



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Twenty-second session

Summary record of the 487th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 3 September 2019, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Basharu

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by parties to the Convention under article 35

(continued)

Initial report of Greece (CRPD/C/GRC/1; CRPD/C/GRC/Q/1 and CRPD/C/GRC/Q/1/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Chatzipanagiotou** (Greece), introducing her country's initial report (CRPD/C/GRC/1), said that the Committee's current session coincided with a period of transition for lawmakers and policymaking in Greece, which had recently elected a new Government. On 21 August 2019, at their first meeting with the president and members of the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities, Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and Minister of State Giorgos Gerapetritis had identified the development of a national strategy for persons with disabilities as a key priority. Those present at the meeting had agreed that the task of overseeing and coordinating the planning and implementation of the strategy should be entrusted to the Minister of State, who was also responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Convention.
3. The Government was committed to formulating a bold strategy for persons with disabilities, with clear action steps, a strict timeline and measurable outcomes. In accordance with the slogan "Nothing about us without us", the Government would engage in a dialogue and consultations with civil society. The country's efforts to honour its multilevel legal obligations and the commitments that it would assume under the national strategy and national action plan would be bolstered by the increased awareness of disability in Greek society and its recovery from the economic crisis.
4. Three specific steps had already been taken in that direction: a standing technical committee whose members included representatives of all relevant ministries and the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities had been set up to examine and prepare proposals; a national accessibility authority had been established under the Office of the Prime Minister to oversee the establishment of an institutional accessibility framework for persons with disabilities and to propose regulatory interventions; and the European Union disability framework had been incorporated into national law.
5. The Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure set out a number of safeguards to ensure that persons with disabilities had access to justice. The Ministry of the Interior and Administrative Reconstruction was responsible for civil and citizenship affairs, the political participation of voters and candidates with disabilities in the electoral process and, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, coordination with local and regional authorities of efforts to address such matters as the installation of ramps in schools and municipal tax reductions and exemptions.
6. The country's e-government and digital policy initiatives were aimed at simplifying administrative procedures, removing barriers that might impede the access of persons with disabilities to public services and facilitating interaction with the State. The social inclusion of persons with disabilities was a major strategic objective of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which had developed targeted policies and programmes to enable persons with disabilities to live in environments of their choice. Supported living arrangements offered a path towards social inclusion and independence.
7. The steps taken by the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities included the publication of new building regulations and accessible design guidelines, the adoption of ministerial decrees establishing accessibility guidelines for public infrastructure, sustainable urban mobility plans, accessibility guidelines for soft infrastructure and the establishment of central and regional accessibility committees.
8. The Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights had carried out an assessment of the accessibility of court buildings. In addition, steps had been taken to improve the accessibility of public and private health-care facilities. Persons with

disabilities were entitled to use their local public transportation system free of charge. Various additional measures had been taken to ensure the accessibility of public transportation systems in Greece.

9. The Government strove to ensure that students with disabilities were able to access education and mental health support services on an equal basis with others and had taken steps to eliminate barriers to education. Recent developments on the legislative front included the adoption of a law providing for dedicated programmes in mainstream and special schools and the introduction of a definition of inclusive education. In addition, 570 inclusion classes had been set up in mainstream schools, 4,500 specialist professionals had been appointed on a permanent basis, 22,000 teachers had been trained in differentiated instruction methods, and education coordinators had received training in the area of inclusive education. Detailed statistics were compiled on students with disabilities in mainstream schools, and a record was kept of the number of refugee children with disabilities in the country's accommodation centres.

10. The legal framework for inclusive employment for persons with disabilities set out in Law No. 2643/1998, which fell within the purview of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, had to be read in the light of the obligations established under the Convention and Law No. 4443/2016 with respect to reasonable accommodation and the prohibition of discrimination. The participation of persons with disabilities was expressly provided for in the operational framework for social cooperative enterprises. Accessibility for persons with disabilities was one of the criteria used to evaluate bids in the context of calls for tender for community employment programmes.

11. Various measures were in place to enhance the care provided for children with disabilities, including support for unaccompanied children with disabilities, a deinstitutionalization programme and a legal framework for adoption and fostering arrangements.

12. The Ombudsman had been designated as the responsible authority for the implementation of the regulatory framework for combating discrimination. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016–2020 and the new law on gender equality both addressed the problem of multiple discrimination, including discrimination against women with disabilities.

