



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
20 February 2025

Original: English

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

Summary record of the 3rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 11 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

Contents

Consideration of reports:

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

Second periodic report of Croatia (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports:

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

Second periodic report of Croatia (continued) ([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. **The Chair** invited the delegation to continue replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Croatia** said that measures were being taken to ensure greater availability of community-based social services, including services for older people, and to increase the number of foster families, in particular those willing to foster the youngest children. An action plan for the prevention of institutionalization and the transformation of the provision of social services had been adopted in June 2023. Earlier, in December 2022, her country and the World Bank had entered into an agreement within the framework of which a number of individual plans had been drawn up to find suitable alternatives to institutions for persons with disabilities, including children. There had also been an increase in the payments made to foster families, whose role had had been highlighted in a number of media campaigns. Social workers known as family associates, of whom there were 38, spent considerable amounts of time – nearly every day, in some cases – working with dysfunctional families that were at risk of breaking down.
4. A legal framework for recruiting personal care assistants had been developed pursuant to the Personal Assistance Act, which had entered into force in July 2023. More than 5,000 such assistants had been hired, and efforts to hire and train even more were ongoing. Starting in July 2025, members of the public would have access to a digital application that would make it possible to obtain information, including anonymously, on the benefits that they were entitled to.
5. **A representative of Croatia** said that the adoption of policy documents on children's services was coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, the Pension System, Family and Social Policy. The preparation of the National Plan for Children's Rights had been informed by a comprehensive policy framework – the European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee – adopted by the European Commission in 2021. Steps were taken in follow-up to the recommendations made by such intergovernmental bodies of the Council of Europe as the Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child.
6. A pilot project for the provision of children's services in Međimurje County, where 80 per cent of the special benefit recipients were children from Roma families, had proved sustainable. Enhanced access to education, including preschool education, to support, to good food – cafeterias in primary schools offered meals at no charge – to healthcare, to housing and to community-based social services was provided in a bid to prevent the marginalization of children living in poverty.
7. Relevant indicators, which informed the development of measures to help lift children out of poverty, were monitored. The percentage of children living in poverty had fallen from 17.1 per cent in 2021 to 16.1 per cent in 2023. The 2024 figures were not yet available. One of the major aims of a project launched two months previously in cooperation with other States members of the European Union was to facilitate the collection of data that could be drawn on to develop effective policies to help children in poverty.
8. **A representative of Croatia** said that considerable efforts made by the authorities, including outreach to employers, talks and workshops, had led to increases in the employment of members of the Roma and other vulnerable communities. Staff at the country's 17 career management centres – the opening of two more was planned – reached out to people of working age who were not in education, employment or training with a view to helping them enter the labour market.

