



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
21 June 2024

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Bhutan*

I. Introduction

1. The Committee considered the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Bhutan¹ at its 2800th and 2801st meetings,² held on 14 and 15 May 2024, and adopted the present concluding observations at its 2816th meeting, held on 24 May 2024.

2. The Committee welcomes the submission of the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the State party, under the simplified reporting procedure, which allowed for a better understanding of the situation of children's rights in the State party. The Committee expresses its appreciation for the constructive dialogue held with the high-level delegation of the State party.

II. Follow-up measures taken and progress achieved by the State party

3. The Committee welcomes the measures taken to implement the Convention, including the adoption of the thirteenth five-year plan (2024–2029), the Civil Liability Act of 2023, the national gender equality policy of 2022, the national policy for persons with disabilities of 2019, the national sanitation and hygiene policy of 2020, the acceleration of mother and child health policy of 2020, the establishment of the Bhutan National Legal Institute and the National Resilience Fund, progress in reducing child mortality rates, and the vaccination of nearly all eligible children against deadly diseases. It also notes with appreciation the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2024.

III. Main areas of concern and recommendations

4. The Committee reminds the State party of the indivisibility and interdependence of all the rights enshrined in the Convention and emphasizes the importance of all the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations. The Committee would like to draw the State party's attention to the recommendations concerning the following areas, in respect of which urgent measures must be taken: birth registration and nationality (para. 19), abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation and abuse (para. 24), harmful practices (para. 27), children deprived of a family environment (para. 31), adolescent health (para. 36) and education (para. 40).

* Adopted by the Committee at its ninety-sixth session (6–24 May 2024).

¹ [CRC/C/BTN/6-7](#).

² See [CRC/C/SR.2800](#) and [CRC/C/SR.2801](#).



5. The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the realization of children's rights in accordance with the Convention, the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It urges the State party to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concern children.

A. General measures of implementation (arts. 1, 4, 42 and 44 (6))

Legislation

6. While noting the measures taken to review the Child Care and Protection Act and child rights-related provisions in national legislation, the Committee is concerned about the need for further progress in amending the Child Care and Protection Act and harmonizing child rights-related provisions in legislation with the Convention. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Expediently amend the Child Care and Protection Act to include all the rights enshrined in the Convention;

(b) Fully align national legislation with the Convention and further address any inconsistencies, including by implementing the recommendations of the National Law Review Taskforce and amending child rights-related provisions in the Child Adoption Act, the Penal Code, the Marriage Act and the Citizenship Act;

(c) Allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of the Child Care and Protection Act, and conduct capacity-building for relevant professionals working with and for children;

(d) Develop mandatory child-rights impact assessment procedures for all legislation and policies relevant to children.

Comprehensive policy and strategy

7. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Expediently adopt the national child policy and corresponding action plan and ensure that they encompass all areas covered by the Convention and include specific, time-bound and measurable goals;

(b) Provide adequate human, technical and financial resources for the implementation and monitoring of the policy and action plan, including through accountability mechanisms and regular monitoring and evaluation.

Coordination

8. Noting that the recent restructuring of entities responsible for children's rights, including the incorporation of the National Commission for Women and Children into the Ministry of Education and Skills Development and the transfer of case management to the PEMA secretariat, has led to a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities and a fragmentation of services for children, the Committee urges the State party:

(a) To review the structure of the National Commission for Women and Children and ensure that it has sufficient authority and a clear mandate to coordinate all activities regarding the implementation of the Convention across all sectors and at all levels;

(b) To clarify the mandates, roles and responsibilities of the National Commission for Women and Children and the PEMA secretariat, and provide them with adequate human, technical and financial resources.

Allocation of resources

9. Noting with appreciation the increased budget allocations for sectors relevant for children, including child protection, education and health, and recalling its general comment No. 19 (2016) on public budgeting for the realization of children's rights, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a budgeting process with a child rights perspective and clear allocations to children in the relevant sectors and agencies, including specific indicators and a tracking system for the allocation, use and monitoring of resources for children;

(b) Define specific budgetary lines for all children, paying special attention to those in disadvantaged situations who may require affirmative social measures, and ensure that those budgetary lines are protected even during times of economic crisis;

(c) Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the adequacy, efficacy and equitability of the distribution of resources allocated to the implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols;

(d) Ensure transparent and participatory budgeting, including at the local level, in which civil society and children can participate effectively.

