It will ensure every child has the opportunity to access high quality childcare and education. Presently there is a Pre-School Credit Scheme providing UC to be used towards

¹⁴ Shared Parental Leave (SPL) evaluation - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

the cost of pre-school provision for each eligible child, supporting approximately 15-20 hours of registered child day care per week. The Government provides a maternity allowance payable for a maximum of 39 weeks under broad qualifying conditions.

193. In Jersey, the recommendations of the Early Years Policy Development Board have started to be implemented with an increase in the Nursey Education Fund (NEF) hours offered to children aged 3–4yrs from September 2021, alongside an increase in the NEF hourly rate.

194. In Guernsey, 15 hours of free pre-school provision per child is offered in the year before children start primary school. Additionally, to support parents in work, assistance with childcare costs is also available through income support on a means-tested basis.

27. Regulation and monitoring of private and for-profit providers of child protection services:

195. Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty (the ‘sufficiency duty’) on each local social services authority to take steps that ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that they are able to provide accommodation in their area that meets the needs of children who are looked after by them.

196. To support LAs with their sufficiency duty, DfE is allocating £424 million in funding, £259 million from Spending Review 21 and a further £165 million announced at Spring Budget 2024, to LAs to maintain capacity and expand provision across both open children’s homes (OCH) and Secure Children’s Homes (SCH) sectors within England.

197. Spending Review 21 funding for Open Children’s Homes placements, match-funded equally by DfE and local authority investment, is expected to create 95 new homes, providing up to 360 additional placements across England by March 2025. Funding will also create 62 additional Secure Children’s Homes welfare placements and 10 step-down placements through the delivery of two new builds and one rebuild Secure Children’s Home scheduled to complete in the next spending review period and refurbishment work in existing Secure Children’s Home.

198. From Spring Budget 2024, DfE are committing a further £45 million match funding to LAs to build a further 200 Open Children’s Home placements and £120 million to fund the maintenance of existing Secure Children’s Homes and rebuild Atkinson and Swanwick Secure Children’s Homes.

“Unregulated” placements

199. In April 2023, DfE laid regulations to introduce mandatory national standards and Ofsted registration and inspection requirements for what were unregulated supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-old looked after children and care leavers (supported accommodation).

200. From 28 October 2023, LAs have been prohibited from placing or arranging accommodation for looked after children or care leavers aged 16 or 17 in supported accommodation that is not registered or in respect of which there is an application to register that has been accepted before this date.

201. This means that for the first time all provision offering care and support for children under-18 in care or care leavers must be registered and regulated with Ofsted. Ofsted will begin regular inspection of supported accommodation providers in September 2024.

202. To support LAs with the reforms, DfE is distributing £123 million between 2023-25 and commissioned the National Children’s Bureau to lead a national sector awareness and provider preparedness programme which ran from March 2023–March 2024.

Regulating children’s homes

203. Children’s homes are subject to the Children’s Homes (England) Regulations 2015. The Regulations include Quality Standards which set out the aspirational and positive

outcomes that we expect homes to achieve. They also set out the underpinning requirements that homes must meet in order to achieve those overarching outcomes.

204. Ofsted is the registration authority for children's homes and regulates and inspects children's homes, in order to assess the quality of care being provided for children.

28. Social care services

205. At the Autumn Statement 2022, the government made available up to £7.5 billion of additional funding across 2023-24 and 2024-25 in England to help support adult social care and discharge. This was supplemented by a further £570 million through the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund: Workforce Fund (MSIF), announced in July 2023. The objective of this funding was to support LAs to buy more care packages, help people leave hospital on time, improve workforce recruitment and retention, and reduce waiting times for care.

206. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the independent regulator of health and adult social care. It registers and regulates health and adult social care providers who deliver regulated activities to ensure they meet the minimum fundamental standards of care. Under regulation 12 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014, providers must ensure the safety of their premises and the equipment within it. They should have systems and processes that assure compliance with statutory requirements, national guidance and safety alerts. This includes both nursing and non-nursing residential care services and both public and privately funded, of which around 14,300 are currently registered.

207. In June 2023, the government published the Safe Care at Home Review.¹⁵ This reviewed the existing protections and support for adults with care and support needs who are at risk of, or experiencing, abuse in their own homes by people providing their care. Home Office and DHSC have delivered work across all actions from the Safe Care at Home Review.

Other jurisdictions

Scotland

208. The Scottish Care Home Census and Public Health Scotland publishes information on care home provision in Scotland used by policy makers and care home providers. The Care Inspectorate is the regulatory body for care services in Scotland. Information regarding staff vacancies can be found on their website: Care Inspectorate.

Northern Ireland

209. Nursing Homes' primary purpose is to provide care and support for people with complex conditions, those who have a disability or are living with a terminal illness. Nursing Homes are defined in Article 11 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

210. Residential care homes are staffed 24 hours a day, providing board and general personal care to the residents. Such premises are specialised facilities that provide round the clock care and support for individuals who due to illness, age or disability require assistance with daily living activities in circumstances where nursing care would normally be inappropriate. They are defined in Article 10 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

¹⁵ Safe care at home review - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Right to an adequate standard of living (art. 11)

29. Poverty rates

211. The annual Households Below Average Income publication, contains estimates of household incomes and a range of low-income indicators, derived from the Family Resources Survey.