13. The access of persons with disabilities to health-care services had been strengthened by a number of national laws and decisions of the Ministry of Health. With regard to primary health care, one of the functions of local health groups was to promote the health of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Other developments included a range of measures to enable persons with psychosocial disabilities to play an active role in their communities and the delivery of community mental health services for persons of all ages who were living with dementia or autism. The Ministry of Health had recently issued specific instructions on the use of means of restraint at psychiatric facilities.

14. The Ministry of Tourism was endeavouring to make Greece one of the top accessible tourism destinations in the world. There were laws and ministerial decisions in force to ensure the accessibility of accommodations for tourists. At least 5 per cent of hotel rooms had to be equipped for persons with disabilities or reduced mobility. The Ministry of Culture and Sports was working to develop the necessary infrastructure for accessible tourism, which included building fully accessible museums and cultural facilities, upgrading existing spaces and ensuring compliance with applicable technical and accessibility requirements.

15. The code of conduct for the Hellenic Police Force on the treatment of members of religious and vulnerable social groups covered the treatment of persons with disabilities. In 2012, the Chief of Police had issued a circular on the protection and treatment of persons with disabilities. Third-country nationals who attempted to enter Greece unlawfully were subject to the standard procedures under national, European Union and international law. Special emphasis was placed on vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, in the instructions and orders issued to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees.

16. Further action was needed to develop inclusive employment opportunities, speed up the deinstitutionalization process, strengthen the legal framework for independent living, enhance the social protection of vulnerable groups and support participation in political life. Those areas would all be key priorities in the national action plan. Two other priorities were training and awareness-raising. Training activities and seminars were organized on a regular basis, as were programmes to raise awareness of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto.

17. **Ms. Rose** (Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions), reading a statement on behalf of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights, said that the National Commission recommended that the Government of Greece should develop a coherent and robust legal framework for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the prevention of discrimination against them. In accordance with the Committee's general comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, the National Commission called upon the authorities to allocate adequate financial and human resources to address the chronic problems hindering the education of children with disabilities, including insufficient parallel support staff, delayed starts to the school year and impediments to access to inclusive education. The National Commission suggested that the necessary funding should be allocated from the State budget.

18. The National Commission also recommended that the authorities should ensure equal access for persons with disabilities to facilities and services in both rural and urban areas, including the physical and digital environments, transportation services, and information and communications technologies. With respect to the issue of deinstitutionalization, the National Commission wished to highlight the need to integrate durable social policy measures into the framework for the provision of health-care and welfare services.

19. The National Commission recommended that the restrictions placed on the system of collective bargaining and collective agreements during the so-called "crisis period" in Greece should immediately be lifted, as they were an impediment to the establishment of universally binding minimum work standards and had had a particularly strong impact on persons with disabilities.

20. The National Commission was concerned about the problems it had identified with respect to the protection of migrants and refugees, in particular those with disabilities. Those problems included a lack of transparency in the asylum application process, deficiencies in the procedure for assessing the vulnerability of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities, and the lack of suitable accommodation centres. As a matter of urgency, the Government should immediately transfer all vulnerable persons from the islands to appropriate accommodation centres on the mainland, ensure the effective monitoring of the conditions for granting international protection to refugees with disabilities and to refugee families in which one of the members had a disability, and appoint specialist staff to work at accommodation centres.

21. In closing, the National Commission wished to underscore its strong belief that committed policymakers and proactive stakeholders, along with awareness-raising initiatives and transparency mechanisms, were needed to ensure that persons with disabilities were able to realize their rights on an equal basis with others.

22. **Mr. Schefer** (Country Rapporteur), welcoming the State party's delegation and the civil society organizations in attendance, said that it had been gratifying to learn from civil society organizations that Greece had not reduced disability allowances in nominal terms despite having faced two crises of enormous proportions during the past decade, namely the collapse of the financial system and the arrival of a huge number of people seeking to escape the horrors of war. Those crises had, however, had a significant impact on the situation of refugees and asylum seekers, who desperately needed the support of the receiving State. Refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities were in an especially precarious situation. The Committee had concerns about the conditions in which refugees and asylum seekers were being held in the detention centres on the islands and in Évros, particularly with regard to overcrowding and the provision of reasonable accommodation measures. In that connection, he would like to know more about the accessibility of asylum

procedures, including the provision of information in accessible formats. It would be particularly interesting to learn more about the inclusion of migrant children in the education system and the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities. It would also be useful to know what measures were in place for refugees and asylum seekers who had been released and were trying to gain a foothold in Greek society.

