



**Convention on the Rights
of Persons with Disabilities**

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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Combined second and third periodic reports
submitted by Belgium under article 35 of the
Convention pursuant to the optional reporting
procedure, due in 2019*, ****

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



I. Introduction

1. This report is submitted under article 35 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and has been prepared in accordance with the optional procedure decided by the Committee in 2013.
2. It describes new policies and changes in legislation, regulations, jurisprudence and administrative practices that have been adopted since the initial report of Belgium in 2011 (CRPD/C/BEL/1), its replies in 2014 (CRPD/C/BEL/Q/1/Add.1) and its interim follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations (CRPD/C/BEL/CO/1) up until 31 December 2019. The new measures adopted since then will be discussed during the oral introduction of the report. For general information, please refer to the common core document.
3. As part of the preparation of this report, a meeting was held on 5 March 2020 between representatives of the Belgian authorities and civil society (Belgian Disability Forum and Gelijke Rechten voor Iedere Persoon met een handicap (GRIP) (Equal rights for every person with a disability)) and Unia (Inter-federal Centre for Equal Opportunities).

II. Purpose and general obligations

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 (a) of the list of issues (CRPD/C/BEL/QPR/2-3)

4. In view of the division of powers, legislation is adapted to comply with the obligations arising from the Convention at the various levels of government. Each entity follows its own methodology for managing and coordinating these adjustments (see reply to the issues raised in para. 2 of the list of issues). Inter-federal cooperation on the implementation of the Convention takes place at the administrative level between focal points with the support of the coordination mechanism (see reply to the issues raised in para. 31).

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 (b) of the list of issues

5. See the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 (c) for the human rights-based concept of disability.
6. The Flemish Community has adopted a decree on personal funding (see reply to the issues raised in para. 18) and legislation on education (see reply to the issues raised in para. 22) to promote the autonomy and independence of persons with disabilities.
7. The Flemish Region has made changes to the decree on employment (see reply to the issues raised in para. 25).
8. In Brussels, the French Community Commission has reinforced the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its legislation.
9. The German-speaking Community has amended its legislation and adapted its support services for persons with disabilities (see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 (c)).

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 (c) of the list of issues

10. In terms of consistency between concepts of disability, there are currently no targeted initiatives aimed at harmonization. However, the definitions contained in the new legislation are consistent and based on a human rights model. In addition, measures have been taken to adapt existing notions of disability for the granting of benefits and other social assistance.
11. At federal level, various universities were commissioned to propose a new assessment tool for the integration allowance for persons with disabilities. This new tool, developed and presented in 2019, based on the concepts of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), will move away from a medical model and give greater weight to participation in social life.
12. In the German-speaking Community, the Service for Independent Living (DSL) has been using ICF and the Belgian resident assessment instruments (BelRAI) to assess people's care needs since 2019. These take into account criteria other than medical ones. As part of

the next phase of implementation of the Plan for Regional Development, social legislation is expected to be adapted and updated to bring it into line with the human rights model and to ensure that support services meet the needs expressed by persons with disabilities.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 2 of the list of issues

13. Plans and strategies focusing on the rights of persons with disabilities have been developed at the different levels of government.

14. At federal level, the Federal Disability Action Plan, adopted in 2016, has two components. For the component “disability mainstreaming (*handistreaming*): cross-cutting actions and objectives”, the various Ministers and Secretaries of State undertake to mainstream disability in at least two policies in their policy statements each year. The mainstreaming of disability into such policy measures was the subject of a report to the Council of Ministers. The aim is to examine the impact that the policy measure in question could have on persons with disabilities and to make disability mainstreaming a reflex in the various areas of competence. The second component, “specific measures and objectives”, aims to follow up on the Committee’s recommendations, taking into account the observations and opinions of civil society and the independent mechanism.

15. The Flemish government uses the open method of coordination for disability (and gender) mainstreaming in its various areas of competence and sectors. This method is anchored in equal opportunities policy by decree, which means that responsibility lies not just with the Minister for Equal Opportunities, but with all members of the government. At the beginning of the term of each elected parliament, the government, in close consultation with civil society, establishes a common framework of objectives, which are then translated over two cycles into action plans to implement these objectives. This is reflected in the horizontal strategic plans for equal opportunities. They provide an overview of the ambitions and actions that will expedite implementation of the Convention. For the 2015–2019 legislative term, the focus has been on objectives relating to awareness-raising, data collection and monitoring, accessibility and participation.

16. In the Walloon Region, a report is drawn up every three years by the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families, known as the Agency for Quality of Life (AVIQ), on the application of disability mainstreaming in Walloon public interest organizations. The first report stresses that the decree on gender mainstreaming “contributes to changing mentalities and strengthening public policies across the board”. Gender mainstreaming is included in the regional policy statement for the current legislative period.

17. In Brussels, the Disability Mainstreaming Charter was adopted in 2015 by the Brussels-Capital Region, the Common Community Commission and the French Community Commission. This charter implies that each minister must pay specific attention to the rights of persons with disabilities within his or her competence. It has been legally anchored in the legislation of the three Brussels federated entities. At the French Community Commission, disability mainstreaming has been implemented as a priority by the Brussels public body responsible for vocational training, Bruxelles Formation, with the approval of several specific support services. In addition, as part of the Brussels-Capital Region strategy for mainstreaming disability in various fields, equal.brussels and the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition supported the implementation of eight pilot projects in 2018 and 2019.

18. In the German-speaking Community, the action plan of the German-speaking Community for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (DG Inklusiv 2025) was adopted by the Service for Independent Living in 2015, in follow-up to the recommendation in paragraph 6. This plan can serve as a guideline for the implementation of policies to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 3 of the list of issues

19. At federal level, the participation of persons with disabilities in the drafting, application and review of legislation and policies relating to disability is mainly through advice and contacts with the National High Council for Persons with Disabilities. It is responsible for examining all matters likely to have an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. Members of the Government and public services may request opinions on

proposals, and the Council also issues opinions on its own initiative. Such opinions are mandatory for proposals relating to allowances for persons with disabilities. The coordination mechanism supports the Council by further disseminating its advice to all the public services concerned.

20. At the level of the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, there is a tradition of political participation by persons with disabilities at the sectoral level, with representation on various working groups and committees. The framework for the objectives of the cross-cutting equal opportunities policy for the period 2015–2019 provides that the participation of persons with disabilities must be strengthened, starting with policies. Inter, the Flemish agency for accessibility, has developed initiatives to increase the participation of experts by experience. In addition, the Flemish government subsidizes a number of organizations of persons with disabilities, including GRIP and Onze Nieuwe Toekomst, to facilitate their participation in politics through all kinds of direct and indirect interventions.

21. In the French Community, the decree of 30 January 2014 on inclusive higher education and the decree of 30 June 2016 on social advancement education provide for the participation of organizations representing persons with disabilities in commissions dedicated to this type of education.

22. In the Walloon Region, the participation of persons with disabilities in the Council for Strategy and Forward Planning is provided for through a non-permanent group of experts. Pending adoption of the implementing decree, persons with disabilities will be represented on the Council by two members appointed by the Disability Branch Committee.

23. For the Brussels-Capital Region, the new Brussels Council for Persons with Disabilities is involved in drafting, implementing and monitoring legislation. The Council's role is to formulate opinions and recommendations on any issue relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Brussels-Capital Region and to monitor this issue at other levels of government insofar as it has an impact on the Brussels-Capital Region.

24. At the French Community Commission, since 2017, any regulations adopted by the Board of the Commission is examined from the point of view of disability mainstreaming. A coordinating group responsible for implementing the Disability Mainstreaming Decree submits draft plans, interim reports and final reports to the Advisory Council.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 4 of the list of issues

25. For the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, in 2018 discussions were initiated on a Flemish advisory council to achieve full participation in policies by a group of more than 20 organizations of persons with disabilities, which outlined the council's guiding principle "Nothing about us, without us" as the basis for such an advisory body. The aim was to maximize the participation of all disability stakeholders on the ground and those who are not represented in mainstream civil society. A budget of €700,000 has been earmarked for the pilot project. A project evaluation is scheduled for 2020 with a view to possible consolidation by decree.

26. In the Walloon Region, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are involved in their policies and are represented on a structural basis via the Walloon Commission for Persons with Disabilities. With the creation of the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families by decree on 1 January 2016, it was envisaged that the advisory function would be carried out through a body of this Agency that would eventually replace the Walloon Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

27. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the Brussels Council for Persons with Disabilities was created in 2018. It is made up of members of the other advisory councils of the Brussels-Capital Region communal entities, five disability mainstreaming experts from civil society and a representative of Unia. The Council is an independent body with a separate budget (€30,000 for 2019).

28. At Common Community Commission, the advisory function has been integrated into Iriscare, the public interest organization for social protection. The Persons with Disabilities Commission meets as an ad hoc body and is made up of organizations representing service

providers in the sector and insurers, as well as associations representing persons with disabilities, which appoint their representatives or user representatives.

29. The government of the German-speaking Community has undertaken to support civil society in the creation of a consultative council with legal personality, including making available adequate financial resources as soon as the representative organizations have agreed on the council's statutes, aims and internal workings.

III. Specific rights

Equality and non-discrimination

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 5 (a) of the list of issues

30. For discrimination in the workplace, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 25 (c). For the federal level, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 5 (b).

31. At the level of the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, an evaluation study was launched in 2019 on the Equal Opportunities Decree, particularly on the provisions relating to non-discrimination policy. This decree provides for the transposition of relevant European directives and the implementation of treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The central question is whether the current decree provides an adequate framework for an effective anti-discrimination policy.

32. The Walloon Region introduced multiple discrimination, including on the basis of disability and gender, into its anti-discrimination legislation in 2019.

33. The Brussels-Capital Region has strengthened its anti-discrimination legislation with the adoption of the ordinance of 5 October 2017 aimed at combating certain forms of discrimination and promoting equal treatment, the framework ordinance of 25 April 2019 aimed at ensuring a policy of diversity and combating discrimination within the local civil service, and the ordinance of 21 December 2018 amending the Brussels Housing Code in order to strengthen the fight against discrimination in access to housing. Under the Code, one of the duties of the Regional Inspection Service is to determine whether discrimination has occurred following situation testing.

34. In the German-speaking Community, there has been a contact point for discrimination issues since 2017. Prisma, a counselling centre for women and victims of violence, and Unia regularly offer consultation hours in the Parliament Building.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 5 (b) of the list of issues

35. At federal level, a commission of 12 experts was tasked with assessing the three anti-discrimination laws. Its mandate covers the period from 2016 to 2021. In 2017, the commission completed its first interim report containing 33 recommendations for improving the effectiveness and implementation of the legislation.

36. These recommendations include the need to include intersecting and multiple discrimination, discrimination by association and discrimination based on previous health status in the legislation. It also recommends that this adaptation be accompanied by a review of the appropriate penalties in the event of multiple discrimination and the adjustment of the right of action of equality bodies. Bills incorporating some of these recommendations are being prepared.

37. The Commission also intends to re-examine the entire system of penalties introduced by the 2007 laws. This review will examine existing financial penalties to ensure that they are adequate, proportionate and dissuasive, it being understood that the notion of proportionality also implies that the penalties applied must not be excessive. It will also examine the relevance and appropriateness of introducing possible non-monetary penalties, in the light of foreign experience.

Women with disabilities

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 6 (a) of the list of issues

38. Several levels of government aim to integrate the gender dimension into all policies (gender mainstreaming), including disability, as well as integrating the disability dimension into all policies (disability mainstreaming), including gender.

39. To combat multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 5 of the list of issues. For violence against women and girls with disabilities, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 16 (a). For action plans to integrate the disability dimension, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 2.

40. In 2018, Belgium organized a side event on gender and disabilities at the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a focus on sexual and reproductive rights.

41. During negotiations on the agreed conclusions for the Commission on the Status of Women, Belgium is always insistent on the inclusion of multiple and intersecting discrimination. On several occasions, Belgium has taken on the role of negotiator for the European Union on this subject.