212. In 2022/23 (the latest year for which published data is available) there were 14.3 million people (21%) in relative poverty (after housing costs) compared with 13.5 million (22%) in 2009/10. In 2022/23, there were 12 million people (18%) in absolute poverty (after housing costs) compared 13.1 million (21%) in 2009/10.

213. In 2022/23, there were 4.3 million children (30% of children) in relative poverty (after housing cost) compared with 3.9 million (29%) in 2009/10. In 2022/23, there were 3.6 million children (25% of all children) in absolute poverty (after housing costs) compared 3.7 million (28%) in 2009/10.

214. The UK Government has set out a commitment to tackle poverty including through reformed employment support to help people move into good work and through developing a comprehensive strategy to reduce child poverty. Following the July 2024 General Election, the UK Government has not yet announced detailed plans for a future policy direction in this area but hopes to be able to update the Committee at the interactive dialogue.

Other jurisdictions

Scotland

215. The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets in statute ambitious income-based targets to significantly reduce child poverty by 2030-31, with interim targets to be met in 2023-24.

216. The SG has published two Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plans: 'Every Child, Every Chance' and 'Best Start, Bright Futures. The final Plan is due for publication by the end of March 2026 and will outline action for the period 2026–2031 inclusive.

217. The SG publishes annual child poverty progress reports. The latest annual report was published in June 2023.

Guernsey

218. The Guernsey Indicators of Poverty Report 2021 was issued on 25 April 2023.

30. Information covering

Impact and concrete results of the Affordable Housing Program, the Shared Ownership scheme, the Care & Support Specialised Housing Fund, and Housing 2040

219. The £11.5 billion Affordable Homes Programme has delivered 4,812 affordable homes to 31 March 2023.

220. The UK Government is on track to deliver its target of building around 250,000 affordable homes through the 2016-23 Shared Ownership and Affordable Homes Programme, with around 244,000 new housing starts delivered by March 2023, and a further 5,000 homes granted an extension to start before March 2024.

Scotland

221. The SG is committed to delivering on its target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032 and publishes quarterly progress reports on the Affordable Housing Supply Programme.

222. From January 2019 to June 2023 the SG delivered 41,536 affordable homes, over 31,000 of which were for social rent including almost 12,000 council homes. An estimated 3,590 households with children have been helped into affordable housing in the year to June

2023. Keeping social rents lower than market rents benefits approximately 140,000 children in poverty each year.

Northern Ireland

223. £158 million of funding has been approved to Northern Ireland 'Co-Ownership' Housing Association to support over 4,400 households purchase a home between 2020 and 2025. To date over 3,600 people have been helped into home ownership with this funding. Most Co-Ownership customers are first time buyers and so the scheme is of particular help to younger people.

224. A further £12.5m has been provided to Co-Ownership to deliver its Rent to Own pilot. Under this scheme new build properties are purchased for rent and eventual ownership by households which are not yet financially ready to purchase a home, even by way of shared ownership.

Disabled Facilities Grant

225. The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) budget in England has more than doubled, from £220m in 2012/13 to £625m in 2024/25. In the latest year for which data is available (2022/23) there were 54,436 completions.

226. The Government does not collect data on the type of adaptations funded by the DFG. Adaptations funded by the DFG can include stair-lifts, level access showers, widening doors, installing ramps, grab rails, raised toilets, access to gardens and, in some instances, bespoke home extensions to existing dwellings. Heating systems, insulation and Telecare can also be funded through the DFG, as well as adaptations to support independent living for people with learning disabilities and dementia.

Overcrowded housing

227. The English Housing Survey (EHS) publishes a national figure for overcrowding in England. The time series can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1169873/FA1422_overcrowding_and_under-occupation_by_tenure.ods.

228. The EHS, 2019 to 2020: social rented sector report provided some further data with a limited number of variables. This can be found at Annex table 1.18 here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2019-to-2020-social-rented-sector>.

Scotland

229. The Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) annually publishes the extent of overcrowded households broken down by household type, income band after housing costs, and house type.

Wales

230. According to Census 2021, 2.2% (30,000) of households in Wales had fewer bedrooms than required and are considered overcrowded. This is down from the 2.9% (38,000) seen in 2011.

231. Households living in rented accommodation were more likely to be overcrowded (4.3%), compared with owner-occupied accommodation (1.2%).

Overcrowding and under-occupancy by household characteristics, England and Wales – Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk).

Social housing requests

Waiting lists – Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS)

232. There were 1.29 million households on local authority waiting lists on 31 March 2023, a 3% increase compared to 31 March 2022. Since its peak in 2012 the number of households on local authority waiting lists has fallen by 31%.

233. LAs periodically review their lists to remove households who no longer require housing, so the total number of households on waiting lists may overstate the number of households who still require social housing at any one time.

234. Local authority-level and regional data on waiting lists can be found in this table: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6492ed965f7bb700127fae11/LT600_accessible.ods.

Scotland

235. Information on the estimated number of households on a social housing list, or who have applied for social housing using choice-based lettings, is available from Scottish Household Survey Annual Report publications.

Northern Ireland

236. The Housing Executive, which has statutory and operational responsibility for the housing selection scheme in NI, including the assessment of housing need and allocation of social housing, collects this data.

Homelessness, temporary accommodation standards and rough sleeping

237. Since the Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in 2018, over 740,000 households have been prevented from becoming homeless or supported into settled accommodation, including greater support for single adults.

