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Summary record of the 5th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 14 February 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran (Vice-Chair)

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Ms. Saran (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

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

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

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

Sixth periodic report of Romania (continued) (E/C.12/ROU/6; E/C.12/ROU/Q/6; E/C.12/ROU/RQ/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Romania joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Romania**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the new social dialogue law was being implemented and that the Labour Inspectorate carried out information campaigns on collective bargaining throughout the country.
3. **A representative of Romania** said that, according to data from Eurostat for 2022, the proportion of young persons aged 15 to 24 years not in education, employment or training had been 20.9 per cent for women and girls and 14.3 per cent for men and boys, giving an overall rate of 17.5 per cent. Among young persons aged 15 to 29 years, the rates had been 25.4 per cent for women and girls and 14.5 per cent for men and boys, giving an overall rate of 19.8 per cent. The employment rate for persons aged 15 to 64 years had been 63.1 per cent, a 1.2 percentage point increase compared to 2021; it had stood at 71.5 per cent for men and boys and 54.4 per cent for women and girls.
4. **A representative of Romania** said that the National Recovery and Resilience Plan had been approved in November 2021 and renewed in December 2023, including to reflect the REPowerEU Plan, introduced in May 2022. Through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, Romania had been allocated €28.5 billion, of which €14.9 billion would come from loans and €13.6 billion from grants. To date, Romania had submitted three requests for payment from the Facility and had received €9.11 billion, which it was investing in the green and digital transitions, health care, public employment services, social protection, transport and education, among other sectors. It would submit a fourth payment request by the end of 2024 and four more by June 2026.
5. **A representative of Romania** said that the idea behind the National Recovery and Resilience Plan was to bounce back from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and to improve compliance with international obligations pertaining to economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.
6. **A representative of Romania** said that, according to statistics from the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for 2023, the number of persons with disabilities in employment had stood at 50,295, of whom 9,831 had been working in the private sector. Between May 2019 and October 2023, the National Authority, in cooperation with the National Agency for Employment, had implemented a project to facilitate the labour market insertion of persons with disabilities. The main objective of the project, which had been financed in the amount of 111,000 lei using European Union and State funds, had been to ensure the equal access of persons with disabilities to the physical, information and communication environment in order to increase their chances of employment. Among the results achieved, 5,700 persons with disabilities had benefited from information and counselling services, 987 had found employment, five workplaces had been adapted and 2,062 vouchers worth over 61,000 lei had been issued for the purchase of assistive technology for employment purposes.
7. **A representative of Romania** said that, at the domestic level, members of civil society could participate in decision-making processes through public consultations, which were a requirement of legislative transparency and were open to all stakeholders, or through sectoral bodies such as the National Disability Council, the Interministerial Committee to Prevent and Combat Domestic Violence and the Council of National Minorities. The Economic and Social Council, which was composed of representatives of civil society, trade unions, employers and the Government, was an independent advisory body that issued

opinions on draft legislation concerning certain topics. Representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) typically accounted for two thirds of the Council's members. The Government and parliamentarians were legally obliged to consult the Council on draft legislation that came within its purview.

8. At the international level, reports submitted to the human rights treaty bodies were subject to public consultation prior to their adoption. In the case of the sixth periodic report submitted under the Covenant, no comments or requests for a public debate had been received from stakeholders. However, previous civil society submissions to the Committee and to other United Nations human rights mechanisms were proof of awareness of existing avenues for engagement. Together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Government would explore ways of further publicizing those avenues. Since the mandates of several domestic bodies covered economic, social and cultural rights or related issues, the Government could not ratify the Optional Protocol without first assessing how future individual communications could be handled in a coordinated and effective manner.

9. Child abuse could be reported through a free 24/7 helpline. When an immediate medical or police response was required, operators alerted the relevant emergency service. Children found by social services to be in danger of abuse or neglect were immediately removed from their family and placed under protection. Such measures had to be confirmed by a court order and were reviewed every three months. Institutions whose employees had direct contact with children in the performance of their duties had to adopt internal procedures for reporting violence against children to the competent authorities. In the first nine months of 2023, social services had recorded 13,340 cases of child abuse, over 8,700 cases of neglect, 170 cases of labour exploitation, 31 cases of sexual exploitation and 94 cases of criminal exploitation. The figures for rural and urban areas were roughly comparable.

