

ADVANCE UNEDITED VERSIONDistr.: General
30 May 2024

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child**Concluding observations on the combined fifth to seventh reports of Estonia*****I. Introduction**

1. The Committee considered the combined fifth to seventh periodic reports of Estonia¹ at its 2801st and 2802nd meetings,² held on 15 and 16 May 2024, and adopted the present concluding observations at its 2816th meeting, held on 24 May 2024.

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

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

3. The Committee welcomes the various legislative, institutional and policy measures taken by the State party to implement the Convention, including amendments to the Child Protection Act in 2022, which established legal basis for the children's house services (the *Barnahus*), amendments to the Penal Code in 2022 that raised the age of sexual self-determination to 16 years, adoption of new rules on the treatment of child offenders and other institutional and policy measures related to children's rights since its last review.

III. Main areas of concern and recommendations

4. The Committee reminds the State party of the indivisibility and interdependence of all the rights enshrined in the Convention and emphasizes the importance of all the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations. The Committee would like to draw the State party's attention to the recommendations concerning the following areas, in respect of which urgent measures must be taken: mental health (para. 31), education (para. 36), rest, play, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities (para. 38), asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children (para. 40) and administration of child justice (para. 44).

5. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the realization of children's rights in accordance with the Convention and the Optional Protocol on the**

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

¹ CRC/C/EST/5-7.

² See CRC/C/SR.2801 and 2802.

involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography throughout the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It urges the State party to ensure the meaningful participation of children in the design and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at achieving all 17 Sustainable Development Goals as far as they concern children.

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

Legislation

6. While welcoming the various legislative reforms, the Committee recalls its previous concluding observations³ and recommends that the State party:

(a) Develop a child-rights impact assessment procedure for national legislation and policies relevant to children;

(b) Ensure that the human, technical and financial resources for the implementation of legislation providing for the rights of children, including for the increase in number and qualification of the child protection workers, are adequate and sufficient.

Comprehensive policy and strategy

7. While welcoming the adoption of the Welfare Development Plan 2023-2030, the National Health Plan 2020-2030 and the Education Strategy 2021-2035, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure their effective implementation, supported by sufficient human, technical and financial resources.

Coordination

8. The Committee recommends that the State party provide the newly established Prevention Council with sufficient authority and with the necessary human, technical and financial resources for its effective operation to coordinate all activities related to the implementation of the Convention, including the development of the cross-disciplinary protection of children's rights, at cross-sectoral, national and local levels.

Allocation of resources

9. The Committee notes the information provided by the State party concerning allocation of resources for children such as child protection, support for family and education, and the working programme of the Welfare Strategy connected to the State budget. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure that budgetary lines for children are defined for the programmes directly or indirectly affecting children in all fields including health, social protection, with special attention to those in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations that may require affirmative social measures, to allocate adequate budgetary resources for the implementation of children's rights;

(b) Use a tracking system for impact assessments on how investments in any sector on national and local level may serve the best interests of the child, ensuring that the different impact of such investments on children is measured;

(c) Ensure transparent and participatory budgeting through public dialogue, especially with children and for proper accountability of national and local authorities.

Data collection

10. The Committee notes the collection and publishing of a set of child well-being indicators on the Chancellor of Justice's website as well as the comprehensive article

³ CRC/C/EST/CO/2-4, para. 5

collection “Children in Estonian Society” in 2021. Recalling its general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation, the Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations⁴ and recommends that the State party ensure that data collected covers all areas of the Convention and the Optional Protocols thereto, and are disaggregated by age, sex, disability, geographical location, ethnic and national origin and socioeconomic background.

Access to justice and remedies

11. The Committee recommends that the State party:

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

(b) Raise awareness and widely disseminate information about existing mechanisms for reporting violations, violence and abuse, including the child helpline and the portal for reporting online violence, and provide sustainable funding for such services to ensure that they are accessible, confidential, child-friendly and effective;

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

Independent monitoring

12. The Committee welcomes the availability of the Ombudsman for Children’s website in Estonian, Russian and English as well as accepting complaints from children in all three languages. It recommends that the State party strengthen the Chancellor of Justice’s Children’s and Youths’ Rights Department to be able to discharge its mandate relating to children’s rights in an effective and independent manner.