23. In the course of its dialogue with the delegation, the Committee would seek to arrive at an accurate assessment of the level of implementation of the Convention in the State party. That assessment would serve as the basis for the Committee's concluding observations, the purpose of which was to provide guidance for the State party's efforts to realize and strengthen the rights of persons with disabilities. The Committee looked forward to a constructive dialogue.

The meeting was suspended at 3.40 p.m. and resumed at 4.05 p.m.

Articles 1–10

24. **Ms. Gamio Ríos** said that the definition of disability used in the State party was not in line with the Convention. Although the State party had established a legal framework for combating direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of disability, its laws and practices were still not free of discriminatory aspects. In view of that situation, she wished to know whether the Government would consider taking measures to tackle discrimination in areas other than employment for all persons with disabilities living in the country, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with disabilities. She wondered whether legislative measures would be adopted to establish the denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of direct discrimination and whether actions would be taken to tackle multiple and intersectional discrimination.

25. The Committee wished to know how many of the 8,017 refugee children enrolled in all levels of the public education system in the 2017/18 school year had been children with disabilities. It would also be interested to hear whether the State party's Action Plan on the Rights of the Child provided for the participation of children in consultations and addressed the protection of unaccompanied children, children in institutional care and children with disabilities. She wondered what measures were being taken to protect children housed in reception and identification centres from human trafficking and other serious risks and whether the education programme for Roma children took account of children with disabilities.

26. **Mr. Chaker** said that he wished to know what was being done to promote the physical and digital accessibility of cultural, tourism, leisure and sports facilities and to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in those areas. Since the streets of Athens contained many obstacles for persons with disabilities, and ramps were not always available, he wondered what steps were being taken to ensure that blind persons, wheelchair users and other persons with disabilities were able to circulate safely around the streets of the capital. The Committee would welcome information on any measures being taken to increase the accessibility of buildings, other infrastructure and services, including information and communications services.

27. **Mr. Kabue** said that he wished to know to what extent organizations of persons with disabilities were involved in decision-making processes concerning them and whether they had participated in the drafting of the State party report. In view of the fact that the Government's reassessment of disability allowances following the economic crisis had led to a loss of benefits for some persons with disabilities, the Committee would welcome information on how disability was assessed and whether organizations of persons with disabilities were involved in that process. It would be interesting to learn whether the denial of reasonable accommodation constituted discrimination under the law and whether reasonable accommodation was provided in areas other than education and employment. He wished to know what steps were being taken to deinstitutionalize children with disabilities, whether legislation on accessibility was being developed and, if so, when that legislation would be adopted.

28. **Mr. Ruskus** said that he wished to know to what extent the medical model of disability had been replaced by the human rights model in the regulatory framework. The Committee would be grateful for information on the procedure for assessing and classifying disability and the model on which it was based and would like to know what kind of support was provided to enable persons with disabilities to live independently in the community and participate in social and economic life on an equal footing with others.

29. He would like to know what steps were being taken to implement Law No. 4538 of 2018 on the promotion of foster care for children with disabilities. It would be interesting to learn whether centres for creative activities aimed at children with special needs operated within the mainstream education system. In view of the fact that blatant human rights violations had reportedly taken place at the Lechaina Care Centre in 2015, the Committee wished to know how the State party had responded to those violations, whether redress had been provided to the children concerned, how many such care centres continued to operate and how many children were housed in them. The delegation might wish to provide information on the measures taken to deinstitutionalize children with disabilities in the State party. Lastly, he would like to know what was being done in the media industry and elsewhere to combat prejudice and stereotyping aimed at persons with disabilities in all areas of life and to raise awareness of the rights, capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities across the State party.

30. **Ms. Kim Mi Yeon** said that she would welcome information on any measures being taken to bring national legislation and policies into line with the Convention. She wished to know whether any specific steps had been taken to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities under the National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and, if not, whether the General Secretariat for Gender Equality was planning to do so. She would be interested to learn what impact gender mainstreaming had had on gender-related policies aimed at women and girls with disabilities and the mothers of children with disabilities. The Committee would appreciate hearing about any efforts being made to incorporate the gender perspective into social policies designed to benefit women and girls with disabilities. It would be interesting to learn whether, in its efforts to establish policies on non-discrimination and equal opportunities for women and girls with disabilities, the State party had considered drawing on the European Disability Strategy 2020–2030 and the European Parliament resolution of 29 November 2018 on the situation of women with disabilities. The delegation might wish to provide information on any measures taken under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016–2020 to increase the participation of women with disabilities in power structures and decision-making processes. It would be interesting to learn whether the Government had established a system for collecting disaggregated data on women and girls with disabilities. The Committee would welcome information on any efforts made to ensure respect for the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls, at all levels of the education system. Information on any steps taken to provide training to public sector officials on the rights of persons with disabilities would also be appreciated.