9. **A representative of Croatia** said that even households whose income exceeded the minimum wage could qualify for child benefits.
10. **A representative of Croatia** said that the register of households, which was maintained by the tax authorities, was used as a tool to target the provision of social services more effectively. It also made it possible to monitor all the benefit payments made by the State.
11. **A representative of Croatia** said that there was a shortage of affordable housing throughout the European Union, including in his country. The affordability crisis had been exacerbated by inflation linked to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In response, the Government was formulating a new national housing plan, the final consultations on which were drawing to a close. However, even before the forthcoming adoption of the new plan, steps had been taken to provide groups of people such as war veterans and victims of violence with housing. There were also programmes to encourage settlement in underdeveloped areas. Those and other housing programmes or initiatives would be brought within the framework of the new plan, which would also focus on people living on the edge of poverty.
12. In Croatia, as in many other post-socialist States, rates of homeownership were high, but there was a shortage of as many as 270,000 housing units and, as a result, it was particularly difficult for young people to become property owners. At the same time, there were tens of thousands of housing units that were either left empty or rented only seasonally. Plans had therefore been made to adopt a law on affordable housing that would enable the State to take over empty houses or apartments and offer them to young families or persons at risk of poverty. In addition, spatial planning regulations would be amended with a view to facilitating the construction of affordable housing, and the process of obtaining a permit to build a family home would be simplified.
13. **A representative of Croatia** said that special support was provided to victims of family violence. If, for instance, such persons, many of whom were single mothers, could not be accommodated in public housing, the State offered them privately rented housing for which it paid the rent. Help was also given to young families at risk of marginalization.
14. Work to improve the living conditions of the Roma minority was ongoing. Six family homes, for example, were being built in Osijek-Baranja County in eastern Croatia. Members of Roma communities in rural areas could apply for public dwellings to be turned over to them. They could also apply for subsidies for the purchase of building materials. In recent years, housing had been provided to nearly 900 people under international protection. In short, housing was provided to all groups at risk of social exclusion.
15. **A representative of Croatia**, noting that the provision of homeless services was the responsibility of county and municipal governments, said that more than 600 people, of whom 7 were foreign nationals, had made use of her country's homeless shelters in 2022.
16. A fund for the maintenance of children whose parents were incapable of supporting them had been set up pursuant to an act recently adopted with the unanimous backing of the country's lawmakers. Under the new act, maintenance payments could be made, in particular cases, until a child was 26 years old, not simply for a maximum of three years, as had been the case previously. Red tape had been cut, simplifying the process of applying for benefits.
17. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Water Act, under which water utilities and local governments were required to provide water to all, including by installing public water fountains, had been amended with a view to improving access to water, in particular for marginalized communities. The Government was investing heavily in improvements to the water distribution network.
18. **A representative of Croatia**, noting that his country had the lowest energy prices in the European Union, said that the Government had introduced seven packages to help blunt the impact of sharp increases in the prices of food and fuel. All shops had a section in which products subsidized by the State were sold. Pensioners had received cash transfers. Those and other such measures had accounted for a larger share of gross domestic product than in any other State member of the European Union but Germany.

19. **A representative of Croatia** said that, in a bid to protect the most vulnerable groups from inflationary pressures, some 70 commonly purchased products had been subjected to price controls. As those controls had been introduced in the wake of consultations with relevant stakeholders, they had been widely accepted, including by retailers. When, as a result of the war in Ukraine, energy prices had spiked, energy supplements had been introduced. More than 700,000 pensioners had received the cash transfers mentioned previously. Other groups, too, including households receiving child benefits, had been made eligible for supplementary support.

20. **A representative of Croatia** said that there had been a number of amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act to strengthen the framework for the protection of women from family violence. Any act of gender-based violence attending the commission of a crime aggravated the enormity of the crime. Croatia had been one of the first countries in Europe to make femicide, the murder of a woman because she was a woman, a criminal offence.

21. Victims of family violence had been given automatic access to support services that had previously been provided only on request. Victims of such violence were also notified of the perpetrator's release. Victims of sexual violence could give statements either via video link or in the courtroom. Persons arrested on suspicion of crimes involving gender-based violence were detained until their trial.

22. Training on those and other relevant criminal proceedings was offered regularly by the Judicial Academy. In addition, plans were being made to organize 13 training sessions for judges, prosecutors, police officers and persons working at victim support centres on topics such as family violence, gender-based violence and sexism.

23. **A representative of Croatia** said that, in addition to the amendments to the Criminal Procedure Act, there had been amendments to the Act on Protection against Domestic Violence. As a result, penalties had been stiffened, victims had been made eligible for additional support, and the cooperation offered by victim support services had been made more robust.

24. The preparation of a new national plan for the prevention of sexual violence, which would focus on victims' rights, was under way. Within the framework of another national plan, a plan on the protection of women from family violence, steps were taken in follow-up to the recommendations made by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which was responsible for monitoring the parties' implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

25. There were 26 shelters, at least one in each county, for victims of domestic violence. Six new shelters had been set up since 2020. Millions of euros had been set aside for the operation of the shelters.

26. Public awareness campaigns had been launched with a view to ending violence against women. The catchphrase of one such campaign was "Empathy Now!"

27. **A representative of Croatia** said that mobile health teams had been organized to increase access to primary healthcare. An emergency helicopter service, which had centres in Zagreb, Osijek, Split and Rijeka, had begun operating in 2023, while the maritime emergency service, which was equipped with speedboats, operated chiefly in the Adriatic. A telemedicine project had been launched in particular to facilitate consultations with cardiologists.