42. At the federal level, since 2014 all draft laws and regulations submitted to the Council of Ministers must be the subject of a policy impact assessment that contains a gender component. In 2015, the Government adopted the federal gender mainstreaming plan. The plan contained a series of commitments to integrate the gender dimension into, for example, policies for persons with disabilities. Training in gender mainstreaming has been organized within the Federal Public Service for Social Security, which is responsible for federal benefits for persons with disabilities. The training session was also attended by members of the Belgian Disability Forum secretariat and the coordination mechanism for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

43. The French Community adopted the decree on gender mainstreaming in all policies in 2016 and introduced a gender impact assessment (*test genre*) in 2017.

44. In the Walloon Region, legislation has been passed to amend the decree introducing the gender impact assessment.

45. In Brussels, the French Community Commission subjects all draft regulations to a gender mainstreaming analysis procedure.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 6 (b) of the list of issues

46. See the replies to the issues raised in paragraphs 22 and 25 for general measures.

47. The French Community, the Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the German-speaking Community have organized self-defence workshops for women with disabilities. The aim is to improve self-confidence and assertiveness.

Children with disabilities

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 7 (a) of the list of issues

48. For family allowances, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 26. Reference is also made to the report [CRC/C/BEL/5-6](#) (paras. 110–120).

49. In the Flemish Community, the organization of specific support for children with disabilities has undergone radical change in recent years, with the aim of achieving demand-led support for greater inclusion.

50. Directly accessible support (an additional €2 million in 2019), the basic monthly budget for care (€300) and support for the network of children with disabilities have been strengthened. At the same time, the budget allocated to personal assistance budgets has been increased. As a result, as at 30 June 2018, 882 young people had been given such assistance, an increase of 29.8 per cent compared with 2017. In 2019, the entire personal assistance

budget stood at €38.5 million, including over €12 million for new allocations. The principle of “funding linked to the person” has already been put into practice for adults. Personal funding for children is to be implemented from 2020.

51. Regarding early childhood care, since 2014 there have been 16 inclusive childcare centres, which ensure that care is inclusive and make inclusion coaches available to other care settings. Each year, the 16 coaches support between 200 and 240 childcare teams in their inclusive work.

52. The Flemish government has also taken initiatives to stimulate inclusion in leisure activities, including: training to make youth movements and holiday camps more inclusive; organizational subsidies for youth activities for children and young people with disabilities; and the Masterplan Diversiteit in/en Jeugdwerk (Diversity and youth work master plan) to develop even more inclusive policies adapted to children and young people with disabilities.

53. In the French Community, there are specific projects to help children with disabilities make the transition from school to the world of work. Collaboration between the Walloon Region and the French Community has led to the development of eight support facilities for the inclusion of 0–3 year olds, and 19 early intervention services to support the inclusion of 0–6 year olds, including their integration into school. Some 1,500 families have benefited from these services. In addition, the Walloon Region supports the Disability Notice Platform, which aims to improve information for families upon notification of a disability and to train professionals. Assistive technology has been provided to 353 children.

54. In the Walloon Region, certain children who require specific support can benefit from the assistance of one of the Region’s 31 integration services. In this way, 3,000 children are supported in their living environment and can benefit from an individual project prepared with the family and external stakeholders. Specific training courses for family members are also organized. In addition, through five family support services, in 2017, 137 children were taken in by foster families, 437 children who had temporarily or partially dropped out of school were taken in by one of 16 specialized day-care services (Sas-J) aimed at supporting their gradual reintegration in partnership with schools. Lastly, 2,051 children were cared for in one of the 52 residential services for young people. These services ensure that the child’s life plan is organized, in agreement with the child, with the aim of opening up to the community. In 2018, 390 young people benefited from new projects aimed at developing their independence and adult life plans thanks to the 65 supportive housing services that were set up. A total of 17 people were monitored as part of an innovative managed housing scheme. Thanks to collaboration between the federal government and the Walloon Region, seven mobile intervention units have been set up to help people with a dual diagnosis, thereby avoiding hospital admissions as far as possible, particularly for children. Additional resources have been made available for priority cases at the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families.

55. The Brussels-Capital Region supports the Handyfriends platform, which brings together families of persons with disabilities and students in the social and medical sectors.

56. At the French Community Commission, the regulations were amended in 2018 to strengthen the work of the support services for children with disabilities in childcare facilities and school inclusion in mainstream education.

57. In 2016, the German-speaking Community set up a pilot project as part of general extracurricular support to enable it to cater for children with disabilities. The carers are trained and made aware of disability issues in order to look after children with disabilities.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 7 (b)

58. In the Flemish Community, regulations governing childcare facilities have been amended. Various forms of traditionally recognized facilities have evolved into multifunctional centres that can deploy their capacity according to demand. A distinction is made between different support functions, i.e. accommodation, day care and support. This greater flexibility in the provision of care for children with disabilities is helping to reduce the need for residential care in Flanders.

59. In 2018, around 11,000 children and young people received support from a multifunctional centre, and 64 per cent of them benefited from at least one day's stay as part of their proposed support. The budget is around €435 million for 11,099 children.

60. In addition to the above forms of assistance that are not directly accessible, the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities (VAPH) also recognizes and subsidizes assistance that is directly accessible to children. In 2018, about 14,000 children and young people under the age of 21 used these services, and 3 per cent of them took the opportunity to stay through this directly accessible assistance for less than 60 nights a year.

61. Figures on children with disabilities in foster care are only available for foster homes that are not directly accessible. For direct assistance, it is not recorded whether or not the children have a disability.

62. There are 52 residential services for young people in the Walloon Region, providing 3,132 places, while there are 16 specialized care services for young people, providing 437 places. Based on estimates from the family allowance funds in December 2017, 1,402 children with disabilities were placed in institutions, while 69 were with private individuals out of a total of 20,217 children.

63. In the German-speaking Community, there are no foster families specifically for children with disabilities. Families are assisted by support services and have the option of using a short-stay or respite service. From secondary school onwards, children with disabilities can be accommodated in a residential school run by a special education centre. Since 2014, an average of 20 children with disabilities supported by the Youth Welfare Service have been living with foster families, in institutions or in residential schools. Of these children, an average of 10 to 11 were taken in by a foster family, 7 to 10 by an institution and 1 to 2 by a residential school.

Awareness-raising

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 8 (a) of the list of issues

64. All initiatives taken by the Flemish government to achieve the objectives of the Convention are set out in the Convention. This is particularly true of the various disability awareness campaigns.

65. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families has set up a website called Wikiwiph to provide accessible thematic fact sheets covering help and advice or the rights of persons with disabilities in all areas of daily life.

66. In the German-speaking Community, the Service for Independent Living has produced a brochure which seeks to explain the Convention and relevant concepts to a wider public, both to persons working with persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities themselves and their family members.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 8 (b) of the list of issues

67. The Flemish government notes that the medical approach to disability is still very present in our society and that the evolution towards a human rights perspective is very slow. It therefore continues to focus on a non-stereotyped image. In addition to initiatives by organizations with structural funding, there have been projects aimed at breaking down stereotypes about mental disability and persons who have visual impairments, and initiatives to raise awareness among (future) journalists. Research has also been carried out into the representation and perception of disability in the media, and personal experiences of inclusion. In the management contract of the VRT public-service broadcaster for the Flemish Community, attention to diversity is a priority, and a nuanced, non-stereotypical approach to disability is applied.

68. The French Community has published and distributed booklets on disability entitled "Fureur de lire" (Passion for reading).

69. The Walloon Region raises awareness and encourages citizens to adopt inclusive behaviour through communication campaigns broadcast on social networks, television and radio, awareness-raising activities at stands at public events, and events in schools, communes and hospitals. The Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families has also created an educational toolkit for nursery and primary school teachers.

70. The Brussels-Capital Region has launched an awareness-raising campaign to encourage the public to be more attentive to the difficulties encountered by persons with disabilities in public spaces and to provide the little extra help that can make all the difference. The region subsidized the project entitled “*ChaisArt, l’art de la chaise: Une expo pour l’autonomie*” (ChairArt, the art of the chair: an exhibition for autonomy).

71. In the German-speaking Community, the aim of the Community’s action plan for the implementation of the Convention is to raise awareness of disability among various actors in society, to encourage schools, sports clubs, associations and businesses to open up their activities to persons with disabilities, and to promote inclusion.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 8 (c) of the list of issues

72. At the level of the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, organizations of persons with disabilities are involved in new awareness-raising campaigns through focus groups and the creation, development or updating of awareness-raising or information tools. GRIP is a major partner in the field of awareness-raising and has set up various awareness-raising campaigns.

73. The awareness-raising activities of the French Community mentioned above were led by persons with disabilities themselves active in associations working for greater inclusion.

74. In the German-speaking Community, the activities to raise awareness about disability under its action plan for the implementation of the Convention actively involve persons with disabilities and are tailored to a diverse audience.

Accessibility

75. For web accessibility, see the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 20 of the list of issues.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 (a) of the list of issues

76. At the federal level, the Buildings Authority adopted a set of new obligations and recommendations in 2018. They are applicable to building designers and managers. In addition, the Authority has designed electronic forms to assess the accessibility of the buildings it owns and distributed a document for awareness-raising addressed to occupants of federal buildings. Since 2016, in addition to the contact officer for the Convention operating in the central service, an officer has been appointed in each local branch of the Buildings Authority to specifically oversee accessibility issues in all projects.

77. At the level of the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, Inter, the Agency for Accessibility in Flanders, has been operational since 1 May 2015. Inter supports and offers policy advice to the Flemish government, provinces and local authorities, provides support for construction and architecture in all phases of the building process, heightens public awareness, conducts research and organizes training and presentations on accessibility. The Horizontal Equal Opportunities Policy Plan 2015–2019 has included the goal of achieving full accessibility. The following initiatives have been undertaken:

- A provision on accessibility in the new regulations for recognition of services for older persons
- A new Social Housing Design Guide containing guidelines for the design and construction of social housing
- The development of an accessibility label for office buildings

78. A project has been launched to optimize the collection of and access to information on accessibility on the Accessible Flanders (Toegankelijk Vlaanderen (ToeVla)) database.

79. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Accessibility Plan 2017–2019 aims to promote universal accessibility in the fields of social welfare, spatial planning, housing, infrastructure, mobility, tourism and local government. The plan has:

- Established an accessibility charter for events requiring a subsidy from the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families
- Promoted access to Walloon nature parks for people with reduced mobility and drawn up a register of accessible tourism infrastructure
- Continued to support the “Adaptable Construction” initiative, with a symposium organized and a working group set up with Unia, the Agency, public housing associations and the Walloon Housing Association.

80. In addition, a methodology for assessing the accessibility of services and goods available to the public has been developed by the non-profit organization Access-i, with the support of the Agency and the National Tourism Office.

81. The Walloon Region, the Brussels-Capital Region and the French Community Commission support the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition.

82. For its own buildings and rentals, the French Community consults with leading associations to ensure effective spatial planning. The priority works programme of the General Service of Subsidized School Infrastructure is aimed in particular at improving the accessibility of buildings for people with reduced mobility.

83. In 2017, the Brussels-Capital Region supported the updating of the guide designed by associations of the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition with the aim of providing construction professionals with an accessibility framework for persons with reduced mobility. The guide is therefore aimed at designers, contractors and urban planners concerned with accessibility. In 2017–2018, the Region launched an accessibility audit, diagnosis and certification for persons with reduced mobility in five regional public service buildings in collaboration with the National Association for the Housing of Persons with Disabilities. The Common Community Commission supports and finances various associations, some of whose activities also include improving the accessibility of public places. At the level of the French Community Commission, specialized services are accredited by the PHARE Service, a French acronym signifying “beacon” that stands for “persons with disabilities seeking autonomy”, to certify the accessibility of a social space to people with disabilities. The Accessibility 2025 plan, led by the French Community Commission, is financially supported by the Commission. Access to cultural and sporting activities is also encouraged.