238. The Act places duties on local housing authorities to take reasonable steps to try to prevent and relieve a person's homelessness, irrespective of whether a person has 'priority need' or may be regarded as being 'intentionally homeless'.

239. The Act also requires named public authorities to refer service users who they think may be homeless or threatened with homelessness to their chosen local housing authority.

240. The 2020 review of the Act found improved services for those who would previously have had limited support and households receiving help both earlier and for longer but identified some challenges with administration, data collection and joint working.

241. There is an investment of over £1.2 billion through the Homelessness Prevention Grant over 2022/2023 to 2024/25, including a £109m top-up for 2024/25, which can be used to help those at risk of homelessness. Future funding for homelessness and rough sleeping will be decided at the next Spending Review.

242. As of 31 March 2024, the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme had delivered over 5,550 homes for rough sleepers across England.

243. Official Statutory Homelessness Statistics for England were introduced at the same time as the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 and is the quarterly data return on local authorities' actions under homelessness legislation.

244. Statutory homelessness statistics for England: Homelessness statistics – GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

245. According to the latest annual rough sleeping snapshot statistics, the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2023 was 3,898.

246. The annual autumn snapshot statistics remain our official and most robust measure of rough sleeping on a single night given they are independently verified and are published in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

247. The published official statistics, disaggregated by region, gender, age and nationality over the past five years can be found in the ‘Rough Sleeping Snapshot Statistics’, which includes an infographic and data tables disaggregated by local authority district and region.

248. The rough sleeping snapshot takes place on a single night between 1 October and 30 November each year. This year’s snapshot will be published in February 2025.

Headline Statistics, Autumn 2022

249. See annex for further details.

Temporary accommodation standards

250. LAs have a statutory duty to provide temporary accommodation for qualifying households until long-term accommodation, which must be suitable in relation to the applicant and to all members of their household, can be offered to them.

251. Housing authorities must, as a minimum, ensure that all temporary accommodation is free of Category 1 hazards as identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS).

252. If LAs identify the presence of a Category 1 hazard, they have a duty under the Housing Act 2004 to take enforcement action. To enable effective enforcement, LAs have strong powers, including imposing financial penalties of up to £30,000, extending rent repayment orders and introducing banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders.

Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework

253. In May 2023, the UK Government rolled out a new data-led framework with a more comprehensive overview of the drivers of rough sleeping in local areas. The approach is grounded in a shared vision of a future where, across England, rough sleeping is prevented wherever possible or is a rare, brief and non-recurring experience. The framework indicators are collected from LAs as part of our monthly rough sleeping management information and published on a quarterly basis.

254. The latest published information includes data up to December 2023 which can be found here: [Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework, December 2023 – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ending-rough-sleeping-data-framework).

255. The information in the release is management information not official statistics.

Provision and standards of Home Office (HO) accommodation for asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their claim

256. In accordance with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the HO has a statutory obligation to provide destitute asylum seekers with adequate accommodation and subsistence support whilst their application for asylum is being considered.

257. Our accommodation providers are accountable for all services contracted to be provided within the accommodation.

258. HO accredited service providers comply with stringent contractual standards, as well as statutory and local authority legislation, including but not limited to housing, food, road traffic, hygiene, employment, equal opportunities, race relations, child protection, safeguarding, data protection and health and safety. Contractors and providers are monitored closely to ensure they continue to meet these standards.

259. The maximum length of stay at an ex-MoD site and a vessel is expected to be 9 months, except when the Home Secretary is unable to find suitable onward dispersal accommodation despite reasonable efforts to do so. The maximum length of stay at the Napier accommodation is 90 days.

31. Inequalities in housing in Northern Belfast

260. The Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme is a public health-based approach to violence reduction jointly funded by the NI Executive and UK Government (currently around £16 million per year) until March 2025. Phase 1 of this unique programme ran from 2016–2021. Phase 2 began in 2021 and is currently in its third year of delivery. Early consideration is being given to next steps following completion of Phase 2 in March 2025.

261. Phase 2 is a data-driven, outcomes focused model that takes account of learning from Phase 1 as well as international best practice on gang violence, violent extremism, community resilience and youth violence. At present there are over 100 innovative, evidence-based interventions designed to address different types of vulnerability, reduce and prevent all types of violence, harm and coercive control of individuals and communities which are showing real impact. The projects, harm and violence at different stages but work together to achieve shared outcomes.

262. The Programme is a collaboration between 7 NI Departments, 15 statutory agencies (including PSNI) and 89 public bodies/voluntary and community sector partners.

263. It has a particular focus on supporting young people and in addressing the impact of many decades of violence.

Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP)

264. The SHDP is a three-year rolling programme of planned social housing schemes based on the identification and analysis of housing need by geographical area. The NI Housing Executive ensures that the SHDP is distributed equitably across a range of programme policy areas and targets those areas of greatest social housing need. The Department for Communities is committed to building a shared society through the development of shared housing developments, which are supported by Good Relations programmes, projects and events. The Shared Housing Programme is now supporting 76 shared housing schemes.

265. In 2023/24, a budget of £159m secured starts on 1508 new social homes. While the budget for 2024/25 has been reduced, the Department will continue to direct the majority of its capital budget spend on the delivery of new social homes.

SHDP Expansion

266. It is vitally important to direct the Social Housing Development Programme's output to provide social homes in greater numbers in the areas of most acute housing need such as North Belfast.

