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Summary record of the 14th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 25 February 2020, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão

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

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

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

Sixth periodic report of Norway (E/C.12/NOR/6; E/C.12/NOR/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Norway took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway), expressing his appreciation for the Committee's work, said that the Covenant was considered by Norway to be on an equal footing with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and that its provisions took precedence over any conflicting provisions of national laws. The delegation of Norway included representatives from many different ministries, which testified to the centrality that his country accorded to economic, social and cultural rights in different policy areas. All the ministries represented had been involved in drafting the periodic report (E/C.12/NOR/6), which had been submitted under the simplified reporting procedure, a procedure that Norway appreciated as it contributed to greater efficiency.

3. Norway had made great strides towards gender equality and had been ranked second out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020. More women were in full-time employment, the number of women in management positions was growing and the gender pay gap had been reduced. Still, challenges remained, such as gender segregation in education and the labour market. In response, the Government was formulating a strategy on gender equality in education and the labour market for the period 2021–2024, it had strengthened the duty of employers and public authorities to work actively to promote gender equality and report on their efforts, and it had established an enforcement mechanism for sexual harassment cases.

4. Discrimination occurred at various levels of Norwegian society. For example, reports indicated negative trends in attitudes towards Muslims. Accordingly, steps were being taken to address discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and religion. The Strategy against Hate Speech 2016–2020 had been developed and adopted, and the Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination on the grounds of Ethnicity and Religion had been presented in December 2019. The Plan provided for 50 measures in a range of areas, including the labour market, housing and health sectors. The Government was also drawing up a national action plan to combat discrimination and hatred against Muslims.

5. The Action Plan against Anti-Semitism 2016–2020 set out a number of measures aimed at eliminating antisemitism in Norway. The Government had decided to extend the period covered by the Plan beyond 2020.

6. The Government had launched a strategy entitled “A Society for All”, which sought to ensure equality for persons with disabilities and respect for their human rights. It was also working on a white paper to be submitted to parliament concerning the human rights situation of persons with intellectual disabilities.

7. Consultations between the State authorities and the Sámediggi (the Sámi parliament) had been formalized since 2005, and a number of consultation processes took place every year. The Government was preparing additional statutory rules that would further strengthen and clarify the Sámi people's right to be consulted on matters that might affect them directly. A bill in that regard was currently undergoing public consultation, to be concluded by the end of February 2020.

8. All persons staying or living in Norway, regardless of their citizenship or permanent residence or the legality of their stay in the country, were entitled to emergency health care and to a specialized assessment to determine whether or not they required health care. The Government continued to prioritize mental health care and substance abuse treatment by facilitating increased user influence, shorter waiting times and better access to, and predictability and quality of, services. Non-consensual measures in the provision of mental health care were subject to strict and detailed regulations.

9. In 2019, the Government had received a report from an appointed legislative committee on the use of coercion in health care. Among other recommendations, the

committee had suggested removing diagnosis-specific terms from legal provisions on coercion and replacing them with requirements related to the absence of decision-making competence and the “strong need” for relevant measures. The report had been submitted for public consultation the previous summer, and the Government aimed to present a bill to parliament as soon as possible.

10. Norway was currently under scrutiny from the European Court of Human Rights in 35 child welfare cases. Seven judgments had so far been handed down, including two findings of no violation. The judgments had provided important input to improve the Norwegian child welfare system. The principle of the best interests of the child was enshrined in the Constitution and the Child Welfare Act, and Norway was committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

11. **The Chair**, speaking as Country Rapporteur, said that he would be interested to know whether the Covenant in its entirety had been taken into account in the development of the human rights catalogue mentioned in paragraph 1 of the State party’s report, whether the Covenant was considered to be on an equal footing with the Constitution, and whether its provisions were incorporated into the training given to Norwegian judges.

12. Referring to paragraph 7 of the report, he commended the State party’s policy of integrating follow-up to human rights recommendations into the daily work of all government ministries. In that regard, it would be helpful to receive information on the effectiveness of the policy and on the results achieved through implementation of the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act. An explanation of how the State party ensured the fulfilment of its specific obligations under the Covenant would also be appreciated.