84. In the German-speaking Community, a study of the current state of accessibility is scheduled to run from the end of 2019 to 2024, to provide a better overview and then define the priority actions to be carried out.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 (b) of the list of issues

85. At federal level, in 2018, the National Railway Company of Belgium (SNCB) presented updates to Revalor, the SNCB reference manual for accessible infrastructure. The revised version is currently being drafted. As with the previous version, opinions were sought from various interest groups such as the National Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities. Belgium was one of the first countries to submit its national implementation plan on accessibility of the rail system at the end of 2016, in accordance with European regulations. Infrabel, the railway infrastructure manager, and SNCB plan to double the number of fully accessible stations by 2025.

86. In 2016, an accessibility audit of Brussels airport was carried out by experts, accompanied by the disabilities contact.

87. In the Flemish Region, 97 per cent of buses and 55.5 per cent of trams operated by the Flemish transport company De Lijn were accessible by the end of 2018. Based on an analysis of tram operating hours, accessible trams provide more than 70 per cent of tram services. An

inventory of stops shows which stops are accessible to the various persons with disabilities. This information is kept up to date and immediately linked to travel information such as route planners, timetables and transit boards. The inventory shows that, by the end of 2018, 28.8 per cent of stops were accessible to persons with reduced mobility, with assistance. Without assistance, the figure is 11.5 per cent, while 5.7 per cent have a tactile guidance system. In the field of mobility policy and public works, an accessibility knowledge hub has been in operation since 2019. Via MeerMobiel.be, passengers with disabilities can find out about their rights, transport services in Flanders and mobility policy.

88. In the Walloon Region, an agreement has been signed between the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition and Walloon Transport Operator to improve the accessibility of public transport. As part of this process, various lines and stops are to be assessed according to the criteria defined in the agreement, in order to establish which lines are accessible. Stops and rolling stock are assessed. The agreement includes an information, awareness-raising and training component for Walloon Transport Operator staff on the needs of persons with reduced mobility and the use of accessible equipment.

89. The public service contract between the Region and Walloon Transport Operator also includes a section aimed at improving and developing the universal accessibility of public transport, through investments in infrastructure, support and information. The contract calls for 100 per cent of buses to be equipped with access ramps by 1 January 2021.

90. The Transport Management Authority is responsible for the supervision and control of the achievement of the objectives set out in the contract, through constructive dialogue with Walloon Transport Operator and those involved in transport of persons with reduced mobility.

91. The Brussels-Capital Region has appended to the management contract for the public transport operator Brussels Intercommunal Transport Company (STIB) a 10-year strategic plan for making the system accessible. The plan includes making 70 overground stops accessible each year, equipping two metro stations with elevators each year, reviewing elevator maintenance to reduce breakdowns and improving the availability of bus ramps. In terms of urban infrastructure, between 2014 and 2019, every commune in the Region drew up an accessibility plan for roads and public spaces. This involves a mapping exercise for 3,600 km of pavements to identify any non-conformities for persons with reduced mobility, which are georeferenced in a database. Works to ensure accessibility based on these plans are carried out whenever there is an improvement to or maintenance of pavements. The Road Research Centre has developed a sensor-equipped wheelchair to measure the quality of use, comfort and slipperiness of pavement surfaces. All the rules on accessibility for the construction of roads and buildings were introduced at time of the revision of the regional planning regulations subject to public inquiry at the end of 2019, making them applicable to all new projects.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 (c) of the list of issues

92. In the Walloon Region, various public services have introduced tools to raise awareness and provide guidance, as well as adjusting their subsidy rates.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 (d) of the list of issues

93. The Flemish Region evaluated the Accessibility Ordinance in 2018 and 2019 to provide an overview of its effectiveness by paying attention to both the content and the application of the Ordinance. The evaluation shows that an adjustment is appropriate in order to achieve more effective and efficient regulation. At present, accessibility regulations and framework initiatives still fall short of guaranteeing effective, basic accessibility in cases of new buildings or renovation work requiring a permit.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 (e) of the list of issues

94. To promote universal design among students of architecture, design and product development, the Flemish government has organized the second “Deadline24” design competition. Universal Design Week features not only activities for designers and

professionals in the construction sector, but also awareness-raising initiatives aimed at students.

95. In the Walloon Region, the “Encourage accessibility training for current and future construction professionals” campaign has been included in the accessibility plan. In this context, a meeting was held between the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition and the Academy of Research and Higher Education. The Academy then proposed introducing the Coalition to its technical education commission as a first step, before considering approaching university officials to make contact with architects’ programmes.

Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 10 (a) of the list of issues

96. An arrivals centre was set up in 2018. The centre, particularly the registration desk, is fully accessible to persons with reduced mobility.

97. As soon as people register, a member of staff carries out an initial assessment of those who are at risk. These are the first to be admitted to the centre. For these people, it is also possible to submit their application for international protection immediately, in order to avoid a further transfer to the Pachéco building. In addition, staff can already assess any procedural requirements that need to be taken into account when the application is processed further. During the procedure, the procedural needs to be taken into account are (once again) assessed. This information is forwarded to the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons.

98. If an asylum-seeker has specific needs, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum-Seekers in Belgium (Fedasil) can allocate a place to be received adapted to his or her needs. A certain number of places have a specific label. In the designated reception structure, appropriate support is provided for persons with disabilities. If necessary, a suitable place can already be allocated on the day of the asylum seeker’s arrival.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 10 (b) of the list of issues

99. At the end of 2014, a web portal was launched to raise everyone’s awareness of the risks in our environment and thus increase their level of preparedness. Recommendations have been made for specific target groups, including persons with disabilities. Since 2017, the “BE-Alert” citizen’s alert platform, where citizens can register to receive an alert message during an emergency situation, has been operational throughout Belgium. Various media are available to make this platform as accessible as possible.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 10 (c) of the list of issues

100. During the Belgian presidency of (the Committee of Ministers of) the Council of Europe, the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement organized a conference entitled “Including People with Disabilities in Disaster Preparedness and Response” in Brussels in 2014, in close collaboration with Belgium and in the presence of Belgian and international organizations of persons with disabilities. The sign language video on the BE-Alert website was produced in close collaboration with the French-speaking and Flemish federations of organizations of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons.

Equal recognition before the law

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 11 (a) and (b) of the list of issues

101. The foundations of disability schemes were reviewed pursuant to the Act of 17 March 2013 and the procedure for placing persons under judicial protection was simplified, modernized and computerized pursuant to the Act of 21 December 2018. The intention is to prioritize personal autonomy and to ensure that persons are placed under judicial protection

only if and insofar as this is necessary in order to protect them, in keeping with the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity.

102. This protection scheme can be organized by the person himself or herself, by means of a lasting power of attorney or a registered declaration that the judge will have to take into account in the context of judicial protection.

103. The law favours extrajudicial protection, whereby the principal organizes the management of his or her proprietary and non-proprietary interests for the future. This power of attorney receives a certain amount of publicity and may contain certain principles to be respected by the agent. It continues by operation of law beyond the point at which the person is no longer in a position to manage his or her own interests. The judge's intervention is limited to partial or total execution of the power of attorney, or, if necessary, to converting this scheme into a judicial protection scheme by means of a specially reasoned decision.

104. As for the registered declaration, it may, on the one hand, contain principles that the administrator must respect and, on the other, indicate a preference as to his or her appointment.

105. The aim is to limit as far as possible the intrusion of other people into the management of the protected person's interests: the protected person is represented or assisted only by an administrator appointed by the justice of the peace. Certain personal acts or acts that concern medical law cannot be the subject of assistance or representation. In addition, since 2019, a person suffering from a serious mental illness is no longer systematically placed under judicial protection, and the justice of the peace can no longer rule on the exercise of the patient's rights.

106. Furthermore, priority is given to an assistance scheme over one of representation. It is only by default that the protected person is subject to a representation scheme. In this case, the administrator must, during the course of his or her work, respect the principles that the person has set out in any declaration and involve the person as much as possible in the performance of his or her duties. The administrator must confer with the protected person at regular intervals and, since 2019, at least once a year. He or she must inform the protected person of the actions he or she is taking, except in special circumstances. Lastly, a trusted person can support the person subject to protection to convey the protected person's wishes, or to give his or her opinion if the protected person is unable to do so.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 11 (c) of the list of issues

107. In 2014, the Union of Justices of the Peace and Police Court Judges and three universities organized an afternoon study of the law of 17 March 2013 for the judicial and social service sectors. In addition, in 2015, a brochure created by the King Baudoin Foundation, the Royal Belgian Notary Foundation and the Federal Public Service for Justice explained the procedure in practice.

108. In 2019, a training course entitled "Personal protection of persons with mental illness" was offered by the Judicial Training Institute in addition to training on adults with incapacity.

Access to justice

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 12 (a) of the list of issues

109. Compulsory training in anti-discrimination laws is organized annually in collaboration with Unia and the Institute for Equality between Women and Men as part of the compulsory initial training for judicial trainees. It deals with discrimination on the basis of disability in civil and criminal matters and the notion of reasonable accommodation. A specialized training course on discrimination and hate crimes, which addresses more specific issues for prosecutors specially appointed to deal with such cases was also organized in 2015 and 2017. A new module, entitled "Approaches to people who have mental health problems or addictions", has been introduced to the Judicial Training Institute curriculum.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 12 (b) of the list of issues

110. The prison administration is attentive to the plight of prisoners with disabilities and takes all appropriate measures to enable them to participate in the legal proceedings that concern them, according to their needs. Special support can therefore be organized.

Individualized support measures

111. In the Flemish Community, the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities funds projects in the form of psychosocial counselling and daytime activities adapted to prisoners believed to have a disability. The projects focus on developing cooperation with care teams, psychosocial services, prison staff and other actors involved in prison assistance. Complementary measures as part of primary legal assistance are also provided for: anyone subject to a penalty or measure will generally receive the necessary counselling or support.

112. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families, in collaboration with Les Marronniers Regional Psychiatric Centre, organizes training days on mental health issues for the disability sector, with the aim of “opening the doors” of services to persons committed to psychiatric hospitals. In addition, initiatives continue to be taken to strengthen collaboration between the disability and institutional care sectors, and to support patients and build their networks with a view to optimizing their living conditions. The aim is to prevent them from being reintegrated into the social defence system and stigmatised, and to raise awareness among new partners. In 2017, the Region adopted a resolution analysing the situation of prisoners’ health, mental health and addictions and providing recommendations.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 12 (c) of the list of issues

113. Access to legal proceedings for persons with disabilities is facilitated. This assistance may be free of charge for people with insufficient means of support, which is presumed to be the case for persons with disabilities who receive an unemployment allowance. In addition, the Constitutional Court annulled the requirement for beneficiaries of this aid to make a contribution for the appointment of a lawyer.

114. All courts guarantee free access to an interpreter during hearings. Those concerned are also entitled to additional assistance from the person who is most accustomed to conversing with them. Persons with a visual disability have the right to obtain free Braille translations of essential documents to enable them to exercise their right to a fair trial, if they are accused, or their rights as aggrieved parties.

115. Lastly, the quality of interpreting and translation services is guaranteed by recent legislation creating and regulating the national register of sworn translators, interpreters and translator-interpreters. Twelve interpreters listed in the register’s database have indicated that they are proficient in sign language. One of them is registered as a translator from Braille into French and French into Braille. Since 2017, the rates for translators and interpreters for their work in the courts have expressly included a flat rate for Braille and sign language.

116. Two recent laws have also codified and strengthened assistance for people with hearing or speech impairments in criminal proceedings. They have the right to be assisted free of charge by an interpreter during hearings and prior private consultation with legal counsel if they are deprived of their liberty. In order to make a lawyer available to persons deprived of their liberty from the moment they are first questioned, the police must use the Salduz application, which lists lawyers who speak sign language.

117. In the Flemish Community, most community justice centres are accessible to persons with disabilities. The legal assistants at the centres can call on the services of sign language interpreters.

