



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2793rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 9 May 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Georgia (continued) (CRC/C/GEO/5-6; CRC/C/GEO/QPR/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Georgia joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to reply to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Georgia** said that, in 2022, a psychiatric rehabilitation centre, based on the *barnahus* model, had been established in Tbilisi to protect child victims of sexual violence from revictimization and rehabilitate them in a child-friendly environment. Approximately 200 children had benefited from the centre's services, and the State Care Agency planned to open a second centre in western Georgia to increase accessibility. Social workers conducted assessments of the needs and level of risk of child victims of violence who were placed in shelters or alternative care and developed individual plans accordingly. The Agency offered psychological services to those children.
4. The Government had taken a number of steps to boost the employment of social workers and psychologists, including the adoption of a law on social work. A set of professional standards for social workers had been approved in 2021 and similar standards for psychologists had been introduced in 2024. A series of guidelines for those professionals had been adopted within the State care system. The salaries of social workers and psychologists increased on a yearly basis. Since 2020, the working conditions of and technical support provided to social workers employed by the State Care Agency had been improved and their salaries had doubled.
5. The 111 children's helpline was available 24 hours a day and provided counselling and response services for children who had been victims of abuse. The helpline had received 4,600 calls in 2023. Children in State care could make complaints to their social workers, the 111 helpline or the Public Defender's Office. Small family-type residences for children were required by regulation to have boxes where children could express their views anonymously in writing.
6. The State Care Agency took active measures to prevent all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment. Upon receiving a report about a case, social workers visited the family of the child in question, evaluated the risk to the child and planned an appropriate response. The relevant professionals received training in violence prevention, and a positive parenting programme was being piloted within the State care system with the aim of preventing violence, helping parents to develop parenting skills and changing patterns of violent behaviour. The Agency planned to expand the implementation of the programme, in cooperation with other State agencies and local authorities.
7. The adoption process was coordinated by a department of the State Care Agency. The number of adopted children had doubled over the period 2021–2023. Social workers ensured that all necessary procedures were followed in a timely and efficient manner, and psychologists participated in the adoption process where needed. Children whose parents were imprisoned were placed with other family members where possible or, failing that, in foster or family-type care.
8. The circumstances in which children could be separated from their parents were set out in article 26 of the Code on the Rights of the Child. The State did not separate children from their families on the grounds that they lived in poverty. In cases where families faced serious financial difficulty, social workers recommended day-care centres, support programmes or services provided by local authorities or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Separation was a last resort and was used mainly in cases of domestic violence that threatened the health, development or life of the child. Where social workers separated children from their family, the court had 24 hours in which to approve or reject separation. Such decisions were based on objective criteria that took the child's views and best interests into account. All relevant professionals, including social workers, psychologists and lawyers, were involved in the decision-making process. After a certain period of separation, the court

reviewed the case to decide whether to reunite the child with his or her family or to extend separation for another fixed period.

9. Children taken into care were placed in family environments wherever possible. All prospective foster parents underwent pre-registration training, during which they were given information on children's rights, development, caring for children with disabilities and issues related to child abuse. The child's individual development plan was reviewed every six months. Children in foster care received priority access to all services administered by the State Care Agency, including psychosocial services for children with mental health issues. Social workers provided ongoing support to foster parents to enhance their parenting skills and address any challenging behaviour and emotional development needs on the part of the child.

10. The State Care Agency was working with children's organizations to enhance and expand the coverage of services, in order to eliminate the exploitation of children in street situations and prevent them from participating in antisocial activities. Seven mobile groups, five day care centres and four shelters were currently functioning in the country. The children were returned to their families wherever possible, provided that it was in their best interests, or placed in an alternative form of care akin to a family environment. In 2023, 15 children had been transferred from homeless shelters to family-type residences or placed into foster care. That same year, 120 caregivers at family-type residences and shelters for children in street situations had been trained in dealing with difficult behaviour, and further courses were planned for 2024. The Agency was evaluating the services currently provided to street children and was developing measures to better address their needs, with support from the European Union and local NGOs.

