



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2682nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 24 January 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Otani

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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 Ireland (CRC/C/IRL/5-6; CRC/C/IRL/QPR/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Ireland joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. O’Gorman** (Ireland), introducing his country’s combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/IRL/5-6), said that the Government had made progress in a variety of areas relating to children’s rights. Investment in early years services had increased from €260 million in 2015 to €1.025 billion in 2023. All children between the ages of 2 years and 8 months and 5 years and 6 months were now entitled to two years of State-funded preschool education under the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme. More than 100,000 children were currently receiving subsidies or services under the National Childcare Scheme, and thus far more than 25,000 children had received targeted support through the Access and Inclusion Model established in 2016. A bill on work-life balance would extend paid parental leave and the period during which breastfeeding breaks had to be provided, while a national parenting support service model had been launched in April 2022.
3. Approximately one third of the 71,000 people who had arrived in Ireland from Ukraine since the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia were under the age of 18. Children arriving unaccompanied were taken into care by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, or received services under the Child Care Act 1991. All children received full needs assessments, which then fed into a care plan. A total of €5 million had been set aside for the recruitment of foster families for unaccompanied minors seeking international protection. Regional Education and Language Teams had originally been established in March 2022 to support the education of arriving Ukrainian children, but their remit had been expanded in November 2022 to include children in the international protection process or the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. A new national action plan against racism was being finalized and was expected to be approved in early 2023.
4. A bill that would establish a family court division had recently been published, and a family justice strategy had been launched to support the planned legislative changes. Under legislation enacted in 2022, the appointment of guardians ad litem was promoted to ensure that children’s voices were heard in childcare proceedings and the courts were required to hear from children before making decisions about their future. A bill recently approved for publication by the Cabinet would create a separate offence for cases where an adult compelled, coerced, induced or invited a child to engage in criminal activity.
5. The social welfare package contained in the 2023 budget was worth almost €2.2 billion and contained a number of measures targeting families with children. For example, the Working Family Payment and One-Parent Family Payment had been increased by €40 and €12 per week, respectively. A special unit would be created within the Department of the Taoiseach to coordinate government efforts to tackle child poverty.
6. Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, the main programme to tackle educational disadvantage, had been significantly expanded in 2022. It now provided support to more than 240,000 students in 1,200 schools and addressed the significant disadvantages experienced in education by children identifying as Traveller or Roma, residing in centres run by the International Protection Accommodation Service or experiencing homelessness. Annual funding for the programme amounted to €180 million, 20 per cent more than in 2020.
7. In 2021, consultations had been held with more than 1,200 children and young people on the various United Nations human rights treaties. The results of those and other such consultations would inform the development of a new national policy framework for children and young people for the period 2023–2028. A blueprint for the framework had been published in August 2022. It addressed topics such as child budgeting and child rights impact assessments and called for a review of the compatibility of domestic legislation and the Convention.
8. **The Chair** (Country Task Force) said that she would be grateful for further information on the planned review of domestic legislation, including the timeline for the

review and the role that children and civil society would play in it. She also wished to know whether, as part of the review, the Government would reassess the possibility of expressly incorporating the Convention into domestic law. In addition, she would welcome more information about the planned introduction of child rights impact assessments and the development of the new policy framework for children and young people. It would be interesting to know, for example, what role children would play in those initiatives. She wished to know whether the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth had a mandate to coordinate all government activities relating to children's rights, whether the Department was responsible for coordinating services for Ukrainian refugees and, if so, whether that responsibility detracted from its other roles.

9. It would be helpful to know whether the well-being framework and other measures introduced to reform the State party's resource allocation procedures took an approach based on children's rights and provided for the participation of children in budget processes. She would be curious to learn whether specific budget lines for children would be included in all child-related national policies, whether the new national strategy for the inclusion of Travellers and Roma would make it possible to track funds set aside for Traveller and Roma children and whether estimates for expenditures on children were now available. She wished to find out whether the new National Equality Data Strategy provided for the systematic collection and disaggregation of data on children.

10. She wondered whether funds allocated to the Ombudsman for Children's Office could be disbursed directly to the Office rather than through a government department and whether it was true that, as reported to the Committee, the Office lacked jurisdiction to investigate complaints in areas such as international protection and the administration of early years services. She wished to know whether State-funded accommodations for children in vulnerable situations were subject to independent inspections.

