



# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-seventh session

### Summary record of the 2nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 10 February 2025, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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*Second periodic report of Croatia*

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports:**

**(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**

*Second periodic report of Croatia (E/C.12/HRV/2; E/C.12/HRV/Q/2; E/C.12/HRV/RQ/2)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Croatia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Croatia**, introducing his country's seventh periodic report (E/C.12/HRV/2) said that the Government was proud of the progress achieved in the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in the country, in particular since its accession to the Schengen area and the eurozone on 1 January 2023, and despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine. All the projects being run under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan were being financed through the national budget and European funds.
3. A series of measures had been taken to strengthen workers' rights and enhance working conditions. For instance, the Labour Act had been amended to introduce fairer working conditions and changes had been made to the minimum wage and the civil service salary system, in particular for the judiciary. Social partners were involved, both formally and informally, in all of the activities of the Ministry of Labour. To ensure that the 123,000 foreign workers in Croatia were not subjected to discrimination, the Act on Combating Undeclared Work, which included strict measures concerning non-compliance by employers, had been adopted.
4. Significant advances had been made in the area of social security. Entitlements had been expanded, to cover a larger share of the vulnerable population and raise the standard of living. In addition, six assistance packages had been introduced to subsidize energy prices for various vulnerable groups, and concerted efforts were being made to improve the situation of the rights of older persons. The Government had invested €140 million in housing projects, including social housing for vulnerable groups. The funding for legal aid increased each year.
5. Lastly, in 2024, at the recommendation of the Council of Europe, the definition of violence against women and gender-based violence had been amended and a definition of femicide had been introduced, thus bringing national legislation into line with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).
6. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Rapporteur) said that she was interested in hearing about specific cases in which the Covenant had been invoked before the courts and about any plans to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. She also wished to hear about the legal status of concluding observations issued by the human rights treaty bodies, the extent to which the legislature and civil society organizations were involved in their implementation and monitoring and the preparation of periodic reports, and whether there was a national mechanism to coordinate the work of the various entities involved in implementing and monitoring international recommendations.
7. She was curious to know what measures were being taken or planned to reduce the State party's reliance on fluctuating tourism revenue, increase private sector productivity and build the capacities of current and future generations with a view to boosting the country's competitiveness.
8. She would also like to know how the State party would transpose the European directive on corporate sustainability due diligence into national law, how, in the absence of a national action plan on business and human rights, it would align national regulations with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and other relevant international norms, what mechanisms were in place to encourage and monitor private sector compliance with human rights due diligence and what remedies were available to victims of human rights abuses by businesses.

9. The delegation was invited to comment on the likelihood that the State party would meet its climate-related commitments by 2030 and, if that was uncertain, to describe any planned remedial measures, the main challenges to achieving greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, steps being taken to set more ambitious reduction goals and any clear plan for quickly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Was there any specific plan to gradually end fossil fuel subsidies and redirect those funds towards renewable energy and energy efficiency?

10. She wished to hear about any measures the State party was taking or envisaging to increase its official development aid and any challenges it was facing in reaching the target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product.

11. She wondered what steps the State party was intending to take to ensure that information on action plans under the National Plan for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights and Combating Discrimination was publicly available and what specific actions were envisaged in that domain for the coming period. She was eager to learn about any measures the Government was taking to prevent and punish incitement to hatred and hate crimes against the Serbian and Roma communities, the results of the 2013-2020 National Roma Inclusion Strategy and any planned replacement for that strategy.

12. Lastly, she would welcome information on any measures, and their effectiveness, taken to close the gender gap in labour market participation and employment, to promote greater representation of women in decision-making positions in the private and public sectors and to combat gender discrimination and stereotypes; and on any incentives for businesses to adopt policies on equal pay and salary transparency.

13. **A representative of Croatia** said that, in 2024, the country had seen one of the highest economic growth rates in the European Union for the third consecutive year, at 3.6 per cent. It had been using European funds to enhance skills, with a focus on digital and green skills, and was working on projects to upskill or reskill approximately 140,000 Croatian citizens.

14. **A representative of Croatia** said that members of the judiciary systematically received training in the Covenant through the Judicial Academy. Four workshops on the topic of the Covenant were planned, with the aim of promoting the application of the provisions of the Covenant and thus its citation in case law.