31. **Mr. Lovász** (Country Rapporteur), noting that the National Confederation of Disabled People of Greece had requested that article 5 of the Constitution should be amended to identify disability as a prohibited basis of discrimination, said that he wished to know what the State party made of that request and whether, in its view, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union had any bearing on the issue. The Committee would welcome information on any measures taken to detect and prevent domestic violence directed at persons with disabilities, particularly women and children. In that regard, the delegation might wish to identify the main obstacles faced by the Government in its efforts to protect persons with disabilities from domestic violence.

32. He wondered whether sufficient staff and funding had been allocated for the implementation of Law No. 4030 of 2011, which dealt with the accessibility of the built environment, and whether a road map for improving accessibility had been established. It would be interesting to receive further information on the special tool for facilitating inclusive design mentioned in the delegation's opening statement.

33. **Mr. Schefer** said that he wished to know what was being done to prevent further delays in the adoption of secondary legislation under Law No. 4488, which extended the

areas and sectors in which individuals would be protected against discrimination on the basis of disability. The Committee would welcome further information on the implementation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016–2020 and its impact on the situation of women and girls with disabilities. He would also appreciate more information on the measures taken to ensure that children with disabilities enjoyed the right to be heard and have their views taken into account in all matters affecting them. Lastly, he would be interested to learn whether the Government had established a national strategy for the implementation of accessibility standards for buildings and services, including transportation and communication services in the public and private sectors.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

34. **Ms. Chatzipanagiotou** (Greece) said that the Government recognized the need to amend laws relating to discrimination on the basis of disability in order to cover other areas, in addition to education and employment, and to respond to the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. Steps were being taken to establish a national plan on the rights of persons with disabilities. The incorporation of the human rights approach to disability was a cross-cutting priority for the Government, and that model was being adopted by government ministries in all areas relevant to persons with disabilities. The human rights approach to disability had been mainstreamed in the national strategy for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and incorporated into specific indicators in that strategy.

35. **Mr. Alexandris** (Greece) said that public incitement to acts that might result in discrimination, hatred or violence aimed at individuals or groups of individuals, including persons with disabilities, in a manner that endangered public order or threatened the life, liberty or physical integrity of such individuals, were punishable under Law No. 4285 of 2014. Furthermore, the establishment of organizations that promoted the commission of such acts and participation in such organizations were also punishable under that law.

36. The National Council against Racism and Intolerance was working to determine the types of actions that would be most effective in combating racism, intolerance, hate crimes and hate speech. In that regard, the Council had identified the need for awareness-raising activities and practical measures to combat racism and intolerance targeting, among others, persons with disabilities. The Council would continue to place emphasis on disability issues.

37. **Ms. Konsta** (Greece) said that, the ability of children with disabilities to express their views in judicial proceedings concerning them was governed by the general provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure concerning persons with disabilities. The Code provided that, prior to delivering a judgment in family law cases, the court was to consider the child's level of maturity and, if the judge deemed it appropriate, a private meeting would be held between the judge and the child, with no other person present unless the judge decided otherwise.

38. Child victims of crime were questioned in purpose-built facilities by the competent authority, prosecutor or examining magistrate in the presence of a specialized psychiatrist or psychologist. A national mechanism had been established to formulate, monitor and evaluate an action plan on the rights of the child and to ensure children's participation in consultations with civil society on the development of that plan.

39. **Ms. Katsigaraki** (Greece) said that the Department of Technical Services of the Ministry of Justice worked to ensure the accessibility for persons with disabilities of all court buildings and judicial offices. Moreover, to promote implementation of the Convention, the Ministry gathered information from all judicial services on the extent of their accessibility for persons with disabilities. Currently, approximately 71.8 per cent of such buildings had accessible entrances, 61 per cent had accessible sanitary facilities, 51 per cent had visual and acoustic signs and displays, and 43.9 per cent had accessible elevators, acoustic devices and Braille displays.

