



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Ninetieth session

### Summary record of the 2602nd meeting\*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 16 May 2022, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Otani

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Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Cyprus*

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\* No summary records were issued for the 2600th and 2601st meetings.

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

**Consideration of reports of States parties** (*continued*)

*Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Cyprus (CRC/C/CYP/5-6; CRC/C/CYP/Q/5-6; CRC/C/CYP/RQ/5-6)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Cyprus joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Christodoulidou Zannetou** (Cyprus), introducing her country's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/CYP/5-6), said that the promotion and protection of children's rights were a priority for Cyprus. Regrettably, however, the Government was not in a position to ensure the implementation of human rights treaties in the portion of its territory that had been under illegal Turkish occupation since 1974 and could report only on the areas under the Government's effective control.
3. Laws had been enacted in 2021 to reinforce the country's efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and girls and to strengthen its child-friendly criminal justice system. Under that system, the prosecution of children was a measure of last resort; when it did become necessary to prosecute a child, he or she would be tried by the Children's Court, which was authorized to apply alternatives to detention. Another 2021 law had made harassment and stalking criminal offences and provided that the commission of such acts against children constituted an aggravating circumstance. Laws had been amended in recent years to allow child witnesses to give testimony outside the courtroom, to combat bullying in sports and to expand parental leave entitlements.
4. Violence against women and gender equality were covered in the sex education curricula, and teaching children the "underwear rule" – a method for explaining to children where other people should not try to touch them – was mandatory starting in kindergarten. Special units had been set up in all police districts to investigate cases of domestic violence and child abuse, and an office had been established at police headquarters to focus on those issues. The Children's House, which was based on the *barnahus* model, made all the services needed by child victims of abuse available under one roof in a child-friendly setting. A crisis centre providing a comprehensive range of services to victims of domestic violence and their children had been in operation since 2020. Professionals working with children, including teachers and police officers, received regular training on issues such as gender equality, child abuse and child trafficking.
5. Amendments to the Family Law that would ensure that parents were treated equally after a divorce or break-up were before the legislature. The legislature was also in the process of adopting implementing regulations for a 2017 law on family mediation.
6. The country's General Health System ensured that all children, including children of undocumented migrants, had access to health-care services. The National Breastfeeding Committee had been established in 2018, and it was a criminal offence to prevent a mother from breastfeeding in public. A free health screening programme for all newborns was being implemented. The mandate of the School Health Service included the early detection of health problems and of cases of child abuse.
7. Under 2019 amendments to the country's anti-trafficking law, the penalty for trafficking in children was life imprisonment. As part of the asylum process, a vulnerability screening and assessment procedure had been established in accordance with European Union guidelines. Interviews with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors were conducted in a child-friendly manner. If there was reason to believe that an individual was not a minor, the person's age was ascertained with his or her consent. Unaccompanied minors were transferred from reception centres to a home that had been specially designed for such minors or were placed with foster families or in semi-independent living arrangements.
8. The detention of migrant children was prohibited. Families with children were not held in detention. If one parent of a child was arrested pursuant to a removal decision, the other parent would not be detained. If a child was accompanied by a single parent, that parent would not be detained. The Government had instituted measures to promote the social and educational inclusion of the children of migrants.

9. Changes being made to the budget structure by the Ministry of Finance would facilitate the tracking of the resources that each ministry allocated for the protection of children's rights. The Government had implemented special measures in areas such as health, education and social services to support children and families during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

10. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate an update on the status of the draft laws on the welfare and protection of children and on the care and protection of children, which had been pending since 2008, and on the specific steps the Government had taken to move the process of their adoption forward. She wished to learn how the activities of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance – which was charged with monitoring the implementation of the Convention, the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure – were coordinated with those of the interministerial committee that had been put in place to monitor the implementation of the Convention and the Committee's recommendations. It would also be helpful to know to what extent the interministerial committee had been effective in furthering the implementation of the Committee's recommendations and whether other mechanisms existed to promote horizontal and vertical coordination in the implementation of the Convention and the Optional Protocols.