10. Human trafficking and exploitation were punishable under the Criminal Code. The relevant provisions had been systematized to facilitate their understanding. Child trafficking was a stand-alone criminal offence. Domestic laws provided for specific lines of cooperation on child protection between social services and other relevant authorities, including through multidisciplinary teams. Social service providers seeking accreditation for the provision of specialized services to child victims of trafficking had to meet nationally approved minimum quality standards. The National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, in cooperation with relevant NGOs, had organized training sessions on subjects such as trauma and identification procedures for more than 300 specialists working directly with child victims of trafficking and abuse. All forms of corporal punishment had been prohibited since 2004.

11. **A representative of Romania** said that domestic legislation had been harmonized with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Accordingly, police officers informed of a case of domestic violence were required to separate the victim from the aggressor and to take any other steps necessary to eliminate imminent risk, such as by issuing a five-day temporary protection order that could be extended until the issuance of a court order. Breaching a temporary protection order was a criminal offence. In 2023, cases of domestic violence had increased in number by 4.8 per cent compared to 2022 and had involved 60,500 victims, of whom 68 per cent had been women, 18 per cent had been men and 14 per cent had been minors, down 2.7 per cent compared to 2022. On 1 October 2022, the authorities had begun to use electronic monitoring.

12. **A representative of Romania** said that, between 2019 and 2023, measures taken to protect victims of violence against women and domestic violence had included issuing more than 50,000 temporary protection orders, extending the scope of domestic violence provisions to cover perpetrators not married to or living with the victim, creating over 1,000 mobile teams to provide emergency responses and refer victims to appropriate social services, giving ongoing training to all categories of professionals, conducting more than 10 information and awareness-raising campaigns and expanding the services available to victims, which included a free national 24/7 helpline that had handled 27,000 calls during the period. Furthermore, the authorities had established 42 shelters for victims,

84 complementary services, 10 sexual assault referral centres and 8 centres to assist perpetrators.

13. **A representative of Romania** said that, pursuant to a 2022 law, a national mechanism had been set up to prevent crime, protect victims and promote legal education. Under the law, proceeds of crime were used to protect and provide redress to victims by six institutions, namely the Ministries of Education, Health, Internal Affairs and Justice, the Public Ministry and the National Agency for the Management of Seized Assets. Victims could request advance payment vouchers from a unit of the Ministry of Justice to pay for, inter alia, accommodation, personal hygiene products and medical assistance.

14. **A representative of Romania** said that, the previous week, Parliament had approved a bill put forward by the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Justice to extend the scope of temporary protection orders to cover cases of online harassment, including the sharing of intimate images without consent. Once promulgated by the President, the bill would enter into force within 180 days of its publication in the Official Gazette.

15. **A representative of Romania** said that, as documented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) since the early 2000s, school violence was worryingly prevalent in Romania. According to the 2023 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), one in four students had reported being bullied in the previous few weeks. School violence disproportionately affected children from disadvantaged backgrounds. To tackle the issue, modules on personal development, civics and social education had been embedded in school curricula, indicators related to student safety and well-being had been included in assessments of the quality of education and, in October 2023, the Ministry of Education had developed a comprehensive set of guidelines for teachers, non-teaching staff and local authorities on identifying and responding to school violence. The Ministries of Education and Internal Affairs were currently conducting a comprehensive study on new forms of school violence and applying research tools in a representative sample of schools to identify and better document existing challenges.

16. **A representative of Romania** said that, together with State and NGO partners, the Romanian Police ran campaigns to raise awareness of violence against children. In addition, it had implemented a project to prevent violence against girls in 30 rural communities in partnership with World Vision Romania, the "Unwanted Touches" campaign in collaboration with the Child Helpline Association, which had received extensive media coverage and had benefited more than 50,000 children and adults, a national campaign against school violence together with the Ministry of Education, which had involved some 450 activities targeting more than 25,000 children, and a campaign to stop cyberbullying that had benefited around 30,000 individuals.