Dissemination of the Convention and awareness-raising

13. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen its awareness-raising programmes, including campaigns, in cooperation with civil society organizations, to ensure that the Convention, the Optional Protocols thereto are widely disseminated and made known by the general public, including parents and children themselves;

(b) Promote the active involvement of children in public outreach activities, including in measures targeting parents, social workers, teachers and law enforcement officials, and encourage the media to promote children’s rights through their programmes, including children in the development of such programmes.

Cooperation with civil society

14. While welcoming the strategic partnership as a new form of cooperation with the civil society and providing long-term financing to civil society organisations, the Committee recommends that the State party further strengthen its collaboration with civil society organizations, including by providing support also to small and starting organisations and by ensuring the civil society’s meaningful participation in the drafting of legislation, policy and strategy relevant for children’s rights.

International cooperation

15. The Committee encourages the State party to meet the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of its gross national income (GNI) allocated for official

⁴ CRC/C/EST/CO/2-4, para. 11

development assistance and to prioritise children's rights in its international cooperation agreements.

Children's rights and the business sector

16. Recalling its general comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Committee recommends that the State party establish and implement regulations to ensure that the business sector complies with international and national human rights, labour, environment and other standards, particularly with regard to children's rights.

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

Non-discrimination

17. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Speed up the process of revising the Equal Treatment Act (2009) and combining it with the Gender Equality Act (2004) to expand its scope of protection against discrimination relevant to children in all spheres and sectors, on all prohibited grounds under the Convention;

(b) Ensure that children in vulnerable situations, including children from economically disadvantaged households, children belonging to linguistic and ethnic minority groups, including Russian-speaking children, children in situations of migration, children with disabilities, LGBTI children and children who are victims of violence and of trafficking have equal access to essential services, housing, education, childcare facilities, health care, leisure and State support.

Best interests of the child

18. While noting the article setting the best interests of the child as primary consideration in the Child Protection Act and recalling its general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure that the right of the child to have their best interests taken as a primary consideration is consistently interpreted and applied in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings and decisions as well as in all policies, programmes and projects that are relevant to, and have an impact on, children;

(b) Strengthen the capacity of all professionals working with and for children to assess and determine the best interests of the child in every area as a primary consideration, including through systematic training and the development of procedures and criteria.

Right to life, survival and development

19. In view of the high proportion of deaths caused by accidents and injuries, such as domestic accidents and poisoning, the Committee recommends that the State party establish the root causes for child mortality resulting from injuries and strengthen preventive measures, including psychosocial support to children, and ensure a safe environment.

Respect for the views of the child

20. While welcoming the amendments to the Civil Procedure Code in 2022, stating that the court personally hears children of any age in a matter concerning them who are capable of holding their own opinions, the Committee recalls its general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard and recommends that the State party:

(a) Take measures to ensure the effective implementation of legislation recognizing the right of the child to be heard in relevant legal proceedings, including by establishing systems and/or procedures for social workers and courts to comply with the principle;

(b) Promote the meaningful and empowered participation of all children, including younger children, in the mechanisms and platforms such as the Youth Council under the Estonian Union for Child Welfare and the Advisory Committee for consultation with the Chancellor's advisers;

(c) Develop toolkits for public consultation on national policy development to standardize such consultation at a high level of inclusiveness and participation, including consulting with children on issues that affect them.

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

Nationality

21. While noting the amendment to the Citizenship Act in 2020, the Committee recalls its previous concluding observations and recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish procedures for the identification and determination of persons as stateless, facilitate naturalization of children with undetermined citizenship and collect data, disaggregated by relevant factors, on stateless children;

(b) Consider ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 1954 and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961;

(c) Consider ratifying the 1997 European Convention on Nationality and the 2009 Council of Europe Convention on the avoidance of statelessness in relation to State succession.

Access to appropriate information

22. Recalling its general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Enhance the digital literacy and skills of children, teachers and families, and protect children from information and material harmful to their well-being;

(b) Ensure the availability of and access to adequate and age-appropriate information on matters related to children's rights;

(c) Elaborate safeguards with a view to ensuring the rights of children in the use of Artificial Intelligence.

