



**International Convention on the
Protection of the Rights of
All Migrant Workers and
Members of Their Families**

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**Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All
Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
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Summary record of the 533rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 28 November 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Corzo Sosa

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 73 of the Convention

Second periodic report of Uruguay (CMW/C/URY/2; CMW/C/URY/Q/2 and CMW/C/URY/RQ/2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Uruguay joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Uruguay to the meeting, explained that additional members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **Mr. Lozano Bonet** (Uruguay), introducing his country's second periodic report (CMW/C/URY/2), said that, in order to respond to the challenges posed by the increase in the number of people seeking to reside, temporarily or permanently, in Uruguay, the Government had adopted various regulations, plans and actions to ensure that migrants enjoyed the same rights as nationals. Although much remained to be done, Uruguay was proud to have good practices in place and to have made clear progress. Migrants had immediate access to health care, education and work, among other rights. In compliance with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Government of Uruguay provided migrants with documentation in a timely fashion to enable them to exercise their rights, and, during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it had continued to allow vulnerable persons and asylum-seekers to enter the country and had enabled family reunifications.
4. A comprehensive legal framework was in place, comprising the Migration Act (No. 18250) of 2008 and the Refugee Act (No. 18076) of 2006. Pursuant to those laws, the National Migration Board had been established as an advisory and policy-making body and the Refugee Commission as the body responsible for determining refugee status. The first National Plan for the Integration of Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees had been developed in 2022 through a participatory process involving State actors and civil society; implementation had begun in 2023. The Plan had eight focus areas: access to documentation and regularization; employment; education; health; housing; violations; discrimination, racism and xenophobia; and highly skilled migrants. The Plan's comprehensive human-rights based approach encompassed gender, generations, interculturalism, territoriality, intersectionality and diversity.
5. The Programme to Support the Socio-urban Integration of the Migrant Population had received non-reimbursable funding from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and was intended to expand the scope of the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and the Environment's Neighbourhood Improvement Programme, linking the migrant population with the host community. The Programme was being run on a pilot basis with a view to preventing the formation and/or expansion of informal settlements in Montevideo. Uruguay had obtained the grant based on projections of increased migration flows, mainly at the regional level. To date, 8 per cent of the rental subsidies for migrants provided for under the agreement with IDB had been disbursed, each with a value of approximately USD 500 per family. The Programme had also involved the establishment of a meeting centre for migrants in Montevideo from where a comprehensive and coordinated response that accelerated their social integration could be provided. The software system for processing residency applications would also be updated.
6. Progress had been made in reducing the waiting time for the recognition of qualifications as well as in relation to access to housing, social security and job training and entrepreneurial support.
7. **Mr. Ceriani Cernadas** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would welcome specific information on the measures being taken to implement the National Plan for the Integration of Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees and the targets established thereunder, and on the participation of civil society and local government authorities in the implementation and follow-up of those measures. He would be interested to hear about efforts to strengthen the Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia and All Other Forms of Discrimination and the budgetary and human resources that it was allocated. He would also welcome an

update on the status of the bill on the establishment of criminal penalties for acts of discrimination, tabled in 2019, and on the bill on derogations from certain articles of the Audiovisual Communications Services Act, concerning penalties for acts of incitement to hatred.

8. In its 2014 concluding observations on the initial report of Uruguay (CMW/C/URY/CO/1), the Committee had recommended that the State party should take the necessary steps, including legislative measures, to guarantee Uruguayan migrant workers abroad the right to vote. He would therefore be interested to know more about the status of the bill setting forth regulations for the exercise of voting rights by citizens residing abroad that was currently under consideration by the Constitution, Codes, General Legislation and Administration Commission of the House of Representatives and the factors that had hindered the adoption of such legislation thus far.

9. While he understood that Decree No. 45/023 had introduced a number of changes aimed at rationalizing the National Migration Directorate and expediting the processing of residency applications, the Committee had received reports of continuing difficulties in relation to the cost and duration of some processes, including for nationals of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) member States and associate States. He thus wished to know what was being done to ensure that the recent reforms effectively facilitated access to residence in Uruguay. He would also be interested to know what impact the introduction of a visa requirement for persons arriving in Uruguay from Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic had had, and, in particular, whether it had helped to prevent trafficking in persons, as had initially been hoped.