13. The delegation should clarify whether the State party was in a position to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and, if it was not, describe the obstacles to ratification and the measures being taken to overcome them. In reference to paragraph 10 of the report, in which it was noted that a budget model implemented on 1 January 2018 ensured that budgetary resources were not a hindrance to providing an interpreter, he asked what challenges remained in guaranteeing all public service users access to professional interpreting services.

14. Noting that large companies were required, under the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act and the Accounting Act, to report on the measures they had taken to promote equality and prevent discrimination, he asked whether the Government had been receiving reports and what progress had been made thanks to the implementation of the two Acts.

15. He would be grateful for examples of cases in which citizens had contacted the Patient and Care Service Ombudsman, and for details of any programmes to inform and educate citizens on the national ombudsman institutions and their services. Referring to paragraph 42 of the report, he asked how many applicants had been granted legal aid pursuant to Sections 11 (4) and 16 (4) of the Legal Aid Act. Examples in that regard would be welcome.

16. The delegation should provide information on the implementation and outcome of the responsible business conduct initiatives mentioned in paragraph 45 of the report, and on efforts to conduct the risk-based due diligence for responsible business conduct referred to in paragraph 46. He would also be glad of an update on the steps taken by the State party to ensure that the activities of Norwegian companies abroad were carried out in compliance with international human rights law, especially the Covenant.

17. It would be useful to receive an update on what the State party was doing to ensure the provision of official development assistance. He would be grateful for examples of such assistance and an explanation of the Government’s motivations for offering aid.

18. He wished to know the conditions for recognition of the right to fish for all inhabitants of Finnmark and northern Troms, and municipalities in the rest of northern Norway with coastal Sámi areas. Noting that the Marine Resources Act, the Participation Act and the Finnmark Act had been amended on 1 January 2012 to include new provisions, he asked how those provisions had been implemented and to what effect.

19. He would be interested to receive an update on the status of the bill mentioned in paragraph 59 of the report, an indication of whether the public hearing referred to in the

same paragraph had been held, and details of any time frame for the adoption of the bill. Lastly, he would appreciate an update on the Government's efforts to combat climate change in its territory and monitor the activities of Norwegian companies abroad.

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

20. **Ms. Drazdiak** (Norway) said that the human rights catalogue had been incorporated into the Constitution in 2014, following a proposal from a human rights committee appointed by parliament. The adoption of the catalogue had contributed to an increased focus on human rights in general. Parliament had decided to reflect only the most fundamental human rights obligations of Norway in the Constitution. The Covenant, which had been invoked in several domestic court cases, did not enjoy the same formal status as the Constitution but did take precedence over other Norwegian laws in the event of conflict.

21. Regarding the training of judges, she wished to draw the Committee's attention to paragraph 3 of the report. In February 2019, guidelines had been introduced for courts to ensure that they dealt with cases involving the Sámi people in an appropriate manner. Although the Government did not envisage establishing a separate unit or mechanism dedicated to following up on recommendations from international treaty bodies, it greatly appreciated its cooperation with those bodies and with non-governmental human rights organizations.

22. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway) said that in 2018 Norway had provided almost 35 billion kroner (Nkr) in official development assistance, making it one of the few countries in the world to donate around 1 per cent of its gross national income. Some 56 per cent of its aid went through multilateral channels, with the three largest recipients being the Gavi Alliance, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund. Roughly 22 per cent of its aid was channelled through civil society. Some of its most important partners were the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Norwegian Red Cross, Norwegian Church Aid, Norwegian People's Aid and Save the Children Norway.

23. In 2019, the Government had announced that an additional Nkr 400 million would be allocated to disability work in the period 2019–2022. The Government would also be launching a strategy to promote disability initiatives in the context of international development policies and cooperation.

24. Programmes had been introduced on gender issues, to promote children's rights and to eradicate harmful traditional practices, and the Oil for Development, Fish for Development and Tax for Development programmes had helped to encourage the sharing of good practices.

