



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
20 August 2024

Original: English
English, French and Spanish only

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Seventh periodic report submitted by Norway under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2024* ** ***

[Date received: 14 June 2024]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The present document was submitted pursuant to the simplified reporting procedure. It contains the responses of the State party to the Committee's list of issues prior to reporting (CRC/C/NOR/QPR/7)

*** The annex to the present document may be accessed from the web page of the Committee.



Reply to paragraph 2 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting (CRC/C/NOR/QPR/7)**(a)**

1. Children's right to protection and the principle of the best interests of the child are a fundamental pillar in Norwegian law and in the work of the Child Welfare Service. A reform of the Child Welfare Service came into effect on 1 January 2022. The purpose of the reform is to increase the municipal authorities' responsibility for child welfare and help ensure that children and families get the help they need at an early stage. The new Child Welfare Act entered into force on 1 January 2023.
2. The Government is working on a new Children Act. In Official Norwegian Report NOU 2020:14 "New Children Act", the Children Act Committee proposes, among other things, an introductory chapter in the Children Act, stipulating children's rights. From 2022, the Children Act has been amended such that the Child Welfare Experts Commission must assess the quality of expert witness's reports in parental dispute cases before the courts can use them as evidence. The amendments are intended to strengthen the legal security of children and parents alike.
3. In 2018, an absolute minimum age limit of 18 years was introduced for entering into marriage. Statutory provisions have also been adopted that marriages entered into with minors under foreign law shall not, as a general rule, be recognised in Norway.
4. Requirements have been introduced for several professional groups that they must submit a criminal record certificate from the police, with a view to preventing violence and abuse of minors. This applies, among other things, to expert witnesses appointed by the State in cases pursuant to the Children Act and the Child Welfare Act, representatives of the child in cases pursuant to the Children Act, external mediators in cases pursuant to the Children Act and the Marriage Act, and employees at the Ombudsperson for Children and Family Counselling Offices.
5. In January 2024, the Government submitted a proposal to the Storting on inclusion in the Police Act of the principle that the best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration when police actions affect, target or occur in the presence of children.
6. The new Education Act enters into force on 1 August 2024. The Education Act shall provide a solid framework that ensures everyone education and training of high-quality, a safe learning environment, and the right to participate in matters that affect them.
7. The Ministry of Children and Families established NASAK in 2022, which is a national Sami centre of competence aimed at ensuring more equitable services for the Sami population in the Child Welfare Service, the Family Counselling Service and crisis centres.

(b)

8. In spring 2020, the Government implemented extensive measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. The measures had a major impact for all children and young people, with the closure of kindergartens, schools and recreational activities, and with reduced municipal services. The Government stated early on that priority would be given to children and young people, and that services for children and young people would be shielded as far as was possible and in compliance with the infection control guidelines.
9. During the pandemic, the Government presented various packages with compensatory measures for children and young people, including measures to increase participation in holiday and recreational activities, measures to catch up on missed learning, and measures to strengthen mental health and prevent substance abuse problems. In 2022, the Government strongly recommended that the municipalities should not close recreational clubs for children and young people. Special adaptations were introduced in sports and cultural activities for children and young people.
10. The Coronavirus Commission and the Coronavirus Special Committee both concluded that the infection control measures were particularly hard for children and young

people. A report from the Norwegian Directorate for Education (2022) concludes that the pandemic had consequences for pupils' motivation, academic progress and learning.

11. Between 2020 and 2022, the Government allocated a total of NOK 621 million for compensatory measures in the municipalities to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on learning and social development in children and young people. In 2021, the Government appointed an expert committee to advise on how best to compensate for lost learning and social development (the Parr Committee).

(c)

12. In 2024, NOK 10 million has been granted to establish an investigation system for cases related to violence, abuse and gross neglect of children. The main purpose is to identify shortcomings in the system, contribute to learning, strengthen preventive work, and improve collaboration across services.

13. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended that the State ensure that children are informed about their right to participate in mediation in connection with a breakdown in their parents' relationship. The Family Counselling Service's skills in talking to children has been strengthened and information about mediation has been prepared for children.

14. The Government is planning to present a white paper called "Safe digital childhood" in autumn 2024 and a white paper on social mobility and social equality for children and young people and their families in spring 2025.

Reply to paragraph 3 of the list of issues prior to reporting

15. All the ministries report on the following up on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Statistics Norway has prepared national indicators to enable the Government to monitor progress in the various areas. Children and young people have been invited to participate in forums where follow-up of the work is discussed.

Reply to paragraph 4 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

16. Several of the rights arising from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child have been included in Article 104 of the Norwegian Constitution. This includes the right of children to be heard in questions affecting them, that their views must be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity, and that the best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration. The Convention on the Rights of the Child has been implemented in Norwegian law through the Human Rights Act. It follows from this Act that the Convention applies as Norwegian law and shall prevail in the event of conflict with other legislation.

17. The Child Welfare Act provides the legal basis for invasive measures aimed at both children and adults. The Act builds on extensive human rights assessments, such as the best interests of the child, the child's right to participate, the child's right to care and family life, and respect for the child's cultural, linguistic and religious background.

18. In spring 2020, rules were enshrined in law in the Kindergarten Act on how kindergartens should work to ensure the children in the kindergarten a good, safe psychosocial kindergarten environment. It was also enshrined in law that the best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration in all actions and decisions concerning children in the kindergarten.

19. A new Education Act enters into force on 1 August 2024 (cf. Section 2(a)). The principle of the best interests of the child is stated in a separate section to clarify that this applies to all actions and decisions pursuant to the Education Act. A separate rule has also been defined in law on the pupils' right to participate in all matters that concern them, to

express themselves freely and to be heard, and that the pupils' views must be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Similar rules are also enshrined in the Independent Schools Act.