Data collection

10. Noting with concern the absence of recent statistical data on children and the lack of a centralized data collection system, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a central data collection system encompassing all areas of the Convention and disaggregated by age, sex, disability, geographical location, ethnic origin, nationality and socioeconomic background;

(b) Conduct the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and ensure there is sufficient and regular monitoring and analysis of data on the situation of children;

(c) Improve the collection and analysis of data on child marriages, violence against children, including children in alternative care and children with disabilities, nutrition, mental health, bullying, asylum-seeking and migrant children, child labour, trafficking and child justice;

(d) Ensure that statistical data on children are collected and analysed regularly, shared among the relevant ministries, professional groups and civil society organizations and used for the formulation and evaluation of policies and projects on children's rights;

(e) Continue its cooperation on data collection with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other relevant entities.

Access to justice and remedies

11. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure that children have access to (i) confidential, child-friendly and independent complaint mechanisms in schools, alternative care settings, detention settings and the Gyalsung programme for reporting all forms of violence, abuse, discrimination and other violations of their rights; and (ii) legal support and representation, age-appropriate counselling and remedies, including compensation and rehabilitation;

(b) Raise awareness among children of their right to file a complaint under existing mechanisms;

(c) Ensure systematic and mandatory training for all relevant professionals working with and for children on child-friendly procedures and remedies, children's rights and the Convention.

Independent monitoring

12. Recalling its previous recommendations,³ the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Expediently establish an independent mechanism for monitoring human rights, including a specific mechanism for monitoring children's rights that is able to receive, investigate and address complaints from children in a child-sensitive manner;

(b) Guarantee the independence of such a monitoring mechanism, including with regard to its funding and mandate, and ensure that it has adequate and sustainable human, technical and financial resources to carry out its mandate in full compliance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles).

Cooperation with civil society

13. Noting with concern the restrictions placed on the registration and activities of civil society organizations under the amended Civil Society Organizations Act, including those working on children's rights, the Committee urges the State party to remove restrictions on the registration and activities of civil society organizations, including the requirement to establish an endowment fund, and ensure that they receive adequate support and funding opportunities to implement their activities relating to the promotion and protection of children's rights.

Children's rights and the business sector

14. Recalling its general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish and implement regulations to ensure that the business sector, including the agricultural, forestry, tourism and informal sectors, complies with international and national human rights, health, environmental and other standards, particularly with regard to children's rights and in the light of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;

(b) Require companies to undertake assessments of, consultations on and full public disclosure of the environmental, health-related and children's rights impacts of their business activities and of their plans to address such impacts.

B. General principles (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

Non-discrimination

15. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Explicitly prohibit all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of national or ethnic origin, disability and socioeconomic, residence or other status;

(b) Implement targeted policies and programmes to eliminate discrimination against children with disabilities, children living in remote areas or in communities that are difficult to reach, children deprived of a family environment, children of single parents, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and children of migrant informal workers;

(c) Ensure the physical and/or financial access of children in remote areas and children in socioeconomically disadvantaged situations to adequate health services, education, housing and an adequate standard of living;

(d) Strengthen the capacity of the National Commission for Women and Children to address cases of discrimination against children;

³ CRC/C/BTN/CO/2, para. 12, and CRC/C/BTN/CO/3-5, para. 10.

(e) Ensure that children who experience discrimination, bullying or harassment in relation to their ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity receive protection and support, including through targeted anti-bullying measures;

(f) Address discriminatory stereotypes regarding children belonging to any ethnic and religious minority groups, children with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, and promote a positive image of them as rights holders;

(g) Evaluate, with the participation of children and civil society organizations, existing measures aimed at combating discrimination against children in disadvantaged situations to assess their effectiveness and revise the measures as needed.

Best interests of the child

16. Noting with concern the inconsistent application of the principle of the best interests of the child, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration and recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen efforts to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child is consistently interpreted and applied in all policies, programmes and legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings affecting children, including in relation to placement in care, custody and child justice;

(b) Ensure that all professionals working with and for children receive guidance and training on assessing and determining the best interests of the child in every area as a primary consideration.