15. **A representative of Croatia** said that ratification of the Optional Protocol was being discussed, including in public consultations with experts. If ratification was deemed to be relevant and justified, the accession procedure would be initiated.

16. **A representative of Croatia** said that the legislative process always involved working groups composed of experts from the line ministries, social partners and any other stakeholders, as well as public consultations, including with non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the working groups were required to respond to all comments received during the consultations. Before a new piece of legislation was drafted, an analysis had to be conducted, including of relevant recommendations made by United Nations bodies, other international organizations and the European Union, to determine where and how to align national law with international law and the country's international obligations. The parliamentary committee on human rights and minority rights had, on multiple occasions, highlighted the importance of considering reports by international organizations when drafting new legislation.

17. The Government took the view that tourism should be sustainable; it therefore carefully crafted the relevant policies and did not allow the industry to operate in an improvised fashion.

18. The interministerial process was under way to transpose into law Directive (EU) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence, for which there was a national contact point composed of government bodies, NGOs and social partners.

19. The Anti-Discrimination Act recognized 17 different grounds for discrimination and left room for them to be further developed and interpreted. Some specific action plans in that

domain had been adopted, while others were temporarily delayed. Since it was not possible to achieve full respect for the rights of vulnerable groups, including the Roma, within a predetermined period of time, the relevant strategic documents were of an ongoing nature.

20. **A representative of Croatia** said that tourism was vibrant in the country, which derived many benefits from the industry. Nevertheless, weaknesses had been identified during work on housing policy. For example, some 270,000 properties were being used as short-term rentals for tourists, prompting the introduction of new regulations to protect residents, such as tax incentives for owners to place their properties on the long-term rental market and the requirement that the agreement of two-thirds of owners in apartment buildings was needed before a unit could be used for short-term rentals.

21. **A representative of Croatia** said that efforts to support the productive sector included reforms of the education system designed to prevent school dropout and better equip students for the labour market, through improved availability and relevance of vocational training. A new curriculum that provided for more hands-on learning would be rolled out as of the 2025/26 school year. The current National Roma Inclusion Strategy, which covered the period 2021–2027, contained education measures for Roma students. There were also operational programmes for national minorities covering the period 2024–2028.

22. **A representative of Croatia** said that her country adhered to the ambitious climate change policies set by the European Union, which was aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55 per cent by 2030 and making the European Union climate-neutral by 2050. The national target for Croatia had been set at 16.7 per cent for sectors not covered by the European Union Emissions Trading System. The Government was implementing the Low-Carbon Development Strategy and had adopted the National Energy and Climate Plan, which set out more than 100 measures, including the abolition of fossil fuel subsidies. A detailed analysis had been conducted of the social and economic impacts of such abolition. Emissions were monitored and discussed regularly at the government level, and efforts were being made to remove obstacles that might hinder the implementation of the measures set out in the Plan.

23. **A representative of Croatia** said that the gender employment gap stood at 11 per cent, which was lower than the European Union average of 14 per cent.

24. **A representative of Croatia** said that the transposition of Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on pay transparency into law would enable the full application of the principle of equal pay for equal work. A series of measures had been put in place to improve the prospects of population groups who had difficulty finding employment, such as women with a lower level of education and women over the age of 50 years.

25. The increase in the number of foreign workers in Croatia had led to a rise in hate crimes against such persons. The authorities were implementing measures designed to better integrate them into society. The Ministry of Culture funded projects to enhance public access to cultural content produced by minorities, including the Roma population, with the aim of increasing public awareness of different cultures.

26. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Roma population had access to health insurance under the same conditions as all other citizens. Counties and regional and local government units worked with the sanitation authorities to undertake measures designed to improve quality of life for the Roma population, including through better access to healthcare, especially for children. Public health bodies at the county level had specific departments that were responsible for air quality, water quality, infection control and immunization. All persons residing in Croatia were obliged to comply with the rules on compulsory vaccination. Community-based nurses played a vital role in raising awareness among the Roma population about the importance of vaccination.

27. **A representative of Croatia** said that the draft national action plan on business and human rights was largely based on the recommendations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Ahead of the transposition into law of Directive (EU) 2024/1760 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 on corporate sustainability due diligence, which must be

completed by July 2026, all competent authorities had begun work on an analysis of the content, the first results of which would become available in February 2025.