40. **Ms. Zerva** (Greece) said that the denial of reasonable accommodation was expressly prohibited, and employers were required to take all appropriate measures to make employment and training opportunities accessible to persons with disabilities, provided that

such measures did not place a disproportionate burden on the employer. The law set out a quite broad definition of reasonable accommodation, as it was not a matter of horizontal policy measures but rather of individualized measures that could be tailored to accommodate specific disabilities. The Hellenic Manpower Organization had subsidized 90 per cent of the cost of accommodation measures for the companies participating in its programmes on accessible employment and training.

41. Multiple discrimination was prohibited by Law No. 4443 of 2016, and the General Secretariat for Gender Equality was working within the framework of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016–2020 to protect the rights of women facing multiple forms of discrimination, including Roma women, refugees and other women with disabilities. The action plan called for gender mainstreaming in legislation and public policies, the adoption of targeted policies and the dissemination of data disaggregated by gender. The target group of the National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women had been expanded to include women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

42. As specific legislation on women and girls with disabilities had not yet been developed, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality would consider the issue when updating its national action plan. In any event, women and girls with disabilities were covered by the general legislation for persons with disabilities and the prohibition of multiple discrimination, and it was hoped that Law No. 4604 of 2019 would make a further contribution to the effort to eliminate inequalities and violence against all women.

43. Greece had ratified the Istanbul Convention, which provided for the protection of women with disabilities, and the National Programme on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women had been in force since 2010. A total of 172 women with disabilities had received support under that programme to date, with 96 cases involving gender-based violence and 76 relating to multiple discrimination.

44. The laws governing the provision of social protection and social benefits did not discriminate against persons with disabilities. In addition, the cash benefits paid to persons with disabilities were not officially categorized as income and were tax-exempt so that persons with disabilities would not be prevented from receiving other social benefits on the basis of their total income. The newly installed Government was preparing to take the necessary steps to improve the system for assessing and certifying disabilities. During the economic crisis in Greece, many people had benefited from the assessment procedure, and approximately 170,000 persons with disabilities currently received disability allowances. The number of categories of permanent and irreversible diseases that entitled a person to special social benefits had also been significantly increased.

45. **Mr. Nikolsky** (Greece) said that the national action plan on the rights of the child would include provisions on child protection in the community and deinstitutionalization. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was in the process of developing a national action plan on the rights of persons with disabilities in close cooperation with all competent ministries, stakeholders and civil society. One of the focuses of that action plan would be the rights of children with disabilities. Child protection actions and programmes of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs were implemented by the child protection departments of the 12 regional welfare centres established under Law No. 4109 of 2013. Rehabilitation services, assessment and treatment were provided by specialized staff to children with disabilities. Social inclusion centres had been established to provide creative activities, education and training for children and young people with disabilities to foster the development of independent living skills. Those centres provided nationwide coverage, as there was a high demand for specialized services of that nature. Children under the age of 6 could receive integrated care services from appropriate specialized staff. The cost of such services and the associated medical, social and infrastructure costs were covered by the Greek National Organization for Health-Care Provision.

46. In 2018, a law had been adopted to facilitate fostering and adoption, and a national register of minors had been set up in the National Centre for Social Solidarity. All public and private institutions were required to register all minors, with or without disabilities, who they housed, with the final aim being the deinstitutionalization of those children. A national register of foster parents had also been established, along with administrative

procedures designed to ensure the reliability and fairness of the system. A fostering allowance was provided which could be as much as €800 per month for children with severe disabilities, and there was a plan to increase those allowances further.

47. Law No. 4544 of 2018, which dealt with the guardianship of unaccompanied children, including those who did not have Greek nationality and stateless children, provided for the appointment of professional guardians employed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity, the establishment of a supervisory board to oversee the guardianship arrangements for unaccompanied children, an assessment procedure for determining the best interests of the child and the establishment of registries of unaccompanied children, professional guardians and reception centres for unaccompanied children, including, of course, those with disabilities. Since January 2019, the Ministry of Labour had been working with United Nations human rights bodies and non-governmental organizations to pilot the implementation of the guardianship law. The associated guardianship programme would involve the secondment of staff to act as guardians for children seeking asylum, of whom there were currently some 1,100 across Greece.

48. Children with intellectual disabilities who were housed in institutions were offered appropriate care, and seminars were organized to help all health professionals and other staff to improve the quality of the care they provided. Each centre had a special committee that monitored individual needs and proposed an appropriate therapeutic programme for each person. The staff was aware of the importance of being proactive and of supporting social activities as well as offering quality medical services. Restraints were not used on any person with intellectual disabilities.