11. She would appreciate information about the upcoming national plan on business and human rights. She wondered, for example, whether it touched on child rights impact assessments or extraterritorial remedies, the human rights-related obligations of non-State actors involved in public procurement processes, the State party's implementation of European directives on corporate sustainability reporting and the impact of tax policies in the State party, the world's leading destination for shifted corporate profits, on children's rights in other countries.

12. She wished to find out whether there was a good character requirement for naturalization, whether children born through surrogacy arrangements received Irish nationality, whether children could apply for naturalization themselves and whether Tusla could submit naturalization applications on behalf of children in its care. She also wished to know whether children under 16 years of age were entitled to their early life information, whether children's views would be considered in future reviews of the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022 and whether children born through assisted reproduction, including surrogacy, could obtain information about their background under the Act. She wondered whether the Gender Recognition Act 2015 would be amended to allow children under 16 years of age to have their preferred gender recognized and introduce a simplified gender recognition procedure for 16- and 17-year-olds.

13. She asked whether the Education Act applied to private primary and secondary schools, whether students were provided with alternatives to religious classes and when more non-denominational and multi-denominational schools would be opened. She also asked what the State party was doing to increase Internet access for children in disadvantaged situations, ensure that children without such access could obtain public services and raise awareness of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022. Did the mandate of the Online Safety Commissioner include the protection of children?

14. **Mr. Nelson** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that he wished to know under which specific legislative provisions children were protected from discrimination, what efforts had been made to raise children's awareness of the remedies available to them if they were subjected to discrimination and whether the courts had heard any cases of discrimination. He also wished to know when the national action plan against racism would be approved and implemented. He would be grateful for details about the funding and

oversight of the State party's anti-discrimination strategies, the collection of data and the targets that the strategies involved and any delays in their implementation.

15. He wished to know what steps the State party was taking to ensure that the best interests of the child were consistently taken into account in all areas concerning children. It would be helpful to know whether there was a national strategy on preventing child suicide and whether any suicide prevention measures specifically targeted Traveller children and children in care. He wished to find out whether the Government's failure to cover the costs of the experts authorized to present the views of a child to the courts or to allow guardians *ad litem* to act on behalf of a child in proceedings other than childcare proceedings often resulted in failure to hear the views of the child.

16. It would be useful to have an update on any plans to hold a referendum on lowering the voting age to 16, as well as information on mechanisms to hear children's voices at the local level and on community-based youth consultations. He wished to know whether the State party had a functioning children's parliament and student councils and what was being done to strengthen mechanisms that allowed children's voices to be heard, including under the new national policy framework for children and young people. He would like to hear what preparations were under way for the implementation of the family court bill and the National Family Justice Strategy and whether consideration had been given to improving facilities in courts. Similarly, he wondered whether there were any plans to improve facilities for imprisoned mothers and their babies and for children visiting their parents in prisons.

17. He wished to know how many children were in voluntary care and what plans there were to scale down or abolish that system and update the Child Care Act. He would also like to know how many complaints of failure to consider children's views on alternative care placements and planning had been lodged with the Ombudsman for Children's Office and how they had been addressed. He wondered how children in care, particularly children with disabilities, could lodge complaints of abuse and whether they had access to the hotline run by the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

18. As the strategic plan to address the lack of foster care placements and State housing for children appeared not to be having the desired outcome, he would like to know how the plan's shortcomings were being remedied. He wished, too, to know what support was given to children leaving care and what steps had been taken to conduct the inquiry into illegal adoptions recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material.

19. **Mr. Jaffé** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to hear what effect the Children First Guidance 2017 and the Domestic Violence Act 2018 had had on the prevalence of violence against children and how many referrals had been made in 2021 and 2022 in relation to all forms of abuse. He also wished to know what impact the ban on corporal punishment had had and whether the collection of data on bullying and cyberbullying was centralized. It would be useful to know whether the Tusla complaints process was child-friendly, whether it had the capacity to address the increasing number of complaints, whether the number of cases awaiting assignment to a social worker had fallen and whether the increase in Tusla's budget kept pace with overall child protection needs and allowed it to fulfil its mandate.

20. He would welcome a description of the mandate of the Health Information and Quality Authority and of the Authority's connections with other child protection bodies. In view of the alarming figures mentioned in the State party's periodic report, he wished to know how many reports of the abuse of children with disabilities living in care centres there had been. He would also like to know whether the Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group was a central entity that provided an overarching response to children's needs, why the *barnahus* model had not been implemented for all children and what specific plans there were to expand it.