25. Through its International Climate and Forest Initiative, the Government was working with partner countries to save tropical forests, partly because of their importance to biodiversity and indigenous peoples but also as a means of meeting its commitments under the Paris Agreement.

26. **Ms. Hubert** (Norway) said that the Government had a new development cooperation strategy entitled Food, People and the Environment. Norway supported a human rights-based approach to development, which incorporated gender equality, anti-corruption measures, and climate and the environment as cross-cutting issues.

27. The Government had commissioned an independent review, subject to public consultation, of each of the individual complaints mechanisms of the human rights treaty bodies that it had not ratified. In a white paper submitted to parliament in 2016, the Government had recommended that Norway should not become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant because economic and social rights were often not suited to review in individual cases. In 2017, a broad majority in parliament had voted in favour of the Government's position. The Covenant had nonetheless been incorporated into national law through the Human Rights Act.

28. The Government took the view that the Covenant was primarily territorial in nature. It could have extraterritorial scope only in exceptional circumstances, when the State exercised a high degree of authority or control over an activity that affected human rights in another State.

29. **Ms. Skoklefeld** (Norway) said that the Government recognized the right of all people to use public services regardless of the language they spoke. Interpretation in the

public sector was regulated by various laws, including the Public Administration Act, which provided for the use of interpreters to meet the general obligation to supply information. A new law had been proposed to improve the use and quality of interpreting in the public sector, and funding had been allocated to ensure the availability of sufficient qualified interpreters.

30. **Ms. Drazdiak** (Norway) said that the courts appointed interpreters when necessary, including when one or more of the parties to a case spoke a minority language. Interpretation was provided at public expense in all criminal cases, in civil cases with no court fees, or when the court ordered the use of an interpreter because one or more of the parties did not speak Norwegian and was a Norwegian citizen or a foreign citizen resident in Norway. Expenses could also be paid when a party was a foreign national not resident in Norway, or if a witness or expert did not speak Norwegian, whenever the court deemed it reasonable. The Sámi Act provided for the right to use the Sámi language in courts of the Sámi language administrative district. In such cases, the court was responsible for translation into Norwegian or could decide that the language of the proceedings and the court records would be Sámi. In 2018, translation and interpreting costs in the justice system had amounted to approximately €11.3 million, of which €1.2 million had been used for criminal cases.

31. A wide variety of measures were in place to meet the legal needs of the population. The Government funded several special legal aid services targeting vulnerable groups, such as “street lawyers”. In criminal cases, everyone was entitled to a free lawyer of his or her choice. Free legal aid was not provided to those with alternative coverage, such as the legal assistance provided by trade unions in employment cases. For legal aid purposes, civil cases were divided into means-tested, non-means-tested and non-priority. Non-means-tested cases included medical cases involving coercive measures and some child welfare cases, while cases of marital and parental disputes, evictions and dismissals were subject to means testing. Legal aid could exceptionally be provided in the remaining non-priority cases, if the applicant had an income below the threshold or less than €2,000 over it. The Government had appointed a committee to review the legal aid scheme, which would deliver its report in May 2020. In 2018, county governors had received over 16,000 applications for free legal aid; county social welfare boards had handled over 3,000 free legal aid cases, and the courts had handled an estimated 6,800 cases.

32. **Mr. Uchermann** (Norway) said that the tasks of the health and social services ombudsmen were to answer general questions regarding health and social services; to listen to patient experiences; to provide guidance on patient rights and information on compensation and complaint mechanisms; to help patients obtain answers to their questions in meetings with service providers; to assist with formulating a compensation claim; to give advice on what to do in the event of injury; and to offer suggestions about who to contact if the ombudsman was unable to help.

33. **Mr. Drægni** (Norway) said that the proposed statutory rules on the right of Sámi persons to be consulted in matters affecting them had been submitted for public consultation on 29 November 2019, with a deadline of 29 February 2020.