(b)

20. The health legislation complies with the principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the right of children to be heard, decisions in the best interests of the child, and children's right to respect for their private life. The Patient and User Rights Act nevertheless has a separate chapter on children's special rights in the health service. Children also have the right to a higher degree of participation and rights if their siblings are seriously ill or if a parent or sibling dies.

(c)

21. The guide to the Instructions for Official Studies and Reports ("*Utredningsinstruksen*") is currently being updated to ensure that consequences for children and their interests are specified and assessed in detail. These must be taken into account when considering public measures that may affect children, directly or indirectly. This applies to all public measures, including changes to regulations and allocations.

(d)

22. The Storting last addressed the question whether to ratify the third Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children's individual right to petition in 2022 in connection with a private member's proposal, and once again voted not to ratify the protocol. The Government is working on a national system to ensure children's opportunity to appeal and has implemented measures to improve information to children and young people about their right to appeal in individual cases and the options available to them (cf. Section 8 (b)).

Reply to paragraph 5 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

23. The local government sector is organised on the basis of the "generalist municipality principle". The principle entails that all citizens shall have access to the same public services, regardless of which municipality they live in.

24. Income in the local government sector consists of both flexible funding and earmarked funding. The flexible, unearmarked income comprises tax revenues and block transfers from the State, and accounts for approximately 70 per cent of the municipal sector's total income. The municipalities' unearmarked income is distributed through the income system. The overarching goal of the income system is to level out the municipalities' financial situation, with a view to enabling equitable provision of services to people all over Norway. This does not mean that all municipalities are to have equal income, but rather that all municipalities must be able to provide the citizens with equitable services. One goal of the income system is to level out differences in expenses. Since there is a lot of variation in municipalities in terms of aspects such as geography, demographics and living conditions, the income is redistributed so that the municipalities are compensated for involuntary differences in costs and demand. The levelling out of differences in expenses in municipalities applies to the following sectors: compulsory schooling, nursing and care, social assistance, child welfare, kindergartens, agriculture, administration and the environment.

(b)

25. The county governors have been tasked with assisting the municipal authorities in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure good, comprehensive solutions for children and young people.

26. The Ministry of Children and Families coordinates the "Core group for vulnerable children and young people". This is an internal collaboration between seven ministries, to

help ensure good coordination in the development and management of policies and services relating to children and young people. The relevant underlying agencies have established a structure for collaboration that supports the ministries' work for vulnerable children and young people.

27. In order to strengthen the follow-up of vulnerable children and young people and their families, amendments have been made to 14 welfare service laws in 2022, obligating the various services to collaborate with other parts of the public service system where this is necessary to provide the user with a cohesive and coordinated offer.

Reply to paragraph 6 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

28. The rates for child benefit have increased several times since the previous report (cf. Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child). From 1 January 2024, the ordinary rate for children under the age of 6 years is NOK 1,766 a month and for children over the age of 6 years NOK 1,510 a month. Extended child benefit for single caregivers amounts to NOK 2,516 per month.

29. The lump-sum grant is a minimum guarantee for new parents who do not qualify for parental benefit and is intended to compensate for the expenses families incur when they have a child. The lump-sum grant has increased from NOK 46,000 in 2016 to NOK 92,648 in 2024.

30. The state guidelines for financial social assistance, including rates for childrens' living expenses, were increased by 10 per cent from 1 July 2023. From 1 September 2022, child benefit is not included when financial social assistance is determined.

31. Child supplements to work assessment allowance, qualification benefit and unemployment benefit has been increased and amounts to NOK 36 per child per day from 1 January 2024.

32. Municipal authorities, NGOs and other non-profit organisations receive grants through the "Grants for inclusion of children and young people" scheme to enable them to include vulnerable children and young people in cultural, holiday and leisure activities, courses of education, and summer and part-time jobs. The scheme was established in 2022, and in 2024 has a budget of NOK 758 million.

33. NOK 10 million has been allocated to an action plan for equal opportunities to participate in cultural, sporting and outdoor activities for children and young people in 2024. In 2023, an additional NOK 125 million was allocated for participation in sports teams; and grants for premises, measures to encourage a love of reading and voluntary cultural activities were increased.

34. NOK 1,7 billion was allocated for sports facilities in the municipalities in 2022 and 2023, and support for local community facilities in disadvantaged areas was increased.

35. It is a goal of the national library strategy 2020–2023 for libraries to reach new users with literature and reading, including children and young people. Arts and Culture Norway has established a pilot project whereby books are bought for school libraries to give children and young people better access to more new literature. The school library scheme will be made permanent from 2024.

36. The Ministry of Culture and Equality provides approx. NOK 2,5 billion in fixed operating grants to Norwegian museums. The Cultural School Bag (DKS) is a nationwide scheme that ensures that all school pupils in Norway experience professional art and culture each year.

37. Support is provided for the national and international work of voluntary organisations for children and young people through a grant scheme for basic support. In 2024 national basic support amounts to NOK 183,3 million.

38. The statistics and reporting tool KOSTRA makes it possible to monitor municipal priorities in the form of budget funding for municipal activities for children.

39. Norway wants to make kindergartens available to all children, regardless of the family's finances, through free core hours for children in low-income families, more affordable kindergartens, and grants both to support language development for children from a minority background and to increase the number of qualified educational staff in disadvantaged areas. Free child care at school outside school hours (SFO) of 12 hours per week has been introduced for all pupils in Years 1 and 2. From 1 August 2024, this will be extended to also apply to pupils in Year 3. Free full-time kindergarten places have been introduced for all children in municipalities in the so-called action zone in Finnmark and Nord-Troms. A national scheme has also been introduced for families with three or more children in kindergarten at the same time, providing a free full-time place from the third child.