D. Violence against children (arts. 19, 24 (3), 28 (2), 34, 35, 37 (a), and 39 of the Convention and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography)

Abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation and abuse

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

(a) Adopt measures for the effective implementation of the domestic violence action plan 2024-2027, ensure that children who are exposed to domestic violence have a status of victims and procedural rights with regard to support in legal proceedings, and improve access to trauma support especially in rural areas;

(b) Establish a national database on all cases of violence against children, including domestic violence, and undertake regular research and assessments of the extent, causes and nature of such violence;

- (c) Put into place accessible, confidential and child-friendly mechanisms for children to report violence;
- (d) Facilitate and promote the mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect among the public;
- (e) Strengthen the local child protection infrastructure, including by increasing the number of child protection workers and emphasising prevention by multisectoral collaboration;
- (f) Ensure that all children who are victims or witnesses of violence have prompt access to child-friendly, multisectoral, and comprehensive interventions, services and support, including forensic interviews and psychological therapy, with the aim of preventing the secondary victimization of those children;
- (g) Consider extending the target group of Barnahus to victims of all types of abuse and neglect and expand their coverage to ensure access for all children irrespective of place of residence;
- (h) Accept audiovisual recordings of the child victim's testimony and conduct cross-examination without delay in Barnahus as evidence in court proceedings for all children, including those 14 to 18 years of age;
- (i) Strengthen measures to combat different forms of bullying, including improving the capacity of teachers, school staff and students to cope with diversity and resolve conflicts;
- (j) Implement the measures necessary to enhance awareness of child sexual abuse and exploitation among both the members of public and professionals working with and for children and respond to all manifestations of child sexual exploitation and abuse;
- (k) Strengthen the professional capacity and software tools to detect and investigate online grooming and child sexual abuse images, and promote training for parents, teachers and children about risks associated with sexting;
- (l) Continue to address the violence and abuse in sports organisations by establishing clear rules of behaviour to prevent ill-treatment of children and adequate procedural rules for investigating violations and raise awareness among children, parents, coaches and sports organizations about abuse in sports.

Corporal punishment

24. Recalling its general comment No. 8 (2006) on corporal punishment, the Committee urges the State party to:

- (a) Continue to promote positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing and discipline by implementing evidence-based programs and evaluate their outcome on a regular basis;
- (b) Intensify awareness-raising campaigns for parents and professionals working with and for children to promote attitudinal change, within the family and the community, with the aim to end corporal punishment of children.

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

Family environment

25. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Strengthen its efforts to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by State-funded family mediation services and counselling;
- (b) Strengthen the availability of affordable childcare options for working parents including by significantly increasing the resources allocated to childcare;

(c) Continue to take measures to strengthen the fathers' role in the upbringing of their children;

(d) Provide systematic support for parents at risk and make family counselling, therapy and parenting education training widely available.

Children deprived of a family environment

26. Drawing the State party's attention to the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children,⁵ the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Continue to phase out institutionalization, particularly of children under 3 years of age, and adopt without a delay a strategy and action plan for deinstitutionalization, ensuring that it has adequate human, technical and financial resources for its implementation;

(b) Ensure that policies and practices are guided by the principle that financial and material poverty — or conditions directly and uniquely attributable to such poverty — should never be the sole justification for removing a child from parental care, for placing a child into alternative care or for preventing a child's social reintegration;

(c) Ensure sufficient alternative family-based and community-based care options for children who cannot stay with their families, including by allocating sufficient financial resources for foster care and adoption, regularly reviewing placement measures and facilitating the reunification of children with their families when possible;

(d) Monitor the number of children and the length of stay of children placed in "safe houses" and ensure they are not deprived of family environment longer than it is necessary;

(e) Train alternative care service providers, including foster families and guardians, on the principles of trauma-informed care and ensure the availability of mental health services for children and their caretakers;

(f) Ensure adequate safeguards and clear criteria, based on the needs as well as best interests of the child, for determining whether a child should be placed in alternative care;

(g) Establish quality standards for all alternative care settings, ensure periodic review of the placement of children in alternative care, and monitor the quality of care therein, including by providing accessible channels for reporting, monitoring and remedying maltreatment of children;

(h) Ensure that children leaving alternative care receive support and aftercare tailored to their needs, including for children with disabilities, and raise awareness of aftercare options for children living under guardianship;

(i) Strengthen the capacity of professionals working with families and children, in particular family judges, law enforcement personnel, child protection workers and service providers, to ensure family-based alternative care responses and to enhance their awareness of the rights and needs of children deprived of a family environment.