118. In the Walloon Region, legal assistants can apply to the Walloon Interpreting Service for Deaf People to commission professional service providers accredited by the Federal Public Service for Justice to facilitate communication with deaf persons who use French-speaking Belgian sign language. If the person uses another sign language, two interpreters, one of whom is deaf and uses international sign language, are also available.

119. In Brussels, the French Community Commission approves and subsidizes communication and interpreting support services. They are designed to facilitate communication between hearing and deaf persons through the presence of a sign language interpreter or transliterator.

Liberty and security of the person

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 13 of the list of issues

120. Patients have the right to free and informed consent to treatment. The use of measures involving deprivation of liberty for people with mental disorders is strictly regulated.

121. In cases of commitment to a psychiatric hospital, the law of 5 May 2014 has been extensively amended. Like previous laws, it never authorizes deprivation of liberty on the grounds of disability or mental impairment. The judge may decide to commit the person only if the legal conditions for the commitment have been met, and this measure will not automatically be accompanied by deprivation of liberty. The law states that the objectives of commitment are the protection of society and the reintegration of the person committed, and establishes the course of treatment to be followed to this end. Henceforth, only crimes or offences that have caused physical or mental harm will be grounds for commitment. Furthermore, a joint expert opinion is required to establish the initial diagnosis. It is carried out by and placed under the responsibility of a forensic psychiatrist. The person being assessed has the right to be assisted by a doctor of his or her choice and a lawyer, and to be able to communicate in writing to the legal experts. Lastly, permanent social protection divisions were set up, with sole responsibility for monitoring committed patients.

122. With regard to the implementation of the commitment decision, the divisions must, in principle, decide within three months of that decision either on the admission, by designating the institution, or the granting of an enforcement order for the commitment. The situation of the committed person is to be re-examined at regular intervals determined by law. As a result, commitment is now seen as an evolving process. The social protection division does not give an opinion on the treatment to be prescribed.

123. In addition to commitment, inpatient treatment for mental disorders may be provided at the request of the person concerned or any interested party under the law on the protection of persons with mental illness. The conditions for this protection measure are very strict. Inpatient treatment can be divided into two successive phases: observation and continued treatment. Treatment can also take place in the home if conditions are suitable. The proceedings take place before or under the supervision of the justice of the peace. The judge's obligation was extended to close family members under the law of 20 February 2017. Similarly, the law now requires the close family to be informed of all decisions concerning the person admitted, from observation to aftercare.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 14 of the list of issues

124. In line with its national legal framework, Belgium does not support the draft additional protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine (Oviedo Convention), or at least the version presented to the Council of Europe Committee on Bioethics in May 2018. Belgium considers that this draft protocol runs the risk of legitimizing involuntary treatment, rather than encouraging the restriction of such practices by promoting alternative measures and patient-professional dialogue. Belgium also has a number of concerns about the scope of the draft protocol, which seems too vague to guarantee restrictive use of these practices.

Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 15 of the list of issues

125. Belgium considers that it is not currently possible to completely end the use of restraints, as there are situations where this is the only way to ensure the safe and sound

incident management. On the other hand, the priority of all organizations that house these people is to avoid restraints and limit them to exceptional cases and, when their use is necessary, to supervise the procedure in order to protect the persons concerned against any abuse.

126. The use of restraints is based on procedural safeguards such as the principles of proportionality, subsidiarity and legality.

127. Belgium remains attentive to future developments, including at international level, that could further restrict the use of restraints, or even abolish them.

128. Furthermore, various initiatives have been taken at the level of the federated entities.

129. The Flemish Community is committed, together with the hospitals, to developing a sustainable framework for the minimal use of restrictions on the freedom of minors and measures have already been adopted to that end.

130. In the Walloon Region, a brochure entitled “Restraint and isolation: guidance and good practice” has been drawn up in collaboration with the departments concerned in order to implement the relevant recommendations on isolation. This is a particular issue that is addressed during inspections carried out by the Audit and Control Department of the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families.

131. In Brussels, the Advisory Council of Persons with Disabilities of the French Community Commission set up a working group in 2018 to establish rules of conduct that respect people’s rights with regard to restraint in day-care and residential centres.

132. The German-speaking Community has set up a system for inspecting and monitoring institutions for persons with disabilities. This system, developed in conjunction with service providers, is based on the principles of the Convention and aims to prevent all kinds of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In addition, since 2014, the Service for Independent Living has had a complaints management mechanism.

Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 16 (a) of the list of issues

133. In 2018, the Flemish government published the results of a study on sexual violence against women and girls with disabilities and its emotional and physical consequences and effect on relationships. The study led to policy recommendations aimed at lifting the taboo on their sexuality both inside and outside establishments, developing the expertise of those involved, and overcoming the challenges of low reporting and prosecution rates.

134. The French Community has funded three research and training projects on violence against women with disabilities.

135. In the Walloon Region, as part of the “Decent Treatment” plan, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families has set up a quality of services Internet platform, providing a forum for exchanging and sharing know-how and good practices on service quality issues. This platform enables all actors in the sector, families and associations to benefit from the Committee’s recommendations and observations. In addition, all reception and accommodation services approved by the Agency must set up a users’ Council to represent users.

136. There is also a joint action plan between Wallonia, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the French Community Commission to combat gender-based violence, which includes various measures to address disability issues such as the accessibility of helplines, for example.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 16 (b) of the list of issues

137. At federal level, certain specific guarantees applicable to hearings of minors who are witnesses or victims were extended to vulnerable adults by the law of 5 May 2019, which has made it possible to broaden certain protections reserved for minors.

138. In the Flemish Community, in addition to the complaints that can be addressed to the establishments, victims of abuse or violence can make a complaint, anonymously, directly to the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities. In the event of complaints of abuse and violence, an investigation is undertaken by the Health Care Inspectorate.

139. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families investigates and handles 80 per cent of complaints in institutions. The emphasis is on re-establishing a constructive dialogue between the complainant and the service concerned. Corrective measures may also be proposed and sanctions imposed, if necessary. In terms of prevention, the Agency has set up training and peer learning schemes for quality auditors responsible for assessing the quality of life of people in institutions (including psychiatric hospitals) and training for staff working on “Special Initiatives” projects. In addition, any person may lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman for Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

140. In Brussels, the French Community Commission introduced a comprehensive complaints procedure in 2019 for people with disabilities who are dissatisfied with their care from a service provider. A procedure for gathering the opinions of persons with intellectual disabilities on the help they receive on a daily basis has also been created.

141. The German-speaking Community has set up a system for monitoring service providers in institutions (see question 15).

Protecting the integrity of the person

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 17 of the list of issues

142. The Advisory Committee on Bioethics and the Superior Health Council have repeatedly pointed out that the principle of freedom of consent laid down in the law on patients’ rights also applies to the sterilization of persons with disabilities, and that sterilization is not acceptable when its sole purpose is the convenience of carers or relatives. Sterilization of persons with disabilities must remain an exception. Each individual case has to be assessed and discussed individually.

143. This legislation on patients’ rights also applies to surgery on intersex persons.

144. In addition, general support and information measures aimed specifically at intersex persons and their parents have been developed through various channels by the federal and federated authorities, notably as part of the inter-federal plans of action to combat homophobic and transphobic discrimination and violence. For example, the latest inter-federal plan on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons for the period 2018–2019 included 22 objectives and 115 measures and actions relating to the various policy areas, implementation of which takes into account the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Associations that promote the rights of intersex people and campaign against unnecessary conversion operations also receive financial support from the authorities.

145. In addition, in 2015, the federal State and the Flemish Community carried out research into the care and social situation of persons and parents of children with an intersex condition. As a result, an information and awareness-raising platform, also aimed at care providers, was created, along with information tools and support groups.

146. In the Walloon Region, the intersex issue has not yet been given any real consideration. Walloon regulations deal with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues, without addressing intersexuality.

Living independently and being included in the community

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 18 (a) of the list of issues

147. A number of measures have been taken to promote independent living and inclusion in the community.

148. The Flemish Government Perspective 2020 Plan incorporates a new approach to disability in a number of areas.

149. In terms of independent living, the presence of a person with disabilities in the family is taken into account in the calculation of income as a criterion for eligibility for support measures.

150. In terms of appropriate care, since 1 April 2016, personal funding can be requested from the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities, giving persons with disabilities direct access to the means to organize their own care and support. Persons with disabilities can also receive direct assistance. In addition, a fixed monthly amount of €300 is available for people with low support needs.

151. With regard to waiting lists, the government is endeavouring to meet the growing demand for specific aid, by reinforcing and extending directly accessible aid and the care budget, on the one hand, and introducing priority rules for the most vulnerable groups, on the other.

152. The Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities has also drawn up various financial scenarios in an attempt to eliminate waiting lists, including one in which €1.6 billion would be added to the current €1.75 billion to cope with annual growth in demand.

153. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families is working to make facilities more inclusive and family-friendly by supporting needs with a view to more inclusive solutions. Three types of mobile inclusion support services have been approved and funded. Their role is to provide support, advice and expertise to other professionals and to the family and friends of persons with disabilities.

154. In Brussels, the French Community Commission has adjusted its tools to work towards eliminating waiting lists.

155. In the German-speaking Community, there is a waiting list only for training and work assistance and support, and for stairlifts.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 18 (b) of the list of issues

156. In the Flemish Community, the system of customized personal financing allowances contributes to deinstitutionalization, as it offers more flexibility in spending options and diversity of services. This system is currently being evaluated; its conclusions will help to anchor it and make any necessary adjustments. However, the Flemish Community is aware that unremitting concerted efforts between the different sectors must be made to ensure long-term care and support. The question of the adaptability of the current organization of the sector to the needs of persons with disabilities has also been raised.

157. In the Walloon Region, measures have been taken to transform facilities into smaller living units, in particular by transforming supervised, individual or community housing into services. The aim is to support adults with disabilities (aged 16 and over) in their own homes, both in leading their daily lives and in carrying out their life plans.

158. In Brussels, the French Community Commission is subsidizing a pilot project for inclusive housing that brings together in the same building persons with disabilities and those without, with shared activities, mutual support and the necessary basic supervision. The number of children placed in institutions and deinstitutionalization fall within the remit of the PHARE Service.

159. Unfortunately, the German-speaking Community is finding that an increasing number of persons with disabilities under pensionable age are forced to move into a residential care home in order to receive appropriate support. In 2018, however, a workshop on deinstitutionalization was organized with the aim of drawing on best practice in this area.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 18 (c) of the list of issues

160. In the Flemish Community, personal funding enables persons with disabilities to negotiate their own support system with recognized or unrecognized care providers. In addition, the system of private financial contributions has been abandoned: the Flemish

Agency for Persons with Disabilities covers care and running costs. People can also opt for residential care or support in their family environment. There are two levels to the personal financing system: either a relatively limited demand for support, or a more complex or intensive need for support. For persons with disabilities in immediate need of support, there are fast-track procedures that can lead to the automatic allocation of a budget. At the request of the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities, Inter has provided an overview of the most important conditions and levers that enable people to live and stay at home, including recommendations on how the Agency can further support them, a list of common housing adjustments that should be eligible for compensation in the future, and a proposal on how to provide users with information on the provision and preconditions of support.

161. In the Walloon region, in addition to assistive technology and housing adjustments, the “Bien Vivre Chez Soi” (Living well at home) website provides information on home support and services. Similarly, the public services in charge of housing policy are integrating various measures to increase the accessibility and adaptability of housing in terms of standards, specialized services, and interest-free credit for or reimbursement of home adaptations, for example. Lastly, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families offers and finances training courses to promote self-determination and choice of living environment, aimed at professionals in the sector, family carers and persons with disabilities. In addition, training courses are developed as part of European projects.

162. In Brussels, Common Community Commission is subsidizing a pilot project to set up personal assistance budgets. The aim is to provide persons with disabilities with aid and assistance in their daily activities and with social, educational and resource teaching support. This budget is allocated annually and set according to the needs of the beneficiaries. In addition, the Commission approves and subsidizes five youth welfare services accessible round the clock, seven days a week, through the Iriscare public service organization, and seven supervised housing services. The French Community Commission also approves support services that develop similar housing.