21. As abuse by the clergy had not been referred to in the periodic report, he wished to know whether it had been addressed systematically. He would like to hear about efforts to raise awareness of and prevent early marriage and to remove legal exceptions allowing minors to marry, as well as about measures to improve targeted action to prevent female

genital mutilation. He wished to know to what extent intersex children had a say in relation to medical procedures that might affect them.

The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.

22. **Mr. O’Gorman** (Ireland) said that children’s rights were addressed by the relevant government departments. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth dealt with, inter alia, alternative care, early years education and adoption. The newly formed Cabinet Committee on Children and Education would increase cross-government coordination, and there were plans to establish a coordination unit to address child poverty and well-being. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth was responsible for the immediate accommodation needs of children arriving from Ukraine, while other needs were met by other government departments. The Government was providing accommodation for around 54,000 Ukrainians, along with 19,000 other persons seeking international protection, a situation that had placed pressure on all departments.

23. **A representative of Ireland** said that the forthcoming national policy framework for children and young people, whose scheduled publication in the first half of 2023 had been timed to respond to the Committee’s recommendations, would be informed directly by the results of consultations with children. The Government would commission a full review of the compatibility of its legislation and the Convention, including a consultation process, once the policy framework had been published. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth participated in a project on child rights impact assessments that was funded by the European Commission; such assessments would be undertaken under the new policy framework, which would also require government departments to more clearly identify their spending on children as part of efforts to determine whether it was sufficient.

24. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Ombudsman for Children’s Office was independent and received funding via a letter of allocation from the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The Department was currently considering several amendments to the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002 recommended by the Office, including the possibility of strengthening its financial independence by moving the funding mechanism to another government department. Early years learning and care services, as well as care services for school-aged children, were regulated by an inspectorate within Tusla. The providers of all such services were required to establish a complaints policy. Feedback and concerns could also be communicated to a dedicated Tusla unit that assessed whether children’s health, welfare or safety were at risk.

25. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Ombudsman for Children could receive complaints, to which the Department of Justice responded, relating to the immigration process.

26. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Government had fully implemented the European Council directive laying down rules against tax avoidance practices that directly affected the functioning of the internal market and strongly supported the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Project and the two-pillar solution to address the tax challenges arising from the digitalization of the economy, which would come at a cost to Ireland of more than €2 billion. The Government’s spillover analysis of the tax system in relation to developing economies had led to the updating of two treaties to include terms more favourable to its partners. Substantial reform to the international tax framework was ongoing, and a policy had been adopted under which the Government would not approach any developing country with the intention of establishing a treaty and, if approached by such a country, would undertake a spillover analysis to ensure that benefits would accrue there.

27. **A representative of Ireland** said that under planned amendments to immigration legislation, the requirement for minor applicants for naturalization to be of good character could be waived for children aged 14 or over. Naturalization would be denied to a child under 14 only if he or she had been charged with or convicted of murder, manslaughter, rape or aggravated sexual assault.

28. **Mr. O’Gorman** (Ireland) said that the new legislation on birth information and tracing did not apply to children under 16. The possibility of extending it to such children, or adopting separate legislation for them, would be examined during the two-year review,

including through consultation with children. Draft legislation on assisted reproduction, including surrogacy, would seek to give adults conceived through those techniques full access to their information.

29. **A representative of Ireland** said that around 50 children seeking international protection were waiting to be assigned a social worker. Delays could arise during the assessment of needs.

30. **A representative of Ireland** said that draft legislation on gender recognition had been approved by the Government and would remove the requirement for children aged 16 and 17 to obtain a court order before applying for a gender recognition certificate. Research into other countries' mechanisms for recognizing the preferred gender of children under 16 was under way.

31. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 applied to schools in the fee-charging sector that were in receipt of public funds. Schools were responsible for determining how best to provide alternative classes to children who opted out of religious education. With regard to multi-denominational schools, the schools involved in Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity, a pilot process, were expected to have consulted with students, parents, teachers and the wider community on whether to participate in the process by 2023.

32. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Family Justice Strategy 2022–2025 ensured that experts were available to hear and convey children's views. The circumstances in which experts were made available were clarified in the Strategy, as were the means by which the costs involved would be met. A publicly funded system of intermediaries that would assist children involved in criminal proceedings was being established. Research was under way on managing the difficulties caused by parallel civil, criminal and child protection proceedings in cases of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence. The judiciary took seriously the need for training for judges on family law and domestic, sexual and gender-based violence cases. There were plans under the Strategy to create courts dedicated to family law cases or, where that was not possible, to ensure that those cases were heard on days on which the court did not conduct other business. That process would take time.