11. **A representative of Georgia** said that the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs had adopted a biopsychosocial approach to assessing disability status, as part of a major reform to align itself with the principles and requirements of the European Union and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In support of the reform, the Ministry had adopted an action plan for the period 2023–2025. The reform was being carried out with the engagement of persons with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. The paradigm shift was a lengthy process that involved many national and international partners.

12. An electronic register of disability status had been created to improve access to services, and its use was mandatory for agencies responsible for disability assessment. A unified platform was being developed for social protection, employment, health-care and other services, with support from the World Bank Human Capital Project. The platform would be operational by the end of 2026. Furthermore, the Ministry was designing a website to provide information on the programmes and benefits available to persons with disabilities and to raise awareness of disability issues. Family support services to prevent child abandonment and institutionalization were provided in 40 out of the country's 64 municipalities under the State Programme on Social Rehabilitation and Childcare. Funding for the Programme increased on a yearly basis.

13. In 2023, the Government had closed the last remaining boarding school for children with disabilities and alternative care services had been established, including a long-term paediatric service where children received care in family-type settings with on-site psychosocial support. Also in 2023, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs had adopted a strategy to prevent institutionalization of children by creating a gatekeeping mechanism and raising awareness among health-care providers, medical practitioners and other stakeholders of the rights of persons with disabilities. Front-line public services staff received training courses on attending to persons with disabilities, including sign language courses.

14. Children with disabilities were eligible for monthly cash benefits, the amount of which was adjusted yearly according to the indexation principle. Around 15,000 children were in receipt of the disability benefit, which enjoyed a sizeable State budget allocation. In 2015, a child benefit programme had been introduced with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Under the programme, children up to the age of 16 living in socially vulnerable families received a monthly cash benefit. In 2023, the amount of the

benefit had increased from 150 to 200 lari per month and there were 240,000 recipients. The Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs held outreach meetings to raise awareness of the benefits among ethnic communities around the country. Various other benefit programmes existed, including a maternity allowance, benefits for children with specific conditions, such as autism, and cash assistance for internally displaced persons. The Government was building housing in several regions to ensure decent living conditions for the internally displaced population.

15. Georgia was a party to a wide range of international instruments on the abolition of child labour, and the Government was seeking to harmonize national legislation with European Union labour and employment standards. Under the Georgian Labour Code and the law on occupational safety, children were barred from engaging in work that put them at risk of physical or psychological harm, sexual exploitation or harassment. The Labour Inspection Office conducted unannounced visits to identify potential cases of forced labour or exploitation, carried out awareness-raising and information campaigns for employers and employees, and had the power to suspend work, issue administrative penalties as provided for by law and refer cases to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In 2023, the Office had found 23 cases of child labour rights violations at 11 workplaces and had issued fines totalling 64,000 lari.

16. **A representative of Georgia** said that, by decree No. 54 of January 2020, the Government had established the Climate Change Council to ensure effective implementation of the country's climate change policy. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development were jointly responsible for coordinating action to combat climate change and promote sustainable energy. Municipalities played an important role in achieving the country's nationally determined contributions and in the development of sustainable energy and climate action plans. They would join the European Union's Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative by the end of 2024. Georgia had ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017, and the Government aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 35 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030, in line with its nationally determined contribution under the 2030 Climate Change Strategy.

17. Georgia was committed to implementing climate adaptation measures in various sectors of the economy. Based on experience of extreme weather events over the previous 10 years, the vulnerable groups requiring urgent adaptation measures were children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities or chronic diseases and persons displaced or at risk of displacement by climate-change-induced disasters. Under the National Adaptation Plan, the Government had undertaken to identify the needs of children and women and to set priorities within the climate change adaptation measures.

18. As part of the country's updated nationally determined contribution, all national stakeholders were invited to cooperate on climate change education and awareness-raising for children and young people and to design information programmes for persons with disabilities. In its fifth national communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Georgia had expressed its commitment to identifying the areas of the country whose populations were most vulnerable to displacement due to climate change.

19. The objectives of the Mental Health Strategy 2022–2030, which had been formulated with support from the French Development Agency, included ensuring mental health care and support for children and the well-being of their families. Mental health had been further prioritized in the National Strategy on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2023–2030 and related action plan.