28. **A representative of Croatia** said that, between 2020 and 2025, Croatia had doubled the funds it allocated to official development assistance and humanitarian aid and, in 2024, had adopted new legislation in that area. The Government was providing support to countries in the region that wished to join the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

29. **A representative of Croatia** said that no cases had been recorded of hate crimes committed by police officers against members of the Roma or Serbian minorities. Police officers received ongoing training on human rights, including the proper treatment of Roma women and girls.

30. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** said that she would like to know what had been done to strengthen capacity and increase the human and financial resources available to the Ombudsman's Office in the light of the expansion of its mandate and workload.

31. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know if the State party had designated a national mechanism to give follow-up to the recommendations issued by treaty bodies. If so, he would welcome details of its composition and mandate.

32. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that the delegation might give an account of the main challenges that remained in terms of ending regional disparities and ensuring that everyone, including persons living in remote villages, could exercise their rights under the Covenant.

33. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he would appreciate more details about the legal status of the Covenant in the State party, as well as of any cases in which the Covenant had been invoked by lawyers or directly applied by judges. He was also curious to know about any obstacles that were preventing the State party from ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

34. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to know whether the authorities had conducted an assessment of the reportedly unequal geographic distribution of free legal aid services. She would also be interested to learn whether there were any plans to roll out training and awareness-raising activities relating to the Covenant in schools, universities and professions other than the judiciary. She wished to know whether the State party planned to design and implement a concrete human rights action plan.

35. **Ms. El Yedri Afailal** asked whether any climate change adaptation plans were in place, with a particular focus on minorities, especially in connection with flood protection initiatives and access to water and sanitation.

36. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Covenant had legal status in Croatia and could be applied directly by lawyers and judges. No specific examples were available of cases in which that had been done.

37. Funding for free legal aid in civil and administrative cases in the regions had been increased. In 2023, a public tender for legal clinics had been launched, and a three-year project was under way to strengthen capacity in that area. During the first year of the project, legal aid funding had been doubled, and an increase of a further 24 per cent had been implemented in 2024. To incentivize lawyers to provide secondary legal aid in underserved areas, regulations on the relevant fees had been adopted in 2023, and additional remuneration was payable when lawyers travelled to a location more than 60 kilometres from their workplace; that threshold would drop to 30 kilometres in 2025. Plans were being made for an online free legal aid scheme to improve accessibility and overcome regional disparities.

38. **A representative of Croatia** said that the comprehensive reform of civil service salaries also applied to the Ombudsman's Office, where remuneration had risen by 25 per cent.

39. Within the Ministry of Labour, the Pension System, Family and Social Policy, the department responsible for matters relating to international and European Union law worked with the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs to monitor the follow-up given to the recommendations of the human rights treaty bodies and other international entities. The

Economic and Social Council shared all international recommendations with social partners, including trade unions and employers' associations.

40. **A representative of Croatia** said that the budget of the Ombudsman's Office had been increased since 2022 to take account of the additional responsibilities attributed to it.

41. **A representative of Croatia** said that everyone had the right to have their social needs met in terms of education, employment, housing and social protection. The authorities were taking steps to ensure that all citizens who were at risk of poverty or exclusion could exercise their social rights.

42. **A representative of Croatia** said that efforts were being made to transfer more competencies and fiscal resources to local and regional government units to enable them to better manage the implementation of Covenant rights.

43. **A representative of Croatia** said that the central authorities were providing support to local and regional government units to enable them to implement development projects, including through annual public calls for regional development projects published by the Ministry of Regional Development and European Union Funds.

44. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Ministry of Labour, the Pension System, Family and Social Policy intended to build 18 community centres for the care of older persons. The centres, which would cost €0.5 billion, would provide services to 1,800 users and jobs for 9,500 women in rural areas.

45. **A representative of Croatia** said that a range of initiatives were in place to generate employment in rural areas and encourage people to remain in such areas. A social housing fund would be set up for rural residents. The Government was funding community infrastructure projects involving, inter alia, water and sanitation, and care for older persons.

46. **A representative of Croatia** said that the draft updated action plan to combat discrimination was awaiting adoption. In the meantime, the previous plan was still in place, alongside a range of other related initiatives, including the National Plan for Combating Trafficking and a number of plans and strategies aimed at the Roma population.