10. He would be grateful for statistics on the employment situation of migrant workers in Uruguay. It seemed that, despite the establishment of the Migration Unit in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in 2017, challenges remained in relation to job insecurity, informal employment and exploitation. He would therefore be interested to hear of any measures being taken to ensure that migrants' qualifications and skills were recognized and that they could take up work in their field of specialization.

11. Although Act No. 18250 provided for equal access to health care for migrants, he understood that a Uruguayan identity card was required in order to register with the State Health Services Administration. He would therefore be interested to hear what happened to persons who did not have such a card. He also wished to know what initiatives were being taken in relation to access to mental health services for migrants. Lastly, he would welcome further information on the requirement under Act No. 18987 for non-national women to have been resident in the country for a year before being able to undergo a voluntary termination of pregnancy.

12. **Mr. García Saénz** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like information about problems encountered by Uruguayan workers abroad, the kind of support they received from the Uruguayan embassy or consulate in their country of residence, the number of Uruguayan embassies and consulates worldwide, and whether embassy and consular officials were familiar with the Convention. He would also be interested to know about any agreements intended to facilitate regular employment that had been concluded with countries in the region or beyond or with consular representatives accredited in Uruguay to deal with the problems faced by migrant workers from their respective countries.

13. **The Chair**, speaking as Country Rapporteur, said that he would welcome an update on the status of the Recommendations Monitoring System (SIMORE) – the public information system for recording State actions relating to compliance with, and the implementation of, the recommendations and observations made by the universal system for the protection of human rights, which had apparently been offline for more than two years owing to software-related issues – and on any mechanisms replacing that system.

14. According to paragraph 133 of the State party report, the National Migration Board had strengthened coordination with the National Support Programme for Foreign Nationals and Migrants Deprived of their Liberty in order to improve support for foreign nationals and migrants in prison. However, paragraph 31 of the replies to the list of issues (CMW/C/URY/RQ/2) stated that there were no detention centres in Uruguay that housed only migrants or foreign nationals as they were held in the same facilities as any other

detainee would be. In the light of those statements, he would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the detention of migrants, bearing in mind the Committee's clear position that the irregular stay of a person in a State should never constitute a criminal offence and, at worst, should constitute only administrative misconduct. The delegation might also comment on how the State party viewed the relationship between the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Convention, and on whether it saw any points of convergence between the two instruments.

15. It would be interesting to hear how coordination was ensured between the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, established as part of the National Human Rights Institution and Office of the Ombudsperson, and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Prison System, which also acted as a national mechanism for preventing torture in the adult prison system.

16. He wished to reiterate some of the concerns raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in its recent concluding observations on the combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports of Uruguay ([CERD/C/URY/CO/24-26](#)). For example, that Committee had agreed that the Honorary Commission against Racism, Xenophobia and All Other Forms of Discrimination should be strengthened, including by giving it a legal mandate to receive and process complaints in individual cases of racial discrimination in the public and private sectors and to impose administrative sanctions on those who committed such acts. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination also shared the view that the State party should consider strengthening the National Human Rights Institution by giving it a legal mandate to receive and process individual complaints of racial discrimination. Lastly, given that persons of African descent made up 8.1 per cent of the population of Uruguay, the Committee agreed that the State party should implement thorough accountability processes in the work and allocation of resources of the Division for the Promotion of Public Policies for People of African Descent and that it should ensure the prior consultation and effective participation of people of African descent in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, plans and programmes within its remit.

17. **Ms. Diallo** said that the Committee welcomed the good practices put in place by the State party, such as making permanent residence freely and directly available to nationals of MERCOSUR member States, including associate States, as well as to non-nationals with Uruguayan relatives. Given that, according to Act No. 18250, deprivation of liberty was to be used only as a punishment for violations of criminal law, she would like to know what penalties and alternatives to detention were imposed for non-criminal offences. She would also welcome details of the resources made available to the National Migration Directorate, particularly for local offices.