163. The German-speaking Community is trying to set up different types of housing adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, such as accommodation for “training in independent living”. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of housing adapted to specific forms of disability.

164. The creation of additional small, inclusive housing structures and the provision of personal assistance are among the priorities for the coming years.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 18 (d) of the list of issues

165. In the Flemish government, for the period 2014–2019, over €330 billion has been allocated to people for care and support. An annual amount of €1.75 billion has been invested in specific assistance for persons with disabilities. A total of 70,000 people receive support. Today, 19,000 people are still on the waiting list.

166. In the French Community, the position of coordinating consultant was created and financed by a European Social Fund project totalling €3,489,911 for the 2014–2020 period. The position consists in improving the social and professional integration of young people from special educational institutions (special education types 2 and 3) thanks to counsellors attached to the schools.

167. In the Walloon Region, various projects financed by Structural Funds aim to support persons with disabilities in defining their life plans and achieving self-determination. For example, the European Social Fund budget for social inclusion is €31,218,155.55. The aim of the civic involvement programme is to offer persons with disabilities who are unable to enter the world of work the opportunity to carry out a useful and rewarding activity with the necessary support. It ensures that participation is unrestricted, voluntary and free of charge. In 2018, 523 people benefited from the civil involvement programme. Regional funds also finance projects with a social inclusion component.

168. In Brussels, the French Community Commission stepped up its support for vocational training in 2019 thanks to the European Social Fund.

169. In the German-speaking Community, the Service for Independent Living regularly calls on the European Social Fund and national funds to promote independent living, develop existing services and set up projects for persons with disabilities. The Interreg Euregio Meuse-Rhine Mobi project is one example.

Personal mobility

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 19 (a) of the list of issues

170. Persons with disabilities can use parking spaces specifically reserved for them (in Belgium and abroad) thanks to parking permits. In 2018, the “Handi2Park” app was launched to make it possible to check the validity of a permit and thus effectively tackle abuse. In addition to public transport discount cards enabling blind or partially sighted persons (with a permanent disability of at least 90 per cent) to travel free on buses, metros, trams and trains and, in 2018, the Federal Public Service for Mobility developed a set of frequently asked questions with the heading “Mobility for all”. It provides quick answers to questions about assistance, accompaniment, discounts and other areas for the four modes of transport. A contact email address is also available for personal enquiries of persons with disabilities.

171. In addition, in the Flemish Region, the Inter accessibility agency is helping local authorities to make the public spaces more accessible by providing advice, training and information on guidelines and standards for political decision makers, technical services and residents with disabilities. Structural cooperation exists with over 90 communes. A decree on basic accessibility was ratified in 2019 as part of these efforts. It is gradually being implemented and aims to maximize the inclusion of persons with reduced mobility in the regular public transport network through the concept of “made-to-measure” transport. It is expected to be completed in 2022.

172. The Walloon public service approves carriers that use rolling stock adopted for persons with reduced mobility as transport services in the public interest.

173. The Brussels-Capital Region launched an awareness campaign to promote access for service dogs to public places on 5 December 2018 in collaboration with Unia. A charter has been signed to this effect.

174. In 2019, the German-speaking Community introduced the right of access to public places for people accompanied by a service animal.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 19 (b) of the list of issues

175. In the Flemish Community, the Flemish Social Protection agency has been awarding grants for the purchase of mobility equipment since January 2019, as well as reimbursements in certain cases. The Flemish Mobility Centre is accessible via a number of channels. In the Flemish Region, the Department of Mobility and Public Works has been involved in a European Horizon 2020 project (for the development of an inclusive mobility application).

176. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families has set up a number of commissions, including the Autonomy and Long-Term Care Technical Commission. In particular, it is responsible for proposing new products for reimbursement to the decision-making bodies, and for the joint management of regulations.

177. In Brussels, Iriscare (Common Community Commission) has been responsible for mobility aids since 1 January 2019. Residents of the Brussels-Capital Region may be entitled to assistance from their Brussels mutual insurance company. This aid is coordinated with any entitlement to additional assistance from the French Community Commission or the Flemish Community. In addition, shuttle buses are still in service, and there is a plan for metro stations to become progressively more accessible as well as the accessibility plan for roads and public spaces. A new application, parking.brussels, can also be used to view available parking spaces for persons with reduced mobility.

178. In the German-speaking Community, the decree on mobility aids has been adopted: the Service for Independent Living is now a one-stop-shop for mobility aids, grants and home adaptations. These aids and grants now also apply to people over the age of 65 and, although

the procedures may take longer than before, the quality of follow-up and the involvement of persons with disabilities have improved. The new legislation also allows mobility aids to be made available to people on a rental basis. Assessment of the need for mobility aids is now carried out using the information resources of the ICF system.

Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 20 (a) of the list of issues

179. The various levels of government have introduced legislation transposing the European directive on the accessibility of the websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies. An inter-federal working group (Belgium Web Accessibility Office) facilitates the exchange of knowledge and good practice in the public sector.

180. For example, the Flemish government monitors the basic accessibility of its websites. In 2018, a sample showed that 44 per cent of 150 government websites were basically accessible. The government is aware of the work it still has to do.

181. In the Walloon Region, a working group has been set up to implement the obligations of the European directive.

182. In the Brussels-Capital Region, implementation of the relevant ordinance was accompanied by awareness-raising sessions and training modules, a brochure and a one-year consultancy for the actors concerned in the regional public services. In addition, information subject to public disclosure by the administrative authorities is organized under the joint decrees and ordinances of the Brussels-Capital Region, the Common Community Commission and the French Community Commission of 16 May 2019 relating to the public disclosure of information from the administration in the Brussels institutions. Actions are under way to improve the accessibility of websites.

183. The German-speaking Community has also adopted a decree partially transposing the European directive. To this end, a working group has been set up to implement it on all public body websites. A series of seminars were also held for the employees concerned. The authorities are producing a growing number of publications and accessible audiovisual material.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 20 (b) of the list of issues

184. In the Flemish Community, the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities provides for various communication, mobility and day-to-day measures to facilitate access to public information. Each year, a budget of around €3 million is devoted to special educational resources, in particular to helping students with hearing impairments by funding sign language interpreters. This also includes the conversion of teaching materials and assistive technology such as adapted furniture. The accessibility of television programmes is regulated by means of obligations, quotas and subsidies to private television channels. The Flemish media regulator ensures compliance with these regulations. The management agreements of the various stakeholders include provisions for audio description.

185. In addition, the Flemish Knowledge Centre for Digital and Media Literacy of the Flemish government helps people in Flanders and Brussels to use information and communications technology and the media.

186. The terms of reference for a comprehensive, integrated accessibility policy include various processes for communicating and delivering accessible services. The publication “Towards an accessible municipality” (2019) contains inspiring practical examples.

187. Equal opportunities grants have made it possible to develop a Flemish sign language course for deaf persons of foreign origin and for newcomers in particular.

188. In the French Community, social advancement and university training courses provide educational units and training in sign language. In terms of culture, there has been support for training projects and the development of readability software and audio description for films. In addition, the regulations on the accessibility of programmes for persons with sensory

impairments came into force on 1 January 2019. On 13 December 2019, the Supreme Audio-Visual Council of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation published a charter on the quality of accessibility measures and a guide to good practice for audio description professionals (effective from 1 January 2020), which will enhance the quality of these services and allow them to be monitored by the Council. The Council focused on three main areas: accessibility of programmes (commitment of the sector to a timetable for transition to an inclusive audiovisual landscape), media representation and diversification of the sports covered by the French-language broadcasting service Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF).

189. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families has taken various steps to ensure the accessibility of information in sign language in French-speaking Belgium, such as creating a market for interpretation in French sign language, subtitling and translation into Easy Read. In addition, some communes use the Relais-signé service, a free remote interpretation service for telephone calls or short interviews with a deaf person.

190. Common Community Commission subsidizes a social documentation and coordination centre with nearly 20,000 documents and a database of 4,000 addresses. The Brussels government statement provides for the creation of a Brussels Disability Information Centre, bringing together in one place all the information of use to persons with disabilities in Brussels and their families.

191. The German-speaking Community has adopted a decree recognizing German sign language and will facilitate and encourage its use.

Respect for home and the family

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 21 (a) of the list of issues

192. At federal level, legislation on time credit was amended in 2017. Employees can take time credit for specific reasons. The duration of this time credit has been increased from 36 to 51 months by the Act of 5 March 2017 on feasible and manageable work for “care” reasons, including caring for a child with a disability under the age of 21. The legislation on parental leave and adoption leave has also been adapted so that the impact on the family environment and the consequences of the disability on the child’s activities are also taken into account. More children will fall within the scope of the definition of disability with regard to parental leave. In the case of adoption leave, the length of adoption leave to which the parent is entitled has doubled. Finally, the Act of 17 May 2019, which establishes an official status for family carers, provides for a fourth category of leave for people recognized as family carers. This entitles workers thus recognized to fully suspend their employment contract for one month for every person in need of care. It is also possible to reduce working hours by a fifth or by half for a period of two months.

193. In the Flemish Community, childcare establishments can apply for subsidies for individual inclusive childcare and for structural inclusive childcare. Since 2014, there have been inclusive childcare centres, which provide advice and support to over 200 childcare centres every year. This strategy focuses on raising awareness and expanding the types of support available. In 2018, 13 pilot projects were launched in which day-care centres and multifunctional centres examined how best to provide care for children with complex needs.

194. In the Walloon Region, adapted training and socio-vocational integration centres offer a contribution towards trainees’ childcare costs.

195. In Brussels, the Common Community Commission and the French Community Commission subsidize various organizations that offer opportunities for relaxation and rejuvenation to parents and families of children with disabilities.

196. In the German-speaking Community, the 2025 Master Plan provides for families with children with disabilities to be able to make more systematic use of regular out-of-school childcare services. In 2017, the Service for Independent Living, in collaboration with the Regional Centre for the Care of Small Children, launched a pilot project for out-of-school

childcare, which enabled parents to find a place for their children in a day-care centre near their home, regardless of their disability.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 21 (b) of the list of issues

197. Under the Civil Code, all citizens are subject to the same conditions in order to be eligible to adopt, and none of these conditions are linked to the state of health of the person wishing to adopt. However, all adopters must be pronounced qualified and fit to adopt by the family court. Candidates are considered “suitable” if they have the necessary social and psychological qualities, based on an investigation by the welfare authorities. The investigation examines the suitability of the adopter and the interests of the adopted child, and takes into account the personal, family and medical situation of the person concerned, and his or her motivation.

198. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families organizes the “Desire for love” (*Envie d’amour*) event, which offers advice and solutions to enhance people’s autonomy in their emotional and sexual lives and personal relationships. The event includes a booth devoted to parenthood to help break down taboos surrounding the subject. A parenting group has been set up to take stock of all parenting support initiatives in the French-speaking world and to suggest ways of improving the existing range of services.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 21 (c) of the list of issues

199. In the Flemish Community, a 2018 study on sexual violence among women with disabilities in Flanders clearly showed that, in the closed environment in which women with mental disabilities live, sexuality is barely discussed, sexual knowledge and autonomy are limited, and their sexuality is not respected. The researchers identified a need for training and greater expertise for (future) professionals with regard to recognizing signs of sexual violence, receiving and guiding women who are victims of sexual violence, and paying attention to the experience of sexuality and sexual experiences and relationships, particularly in the field of education.

200. In the Walloon Region, a Resource Centre for Sexuality and Disability is available to anyone seeking information on the emotional and sexual lives and relationships of persons with disabilities. As part of the policy on emotional and sexual life and relationships, parenthood is addressed through a booklet available in Easy Read and training courses that focus on the topic of parenthood. Training courses and coaching sessions are also organized for professionals and any other persons with an interest in the topic. The Proximam project offers a space to particularly vulnerable women, including women with disabilities, where they can rebuild a bond with their child, foster a positive relationship and provide mothers with the tools necessary to enable them to return to permanent housing with their child.