34. **Mr. Brattskar** (Norway) said that his country had published its National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights in 2015, with the aim of achieving a more coherent approach to implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Follow-up was ensured by an interministerial working group, mandated to communicate a set of common expectations for responsible business conduct, as well as by individual ministries within their areas of responsibility. The Government expected Norwegian companies to comply with the Guiding Principles and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and it actively promoted them as a basis for sustainable and inclusive economic growth worldwide. The Guiding Principles were prioritized as a pathway to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through respect for human rights by companies in every aspect of their business operations. The updated National Action Plan would focus on alignment of the Guiding Principles with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

35. In November 2019, the Government’s Ethics Information Committee had drafted a law to improve transparency, enshrine the right to information about the impact of companies on human rights, and promote respect for human rights in business operations

and supply chains, in line with the Guiding Principles. The bill was currently under consultation and would be debated in 2020.

36. In 2018, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation had evaluated the level of implementation of the Guiding Principles in line with the National Action Plan. It had found that, although high-level policy documents contained clear reference to the Guiding Principles, the guidance documents and practical implementation required improvement. In response to the finding that Foreign Service staff needed greater expertise in the follow-up of development projects involving the private sector and in the assessment of human rights risks in host countries, the Government was introducing a more systematic approach to competence-building for Norwegian embassies. The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now stipulated that compliance with the Guiding Principles and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises was a prerequisite for support for private sector development projects.

37. Norway aimed to fulfil its 2030 targets for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It was a member of the European Union Emissions Trading System and had also agreed to implement European Union legislation that regulated emissions not covered by the system. Following finalization of the agreement with the European Union, the Government would propose a plan on how to achieve a 45 per cent reduction in domestic emissions not covered by the Emissions Trading System. The Government had already committed to purchasing emission reductions from other countries only if strictly necessary. Since 2008, most petroleum sector emissions had been covered by the Emissions Trading System; emissions under the scheme would be reduced by 43 per cent compared to the 2005 level by 2030. The petroleum sector was also subject to a carbon dioxide tax and other environmental requirements. Norway had allocated Nkr 1.68 billion to the Green Climate Fund for the period 2015–2018 and would provide Nkr 400 million in 2020. The Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment had visited Norway in 2019 and the Government looked forward to reviewing his report.

38. **Ms. Shin** (Country Task Force) said that new equality legislation, which provided that employers had an active obligation to prevent discrimination, did not apply to private companies with fewer than 50 employees. She would appreciate clarification of the scope of the legislation, which appeared to represent a step back compared to previous legislation applicable to all employers. What percentage of companies were exempted from the obligation, and what measures had been taken to address discrimination in such organizations? It would be useful to have information on the status of compliance in the public and private sectors and to know who was responsible for monitoring it. She asked how many fines had been imposed and whether the level was high enough to have a deterrent effect. Any further details on how the law functioned would be appreciated.

39. It would be interesting to hear an assessment of the various efforts made to tackle high unemployment among immigrants and to know whether such programmes tackled the root cause of the problem. Noting that equality legislation did not require universal design and individual accommodation for persons with disabilities in the workplace, she wished to know what efforts had been made to support disadvantaged persons, including persons with disabilities, new migrants and asylum seekers, to cope with the new technologies required in modern work. In light of reports that women prisoners had fewer work training opportunities than men in prison, she wondered what measures had been taken to ensure equality in that regard.

40. She would appreciate more details of work-related complaints received by the Ombudsman and wished to know how they had been handled and what sanctions and remedies had been applied. She had seen conflicting statistics on the gender pay gap and would like to hear the official figures for its level and the rate of decrease. She would like to know whether data disaggregated by ethnic minority or by disability were available. If the gap was mainly due to the higher frequency of part-time work among women, she wished to know what was being done to reduce the discrepancy. What efforts was the Government making to address gender-segregated labour markets and the unequal division of work and care responsibilities between men and women? She would appreciate statistics on the use of maternity, paternity and parental leave under the newly introduced system and wished to know to what extent it helped to reduce the burden on women, improve the balance between work and family, and reduce part-time work among women.