17. **A representative of Romania** said that, in 2020, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities had concluded a partnership agreement with UNICEF Romania to ensure equal development opportunities for all children and had agreed to use the U-Report platform to consult children and young people on issues related to gender and equal opportunities. In the first U-Report poll carried out in 2020, over 60 per cent of respondents had stated their belief that, in Romania, girls and boys did not benefit from equal opportunities. In 2020, the Agency had organized a 19-day campaign of activism to prevent violence against children and young people, which had drawn the participation of more than 200,000 students from 1,200 schools evenly split between rural and urban areas and over 20,000 teachers, psychologists, police officers, social workers, doctors and parents. Every year, the Agency organized a week of activities to celebrate the National Day of Equal Opportunities Between Women and Men on 8 May. From 2017 to 2019, in cooperation with the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, it had implemented the "Justice Has No Gender" project, which had involved conducting awareness-raising campaigns in 27 secondary schools targeting more than 20,000 students, teachers and other staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it had carried out various online campaigns. Gender equality commissions set up at the county level and including representatives of trade unions, employers and NGOs conducted local awareness-raising campaigns.

18. **A representative of Romania** said that the National Agency for Roma had provided academic training to medical students and police trainees and had organized a series of

lectures for almost 500 students in Bucharest on topics related to Roma history, culture and traditions, anti-racism and relevant legislation. In January 2024, it had teamed up with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to launch a nationwide project to extend the training programme to all police trainees. Furthermore, the National Centre for Roma Culture had organized the “Roma for Romania” campaign to highlight the achievements of successful persons of Roma ethnicity throughout history and thereby counter prejudice and promote the self-esteem of Roma youth. In 2023, with the support of the Council of Europe, an event had been held on government premises, in the presence of the media and diplomatic representatives, to recognize the outstanding academic performance of 20 Roma students from across the country.

19. **A representative of Romania** said that, over the previous four years, only 6 out of 67 applications for Romanian citizenship submitted by stateless persons had been rejected. While Romanian citizenship was normally based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*, *jus soli* applied to children born in Romania of unknown parentage. Since, in that case, it would be impossible to ascertain whether at least one parent was a Romanian citizen, the child would be considered a Romanian citizen unless evidence was produced to the contrary. A new draft law would be of direct benefit to persons without automatic Romanian citizenship because, for example, the annulment of an adoption while the child in question was still a minor would have no effect on the citizenship of that child if he or she would then become stateless. If a person forfeited Romanian nationality because he or she had acquired it fraudulently, the draft law stipulated that such loss of nationality would have no effect on the nationality of his or her offspring or spouse if they would otherwise become stateless. National legislation complied with the relevant international or European conventions protecting the rights of children and stateless persons.

20. **A representative of Romania** said that the 47 key social inclusion indicators for monitoring poverty had been updated in 2021 as part of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction. External independent experts had assessed progress towards achieving the objectives set in the Strategy. The public had also been consulted and feedback had been received from various stakeholders. Recent measures to combat poverty and reduce economic inequality included the introduction of the right to a minimum income and the provision of high-quality care services for vulnerable groups, older persons with disabilities, families with children and rural marginalized population groups as well as access to integrated services at community level. The funds for those measures came from the State budget, the European Social Fund and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, inter alia. The National Strategy for Long-term Care and Active Ageing focused on a proactive and preventive approach to long-term care and achieving the best quality of life for all by reducing the progression of functional decline and loss of capacity and ensuring independence and social participation. The Strategy envisaged the development of home-care and community-based day-care services and a review of the regulatory framework for the social care of older persons with a view to ensuring efficient funding and improved long-term care services.

21. **A representative of Romania** said that other social benefits for vulnerable persons included food vouchers, energy vouchers, school vouchers and financial support for mothers of newborn babies. Food vouchers were issued every two months to homeless or extremely poor persons such as individuals with a monthly income of less than €400 or families with two minor children with a per capita monthly income of less than €135. The programme had been launched in 2022 and would continue throughout the current year. In 2023, 2.6 million people had received the vouchers. Packages of essential foodstuffs were distributed twice a year to persons entitled to social inclusion assistance. The energy voucher introduced in 2023, which compensated for higher energy prices, had been issued to 2.8 million households. The school voucher would be introduced in the current year and would be given to 500,000 vulnerable children to enable them to attend preschool, primary and secondary schools. It was expected that the programme of financial support for mothers of newborn babies would be in operation by the end of 2024.

22. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate answers to the Committee’s questions regarding the portion of the national budget allocated to mental health care, plans to improve access to care and follow-up for patients suffering from

psychiatric pathologies, particularly among disadvantaged social groups, access to legal abortions and post-abortion care and measures to ensure that all women, including those living in rural areas or belonging to vulnerable groups, had access to those services in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner.

23. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to know more about the distribution of medical services and hospitals and the availability of beds, especially in rural areas. In light of the marked difference in the child mortality rate between urban and rural areas and the chronic lack of neonatal care, he would appreciate more information about measures to reduce the high child mortality rate.

24. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she would like to receive the texts of Law No. 367/2022 on Social Dialogue and the provisions of the legislation on the Minimum Inclusion Income that concerned the minimum level of that income and the procedure for adjusting the reference social indicator. She wished to know whether the minimum level of unemployment benefit was enough to ensure a dignified life for the jobless.

25. **A representative of Romania** said that the latest Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights sought to realize the rights of the most vulnerable children. To that end, it listed 19 targets, one of which was to ensure that 400,000 fewer children were affected by poverty and social exclusion than in 2019 and to reduce the child poverty rate to 30 per cent. Action to that end would include increasing social protection for poor children and covering their nutritional needs, prioritizing needy families with children and ensuring an enrolment rate in early education of at least 22 per cent among children up to the age of 3 and at least 95 per cent in the 4–6 years age group. Other goals were to facilitate access to quality services and improve children's health, to enable vulnerable children to receive inclusive education and to protect children from violence. Funding from the European Union would make it possible to provide integrated community services to 2,000 rural communities.

26. **A representative of Romania** said that that funding for the multiannual National Programme for Social Housing had increased to €40 million in 2023 and contracts to the value of €130 million had been signed in that year. Housing units were also built under both the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and the Inclusion and Social Dignity Programme.

27. **A representative of Romania** said that the value of the pension point had increased by 61 per cent between January 2020 and January 2024, and the level of the minimum pension had gone up by approximately 60 per cent over the same period. The Government had broadened the scope of pension credits as a means of tackling pension inequalities. The higher minimum benefit had improved the welfare of pensioners on low incomes, especially women over the age of 75. In addition, the Government had provided pensioners on low benefits with a series of one-off payments and food vouchers in 2020 and 2023, along with a one-off payment to offset higher energy prices for pensioners on small incomes in 2023.

28. **A representative of Romania** said that the Minimum Inclusion Income would be indexed twice a year. It was double the previous minimum guaranteed social pension and amounted to 50 per cent of the unemployment benefit of a person who had paid social insurance contributions for the previous 12 months.

29. **A representative of Romania** said that, in order to reduce poverty among members of the Roma community by enhancing their employability, adult education and vocational training courses were run to enable them to obtain primary and secondary school qualifications. They were also informed about employment services. An integrated package of personalized services was offered to jobless Roma women and young persons. Roma young persons and women with disabilities received special attention in national programmes to stimulate the social economy and encourage entrepreneurship. In 2022, 11,585 members of the Roma community had been enrolled in employment promotion measures; 2,930 of them had found a job. During the first four months of 2023, 5,469 individuals had been covered by such measures, and 1,149 of them had been actually recruited.

30. **A representative of Romania** said that the criteria for eligibility for social housing were membership of a vulnerable group as defined by the Law on Social Assistance, existing living conditions, the number of children or other persons living in the same household, the

health status of the persons concerned and of their family members and the length of time that they had been on the waiting list.

31. **A representative of Romania** said that forced eviction could only be carried out subject to a court order. A court would examine whether the persons concerned had access to alternative housing and basic services. Forced evictions were prohibited at certain times of the year. Annex 7 to the State party's replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/ROU/RQ/6) provided statistical data on forced evictions and the reasons for them. More people from vulnerable groups had been able to obtain social housing after the criteria for eligibility had been supplemented in November 2023.