267. One obvious critical issue is land availability. The provision of suitable land in areas of housing need is one of the key challenges to development. A stakeholder innovation lab has been convened to explore the barriers to expansion.

32. The Traveller site Fund, the Affordable Housing Program, the Housing 2040, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Irish Traveller's Accommodation Strategy (2021–2026)

268. The Housing (Wales) Act introduced a number significant reforms to housing law in Wales, in particular improving management of the private rented sector, the prevention of homelessness and Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. As a result of this legislation, a local housing authorities must, in each review period, carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers residing in or resorting to its area.

269. To benefit those engaged in planning for traveller sites, specific planning policies for traveller sites are set out in the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites document (PPTS) which should be read in conjunction with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

270. In terms of site provision, the PPTS is clear that it is the responsibility of LAs to assess the need for Gypsy and Traveller sites in their area, and then plan to meet that need, in the

same way they plan for all forms of housing. LAs are best placed to make decisions about the number and location of such sites locally, having had due regard to national policy and local circumstances.

271. In February 2019, LAs were reminded of their duties to assess the need for transit sites, in addition to permanent sites, through a Written Ministerial Statement. <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-02-06/HCWS1305/>.

272. An Equality Impact Assessment for the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 (PCSCA) is currently accessible online via the GOV.UK website. The Equality Impact Assessment considers how the measures in the Act impact on specific communities, including the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

273. HO measures in the PCSCA: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-equality-statements/home-office-measures-in-the-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-equalities-impact-assessment>.

274. We do not hold any statistics on the policing of unauthorised encampments.

275. The relevant provisions in the PCSCA relating to unauthorised encampments will be subject to the usual post-legislative scrutiny at a time prior to three years after commencement.

33. A comprehensive national strategy to promote and protect the right to adequate food

276. The Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) monitors the available data on population diets and nutrient intakes, including through the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS). Questions on food insecurity have been included in NDNS since April 2022. The impact of increasing food prices and falls in food sales on population health and nutrition will not be known for some time due to the time taken for the collection and analysis of sufficient data.

277. Questions on food security have been included annually in the Department for Work and Pension's Family Resources Survey since 2019/20.

278. The Food Standards Agency monitors insecurity and other consumer related behaviours through its Food and You survey. The Family Food Survey also collects food insecurity data and information on purchasing behaviours.

279. Under the Agriculture Act 2020, the Defra Secretary of State must publish at least every three years a report containing an analysis of statistical data relating to food security in the United Kingdom. The first version of the report, published in 2021, included analysis of the following aspects of food security: global food availability; supply sources for food; the resilience of the supply chain for food; household food security, food safety and consumer confidence in food.

280. The three Healthy Food Schemes (Healthy Start, Nursery Milk and the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme) together help more than three million children. They support wider Government priorities on obesity and levelling up. The schemes help to support children and babies when they are at home, in childcare and in early years at school, and pregnant women. Over £200m is devoted to the Healthy Food Schemes each year to reflect this commitment.

281. Free school meals are provided to over one third of school children. This includes 2 million pupils who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals (23.8% of all pupils), which is an increase from January 2021 when 1.7 million (20.8%) pupils were eligible. In addition, almost 1.3 million more infants enjoy a free and nutritious meal at lunchtime following the introduction of universal infant free school meals in 2014. A further 90,000 disadvantaged pupils in further education also receive a free meal at lunch time.

282. The UK Government's wider programme of work to create a healthier environment to help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight includes:

- Regulations which restrict the placement of products high in saturated fat, salt or sugar in store and online;
- Efforts to reformulate products high in calories, sugar and salt;
- The Soft Drinks Industry Levy;
- Calorie labelling regulations for food sold in large out of home businesses.

Other jurisdictions

Scotland

283. The SG’s proposed Human Rights Bill will help to ensure, through the incorporation of the ICESCR, that the right to adequate food as part of the right to an adequate standard of living will become part of Scotland’s domestic law for the first time, strengthening how those delivering devolved public functions respect, protect and fulfil this right.

284. The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022 requires Scottish Ministers and relevant authorities, to have regard to the fact that adequate food is a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights, when preparing good food nation plans. The first draft national Good Food Nation Plan will be subject to public consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny in 2023/24.

Northern Ireland

285. On 24 November 2023, the NI Department of Health issued a consultation on a new obesity strategy for NI, “Healthy Futures” (<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/strategic-framework-prevent-harm-caused-by-obesity-and-improve-diets-and-levels-physical-activity>). The consultation, which was co-produced with key stakeholders and was open until 16th February 2024, sought views on the vision, principles, themes, and priorities that have been identified by the work to date. Consultation events were held in January and February 2024. Following the close of the consultation, responses will be analysed, and an action plan developed, prior to seeking Ministerial and Executive approval.

Right to physical and mental health (art. 12)

34. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on NHS

286. The Government is clear that patients are waiting too long for elective care and has committed to return performance to the NHS constitutional standards on waiting times, by the end of this parliament. The NHS Constitution sets out that 92% of patients should wait no longer than 18 weeks from Referral to Treatment (RTT). As of June 2024, 58.9% of waits are within the 18-week standard, down from 86% in April 2019, pre-pandemic.