41. She wondered what challenges the State party faced in preventing occupational accidents and improving occupational safety, particularly in the most hazardous sectors such as construction, and what measures it had taken to that end. She wished to reiterate the Committee's request for data related to occupational diseases. In view of reports that less than 5 per cent of Norwegian medical practitioners reported work-related diseases to the labour inspection authority, she would like to know whether any change had occurred and what steps had been taken to improve reporting and collect reliable data. Had any measures been taken to protect firefighters and construction workers who were exposed to radon, asbestos and other dangerous chemicals?

42. Noting that the Government could compel those involved in a labour dispute to undergo arbitration if it believed that a strike would threaten public safety, she wished to know how the State party would respond to criticism by trade unions that it often intervened too quickly in such cases and how strikes among oil industry workers could be considered to pose such a threat. In view of the State party's pioneering work to promote female leadership in large corporations, she asked what percentage of leadership positions in trade unions were held by women and whether trade unions were monitored in that regard.

43. She would welcome an update on the reforms to the social security system, including the pension system, and she asked whether the impact of the pension reform on women and on persons with disabilities had been assessed. In the light of reported difficulties in gaining access to social welfare services experienced by members of minorities, including the Roma community, she wished to know what efforts were being made to streamline the process of claiming social security benefits, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

44. **Ms. Skarstein** (Norway) said that the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act had been amended in January 2020 to clarify and expand employers' anti-discrimination duties, including with regard to intersectional discrimination, sexual harassment and gender-based violence. All employers, regardless of size or sector, were obliged to make active efforts to promote equality and combat all forms of discrimination and to document those efforts. Private employers with more than 50 employees and all public employers were obliged to follow a four-step model in those efforts and, since the amendments, they also had to assess pay conditions from a gender perspective and review the use of involuntary part-time work. Such provisions were now also applicable to companies with 20–50 employees if requested by the employees or their representatives. While entities that were obliged to submit an annual accounts report must include a statement on how they were meeting their anti-discrimination duties, the Government had amended the Accounting Act in 2018 to remove that obligation for small companies in order to reduce their reporting burden. The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman monitored public and private employers' discharge of their duties in that area. It was authorized to conduct follow-up visits to companies, view documents related to anti-discrimination activities and conduct tribunals to hear complaints, through which it could impose fines. As the amendments were relatively new, no case law had yet been accumulated.

45. While public entities and private companies oriented towards the public were obliged to ensure that their general functions respected universal design criteria, parts of a company that were only for employees did not need to meet the same criteria. Persons with disabilities had the right to individual accommodation, however. Norway was making efforts to implement Directive (EU) 2016/2102 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 October 2016 on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies (the Web Accessibility Directive) and Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services (the European Accessibility Act) in order to improve access to products and services for persons with disabilities, reduce their reliance on assistive technologies and increase their participation in work and society. The Government would consider whether any further regulations were required to that end.

46. With regard to the gender pay gap, in 2019 women in full- and part-time work had earned an average of 87.6 per cent of the average wage for men, which was a small increase

over the figure for 2018. The delegation would provide data disaggregated by disability and ethnic background in writing, if available.

47. In 2020, the Government planned to develop a strategy to improve gender equality in education and the labour market. Between 2006 and 2016, the proportion of women in the age group 25–54 years in part-time work had fallen from 37.4 per cent to 28.7 per cent, and the proportion in full-time work had increased, especially among women with small children or more than three children. In 2019, a government commission had published a report on gender equality challenges for children and youth, which included proposals to encourage non-traditional education choices. The proposals were currently under public consultation and would subsequently be examined by the Government. Efforts were also being made to promote a fairer gender balance in the workplace. The former Ministry of Children and Equality had held meetings with large companies in the private sector, in particular the law and financial sectors, and with employer and employee organizations to promote efforts to achieve gender equality. While trade unions were self-regulated with regard to promoting female leadership, women had held leadership positions in many of the largest trade unions in Norway. The delegation would provide statistics in writing if available.