40. Children in reception centres for asylum seekers are not entitled to a place in a kindergarten, but there is a State grant providing children aged 1–5 years who live in a reception centre for asylum seekers with the opportunity to attend kindergarten, regardless of the status of their application for asylum.

41. In 2024, more than NOK 100 million has been allocated to measures in the escalation plan against violence and abuse of children and violence in close relationships.

(b)

42. Municipal and county authorities are required by law to have a youth council or some other form of formal consultative body for young people, to provide input and comment on all matters concerning young people. This also applies to input on local budgets.

43. Children's and youth NGOs and representatives from the county youth councils provide input to the fiscal budget at the regular meetings with the Minister of Children and Families. Children's and youth organisations and organisations that work for and with children send written input regarding the fiscal budget to different ministries.

44. The Storting's standing committees conduct consultations with civil society in connection with their processing of the fiscal budget. Children's and youth organisations and organisations working for and with children can provide input on the budget.

Reply to paragraph 7 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

45. Statistics Norway does not produce statistics on people's ethnic background. Norway's official guidelines have long been that information about citizens' ethnicities should not be registered. On a general basis, Norway exercises great caution in producing statistics based on personal data that could be perceived as sensitive, or that might serve to stigmatise vulnerable groups in society (cf. the General Data Protection Regulation Article 9 (1)).

(b)

46. The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, which came into force on 1 January 2018, expressly prohibits compound discrimination, i.e., discrimination on the basis of a combination of several different grounds of discrimination.

47. The research report "Children and young people's experiences of racism and discrimination" was published in March 2024. The report provides new insight into the experiences of young Jews, Roma and Sami people and fills a knowledge gap in this area.

Reply to paragraph 8 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

48. Norway's fifth and sixth reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child from 2016 stated that the Government has decided that the mandate for the Ombudsperson for Children is not to be expanded to apply to the processing of complaints and appeals in

individual cases. Among other things, it was pointed out that the Ombudsperson for Children is independent and that an expansion of the mandate could diminish its important role as a driving force behind more fundamental questions concerning the protection of children's interests. This is still Norway's position today.

49. The same arguments apply with regard to the recommendation to mandate the Norwegian National Human Rights Institution (NIM) to deal with complaints and appeals from children. NIM is an independent public body, which reports directly to the Storting. It is pointed out further that complaints and appeals from children concern very many different areas, each requiring specific specialist expertise in the individual field.

(b)

50. The ministries have recently mapped out children's rights of complaint in all the sectors, and a number of important sectoral processes are under way in this area, both in terms of the right to complaint and the right of self-determination. Improved information aimed at children and young people about their right to complaint in individual cases and the rights to complaint and appeal that exist in general has recently been published on the public information channel for young people (ung.no).

51. Work has been carried out to improve information about children and young people's rights of appeal in the Child Welfare Service, and an online, child-friendly complaints portal has been launched on the county governor websites where it is easy for children to find information and submit complaints and appeals. The county governors must give priority to complaints and appeals they receive from children. A proposal that children should be able to appeal a decision to move them out of a foster home, and a general strengthening of children's legal rights as a party to the case in child welfare cases, has been circulated for consultation and comment.

52. The Parliamentary Ombud is the Storting's complaints management and resolution agency. The Ombud's main task is to safeguard the rights of individuals in their dealings with the public administration. The Parliamentary Ombud has improved its opportunities to assist children in complaints and appeal processes.

Reply to paragraph 9 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

53. The Regulation on national guidelines for Bachelor's degrees in child welfare and protection stipulates that programmes must ensure broad knowledge of the applicable Norwegian and international law relevant to the field of child welfare and protection. The Regulation on Master's degrees in child welfare and protection stipulates that students must acquire in-depth knowledge of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Hague Convention of 1996. All employees in child welfare institutions receive training in safety, security and trust.

54. Employees of the Norwegian Correctional Service and Norwegian Mediation Service receive training in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

55. Students at the Norwegian Police University College learn about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In law degrees, this field is incorporated into the training on human rights in general. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is also a topic on the introduction programme for new judges, as well as at individual seminars for judges, lawyers and psychologists.

56. Training materials and guidance have been prepared in order for the employees to take into account the interests of the children in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV).

57. Personnel in the health and care sector who have completed education in health and social care should have knowledge about children and young people, be able to meet their needs for treatment and/or services, and ensure their participation and rights. They should also possess knowledge of social and health problems, including neglect, violence, abuse,

drugs and alcohol, and socio-economic problems, and be able to identify and follow up people facing such challenges.

(b)

58. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has a special responsibility to raise awareness about issues covered by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and how it can be used to strengthen children's participation in different sectors and at different levels of the administration.

Reply to paragraph 10 of the list of issues prior to reporting

59. The Transparency Act came into force on 1 July 2022 and shall ensure children access to information regarding how enterprises address adverse impacts on fundamental human rights and decent working conditions. Larger enterprises are required by law to carry out due diligence to identify, manage and mitigate adverse impacts on fundamental human rights in their own operations or via the supply chain or their business partners.

60. The Transparency Act does not cover environmental impacts. The Environmental Information Act requires all public and private undertakings to hold information about factors relating to their operations that may have an appreciable effect on the environment, and, with a few exceptions, to supply such information to anyone who requests it, including children.