287. Our first step towards doing this will be to deliver an extra two million operations, scans, and appointments every year in England. That is 40,000 extra appointments every week. We will also be supporting NHS Trusts to deliver these through innovation, sharing best practice to increase productivity and efficiency, and ensuring the best value is delivered. Furthermore, as outlined in our manifesto commitments, supporting the NHS to increase diagnostic capacity to meet demand for diagnostic services (e.g. MRI and CT services) is a priority for this government. Specific programmes of funding to support this are subject to the upcoming Spending Review.

288. The Secretary of State has appointed Professor Ara Darzi, Baron Darzi of Denham, to lead an immediate and independent investigation of the NHS, which will report in September 2024. This will provide an independent and expert understanding of the current performance of the NHS across England and the challenges facing the healthcare system and will feed into the development of a publicly available 10-year plan for the NHS.

Other jurisdictions*Scotland*

289. The SG published the NHS Recovery Plan in August 2021, which set out its plans for health and social care over the next 5 years. £1 billion of funding will support an increase in inpatient, day case, and outpatient activity to address the backlogs of care, which will be supported by the implementation of sustainable improvements and new models of care.

Wales

290. Health Boards in Wales continue to provide health services in line with Welsh Government Guidance on the Health and Wellbeing for Asylum Seekers and Refugees and Travelling to Better Health – Policy Implementation Guidance for Healthcare Practitioners Working with Gypsies and Travellers. Welsh Government issued a Directed Enhanced Service Specification for Asylum Seekers and Refugees via the GMS Contract for Wales in 2008-09. It provides an enhanced service specification for Health Boards when commissioning primary medical services for asylum seekers and refugees in their area.

NI

291. An Elective Care Framework (published by the Department of Health (NI) in June 2021) sets out a five-year plan to systematically tackle the backlog of patients waiting. At the time of publication of the Framework, it was estimated that an additional £707.5m was required over the five-year period. While there has been significant non-recurrent investment in 2021/22 and 2022/23, the sustained recurrent investment that is required to address the issue of demand outstripping capacity, has not been made available.

35. The Mental Health Act 1983 and mental health strategies

292. In the King's Speech 2024 it was announced that the Government will legislate to modernise the Mental Health Act so it is fit for the twenty first century. The Mental Health Bill will amend the Mental Health Act 1983 to give people detained greater choice and autonomy, enhanced rights and support, and ensure everyone is treated with dignity and respect throughout treatment.

293. A new suicide prevention strategy for England was published in September 2023 (the suicide prevention strategy). The strategy set an ambition to reduce the suicide rate in England, and over 100 actions to make progress against that aim. Middle-aged men and children and young people are also identified as priority groups for tailored and targeted support. It also committed to better understanding national trends in suicides for ethnic minority groups including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.

Other jurisdictions*Scotland*

294. The SG published a new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy jointly with the Convention of Scottish LAs (COSLA) in June 2023. The Strategy is evidence-based, informed by lived experience, and underpinned by equality and human rights.

295. The SG published the Strategy's first Delivery Plan and Workforce Action Plan on 7 November 2023. The first Delivery Plan describes the work that the SG, together with their partners, will undertake over the next 18 months under each of the Strategy's 10 priorities.

296. The SG published its joint Suicide Prevention Strategy with COSLA in September 2022. The SG developed the strategy and action plan through wide consultation with communities right across Scotland, listening to people with lived experience of suicide, as well as reviewing all the evidence available. The activities will prioritise high risk settings and are tailored to meet the needs of different groups most at risk of suicide.

Wales

297. The Welsh Government draft Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Strategy is currently out to public consultation. The draft strategy includes a focus on strengthening our understanding of the risk factors associated with suicide and self-harm and targeting efforts to support the most vulnerable. Its overall vision is that people in Wales will live in communities which are free from the fear and stigma associated with suicide and self-harm, and are empowered and supported to both seek and offer help when it is needed. The strategy also recognises that suicide is preventable and never inevitable; and we all have a role to play.

298. The strategy has been developed following significant stakeholder engagement and the current consultation provides another opportunity for stakeholders to shape the strategy and our actions over the next 10 years. Alongside our consultation on the Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Strategy, we are also consulting on a new ten year Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

NI

299. The Public Health Agency commission services to support emotional health and wellbeing and prevent suicide in the Traveller community across the jurisdiction. Programmes have also been delivered through the South Tyrone Empowerment programme to support these communities.

300. Once fully commenced, the Mental Capacity Act (NI) 2016 ('MCA') will repeal the Mental Health (NI) Order 1986 ('MHO') for anyone aged 16 and over. This will fuse mental health and mental capacity law in NI. There are currently no plans or indicative timings for the MCA repeal of MHO.

36. Sexual and reproductive health

301. LAs in England are mandated to commission comprehensive open access sexual and reproductive health services through the public health grant funded at £3.5 billion in 2023-24. Individual LAs are well placed to make funding and commissioning decisions about the services that best meet the needs of their local populations. This includes oral HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, which has been routinely available in specialist sexual health services since 2020.

302. A wide range of contraceptive choices are available free of charge in a range of primary and community care venues in England, including through the NHS Pharmacy Contraception Service announced in April 2023.

Other jurisdictions*Scotland*

303. In August 2021 the SG published a Women's Health Plan aimed at reducing inequalities in health outcomes for women and girls in Scotland. The Plan focuses on six priority areas including menopause, menstrual health, endometriosis, abortion and contraception, post-natal contraception, and heart health. In January 2023 the SG published the Women's Health Plan Report on Progress, setting out the progress made.