49. In the case of the Lechaina Care Centre, which accommodated a very small number of persons with intellectual disabilities, the Institute for Child Health had developed a programme with technical support from Lumos, a British NGO, to support caregivers and address medical issues. The administrative authorities of the Lechaina Care Centre were taking proper measures to ensure the safety, education and medical care of the children with disabilities housed in that centre on the basis of the principles of non-discrimination. In July 2016, a plan had been put in place to implement individual and group therapeutic programmes in collaboration with various stakeholders.

50. In 2017, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs had issued a ministerial decision under which the deinstitutionalization process was to be carried forward in two regions. Persons with disabilities accommodated in the Social Welfare Centre of Attica and the Social Welfare Centre of Western Greece, which included the Lechaina branch, would be moved from closed institutions to supported accommodation or family-type settings or, where possible, to their own families. The deinstitutionalization plan called for the development of a pilot programme for professional fostering, the creation of a mobile unit to provide support services to children with disabilities and the establishment of creative activity centres. A budget of €15 million had been allocated for 2019–2021 for the programme, and the European Commission and the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities would provide technical assistance for its implementation over a two-year period. The aim would then be to expand the deinstitutionalization scheme to include all institutions in the country.

51. **Ms. Papadaki** (Greece) said that the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change prioritized the promotion of independent and equitable lifestyles for persons with disabilities. The Ministry had prepared technical guidelines on accessible built environments for use by planners, architects and engineers. In addition, Law No. 4067, which set out new building regulations, contained specifications for the development and redesign of buildings and focused on accessibility for persons with disabilities. Accessibility committees had been established at the central and regional levels to deal with disability-related issues and to work with stakeholders to establish accessible facilities. The same legislation also addressed accessibility issues in rural areas and small settlements.

52. Numerous ministerial decrees provided guidelines designed to help municipalities to make public spaces accessible. Guidance focused on facilitating the mobility of persons with disabilities. Sustainable urban mobility plans for over half of the municipalities around the country had received funding, and technical guidelines to ensure the accessibility of the

natural environment had also been developed. Further guidelines were needed for other cases, such as traditional island settlements, and a national accessibility strategy was being developed.

53. **Ms. Lamprou** (Greece) said that the Government had introduced a series of bills aimed at modernizing the laws on the accessibility of the electronic communications environment. The provisions focused mainly on ensuring non-discriminatory universal access to media services by means of subtitling, the use of Greek sign language, the audio description of visual content and social messaging functions that were accessible to persons with disabilities. The implementation of those provisions was to be monitored, and annual reports in that connection were to be prepared by the Greek National Council for Radio and Television and the General Secretariat for Media and Information.

54. With respect to the Committee's questions regarding awareness-raising in the media and efforts to combat stereotyping, she was pleased to report that Greek broadcasting legislation had been fully harmonized with the updated European Union Audiovisual Media Services Directive and prohibited discrimination based on disability, as well as other types of discrimination. The Greek National Council for Radio and Television had also provisionally decided to suspend the transmission of television broadcasts that incited hate speech, including hate speech directed at persons with disabilities. The General Secretariat for Information and Communication had issued guidance for journalists, in particular, concerning ways of combating stereotypes and prejudices both online and offline. Guidance had also been made available on the use of appropriate disability-related terminology and the portrayal of people with disabilities in the media.

55. **Ms. Christopoulou** (Greece) said that the Ministry of Education was particularly concerned about the situation of refugee children with disabilities. In the 2018/19 school year, the Directorate of Special Education had made a first attempt to register children with disabilities who were staying in hosting facilities. In February 2019, refugee education coordinators had identified and recorded the specific individual needs of 129 refugee children with disabilities with a view to placing them in appropriate school settings. On the basis of that initial pilot effort, meetings had been held with representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to discuss the possibility of setting up a platform for the collection of further data on refugee children with disabilities. The issue remained pending. The education of refugee children was covered by Law No. 4547 of 2018, which provided that during a preparatory transitional phase, pupils could attend reception centre school facilities and, if they remained in Greece, could then attend mainstream schools while receiving special support in reception classes. In the 2018/19 academic year, a total of 8,290 students had attended reception classes at different levels, but there were no data on the number of those students who had disabilities. Many barriers still existed in that respect. For example, no assessment tools were available in the refugees' native languages, although interpreters at the accommodation centres could accompany families during assessment procedures. Moreover, it was sometimes difficult to locate refugee children with disabilities because many refugees were constantly on the move, since Greece was not their final destination. In any case, a plan needed to be developed for the provision of adequate assessment services and support for that vulnerable group.