201. In Brussels, the French Community Commission also funds the Resource Centre for Sexuality and Disability. The PHARE Service participates in the “Desire for love” event.

202. In the German-speaking Community, the SENS support service of the Service for Independent Living provides advice and support to persons with disabilities and their families, in response to their questions about relationships, emotions and sexuality.

Education

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 22 (a) of the list of issues

203. In the Flemish Community, several policy measures have been implemented to make mainstream education more inclusive: the decree on measures for students with special educational needs (the so-called M decree), a new support model (see below) and the decree on student guidance in primary and secondary education and school guidance centres. The strategy adopted to move towards a more inclusive education gives parents the choice of enrolling their child in mainstream schools, which are required to assess the reasonableness of the adjustments needed to enable students to progress in their studies on the basis of an individually adapted programme. If decisions taken by parents and schools lead to a reduction

in the number of students in special education, a guarantee scheme will come into effect, triggering a transfer of resources from special education to mainstream education. Following the introduction of the decree on 1 September 2015, this strategy had an immediate effect on primary education and a more limited effect on secondary education.

204. In the French Community, the Act of 3 May 2019 provides for the creation of special education classes or facilities within mainstream education buildings. These classes are known as “inclusive classes” and are located within mainstream schools. Furthermore, two decrees have been adopted to make higher education more inclusive. The first decree, which defines the higher educational landscape and the academic organization of studies (the so-called landscape decree), allows students who have difficulties participating in learning activities to lighten their annual programme of studies. The second decree on inclusive higher education aims to improve access to facilities and ensure that the educational offering is adapted to students’ needs, in particular through support services and reasonable accommodation.

205. In the Walloon Region, the Individual Assistance Programme of the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families covers the cost of up to 450 hours per year of tutoring for students enrolled in higher education or adult learning programmes. A protocol between the Agency and the General Administration for Education, updated in 2019, aims to foster collaboration between the two sectors, taking into account their specific natures, in the interests of students and their families.

206. In the German-speaking Community, greater emphasis was placed on individual student support during the last legislature. Since 1 September 2017, compensation for disability has been available and allows for a student’s specific, individual impairments to be compensated by material, intangible, methodical, educational or organizational measures. Many students have already benefited from such compensation. Protection for students’ grades was introduced on 1 September 2018. It exempts students from being assessed in one or more areas of the school curriculum where there are gaps that cannot be or have not yet been filled.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 22 (b) of the list of issues

207. In the Flemish Community, the entry into force of the decree on measures for students with special educational needs not only had an effect on the number of students in special education, but also led to a decrease in the number of students who received support in mainstream schools through integrated education. Support measures have been taken to compensate for this situation: a guarantee that budgets will remain at 2014–2015 levels despite the reduction in the total number of students, and the early entry into force of the guarantee scheme in special education. Since 2017, a new support model has been in place that integrates the measures described above into a single model through integrated education, inclusive education and support based on a guarantee system. In consultation with parents, school guidance centres and the special education schools, the school determines the support required according to the children’s needs. With the launch of the new support model, an additional budget of €15.2 million was made available. In addition, an annual budget of around €3 million has been earmarked for special educational materials. In terms of school infrastructure, building and rebuilding projects must comply with specific accessibility rules. While resources are inadequate in existing buildings, the Agency for School Infrastructure offers support by providing information on the accessibility of school buildings.

208. In the French Community, the decree of 7 December 2017 requires mainstream schools to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided for students with special needs, as long as their situation does not make it absolutely necessary for them to attend a special education school. Reasonable accommodation can be material, organizational or educational. Such accommodation is provided for students with specific needs, confirmed by a diagnosis made by specialists, and must be discussed by all of the parties concerned. To facilitate the access of students with disabilities to social advancement education, the decree of 30 June 2016 on inclusive education for social advancement and the order of 5 July 2017 aim to remove or reduce the various barriers that stand in the way of access to education and education itself. With regard to higher education, the decree on higher education (see reply to the issues raised in para. 22 (a)) provides that the reception and support services of higher

education establishments must draw up an individualized support plan, ensure its implementation and evaluate it (adapting it if necessary) according to the needs of the student.

209. In Brussels, the French Community Commission has strengthened its support services for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in schools. These measures involve specific “school inclusion” actions by approved support services, the reinforcement of inclusion aids in mainstream schools, and an increase in educational support services for higher and university education.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 22 (c) of the list of issues

210. No specific steps have been taken to promote and support the training and employment of teachers with disabilities. Each situation is examined individually, and specific modifications or adjustments to an individual’s work are considered as and when the need arises.

Health

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 23 (a) of the list of issues

211. As a reminder, in Belgium, the compulsory health insurance system allows almost the entire Belgian population to be covered by the compulsory public health insurance system for quality health care.

212. In the Flemish Community, three areas of action have been considered. For home-based care, family care services receive an additional subsidy to support persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities do not have to pay the full cost of an hour of family care, just the user fee. For other establishments, they must pay for the actual cost of their care. In the field of mental health care, better cooperation between the Flemish Agency for Persons with Disabilities and psychiatric hospitals has been established to ensure better care for persons with disabilities. It was also examined whether and how people with a dual diagnosis who have a personal assistance budget can cover the costs of personal care through personal financing (*Persoonsvolgende financiering* (PVF)). Regarding the care of older persons, research by the University of Antwerp has been carried out into how such financing can be used to increase the scope for subsidized recognized care for older persons, with a view to giving more autonomy to persons with disabilities and improving their access to different care sectors.

213. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Code of Social Welfare and Health has been amended to include a third-party payment scheme. The Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families coordinated a working group that carried out a study on access to care for persons with disabilities. In addition, when grants are awarded to medical-social organizations, the Agency’s Medical and Social Infrastructure Department checks that plans comply with accessibility standards.

214. In Brussels, the Common Community Commission subsidizes a mobile intervention unit for persons with intellectual disabilities and behavioural disorders aged 16 and over, or for people likely to develop them. The aim is to alleviate these disorders and improve patients’ psychological state and their living situation in the family or institutional environment.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 23 (b) of the list of issues

215. In the Walloon Region, the Disability Notice Platform has set up a website that outlines best practices for professionals who have to notify an individual of a disability diagnosis. The Interreg Mobi project is developing an e-learning course to develop professionals’ skills in dual diagnosis. Training days are also organized under this project by its various partners.

Habilitation and rehabilitation

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 24 (a) of the list of issues

216. In the Flemish Community, psychosocial rehabilitation centres for adults cater for users who, due to severe mental health care needs, have lost certain skills or have only limited skills and, as a result, have serious difficulties staying in school or finding work, or living or maintaining their autonomy in a family environment. These centres offer outpatient or residential rehabilitation programmes of limited duration. Psychiatric care homes and sheltered housing initiatives offer restorative care and counselling to adults and older people with severe and long-term psychological disorders.

217. In the Walloon Region, multidisciplinary rehabilitation and referral centres are available. Rehabilitation centres offer people with various functional disabilities a multidisciplinary rehabilitation programme, with the aim of achieving the greatest possible autonomy and optimum social and family reintegration. Multidisciplinary referral centres, on the other hand, specialize in certain pathologies and offer their patients lifelong support. After diagnosis, they can then monitor the progress of their patients, who are mostly outpatients, and provide them with the necessary information, training and psychosocial support. To this end, collaboration with other primary and secondary care providers is essential.

218. In Brussels, the Common Community Commission is responsible for approving and subsidizing bicommunal centres and services for persons with disabilities. There are currently 7 accommodation centres and 11 day centres. The objective of these centres is to promote the integration and participation of persons with disabilities. As of 1 January 2019, Iriscare finances 24 bicommunal functional rehabilitation centres.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 24 (b) of the list of issues

219. In the Flemish Region, subsidies for rehabilitation equipment are set out in a rehabilitation agreement. The user's financial contribution to health-care costs is established by decree. In principle, no additional costs can be charged to the care user (unless otherwise specified in the agreement). However, the specific situation of persons with disabilities will be taken into account. Persons with disabilities who receive an increased allowance based on their disability-related income, for example, do not pay a personal contribution or pay a reduced amount.

220. In the Walloon Region, centres dealing with persons with disabilities are organized on the basis of an agreement signed with the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families, which ensures equal access for all, subject to compliance with a number of criteria. Generally speaking, patients do not contribute financially to the cost of treatment, which is covered by the Walloon Region through insurance companies.

221. In the German-speaking Community, the financing of long-term rehabilitation services, for which it is responsible, does not differentiate between persons in terms of funding and access to care.

Work and employment

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 25 (a) of the list of issues

222. At the federal level, indemnity insurance provides a replacement income for workers who are absent from work due to illness for more than one month and who have temporarily or permanently lost more than 66 per cent of their earning capacity owing to their state of health. Since 2018, labour inspectors have been able to use so-called mystery calls to investigate discrimination in the labour market without having to reveal their identity. Such calls are used under the three existing anti-discrimination laws, which also cover disability. A new legal framework was adopted in 2019 to ensure legal certainty for employers' affirmative action for disadvantaged groups, particularly persons with disabilities. The National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance has also launched a large-scale pilot experiment to endorse the "individual placement support" model, which is targeted at people with severe and long-term mental illness and works on the "place then train" principle, with

the active support of job coaches trained in the methodology. The ongoing “Handicapable” advocacy campaign is intended to inform public authorities and persons with disabilities about reasonable accommodation measures for selection, priority hiring and workstation adaptation. With regard to selection, a reform has enabled persons with disabilities to complete the probationary period for government positions on a part-time basis, and sign language certification procedures have been established.

223. Authorities at all levels jointly organize the national Job Shadow Day (DUOday) event every year.

224. The Flemish government has taken various measures to promote the employment of women and men with disabilities. The Flemish support bonus is a wage subsidy for employers who hire or employ persons with disabilities and for self-employed persons with disabilities. The bonus is either 20 or 40 per cent of the basic wage, depending on the duration of entitlement. In certain cases, the bonus can be increased to 60 per cent of the basic wage. On 1 January 2019, the target group for the bonus was extended to include people with signs of disability whose situation may yet change, but who face reintegration difficulties owing to their medical situation. The bonus is 20 per cent for a maximum of two years, but can be extended and raised to 60 per cent. A reform of workplace learning policy in 2018 included a review of the rules on individual vocational training for persons with disabilities. The recruitment of persons with disabilities is guaranteed for at least the duration of the training. The regulations governing special employment assistance measures have been adapted to also give jobseekers and students with disabilities the right to adapt their working environment. A specialized guidance service for jobseekers with medical, mental, psychological, psychiatric or social problems who are temporarily unable to engage in paid employment, either in the general economy or the social economy, has been established pursuant to the decree of 25 April 2014 on work and care pathways. Furthermore, numerous specific measures have been established under the strategic plan for equal opportunities and diversity for 2016–2020 to achieve the 3 per cent target for the employment of persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses within the Flemish administration. As of the end of 2018, 678 people working for the Flemish government (1.8 per cent) were registered as having a disability or chronic illness.

225. In the French Community, an adviser position was created in 2016 to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities within the civil service and foster a structural approach to this issue.

226. In the Walloon Region, a two-pronged approach was being used to increase the employment rate, through the imposition of legal obligations and measures to raise awareness among employers. The Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Employment has introduced support measures for jobseekers with disabilities, and training courses have been set up for support professionals to address the needs of persons with disabilities. The Walloon government has updated the provisions governing the recruitment and careers of persons with disabilities in the Walloon civil service. Every two years, authorities must draw up a report on the employment of workers with disabilities, in collaboration with the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families.