Respect for the views of the child

17. Recalling its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen measures to promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children, including children belonging to ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities and children in alternative care, within the family, communities and school settings and in policymaking at the local and national levels, including through the allocation of sufficient resources for youth centres and programmes supporting child participation;

(b) Develop and institutionalize a national framework for ensuring the participation of children in national and local decision-making, with toolkits and structures for consulting children and mechanisms for ensuring that the outcomes of such structures are systematically fed into public decision-making;

(c) Ensure that all relevant professionals receive appropriate training on the right of the child to be heard.

C. Civil and political rights (arts. 7, 8 and 13–17)

Birth registration and nationality

18. The Committee notes with appreciation the measures taken to improve birth registration procedures, but is deeply concerned about:

(a) The heavy documentation requirements for birth registration and the classification as “dropouts” of children who were not registered within 12 months of birth;

(b) The registration of the births of children of non-Bhutanese parents or mothers with non-Bhutanese spouses by the Department of Immigration and not within the civil registration system;

(c) Barriers to accessing Bhutanese nationality for children of single mothers or Bhutanese mothers with non-Bhutanese spouses and for children born to non-Bhutanese, refugee or stateless parents;

(d) The lack of a statelessness determination procedure.

19. **The Committee reiterates its previous recommendations⁴ and urges the State party:**

(a) **To ensure the right of all children, regardless of their parents' nationality or marital status, to be registered at birth and have access to identity cards, including by: (i) revising the Bhutan Citizenship Act to disassociate birth registration from citizenship and remove the barriers that prevent the birth registration and access to nationality of children of non-Bhutanese or stateless parents; (ii) ensuring that the births of children of unmarried parents, non-Bhutanese parents or mothers with non-Bhutanese spouses are registered in the civil registration system; and (iii) removing the status of "dropout" for children who were not registered within 12 months of birth;**

(b) **To simplify the documentation requirements for birth registration, particularly for children of parents who do not have the documents required;**

(c) **To take measures to raise public awareness of the importance of birth registration and of collecting birth certificates;**

(d) **To ensure that women, including single mothers and Bhutanese women with non-Bhutanese spouses, are granted equal rights to men to confer Bhutanese nationality on their children;**

(e) **To prevent statelessness among children, develop a procedure to determine the stateless status of children and ensure that every child has the right to a nationality;**

(f) **To consider ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.**

Right to identity

20. **The Committee recommends that the State party consider adopting a regulatory framework for surrogacy that protects the rights of children born through surrogacy, including their right to access to information about their origins, and ensures there are safeguards in place to prevent its use for the sale of children.**

Freedom of expression and religion

21. **Noting with concern the possible impact of defamation laws on children's rights to freedom of opinion and expression and of religion or belief, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure children's enjoyment of those rights in full compliance with the laws in place, particularly for children in disadvantaged situations.**

Right to privacy and access to appropriate information

22. **Noting with concern the possible impact of the National Security Act on children's right to access information, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment and recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Continue to improve digital inclusion for children in disadvantaged situations, including rural children and children with disabilities, and promote the equitability and affordability of online services and connectivity;**

(b) **Develop regulations and safeguarding policies to protect the rights and safety of children in the digital environment, and ensure the effective implementation of the national child online protection guidelines;**

⁴ [CRC/C/BTN/CO/3-5](#), para. 18.

(c) Ensure that laws and policies on access to information and the digital environment protect children from harmful content and online risks and respect their privacy;

(d) Strengthen measures to ensure the digital literacy, awareness and skills of children, parents, caregivers and teachers, including by incorporating digital literacy into school curricula;

(e) Ensure the access of children to information from a diversity of sources, including by ensuring the independence of the national media to report on issues that are relevant to them.

D. Violence against children (arts. 19, 24 (3), 28 (2), 34, 35, 37 (a) and 39 of the Convention, and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography)

Abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation and abuse

23. The Committee is deeply concerned about:

(a) The prevalence of violence against children, underreporting and insufficient investigation of such cases, and a culture of silence and stigma that discourages reporting;

(b) Insufficient services and inter-institutional coordination among relevant sectors for supporting child victims of violence.