48. **Mr. Jølstad** (Norway) said that, since 2016, the proportion of unemployed persons who were migrants had increased to around 40 per cent, owing to the influx of migrants to the country. Although the unemployment rate among migrants had dropped since 2016, it remained three times higher than that among the general population. As the Government had a universal, mainstream, nationwide labour market policy to support vulnerable groups, there were no special employment programmes solely for migrants. All registered, legally resident migrants had the same right to an individual work capability assessment as Norwegian citizens, and local authorities were responsible for helping them obtain work suited to their abilities and needs. Priority was given to young persons, long-term unemployed persons and migrants from outside the European Economic Area. In 2018, 27 per cent of unemployed migrants – mostly women and individuals from Asia and Africa – had participated in labour market measures, compared with 20 per cent of the general population. The main cause of unemployment among migrants was that they possessed insufficient education, invalid qualifications or skills for which there was little demand.

49. The Government was taking various steps to combat unemployment among migrants. In 2018, it had established the Unemployment Commission to identify measures to increase employment, which had issued an initial expert report in March 2019 and was currently engaged in the second round of analysis, including inputs from social partners. The National Inclusion Initiative had been developed to generate employment opportunities for vulnerable groups, which included many migrants. In addition, a pilot scheme involving 15 government agencies had been launched to assess the effectiveness of anonymous job applications in combating discrimination. The scheme would be evaluated in late 2020.

50. Statistics Norway collected data on occupational accidents through a manual system in which employers notified the Labour and Welfare Administration when such an event occurred. Some 24,000 occupational accidents were reported each year, and the number of fatalities had halved between 2000 and 2018. No official statistics on occupational diseases were currently collected; in 2016, various public agencies had accordingly produced joint proposals for an electronic reporting system for occupational accidents and diseases, which the Government was currently considering. The National Institute of Occupational Health operated a nationwide environment and health surveillance system for coordinating and disseminating data on working environments, with a focus on chemical exposure, and a national register of chemical exposure measurements at work. While the level of occupational chemical exposure had dropped from previous highs, it had levelled out over the preceding decade; further work was therefore required. Asbestos, while banned, was still encountered during demolitions, and there were strict regulations for handling it. The Institute was conducting studies on the efficacy of personal protective equipment for preventing chemical exposure in various sectors.

51. As far as the reform of the pension system was concerned, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs had launched a project aimed at evaluating how the reform was working, assessing attitudes towards it and developing new ideas on how to increase employment rates among older persons. The Ministry was also in ongoing discussions with trade unions about reforming the job-specific arrangements on mandatory retirement ages that applied to

groups such as the police, national defence employees and nurses. The Government was of the opinion that the enforcement of a mandatory retirement age was not appropriate at a time when, owing to increased life expectancy, individuals might wish to postpone retirement.

52. Disability rates increased with age in Norway and, by the age of 67, one third of the population received disability benefits. If no action was taken, it was likely that younger persons who currently lived on disability benefits would receive a lower retirement pension later in life. Although the Government had a duty to ensure reasonable pension levels for disabled persons, it was aware that increasing those pensions might result in an increased uptake of disability benefits and, consequently, a drop in labour supply. Under the reformed pension system, persons with disabilities accumulated pension rights on the basis of their income before they had started to claim disability benefits. At the age of 67, they were transferred to the public old-age pension system. It was hoped that certain measures could be taken that, combined with the positive effects of increased labour participation among older persons, would ensure reasonable pension levels for those receiving benefits.

53. On a more general note, the welfare system in Norway was based on the provision of universal mainstream services. As a result, there were no special employment programmes for migrants or ethnic groups. All services were administered by the local offices of the Labour and Welfare Administration, in accordance with the specific needs identified at the local level. Lastly, the Government did not collect data on ethnic minorities and the delegation could not therefore share any statistical information about the Roma community in Norway.

54. **Ms. Ravenberg** (Country Task Force), noting with concern that unaccompanied asylum seekers between the ages of 15 and 18 were accommodated in asylum reception centres, and that there were major differences in the level of care provided in different reception centres, said that she wished to know what factors were preventing the State party from ensuring that all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children received protection from the Child Welfare Service. Further information on any relevant measures taken or planned would be of interest to the Committee. Moreover, it would be helpful to understand whether unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were automatically transferred to reception centres when they turned 15 and, in turn, what protection and services were subsequently provided to individuals when they reached the age of 18.