20. Improving the health and well-being of young people was among the strategic priorities of the Youth Policy Concept 2020–2030, which envisaged actions relating to stigma, the development of coping skills, positive parenting practices and the provision of accessible mental health services tailored to young people's needs. The child component of the State mental health programme provided for the diagnosis of minors who presented with changes in their mental state and behaviour or a deterioration in their social functioning.

21. The issue of sexually transmitted diseases was covered in a number of national strategies, guidelines and protocols. The State maternal and child health programme included

hepatitis B and C screening for mothers and newborns, immunoglobulin treatment for babies born to mothers positive for hepatitis B, and syphilis testing and treatment for mothers and newborns. The State HIV/AIDS programme fully covered testing for mothers and newborns, follow-up visits, medication, voluntary counselling, outpatient services, and prevention activities among high-risk groups. The hepatitis B vaccine was free of charge under the State immunization programme. In 2024, Georgia intended to be officially recognized as having eliminated mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B, HIV and syphilis.

22. **A representative of Georgia** said that, between 2017 and 2020, new water supply and wastewater infrastructure had been constructed and existing infrastructure had been rehabilitated, thus increasing the number of people with access to water and sanitation services by 11 per cent and the number with improved services by 500,000. A total of 320 million lari had been invested in water supply and drainage projects.

23. In keeping with the Government's commitment to the effective implementation of international humanitarian law, the Interagency Commission on International Humanitarian Law had been set up in 2011 to coordinate the work of various government agencies. The Ministry of Justice, in close cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, organized an annual national competition on international humanitarian law for students. Up to 310 students, including cadets at Ministry of Defence institutions, had participated in each competition. In addition, ahead of the competition, lectures were given on various relevant topics, with special emphasis on the prohibition of recruitment of children for armed conflict. Georgia had joined the pledge to protect the rights of children affected by armed conflicts at the thirty-third International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The Commission was currently preparing a new two-year action plan.

24. Participation in armed conflict or military operations as a mercenary was a criminal offence, as were the recruitment, training and financing of mercenaries. Aggravated forms, which carried the penalty of 9 to 13 years' imprisonment, included when the offence was committed by an official or against a minor. The Criminal Code provided for extraterritorial jurisdiction. From the age of 18 years, persons became subject to conscription and could be recruited for reserve duty. Since early 2020, cadets were no longer being trained with real firearms and live ammunition but, rather, using simulators. Violations of cadet rights could be reported internally to the Board of Trustees of the Lyceum, which was composed of representatives of various entities, including the Ministry of Education and Science, or to the Ministry of Defence or the courts.

25. Regarding the question about how the labour inspectorate coordinated with law enforcement agencies, it should be noted that labour inspections included checking workers' identification documents and contracts. Where any documents were missing, the case was immediately referred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The memorandum of understanding with the Central Criminal Police Department had been amended to enable labour inspectors and mobile police groups to conduct joint operations with the aim of combating trafficking in persons, forced labour and labour exploitation. There were plans to further strengthen protection mechanisms for children living and working in the streets. Moreover, coordination mechanisms had been created in nearly half of municipalities to enhance the management of cases of children's rights violations; 137 cases had been handled so far. Coordination mechanisms of that type would become mandatory in all municipalities as of 2025. While the labour inspectorate was not a part of the referral procedures, the Ministry of Labour was. The intention was to update the referral procedures to keep pace with the changes that had arisen in the legal and institutional landscape.

26. Legal aid involved lawyers as well as social workers. Free legal services had become available to all minors, irrespective of financial status, following the expansion of the Legal Aid Service in 2020, leading to a 27 per cent rise in applications. As of April 2024, the Service had 18 offices and 42 consultation centres throughout the country, in addition to the almost 100 consultation meetings held in the field annually. The Service also protected the rights of asylum-seekers of all ages and planned to establish a register of interpreters, who would be trained in techniques for communicating with children. Furthermore, the Service had created a child-friendly website and, in 2022, had launched a mobile application that safeguarded users' anonymity and privacy and did not require them to register or obtain any particular authorization. Since 2017, the Service had been meeting with children and teachers in schools

as part of a rights education project. The national human rights action plan contained measures in relation to the Service, including the creation of child-friendly spaces in its offices and the provision of in-service training for lawyers and psychologists and counselling for street children.

27. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance had visited Georgia in May 2022 and, in its report of March 2023, had noted that incidents of racism against persons from Asia and Africa were isolated events and did not usually involve physical violence. The anti-discrimination law had been amended in 2019 to add sexual orientation and gender identity as prohibited grounds for discrimination.

28. **A representative of Georgia** said that all asylum-seekers were subject to a detailed procedure that included several interviews designed to establish the person's background. All parts of the procedure were conducted in compliance with international standards, including guidelines issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In fact, asylum officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had received from training and capacity-building from UNHCR. Although no cases of alleged involvement of child asylum-seekers in armed conflict had been identified thus far, should such a case arise, the child would receive all necessary services, including health care and psychological assistance.

29. **A representative of Georgia** said that the bill on transparency of foreign influence and the proposed constitutional amendment to protect family values took into account children's rights. Georgia had among the highest ratios of NGOs per capita, with 25,000 active NGOs, 90 per cent of which received their funding from foreign sources and donors. The sole legal requirement for NGOs was to complete a declaration whose overarching purpose was public information. Unfortunately, some politicians had established NGOs to obtain donor funding, which they had then channelled towards their own political agendas. The adoption of the directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing harmonized requirements in the internal market on transparency of interest representation carried out on behalf of third countries and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 was evidence that transparency was an ongoing challenge in modern democracies. As a candidate country, Georgia was steadfast in its commitment to European principles and values.

30. In keeping with the preamble of the Convention, which recognized the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people, the Government had to listen to its constituents, the vast majority of whom demanded that children were protected from LGBTQ propaganda. The proposed constitutional amendment merely aimed to shield children from harmful influence and did not undermine LGBTQ rights, which were strongly protected under anti-discrimination laws and other national and international mechanisms.

31. **A representative of Georgia** said that the Convention had direct legal effect in Georgia and ranked above all domestic laws in the national legal order. The Supreme Court had based its judgments in 180 civil, administrative and criminal cases on the Convention. When adjudicating a case, the principle of the best interests of the child was the primary consideration, in keeping with the Convention and the Committee's general comment No. 14 (2013). Children's right to participate in a trial was guaranteed. There was no minimum age for a child to testify in court, even if that entailed adjusting procedures. For instance, ordinarily adversarial proceedings could be made more inquisitorial, and child witnesses had on several occasions testified by means of a drawing. Judges were responsible for ensuring that children were not revictimized through their participation in court proceedings.

32. The Supreme Court's Human Rights Centre advised judges on how to implement the Convention, and the Court of Appeal, in cooperation with the German Agency for International Cooperation, had created a special website for children to provide them with information on the Convention and, more generally, on how to navigate the legal system. A model for a child-friendly space, elaborated with support from UNICEF in 2017/18, had since been set up in six courts. By law, children were exempt from all court costs, and filing a complaint through the electronic system was also free of charge. In that regard, the High Council of Justice had created a complaint form specially tailored for children that was only one page long, compared to 12 for the ordinary complaint form.

33. Judges received training in the application of international standards, such as terminology guidelines for the protection of children from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (Luxembourg Guidelines), the Guidelines on Justice in Matters involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development interview protocol. The sentences imposed in 60 criminal cases had included mandatory training of convicted persons designed to change their violent behaviour towards children.

34. **A representative of Georgia** said that, under the new Juvenile Justice Code, imprisonment was a measure of absolute last resort. Moreover, as a result of systemic changes in the juvenile justice system, there were currently only 49 convicted juveniles in prison, compared to some 200 in 2012.

35. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said, with reference to paragraph 258 of the combined periodic report (CRC/C/GEO/5-6), that more details would be appreciated on the criminalization of the purchase or sale of children, given the recommendation made in the Committee's guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography that the purchase or sale of children should be established as a separate criminal offence to that of trafficking in persons. She asked how a conflict of interest was avoided when a child who was in the care of the Social Services Agency was represented by the Agency in administrative or criminal proceedings. Details of the measures taken to increase the value attached to social work would be appreciated. It would be helpful to know whether the State party had abolished the requirement of dual criminal liability, since it could lead to impunity, and what measures had been introduced to prevent the de facto replacement of surrogacy with the sale of children.