24. In the light of its general comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, the Committee urges the State party:

(a) To ensure the effective implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and strengthen the legal framework on violence against children, including by revising the Penal Code to define the crime of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, in line with the Committee's previous recommendations;⁵

(b) To update the national guidelines and standard operating procedures for child protection and violence to reflect changes in the national case management system and ensure effective collaboration among and referrals to the PEMA secretariat, child protection officers, law enforcement officials and the health, education and justice sectors;

(c) To strengthen the capacities of relevant professionals to prevent, report and respond to cases of violence, including by (i) investing in the institutional capacity of the PEMA secretariat to support victims and children at risk; (ii) strengthening capacities at the district and local levels to take a multidisciplinary approach to case management; (iii) appointing child protection officers at the district level, with clearly defined roles and referral pathways; and (iv) strengthening child protection and violence response services at the local level, including through capacity-building activities and funding to civil society organizations that support victims;

(d) To ensure and promote accessible, confidential and child-friendly mechanisms for reporting all forms of violence against children, and encourage children to make use thereof;

(e) To take targeted measures to prevent and eliminate violence against children online, including by developing guidelines and training for relevant professionals on combating online violence and requiring Internet service providers to block and remove online sexual abuse material;

(f) To promptly and effectively investigate and intervene in all cases of violence against children, including domestic violence and the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in and outside the home, in the digital environment, in

⁵ CRC/C/BTN/CO/2, para. 36, and CRC/C/BTN/CO/3-5, para. 21.

educational and alternative care settings and in the context of tourism and informal labour, ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice and strengthen the mechanisms for monitoring cases;

(g) To ensure that all children who are victims of or witnesses to violence have prompt access to child-sensitive, multisectoral and comprehensive interventions, services and support, including forensic interviews, medical evaluation, counselling and psychosocial support, with the aim of preventing the secondary victimization of those children;

(h) To provide treatment programmes for children who have committed sexual offences and ensure that children are not prosecuted for sexual acts prohibited under the Penal Code.

Corporal punishment

25. The Committee remains deeply concerned that corporal punishment is legally and socially acceptable in the State party. Recalling its general comment No. 8 (2006) on the right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Explicitly prohibit, as a matter of priority, corporal punishment by law in the home, alternative care, day care, schools, monastic schools, nunneries, penal institutions and all other settings, including by repealing all provisions allowing the use of corporal punishment and reviewing the Child Care and Protection Act, the Child Adoption Act, the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, articles 109–112 of the Penal Code and other relevant legislation;

(b) Address the widespread use of corporal punishment in schools, including by reviewing the school discipline policy to harmonize it with the Convention, strengthening training on non-violent and positive forms of discipline in mandatory teacher training, developing protocols and guidelines for action when corporal punishment takes place and ensuring appropriate responses;

(c) Develop guidance and training for teachers on positive discipline and addressing violence and other disturbances in schools, with a view to preventing the misuse of the school discipline guidelines that allow for sanctions for disruptive behaviour by children and ensuring that such measures take a child-sensitive approach;

(d) Strengthen awareness-raising campaigns to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing, with a view to eradicating the practice of corporal punishment and the culture of silence in that regard.

Harmful practices

26. The Committee notes that the minimum age of marriage was amended to 18 years in the Dzongkha text of the Marriage Act, but is concerned about the persistence of child marriage and that the English text of the Marriage Act states that marriage certificates will not be issued to girls below 16 years of age.

27. Recalling joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019) on harmful practices, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Urgently revise the Marriage Act to ensure there are safeguards for the effective implementation of the prohibition of all marriages under 18 years of age, without exception;

(b) Strengthen measures to prevent child marriages and ensure that they effectively address the root causes of such marriages, raise public awareness of their harmful effects and provide training to relevant professional groups.

Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography

28. **Recalling its guidelines regarding the implementation of the Optional Protocol⁶ and its previous recommendations,⁷ the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Fully incorporate the provisions of the Optional Protocol into national legislation and explicitly define and criminalize all forms of the sale and sexual exploitation of children, as defined in articles 2 and 3 of the Optional Protocol, including the acts of producing, distributing, selling or possessing child sexual abuse material;**

(b) **Continue to ensure the early identification of children who are victims of offences under the Optional Protocol, referral to adequate services and support for social reintegration and physical and psychological recovery, and provision of remedies.**

E. Family environment and alternative care (arts. 5, 9–11, 18 (1) and (2), 20, 21, 25 and 27 (4))

Family environment

29. **Welcoming the measures taken to increase the duration of maternity and paternity leave for civil servants, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Review the Marriage Act to ensure that decisions regarding custody and maintenance take into consideration the best interests and views of the child;**

(b) **Promote the equal sharing of parental responsibilities, including by ensuring paid maternity and paternity leave for parents working in the private sector and increasing paid paternity leave in all sectors, introducing flexible working arrangements for both parents and providing incentives for fathers to be actively involved in child-rearing;**

(c) **Ensure the availability of affordable childcare options for working parents in all sectors, with a view to supporting not only breastfeeding but also the career development of working mothers beyond the first six months of their child's life;**

(d) **Strengthen its efforts, including through awareness-raising programmes, to address discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family;**

(e) **Provide appropriate assistance and support for the performance of child-rearing responsibilities to caregivers of children whose parents are working abroad.**

Children deprived of a family environment

30. **The Committee notes with appreciation the adoption of the alternative care guidelines in 2018 but is deeply concerned about:**

(a) **The lack of a strategy to prevent unnecessary family separation and promote family-based care, and about children in difficult situations staying in monastic schools or shelters run by civil society organizations, with no individual care plans or periodic review of their placement;**

(b) **The severe shortage of professionally trained social workers to support children at risk and the lack of a professional training programme for social workers;**

(c) **The lack of clarity on the government entity responsible for ensuring child protection.**

31. **The Committee urges the State party:**

⁶ [CRC/C/156](#).

⁷ See [CRC/C/OPSC/BTN/CO/1](#).

- (a) To designate the government agency responsible for child protection services and ensure that it has sufficient resources to provide family support and child protection services and ensure multi-agency coordination;
- (b) To prioritize and ensure family-based and community-based care options for children who cannot stay with their families, including by allocating sufficient resources for foster care and adoption and prohibiting the practice of placing children at risk in monastic schools or shelters;
- (c) To develop legal safeguards and clear criteria for determining whether a child should be placed in alternative care and ensure that children are separated from their family only as a measure of last resort and if it is in their best interests, after a comprehensive assessment of their situation and taking into consideration their views;
- (d) To develop a training programme for social workers, increase the number of trained social workers and ensure that they receive continuous capacity-building to provide family- and community-based care responses for children who cannot stay with their families and consistently support children throughout their time in care with individual care plans;
- (e) To monitor the quality of care, including by verifying whether it adheres to minimum norms and standards, conduct regular and substantive reviews of placements in care, with a view to facilitating the reintegration of children into their families and communities whenever possible, and enable the reporting, monitoring, remedying and effective prosecution of maltreatment of children;
- (f) To provide quality education, skills training, housing and opportunities for independent living for children leaving alternative care, including by developing standards for the accreditation of civil society organizations providing such support;
- (g) To ensure the best interests of the child in adoption proceedings and the provision of pre-adoption and post-adoption services and monitoring;
- (h) To consider ratifying the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

F. Children with disabilities (art. 23)

32. Noting with concern the number of children with disabilities who are sent to monastic schools, the Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Revise national legislation, including the Child Care and Protection Act, in line with a human rights-based approach to disability, designate an entity responsible for implementing the action plan on disability and provide that entity with sufficient human, technical and financial resources to ensure the rights of children with disabilities;
- (b) Strengthen early detection and intervention services, including by developing and ensuring multisectoral coordination for the effective referral of children with disabilities to specialized health care and other support services;
- (c) Ensure the right of children with disabilities to grow up in their family environment, including by strengthening support for parents, with a view to eliminating the practice of sending such children to monastic schools;
- (d) Strengthen support for the social integration and individual development of children with disabilities, including by ensuring their access to early childhood care and development, personal assistance, rehabilitation and reasonable accommodation for their full inclusion in all areas of public life, including education, health, play and cultural activities;
- (e) Conduct training for all relevant professionals on the rights and specific needs of children with disabilities and on the national guidelines on accessibility and inclusive education;

(f) Ensure that awareness-raising campaigns on disability address societal misperceptions about disability and promote a positive image of children with disabilities as rights holders;

(g) Take the measures necessary to withdraw its reservations to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly to articles 18 (1) (b) and 23 (1) (c).