55. The Committee would welcome further information on the efforts made by the State party to strengthen the supervision of children in foster care and improve the capacity of foster care providers, as well as on any challenges encountered and results achieved. She would also be keen to receive further information on the supervisions carried out.

56. Notwithstanding the availability of information on the standard of living in the national strategy for housing and support services (2014–2020), the Committee regretted that the State party had not provided a satisfactory reply to the questions on the subject of housing in paragraph 26 of its list of issues (E/C.12/NOR/QPR/6). She therefore reiterated the Committee's request for further information on how the measures taken by the State party had addressed the social housing deficit and homelessness, on the challenges faced in that regard and on the enforcement of legislation related to discrimination in the housing sector. The Committee would also welcome statistical data on the demand for and supply of social housing, average waiting times and the prevalence of homelessness during the reporting period.

57. The State party had also failed to provide information, in its report, on the steps taken since 2013 to ensure that irregular migrants enjoyed effective access to all necessary health-care services. The delegation should comment on reports that no such steps had been taken and, if that was not the case, provide further information in that regard. She would also like to know why a distinction was made between irregular migrants and other people when it came to the provision of medical assistance.

58. The Committee had received reports challenging the validity of the Government's assumption that all irregular migrants could leave the country within three weeks. She wished to know whether that assumption had been based on a thorough investigation, and how the Government dealt with irregular migrants who had been in Norway for a prolonged period and who required urgent medical assistance. She wondered whether the Government had considered how it would handle requests for urgent medical assistance from stateless

individuals or migrants who had had their citizenship revoked She was also keen to hear how the State party justified its decision to deny irregular migrant children the right to a general practitioner and to restrict the right of irregular migrants to municipal medical assistance. On a related note, the Committee would also appreciate clarification as to why the Government had chosen to limit the health-care rights of European Union citizens not in possession of a European health insurance card.

59. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee understood that the Government had adopted changes to the local government structure that had resulted in the number of municipalities being reduced from 428 to 356 and the number of counties from 19 to 11. He would like to know how those changes would impact the Government's efforts to address regional disparities caused by the country's irregular population distribution.

60. It was also his understanding that the responsibility for administering public education services had been delegated to local authorities. He was keen to understand whether those services were funded by the municipalities themselves, by the Government or by a combination of both. The Committee would also welcome further information on the criteria applied by the Government in its efforts to create equal conditions for education throughout the country. With particular regard to education infrastructure, it would be useful to know whether there were enough nurseries and schools in the municipalities and, if not, where the funding would come from to address that shortfall. He would also be keen to hear about any government oversight of the education policies that were formulated and implemented at the local level, and to find out whether the Government played a role in dealing with education-related complaints addressed to County Governors by pupils and parents.

61. In a general sense, the Committee would welcome further information on whose responsibility it was to ensure that the Sámi people were able to preserve and develop their language, culture and way of life in all areas of the country, as provided for in the Constitution. He also wished to know how the needs of the Sámi people and other national minorities were reflected in school curricula and how those curricula differed from municipality to municipality, depending on the size of the local Sámi population. Clarification as to how the views on education expressed by the Sámediggi (the Sámi parliament) were addressed, and how often education issues were raised in discussions between the Sámediggi and the central Government, would be of particular interest.

62. It was reassuring to learn that children with immigrant backgrounds were given equal access to preschool education, regardless of the status of their parents. However, that right was not formalized in national legislation. Indeed, those cases seemed to be left to the discretion of the municipalities. The delegation should comment on whether the Government planned to make any legislative amendments in that regard. He also wished to know whether different rules applied to public and private establishments when it came to ensuring access to education for children with immigrant backgrounds.

63. Lastly, he would be interested to know who was responsible for enforcing the obligation that Roma children must attend school. Clarification as to the role played by the municipalities in that regard would be of particular interest. The Committee would also like to hear more about the Government's overall strategy for ensuring the integration of Roma children into the national education system.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.