11. She wished to find out whether the State party had considered developing a comprehensive, cross-sectoral child rights strategy and the corresponding monitoring and evaluation indicators. She would be grateful for further information about the steps that had been taken to safeguard children's rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further details would also be appreciated on the status of the budget restructuring process that had begun in 2016 and the percentage of the State budget that was allocated for the promotion of children's rights. She wished to know what impact the financial crisis had had on children's enjoyment of their rights and what steps the Government had taken to ensure that spending on the protection of children's rights would not be reduced.

12. She would like to know whether the State party planned to institute a centralized data collection system covering all aspects of the Convention. She was keen to learn how the Government would ensure that the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights had the resources that it needed to carry out its mandate and that government agencies took due account of the Commissioner's recommendations. It would be helpful to know what role, if any, children and civil society had played in the preparation of the State party's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports. Were there any codes of conduct in place in the tourism industry to promote and protect children's rights?

13. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know whether discrimination against children was specifically addressed under domestic law and whether any efforts had been made to harmonize the various legislative provisions on discrimination. It would be helpful to know whether training on discrimination was carried out systematically or on an ad hoc basis and whether efforts had been made to raise the awareness of parents and the general public of the dangers of discrimination. She wished to learn how the Government had responded to the increase in xenophobia, racism and hate speech observed during financial crises and what it was doing to combat discrimination against Turkish, Roma, Traveller and migrant children and children from religious minorities. Did children from those groups have access to mainstream schools? She would appreciate information on any efforts to develop a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, strategy and action plan. She wished to know whether the State party planned to amend the law under which a child born to a Cypriot parent and a parent who had entered the country illegally was ineligible for Cypriot citizenship, as that provision appeared to discriminate against children on the basis of their parents' immigration status.

14. As there was currently no legal definition of the best interests of the child in the State party, she would like to know whether the Government would consider defining that principle in a statutory legal provision in order to ensure its consistent interpretation and application in all proceedings, particularly with regard to migrant children and children with disabilities. Was there a specific official who was responsible for ensuring that the best interests of the child were observed in court proceedings?

15. She would like to know whether the views of children were taken into consideration and given appropriate weight when making decisions that affected them. She wondered whether the Government would consider launching a campaign on children's right to be heard in order to help ensure that it was upheld in law and in practice. She would like to know more about any measures taken to foster the active participation of children in school affairs and other institutions and to sensitize parents to the importance of promoting their participation.

16. **Ms. Kiladze** (Country Task Force) said that it appeared that, under Cypriot law, children aged 16 and 17 years could be married with the written consent of their parents or guardians. She would like to know whether the Government planned to modify that law.

17. She would like the delegation to comment on reports that difficulties associated with birth registration procedures and the fact that fees were charged for registration heightened the risk of statelessness. The Committee had received reports that refugee, migrant and asylum-seeking children, as well as children of stateless parents, were at risk of statelessness. The naturalization process for beneficiaries of international protection was reportedly lengthy and opaque. She would like to know how the Government planned to address that challenge. She also wished to know whether any progress had been made towards the ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1997 European Convention on Nationality.

18. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that, while he welcomed the amendment of article 54 of the Children's Law to ban corporal punishment in all settings, it seemed that children aged from 16 to 18 years were not protected in the same manner as younger children. He would like to invite the delegation to clarify that point and indicate whether the Government planned to rectify that situation. He would also like more information on the measures introduced to follow up on that change in the law. Had steps been taken to encourage positive parenting?

19. He had been encouraged to learn about the Children's House. He would appreciate clarification as to whether children were able to give testimony and be cross-examined at the Children's House or whether they were required to attend court for that purpose. If the latter were the case, he would like to know whether the Government was considering entirely relieving children of the obligation to attend court and ensuring that their testimony was taken and cross-examination conducted during the pretrial period and without delay, in line with the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. Given that the Children's House was exclusively for child victims of sexual abuse, he wondered whether the Government had considered opening up its services to child victims of physical abuse or neglect as well.

20. He was keen to know more about the Women's House and specifically whether it took a multidisciplinary approach similar to the approach taken in the Children's House and whether problems arose within that context in cases involving multiple victims and types of abuse in one household.

21. He would be interested to learn more about the council tasked with implementing the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography and particularly how it was addressing grooming and extortion.