47. **A representative of Croatia** said that the water supply sector had been identified as being particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Measures were being instituted to manage flooding and avoid water shortages. Local government units had the authority to set up public wells and other water sources if required.

48. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she would be interested to learn what impact the recently introduced active employment policy measures had had on vulnerable groups within the labour market and what proportion of persons aged between 15 and 24 were not in employment, education or training. While recognizing the State party's efforts to promote the inclusion of Roma persons into the labour market, the Committee wished to know what specific measures had been taken to address the significant workplace discrimination they reportedly continued to face. According to information received, the disability employment gap – which had reached 39.2 per cent in 2023 – was closely linked to the lack of reasonable accommodation and the inadequacy of alternative arrangements in the workplace. In the light of that, she hoped that the delegation could inform the Committee about any measures taken to ensure equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The Committee was concerned that strict eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits were causing high poverty rates among unemployed persons, only around 25 per cent of whom had received benefits in 2024, and wished to know what measures were being taken to ensure that unemployed persons did not fall into poverty.

49. Despite commendable legislative efforts on the part of the Government to combat irregular labour, the Committee continued to receive reports to the effect that fixed-term contracts, precarious working conditions, unregistered employment, unlawful dismissal and non-payment of wages remained prevalent. Migrant workers seemed to be at particular risk in that regard, with reports indicating that they had to endure, inter alia, illegal overtime, unreported workplace injuries and substandard accommodation. She therefore wished to know what was being done to ensure that labour legislation was effective. She wondered, moreover, if the delegation could explain the root causes underlying the exploitation of

migrant workers, outline the legislative or other measures taken to address those causes and illustrate any steps taken to help judges, prosecutors and labour inspectors prevent labour exploitation and identify and protect victims.

50. Although the State party had increased the base level of the guaranteed minimum benefit and expanded the range of beneficiaries, reports indicated that the benefit remained insufficient, being in some cases less than one third of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. At the same time, the overall number of beneficiaries had apparently decreased, despite a rise in the number of persons at risk of poverty. The Committee wished to know, then, what measures had been put in place to ensure that levels of social assistance – including the guaranteed minimum benefit as well as allowances for older persons and persons with disabilities – were enough to cover the real cost of living. She would also appreciate details about budget allocations for the guaranteed minimum benefit over the previous five years and about plans to establish an effective and transparent indexation system. She hoped that the delegation could provide details about the impact of plans to develop social services, notably via deinstitutionalization and the provision of community-based alternatives. In particular, she wished to know the extent to which the plans addressed the inadequacy of existing services, and the difficulties vulnerable people faced in accessing social services in small towns and rural areas.

51. **A representative of Croatia** said that €150 million from the European Social Fund Plus was invested in the active employment policy measures each year.

52. **A representative of Croatia** said that most of the vulnerable persons on the labour market were in a situation of long-term unemployment, and a programme entitled “Job Plus” had been developed to help them acquire new skills and competencies and provide them with on-the-job training opportunities. Several hundred vulnerable persons had benefited from the programme, most of them remaining in work following their training. In addition to the programme, the active employment policy also provided for individual measures to target specific issues an unemployed person might face.

53. Unemployment records were not disaggregated by ethnicity, although some persons – currently around 3,500 – did identify themselves as Roma when registering as unemployed. They too benefited from the active employment policy measures. In general, however, they had low levels of formal education so efforts focused on enabling them to complete their primary education before proceeding either to secondary education or to vocational training. The number of persons with disabilities registered with the Croatian Employment Service had increased over the previous two years, following legislative changes that had facilitated disability registration. In most cases, they were referred for vocational training and habilitation with a view to integrating them into the labour market. The number of such persons in effective employment was rising.

54. **A representative of Croatia** said that employment among persons with disabilities had, in fact, increased by 70 per cent over recent years and unemployment among that group was at a record low. The Government actively intervened to support persons with disabilities via skills assessment, psychosocial counselling and the co-financing of up to two thirds of their salaries. With regard to irregular work, it was important to note that 80 per cent of workers in Croatia had long-term employment contracts. Unemployment among young persons, which some years previously had stood at 50 per cent, had fallen to just 13 per cent, and two thirds of the employed youth also had long-term contracts.