28. Each country had at least one hospital, and there were numerous hospitals in the larger cities. The number of doctors per 100,000 inhabitants, which was increasing by the year, was very near the European Union average. Funds for hundreds of residencies for new doctors had been set aside or were being sought.

29. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome statistical information on the implementation of the National Strategy for Action in the Field of Addiction for the Period up to 2030. In particular, he wondered whether progress had been made towards reducing drug-related harm. He wondered, too, as he had noted at the previous meeting, what was being done to ensure that medically necessary late-stage abortions were

safe and accessible, to lower the high rate of suicide, particularly among older people, and to ensure that asylum-seekers, refugees and the members of their families had access to healthcare. Information on the steps that were being taken to ensure that health facilities and healthcare were accessible to persons with disabilities would likewise be welcome. Lastly, he wished to know, as he had also noted at the previous meeting, what measures were in place to prevent vulnerable families from being evicted or having their houses demolished and what remedies they had access to if that did happen.

30. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that it would be helpful to learn whether the population of homeless shelter users mentioned by the delegation, 600, was an accurate reflection of the number of homeless people in the State party, how long the average shelter stay was and what the shelter conditions were like. He wondered whether the Government's plan to take over vacant housing units involved expropriation and what else could be done to increase the availability of rental housing. In addition, he wished to know whether families' utilities were cut off for unpaid bills and what happened when homeowners could not make their mortgage payments.

31. **Mr. Bouzid** said that he wondered whether the Government intended to compensate the owners of the empty housing units it planned to take over.

32. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what measures were being taken or planned to ensure that quarterly reporting requirements adopted pursuant to a recent amendment to the Compulsory Health Insurance Act did not deprive vulnerable people of insurance coverage.

33. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that it would be interesting to learn whether the Government planned to update its method for measuring poverty by incorporating into its measurements the indicators used in the multidimensional poverty index.

34. **A representative of Croatia** said that the National Strategy for Action in the Field of Addiction for the Period up to 2030 had been adopted in February 2023 to combat illegal drugs and reduce the harm related to addiction. Since 2019, the Ministry of Health, the Croatian Institute of Public Health and the teacher training agency had worked together on activities, organized in the country's schools, to prevent alcohol and drug abuse and smoking.

35. Rehabilitation services were offered by a variety of providers, including public hospitals and non-governmental organizations. Around a third of the people receiving treatment in hospitals for substance abuse were women. Pregnant women and women with children were a particular concern of a focus group working to improve rehabilitation services for women with substance abuse disorders.

36. All hospitals with gynaecology departments offered abortions. If a particular doctor objected to performing an abortion, another doctor was found.

37. Asylum-seekers, refugees and the members of their families had the right to healthcare under the Compulsory Health Insurance Act. Insurance costs were covered by the State. Foreign nationals without health insurance, including unaccompanied minors, also received healthcare.

38. **A representative of Croatia**, noting that his country followed the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights on the right to housing very closely, said that it was difficult to evict anybody from his or her home. For the rest, the Government had no plans to expropriate anyone. The idea was simply to rent empty housing units and sublet them at subsidized prices.

39. **A representative of Croatia** said that the health authorities had informed all medical facilities that all patients were entitled to the medical and health services they needed, including abortions. Accordingly, all suitably equipped facilities were obliged to provide abortions. A record was made of any conscientious objection by medical personnel to the performance of an abortion.

40. Persons with disabilities had the right to healthcare on a basis of equality with others. Health facilities were procuring the equipment needed to provide care to such persons, and accessibility improvements were being made. In fact, all healthcare providers, including those in private practice, had to comply with newly adopted accessibility requirements.