Reply to paragraph 11 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

61. Funding has been granted for measures to combat anti-Sami behaviour through the grant scheme "Action against racism, discrimination and hate speech". The Government is working on a dedicated plan of action to combat discrimination of the Sami people. The Government provides support for the Norwegian "Stop Hate Speech" movement.

62. The Government also provides support for the Sami advocacy scheme "Sami ofelačat", whereby young Sami people travel round to schools in Norway to tell other young people about Sami life and to counteract anti-Sami behaviour.

(b)

63. The Government launched "Action plan against racism and discrimination – new efforts from 2024 to 2027" in November 2023. The action plan applies to all groups that can be subjected to racism and ethnic and religious discrimination. The measures target three main areas: working life, young people and local communities.

64. The Government will strengthen its efforts to combat anti-Semitism and hatred towards Muslims and will present new action plans in 2024.

65. Dembra (Democratic Preparedness Against Antisemitism and Racism) offers programmes for schools aiming to prevent hatred and exclusion by building democratic competence.

66. The National Police Directorate has prepared an action plan for the police's work on diversity, dialogue and trust for the period 2022–2025. In 2021, a national centre of expertise in the field of hate crime was established in Oslo Police District.

(c)

67. Various plans of action and strategies have measures that are aimed specifically at children and young people who face different forms of discrimination. Examples include the action plan for gender and sexual diversity (2023–2026), the action plan on racism and discrimination (2024–2027), the strategy for the equality of persons with disabilities (2020–2030), and the action plan for equality for persons with disabilities (2020–2025).

68. The Government has initiated work on a strategy for equality between women and men, which is due to be presented in 2024. The Government is also working on a white paper on sexual harassment, which includes children and young people.

69. Since the last report, a number of inquiries and studies have been conducted on the scope and causes of violence and abuse. These show that women are more exposed than men to severe and repeated violence in close relationships, and that inequality entails a risk of violence in close relationships. In addition, age, ethnicity, religion, functional ability, gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation can all have an impact on the risk of subjection to violence.

70. As regards children and young people, research shows that young people who have grown up in families where there has been a breakdown of family relationships, that are struggling financially, where the parents have had difficulties with substance abuse or mental health are more likely to have experienced violence and abuse. The same applies to families with an immigrant background. Children with disabilities may also be at greater risk than other children. In recent years, a number of campaigns have been carried out to help increase public awareness and knowledge about violence and abuse, and where help can be sought.

71. From 1 January 2020, the public authorities' duty to work proactively for gender equality has been strengthened, for example through the public authorities' active duty to prevent harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based violence and to counter stereotyping (cf. Section 24 of the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act).

Reply to paragraph 12 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

72. The best interests of the child are assessed individually in each specific case. Decision makers refer to guidelines and recommendations developed in both national and international law, such as statements from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which are published on the Government's website for ease of access.

73. In order to safeguard the best interests of the child in parental disputes, the National Courts Administration has prepared practical recommendations based on children and young people's own experiences with the courts.

(b)

74. The principle of the best interests of the child is enshrined in Norwegian law through Article 104 of the Norwegian Constitution. This principle has been incorporated into several Acts and regulations, including the Immigration Act. The overarching provision that the best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration was introduced in the Child Welfare Act to clarify that this is the most important consideration and guiding principle in the Act. A ban on conversion therapies entered into force on 1 January 2024. The best interests of the child has been a fundamental consideration in the drafting of the bill.

Reply to paragraph 13 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

75. The new Child Welfare Act includes an overarching provision on children's right to participate in all matters concerning them. This statutory right applies to all children who are capable of forming their own opinions and at all stages of a child welfare case. The child has an independent and unconditional right, but is not obliged, to participate.

76. The child's views are given weight as one of several factors in an assessment of the best interests of the child in all types of cases within the field of immigration. The child's right to be heard and to state their opinion in asylum cases and family immigration cases is safeguarded by the fact that they must, as a general rule, be offered an interview. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) also has separate guidelines for interviewing

children in immigration cases in general and in cases regarding application for asylum/protection.

77. As a rule, in asylum cases, interviews are conducted with accompanying children over the age of 7. All unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors are offered an asylum interview, either in person or online. In family immigration cases, children over the age of 7 are generally offered an interview.

78. Children affected by expulsion cases are covered by Section 17-3 of the Immigration Regulations, but are rarely offered an interview with UDI. Standard practice in these kinds of cases is to hear the child's opinions through a parent, lawyer, representative or others who speak on behalf of the child. This is generally done in writing. If the child wishes to have a direct, oral interview, this will be carried out by the local police district.

(b)

79. All school pupils have the right to be heard. This is required by law in the Education Act. All primary schools must have a pupil council for pupils from Year 5 to Year 7, and all lower and upper secondary schools must have a pupil council. Pupil councils are a forum to promote the common interests of the pupils in the school and help create a good learning and school environment.

80. The School Student Union of Norway is a nationwide, politically independent organisation that represents pupils and apprentices in upper secondary education and in lower secondary school in Norway.

81. Children are represented in the national user council for social housing policy. The purpose of the user council is to provide the authorities with better knowledge about how housing policy affects the users.

(c)

82. The Local Government Act states that all municipalities and counties shall have a youth council or other representative body for young people. This provision came into force in 2019. The members of the youth council must not have reached the age of 19 at the time of their election. The councils are advisory bodies for the municipal and county authorities and have the right to be heard in all matters concerning young people. There has been prepared guidelines for the youth councils.

83. There are several arenas where children and young people can voice their opinions and submit proposals on matters relating to them. Each year a "dialogue forum" is held between the county youth councils, affected ministries and the Minister of Children and Families. Regular bi-annual contact meetings are held between the Ministry and the three umbrella organisations for NGOs working with children and young people. A contact conference is held annually between the Minister of Children and Families and the children and young peoples' NGOs. Children and young people are also invited to provide input on policy development.