55. **A representative of Croatia** said that the State provided financial assistance to employers who hired workers with disabilities, notably to meet the costs of training and of adapting the workplace to meet their needs. Measures were also taken to encourage self-employment among persons with disabilities. Croatia was taking action to combat irregular employment, also in the form of new legislation. Currently, if a labour inspection revealed the presence of irregular workers, the offending employer was required not only to register the workers concerned, but also to pay six months’ salary to each one. In that regard, migrant workers were treated on an equal footing with national workers.

56. Using data from various sources, the State had compiled a register of young persons who were not in employment, education or training, which it used to develop programmes aimed at returning such persons to school or integrating them into the labour market. The

prevalence of short-term employment contracts had dropped significantly, from 17 per cent in 2021 to 11.1 per cent in 2022. As a further protection for workers, employers were no longer allowed to conclude more than three consecutive short-term contracts with an employee.

57. In 2017, the minimum wage had been just 35 per cent of the average wage. Since then, the minimum wage had increased by 130 per cent. Average wages had also been increasing year on year, and the Government was continuing its efforts to achieve a better ratio between the two, its aim being to make the minimum wage 50 per cent of the average wage or 60 per cent of the median wage.

58. With regard to migrant workers, the Government had focused its efforts on those who worked via digital platforms, to verify that they were in possession of a work permit and that their rights were being respected. National workers and migrant workers in Croatia enjoyed the same rights and had the same access to justice and redress. Migrant workers, moreover, were provided with information in their own languages about their rights, notably their rights to the minimum wage, to healthcare and to social protection.

59. **A representative of Croatia** said that legal amendments to the Aliens Act would have their second reading before parliament later in the week. Although migrant labour was a relatively new phenomenon in Croatia, foreign workers now made up a large proportion of the workforce, around 130,000 out of 1.7 million. In addition to being required to disburse six months' salary to unregistered workers, employers were also liable to a fine of €2,600 for each worker.

60. In order to promote integration and stability, the Government intended to introduce three-year work permits. It was also running Croatian language courses for migrant workers, with financing from the European Social Fund Plus. The Government engaged in dialogue with workers' countries of origin to ensure that they were duly informed about their rights and obligations before they reached Croatia. The strict eligibility criteria for unemployment benefits had been relaxed.

61. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Aliens Act regulated migrant labour in such a way as to ensure foreign workers were employed in the sectors where there was the greatest need for their services.

62. **A representative of Croatia** said that the guaranteed minimum benefit was a cash allowance for persons who lacked any means of basic sustenance, including older persons and persons unable to work due to health issues. The benefit, which was one of the mainstays of the social welfare system, was currently being disbursed to more than 44,000 persons. The number of beneficiaries had been dropping in recent years, chiefly due to the fact that the recipients had found employment.

63. The base level of the guaranteed minimum benefit had been raised three times since 2020, from an initial €106 to the current level of €160, an increase of 51 per cent, and further increases were planned. The amount actually disbursed depended upon the number of persons in a household and whether or not the recipient was able to work. In addition to the benefit, beneficiaries also received an additional €70 energy allowance as well as a 30 per cent supplement to cover housing costs. Amendments to the Social Welfare Act were currently being discussed and might include a 25 per cent increase in the guaranteed minimum benefit for single parents and the children of single parents. Other benefits had also been increased at the beginning of 2025, notably by 125 per cent for parents caring for a child with disabilities who might otherwise be institutionalized. Parents receiving that benefit currently numbered around 7,000.

64. Support for the standard of living of socially vulnerable citizens was not covered by the guaranteed minimum benefit but by the social welfare system. Persons with disabilities, for example, were eligible for a special "inclusion supplement", which had recently been significantly increased in value and extended to make it available to more beneficiaries. Persons with the most severe degree of disability could receive as much as €720, and they too were entitled to the energy allowance. Another recently introduced benefit targeted older persons who had not worked for a sufficient number of years to gain a pension entitlement. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan included provision for a public tender for the

building of care homes for older persons, with a total of €160 million being invested in 18 different projects. The Plan also envisioned outpatient care such as home visits, advisory services and psychosocial support.