Children of incarcerated parents

27. The Committee recommends that the State party protect and ensure the visitation rights of the children of incarcerated parents, and continue the reform in facilitating the contact of children with their parents, including by providing child-friendly meeting premises and training officers dealing with children coming for a visit with their incarcerated parent.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 64/142, annex.

F. Children with disabilities (art. 23)

28. Recalling its general comment No. 9 (2006) on the rights of children with disabilities, the Committee recalls its previous concluding observations⁶ and urges the State party to adopt a human rights-based approach to disability, set up a comprehensive strategy for the inclusion of children with disabilities and:

- (a) Address the inequalities in the availability of service for children with disabilities between local authorities, in particular by strengthening services in rural areas, and ensure effective monitoring of the implementation of the rights of children to the services they are entitled to;
- (b) Ensure that children with disabilities with high supportive needs receive additional support from the State as necessary, including accessibility to personal assistance services;
- (c) Continue implementing the reforms with regard to harmonising assessment and multiagency sharing of data with the aim to ensure comprehensive and timely service to meet the special needs of children with disabilities;
- (d) Develop wider range of support services and increased flexibility of care services, reducing the burden of care of children with disabilities for parents;
- (e) Take immediate measures to ensure that children with disabilities have access to health care at their place of residence, including early detection and intervention programmes;
- (f) Undertake awareness-raising campaigns aimed at government officials, the public and families to combat the stigmatization of, and prejudice against, children with disabilities and promote a positive image of children with disabilities as rights-holders.

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

Health and health services

29. Recalling its general comment No. 15 (2013) on the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, the Committee commends the recognition of evolving capacities of children in health care decisions and recommends that the State party:

- (a) Rise the public spending in health care to meet the increasing costs and to provide incentives for health care professionals;
- (b) Strengthen the efforts to increase the number of specialized paediatricians, family doctors, nurses, particularly in rural areas;
- (c) Adopt measures to raise the awareness of children, parents, and health professionals about the right of the child to participate in decision-making independently when appropriate, with the guarantee of the child's right to privacy;
- (d) Increase vaccination coverage of children, raising awareness of the benefits of vaccines and providing adequate information to the anti-vaccine movements, mainly on social networks.

Mental health

30. While welcoming the preventive policies and measures, including the adoption of the mental health strategy – Green Paper on Mental Health – in 2021, the Committee is still concerned about:

- (a) The rise in mental health problems in children since 2010 that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic;

⁶ CRC/C/EST/CO/2-4, para. 39

- (b) The growing suicidal rates among children;
- (c) The shortage of mental health care specialist for children, such as child psychiatrist, clinical psychologists, school psychologists, mental health nurses, and mental health services at the local level.

31. **The Committee recalls its previous concluding observations⁷ and urges the State party to:**

- (a) **Strengthen its focus on prevention, supporting the social emotional skills of children, parental education, promotion of a safe school environment and further adopt specific measures and procedures to ensure the identification of early signs of mental health issues;**
- (b) **Strengthen the network of mental health centres and specialists at the local level with adequate technical, financial and human resources to ensure the availability and accessibility of psychological and psychiatric services to all children;**
- (c) **Expand the measures taken to prevent suicides, such as awareness-raising about healthy lifestyles, mental health training for school professionals, and the suicide prevention programme in schools.**

Adolescent health

32. **Recalling its general comment No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and general comment No. 20 (2016) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence, the Committee recommends that the State party further improves the accessibility and funding of the Youth Sexual Health Counselling Centres as to ensure that all children and adolescents, including those who are out of school and those in rural areas, receive confidential and child-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services, including access to contraceptives.**

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

33. **The Committee recommends that the State party analyse the effects of the new maintenance support system introduced in the Family Law Act in 2022, including the effect on the ability of the child to cope with the economic difficulties by receiving maintenance and undertake actions where necessary.**