36. **Ms. Zara** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what measures were in place to help vulnerable children and parents to access education, including early years education. She wondered what steps had been taken to launch a school nutrition programme. Given the differences in levels of funding of public and private schools, she would appreciate receiving more details of how policy for teachers ensured access to quality education for all.

37. **Ms. Correa** (Country Task Force) said that she would like to know whether there was a register of children whose parents who were deprived of their liberty. Alternative information provided to the Committee indicated that a number of children's shelters were run by NGOs, particularly faith-based organizations. She asked how those shelters were supervised and inspected.

38. **Ms. Beloff** said that she wished to know what measures were in place to ensure that children who committed a crime would not be transferred to a prison when they reached the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Were diversion programmes available and had restorative justice initiatives been taken?

39. **Mr. Chophel** (Country Task Force) said that he would appreciate clarification of the definition of rape in the State party, and the situation concerning abortion and abortion services. He would welcome the delegation's comments as to whether Georgian society was ready for the introduction in schools of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education.

40. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to receive more information on the steps taken to ensure the birth registration of children born to refugees, internally displaced persons and members of minority groups. Given reports of child marriage and forced marriage in the State party, she would appreciate details of the efforts made to bring an end to those practices. Statistics on the prevalence of HIV in the State party would be welcome, as would information on the steps taken to encourage HIV testing, and on the measures taken to prevent tuberculosis and care for children affected by tuberculosis.

The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

41. **A representative of Georgia** said that her Government had joined the School Meals Coalition international initiative in 2023 and a study of schools' needs was under way. The Minister of Education and Science had issued an order in November 2023 that set out the minimum requirements for school catering services, including on ingredients and hygiene.

Daily oversight of school meals would be provided by school monitoring groups comprised of representatives of students, staff and public health and municipal authorities.

42. A large portion of the increased budget for education for 2024 had been allocated to an increase in teachers' salaries, which was scheduled to take effect in July 2024. In the early years education sector, a new salary policy had been developed with the involvement of international partners and the Ministry of Finance; six pilot municipalities would be selected to implement the policy. Health and sex education was a mandatory component of the general education curriculum and was integrated in teaching on different subjects for different school grades. Professional development for teachers included discussion of early marriage and gender equality, and the importance of comprehensive sex education. An innovative programme had been introduced at the elementary level that covered gender stereotypes, feelings and emotions, healthy lifestyles and reproductive health, among other issues.

43. The country possessed more than 2,000 public schools and 210 private schools. Although there were approximately 2,000 kindergartens, more were needed; rural and mountainous areas were particularly affected by the shortage of preschool institutions. Work was under way to develop alternative preschool models for those areas, and a study was being carried out to identify the barriers to access to preschool education and develop recommendations in that regard. In January 2023, a new standard for general education institutions had been introduced that covered student support measures and the protection of students' rights. Also in 2023, new regulations had been introduced for early and preschool education settings. With support from international partners, a guide on preschool educational standards and the authorization of such facilities had been prepared. From 2025, responsibility for assessing and authorizing public and private preschool settings would be taken on by the National Centre for Educational Quality Enhancement.

44. Her Government was committed to creating an inclusive and accessible education system for all. There were approximately 13,000 students with special educational needs enrolled in general educational schools. They received support from special teachers, psychologists and specialists in occupational therapy and other areas. Children were assessed by a multidisciplinary team, comprised of 47 specialists, that issued a specialized curriculum for each child. Schools received targeted funding to better support inclusive education, and methodological resources had been made available. A professional development examination for special teachers had been introduced in 2021.

45. In 2020, the Ministry of Education and Science had introduced a bilingual education model – already in place in a number of schools and kindergartens – in regions with significant ethnic minority populations. Kindergarten associations, preschool specialists and educational resource centres in the targeted municipalities were involved in skills development for teachers. The Law on General Education regulated the teaching of minority languages.

46. Public schools had been provided with high-speed Internet connections and vocational educational institutions had been equipped with computers. Students could develop their digital skills in computer laboratories and libraries, and first-grade students in public schools were provided with personal computers. Students and teachers at public and private schools were able to access discounted mobile and Internet packages. A unified information system provided access to data on schools, including thematic mapping of schools and information on government decisions.