(d)

84. The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens has a chapter dedicated to children's participation and co-determination. Kindergartens shall observe the children's right to participate by enabling and encouraging them to express their views on day-to-day life in kindergarten. They shall enable the children's participation in ways suited to the children's age, experience, individual circumstances and needs. The youngest children and children who communicate by means other than speech are also entitled to express their views on their own terms.

85. The core curriculum on values and principles for primary and secondary education states that a democratic society is based on the idea that all citizens have equal rights and opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes. The indigenous people perspective is part of the pupils' education in democracy.

86. The school must be a venue where children and young people experience democracy in practice. The pupils must experience that they are heard in the day-to-day affairs in school, that they have genuine influence, and that they can have impact on matters that concern them. The dialogue between teacher and pupils, and between the school and the home, must be based on mutual respect. When the voices of the pupils are heard in school, they will experience how they can make their own considered choices.

87. In 2022, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) established a youth panel on integration. The purpose of the youth panel is to enable young people to participate in decision-making processes and participate as real contributors in the development of integration policy on a national level.

(e)

88. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a topic on the introduction programme for new judges, as well as at individual seminars for judges and lawyers. The National Courts Administration has prepared national guidelines on how parental disputes and child welfare cases should be handled in the courts. National guidelines for the police's dealings with children came into force on 1 January 2023 and apply to all police employees. The guidelines introduce principles for encounters involving children.

89. The Criminal Procedure Act contains special rules on the conduct of adapted questioning of children who are an aggrieved party and/or witness. The interviews are conducted in Children's Houses in accordance with the principles for encounters involving children. The Criminal Procedure Act also contains special provisions to ensure that the rights of children who are suspects or have been charged are safeguarded, e.g. through the right to a defence counsel and involvement of the Child Welfare Service. In 2023, the Director of Public Prosecution issued guidelines for police questioning of children and particularly vulnerable persons as suspects in criminal proceedings. From 2024, suspects under the age of 16 in sexual offense cases will also be questioned in Children's Houses (cf. Section 17 (d)).

Reply to paragraph 14 of the list of issues prior to reporting

90. The Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion is going to review the rules on citizenship and, will consider the recommendation to include a definition of statelessness in the legislation on Norwegian nationality. In 2016, an instruction was issued to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) on the interpretation of Section 16 of the Nationality Act, to ensure that cases concerning stateless children, born in Norway, are processed in accordance with our international obligations.

Reply to paragraph 15 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

91. In Official Norwegian Report NOU 2022:11, the Privacy Commission has investigated the overall situation for privacy in Norway and assessed how children and young people's privacy is safeguarded, especially in schools and kindergartens and in digital services where children act as consumers. The Privacy Commission has expressed strong concern about children's privacy in schools, highlighting the advertising pressure in the services schools use in teaching and the commercial exploitation of personal data relating to pupils.

92. The Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance is currently following up the report in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Families and the Ministry of Education and Research. The work is being coordinated with the follow-up of recommendations from the expert group for digital learning analysis (Official Norwegian Report NOU 2023:19).

93. In 2014, a new provision was added to the Constitution: Article 102 on the right to respect of privacy. This provision protects children and adults alike and reads: "Everyone has

the right to the respect of their privacy and family life, their home and their communication”. The right to respect of privacy also applies to children. Pursuant to Article 104 of the Constitution, children also have the “right to protection of their personal integrity”, which includes a right to respect of their privacy.

(b)

94. The Marketing Control Act has a separate chapter on the protection of children. It is stipulated that particular care must be exercised with regard to the impressionability, lack of experience and natural credulity of children. Furthermore, account shall be taken of children’s age, development and other factors that make children particularly vulnerable. The provisions are technology neutral and are also intended to protect children from harmful marketing in digital channels. The Consumer Authority monitors compliance with the Act. The Government has initiated a review of children’s consumer protection in digital media, and is also considering introducing an age limit for social media.

(c)

95. The strategy for digital competence and infrastructure in kindergartens and schools 2023–2030 includes several measures to develop teacher competencies and strengthen good digital practice in kindergartens and schools. Digital competence is also a topic in the white paper “Safe digital childhood”. The Norwegian Directorate for Education has several training packages to promote work-related digital competence for teachers, and is also going to launch a research programme for and on digitalisation and digital competence.

96. The Directorate published a guide with a clear recommendation on regulation of the use of private mobile phones and smart watches in schools. The Directorate has previously published a guide on how schools can protect children against harmful content, and is collaborating with the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) on a broad, updated guide on access control on pupils’ digital devices.

Reply to paragraph 16 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

97. The National Police Directorate issued a new instruction on the use of police custody in November 2018. The instruction stipulates that minors must not be placed in a cell or other locked room unless it is absolutely necessary. Alternatives to cell placement should be considered and attempted, and the assessment and conclusion should be documented in the custody record. If the minor is placed in a cell, the duration of the stay should be as brief as possible. Particular consideration shall be given to the arrested minor at all times so that the burden of the detention in custody is minimised. The custody record must state what special adaptations have been made because the arrested person is a minor.

98. Minors in police custody must at all times have the possibility to access staff from the police custody facility or persons working in the health and care services or child welfare service who are on the premises. Minors are to be kept separate from adult detainees. Arrested minors must be transferred to prison at the first opportunity and no later than 24 hours after arrest. The detention in police custody may only exceed 24 hours in exceptional cases. If the detention in police custody exceeds 24 hours, the reason for this, including which alternative measures have been tried or considered, and the name of the person who has decided this, must be documented in the custody record.