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

34. **Recalling its general comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change and taking note of the environment protection policies of the State party, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Integrate a child rights-based approach in its legislation and policies related to environment protection and climate change;**
- (b) **Ensure systematic support to the Child and Youth Environmental Council and that a due consideration is given to its views and proposals in particular with regard to its involvement in the debates on Estonian Climate Act;**
- (c) **Ensure that children's special vulnerabilities, needs and views are taken into account in developing policies and programmes to address climate change and disaster risk management;**
- (d) **Increase children's awareness and preparedness for climate change and natural disasters by incorporating it into the school curriculum and teachers' training programmes;**

⁷ CRC/C/EST/CO/2-4, para. 41

(e) **Take the necessary steps to ensure that the European Union nationally determined contributions, and the related National Energy and Climate Plan 2021–2030, are participatory and child rights-based, in their implementation.**

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

Education

35. While noting the adoption of the Preschool Child Care Institutions Act of 2018, the Estonian Vocational Training Action Plan 2022–2030, the Education Strategy 2021–2035, and the positive trends inclusive education for children with disabilities in mainstream schools, the Committee remains concerned about:

- (a) Unequal access to places in kindergarten;
- (b) Class sizes exceeding the statutory minimum, especially in urban areas;
- (c) A significant number of children not completing their education in secondary and vocational schools;
- (d) Journeys to and from school being unreasonably long for some school children and school transport not being provided in all circumstances;
- (e) A significant number of children with disabilities who remain in special schools and that in some areas there is a shortage of specially trained teachers and assistant teachers;
- (f) Insufficient coordination of services between social and education specialists that creates barriers to effective assessment of the needs of children with disabilities, and that the failure of some local authorities to provide adequate specialised services in kindergartens and schools.

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

- (a) **Improve access to and coverage of education at all levels through the provision of equitable financial and human resources to local governments, and through systematic and effective national supervision;**
- (b) **Provide places in early childhood education for children in all areas of the country, particularly for the age group 1.5 to 3 years;**
- (c) **Ensure that class sizes in the basic education system are kept to the statutory maximum of 24 children per class and that exceptions proposed are carefully considered and the duration of the exceptions are monitored;**
- (d) **Ensure that all children have access to safe transportation to and from school regardless where they live, which is of reasonable duration;**
- (e) **Improve continuation of every student’s education beyond the basic school level and to reduce dropout from vocational or upper secondary schools;**
- (f) **Ensure that all children with disabilities have access to inclusive education in mainstream schools, and that there are sufficient numbers of appropriately trained teachers and assistant teachers;**
- (g) **Ensure cooperation between social and educational specialists in assessing special needs in schools and kindergartens, strengthen the capacity of those local authorities failing to provide adequate specialised services for children with disabilities and improve national supervision to ensure the necessary assistance is provided.**

Rest, play, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities

37. The Committee is concerned that children’s study load does not correspond to their age and capabilities and that not all children have sufficient time for rest and hobbies.

38. **Recalling its general comment No 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts, the Committee**

recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to guarantee the right of the child to rest and leisure and to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, including through ensuring that children are not overloaded with school work and homework, and to ensure that all children have access to hobby groups.

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

Asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children

39. The Committee is concerned about the detention of children for migration purposes in detention centres remaining permissible under the law and occasionally being used.

40. Recalling the joint general comments No. 3 and No. 4 of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families/No. 22 and No. 23 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) on the human rights of children in the context of international migration and its General Comment No. 6 (2005) on treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, the Committee recalls its previous concluding observations⁸ and urges the State party to:

(a) Amend the Act on Granting International Protection to Aliens to prohibit the detention of refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children and in the meantime strictly apply the decision of the Tallinn Circuit Court;

(b) Ensure that asylum-seeking children are assigned an independent legal representative immediately after their arrival at the border and ensure that the best interests of the child are applied at all stages of the determination procedure;

(c) Further develop professional competencies and capacity of the relevant staff of Estonian Police and Border Guard Board, the Vägeva and its subunit Vao Accommodation Centres for Asylum-Seekers and other State authorities regarding the effective and efficient identification and referral of persons with special procedural and/or reception needs, including unaccompanied and separated children and single parents/families with children;

(d) Consider ratifying the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Economic exploitation, including child labour

41. The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen its efforts to ensure that no child engages in the informal sector and that working conditions are safe and in line with legislation requirements.