65. **A representative of Croatia** said that services for disadvantaged children and their families sought to empower them, break the cycle of poverty and promote social inclusion. An action plan for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee defined vulnerable children and their needs, laying special emphasis on children living in rural areas or in physically or culturally isolated communities, especially Roma children. A pilot project to support families, provide high-quality preschool education and coordinate early intervention services had recently been implemented in a county where 80 per cent of the beneficiaries were Roma children. A technical support instrument for diagnosing poverty had also been rolled out, with the aim of improving data-collection methodologies and ensuring multisectoral monitoring of all policies. It was hoped that the instrument would produce a new set of indicators which would help Croatia to better combat poverty.

66. **Ms. Lee** said that she had been pleased to hear that amendments to the Aliens Act were likely to be passed and wondered whether they would include provisions stipulating minimum standards of accommodation for migrant workers. It had also been gratifying to hear that the number of beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum benefit had fallen due to the fact that many of them had found employment. However, it remained unclear why, at the same time, the number of persons at risk of poverty had increased. She hoped to hear more about how the guaranteed minimum benefit was calculated and whether it was indexed to the cost of living. Lastly, she was concerned that beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum benefit were required to complete between 60 and 90 hours of unremunerated community service per month, and that failure to fulfil that obligation could lead to loss of the benefit. She wondered whether the authorities had any plans to review that requirement to ensure that it did not have a discriminatory effect on people who were already in a vulnerable situation.

67. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would be interested to hear the rationale behind the requirement for recipients of the guaranteed minimum benefit to perform community service, particularly in the light of the fact that it was a local-level imposition and 60 per cent of counties did not require it at all. He hoped that the delegation could comment on troubling reports the Committee had received to the effect that migrant workers often lived in overcrowded conditions, with perhaps as many as 20 persons occupying a single flat. He wished to commend the State party for having introduced a benefit for older persons who had not worked long enough to earn a pension and wanted to know if the benefit was also available to women who, having had to interrupt their careers, faced a gender pension gap.

68. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know over what time frame the 130 per cent increase in the minimum wage had occurred, and he hoped to see evidence that the increase was sufficient to cover subsistence living costs of families. The delegation should explain what measures were being taken to ensure that the minimum wage was being respected by employers. He was concerned that the provision restricting the number of consecutive short-term employment contracts to three might, in practice, lead to unemployment or irregular employment once those contracts had expired. He would therefore appreciate information showing that the provision had effectively produced labour-market stability. He wished to recognize the efforts the Government was making on behalf of persons in situations of vulnerability and wondered whether any specific action had been taken to encourage them into entrepreneurship and self-employment.

69. **Mr. Bouzid** said that the delegation should provide information on the nationalities of the migrant workers in the county.

70. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be interested to hear about any initiatives to facilitate the entry of women into the labour market, such as policies to reconcile work and family life, to promote the sharing of domestic duties between men and women or to provide workplace kindergartens.

71. **A representative of Croatia** said that employers who provided accommodation for their migrant workers had to follow the strict rules set forth in the Aliens Act, under which each worker was to have at least 14 square metres of personal space as well as access to a kitchen and sanitary facilities. Most migrant workers in the country came from other

European States; however, increasing numbers were arriving from countries not traditionally present on the Croatian labour market, such as Nepal, India and Pakistan.

72. **A representative of Croatia** said that data collected since 2019 indicated that the percentage of persons at risk of poverty was not significantly increasing and bore no relation to the reduced number of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum benefit. The amount of the benefit, which was determined by specialized working groups, was due to increase under the amended Social Welfare Act. Many of the local-level administrations that did impose a community service obligation on recipients of the guaranteed minimum benefit had reported positive outcomes, as the community service had subsequently helped the beneficiaries to enter the labour market. In any case, exemptions did exist for persons unable to perform the service. A system of social mentoring had recently been introduced to help vulnerable persons, including recipients of the guaranteed minimum benefit, find employment.

73. **A representative of Croatia** said that the poverty threshold went up as average incomes went up. Therefore, the increase in the number of persons below the threshold had to be seen in the broader perspective of the country's socioeconomic situation.

74. **A representative of Croatia** said that, in order to obtain a pension, persons needed to have worked and contributed for at least 15 years. The benefit for persons who had not accrued a pension entitlement currently stood at €154 plus the energy allowance. Since women generally worked for fewer years than men, they automatically received an additional six months of pension contributions for each child they had.