304. The SG has also taken steps regarding women's access to abortion, including taking forward recommendations from the March 2023 evaluation of early medical abortion at home to seek to improve patient choice where appropriate, and ensuring that telephone or video consultations are routinely offered as an option for women accessing abortion services where appropriate.

305. The SG's Sexual Health and Blood Borne Viruses (SHBBV) Action Plan 2023-26 includes a focus on improving access to sexual health services and is backed by funding of £1.7m per year.

NI

306. As set out in the 7th Periodic Report, since 2019 legislation has been introduced to decriminalise abortion in NI and to provide a legal framework. The UK Government introduced further regulations on 20 May 2022 – The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2022 – removing the legislative requirement for NI Executive agreement under the Ministerial Code for abortion services to be commissioned, and conferring new powers on the Secretary of State (SoS) for Northern Ireland to act in this matter.

307. Subsequently, on 2 December 2022, the SoS instructed the Department of Health to commission and fund abortion services in line with the agreed commissioning framework and service specification for 2022–2025. This service specification sets out the model for a fully resourced service. It was developed by the Department of Health following extensive engagement with Health and Social Care Trusts to understand the full requirements to provide the abortion services, and signed off by the Department’s Project Board and endorsed by the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) as being compliant with the recommendations in the CEDAW report.

308. Since then, a formal programme for implementation and service mobilisation has been developed and recurrent funding allocations totalling £4.3m per annum have been provided to enable full implementation. Abortion services are now available across five HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland enabling the majority of demand to be met locally.

309. A key component of the abortion service specification has been the provision of enhanced sexual and reproductive services across Northern Ireland, including an online contraception ordering service which is consistently available across all Trusts in Northern Ireland and increases access in rural communities.

310. The Department of Health also launched a Sexual Health Action Plan in November 2023 bringing together sexual health promotion, service considerations, culture, communications and research.

37. Drug use

311. Deaths related to drug poisoning have increased every year in England since 2012, up to 4,572 in 2022. Drug misuse accounts for around two-thirds (2,906) of all drug poisoning deaths and a rate of 53 deaths per million people, the highest since records began in 1993.

312. The overall trend is driven primarily by deaths involving opiates (almost half of all drug poisonings registered in 2022 involved an opiate), but also by an increase in deaths involving other substances like cocaine, benzodiazepines and pregabalin. Polysubstance use is involved in most of the deaths.

Legislation on Personal Drug Use

313. We have not taken any steps to review legislation criminalising personal drug use or carried out studies to analyse the impact of such legislation on access to healthcare services by people who use drugs.

314. Measures to Tackle Drug-Related Deaths

The UK Government’s Drug Strategy [Link 1], published in 2021, sets out a comprehensive, whole-system approach to tackling drugs. It includes a target to prevent nearly 1000 drug deaths over 3 years by 2025.

315. As part of this, additional funding has been made available to enhance drug treatment and wider recovery services in England. Local authorities are being awarded an additional £532m investment via drug strategy grants to expand and develop drug and alcohol treatment and recovery services and their workforce. All 150 English LAs receiving this additional funding have submitted plans for how they will prevent drug-related deaths in their areas. These plans include additional naloxone supply, improved surveillance for new drug threats, improved drug death review processes, hospital care teams expanded to cover drugs, and enhanced integration with physical and mental health services. This in addition to the full

range of medicines to reduce harm and support detoxification including opioid agonists like methadone and new medicines, such as long-acting buprenorphine.

316. On 14 May 2024 the government published a response to the consultation on proposals to widen access to naloxone (the lifesaving opioid reversal drug), through amendments to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012. As a result of the overwhelming support for the proposals submitted through the consultation, we are proceeding with the proposed legislative changes during Spring 2024. This will support the drug strategy aim of reducing drug deaths by expanding the list of services and individuals that can give it out without a prescription.

317. The UK Government has launched a ground-breaking Addiction Mission to support drug and alcohol research and innovation. One element of the mission was a £5m competition to fund the development of new technologies to prevent drug deaths, awarded to 12 projects last year, 11 to test feasibility, one to demonstrate real-world evidence. All the feasibility projects have gone on to bid for further demonstration funding.

318. In 2023, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (within the Department for Health Social Care) published an action plan to prevent drug and alcohol related deaths. The plan includes activity aimed at: safer treatment practice; better local systems for drug intelligence and for learning from deaths; improved toxicology and surveillance; tackling stigma; and addressing polydrug use.

Measures to Tackle Drug-Related Infectious Diseases

319. There are a large number of measures in place to tackle BBV transmission among PWID. Action taken includes the provision of needle exchange and opiate agonist therapy, improved case finding and increased investment in localised testing and treatment. Further details are available in the Hepatitis C in England Reports [Link 3].

Right to education (arts. 13–14)

38. Educational attainment and children’s access to education

England

320. Following the July 2024 General Election, the UK government in England have been clear that they are focused on transforming the education system so that all children and young people get the opportunities they deserve through building a system that works for all. The government will support children to get the best start in life, driving high and rising standards across education, and ensuring background is no barrier to getting on in life. The government has committed to introducing free breakfast clubs in every primary school and driving a wider opportunity mission across government to break the link between background and success. The UK hopes to be able to update the Committee further at the interactive dialogue.

321. Information is provided below on the measures taken by the previous UK government in England to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational attainment and children’s access to education, and steps taken to address the disadvantage attainment gap.