22. The Committee had received worrisome reports of intersex children being subjected to unnecessary surgery without their informed consent, both in the State party and abroad. Given the physical and psychological suffering that could be caused by such surgery, he would like to know whether there were any legal remedies in place for those children, whether those legal remedies were subject to a statute of limitations and whether there were any extraterritorial safeguards. He would like to invite the delegation to provide statistics on irreversible medical procedures carried out on intersex Cypriot children both in the country and abroad.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.*

23. **Ms. Efthimiadou** (Cyprus) said that all the international conventions ratified by Cyprus took precedence over domestic law. All forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, were therefore prohibited in Cyprus under the Convention. The

corporal punishment of children under the age of 18 years by any family member or person with parental authority was also prohibited under national law. In 2009, the Ministry of Education had sent a circular to the head teachers of all public schools in which it stated that any form of corporal punishment was strictly prohibited in schools and asked them to make that a priority issue for discussion with staff.

24. **Ms. Lambrianidou** (Cyprus) said that the testimony of persons under the age of 18 years was taken using video recording equipment. In Nicosia, children were cross-examined at the Children's House and their presence in court was not required. Work was ongoing to introduce a similar procedure for courts elsewhere in the country.

25. In cases of child sexual abuse, children were cared for at the Children's House, not the Women's House. The Women's House was a multi-agency crisis centre for women, and their children were welcomed there regardless of whether or not the children themselves had been subject to abuse. The Women's House provided integrated services for victims of violence and was staffed by police officers, social workers and psychologists. They facilitated women's and children's access to the criminal justice system and social services. The Women's House had a specialized team that provided support to child victims of domestic violence.

26. The council tasked with implementing the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography included representatives of the Attorney General's office, the police, the Ministry of Health and the Social Welfare Service of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. A new strategy for combating child sexual abuse had been approved by the Council of Ministers in October 2021. The strategy included preventive measures, awareness-raising activities and training for practitioners that covered the detection of child sexual abuse and procedures for reporting such abuse. It also helped practitioners to gain a better understanding of the vulnerability of children. Those actions were ongoing.

27. **Ms. Efthimiadou** (Cyprus) said that the Women's House and the Children's House were fully subsidized by the Government. The process of enacting the new laws on children was under way. Further amendments had been made to the drafts to ensure that they were in full compliance with the treaties and conventions ratified by Cyprus. The draft law on foster care was in the final stages of public consultation before undergoing legal vetting and being submitted to the Council of Ministers. The draft law on child protection was being vetted in preparation for its submission to the Council of Ministers. The Parents and Children Relation Law would be revised to ensure that it covered all the rights of the child.

28. A committee formed by representatives from several ministries had been established in 2012 to monitor the implementation of the Committee's recommendations and ensure interministerial cooperation in that regard.

29. The Government recognized the importance of having a separate budget for children, but the current budget structure made it difficult to obtain information on the specific budget allocation for the protection of children's rights. However, the budget structure was being changed, and the new structure would provide greater transparency in that respect. It was important to note that levels of expenditure on children had been maintained over the reporting period, despite economic difficulties. The Government was working to improve its system for collecting data on issues concerning children in line with international best practices.

30. **Mr. Tsiakkios** (Cyprus) said that the Ministry of Education had implemented an updated policy for the integration of migrant children. The policy had five strategic areas: language learning, reception of new migrant children, teacher training, data collection and needs analysis, and the incorporation of an intercultural approach into school curricula. The Pedagogical Institute had coordinated a project to improve the social and educational integration of children from countries outside of the European Union which provided support to teachers and promoted parents' involvement in their children's schools.

31. The Observatory on School Violence had developed a four-year national strategy for the prevention of violence in schools. The strategy was based on the Convention and provided for legal, administrative, social and educational measures to address the needs of vulnerable

children, including girls, children with disabilities, migrant children and children in need of care.

32. The Ministry of Education had set up a coordinating committee to prevent and combat the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, and a national action plan for that purpose was in place.

33. All schools were encouraged to implement the Ministry of Education's policy and code of conduct against racism and to follow the guidance it provided for managing and reporting incidents of racism. The policy included a broad definition of racism and outlined commitments and expectations for all members of the school community. Information for the report for the 2020/21 school year on racist incidents had been submitted by 124 schools, of which 86 had reported no incidents and 38 had reported a total of 124 incidents.