75. **A representative of Croatia** said that the increase in the minimum wage had occurred between 2016 and 2025. The figure of 130 per cent was a nominal amount; taking account of inflation, the increase stood at around 70 per cent. The objective of the State in setting the minimum wage was not to regulate wages in general but to ensure that nobody fell below a certain level. The minimum wage was not directly linked to the cost of living but was calculated by a commission of experts, employers and trade unions who took account of a broad range of economic factors, including other benefits and allowances that beneficiaries might be receiving.

76. The limitations on consecutive short-term employment contracts had been introduced to combat a harmful practice whereby employers had issued contracts that were renewable on a monthly basis, particularly for seasonal work, which had created a situation of great precarity. In order to prevent such abuses, a system had been introduced whereby employers and employees could sign just three consecutive short-term contracts over three months followed by an interruption of not less than three months.

77. **A representative of Croatia** said that between 5,000 and 6,000 people were currently receiving self-employment support benefits. Of the 35,000 persons who had received those benefits over the previous five years, over 85 per cent were still in business and provided employment for over 50,000 workers. The amount of the benefit, which changed from year to year, currently stood at between €7,000 and €20,000, with the higher amounts being destined for persons operating in the construction or food processing industries.

78. **A representative of Croatia** said that the State was investing resources to help women return to employment after having had children, in which regard €70 million was disbursed annually to local governments for the running of kindergartens and day-care centres. Paternity leave was also provided. The State was funding the construction of schools across the country so that, by the year 2027/28, all children would be able to go to school in a single shift and at the same time, while their parents were at work.

79. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Task Force) said that he was concerned by escalating rates of violence and domestic violence against women, particularly women with disabilities. In that connection, he looked forward to hearing about any steps taken towards the effective implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). He also wished to know what support was available to victims of violence, especially those with disabilities; what action was being taken to develop a national system to combat all forms of violence against women, including through education and monitoring; what mechanisms were in place to prevent abuse against older persons, including those in social welfare and healthcare institutions; and

what was being done to address the harmful and traditional practices which persisted in Roma communities and which particularly affected Roma women and children.

80. He would be interested to hear about any concrete legal and policy measures to prevent human trafficking, particularly when it involved sexual exploitation and abuse against children. Specifically, he wished to know what steps were taken to ensure that victims of trafficking were duly identified, that they were not subjected to reprisals or further victimization and that the sentences handed down by the courts against traffickers were commensurate with the gravity of the offence. In view of the fact that the State party had acknowledged that the measures it had taken to combat poverty and social exclusion were insufficient, he wished to hear about any plans to adopt a multidimensional plan of action to reduce poverty and exclusion, with clear and measurable targets and a special focus on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. He would also be interested to know what was being done to address the root causes of poverty and to counter the aggravating effects of year-on-year inflation and the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

81. According to reports, Croatia lacked a comprehensive needs-based housing policy and a national strategy for addressing homelessness, to the particular detriment of marginalized groups. Around 6.5 per cent of the population did not have access to running water and many Roma lived in informal settlements that lacked basic infrastructure. He therefore wished to know what measures were taken to ensure the availability, affordability, habitability and accessibility of adequate housing, in particular for marginalized and vulnerable groups and individuals. The delegation should also report on the channels available to persons who wished to challenge house demolitions or forced evictions and explain what action had been taken to assist those affected by earthquakes in 2020, who apparently still lived in improvised settlements. He would be interested to hear what progress had been achieved in tackling homelessness since June 2021, when Croatia had signed the Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combating Homelessness.

82. The national healthcare system seemed to be beset by long-standing structural problems and staff shortages, which was having a negative impact on medical services, particularly in remote and rural areas and among vulnerable communities. He therefore wished to know what action was being taken to address the lack of healthcare professionals, to reduce waiting lists and to ensure timely access to effective and high-quality primary healthcare, including for asylum-seekers, refugees, persons under international protection and persons with disabilities. It would be helpful to learn about the availability and accessibility of safe abortions, especially late-stage abortions which were required due to a malformation of the fetus or the health condition of the mother. Were there any measures to prevent violence or abuse against women undergoing medical treatment related to their reproductive health? He looked forward to hearing about the results of the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Mental Health Development 2030, particularly with regard to community-based mental health services. He wished to know if anything had been done to address the insufficient numbers of child mental health professionals and to combat the high suicide rate among older persons.

*The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.*