18. Referring to paragraph 16 of the replies to the list of issues, she said that she would be interested to learn whether the Ministry of Social Development played a purely coordinating role in relation to housing for migrants, for example, by referring housing requests to civil society organizations and international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It would be helpful to know, more generally, what measures the Government was taking to ensure access to housing and basic social services for migrants.

19. According to the tables in paragraph 17 of the replies to the list of issues, the proportion of residence permit applications granted had decreased significantly, from approximately 90 per cent in 2020 to 63 per cent in 2022. She would like to know the reasons for that decline, and whether it suggested a lack of awareness among migrants of how to correctly file their applications. She would also like to know whether priority was given to regularizing the situation of children, women and other vulnerable migrants.

20. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, she noted that the number of residence permit applications processed had remained virtually unchanged compared to the situation prior to the partial border closure. It would be interesting to know, however, whether the proportion of applications granted had also remained the same. She would also welcome information on access to health services for migrant workers in non-pandemic times.

21. She wondered whether the fact that migrants and foreign nationals were held in the same facilities as Uruguayan citizens meant that persons in detention for migration-related

offences might be held alongside citizens who had committed criminal offences. She would appreciate statistics on the number of visits conducted by the National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and the National Human Rights Institution to places of detention and details of the violations of migrants' rights identified during those visits. She would also be interested to hear about any complaints concerning violations of migrant workers' rights handled by the Advice and Complaints Office of the Inspectorate General for Labour and Social Security.

22. **Mr. Frasheri** said that he would appreciate further information on the type of challenges the State party encountered in enforcing the Convention, including in relation to the legal framework, administrative acts and practices and capacities. The Committee would be interested to hear from the delegation what assistance it might provide to help the State party to better understand its duties and commitments under the Convention and build alliances.

23. **Ms. Gahar**, referring to the particular situation of child migrants, said that she would like to know whether there was a mechanism in place that brought together all relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Migration Directorate and civil society. She would be interested to know the budget allocated by the Government for the domestic implementation of the MERCOSUR regional guide on identifying and addressing the special protection needs of migrant children and adolescents. She would also welcome data on the identification of and response to the special needs of child migrants, disaggregated by age, sex, migration status and vulnerability. For example, were child migrants with specific needs, including children with disabilities and abandoned children, taken into account in education policies?

24. **Mr. Charef** said that it was important to keep in mind that, contrary to widespread perceptions, Uruguay had a sizeable population of persons of African descent – although that diversity was often hidden – who often faced discrimination and had high school dropout rates. He would be interested to hear the delegation's comments concerning those points. He would also be interested to know what was being done to curb the extremely high youth emigration rate in Uruguay and would appreciate up-to-date statistics.

25. **Mr. Taghi-Zada** said that he would appreciate statistics on the number of Uruguayan citizens living abroad who participated in elections in their home country.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

26. **A representative of Uruguay** said that Uruguay had an open-door migration policy and had adopted a range of laws and plans that were favourable to migration. The National Migration Board was composed of representatives of the Office of the President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and benefitted from the active participation of civil society through the Consultative Advisory Council on Migration. The Board had developed the first National Plan for the Integration of Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees through an intersectoral and inter-institutional process. The Plan was being implemented through working groups for each of the eight focus areas. In partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and IOM, activities on specific focus areas were being developed for the private sector and civil society, and training sessions were being run by the Ministry of Education and Culture. A meeting to follow up on the implementation of the Plan would be held at the end of 2023.

27. There had already been two referendums on the question of postal voting from abroad, both of which had resulted in the proposal being rejected. Uruguayan citizens living abroad retained their voting rights but were required to travel to Uruguay to vote.

28. The SIMORE system was currently offline as the software was being updated. The National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up on Recommendations had continued its regular activities but simply had to share information via email rather than uploading it to SIMORE.

29. **A representative of Uruguay** said that article 149 bis of the Criminal Code established the penalty for persons who publicly or by any means suitable for public dissemination incited hatred, contempt or any form of violence against one or more persons on grounds of colour, race, religion, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation.