47. The Ministry of Education and Science was also working to diversify preschool settings and reduce the number of children on waiting lists. The difference in access to education in rural and urban areas reflected differences in infrastructure and resources. Resources had been allocated to boost the qualifications of teachers, and training had been provided in how to use an online portal that hosted electronic resources.

48. School dropout rates remained an issue. The Law on General Education prohibited students from leaving school before they had completed basic education, and a monitoring mechanism had been launched in 2021, alongside clear guidelines to help schools respond to non-attendance. Teachers, education social workers and the student's parents or guardians were involved in action on non-attendance. Attainment of the basic education standard was

required to enter vocational education. Inclusive education was also ensured within the vocational education system.

49. The Ministry of Education and Science was working to ensure that students had access to a high-quality education and to enhance the human rights education delivered in schools. To that end, the National Centre for Teachers' Professional Development offered a programme that trained educators in teaching human rights, using the approach established by the Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Other professional development programmes run by the Centre included training in creating a safe learning environment and eradicating all forms of discrimination in schools. Great importance was attached to Georgian-language teaching programmes. A programme had also been set up to support the development of teachers who taught in non-Georgian-language schools serving children from minority groups. The aim of the programme was to enhance those teachers' subject knowledge and train them in delivering project-based learning and informal activities for students.

50. All students, parents and teachers had the right to appeal against any education-related decisions that they deemed to be illegal or unfair. Schools were obliged to ensure that any complaints received were addressed in an independent and impartial manner.

51. The Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions had worked with experts to develop professional standards for psychologists working in the education sector. The standards outlined the responsibilities of such psychologists and the knowledge, skills and values they should possess. Across the country, there were 10 psychosocial centres that provided free psychological services to students, parents and educators. The centres operated round the clock to ensure that those in need would receive timely counselling and any necessary information.

52. **A representative of Georgia** said that article 143 of the Criminal Code provided for criminalization of the purchase and sale of children regardless of the circumstances or the perpetrators' motives. From 2017 to 2024, 13 such cases had been investigated. The Government recognized that surrogacy took place in Georgia and was seeking to implement laws and procedures to prevent the abuse of surrogacy services. It had seen a number of cases in which children born by surrogacy were suspected to have been sold abroad and had thus taken steps to tighten laws governing the removal of children from the country.

53. A legal and institutional framework was in place that enabled children born to incarcerated mothers to stay with their mothers for the first three years of their life. Specially designed units built to facilitate such stays had recently been renovated. Once children turned four years of age, mothers were entitled to benefit from a one-year arrangement, as part of which they would be released from prison each weekend in order to stay with their children. Over the previous five years, 18 children had lived with their mothers in prisons.

54. The Government acknowledged the challenges in dealing with children in conflict with the law who were under the age of criminal responsibility, which in Georgia was 14 years. Its efforts in that area had been focused on implementing safeguards to protect such children, and a dedicated working group was currently cooperating with partner organizations working on children's rights in order to create a legal framework to address the issue. In 2020, the Ministry of Justice had opened a juvenile referral centre for children in conflict with the law who were under the age of criminal responsibility. The centre worked with children up to the age of 14 years and sought to facilitate their rehabilitation and resocialization. It offered a variety of programmes through which the children and their families could receive support from social workers and psychologists. Those professionals continued to work with the families once their children had completed the programme. The Government's implementation of diversion and mediation programmes had been key in reducing the number of children in prison. Restorative justice measures were widely applied; imprisonment was used only as a last resort. In 2023, around 500 minors had participated in diversion and mediation programmes. Spaces for mediation had been opened in the 118 branches of the Public Service Hall, which were located in cities and towns across the country.

55. **A representative of Georgia** said that social work was a new profession in Georgia. Its development was a priority for the Government, and the adoption of a law on social work

in 2018 had been a major step forward. While an action plan for the implementation of that act had been adopted by Parliament, efforts to follow that plan had been affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The lack of social workers remained a challenge for the child protection system; plans were being made to address the issue by promoting the study of social work at the higher education level. Steps were being taken to ensure that social workers enjoyed adequate working conditions and were able to obtain further qualifications. Salaries had doubled since 2020, and additional sums were paid for overtime and emergency work. Social workers could seek guidance from dedicated professional supervision units and were provided with transport when carrying out emergency work. They participated in training and information sessions aimed at supporting their professional development. The relevant authorities were cooperating with local and international organizations to tackle the issues faced by social workers through the exchange of expert knowledge and the development of guidelines and standard operating procedures.