227. In Brussels, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region launched the “Pool H” pilot project in 2014 to provide face-to-face recruitment assistance for public and private sector employers active in the Brussels region who show an interest in employing and retaining persons with disabilities. Given the positive results, this project was structurally incorporated into Actiris, the Brussels Regional Employment Office, in 2017. In mid-2016, Actiris also issued an invitation to tender for a job search support service tailored to persons with disabilities. In 2018, the Training Fund for Temporary Workers conducted a campaign to raise awareness among temporary employment agencies in Brussels about recruiting persons with disabilities. In accordance with an ordinance on disability mainstreaming, a pilot project has been launched to improve information and guidance for persons with disabilities who wish to set up their own business and to raise awareness of existing assistance measures among those involved in supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities. Furthermore, a number of activation and employment integration policies contribute to the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market in the long term. Within the civil service, the policy on persons with disabilities was included in the list of five priority objectives for

diversity in the regional civil service set for the 2016–2020 period. More specifically, all regional public bodies must integrate this objective into their diversity plans, with concrete measures. A regional disability platform was set up in 2018. New rules were formulated in 2018 to achieve the 2 per cent quota for workers with disabilities. The employment rate of persons with disabilities within the French Community Commission has almost reached 5 per cent. To reinforce this, various measures have been taken in terms of recruitment, accommodation and support for persons with disabilities. Training courses and events have also been organized to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in both the public and private sectors.

228. In the German-speaking Community, the Service for Independent Living, in cooperation with businesses, provides a range of specific measures for labour market integration. A study on supported employment, the social economy and activation measures from the perspective of persons with disabilities in the German-speaking Community was published in 2016. The study analyses the current situation and recommends a number of measures to promote the integration or transition of such persons into the job market and ultimately increase the employment rate. During the 2014–2019 period, “Inclusion in the economic region”, a cross-cutting project under the Regional Development Plan, promoted the employment of persons with disabilities. A survey of the employment situation of persons with disabilities in the civil service was carried out in 2016. The results are encouraging and have shown that the German-speaking Community’s authorities are open to persons with disabilities. The Community has abandoned the idea of introducing an employment quota for persons with disabilities and instead prioritizes concrete measures that genuinely promote employment.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 25 (b) of the list of issues

229. At the federal level, new regulations were passed in 2019 to create a new status for unemployed people with severe medical, physical, mental, psychiatric or psychological disabilities. This framework allows such persons to be assisted by mediation services after the first 36 months of unemployment, to benefit from longer and more specific support with finding a job and to continue to receive an income as long as they actively cooperate with the mediation services. In addition, federal public procurement regulations have been amended to allow and encourage the use of adapted work enterprises.

230. In the Flemish Region, former sheltered and social workshops became customized enterprises in 2015, and support for target groups was adapted. A pilot project entitled “Brake-Out” (2018) is designed to empower persons with disabilities and provide them with sufficient learning opportunities and experience to prepare them for the regular job market, club life or other areas that contribute to their future quality of life.

231. In the Walloon Region, several measures are in place to help people find and keep mainstream jobs. They focus on the added value provided by the worker and on highlighting his or her skills. The “Transition Integration” project is designed to support school leavers in their transition to the world of work, with the help of a coordinating consultant at participating special education schools. In 2014, new regulations on adapted training and socio-vocational integration centres came into effect. After determining and validating professional aspirations, a training course potentially leading to a qualification and support for integration into the company is offered. The Jobseeker Assistance Service in Wallonia and the socio-vocational integration project offer deaf and hard-of-hearing persons appropriate support in finding employment, including guidance, jobseeking advice and workplace integration. Collaboration agreements have been signed with the Walloon Office for Vocational Training and Employment to organize training for jobseekers and workers, and with the Institute of Dual Vocational Education and Training in small and medium-sized enterprises to arrange apprenticeship contracts and training for company managers.

232. In the German-speaking Community, the government has amended legislation to allow people accepted for in-company training (to integrate persons with disabilities into the workplace or as part of an initial training course alternating formal instruction with practical experience) to be recruited under an employment contract in the organization where they underwent training, without a prior public call for applications. This adjustment enables a

smooth transition from a successful in-company or alternating training programme to a stable employment contract.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 25 (c) of the list of issues

233. At the federal level, discrimination against persons with disabilities is prohibited pursuant to the Act of 10 May 2007 on combating certain forms of discrimination. Denial of reasonable accommodation is recognized as a form of discrimination. An e-learning module on anti-discrimination law, the criteria for protection under the law and the link with the practical application of such criteria was launched in 2018. Since 2019, the Federal Public Service for Policy and Support has provided organizational and financial assistance for sessions to raise awareness among federal civil servants of visible and invisible disability.

234. With the support of the three Regions, Unia has launched free interactive online training modules on anti-discrimination law, diversity policies and disability.

235. The Action Plan to Combat Employment Discrimination is at the heart of the Flemish government's anti-discrimination policy. The plan was updated in 2016 to help employers put anti-discrimination policy into practice through tools and publications. Furthermore, greater emphasis was placed on specific measures including the "*C'est vite arrivé*" (It happened fast) campaign, education and training, the promotion of self-regulation by sector (through the use of sectoral agreements and a specific action plan in the service voucher sector) and increased checks by the Flemish Labour Inspectorate.

236. The French Community implements objective and skills-based selection procedures, and allows reasonable accommodation to be requested for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, human resources departments regularly offer training and awareness-raising modules on disability and combating discrimination. This includes learning about the concepts of inclusion, disability and the right to reasonable accommodation.

237. In the Walloon Region, the disability awareness and demystification programme has been adapted to make anti-discrimination measures more flexible and to reach employers more effectively. The Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families offers a series of measures in this respect. In terms of accommodation, it provides financing and expert support for workstation adaptation.

238. In Brussels, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region has adopted an ordinance to combat discriminatory practices in recruitment and job retention. It allows situation tests and mystery calls to be carried out to test for discrimination. Disability is one of the discrimination criteria tested. In parallel with this, a call for proposals to combat discrimination and promote diversity in employment has been issued every year since 2016. Lastly, the government has approved a reform of regional diversity instruments.

239. In the German-speaking Community, the new "AktiF and AktiF PLUS" decree to promote employment in the Community entered into force in 2019. Employers (public or private) can receive a subsidy (that can be increased in certain cases) if they employ jobseekers who are disadvantaged in the Community's labour market. This is an inclusive measure that does not take into account any other status or alternative incomes, allowing persons with disabilities to transition from unemployment to employment.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 25 (c) of the list of issues

240. At the federal level, a law was passed on 5 January 2017 concerning feasible and manageable work. It is the culmination of wide-ranging round-table discussions that began in 2015 with a view to modernizing the labour market to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Its aim is to provide a legal framework for a series of measures that will improve work-life balance and thus achieve full equality between women and men.

Adequate standard of living and social protection

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 26 (a) of the list of issues

241. Disability is taken into account in the third federal anti-poverty plan for 2016–2019. It mentions several measures in this area, such as raising minimum social security benefits and social assistance payments, facilitating the transition to paid work and improving access to entitlements.

242. The situation of persons with disabilities has been incorporated into an action plan to combat poverty adopted by the Flemish government. When the personal funding system for persons with disabilities was introduced, particular attention was paid to their living costs (see reply to the issues raised in para. 18).

243. In the Walloon Region, the disability dimension is covered in various parts of the Walloon plan to combat poverty, such as family services, transport and tourism. The Walloon Housing Association has developed guidelines for public-service housing associations on assisting users with disabilities and helping them design adaptable housing. Lastly, various steps have been taken as part of the Walloon Accessibility Plan for 2017–2019 to continue support for the “Adaptable Construction” initiative.

244. In the German-speaking Community, several projects to combat poverty and exclusion and promote the integration of all population groups are aimed specifically at persons with disabilities.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 26 (b) of the list of issues

245. Belgium has an effective social protection system that also provides assistance for persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, persons with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population. An extensive study was carried out to map and evaluate the social situation and welfare policy across the board. This work led to the publication in 2019 of a book entitled *Pauvreté et handicap en Belgique* (Poverty and Disability in Belgium), which sets out conclusions and recommendations for improving the situation in the future.

246. At the federal level, an income support policy based on social assistance and social security systems has been introduced. Since 2014, the various allowances for persons with disabilities have been increased. To preserve the dignity of persons with disabilities, marriage or legal cohabitation no longer results in a substantial reduction in federal benefits for persons with disabilities as of 1 August 2018. By raising the limits of the integration allowance for persons with disabilities, a larger portion of income is exempt, and progress is being made towards abolishing the “*prix de l’amour*” (cost of love) deduction. The “MyBENefits” application launched in 2019 allows people to determine their benefit entitlements easily and request a certificate themselves online.

247. Following the sixth State reform, a number of responsibilities in areas such as family allowances and assistance for older persons with disabilities were transferred from the federal government to the federated entities. Since 1 January 2014, the entities have gradually implemented new systems that support persons with disabilities in particular.

248. In the Flemish Community, a childcare allowance for children with specific support needs is available as part of a benefits package with additional financial support. Monthly amounts vary from €82.37 to €549.12, depending on the extent of the need. The Flemish authorities have been responsible for family allowances since 2019. Other financial subsidies are linked to the need for specific support, such as care benefits: children with greater support needs automatically qualify for a care allowance (see reply to the issues raised in para. 18) as well as the care allowance for people with considerable care needs (€130 per month). Mobility equipment has been included in the Flemish social protection system since January 2019. In the future, the Flemish system will also fund the rehabilitation sector, part of the mental health sector and home care.

249. In the Walloon Region, a supplement to the basic family allowance is available for children who have disabilities or who are ill. In 2018, 20,917 children received an increased family allowance. This practice supports families and allows children to stay at home.

Personal integration assistance is also available. Furthermore, the Walloon Code of Social Welfare and Health is a tool for providing social protection and support services to persons with disabilities.

250. Under the Common Community Commission in Brussels, the allowance for older persons with disabilities is still being managed and paid by Federal Public Service for Social Security on a provisional basis until the end of 2020. From 1 January 2021, Iriscare will assume responsibility for managing the service and paying the allowance. The amount depends on the disability: the more the disability reduces independence, the higher the amount. On 1 January 2020, Famiris became the new public family allowance fund for Brussels and new regulations apply. All families will receive the highest amount to which they are entitled. The system for assessing disability or medical conditions and the supplement amounts for children with disabilities remain unchanged.

251. In the German-speaking Community, the system of increased allowances previously applied at the federal level has been maintained.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 26 (c) of the list of issues

252. At the federal level, an action plan was launched in 2019 to eliminate the backlog of requests for social protection measures addressed to the Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities. The plan comprises the following measures:

- Implementation of the recommendations of an internal audit, which cover improving internal operations, planning new recruitment and clarifying expectations and roles of employees
- Improvements to telephone availability
- Replacement of the computer system by 2023
- Review and adaptation of forms and letters to make them more accessible
- Simplification of the “My handicap” application, which allows persons with disabilities and institutions such as mutual insurance companies and public social welfare centres to carry out various tasks themselves
- Enhanced cooperation with local entities and mutual insurance companies

253. All these measures are designed to improve the service for persons with disabilities, who faced a host of technical problems when new file management software was introduced in 2017. In the meantime, however, a great deal of effort has been made to reduce the backlog.

Participation in political and public life

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 27 (a) of the list of issues

254. At the federal level, provisions governing the voting rights of persons declared legally incapable are based on the principle of autonomy. As long as the person has not been placed under judicial protection in terms of electoral rights, he or she retains the right to vote. Municipalities will refuse to issue invitations to vote only if they have been informed of the judicial protection measure.

255. The Flemish Region offers assistance to local representatives with disabilities. If they have a medical certificate, such representatives can be aided by a personal assistant.

256. In the Brussels-Capital Region, local representatives who are unable to fulfil their mandate alone due to disability can be supported by a trusted person chosen from among the municipality’s electorate.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 27 (b) of the list of issues

257. For federal, regional and European elections, a series of measures have been taken in relation to disability. Voters who, due to disability, are unable to go to the polling booth alone or to vote themselves may be assisted if they so freely choose and if they have authorization

from the presiding officer of the polling station. Elections guidance has been adapted to raise awareness of the importance of properly accommodating persons with disabilities. In terms of accessibility, at least one of every five polling stations must be specially equipped for persons with disabilities. Lastly, practical recommendations have been drawn up in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities.