Article 149 ter, meanwhile, covered the actual commission of acts of hatred, contempt or violence. In the past four years, there had been 12 convictions for such offences. A bill aimed at expanding the criteria for cases of discrimination was currently under consideration. Any persons who established or participated in a group whose aim was to induce or inspire racial strife or hatred also faced criminal penalties.

30. Article 28 of the Audiovisual Communications Services Act established that audiovisual media could not broadcast content that incited or justified discrimination, violence or hatred against a person or group based on national or racial origin or religion. In its judgment No. 496 of 2016, the Supreme Court had ruled that the article was constitutional and in line with international human rights standards and that it did not limit freedom of expression, as some had claimed.

31. It should be made very clear that being a migrant in an irregular situation was not a criminal offence in Uruguay. Article 82 of the Migration Act provided that foreign nationals who were in an irregular situation at the time of adoption of the Act could be granted legal residence provided they met the criteria established therein. The references in the State party report to the detention of migrants in the same facilities as Uruguayan nationals referred only to those who had committed a criminal offence. There were no migrant detention centres in Uruguay. Persons found to have entered the country irregularly were generally given 60 days to regularize their situation.

32. The National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture and the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Prison System had met in March 2023 to enhance coordination between the two bodies. They would continue to meet on a monthly basis to exchange information and agree on methodologies and tools, to organize a system of coordinated visits to prisons and jointly create a national register of cases of torture and ill-treatment, to address the specific situation of trans prisoners, to review protocols for family visits and to carry out awareness-raising on mental health in detention.

33. Although training courses on the Convention were already provided to members of the judiciary, any assistance the Committee could provide in that respect would be most welcome. A course for judges on vulnerable children and child migrants had been organized in partnership with the Judicial Training Institute of the Argentine Provinces.

34. **A representative of Uruguay** said that access to health care was a universal right in Uruguay. Upon entering the country, migrants and refugees, including children, automatically had access to health care upon presentation of their passport if they had not yet received their Uruguayan identity card. Once they had their identity card and were registered with the State Health Services Administration, even expensive medicines and treatments were covered. In cases where they were not, the State ensured that those in need had access to the necessary health care nonetheless.

35. The legal requirement for a woman to have been resident in Uruguay for at least one year before undergoing a voluntary termination of pregnancy had been established in 2012, when the law on voluntary termination of pregnancy in Argentina had not yet entered into force. The rationale for that requirement had thus been to prevent women from travelling to Uruguay for the purpose of abortion. However, exemptions applied in certain circumstances, such as when the pregnancy was the result of sexual assault, and it was likely that the legislation would soon be amended.

36. Protecting the mental health of migrants and refugees was a priority. All migrants had access to mental health services, including psychological and psychiatric support. A reception committee made up of a social worker, psychologist and psychiatrist assessed each person's situation and gave advice on the necessary treatment and follow-up.

37. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had worked with the Refugee Commission to ensure that all refugees who submitted a request to enter Uruguay received a response within two hours. Once a request had been received, a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test had been automatically arranged free of charge and the applicant had been transferred to a test centre, along with any accompanying persons, to await the test and result. Once vaccines had become available, the vaccination status of persons seeking to enter the country had also been checked.

38. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the number of residency applications submitted had doubled since the Ministry of the Interior had assumed responsibility for processing. Under the Rapid Response Plan for residency applications, individuals who could present an identity document from their country of origin immediately received a provisional Uruguayan identity card upon initiating the application process and were allowed time to compile the remaining documentation required to complete their application subsequently. As a result, there might be a considerable time lag between initial application and approval. The apparent drop in the percentage of residency applications approved between 2020 and 2022 reflected that time lag rather than any actual decline.

39. Regarding the cost of residence permits, for nationals of Brazil and Paraguay, the principle of reciprocity applied, exempting applicants from those countries from payment of the associated fees. In addition, under a special Ministry of the Interior protocol, applicants who could demonstrate that they were in a vulnerable situation could be granted an exceptional exemption from all residence permit application fees.

40. **Mr. Lozano Bonet** (Uruguay) said that Uruguay had around 42 embassies worldwide and each embassy had a consular section. There was also a consular network that was roughly double the size of the embassy network. There were consulates in each of the countries with the highest numbers of Uruguayan immigrants, namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Spain and the United States of America. The consulates provided Uruguayans with assistance in matters relating to employment, family, documentation and repatriation.

41. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and the Environment had 12 agreements with other State bodies that ran support programmes for highly vulnerable persons. Migrants with a Uruguayan identity card who met the necessary requirements had the same right to apply for a rental subsidy as Uruguayan nationals and, in the period 2018–2023, 40 per cent of apartments rented out through the Rent Guarantee Fund had been rented to migrants. IDB had agreed to provide US\$ 5 million to fund housing solutions for migrants while the State had committed to contributing almost US\$ 1 million.

42. The meeting centre for migrants opened in Montevideo under the agreement concluded with IDB by the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and the Environment and the Ministry of Social Development provided basic assistance such as social welfare services and aimed to accelerate migrants' social integration. The centre prioritized support for female heads of household, among other vulnerable groups, and also operated a complaints mechanism. Thus far, the subsidies available under the agreement had been disbursed by IDB but the Ministry of Housing, Land Management and the Environment would assume responsibility for their distribution in the near future. Each subsidy was equal to approximately US\$ 500, paid over two years, and around 300 had been granted to date, 77 per cent of them to Venezuelan nationals.

43. The third component of the agreement with IDB was capacity-building for the agencies responsible for providing assistance to migrants. To that end, the Government was organizing training sessions for staff and was working to establish a team of experts specialized in responding to the different issues faced by migrants. It also planned to start using a single software solution to process all residence permit applications.

44. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents was the lead agency for child- and adolescent-related policies in Uruguay. It had a dedicated team working to support migrant children and adolescents in coordination with relevant inter-agency bodies and mechanisms such as the Integrated System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents from Violence and the National Committee for the Eradication of Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. Both mechanisms were present in all 19 departments of the country and had included specific measures to protect migrant children within their broader strategic plans. The Integrated System for the Protection of Children and Adolescents from Violence had organized workshops for staff at the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents and the Ministry of Social Development, including workshops on human mobility in relation to children and adolescents for employees in border departments.

45. In 2022, a tripartite agreement for the prevention of sexual exploitation in public and private enterprises and protection of victims had been signed between the Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents, the Ministry of Labour and the Workers' Trade Union Confederation-National Convention of Workers. The Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents had also concluded agreements directly with certain companies, in cases where an increased risk of child sexual exploitation was perceived to exist. A third national plan, which included measures on migrant child labour, had already been approved by the director of the Institute, and was awaiting approval by the Council of Ministers.

46. In December 2022, the Government had adopted a protocol on care for foreign children and adolescents found in an irregular situation at the border, which applied the regional MERCOSUR guide on identifying and addressing the special protection needs of migrant children and adolescents. Training on how to apply the protocol was being given in the relevant institutions. The protocol's key guiding principles were the best interests of the child, equality and non-discrimination, special protection, family unity, non-refoulement and the prevention of deprivation of liberty. The Uruguayan Institute for Children and Adolescents endeavoured to guarantee the rights of migrant children and adolescents who entered the country under any of the four special circumstances listed in the protocol, which were: entry on humanitarian grounds with a non-legally relevant accompanying person; entry without an accompanying adult; entry where there was a suspicion of human trafficking; and entry without passing migratory checks.

47. Historical data on care provided for migrant children and adolescents in Uruguay, desegregated by year, would be provided to the Committee in writing at a later stage. At present, the Institute was providing assistance to 919 children and adolescents, of whom 15 per cent were receiving care in the community, 3.5 per cent were in comprehensive full-time care and 80 per cent were in part-time care. The Institute ran centres that children could attend for approximately four hours a day to take part in social and educational activities. There were 502 early childhood care centres, around 130 centres for children between 4 and 12 years of age and 130 centres for adolescents, where support for mental health was available. Just under 1 per cent of children and adolescents were in foster family programmes.