41. **A representative of Croatia** said that the property tax introduced in January 2025, which had replaced a tax on vacation homes, did not apply to a person's primary residence.
42. **A representative of Croatia** said that the obligation to report every three months to the Croatian Health Insurance Institute had been introduced because a large number of Croatian nationals living abroad had continued to return to Croatia for care while not paying into the system, costing the Institute nearly €100 million a year. Of course, if, for example, an insured Croatian resident was unable to keep an appointment to report to the Institute, another appointment was made. The Institute was reasonably flexible.
43. **A representative of Croatia** said that, as people could not be counted if they could not be reached, and as some homeless people avoided approaching providers of homeless services, it was not unreasonable for estimates of the size of the homeless population to differ. Definitions of homelessness also differed. For statistical and other purposes, the Government relied on the definition contained in the Social Welfare Act. Homeless people could obtain identity documents by registering with the social welfare system.
44. **A representative of Croatia** said that one of the objectives of the Strategic Framework for the Development of Mental Health by 2030 was to reduce the suicide rate by 10 per cent through intersectoral measures. The Framework also established many measures focused on children's mental health and mental health in the workplace.
45. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would welcome a more comprehensive reply to the question posed in paragraph 32 of the list of issues ([E/C.12/HRV/Q/2](#)). Specifically, it would appreciate statistics covering the period from 2013 to 2023 on school enrolment, completion and dropout rates at the primary and secondary levels, including a breakdown of the dropout rate by ethnic group. He would be interested to know whether there had been a specific educational programme for Roma children prior to the adoption of the language and culture curriculum of the Roma national minority in 2020 and how that curriculum had helped preserve Roma language, traditions and culture in practice. He wondered whether there were any precise data on the number of Roma children who had actually completed the mandatory one-year preschool programme in the past five years compared to the number that had been eligible to do so and how many had progressed to primary and secondary school. He would like to know to what extent the central Government and local governments took responsibility for the education of Roma children.
46. He had noted the statistics provided in paragraph 247 of the replies to the list of issues ([E/C.12/HRV/RQ/2](#)) but would welcome more detailed information on the specific measures taken by the Government in accordance with the Act on International and Temporary Protection to ensure that refugees and migrants had access to quality Croatian language courses and to higher education. He would also be interested to know whether the Operational Programme for National Minorities for the period 2021–2024 had been updated for 2025 and beyond and whether it included specific provisions for the Serbian minority. It would be helpful to know the Government's position in respect of the reported acts of vandalism targeting Serbian cultural monuments and Orthodox churches and details of the measures taken in response to such incidents, including investigations and prosecutions.
47. A representative of Croatia said that, in 2023, Croatia had had the lowest proportion of early school leavers in the European Union at around 2 per cent.
48. **A representative of Croatia** said that the e-Register system, which contained data on all students at primary and secondary level, did not indicate whether or not they belonged to a national minority. However, as the Roma minority constituted a vulnerable group in need of special attention, the Ministry of Science, Education and Youth collected data on Roma children in the education system on an annual basis, which informed the measures it took for that category of students. Approximately 75 per cent of all Roma children went on to secondary school, which was lower than the national average. The National Plan for Roma Inclusion 2021–2027 included several measures aimed at encouraging the education of Roma children. Some 700 Roma children received government scholarships annually. Since 2008, an average of 400 Roma children had been enrolled in various kindergarten programmes each year free of charge. Since children who attended kindergarten tended to fare better at primary school, it was expected that the measures under way to enhance kindergarten capacity would support the education of Roma children in general. The objective was to ensure that all

children attended preschool by 2030. Preschool programmes came under the remit of local government units. Although the mandatory one-year preschool programme was generally run in kindergartens, some primary schools had a special preschool unit. According to the data collected by local government units, between 10 and 15 per cent of eligible children did not attend the mandatory preschool programme, but there were no penalties for non-attendance. Roma children were provided with additional Croatian language lessons at school, particularly in the early years of primary school, and in areas with a sizeable Roma population, special assistants were employed to facilitate communication between children and their teachers.

49. The second Operational Programme for National Minorities 2024–2028, which had been developed through cooperation between members of national minorities and various government ministries, covered more national minorities than the previous programme and contained both measures of a general nature and measures targeted to specific minorities in particular areas. There were a number of different models for the provision of education in the languages of national minorities. In some schools, all teaching was done in the language of the national minority, while, in others, members of national minorities could attend special classes in their language for between two and five hours per week. In all, 10,500 children from kindergarten to secondary level were attending such language programmes, which were available for the Czech, Serbian, Italian and Hungarian minorities. In 2020, the curriculum for the Roma minority had been adopted. As the Roma population in Croatia spoke several different languages, no single language had been defined in the curriculum, and it was therefore possible for Roma children to choose their language. Three schools currently provided teaching in the languages used by the Roma minority to a total of 80 pupils.