32. **A representative of Romania** said that social housing units had to be of a specified size and had to be supplied with electricity and drinking water. The purpose of several investment programmes was to upgrade and extend water supplies and sewage systems. In addition to investments from the European Union, the Anghel Saligny National Investment Programme financed more than 1,800 projects for water supply and wastewater infrastructure with a budgetary appropriation of around €4.4 billion, and more than 2,400 similar projects were funded by the National Programme for Local Development to the tune of around €2.8 billion. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan likewise included funding to connect the homes of low-income families to the water supply and wastewater networks, covering all eligible expenses up to a limit of €1,900 per household.

33. Measures were under way to improve connections between rural areas and hospitals. The hospitals in the towns of Iași and Craiova were located in two of the poorest regions of the country.

34. A total of around 400 informal settlements had been reported by 194 local authorities in 2022. They contained more than 11,000 housing units and at least 72,000 inhabitants, of whom 47 per cent were female, 76 per cent were from the Roma minority and 6 per cent were from the Hungarian minority, 40 per cent were unemployed, 25 per cent were children below 15 years of age, some of whom were not enrolled in school, 22 per cent were persons over the age of 10 with no school education and 0.5 per cent were persons who had no identity cards.

35. **A representative of Romania** said that, as the right to medical assistance was guaranteed under the Constitution, emergency medical assistance was available to everyone. Uninsured persons received a minimum package of primary medical care. The community medical assistance network, which comprised 1,923 community nurses and 466 health mediators helped to ensure that people in rural or isolated areas had access to health services. The Ministry of Health was constantly training new community nurses. In 2023, the network had conducted several oncological screening campaigns and information campaigns on reproductive health.

36. **A representative of Romania** said that asylum-seekers had the right to primary and emergency health care, care for life-threatening acute and chronic diseases, psychological counselling and psychiatric consultations and treatment. Each regional reception centre for asylum-seekers had a medical unit. Refugees had the same rights as Romanian citizens and were therefore required to pay social health insurance contributions, although vulnerable groups, such as children and persons with disabilities, were exempt. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union paid for medical insurance in some instances.

37. **A representative of Romania** said that a plan of action had been drawn up to make the necessary improvements to mental health services, including the creation of mobile teams and the introduction of an integrated case management system for persons discharged from hospital and other institutions. Significant amendments had been made to mental health legislation in the areas of, inter alia, informed consent to medical treatment, involuntary hospitalization and community-based alternatives to hospital care. As part of a national programme to prevent mental health problems, occupational therapy was used to facilitate social and professional integration. A project to identify risk factors for mental illness in children and adolescents was under way, and professionals working with children were trained to recognize various disorders and inform parents of the most suitable parenting methods. Parents with mental health problems were supported in ensuring that they did not

pass on dysfunctional behaviours to their children. There was no specific budget for psychiatric services, which were funded through the medical insurance system.

38. Work to reduce neonatal mortality included improvements in access to care, for example through the distribution of specialized equipment across the country and partnerships with NGOs, particularly in rural areas. Adolescents had access to screening for sexually transmitted diseases, information on human papillomavirus vaccination and guidance on family planning. Women under the age of 40 received advice on family planning and safe sex. A new national strategy on sexual and reproductive health rights currently being drafted would ensure universal access to contraception and safe abortion. Around 120 family planning clinics were being refurbished and equipped, and a reproductive health education campaign targeted groups vulnerable to early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. In an effort to improve women's health and prevent unwanted pregnancies, groups such as unemployed persons, rural women and persons in receipt of social assistance enjoyed improved access to family planning services, free contraception and abortion. Doctors could refuse to perform procedures, including abortion, that would undermine their moral values or professional independence or damage their reputation; in such cases, they must ensure that the patient's life or health was not endangered. If a doctor refused to perform an abortion on moral grounds, he or she must refer the patient to another health-care provider.

39. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome information on the structure of the education budget, including the main areas covered and any steps being taken to define clearly the amounts to be allocated to different purposes. It would be useful to have statistics on the level of State funding for education over the previous three years. He wished to know to what extent funding for education was guaranteed by law and whether such provisions were set out in the Law on National Education. He would like to know whether that Law provided for a minimum level of funding for the education system; which State body determined that level; how, and how often, it was reviewed and whether factors such as inflation were taken into account. Information would be welcome on the correlation between the State education budget and other sources of funding, as well as the ability of the Government in general, and the Ministry of Education in particular, to ensure equal education opportunities throughout the State party by considering the capacities and needs of poorer regions. He wished to know what was being done to make up for the learning losses that had occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic.

40. The Committee would welcome comprehensive statistics on functional illiteracy, including information on the regions and social groups with the highest rates. It would also be important to hear what budget had been allocated to addressing the problem, how the issue of school dropout was tackled and what specific progress had been made in that regard, supported by statistics. It would be interesting to hear whether the Government's approach in its project to teach Romanian to students belonging to national minorities differed from the approach adopted in the Inclusive Schools: Making a Difference for Roma Children project of the European Union and Council of Europe. He also wished to know whether progress had been made in addressing educational disparities affecting children from low-income households, children in rural areas and children with disabilities.

41. The delegation should provide information on funding for institutions that offered education in minority languages outside the mainstream education system. The Committee would like to know whether the State party had entered into bilateral agreements on the cross-border exchange of textbooks, teaching aids and teaching staff. It would be good to know the outcome of a project undertaken between 2014 and 2020 on separate education institutions for the Roma and Hungarian communities, including whether the number of such institutions had changed. He wished to know whether the planned State Roma Theatre had been established. Lastly, he would like to know what the result had been of efforts to gather data on the implementation of legal provisions on national minorities' right to use their mother tongues in local public administration in locations where they comprised more than 20 per cent of the population and whether a plan had been drawn up as a result.

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.

42. **A representative of Romania** said that it was hoped that resources would be available in 2024 to establish the State Roma Theatre. There were also plans to open a museum on the subject of the Roma.

43. **A representative of Romania** said that a recent significant increase in the education budget to 74 billion lei had brought spending on education to more than 4 per cent of gross domestic product for the first time, although that figure remained below the 6 per cent target set out in law. Per capita funding stood at almost 7,000 lei. Education was funded through the State budget, totalling 59 million lei in 2024, as well as through local authorities' budgets, revenue from higher education institutions and external mechanisms. Strategic funding for education programmes, for example the more than €3 billion granted through the Recovery and Resilience Facility of the European Union, aligned closely with strategic development plans for the education system, with reforms and investments targeting priority areas such as the development of early years education, the reduction of dropout rates and modernization efforts. Additionally, reforms had been made in the governance of the pre-university education system, including capacity-building for local actors in order to support decentralization.

44. Funding for education was also received from the European Structural and Investment Funds, with a focus on preventing school dropout and improving access and learning outcomes for disadvantaged students. Loans, for instance from the World Bank, had been used to fund several projects, including one that supported disadvantaged students in transitioning from upper secondary to tertiary education and another that assisted schools in modernizing their infrastructure. The budget of the Ministry of Education was broken down into specific areas of expenditure, such as salaries and canteen subsidies. Scholarships were covered by both the Ministry of Education and the Government's social assistance budget. Most of the Ministry's budget was spent on salaries, although funding had been increased for goods and services, healthy meal and afterschool programmes, entitlements for children with special educational needs and incentives to promote enrolment in early years facilities. The education budget was guaranteed by law and adjusted annually in consultation with the social partners based on economic factors and schools' needs.

45. Initial teacher training had been reformed and the necessary resources provided to ensure that trainee teachers undertook sufficient practical training. Newly qualified teachers, particularly those working in disadvantaged areas, benefited from mentoring. A programme intended to counter the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning outcomes, supported by European Union funding, had successfully minimized the pandemic's effect on students' scores, as illustrated by the PISA results.

46. However, the PISA results had also shown that three quarters of students from disadvantaged backgrounds were underachieving. As part of a programme to tackle the issue, 55,000 teachers had received 120 hours of training, and it was hoped that the results thereof would be reflected in the next PISA exercise in 2025. The European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development had provided technical assistance with the aim of enhancing the quality of the new competency-based curriculum. A whole-of-school approach that included parents and non-teaching staff had been applied in the design of programmes to support students from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds, with a particular focus on Roma students. School grants had been made available for remedial classes and after-school activities.