Trafficking

42. The Committee notes the update in 2019 to the guidelines of referral and identification of victims of trafficking that included a chapter on children and recommends that the State party continue ensuring the provision of referral and support services to children who are victims of trafficking and investigate all cases of trafficking of children and bring perpetrators to justice.

Administration of child justice

43. The Committee welcomes the integration of restorative justice measures in the system of child justice, the creation of separate facilities as an alternative to imprisonment, and the

⁸ CRC/CEST/CO/2-4, para. 47

significant drop in the number of children in prison. The Committee is however concerned that:

- (a) Children with serious psycho-social problems may be referred to secure care service;
- (b) Children may be disciplined by solitary confinement up to three days and that there is an automatic ban on visits with family and next of kin during disciplinary confinement;
- (c) Children in prison do not have adequate access to support services, particularly modern teaching and learning environment and may consequently discontinue their education.

44. **Recalling its general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system and with reference to the United Nations Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, the Committee recommends the State party continue actively promoting non-judicial measures, such as diversion and mediation, for children alleged as, accused of or recognized as having infringed criminal law and, wherever possible, the use of non-custodial measures for children, such as probation or community service and ensure that health and psycho-social services are provided to such children. In particular, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

- (a) **Ensure a timely assessment and referral for children with serious psycho-social problems and further develop a network of open institutions and rehabilitation to prevent these children from ending up in closed children's institutions;**
- (b) **Ensure that detention is used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time and is reviewed on a regular basis with a view to its withdrawal;**
- (c) **Abolish disciplining children in detention by solitary confinement, and in the meantime enable them to maintain contact with the family and their next of kin at any time;**
- (d) **Modernise the services for children in prison, particularly more interactive education, as well as social skills training, health and psycho-social support;**
- (e) **Provide adequate follow-up services and support for children after the end of their imprisonment.**

Children in armed conflict including implementation of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict

45. **The Committee recalls its previous concluding observations⁹ and recommends that the State party identify children who may have been recruited or used in armed conflicts abroad upon their entering the State party, collect disaggregated data on such children and provide support for their physical and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and integration into society.**

L. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure

46. **The Committee recommends that the State party ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure.**

M. Ratification of international human rights instruments

47. **The Committee recommends that the State party, in order to further strengthen the fulfilment of children's rights, consider ratifying the following core human rights instruments: the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the International Convention for the**

⁹ CRC/C/OPAC/EST/CO/1, paras.7,9,11,14,17

Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

N. Cooperation with regional bodies

48. The Committee recommends that the State party continue to cooperate with the Council of Europe and the European Union on the implementation of the Convention and other human rights instruments, both in the State party and in other States members of the Council of Europe.

IV. Implementation and reporting

A. Follow-up and dissemination

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

B. National mechanism for reporting and follow-up

50. The Committee recommends that the State party establish a standing government structure and ensure that it has the mandate and the adequate human, technical and financial resources to effectively coordinate and prepare reports to international and regional human rights mechanisms and to coordinate and track national follow-up to, and implementation of, treaty obligations and the recommendations and decisions emanating from such mechanisms. The Committee emphasizes that such a structure should be adequately and continuously supported by dedicated staff and should have the capacity to consult systematically with the Office of the Chancellor of Justice and civil society.

C. Next report

51. The Committee will establish and communicate the due date of the combined eighth to ninth periodic reports of the State party in due course, in line with the envisaged predictable reporting calendar based on an eight-year review cycle, and following the adoption of a list of issues and questions prior to reporting, if applicable, for the State party. The report should be in compliance with the Committee's harmonized treaty-specific reporting guidelines¹⁰ and should not exceed 21,200 words.¹¹ In the event that a report exceeding the established word limit is submitted, the State party will be asked to shorten the report. If the State party is not in a position to review and resubmit the report, translation thereof for the purposes of consideration by the Committee cannot be guaranteed.

¹⁰ [CRC/C/58/Rev.3](#).

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