34. **Ms. Olympia Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that a bill for the ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was under parliamentary consideration.

35. **Ms. Elena Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that the Ministry of the Interior had made a great deal of headway in its work in the area of migration and asylum over the past four years. Efforts had focused on enhancing the protection of vulnerable migrants and asylum seekers, especially children, and on more effective management of migration and asylum procedures to expedite the processing of applications. Policy, legal and institutional measures had been taken to tackle abuse, protect the vulnerable and provide effective access to justice.

36. The challenges posed by the influx of refugees and asylum seekers had been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Special measures had been taken to guarantee the safety of migrants, asylum seekers and staff in the country's reception centres based on public COVID-19 health regulations, with priority being placed on the protection of migrant children. All children had access to social services, irrespective of their parents' migration status.

37. The Refugees Law of 2000 and the Amendment Act of the Refugees Law of 2013 made specific reference to the protection of children in the course of asylum procedures. The principle of the best interests of the child was not only used as guidance; respect for that principle was guaranteed by law. Additional information on the relevant provisions in asylum legislation would be provided in writing. A detailed description of how unaccompanied refugee children were dealt with was contained in paragraphs 34 and 35 of the replies to the list of issues ([CRC/C/CYP/RQ/5-6](#)).

38. The COVID-19 response measures had also made it necessary to modify some asylum procedures, including those relating to the identification, interviewing and accommodation of children in reception centres, but the rights and best interests of the children had been respected at all times.

39. The Government had taken note of the concerns expressed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 74/133 and had adopted a series of measures to promote equal treatment and non-discrimination in respect of migrant, refugee, asylum-seeking and stateless children. Those children were protected from refoulement, given access to all relevant information in a language they could understand and entitled to remain in the country with their parents or be reunited with their family. They could also be granted residency on humanitarian grounds, subject to certain conditions and in keeping with the laws in force.

40. Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children had equal access to Cypriot citizenship. Article 109 of the Civil Registry Law, which set forth the conditions for the acquisition of citizenship by birth and by origin, provided that citizenship was granted to any person born in Cyprus if at least one of the parents was a Cypriot citizen. That provision did not apply in cases where the entrance or stay in the country of either parent had been illegal, however, unless the Council of Ministers decided otherwise. Migrant children could be granted citizenship at the request of a parent, provided that at least one of the parents had been naturalized.

41. **Ms. Christodoulidou Zannetou** (Cyprus), responding to questions relating to the best interests of the child, said that the country's legal system was based on precedent, and the Family Court had issued a host of rulings concerning the best interests of the child which

were binding on lower courts. In its decisions, the Court had provided guidance on the material, psychological, ethical, mental and other dimensions of children's best interests. During administrative and judicial procedures involving children, consideration was given to the children's ascertainable wishes, their physical, emotional and educational needs, the likely effect of any change of circumstances on the child, the child's age, sex, background and family environment, and any other characteristics the court considered relevant.

42. **Ms. Efthimiadou** (Cyprus) said that in 2020 the Social Welfare Service, in cooperation with the Commissioner for Children's Rights, had started to develop guidelines and procedures for matters relating to children, with their best interests being a primary consideration. The Youth Board of Cyprus, the Children's Parliament and the Youth Advisory Committee of the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights were involved in all discussions on matters concerning children. The draft law on foster care, for example, had been sent to all those entities for comments. The Children's Parliament had engaged with representatives from different ministries to discuss a variety of issues of concern to children. The Committee's suggestions regarding children's participation in the drafting of the report had been duly noted and would be taken on board.

43. A recently finalized bill on gender recognition provided for legal recognition of gender identity without prior medical intervention based on self-identification. The legislature was currently discussing whether the age of applicability of the new law should be 16 or 18 years.

44. **Ms. Lambrianidou** (Cyprus) said that there were no complaints or criminal cases concerning intersex children under investigation or pending in court.

45. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that clarification was needed on the State party's practice of, in some cases, requiring child victims to give testimony, or undergo cross-examination, years after the offence had been committed. He wondered how that practice was consistent with the best interests of the child, considering the heavy psychological burden it placed on the victim. It would also be useful to know whether child witnesses of domestic violence were provided with trauma therapy, either in the Women's House or elsewhere.

46. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that additional clarification would be appreciated on the respective coordinating roles of the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of the Convention and the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. It would be useful to know what mechanisms were in place to ensure the overall coordination of activities relating to the implementation of the Convention and follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations.

47. **Ms. Kiladze** said that she wished to know what progress had been made towards the establishment of a legal definition of statelessness and appropriate procedures for the determination of statelessness to ensure that a child's status was not left to the discretion of a judge.

48. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he would like to invite the delegation to specify when the bill concerning statelessness had been submitted to the legislature, whether there were any specific obstacles to its adoption and whether it would, if passed, remedy the current legal and procedural shortcomings in that area.

49. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know how many children in the State party were unregistered and how many of them were migrant children born in the State party. Information was also needed on the timeline for issuing birth certificates. She would be grateful for information on breastfeeding rates and on measures taken to promote breastfeeding. Could the delegation explain what was meant by "early detection" in that context?

50. **Ms. Lambrianidou** (Cyprus) said that children of women victims of domestic violence were provided with psychological and other support at the Women's House. All child victims of sexual abuse gave testimony via video recordings. Cross-examination could take place either in court or at the Children's House. Cross-examination by video link was currently possible only in Nicosia, but work to establish the necessary facilities in other districts was under way. In cases involving child victims, the defence often refrained from cross-examination. If there was a need for additional testimony or cross-examination, which

might be the case long after the incident had occurred, the child was prepared for that experience by the prosecution in cooperation with the Children's House. Child victims of sexual violence were provided with psychotherapy at the Children's House.

51. **Ms. Efthimiadou** (Cyprus) said that, under Cypriot law, employers were required to provide an adequate location and facilities for employees who were breastfeeding their babies. Regulations on minimum standards for breastfeeding rooms at the workplace were currently being drafted. National breastfeeding policies were based on the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding of the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, and all public hospitals were adopting baby-friendly practices. Materials for use in health education modules on breastfeeding were also being prepared.

52. **Ms. Olympia Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that the bill concerning ratification of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness had been submitted to the legislature in 2020.

53. **Ms. Efthimiadou** (Cyprus) said that the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been established in 2012 to coordinate, advise and support relevant ministries and services in the implementation of the Committee's recommendations. The necessary resources were made available by the service or ministry in charge of the specific measure or activity involved.

54. **Ms. Kiladze** said that she wondered whether the State party made sufficient resources available for the provision of quality alternative care for children deprived of a family environment. Additional information would be welcome on the measures taken to ensure that children were provided with appropriate support in the context of divorce, in general, and to prevent children's alienation from one of the parents during protracted divorce proceedings, in particular. She was curious to find out how the State party viewed the situation. Was it true that the Social Welfare Service lacked capacity to address children's needs in the context of family separation and was understaffed, not child-friendly and ill-equipped to conduct child rights impact assessments?

55. The Committee would be grateful for statistics on the number of children in alternative care. It would also be helpful to know whether it was true that foster-care facilities were not adequately assessed by the Social Welfare Service, that institutional and family-based care was poorly regulated and monitored, and that foster families did not receive the support they needed to provide quality care. It was unclear whether children in alternative care, especially those with behavioural difficulties, received psychological support and therapy.

56. Had any progress been made with regard to the harmonization of the State party's legislation with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption?

57. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that he wished to know whether the State party planned to incorporate a specific definition of the best interests of the child into its legal framework and adopt a rights-based approach to disability. He wondered whether there were any specific plans to address the high rate of institutionalization of children with disabilities, which was apparently attributable to a lack of sufficient support for the parents of such children.

58. He noted that both parents reportedly must give consent for their child to receive health services, which could conceivably interfere with a child's right to access health services if the child, for example, was in the Women's House or the Children's House. It could especially be a problem in sexual abuse cases where medical examinations might be called for. Did that requirement also apply to reproductive health services? He would like to know whether all children and pregnant women had access to quality health care, regardless of their legal status, and how recently the Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Youth had been introduced. He would appreciate information about government plans, if any, to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children and adolescents.

59. He would be interested to learn what measures the State party had taken to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in order to ensure children's right to a healthy and sustainable environment. In particular, it would be helpful to have information on the country's transition



to sustainable energy sources. Were there any targeted measures to address child poverty and combat social exclusion?

60. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would like to learn more about the impact of the measures that had been adopted to reduce the number of children who had to repeat a school year or who dropped out. She would welcome information about measures to ensure high-quality, inclusive education and vocational training for children with disabilities and children from deprived backgrounds. She wished to hear more about the outcome of efforts to tackle discrimination and violence in schools and to improve the reporting of racist incidents, accountability and the support provided for dealing with racist behaviour. Information about exemptions from compulsory religious education for children who were not Catholic or Orthodox Christians and measures to promote freedom of religion and expression in the schools would be appreciated.

61. She wished to know whether specific instruction on children's rights and the environment was provided for in school curricula, whether children were involved in the governance of their schools and whether they were routinely consulted on the measures taken to improve the education system and combat violence, xenophobia and discrimination. She wondered what efforts the State party had deployed to ensure that all children, without discrimination, had access to leisure and cultural activities, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how much government funding had been allocated for such activities.

62. She would be interested to hear what steps had been taken to bring the law and practice relating to the enlistment of conscripts into full compliance with the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, especially as regards the minimum age of enlistment. Had the minimum age for attending primary school been raised to 6 years in September 2021 as had been planned? She would like to know what measures had been adopted to raise awareness of the relevant Optional Protocol among children, their teachers and families and to protect and assist children, especially migrant and asylum-seeking children, who had been involved in armed conflicts.

63. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** said that, while she understood that the concept of the best interests of the child might be clear to persons who worked directly with children, the fact remained that, because that concept was established by legal precedent rather than in a law, its definition would not be readily accessible to members of the general public. In the light of that fact, she wished to know if the State party might still consider incorporating an explicit definition of the best interests of the child into its statutory legal framework.

64. She applauded the legislative developments aimed at creating a child-friendly juvenile justice system and wished the State party every success in that regard. She wondered whether Cyprus imposed specific limits on the length of time that a child could be held in pretrial detention. It would be useful to know whether the State party intended to investigate reports of serious overcrowding and sexual and physical abuse of children at migrant reception centres and, if the reports proved to be accurate, to take urgent measures to put a stop to such violations.

65. She would be interested to hear whether children's asylum applications were thoroughly assessed to identify any special or psychosocial needs and provide the relevant specialist services. Did asylum-seeking children have access to State benefits and were they entitled to the five-year residency permits recommended by the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament for persons in need of international protection? She would like to know whether the State party would consider using child-friendly assessments to determine the age of potential child asylum seekers, allowing appeals against such assessments and taking into account delays in the asylum process in cases where children reached the age of majority before the asylum process was completed. She would appreciate clarification as to what constituted a "less intrusive" examination of asylum applicants to determine their age under the Refugees Law, and she would welcome the delegation's comments on reports of forced deportation or refoulement where children had been separated from their families.

66. She wondered whether the recently expired National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings had been updated or a new follow-up plan had been developed. She would like to know whether the State party undertook special assessments to identify children who had been trafficked and what protection was provided to such children; it would be useful to

know if they had immediate access to rehabilitation services, counselling and psychosocial care.

67. **Ms. Elena Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that her country had faced significant challenges in connection with the arrival of large numbers of undocumented migrants, especially in late 2020. Many had crossed illegally from the occupied area to the territory effectively controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. In September 2020, 10 vessels carrying migrants had arrived from Lebanon. Their arrival had put significant pressure on the Cypriot authorities, especially because of the mobility restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. A decision had been made to enter into negotiations with the Lebanese Government to implement its bilateral agreement with Cyprus on issues related to border control and migrant smuggling. Following an investigation conducted in cooperation with the Lebanese authorities, it had been agreed that Lebanese nationals who had not requested international protection would be returned to Lebanon in accordance with international and European Union law. All migrants underwent initial screening and individual assessments.

68. After the outbreak of COVID-19, migrants arriving from territories not under the effective control of the Cypriot Government or by sea were transferred to reception centres where they were held for 14 days in accordance with the relevant health protocols. Individual interviews were held with all documented migrants; during those interviews, they were asked whether they wished to apply for international protection. There had been no allegations of police misconduct.

69. The National Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings for 2019–2021 had been renewed for a further two years. The same targets had been retained because the implementation of certain parts of the Plan had been delayed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

*The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.*