48. Regarding country of origin, 25 per cent of the children and adolescents under the State's care were from Brazil, 19 per cent from Venezuela, 19 per cent from Argentina, 12 per cent from Cuba, 4 per cent from the Dominican Republic and 4 per cent from Peru, with a mix of other countries making up the remaining percentage. In terms of their sex, 49 per cent were boys and 51 per cent were girls. Lastly, concerning age, 35 per cent were aged between 0 and 3 years old, 39 per cent were aged between 4 and 12, 25 per cent were teenagers and 4 per cent were adults. The "adult" category was used to refer to young adults who had reached the age of majority while under the Institute's charge but were not capable of living independently.

49. The specific budget allocation for the care of migrant children and adolescents had not yet been measured, but, as the records and tools required were available, the relevant analyses and calculations were expected to be conducted in the near future. Besides assessing the knowledge and expertise of the team working to support child migrants, the analysis would evaluate resource allocation and management with a view to establishing whether the budget was sufficient and was being applied effectively.

50. **A representative of Uruguay** said that Uruguay had signed social security-related agreements with the majority of countries in Latin America, North America and Europe. The Social Security Bank was currently paying contributory allowances to beneficiaries in 36 countries worldwide, including countries with which no agreement had been signed. The Government had recently passed the Social Security Reform Act (No. 20130), which increased the financial support available for vulnerable persons, including many migrants, in the form of disability and old-age pensions and facilitated access to such benefits. For example, to receive a disability pension, it was no longer necessary to have been resident in Uruguay for an uninterrupted period of 15 years. Instead, only 10 years of residency were required, which could be accumulated with interruptions over a period of 20 years. There was no residency requirement for minors, who were entitled to a monthly disability benefit equivalent to around US\$ 400. Migrant children with rare diseases were treated free of

charge, and children in receipt of a disability pension were also eligible for extraordinary assistance grants.

51. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unemployment benefit had quadrupled and special benefits had been created to protect both Uruguayan and migrant workers. Around 4 per cent of beneficiaries had been migrants, the majority of whom had been from Argentina, followed by Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba and Peru.

52. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the revalidation of qualifications had formerly been carried out through the University of the Republic and the process had often taken several years. However, the process was now carried out by the Ministry of Education and Culture and could be completed within a few months. Typically, close to 3,400 requests for revalidation were received each year. The ministerial team responsible currently had six full-time members of staff and one part-time member, and a new staff member would soon join the team. The revalidation criteria had been standardized, amendments to decrees had been made to facilitate postgraduate revalidation, and training had been organized with the help of international organizations. As of 2023, 100 per cent of revalidation requests submitted had been processed, 70 per cent of which had been granted.

53. Regarding the accreditation of degrees, three accreditation visits had been carried out in 2023 and 14 degrees would be evaluated in 2024. A reciprocal recognition agreement for accredited degrees was awaiting ratification by MERCOSUR member States before it could enter into force. Uruguay had taken all the necessary steps and Argentina was in the final stages of the process.

54. Concerning the issue of visas, it had not been possible to open an IOM-run office in Havana to assist with the large number of visas issued at the Uruguayan consulate in Cuba, as had been hoped. The proposed exemption from the visa requirement had also not proved possible. An electronic visa programme was under development and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was awaiting its finalization before notifying the consular office.

55. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the Ministry of Social Development operated a range of programmes to support social inclusion, including for persons with mental health conditions, persons living with addiction and persons who had recently been released from prison. All programmes were universally available, with no distinction made on the grounds of country of origin.

56. In border areas, the Ministry arranged emergency response packages for newly arrived migrants and a number of centres had been established to help such persons find a safe place to live in the short term. The Ministry had set up a pilot programme to provide low-income migrant families with cash subsidies, initially for a period of three months. That period had subsequently been extended to 12 months, in order to enable the authorities to evaluate the programme's impact on the recipients of subsidies.

57. **A representative of Uruguay** said that the Ministry of Social Development offered programmes targeted at migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, including, under an agreement with IOM, a food and toiletries voucher scheme for newly arrived families who were vulnerable. In border areas, the Ministry shared premises with representatives of IOM, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with the aim of providing comprehensive services to migrants on arrival. Uruguay was attractive to migrants, both as a transit country and a destination country, owing to the political and economic crises affecting other countries in the region. In 2022, the Ministry had provided support to 12,000 migrants, and it expected that number to be higher in 2023.