47. **A representative of Romania** said that, under the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014–2020, €803 million had been invested in, inter alia, increasing preschool attendance for children belonging to groups at risk of early dropout, improving teachers' skills and ensuring equal opportunities for students from vulnerable groups. For the period 2021–2027, €497 million had been allocated from State and European Union funding to provide customized packages of measures to support students from marginalized communities, including Roma. A total of €1.17 billion had been allocated to educational services by the European Social Fund.

48. In the area of vocational education and training, to which €498 million had been allocated by the European Regional Development Fund, the focus was on student retention and investment in infrastructure. In addition, approximately €20 million had been allocated

by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus to promote the participation of young Roma in vocational training. A total of €3.51 billion had been allocated by the Recovery and Resilience Facility to increase the resilience of the education system by upgrading infrastructure. Action was also being taken to strengthen integrated personal services in marginalized areas, modernize kindergartens and schools and organize sports and other activities.

49. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know how much teachers earned on average and whether their salary was competitive and remained so throughout their career. He would be grateful for details of any planned increase to teachers' salaries in 2024 and of the career path that teachers could expect to follow.

50. **Ms. Lee** said that she would be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the underlying causes of the high dropout rate and on the action being taken to tackle them.

51. **A representative of Romania** said that 107,000 children who were enrolled in the education system had been identified by their parents as being of Roma ethnicity. Approximately 6,382 Roma students were enrolled in secondary education. There were 247 teachers providing education in the Romani language and 104 teachers delivering lessons on Roma history and traditions; there were 12 teachers of Roma ethnicity working in kindergartens and 40 working in primary schools. Funding for Roma education was provided by the State budget rather than the European Union.

52. **A representative of Romania** said that, in January 2022, a report had been published on the right of citizens belonging to a national minority to use their mother tongue when dealing with local administrative authorities. As a result, a project had been organized to raise awareness of the issue and good practices had been shared.

53. **A representative of Romania** said that, as provided for in law, legally recognized religious denominations and private entities could set up establishments that provided education in national minority languages. Public funds could be allocated to such establishments on the basis of the standard cost-per-pupil formula used by State-run schools.

54. Bilateral cooperation agreements were in place with Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia to cater to the educational needs of national minorities, including through the exchange of textbooks. Agreements were also in place for language teachers from Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece, Israel, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey to work in Romania, and scholarships were available for Romanian teachers to travel to those countries to attend refresher courses in the relevant languages. No minimum number of students was required in order for a minority language unit to be set up; such provision was organized at the request of parents, legal representatives or the relevant authorities. The provision of education in national minority languages did not constitute a form of segregation, which was expressly prohibited by law.

55. **A representative of Romania** said that a quota system was in operation for Roma students in pre-university and university-level educational settings.

56. **A representative of Romania** said that teachers' salaries had risen by 30 per cent in 2023 and would increase again by 20 per cent in 2024. The gross salary for entry-level teachers stood at €1,200 per month, which was close to the national average salary. Experienced teachers could expect to earn up to €2,000 per month.

57. **A representative of Romania** said that the National Cultural Fund Administration provided a range of theatre, film and performing arts opportunities for Roma communities, including an itinerant theatre company and an international festival for Roma theatre, the first edition of which had been held in Bucharest in 2021.

58. **A representative of Romania** said that the legislation governing unemployment benefits had been amended in 2022 to ensure that the value of the reference social indicator, which was used to determine the amount of unemployment support, was adjusted in March each year to match the average inflation rate for the previous year. In addition, the amount granted to persons who had made social insurance contributions for at least one year, which had previously been set at 75 per cent of the reference social indicator, had been raised to 100 per cent.

59. In the area of labour rights, the relevant legislation had been amended to, inter alia, include new definitions of the terms “worker” and “self-employed worker” and to recognize the right to form trade unions for new categories of workers, including self-employed workers. The European Social Fund Plus had provided financing to improve the skills of union leaders, exchange good practices and ensure greater transparency.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.