33. A new prison facility would soon be opened that would provide accommodation for 50 female prisoners and improve facilities for pregnant prisoners, mothers and babies. Difficulties had been encountered in facilitating visits by children to parents in prison during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In-cell telephones that allowed prisoners to make outbound calls had been installed in one prison and were being rolled out in two more.

34. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 was no different from the bill of that name described in the country's periodic report. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth would seek to ensure that the National Cyber Security Strategy incorporated the important child-safety measures required by the Act.

35. **Mr. O'Gorman** (Ireland) said that the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 and Equal Status Acts 2000–2015 were currently under review, with a particular focus on protecting individuals' gender identity and sex characteristics and on outlawing discrimination on the grounds of socioeconomic status; his Government would make sure to incorporate consultation of children into the review process. The launch of the National Action Plan against Racism was scheduled for 1 March 2023. The Government was simplifying the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act 1989, the complexity of which had prevented its successful implementation.

36. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth oversaw numerous equality strategies, including the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, the National Strategy for Women and Girls and the Migrant Integration Strategy; the effectiveness of those three strategies was being examined. Each equality strategy was overseen by a committee comprising representatives of both the Department and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

37. **A representative of Ireland** said that youth was one of the priority groups of "Connecting for Life", the national suicide prevention strategy, which sought to enhance

support for all young persons who had mental health problems or were vulnerable to suicide. The latest implementation plan under the strategy included measures specifically targeting children. Between 2017 and 2021, the adult suicide rate had decreased, while the child suicide rate had stabilized. Under both “Connecting for Life” and “Sharing the Vision” – A Mental Health Policy for Everyone, Traveller and Roma children and those in care settings were recognized as priority groups. The Traveller Health Action Plan, launched in November 2022, was focused on improving and prolonging the lives of all Travellers, including children, and incorporated six actions expressly targeting mental health. Specific policies, including the Children First Guidance of 2017, were in place to safeguard children in residential care, who enjoyed the same level of health care as children in home settings.

38. **A representative of Ireland** said that the budget for Tusla for 2023 was over €1 billion, 70 per cent larger than at its establishment in 2014. Tusla planned to step up the screening of referrals and the implementation of mandatory reporting under the Children First Act 2015, among other measures.

39. **Mr. O’Gorman** (Ireland) said that, of the approximately 6,000 children in care, 89 per cent were in foster care. His Government was not planning to phase out voluntary care, a form of foster care whereby birth parents and Tusla agreed that a child should be fostered for a given period; instead, it was seeking to ensure that such arrangements were not in place for long periods. He hoped that the revised Child Care Act would be ready for parliamentary scrutiny by April 2023.

40. Tusla was working on the third of three strategies for different areas of the care system. A key element of the foster care strategy, which had already been published, was to stem the loss of foster parents over recent years by making the provision of foster care more attractive. The residential care strategy, which had also been published, sought to reduce reliance on the private sector by increasing the number of residential facilities operated by the State or NGOs. The strategy related to aftercare, which had not yet been published, was designed to encourage young persons leaving care to continue their education or training.

41. Following revelations several years previously that Saint Patrick’s Guild had illegally registered the birth of adopted individuals as if they had been the biological children of their adoptive parents, the national Special Rapporteur on Child Protection had made 17 key proposals, most of which had been incorporated into the Birth Information and Tracing Act 2022. Those proposals had included providing resources to enable Tusla to actively investigate suspected illegal birth registrations; a larger-scale investigation into the practice was also under consideration. In addition, recent legislation had provided for exhumations at the former mother and baby home in Tuam and for redress for former residents of such institutions.

42. **A representative of Ireland** said that all residential centres for children were required to meet national standards and register every three years; they underwent inspection twice during each three-year period. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth would soon transfer responsibility for those inspections to the Health Information and Quality Authority.

43. **A representative of Ireland** said that the Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group was the main mechanism for inter-agency cooperation and that the revised Child Care Act would expand the Group’s remit to make the Group the national body responsible for overseeing such cooperation. The Children and Young People Services Committees would be responsible for local coordination. A statutory duty to cooperate with Tusla would also be introduced. In addition, the revised Act would strengthen the voice of the child both in court proceedings and in decisions taken in and outside court.