Response to COVID-19

322. The previous government put in place a multi-year programme for education recovery, with almost £5bn of funding made available. This includes a programme of tutoring for 5–19-year-olds, extra training for staff and teachers, direct additional financial support to schools, best practice curriculum support and funding extra time for 16–19 year olds. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the government prioritised keeping schools open for the most vulnerable children, and overall, for all students, making sure schools re-opened as soon as it was safe to do so.

Remote Learning

323. During the pandemic, the previous government delivered over 1.95 million laptops and tablets to schools, trusts, LAs and further education providers for disadvantaged children and young people. This was part of a £520m investment to support access to remote education and online social care services. The Get Help With Remote Education page on gov.uk provided a one-stop-shop for teachers and leaders on advice, guidance and resources to support remote education in schools and colleges, signposted to support packages available. Mental Health and Wellbeing support

324. To support the return to school for pupils, the previous government put in place the Wellbeing for Education Return and Recovery programmes, backed by £15m. This provided expert training and resources to help schools understand and respond to wellbeing issues faced by children and young people. Senior mental health lead training is supporting schools and colleges to further embed this knowledge in whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing. So far, over 16,700 settings have claimed a training grant.

325. In 2021, an additional £79m boost was announced to expand children’s mental health services. This included progressing the rollout of Mental Health Support Teams, who deliver direct interventions in schools and colleges. These teams covered 35% of pupils in 2023.

Qualifications

326. Exams and formal assessments in England, including GCSE, AS level, A level and T Level, went ahead largely as normal in 2023. To acknowledge that students may still have experienced some disruption they were supported in GCSE maths, physics and combined science with formulae and equation sheets during exams. There was also return to pre-pandemic grading with some protection built in against any disruption, which meant that a student was just as likely to achieve a particular grade in 2023 as they would have been before the pandemic.

327. The Department has recently asked Ofqual to make arrangements to extend formulae and equation sheets for GCSE exams in maths, physics and combined sciences for 2024. Ofqual recently held a consultation on the changes which closed at the end of November.

Attendance

328. To improve attendance the government in England has put in place a comprehensive strategy, this has included: publishing new stronger expectations of schools, academy trusts and LAs (LAs) to work together to improve attendance, deploying 10 expert Attendance Advisers, the collection of data directly from school’s electronic registers to help identify children at risk of persistent absence and to enable early intervention, convening an Attendance Action Alliance of system leaders, doubling the number of attendance hubs to 32 which will see 2000 schools supported to tackle persistent absence, and expanding an attendance mentor pilot from 5 to 15 areas from September 2024 reaching 10,000 children.

Attainment and support for disadvantaged children

329. The previous government’s education recovery programmes were especially targeted at disadvantaged pupils, which included the recovery premium, National Tutoring Programme for 5–16-year-olds, and 16-19 Tuition Fund.

330. Schools receive the Pupil Premium to enable them to provide extra support to improve disadvantaged pupils’ academic and personal achievements. Pupil Premium funding increased to over £2.9bn in 2024-25, an increase of around £90 million from 2023-24. Also, the National Funding Formula (NFF) targets funding to schools which have the greatest numbers of pupils with additional needs. In 2024-25, over £4.4bn (10.2%) of the formula has been allocated according to deprivation, and over £7.8bn (17.8%) will be allocated for additional needs overall.

331. In addition, 2.1 million pupils are eligible for benefits-related free school meals and almost an additional 1.3 million infants following the introduction of universal infant free school meals in 2014, and 90,000 disadvantaged pupils in further education receive a free meal at lunch time. The government has also permanently extended eligibility for free school

meals to children from all families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), subject to income thresholds.

Scotland

332. The Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. (CERG) was established in March 2020 to provide advice on education policy and delivery to ministers and local government leaders in the context of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

333. In May 2020, the SG published the Error! Hyperlink reference not valid., discussing the potential requirement for a blended model of in-school and at-home teaching.

334. The framework was jointly developed by the SG and local government, with support from key partners across the education system through CERG. Prior to the re-opening of schools in August 2020, the SG worked with CERG to develop detailed guidance for schools on how to operate in the context of COVID.

335. In October 2021, the SG published Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. which set out key recovery and related activity for Scottish education.

336. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. (SQA) implemented alternative assessment approaches across the National Qualifications and Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQ) provision to support delivering centres and learners.

337. The SG is committed to improving the lives of Scotland's GRT communities. We published an Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. in October 2019 setting out concrete steps to improving outcomes for members of GRT communities. The plan consisted of 33 actions across health, education, accommodation, equality and social security. In relation to improving uptake of funded early learning and childcare, funding was provided to STEP, who are a charity who work with GRT communities, to design and produce backpacks containing interactive learning materials targeted at the GRT communities to introduce play based learning and change perceptions of education in early years.

NI

338. In an effort to offset the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Engage Programme was launched in September 2020 using Covid-19 funding and continued in 2021-22 and 2022-23. Over £57m in funding was allocated to settings across the three years of the programme. The programme provided the greatest level of funding to settings with higher concentrations of disadvantage while also providing universal support across all settings in recognition of the wider impact of Covid-19.

Isle of Man

339. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, a decrease in attainment was identified for all core subjects across all 3 Key Stages. In-line with the Department of Education, Sport and Culture's policy for inclusive education, schools tackled this decrease by implementing appropriate interventions and support on a needs-based approach.