50. **A representative of Croatia** said that all criminal offences, including acts of vandalism, that targeted a particular ethnic group were treated as cases of discrimination requiring special measures to be taken by the police and justice authorities. The Government cooperated with various interest groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that protected the rights of minorities in order to prevent such incidents and bring the perpetrators to justice. The Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities had set up a strategic working group bringing together NGOs representing the Serbian, Jewish and LGBTQ communities to work on the prevention of violence based on discrimination.

51. According to European Union data, the rate of severe material deprivation of the Roma population in Croatia had halved since 2006 and the employment rate had doubled as a result of government measures in the field of services and infrastructure, as well as the contribution of minority stakeholders. The Ministry of Culture and Media was allocated funding from the national budget to meet the needs of national minorities, with a specific focus on the protection of cultural heritage and traditions. The Ministry provided funding to support cultural associations, libraries and the publishing projects of national minorities through public calls for grants. Public broadcasters had an obligation to provide a certain proportion of programming on topics related to ethnic minorities. The Ministry also paid special attention to ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities and providing the necessary funding to that end.

52. **A representative of Croatia** said that the central Government financed the mandatory one-year preschool programme in all municipalities and cities in Croatia, thus alleviating the financial burden on parents and local government units. In 2025, 2026 and 2027, with the help of European Union funds, the Government would allocate €200 million in funding to enable kindergartens to provide that important public service.

53. **A representative of Croatia**, referring to the acts of vandalism against Serbian churches, said that, under the Criminal Code, hate crimes were defined as crimes committed because of the colour, ethnic or religious origin, gender or other characteristics of the victim. The Criminal Code also defined the offence of vandalism of property, for which the courts handed down harsher penalties if discrimination was involved.

54. **A representative of Croatia** said that the disaggregated school dropout rate among Roma boys and girls varied from year to year. Each year between 50 and 100 Roma children left school early. Between 2016 and 2023, the number of Roma university students who had received government-funded scholarships had increased from 16 to 55. At the primary and

secondary levels, 70 hours of Croatian language classes were provided on a voluntary basis and could be used intensively or spread out over a longer period. If the desired results were not achieved in the first 70 hours, further classes were provided. The universities of Zagreb, Split, Rijeka and Zadar had departments for Croatian as a foreign language for foreign exchange students and third-country nationals living in Croatia.

55. **A representative of Croatia** said that, at the primary level, Roma assistants – persons from the Roma community – were made available to help children cope with the language barrier and participate in school life. In the area of Međimurje, which had a large Roma community, around 30 such assistants were employed.

56. **A representative of Croatia** said that there were also assistants for other children who required additional support in class. The annual budget for those assistants was €8 million.

57. **Mr. Bouzid** asked how many foreign students were studying in higher education institutions in Croatia, whether they had to pay fees and, if so, the annual average amount they paid.

58. **A representative of Croatia** said that there was an quota to facilitate the admission of foreign students, including refugees, to higher education, which meant that those who had attended secondary school in other countries required fewer credits for admission. In 2024, there had been 531 non-Croatian nationals, from Germany, Ukraine, France, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, studying in the country.

59. All directors and other professionals in institutes of higher education were supplied with the 2021 Ministry of Education and Youth guidelines for planning, implementation and evaluation related to students with special needs and were required to implement them. An ordinance on teaching assistants and professional communication intermediaries had been adopted in 2024. The data showed that all students who required such support had made use of their right to it.

60. **A representative of Croatia** said that indexation was used in Croatia in the methodology for calculating retirement pensions on a biannual basis and for other benefits available to older persons.