56. In the Greek education system, all children had the right to have their voices heard on issues that concerned them. The right of students with disabilities to express their opinions on matters relating to their education was established in Law No. 4547, which provided that they could actively participate in drafting their own individualized educational plans in consultation with the interdisciplinary team of the Centre for Educational and Counselling Support and their parents. At the secondary level, all students could acquire democratic citizenship skills by participating in their school community or in the Youth Parliament, which was made up of students from all kinds of schools around the country, including schools in remote areas, intercultural schools and special schools. Extensive efforts were being made in all of the country's educational establishments to prevent school violence and bullying, and students were encouraged to voice their concerns in that regard. Nonetheless, strategies were needed to encourage greater involvement on the part of students with disabilities in decisions that affected them.

57. Education policymakers were aware that discrimination was the main cause of many of the challenges faced by children with disabilities and their families. Efforts were thus being made to raise public awareness of disability issues. A range of programmes had been implemented in the schools to raise awareness of human rights, the harm done by social exclusion and the importance of having equal opportunities. Joint projects had been run that brought together students from mainstream schools and students from special education schools as a way of promoting inclusion and combating prejudice. Every year, to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December, the Ministry of Education organized a series of events in mainstream and special education schools.

58. **Ms. Kourti** (Greece) said that Law No. 4443 of 2016 on equal treatment provided for the members of the Hellenic Police Force to exercise special care in when taking persons with disabilities through the reception process. That law also provided for the development of a cooperation network involving the police and relevant ministries and agencies to ensure the provision of reasonable accommodation in appropriate facilities. Effective procedures for identifying persons with disabilities was essential in order to ensure that they benefited from the specific protection measures in place for vulnerable persons. Under Law No. 4375, asylum seekers with disabilities belonged to a broader category of vulnerable asylum seekers. Asylum seekers with disabilities did not have to file an asylum application in person but could do so through a legal representative. Reception services included psychosocial support, legal assistance and access to health care. The applications of asylum seekers with disabilities, especially women and children with disabilities, were given priority. Persons with disabilities were generally transferred to accommodations on the mainland, as reception and identification centres on the islands were equipped with only quite basic facilities for persons with disabilities. Efforts were made to lodge asylum seekers or recognized refugees with disabilities in apartments and, during their stay, they benefited from individualized services provided by interpreters, social workers and psychologists. The Code of Immigration and Social Inclusion prohibited discrimination on the basis of disability or other personal characteristics. Third-country nationals legally residing in Greece enjoyed the same social security and insurance rights as Greek nationals.

59. **Mr. Moschovakis** said that regulations designed to improve the accessibility of health-care facilities had been adopted in 1983. A 2019 law on private clinics contained specific provisions on accessibility. A circular had been issued calling on all health-care providers to comply with existing accessibility standards.

60. **Ms. Nikolaou** (Greece) said that all hotels built after 1987 were accessible to persons with disabilities, as were all hotels that had received funding under Greek development laws or through European structural funds and those whose quality classification had been upgraded. According to the new building regulations, all buildings, including hotels, must be in compliance with accessibility provisions by 2020. In accordance with a ministerial decision of 2015, at least 5 per cent of rooms in all hotels must be able to accommodate persons with disabilities and reduced mobility. It was compulsory to provide price lists for food and beverages and emergency evacuation instructions in Braille in all hotel rooms intended to accommodate persons who were blind. The room number must also be embossed in Braille on the door of every such room.

61. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) said that the National Referral Mechanism identified victims of human trafficking and provided them with referrals and support. The Mechanism was supervised by the Office of the National Rapporteur under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and managed by the National Centre for Social Solidarity of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Vulnerable groups, including victims of trafficking, were eligible to receive special support under the 2018 law on the reception of applicants for international protection. The authorities were also under an obligation to inform the National Referral Mechanism of the names of any presumed victims of human trafficking. The Office of the National Rapporteur had drafted a national action plan on human trafficking for the period 2019–2023 which took account of the specific needs of children and women, including those with disabilities.

62. **Ms. Chatzipanagiotou** (Greece) said that the State party was fulfilling its obligations concerning the consultation of persons with disabilities on issues that affected them.