G. Health (arts. 6, 24 and 33)

Health and health services

33. The Committee welcomes the measures taken to ensure health services for children, including the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2025, but is concerned about the infant mortality rate and the access of children in remote areas to health services. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen existing measures to ensure that all children, including children in rural areas, have access to quality health services, including by increasing the pool of health professionals and expanding health services in remote areas;

(b) Reduce infant mortality rates and stillbirths, including by addressing the underlying determinants, introducing evidence-based and adequately resourced programmes for comprehensive newborn health interventions and early paediatric care, and ensuring that primary and community health systems have sufficient technical, financial and human resources to implement the 1,000 golden days programme;

(c) Eliminate malnutrition among children, including stunting, micronutrient deficiency, overweight and obesity, by, inter alia, allocating sufficient resources for the implementation of the National Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2025, promoting proper infant- and young child-feeding practices, providing micronutrient supplements to all children and pregnant women, and raising public awareness of good nutrition and the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding;

(d) Strengthen implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

Mental health

34. The Committee notes the establishment of the PEMA secretariat to address mental health and recommends that the State party:

(a) Develop a national mental health programme dedicated to children, with a focus on prevention, that is adequately resourced and includes measures to: (i) address the underlying causes of poor mental health among children, including those that have been exacerbated as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic; (ii) provide outpatient, community-based, child-sensitive, therapeutic and interdisciplinary mental health services; and (iii) provide screening for mental health issues and early prevention services in schools, including through the deployment of more guidance counsellors in all schools;

(b) Promote specialist training in mental health, with a view to addressing the shortage of qualified professionals, including psychologists and psychiatrists specialized in working with children and adolescents, to meet the mental health needs of children;

(c) Conduct awareness-raising activities for children, parents and educators on how children can seek support for mental health issues with a view to removing the stigma associated with such services.

Adolescent health

35. The Committee notes with appreciation the establishment of adolescent-friendly health service units in some hospitals, but is deeply concerned about the high rate of teenage pregnancies; adolescents' limited access to abortion, family planning services and free

contraceptives; and the criminalization and stigmatization of adolescents identified as substance users.

36. **The Committee urges the State party:**

(a) **To strengthen measures to address the high rate of teenage pregnancies and ensure that teenagers have access to age-appropriate family planning services and free contraceptives, including in collaboration with civil society;**

(b) **To decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and ensure, in law and in practice, access to safe abortion and post-abortion care services for adolescents, making sure that their views are always heard and are given due consideration as a part of the decision-making process;**

(c) **To ensure that sexual and reproductive health education includes education on sexual and reproductive health rights, sexual diversity, responsible sexual behaviour and the prevention of early pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections;**

(d) **To provide children and adolescents with objective information and life-skills education on preventing substance abuse, including tobacco, alcohol and solvents (sniffing), and ensure that professionals working with and for children receive training on taking a child rights-based approach to addressing substance abuse;**

(e) **To ensure that adolescents identified as substance users are not isolated in closed spaces or institutions away from families and communities, are treated as victims, have access to adequate referral and community-based, adolescent-friendly and accessible drug dependence treatment services without stigmatization, and are able to return to school after completing their treatment.**

H. Standard of living (arts. 18 (3), 26 and 27 (1)–(3))

37. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Develop an inclusive social protection programme, coordinated by a designated government entity, to identify and support children in disadvantaged situations;**

(b) **Strengthen measures to end child poverty and ensure the right of all children to an adequate standard of living, including with regard to access to adequate housing, water and sanitation;**

(c) **Ensure that measures to combat poverty comply with a child rights-based approach, address the root causes of multidimensional child poverty and inequality, and include a particular focus on children in disadvantaged situations, including children with disabilities, children of single parents, children of migrant informal workers and children in rural areas.**

I. Children's rights and the environment (arts. 2, 3, 6, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 24 and 26–31)