44. One way in which her Government ensured the efficacy of its legislative and policy measures was through research and data collection. Examples included a national longitudinal study of children and young people that had begun in 2006 and would see a new cohort of children introduced in 2024, a review of government expenditures on children in 2019 and a report on the state of the nation’s children.

45. **A representative of Ireland** said that an interdepartmental steering group and an inter-agency group, supported by the Council of Europe, were considering ways of building on the *barnahus* pilot project in Galway by expanding it to eastern and southern Ireland.

46. **A representative of Ireland** said that article 42A of the Constitution specifically provided for children's rights, while rights under the Convention – such as the rights to life, education and due process – were indirectly covered by other articles conferring rights on the wider citizenry. In addition, the country's application of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union gave further effect to rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Moreover, both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court had referred to the Convention and to the Committee's general comments in their decisions.

47. **A representative of Ireland** said that, in 2022, Tusla had introduced a child abuse substantiation procedure covering current and retrospective child abuse allegations, including those made against members of the clergy. Tusla had conducted a significant amount of training on the procedure, in which children played a central role.

48. **The Chair** said that she would be grateful for clarification of whether the mechanism for the submission of complaints about public early learning and care facilities also handled complaints about private or other non-State facilities.

49. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she wished to know whether Irish legislation provided for alternatives to deprivation of liberty for women who were pregnant or had children under 18 years of age. She wondered whether monitoring mechanisms were in place to guarantee that children's rights and best interests were properly protected when they were choosing their foster families.

50. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** asked whether the Government had considered allowing children involved in court proceedings to have their testimony recorded at the pretrial stage of the proceedings.

51. **Ms. Aho** said that she would like to know what measures the Government was taking to support single-parent families and unemployed people. Clarification as to whether corporal punishment was prohibited in the family environment would be of interest, as would an indication of what action was being taken to raise public awareness of the harmful effects of corporal punishment. Lastly, she would be interested to find out more about the way the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth operated. How was it organized, for example, and how many staff members did it have?

52. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that the Committee would welcome further information on any steps taken to trace the whereabouts of the families of the Ukrainian children who had arrived in Ireland. He would also be interested to know what measures the Government had taken to share information on those children with the authorities in their home country.

53. **Mr. Nelson** said that he wished to know whether the Disability Act 2005 was under review. Given the number of children with disabilities who were currently enrolled in special schools or on waiting lists, he wished to understand whether the State party was committed to adopting a model of inclusive education. If so, it would be useful to know whether plans had been made to roll out the Access and Inclusion Model at all levels of education. Confirmation as to whether the Government intended to adopt the School Inclusion Model, which had been piloted since 2018, would also be of interest. Moreover, he would welcome further information on the measures taken to improve access to education for Traveller children with disabilities and to combat the use of seclusion and restraint on children with disabilities at school. It would be useful to know whether there were any plans to extend the prohibition on the use of seclusion and restraint on children to settings other than hospitals and inpatient facilities.

54. He wished to know what measures the Government planned to take to improve access to services for children with disabilities and their families. It would also be helpful if the delegation could confirm whether the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 had been fully implemented and indicate what awareness-raising campaigns were being carried out to combat discrimination against children with disabilities.

55. He also wished to know whether a crime had been made of the recruitment of children for use in armed conflict and, if so, whether that legislation covered acts committed by Irish nationals abroad. If it did not, he would like to know when the State party planned to introduce the appropriate amendment to its legislation. He would be interested to find out whether a system or mechanism had been set up to identify asylum-seeking and refugee children who had been involved in armed conflict prior to their arrival in the State party. Information as to what steps the Government took to ensure their peaceful integration into Irish society would also be of interest.

56. Lastly, he wondered why Ireland had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Was the State party considering ratifying it?

57. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he would be interested to hear the delegation's overall assessment of the health of children in the State party. He wished to know why only children under the age of 6 were entitled to free general practitioner services, whether there were any plans to extend that entitlement to all children and what measures were currently taken to support families that were unable to afford primary care services once their children turned 7. He also wondered how long children had to wait to receive medical treatment.

58. It would be useful to learn what specific steps were being taken to ensure generous access to health services for children from vulnerable population groups, including Traveller and Roma children. He would like to know whether it was true that babies born to Traveller mothers were three times more likely to die in their first year than babies belonging to other population groups. He would also welcome an update on the State party's implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and the 10 steps of the World Health Organization's baby-friendly hospital initiative.