Guernsey

340. In June 2022, Guernsey's government agreed to provide funding to support Error! Hyperlink reference not valid. for education provision. This has included the provision of additional Learning Support Assistants to work within early years, primary and secondary phases.

39. The Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

341. The powers and duties contained in the Shared Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 are for education bodies in NI,

principally the Department of Education and the Education Authority. These bodies are responsible for budget allocation and implementation.

342. As co-guarantors of the GFA, the UK Government has a role to play in supporting reconciliation, integration and a peaceful society in NI. The UK Government believes that greater integration within education is a key aspect of the reconciliation process in NI, and wants every parent to be able to have a proper choice of schools, including an integrated school for their children if they so wish.

343. The UK Government has been providing capital funding to the NI Executive as part of the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement to build integrated and shared schools. The UK Government is also providing £1.9 million to the Integrated Education Fund and Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education from 2022–2025 to raise awareness of integrated education and support schools, teachers and parents in the process to transform to integrated status. Additional details can be found in the annex.

Cultural rights (art. 15)

40. The Irish Language and Ulster Scots Strategies

344. The UK Government passed the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act 2022 in order to progress measures agreed as part of the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) deal reached by all five NI Executive parties, the UK Government and the Government of Ireland. Central to this deal was a carefully balanced package of legislative measures pertaining to language, identity and culture in NI.

345. This package will make provision for:

- An Office of Identity and Cultural Expression;
- An Irish Language Commissioner and official status of the Irish language;
- A Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British tradition to enhance and develop the language, and associated arts and literature.

346. The UK Government has commenced the Act for the purpose of making appointments, including the Irish Language Commissioner and a Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition, as agreed in NDNA. Under the NDNA there is a commitment to adopt the key principles and practice of citizen and community engagement to co-design and co-production of the development and delivery of an Irish Language Strategy and an Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy.

41. Access to sports, sports facilities and competitions by persons with disabilities and transgender persons

347. The UK Government is committed to increasing access to sport and physical activity. Following the General Election the new Government will consider its approach to delivering against this ambition, but has already set out plans for supporting grassroots football club facilities. This will include continued delivery of funding for multi-sport grassroots facilities this year, and support for the Football Foundation and the Football Association in delivering more opportunities for women and girls and disabled players to participate. The UK hopes to be able to update the Committee at the interactive dialogue.

348. DCMS's arm's length body for grassroots sport, Sport England's ten-year strategy 'Uniting the Movement' reinforces their commitment to increasing participation in sport and physical activity for those from under-represented groups, including disabled people. Sport England have ensured that each of their programmes impact directly on disabled people. The overall investment figure from Sport England into disability focussed work between 2021 and 2022 is over £30m, this in addition to investing £6.7m from 2022–2027 into seven National Disability Sports Organisations who represent specific impairment groups.

349. For the Paris 2024 Paralympic Cycle (2021–2025), UK Sport, the arm's length body for elite sport, is investing over £67m in World Class Programme Awards for 18 Paralympic sports. This is an increase of more than £13m from the amount invested in WCPs for the Tokyo Paralympic cycle.

42. Access to the internet and digital literacy training, as well as measures to safeguard the right to privacy and cultural identities

Media literacy

350. In July 2021 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) published the Online Media Literacy Strategy which set out the UK Government's ambition to improve the national media literacy landscape. The Strategy seeks to support the empowerment of users with the key skills and knowledge they need to make safe and informed choices online, whilst making the most of what the internet has to offer. The Strategy sets out knowledge and skills framework which is intended to inform the content and delivery of media literacy initiatives. This includes ensuring that users understand how the online environment operates and use this to inform decisions they take online.

351. To achieve the aims of the Strategy, DCMS has awarded almost £2.5m in grant funding, for organisations delivering innovative media literacy projects, including for citizens from disadvantaged backgrounds or who are disproportionately vulnerable to harm online. This includes providing over £180,000 to projects designed to help vulnerable and marginalised women enhance their media literacy skills, and over £260,000 for projects seeking to improve the digital and information literacy skills of senior citizens nationwide.

352. The Government wants all children to leave school with the knowledge, understanding, and skills that enable them to use information and communication technology creatively and purposefully, whilst becoming discerning consumers of information.

353. Digital literacy is taught through compulsory curriculum subjects such as computing, citizenship and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

354. The DfE does not specify how schools should teach the curriculum; the national curriculum for computing and citizenship; and the RSHE statutory guidance set out the content that schools should cover but not how curriculum subjects, or topics within the subjects, should be taught. Schools are trusted to use their professional judgement and understanding of their pupils to develop the right teaching approach for their particular setting.

Digital Skills

355. Last year, the UK Government launched the Digital Skills Council, which brings together government and industry to drive industry-led action to grow the digital workforce. The Council is focused on addressing industry's current and future demand for digital skills, including through digital apprenticeships and by increasing the amount of business-led upskilling. The Council membership includes leaders from organisations such as Starling, Multiverse and Google.

356. The Government recognises that the digital sector can only reach its true potential if it is representative of society, and therefore continues to support the Tech Talent Charter, which is helping to improve the diversity of the digital workforce by improving reporting on diversity statistics and fostering collaboration to create a more diverse tech workforce.

357. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology is constantly making efforts to gain a better understanding of the digital skills landscape. Therefore, the Digital Skills Council recently co-funded FutureDotNow's roadmap, a comprehensive report that enables the department to gain an insight into the barriers and potential impacts essential digital skills has on the workforce.