99. The Child Welfare Act regulates a number of intrusive measures for children and families. Children in institutions constitute a particularly vulnerable group, and they rely on the care of the adults charged with looking after them. For this reason, there are extra strict requirements that the legal basis for the use of coercion and other interventions must be understandable and predictable. A number of rules on rights and use of coercion in institutions have now been codified in the new Child Welfare Act. A thorough review of the

rules on rights and the use of coercion at institutions has been performed. This will be followed up in a bill that will be presented to the Storting in spring 2025.

100. Children have the same legal protection against abuse and disproportionate use of coercion as adults. Mechanical means of coercion that impede the patient's freedom of movement or short-term incarceration behind a locked or closed door without personnel present may not be used on patients under the age of 16. In the Norwegian Directorate of Health's circular on the Mental Health Care Act and the Mental Health Care Regulations, it is stressed that the use of coercion must be limited to what is strictly necessary and that the need for use of coercion must be assessed specifically in each individual case.

(b)

101. Decisions concerning the use of coercion or interference with the child's personal integrity pursuant to the specified provisions in the Child Welfare Act are individual administrative decisions, meaning they can be appealed. The decisions must be placed on record and presented to the County Governor as the supervisory authority.

102. Children who are victims of a serious criminal offence, or the child's survivors, may be entitled to compensation from the State (cf. Section 1 of the Compensation for Violent Crime Act).

103. The new Compensation for Violent Crime Act entered into force on 1 January 2023. According to the Act, claims for compensation should be dealt with by the courts during the criminal proceedings. As a rule, the child will be entitled to a court-appointed lawyer (counsel) in the criminal proceedings. If so, it is the responsibility of the counsel to bring the claim for compensation before the court. Once the judgment is final, the State pays the compensation almost automatically, and at the same time demands redress from the perpetrator. This ensures an efficient and fair processing of claims.

104. If the claim for compensation is not processed by the courts during the criminal proceedings, for example because the case was dismissed, the child's legal guardian can apply to the Compensation Authority for compensation for violent crime. However, the child must be heard and their views must be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity. Legal expenses may be covered if the scope or complexity of the case so requires. On 1 January 2024, the Regulations to the Compensation for Violent Crime Act entered into force, giving children who have experienced violence against a close family member the right to compensation even if the perpetrator is not liable under general rules of compensation. All children have the right of co-determination in the areas where their guardian has the decision-making authority. The Guardianship Act has been amended to strengthen children's rights. The statutory age limit for when children must be consulted in matters over which their guardian has legal responsibility has been lowered from 12 to 7 years. There is also a duty to consult children over the age of 7 years in questions of whether a parent is to be deprived of their guardianship over the child (cf. Sections 8 (b) and 23 (f)).

(c)

105. The general right of the police to exercise force is sanctioned by law in Section 6 of the Police Act and Section 3-2 of the Police Instructions. The police can use force against children in the same way as for adults. A national guideline for the police's dealings with children specifies that a qualified proportionality rule nevertheless applies when using force against children. The use of force against children to be considered proportionate is higher than for adults. A stricter requirement for a proportionality assessment also has an impact on the types of means of force that the police can use against children, and the situations in which they can be used.

106. In January 2024, the Government submitted a proposal to the Storting on inclusion in the Police Act of the principle that the best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration when police actions affect, target or occur in the presence of children. As a rule, force may only be used against children when it is strictly necessary, all other options have been tried and have proved insufficient and the purpose of the use of force is to prevent immediate harm to the child or others. The right to use force will depend in particular on the necessity of the use of force and the child's age, health situation and vulnerability in general.

107. The police have prepared an action plan to promote diversity, dialogue and trust, including in encounters with young people from minority communities. The police are going to assess and test various measures to prevent police checks of individuals from being perceived as unfair or discriminatory.

Reply to paragraph 17 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

108. In 2023 a new provision was introduced into the Dispute Act in connection with child welfare cases involving an undisclosed address. This provision gives the courts the opportunity to decide that a witness's name and other personal details shall not be stated in open court sessions, if this might serve to reveal the undisclosed address. The provision also applies correspondingly in cases being processed by the Child Welfare Tribunal.

109. Amendments were made to the Criminal Procedure Act in 2023 stating that the prosecution authority is allowed to impose electronic monitoring (a so-called "reverse violence alarm") if there is suspicion of violation of a restraining order or a contact ban. In exceptional cases, electronic monitoring of restraining orders may also be imposed without any prior violation. It is highlighted in the preparatory works that cases that trigger the rules on restraining orders or contact bans often affect children – directly or indirectly (cf. Section 16 (b)).

(b)

110. National action plans and strategies have been important tools to strengthen and coordinate efforts to prevent violence against and sexual abuse of children across sectors. Several plans and strategies that specifically address violence against children have been launched in the past 10 years. The Norwegian Parliament adopted in May 2024 an Escalation plan against violence and abuse of children and violence in close relationships (2024 – 2028). Nine ministries have collaborated on the plan, which also addresses negative social control, honour-related violence and online child abuse.

111. The Government will strengthen efforts to combat violence against very young children and online child abuse. Priority will be given to attitude-shaping work aimed at general public, parental support measures and competence raising in the services. Furthermore, the Government is going to focus on children and young people who exhibit or are at risk of developing problematic or harmful sexual behaviour.

112. The national strategy for coordinated efforts against online abuse of children was launched in 2021. Measures have been implemented to ensure greater knowledge and competence, including among children and young people and their guardians. Collaboration with the private sector on combating this type of sexual abuse has been strengthened. Criminal prosecution of online abuse is a high priority for the police and the prosecution authority.