61. **A representative of Croatia** said that, although it was not linked to an indexation system, the guaranteed minimum benefit was adjusted annually for inflation by government decision on the basis of several factors, including the need to ensure that income from such benefits did not exceed the wages earned by workers. A recent project entitled Support to Improve Poverty Diagnostic and Social Policies Monitoring, financed from European Union funds, would gather data to help monitor and track poverty. The central population register, to be established in 2025, would facilitate the monitoring of all social indicators and some new ones, such as unique identifiers of housing units.

62. **A representative of Croatia** said that the trade unions were involved in the processes for drafting national legislation, guidelines and policy and collaborated with the Government and the employers in the tripartite National Economic and Social Council. They participated in working groups on drafting legislation in all areas that affected citizens' rights, as well as in the work of parliamentary committees. Work was currently underway to improve the conditions for collective bargaining. It was possible, with the agreement of both parties involved, to extend the provisions of existing sectoral agreements, as had been done, for example, in the construction sector in order to guarantee improved rights for all workers and prevent unfair competition.

63. There were constitutional provisions that permitted restrictions on the trade union rights of military and police personnel, but only in line with legislation. For example, the restrictions on the trade union rights of military personnel, who had to be ready to defend the country, were in compliance with the International Labour Organization Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98).

64. **A representative of Croatia** said that the trade union system for the police was both transparent and successful, with nine unions in total, of which two could negotiate collective agreements and thus were fully representative.

65. **A representative of Croatia** said that, when the State was founded, the trade unions that existed under the previous regime had been discontinued and their property had passed to the Government. However, under recent legislation, most of that property had now been transferred to a new trade union fund and would subsequently be passed on to the current trade unions.

66. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Rapporteur) said that, in the light of the noticeable difference between the number of officially registered complaints of racial discrimination and the number of such cases reported during surveys conducted among ethnic minority groups and non-Croatian nationals, she would like to know what the State party was doing to address that situation. While there was a legislative framework for combating racial discrimination, it was reported that funding for its implementation was lacking and the local and regional authorities responsible were unwilling to implement its provisions; she would welcome the delegation's comments on that matter. She would also like to hear the delegation's view on the reports of incitement to hatred and hate crimes committed against Serbian nationals.

67. **A representative of Croatia** said that local and regional authorities were required to implement the programmes and projects decided on at national level; while they had some revenue independent of the central Government, that was not the case for all funding, and compliance could be enforced through conditions imposed. The figures reported for hate crimes based on national, racial or sexual factors were 61 cases in 2023, compared to 67 cases in 2021. Serbs, Roma, Albanians and Bosniaks were the groups most affected. Members of minority groups were encouraged to report such crimes, and training was provided for judges to ensure that penalties imposed were commensurate with the crime.

68. Complaints of discrimination received in the Ministry of Labour were considered individually. The discrepancies in the numbers found by the country rapporteur might be a result of the fact that, although discrimination on the basis of nationality might have initially been given as the ground for a complaint, it was frequently the case that the actual cause was a dispute between the worker and the employer.

69. **A representative of Croatia** said that training on the prevention of discrimination, hate crimes, hate speech, including antisemitism, and other discrimination based on religion, was provided to judges, prosecutors and other staff of the judicial system through the Judicial Academy; 13 training workshops were planned for 2025.

70. **A representative of Croatia** said that members of the police force were involved in 79 different activities, such as lectures and workshops, on preventing discrimination and modern antisemitism, including negation of the Holocaust, and preserving the memory of all victims of the Holocaust. Experts from the Institute for Social Sciences and the President of the court dealing with misdemeanours had contributed to improving the legislative framework for that work.

71. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** said that the Committee greatly appreciated the delegation's openness and constructive attitude to the dialogue, and looked forward to similar interactions in the future.

72. **A representative of Croatia** said that his Government was passionate about addressing the challenges before it in the areas of concern to the Committee and appreciated the Committee's constructive approach during the dialogue, which took account of the aggression the country had suffered in the past. The current Russian aggression against Ukraine had led to even more challenges such as the increased cost of living, from which the Government had done its best to protect the population. The demographic trend, with a growing older population and a decline in the birth rate was another challenge which the Government was addressing with cross-party support.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.