38. **The Committee acknowledges the strong political commitment of, and impressive investments and achievements made by, the State party in protecting the environment and biodiversity. However, the Committee also notes the possible negative impact of climate change on children's right to health and an adequate standard of living. Recalling its general comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Strengthen measures to ensure the sustainable use of water resources and to increase the resilience of water, sanitation and health infrastructure, with a view to reducing the risk of climate change-related hazards;**

(b) **Ensure that the national climate change policy, national disaster management and contingency plans, and other policies and programmes addressing environmental protection, climate change and disaster risk management are developed and implemented with child rights impact assessments and taking into account the principles of the Convention and the needs and views of children;**

(c) **Ensure that age-appropriate, safe and accessible mechanisms are in place for children's views to be heard regularly and at all stages of environmental decision-making processes affecting them;**

(d) **Incorporate rights-based environmental education into school curricula at all levels and in the training of teachers, and ensure that it promotes children's awareness of and preparedness for climate change and natural disasters;**

(e) **Strengthen, with the active participation of schools, awareness-raising for children on their right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.**

J. Education, leisure and cultural activities (arts. 28–31)

Education: aims and coverage

39. The Committee welcomes the measures taken to ensure the access of all children to education and to address bullying in schools, but is deeply concerned about:

(a) The limited progress in adopting the education bill and that primary education is still not compulsory;

(b) High dropout and repetition rates;

(c) The large number of children living in monastic or boarding schools, often due to insufficient access to schools close to their homes, and insufficient mechanisms to monitor children's access to health, psychosocial and other support in such schools;

(d) Children in disadvantaged situations, particularly children living in poverty and children in rural areas, who start living in monastic schools as early as 3 or 4 years of age;

(e) The underrepresentation of girls enrolled in technical training institutes and in non-traditional fields of study;

(f) The limited availability of early childhood education centres;

(g) The prevalence of violence and bullying, including of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children, in schools.

40. **The Committee urges the State party:**

(a) **To adopt legislative measures, including the education bill, to ensure, as a matter of priority, that primary education is compulsory and applicable to both public and private educational institutions, as well as to monastic schools and nunneries;**

(b) **To continue to address the root causes of school dropout and repetitions, particularly among children in disadvantaged situations;**

(c) **To strengthen measures to improve the quality of education, including by:**
(i) expanding the implementation of interventions designed to reduce dropout rates;
(ii) integrating life skills training and modern teaching methods at all levels of education;
and (iii) strengthening the training of teachers and education professionals;

(d) **To review and adapt the content of the curricula of monastic schools and nunneries to ensure that they are aligned with national standards, including with regard to the English and information and communications technology (ICT) curricula;**

(e) **To ensure that children living in remote areas can attend school while living at home, wherever possible by increasing the availability of schools in rural areas**

and strengthening support for parents and caregivers, with a view to discouraging the enrolment of young children in monastic schools;

(f) To ensure that children attending monastic or boarding schools receive adequate support for their health, psychosocial and other needs, and establish a mechanism for monitoring the quality of such support;

(g) To strengthen targeted measures to encourage girls to pursue non-traditional fields of study, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics;

(h) To continue to improve access to early childhood education, particularly in rural areas, by: (i) adopting the strategic action plan for multisectoral early childhood care and development and allocating sufficient resources from the national education budget for its implementation; (ii) promoting awareness among parents of the importance of early childhood education; (iii) investing in innovative methods for ensuring access to early childhood education for children in remote areas; and (iv) revising the minimum number of children required for the establishment of centres in rural areas;

(i) To take targeted measures to eliminate bullying, cyberbullying and other forms of violence in schools, and ensure that such measures encompass prevention, early detection mechanisms, intervention protocols, psychosocial support for victims, mandatory training for teachers on the anti-bullying guidelines and relevant procedures, recording and monitoring of bullying behaviour, and awareness-raising regarding the harmful effects of bullying.

Inclusive education

41. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Continue to ensure, including through the provision of sufficient resources, the access by children in disadvantaged situations, including children in rural areas, children with disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, children belonging to ethnic minority groups and children born to a foreign parent, to inclusive early childhood education, free primary and secondary education and sporting, recreational, leisure, cultural and artistic activities;

(b) Strengthen measures aimed at ensuring that all children with disabilities, including children with autism, have access to inclusive education in mainstream schools, including by: (i) allocating sufficient resources for ensuring reasonable accommodation within the school infrastructure; and (ii) adapting curricula and training, and assigning specialized teachers and professionals in integrated classes, so that children with disabilities receive individual support and due attention.