58. Within the Ministry, a specific department had responsibility for promoting the inclusion and integration of migrants and assisting them in obtaining documentation. Migrants who did not have the necessary financial means were exempted from the payment of fees to obtain documents. Migrants who did not have identity documents were still able to join social welfare programmes run by the Ministry and asylum-seekers could obtain a special certificate for that purpose from UNHCR. In addition to its other activities, the Ministry delivered training for public officials on issues related to migration and asylum. One of the main challenges the authorities faced when dealing with migrants was the difficulty

many of them encountered when attempting to obtain documents from their country of origin. Another challenge was to ensure that persons who worked with migrants received appropriate training to enable them to provide a high-quality service.

59. **Mr. Ceriani Cernadas** said that it would be helpful to receive more detailed information about how the authorities met the housing needs of vulnerable migrants and ensured that they did not have to resort to living on the streets. He would also like to hear about any programmes or measures designed to combat xenophobic bullying in schools. While he welcomed the fact that migrants without the correct documentation could obtain a one-year provisional residency permit allowing them to enrol in education, it was unclear what happened if such persons were unable to regularize their situation within that time period.

60. He would appreciate clarification as to whether the changes that had been made to the residency requirements that must be met in order to obtain disability or old-age pension benefits applied to returning Uruguayan nationals as well as to migrants from other countries. While the requirements were not applied to children, children would feel their impact if they were applied to their parents. He would be grateful for the delegation's comments on that point. He would also appreciate clarification as to when the State party had begun to implement the MERCOSUR regional guide on identifying and addressing the special protection needs of migrant children and adolescents and the protocol on support for undocumented migrant children and adolescents at the border. Likewise, it would be interesting to receive any statistical data that had been obtained from the questions on migration that had been included in the 2023 census.

61. The distinction the State party made between legal citizenship and nationality was difficult to understand and reportedly sometimes caused problems for passport holders attempting to enter other countries. He wished to know whether persons with legal citizenship could obtain Uruguayan nationality. Given that some countries did not recognize dual citizenship, it was unclear whether the State party's approach to questions of citizenship and nationality might inadvertently render some individuals stateless. He would also like to know what follow-up action had been taken with regard to Decision No. 960/2021 of the National Human Rights Institution and Office of the Ombudsman.

62. He would be grateful if the delegation could comment further on the issue of voting rights for Uruguayan nationals living outside the State party. Clarification of the role of the parliamentary committee set up to examine that issue would be particularly welcome.

63. It was unclear why the State party applied the principle of reciprocity with respect to fees for residence permits since that policy created an unnecessary obstacle to access. He would welcome details of whether, and, if so, how the fees might be waived if the applicants who could not afford them.

64. **Mr. García Sáenz** said that the Committee was very interested in ensuring that Brazil ratified the Convention at the earliest opportunity. It would be useful to know whether the State party's authorities had raised, or planned to raise, that issue during any bilateral discussions with the Brazilian authorities.

65. **The Chair** said that he wished to know when the State party had begun, or would begin, to implement the National Plan for the Integration of Migrants, Asylum-seekers and Refugees. He would also welcome clarification as to whether migrants were required to present a passport in order to obtain health care, including mental health care, and, if so, how they could obtain those services if they did not possess a passport.

66. It was unclear whether the transfer of responsibility for the issuance of residence permits to nationals of MERCOSUR States from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the National Migration Directorate was simply a formality or whether changes would be made to the human and financial resources allocated to that area of administration.

67. In the light of reports that a telephone hotline for victims of trafficking in persons was no longer operational, he wished to know what steps the authorities were taking to provide support to persons affected by trafficking. Further details of the scope of the bill on the deportation of foreign nationals who committed serious criminal offences would also be

welcome, as would details of any mechanisms in place to facilitate remittances and information about family reunification schemes.

68. **Mr. Zounmatoun** said that it would be helpful for the State party to collect statistics on the basis of which it could evaluate the impact of its many efforts to address the issues faced by migrants.

69. Given that the State party's economy was based on agriculture, it would be interesting to hear about the role migrants played in that industry and to know whether the State party had ratified the ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129).

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.