Articles 11–20

63. **Mr. Babu**, referring to article 11, said that he would be interested to know whether the State party considered the current refugee and migrant crisis to be a humanitarian emergency. The fact that the word “refugee” appeared only once in the State party’s report and the word “migrant” only four times seemed rather strange considering the country’s role in the European context. He would therefore welcome information on what was being done to promote and protect the rights of refugees and migrants with disabilities, including on any strategies for addressing the socioeconomic and livelihood concerns of that group. He would appreciate data, if available, on refugees and migrants with disabilities currently living in Greece, disaggregated by gender, disability and age. He wished to know what mechanisms were in place to identify refugees and asylum seekers in need of special attention due to their disability, particularly women, children and older persons with disabilities. Given that the emergency planning policy made no mention of the issues and needs of persons with disabilities, he would like to know what measures had been taken to fill that gap.

64. **Ms. Utami**, referring to the new bill on involuntary psychiatric placement, said that she would like to know how the State party protected the rights of persons, particularly women, with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities and what safeguards were in place to prevent unnecessary placements. She wished to know what concrete measures were planned to replace the current system of substitute decision-making with supported decision-making, in accordance with the Committee’s general comment No. 1. In the light of reports that the medico-legal scheme of compulsory hospitalization had been overused in Greece in recent years, she would appreciate information on the specific steps being taken to do away with that scheme. She would also be interested to know whether there were any plans to change the practice whereby police officers were used to transfer persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities to mental health units.

65. **Mr. Martin** said that he wished to know for how long persons with disabilities could be deprived of their legal capacity. Concerning access to justice, he would welcome information on how persons with intellectual disabilities living in Greece who were accused of committing a crime were treated and whether they were given the reasonable accommodations they needed, such as information on their cases and court processes in Easy Read format. Could such persons stand trial and choose their own lawyer? If it was decided that they were unfit to plead, would they be sent to an institution and, if so, for how long? Upon their release, would they be given the necessary support to live independently in the community?

66. **Mr. Ishikawa** said that he would welcome information on the outcomes thus far of the pilot deinstitutionalization programme run in Attica and Western Greece and on any plans to extend its scope. He would also be interested to know whether there were any plans to extend the coverage of the Help at Home Programme, which currently provided assistance to older persons and persons with physical disabilities, to encompass all persons with disabilities so as to support independent living. He would appreciate information on plans to ensure the provision of personal assistance for persons with disabilities in order to provide support for them in the workplace, in education and in their daily lives. Lastly, he wished to know whether there were any plans to establish centres for independent living.

67. **Ms. Kayess** said that, although the delegation had stated that restraints were no longer used on adults or children with intellectual disabilities, there were reports that physical restraints and other harmful practices continued to be used in institutions for children and adults with disabilities, including intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. She would therefore welcome clarification as to whether harmful practices, including all forms of chemical and physical restraint and punitive behaviour management, had been eliminated in all institutions for all children and adults with disabilities. She wished to know how often the Ombudsman monitored institutions for children and adults with disabilities, including psychiatric facilities, and whether there were sufficient dedicated

resources for the Office of the Ombudsman to properly perform its role as the national mechanism for the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. She would be interested to learn whether children with disabilities continued to be placed in institutional care facilities.

68. She wished to know whether the establishment of supported living homes was a measure provided for under the 2017 deinstitutionalization programme. She would welcome details about the homes, and specifically would like to know whether they offered genuine community living arrangements, whether persons with disabilities could choose to live there and with whom, and how many persons with disabilities lived in them. She would like to know whether the austerity measures adopted in response to the economic and social crisis had had an impact on the deinstitutionalization programme and what action was being taken to reinvigorate deinstitutionalization now that the Greek economy was emerging from the crisis.

69. **Mr. Schefer** said that he would welcome further information on the specific type of training provided to judges, lawyers and law enforcement officials concerning the rights of persons with disabilities in criminal, civil and administrative proceedings. The Committee was concerned about overcrowding in psychiatric institutions, reports of instances of patient injuries going unrecorded and the lack of information on relevant legal safeguards and monitoring mechanisms. He would appreciate detailed information on the framework in place to ensure that the daily needs of prisoners with disabilities were met. He wished to know what measures were being taken to detect, prevent and combat domestic violence directed against persons with disabilities, especially women and children. He would also welcome clarification on the nature of the transport benefits that were granted to ensure the mobility of persons with disabilities, including access to parking spaces.

70. **Mr. Lovász** said that he would like the delegation to comment on the Ombudsman's reports of cases of persons with disabilities who had not had access to social benefits and had been deprived of their rights because their relatives had been unable to pay the court costs required to ensure their legal representation. The delegation might also wish to comment on reports that deaf persons had to pay for sign language interpretation in court proceedings.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.