56. **A representative of Georgia** said that the rate of selective abortions was decreasing. One possible explanation for that trend was the fact that the health authorities had taken steps to restrict abortion after the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, which was the point at which it was possible to determine the sex of the fetus. After that point, any abortions for which there was no medical indication had to be approved by a commission made up of the woman's obstetrician and other medical specialists. The commission's decision was then transmitted to the health authorities for approval. Sex-selective abortion was permitted only in cases in which there was a risk linked to congenital or genetic diseases.

57. While the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria was gradually handing responsibilities back to the Government, it continued to provide voluntary HIV testing kits and 20 per cent of antiretrovirals and antituberculosis medications. The prevalence of HIV remained low. Nonetheless, there had been an increase in transmission of the virus among heterosexual individuals. In 2016, Georgia had been removed from the list of high-burden countries for multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, the incidence of which continued to decrease.

58. **A representative of Georgia** said that, in 2020, the High Council of Justice had approved a standard establishing that civil, criminal and administrative cases involving children had to be heard by judges who had completed the High Council's training programme on the protection of children's rights. As of April 2024, 281 of the country's 331 judges had done so. Overall responsibility for legal capacity-building and continuing legal education lay with the High School of Justice, which was a separate public-law entity within the judiciary that had its own budget and management. The High School worked with the Supreme Court to deliver seminars for judges and court staff on new approaches to handling cases involving children and the harmonization of such approaches.

59. **A representative of Georgia** said that the Government considered that capacity-building was an essential part of efforts to ensure that crimes against children were effectively investigated and prosecuted and that the children's best interests were upheld throughout the proceedings. A centre for the training of prosecutors had been set up within the prosecution service. It provided initial training for prosecutors wishing to specialize in a certain field and follow-up courses that allowed for the ongoing development of their skills. A total of 191 prosecutors and 107 managers had opted to specialize in juvenile justice. Between 2021 and 2023, 61 training events had been held, attended by more than 700 participants. The centre regularly invited experts from the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other international bodies to deliver training. Participants were required to pass an examination after completing the training in order to be accredited as a specialist prosecutor. A department had been set up within the service to evaluate the effectiveness of the training by monitoring how prosecutors handled cases, which also allowed for the identification of topics that needed to be addressed in future training sessions.

60. **A representative of Georgia** said that the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee of the Parliament had decided to study ways of harmonizing national laws regulating sexual crimes with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Particular attention was being paid to improving definitions of sexual crimes by incorporating a mention of the fact that the acts concerned were committed without the victim's consent. In October 2022, the

Committee of the Parliament had submitted a proposal that would specifically criminalize the rape of minors.

61. **A representative of Georgia** said that some of the key priorities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were improving the effectiveness of investigations into crimes committed by or against minors, ensuring that investigations were tailored to children and increasing the number of child-friendly spaces in its territorial units. Such spaces had first been introduced in 2018, and their existence contributed to the high level of compliance with the Juvenile Justice Code and the Code on the Rights of the Child. Juvenile affairs divisions had been established within the Tbilisi and Adjara police departments. The divisions were staffed with specialist investigators who received ongoing training on juvenile justice, so that they were able to respond promptly and effectively to crimes or administrative offences committed by or against minors.

62. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi**, thanking the delegation for the constructive exchange, said that the State party was well aware of the challenges before it, and she was certain that it would have further progress to report to the Committee at the next dialogue.

63. **A representative of Georgia** said that he would like to express his gratitude to Committee members for their questions and assure them that the Government would give due regard to their recommendations when implementing policies and programmes concerning children. The delegation was grateful to the relevant civil society organizations and the Public Defender's Office for their contribution to the review. He wished to conclude by reiterating his Government's commitment to protecting human rights and its full support for the United Nations human rights treaty bodies.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.