59. He wished to know what plans had been made to ensure that a sufficient number of child psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and specialized social workers were registered in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services system. It would be helpful to understand what action was being taken to improve child inpatient facilities and what financial support was provided to families of children who needed substantial outpatient mental health treatment. Moreover, he would welcome further information on any measures taken to reduce the suicide rate among children on the autism spectrum, Traveller children and children with disabilities. It would also be helpful to know what action the Government had planned to tackle the high level of alcohol consumption in the State party, particularly by pregnant women and girls.

60. He would welcome statistical data on the teenage pregnancy rate and further information on any measures taken to support girls who wished to have an abortion. He would also like to know what progress the State party had made towards the provision of comprehensive age-appropriate and evidence-based education on sexual and reproductive health. An indication as to the speed at which that education was being integrated into teacher training programmes and mandatory school curricula would be of particular interest. It would also be useful to know whether the Government would consider repealing or amending section 15 (2) (b) of the Education Act 1998 in order to ensure that religious considerations did not affect the access of children to high-quality education.

61. In addition, he would appreciate further information on the plans to establish an anti-poverty unit reporting directly to the Taoiseach. He would like to know, for example, what responsibilities the new unit would have and when it was expected to become fully operational.

62. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** said that she would like to know what measures were planned to provide children with access to non-denominational primary education in the seven years between 2023 and 2030, the year by which the Government intended to establish 400 multi- or non-denominational primary schools. She also wished to know whether the Government would consider terminating or amending the school admissions policy by which 25 per cent of places were reserved for relatives of former students.

63. It would be useful to understand what specific measures were planned to support disadvantaged families that could not afford to buy school uniforms or to pay for their

children to participate in school trips. She also wished to know whether there had been any research into the reasons why children from socially disadvantaged families were disproportionately likely to be put on reduced school timetables and to be suspended or expelled. She would like to know who made the decision to put children on reduced timetables and whether there were centralized government policies on suspension and expulsion.

64. She would also like to know whether the Government planned to take any measures to remove all negative stereotypes from school materials and to make curricula and teacher training programmes more culturally relevant to the State party's increasingly diverse school population. It would be useful to learn whether education resources on Traveller and Roma culture and history were being used at all schools and whether school staff had been adequately trained to stamp out racism and promote tolerance and respect for the culture of minority children. In addition, she wished to know whether there were any plans to reduce the powers of the patron bodies of individual schools and to adopt a fully centralized policy on the administration of the State party's schools.

65. She would welcome further information on any steps that had been taken to lower high dropout rates among Traveller and Roma children and other minority children and to provide alternative school-leaving certificates for children who had not been able to continue their education during the pandemic. She also wished to know what specific measures were taken to ensure that refugee and asylum-seeking children were registered in education and able to participate fully in school activities. Clarification as to whether teachers received the appropriate training to inform children of their rights and the Convention, subjects that were now part of the national curriculum, would also be of interest.

66. She would be interested to see any disaggregated data, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged children, used by the State party in the development of its education policies. She wished to know whether National Play Day had made a positive impact in developing play and recreational opportunities for young people and whether it was true that, as indicated in reports received by the Committee, some local authorities, above all those in disadvantaged areas, were not spending their National Play Day grants on activities related to that initiative.

67. As the new International Protection Support Service would not come into operation until December 2024, she wondered what steps would be taken to improve the services offered under the direct provision service in the meantime. She would welcome reassurances from the delegation that Ukrainian children in the State party would be given access to housing, education and psychosocial support. She would like to know whether the State party would consider reviewing the visa requirement for asylum-seekers and refugees from outside the European Union and the legislation providing for medical examinations to determine the age of unaccompanied children. It would also be interesting to know whether the Government would consider making the best interests of the child a primary consideration in a simpler approach to family reunification.

68. She wished to know whether the Government intended to review the legislation that meant that children who had been born in Ireland to migrant parents in an irregular situation were unable to regularize their own residency status. In particular, it would be useful to learn whether the State could guarantee those children independent legal representation and the resolution of their cases before their eighteenth birthdays.

69. She would like to know what action the Government planned to take to strengthen its approach to trafficking in children, since it appeared that its referral system was not functioning properly and that trafficking cases had been incorrectly reclassified as sexual exploitation. It would also be helpful to know whether the State party would raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 and remove the legislative provision allowing charges of the most serious crimes to be brought against children aged 10 to 11. Lastly, she wished to know how the Government planned to address the overrepresentation of Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minority children at the Oberstown Children Detention Campus.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.