(c)

113. The duty to avert a criminal offence entails an obligation to seek to avert certain serious criminal acts or the consequences thereof (cf. Section 196 of the Penal Code). The duty is individual and applies to all citizens and is fulfilled by reporting to the Child Welfare Service, the police or another appropriate public agency or service, or otherwise seeking to prevent the act or the consequences thereof. The basic condition is that it appears "certain or most likely" that the offence has been or will be committed. Examples of offences that people have a duty to seek to avert are aggravated physical assault, murder, rape, rape of children under the age of 14, and abuse in close relationships. The duty to avert a criminal offence supersedes any duty of confidentiality.

114. All public services, health professionals, employees covered by the Independent Schools Act, and certain other groups have a duty to notify the Child Welfare Service pursuant to Section 13-2 of the Child Welfare Act. The duty to notify the Child Welfare

Service includes cases where there are grounds to believe that a child is being or will be subjected to mistreatment, serious shortcomings in the daily care or other serious neglect and cases where a child exhibits serious behavioural problems. The duty to avert a criminal offence pursuant to Section 196 of the Penal Code entails an individual responsibility to report and applies irrespective of any duty of confidentiality.

115. In February 2023, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security issued a new guide on confidentiality, disclosure rights and the duty of disclosure in the public administration. The guide also deals with the duty to avert a criminal offence.

116. The police's efforts to prevent and combat violence and abuse have been significantly strengthened in recent years, both in terms of competence and capacity. The Children's Houses has been further developed and expanded over several years, and support centres for victims of crime have been established in all the police districts. Common national guidelines have been developed for interaction between the Child Welfare Service and the police. In recent years, the National Courts Administration has worked systematically on competence-raising measures in cases involving children.

117. The Government will take steps to improve the clear-up rate in cases of violence and abuse, and is working to improve the quality of criminal proceedings by strengthening the prosecution authority and enhancing investigation work. In 2024 research will be initiated to shed light on the reasons for the falling clear-up rates in priority categories of crime, including serious violence and abuse.

118. All the police districts have established "cyber patrols" that receive information and tips about online crime. The police have also introduced a secure chat service for children who are in a situation online where they may need to get in touch with the police. The Government is looking into introducing a duty for Norwegian service providers to report if they discover that their services are being used for unlawful storage or distribution of abuse material.

(d)

119. The Children's Houses play a key role in the work to ensure that children's legal rights are safeguarded and the coordination of the help for children who have witnessed or been subjected to violence and/or sexual abuse, where the case has been reported to the police. Within the health service, the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Outpatient Clinics (BUP) is an important partner. BUP investigate and treat trauma related to violence and abuse. In particularly severe cases, the child is referred to a specialist psychiatric department in a hospital.

120. The Government will follow up the evaluation of the Children's Houses, among other things, by working to strengthen the offer of medical examinations. The common guidelines for all Children's Houses are under review, and the Government will also consider introducing a separate Children's Houses Act. In 2024 Children's Houses will be established in Finnmark Police District at three locations. The Children's House in Karasjok will be responsible for services aimed specifically at Sami children. The Government will also establish further Children's Houses in areas where long journeys still pose a challenge. In 2024, the Government will expand the target group of the Children's Houses to encompass suspects in sexual offence cases who are under the age of 16.

121. The State provides grants for the operation of the Stine Sofie Centre, which is a national centre for children who have been subjected to violence, their caregivers of trust and siblings. The Centre offers families a free six-day stay, where they can have fun and learn to better master their lives in safe surroundings.

(e)

122. The Child Welfare Act applies to all children in Norway, regardless of their status and nationality. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors under the age of 15 receive an offer of accommodation and care under the State's regional child welfare authority (cf. Section 11-1 of the Child Welfare Act). The care centre will provide the child with good care and

emotional security, as well as help them get the follow-up and treatment they need. Care centres have a statutory duty to assess the children who stay there.

123. The Directorate of Immigration (UDI) is responsible for the care of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors between the ages of 15 and 18 who live in a reception centre for asylum seekers. The care provided must be of good quality and adapted to the individual's needs. The reception centres must provide trauma-sensitive, relationship-based care. UDI sets requirements and provides training and guidance for the reception centres. UDI has also developed its own "action cards" that provide guidance for the special reception centres for asylum seekers for sexual and gender minorities, as well as what to do if a resident reports being subjected to sexual assault, violence or harassment, child marriage, human trafficking or abuse in close relationships.

124. In 2022, an independent central supervisory authority was established for unaccompanied minors living in reception centres for asylum seekers. The supervisory authority shall ensure that unaccompanied minors who live in reception centres for asylum seekers are offered adequate accommodation and care. All unaccompanied minors are appointed a representative who will assist them during the asylum application process.

125. Children who have come to Norway after the granting of family immigration and where there is reason to believe that the parents or children have been abused in the family relationship or by other members of the same household (or by the family-in-law) must be granted a residence permit on an independent basis if the cohabitation has ended.

126. The Government is going to consider the establishment of a scheme in which the municipal authorities are notified by the immigrant authorities about family immigrants who will be settling in the municipality, so that the municipal authorities have the opportunity to actively investigate whether there is a risk of neglect or abuse in the home.

(f)

127. The Norwegian Police University College plays a central role in the training of the police through the basic, further and continuing education it offers, including on violence and abuse of children. "Abuse in close relationships" and "Investigation of serious violence against children" are two of the studies offered as further and continuing education.

128. The Norwegian Police University College has entered into an interprofessional collaboration with the University of South-Eastern Norway, called SAMOT – Partnership against violence and abuse of children and young people.