258. In the Flemish Region, rules have been introduced requiring polling stations to be provided for voters with disabilities and establishing the standards that these stations must meet. Guidance for polling stations emphasizes that accessibility to persons with disabilities must be guaranteed, in the broadest sense of the term. Specific brochures containing guidelines for accessible elections have also been produced. Audio modules were piloted at polling stations during the 2018 and 2019 elections. Voters who are unable to vote themselves for medical reasons can appoint a proxy, and voters with physical disabilities who vote themselves can use specially equipped polling booths, at another polling station if necessary. If they are unable to vote independently, they can be assisted by a person of their choice.

259. For the 2018 local elections in the Walloon Region, an action plan was drawn up with representative associations and the authorities to promote the participation of all in the democratic process. The Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition organized a panel of political party representatives on the theme “Voting for accessibility” to take stock of the various pledges made by these parties. They had also been invited to submit video clips outlining the key points of their pledges in the run-up to the event.

260. In the Brussels-Capital Region, a range of measures were taken concerning accessibility for persons with disabilities during the municipal elections of 14 October 2018. First, a circular outlining accessibility recommendations and practices was sent to local authorities. Brochures were also distributed on the subject, and a specific page dedicated to accessibility was created on the elections website. On election day, 458 of the 726 polling stations open in the Brussels-Capital Region were accessible to persons with reduced mobility. Lastly, a survey conducted with the Wallonia-Brussels Accessibility Coalition was published after the elections to evaluate their accessibility.

261. In the German-speaking Community, a government decree set minimum accessibility standards for voter assistance during the 2018 municipal elections. Brochures and information sessions provide information to people with and without disabilities in easily understandable language, and offer encouragement and support to persons with disabilities in exercising their right to vote.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 27 (c) of the list of issues

262. At the federal level, an inclusive selection, training and talent management policy is being developed. It is open to all individual situations, giving women access to positions of responsibility and persons with disabilities to careers at the federal level, with the possibility of requesting reasonable accommodation in selection processes and workstation adaptation from employers. However, legal rules on privacy and particularly disability prevent specific monitoring.

Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 28 (a) of the list of issues

263. See also the reply to the issues raised in paragraph 9 for accessibility of the built environment.

264. Belgium took part in the European Disability Card project. The card is designed to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and to facilitate their participation in cultural life, leisure and sports through access to certain benefits.

265. In the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, an accessibility label for events also aims to better structure the integration of accessibility into these sectors. One of the criteria for recognition of organizations managing cultural heritage collections (museums, cultural archives and heritage libraries) is to ensure accessibility for specific target groups.

266. The French Community provides structural support for the activities of disability associations. Many cultural operators have arrangements in place to promote access for persons with disabilities.

267. In the Walloon Region, the non-profit organization Access-i has set up an information portal on the accessibility of cultural, sporting and leisure events and infrastructure. In the field of tourism, the National Tourism Office has set up an action plan to promote tourism for all by applying the concept of accessibility for persons with reduced mobility to tourism, and to strengthen collaboration with the relevant actors in the tourism and social sectors, as well as those specialized in accessibility issues. The Office also supports Access-i certification for tourism operators through higher subsidy rates for work to improve the accessibility of tourist accommodation. In terms of sports, the swimming pool plan for 2014–2020 is designed to support renovation or construction work based on four criteria, including accessibility for all types of disability. As for leisure activities, the “Natur’accessible” project is part of a drive to make nature accessible to all. Since 2017, any organizer of a public event who submits a grant application is invited to sign up as a partner to the accessibility charter, whereby they undertake to implement all possible measures to ensure that everyone can take part in an event.

268. In Brussels, accessibility and equal opportunities are among the criteria for a yearly invitation to tender issued by the Brussels-Capital Region for sports associations targeting young people. The disability mainstreaming plan for 2018–2019 also included two accessibility-related projects: one for municipal sports facilities and the other for parks and green spaces. Regarding tourism, visit.brussels has produced a brochure entitled “be accessible be.brussels”, which features some 50 museums and tourist attractions accessible to persons with reduced mobility, and has launched the “Handy Events Guide”, a practical guide to organizing outdoor events accessible to persons with reduced mobility. Every year since 2015, the Region has issued a specific call for projects to enable associations working in the field of disability to improve accessibility and make festivals more accessible. The French Community Commission issues a yearly call for projects to include persons with disabilities in sporting activities. The Commission accredits services that make meeting spaces more accessible and leisure activities more inclusive. It also provides financial support to numerous associations working to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in areas such as lifelong learning, the arts and the audiovisual sector.

269. In the German-speaking Community, the Regional Development Plan includes an extensive accessibility analysis. The Service for Independent Living also offers training modules for people wishing to accompany persons with disabilities so that they can take part in a range of leisure activities. Lastly, a number of new cultural facilities have opened their doors in recent years, taking into account accessibility and the participation of persons with disabilities.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 28 (b) of the list of issues

270. The Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled has been adopted and implemented within the European Union by two legislative instruments: a regulation and a directive. The directive was incorporated into Belgian law in 2018. National law has thus been aligned with the Treaty since 22 December 2018.

IV. Specific obligations

Statistics and data collection

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 29 of the list of issues

271. At the federal level, the Federal Public Service for the Economy, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the Self-Employed and Energy conducts ongoing analysis of the integration of disability into the generation of statistics for all fields of study so that such statistics may be disaggregated by disability whenever possible. That disaggregation must be

assessed in terms of relevance, methodological feasibility and budgetary implications while ensuring that it does not contradict Eurostat guidelines. Since 2017, the Statbel, the Belgian statistical office, has published an annual press release on the available statistical data relating to disability. Within the Federal Public Service for Social Security, the database containing statistical data from the Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities has been adapted so as to disaggregate administrative, medical and financial data by sex. Additionally, the data contained in all tables in the new version of the Annual Statistical Overview of the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons published in 2018 were disaggregated by sex. Communication with external partners is also systematically disaggregated by sex.

272. The Flemish government has been working on a disability rights monitoring mechanism since 2017 to generate indicators for monitoring disability policy in Flanders. In cooperation with civil society and researchers, a set of 23 indicators, based on the quality of life concept advanced by Robert Schalock, has been developed. The Diversity Unit monitors the presence of staff with disabilities in the Flemish government and publishes those data in its annual reports; the data are gathered using voluntary registrations by staff members and compulsory registrations by persons requesting reasonable adjustments in the workplace. A report entitled “Reflection of Inclusion in Flanders”, published by GRIP, provides an important point of reference and contains a number of key indicators in areas such as education, work, housing, income, sport and culture, as well as setting out figures that illustrate the participation gap between persons with and without disabilities.

273. In the French Community, information on persons with disabilities is collected on an ad hoc basis by various bodies, including the Chamber of Inclusive Higher Education and the Social Advancement Education Inspectorate.

274. In the Walloon Region, the Walloon Agency for Health, Social Protection, Disability and Families is currently undertaking four projects to improve statistics on adults with disabilities in a highly dependent state by, respectively, gaining access to the individual data collected by the Federal Public Service for Social Security as part of the disability certification process, improving knowledge of each type of disability, improving knowledge of needs in terms of assistance services and improving knowledge of levels of loss of autonomy.

275. Several actors in the Brussels Region and the Common Community Commission, including the Brussels Observatory of Health and Social Issues and perspective.brussels, collect, analyse and disseminate data. There are plans to set up a single centre for information on disability for all actors, to be known as handicap.brussels, to systematize the collection, analysis and dissemination of data on the rights of persons with disabilities. In the Brussels Region, the introduction of the equal opportunities test means that the impact of all measures must now be assessed against five criteria: gender; disability; ethnic and cultural origin; sexual orientation and gender identity and expression; and social origin and status.

276. In the German-speaking Community, the only data pertaining to disability collected by the statistics service relate to three questions in the Labour Force Survey that address work-related disability and health problems and any need for accommodation. Statistics and data are gathered as part of the in-depth studies on disability-related themes conducted by the Service for Independent Living in order to improve public policy design.

International cooperation

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 30 of the list of issues

277. All Belgian development cooperation, at both the federal and federated entity levels, aligns fully with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the call to “leave no one behind”, which focuses on the most vulnerable groups in society.

278. All development cooperation activities at the federal level must adopt a human rights-based approach and be based on humanitarian aid needs. This intersectional approach enables Belgium to take all forms of vulnerability into account, including the specific needs

linked to some forms of vulnerability. The Belgian humanitarian strategy also specifies that “humanitarian funding must be based on the needs and degree of vulnerability of the affected populations.” Since disability is a form of vulnerability, persons with disabilities are considered in funding for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Belgium has also endorsed the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. In addition to this cross-cutting integration, Belgium supports initiatives aimed specifically at supporting persons with disabilities. In 2017, for example, Belgium funded an innovative project to test the feasibility of 3D printing and remote rehabilitation technologies for persons requiring orthotics in Mali, the Niger and Togo. In 2018 Belgium funded a project aimed at improving care for persons with functional limitations in care facilities and communities in North Kivu.

279. In the Flemish Community and Flemish Region, the Framework Decree on Development Cooperation includes the principle of inclusiveness to ensure that the projects supported in developing countries reach disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Depending on a project’s context, those groups may comprise women, persons with disabilities or adolescents, for example. As part of the Flemish Horizontal Equal Opportunities Policy Plan, Flemish development cooperation focuses particularly on persons with disabilities.

280. In Brussels, the Brussels-Capital Region and the French Community Commission have launched various development cooperation projects that contribute to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in practice.

281. In the German-speaking Community, priority is given to supporting projects in the fields of training, employment and health, as well as projects protecting at-risk population groups, including persons with disabilities.

National implementation and monitoring

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 31 (a) of the list of issues

282. In Belgium, the Federal Public Service for Social Security is the designated inter-federal coordination mechanism. In that capacity, it coordinates the exchange of information on the implementation of the Convention and ensures cooperation between the various designated focal points at each level of governance, as well as with the independent mechanism and civil society. As part of that work it supports the focal points, particularly through the exchange of information and best practices. Coordination meetings for all focal points are held two or three times a year, and an online exchange platform has been set up. Lastly, the Federal Public Service for Social Security prepares biannual newsletters to inform the focal points of action taken, current cases at the national and international levels and news concerning disability or the provisions of the Convention.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 31 (b) of the list of issues

283. The Centre for Equal Opportunities and Action against Racism, known as Unia, was created by means of a cooperation agreement in 2014. In accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles), Unia carries out its tasks as defined in the cooperation agreement with full independence. In 2018 Unia was recognized as a national human rights institution with B status by the United Nations-backed Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. The financial resources granted to Unia are governed by article 16 of the cooperation agreement, which requires all parties to the agreement to provide funding. Unia takes independent decisions on its internal structure, budget management and the recruitment and assignment of its staff.

Reply to the issues raised in paragraph 31 (c) of the list of issues

284. Nationally, organizations representing persons with disabilities are actively involved in implementing the Convention at various levels. Below are some examples.

285. At the federal level, the National Higher Council for Persons with Disabilities participated in developing the disability action plan launched in 2015. Additionally, frequent

contact between the coordination mechanism for the Convention, the National Higher Council and the Belgian Disability Forum ensures ongoing dialogue on the implementation of the Convention. Each year, associations, including the National Higher Council and the Belgian Disability Forum, are consulted when drawing up the position to be taken by the Belgian Government at the Conference of States Parties to the Convention. The federal authority also funds the participation of civil society representatives at the Conference.

286. In 2018 the Flemish government organized a round table that brought together all the relevant public and civil society actors to assess the implementation of the Convention in all its jurisdictions.

287. The Advisory Council of Persons with Disabilities of the French Community Commission meets once a month at the PHARE Service to discuss all relevant issues, including the implementation of the Convention.

288. In the German Community, exchanges on various themes relating to the Convention are organized between representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities and the focal point for the German-speaking Community, the Service for Independent Living.