K. Special protection measures (arts. 22, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37 (b)–(d) and 38–40 of the Convention, and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict)

Children belonging to minority groups, including Lhotshampa children

42. Noting with deep concern the lack of progress in repatriating Lhotshampa children from refugee camps in Nepal, the Committee reiterates its previous recommendations⁸ and urges the State party:

(a) To take effective and urgent measures through constructive dialogue with the Government of Nepal to ensure the return and resettlement of Lhotshampa children from refugee camps in Nepal;

(b) Ensure that all children belonging to minority groups, including Lhotshampa children, are protected against discrimination and guarantee their rights

⁸ CRC/C/BTN/CO/2, para. 65, and CRC/C/BTN/CO/3-5, para. 42.

to nationality, health and education, as well as their rights to enjoy their own culture and practise their religion or beliefs freely.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

43. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Intensify labour inspections and improve the monitoring and enforcement of laws and policies on child labour, including in the informal and agricultural sectors, and impose sanctions on violators;

(b) Conduct prevention activities with families and capacity-building activities for employers, local authorities and other relevant stakeholders.

Trafficking

44. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen measures to ensure the early identification and referral of child victims of trafficking to appropriate services, and that they are treated as victims and have access to rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Administration of child justice

45. Recalling its general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, the Committee recommends that the State party bring its child justice system fully into line with the Convention and other relevant standards, and in particular:

(a) Further raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14 years of age;

(b) Increase the number of probation officers and actively promote non-judicial measures, such as diversion and mediation, and, wherever possible, non-custodial measures for children, such as probation or community service, and ensure that health and psychosocial services are provided to such children;

(c) Ensure the effective provision, at an early stage of a procedure and throughout legal proceedings, of qualified and independent legal aid to children accused of or recognized as having infringed criminal law;

(d) Ensure detention is used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, that in cases where detention is unavoidable, children are not held together with adults and that detention conditions comply with international standards, including with regard to access to education, health services and to child-friendly complaint mechanisms;

(e) Strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration support for children leaving the child justice system, including by allocating sufficient resources for the provision of such services, revising the education policy to enable them to return to school and granting such children security clearance.

Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

46. Recalling its previous recommendations,⁹ the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Explicitly prohibit and criminalize the recruitment of children under 18 years of age by the armed forces, non-State armed groups and private military and security companies;

(b) Ensure that enrolment into the Gyalsung programme is limited to children who have completed education and that safeguards for voluntary enrolment are sufficient;

⁹ See [CRC/C/OPAC/BTN/CO/1](#).

(c) Establish mechanisms for the effective reporting and investigation of any reports of bullying, abuse, sexual harassment or other forms of violence against children in the Gyalsung programme;

(d) Consider endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration.

L. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure

47. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, accede to the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

M. Ratification of international human rights instruments

48. The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, consider ratifying:

(a) The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

(b) The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

(c) The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

(d) The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

(e) The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;

(f) The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;

(g) The Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

N. Cooperation with regional bodies

49. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to cooperate with regional bodies including, among others, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

IV. Implementation and reporting

A. Follow-up and dissemination

50. The Committee recommends that the State party take all appropriate measures to ensure that the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations are fully implemented and that a child-friendly version is disseminated to, and made widely accessible for, children, including those in the most disadvantaged situations. The Committee also recommends that the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports and the present concluding observations be made widely available in the languages of the country.

B. Next report

51. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the eighth periodic report of the State party in due course, in line with the envisaged predictable reporting calendar based on an eight-year review cycle and following the adoption of a

list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State party. The report should be in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines¹⁰ and should not exceed 21,200 words.¹¹ In the event that a report exceeding the established word limit is submitted, the State party will be asked to shorten the report. If the State party is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, translation thereof for the purposes of consideration by the Committee cannot be guaranteed.

¹⁰ [CRC/C/58/Rev.3](#).

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 68/268, para. 16.