129. Through the escalation plan against violence and abuse of children and violence in close relationships, the Government is aiming to increase the knowledge about violence and abuse among operative personnel in the police, increase police competence on negative social control and honour-related violence, and strengthen competence in the justice sector on online and internet-related abuse.

130. Knowledge about violence and abuse is included in the framework plan for kindergartens, the Education Act, various school curricula, the framework plan for child care at school outside school hours (SFO), and the plan for teacher education and all health and social science education.

131. A learning resource has been developed for use in kindergartens and schools on bullying, violence, abuse and children's rights (cf. jegvet.no). In addition, a knowledge and training portal has been developed on how to conduct difficult conversations with children and young people who may be at risk (cf. Snakkemedbarn.no). The target group is all employees in services that have dealings with children and young people.

(g)

132. The Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic (BUP) has a responsibility to offer treatment to children and adolescents who exhibit harmful sexual behaviour. Individualised treatment is recommended. Many of children and young people who violate others have themselves been victims of serious incidents such as neglect and sexual abuse. Others may have cognitive impairments that contribute to their sexualised behaviour. There

are various tools for assessing and treating these kinds of behavioural problems. There are also units in the specialist health service with expertise in harmful sexual behaviour.

Reply to paragraph 18 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

133. The Government finances a range of attitude campaigns to prevent negative social control, honour-related violence, forced marriage (including child marriage) and female genital mutilation. In 2022, the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) developed new information measures aimed at parents and children aged 12–18 years. IMDi also supports a number of campaigns and information initiatives on these issues through the allocation of project funding to civil society organisations.

(b)

134. Forced marriage and female genital mutilation are criminal offences according to the Penal Code. A government-appointed expert commission is currently conducting an assessment of legal issues related to negative social control, honour-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and psychological violence. The commission will submit its report in 2024.

135. Norway also has several special assistance services with expertise on negative social control, honour-related violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation. One example is the national, cross-sectoral expert team on negative social control and honour-related violence. There are also diversity advisors at selected lower secondary and upper secondary schools in all the counties and four special envoys for integration issues at the foreign service missions in Ankara, Amman, Islamabad and Nairobi.

(c)

136. Treatment is only initiated when medically necessary. This concerns only a handful of children, who are followed up from the time they are born. The children are promptly referred to the specialist health service for examination and treatment. In some patients, surgery may be necessary, which is then done in consultation with the child's parents. Treatment practices in Norway are in line with those in the rest of Europe and follow international standards in the field.

Reply to paragraph 19 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

137. The new Child Welfare Act attaches greater importance to prevention and early intervention. The municipal authorities' responsibility for preventing children and young people from being subjected to neglect has been defined more clearly, and the municipal council has been made responsible for coordinating and drawing up a plan for this work. The child welfare reform also gave the municipal authorities greater autonomy in the practice of and financial responsibility for the child welfare services.

138. The Family Counselling Service is a free, low-threshold service for family relationships. The Family Counselling Service can advise and help families to manage challenges and find solutions. The service has a preventive approach. The Ministry of Children and Families is reviewing the Family Counselling Service Act.

139. Municipal authorities can apply for grants for parental support measures. This grant scheme has been strengthened in 2024 and now amounts to approximately NOK 51 million.

(b)

140. The Children Act gives children the right to contact with both parents, even if the parents do not live together. It is nevertheless a problem that some children and parents are prevented from having contact with each other.

141. The Ministry of Children and Families is currently working on a new Children Act, and is considering amending the regulations to combat obstruction of contact between children and a parent. There is a particular focus on the rules concerning child maintenance, with a view to ensuring that there are no financial incentives to obstruct contact.

(c)

142. The main purpose of the Child Welfare Service is to assist families, and it must adhere to the principle of least intervention. This means that home-based assistance measures are offered in most cases where children and families need assistance. Children are only taken into care and placed outside the home in cases of severe neglect, violence or abuse. It is the Child Welfare Tribunal that issues care orders.

143. The number of children who have been taken into care pursuant to the Child Welfare Act has decreased since 2013. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has initiated a research project on causes of the decline in the number of children taken into care from 2013 to 2022.

144. A family group conference is a meeting between the family's network and public agencies. The method makes use of the resources within the child's family and network. The goal is to come up with a plan to improve the child's and the family's situation. Family group conferences are mostly used in the Child Welfare Service, but in recent years have also been used in other services.

Reply to paragraph 20 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting**(a)**

145. The principle of the best interests of the child will be a fundamental consideration in connection with a child being taken into care, determination of the extent of contact with the biological family, family reunification, and adoption pursuant to the Child Welfare Act. The new Act sets requirements for an explanation of the grounds for decisions, and it must be specified in administrative decisions issued by the Child Welfare Service and the Child Welfare Tribunal how the best interests of the child and respect for family ties have been assessed.

(b)

146. Measures imposed by the Child Welfare Service must not be more intrusive than necessary. This principle has been stated more clearly in the new Act and is decisive in the application of all the provisions of the Act. There are strict conditions that must be met for the Child Welfare Service to take a child into care. The conditions have been enshrined in law. The Act also states that the Child Welfare Tribunal can only issue a care order if less invasive measures cannot create satisfactory conditions for the child and this is necessary based on the child's situation. Taking the child into care must be in the best interests of the child.

147. The Child Welfare Service has a statutory duty to follow up the child and the parents after a care order and must regularly assess whether there is a need to implement or change other measures pursuant to the Act. Moreover, care orders should normally be considered temporary and the Child Welfare Services must work to facilitate reunification where this is not precluded by the best interests of the child.

148. Children and young people with an ethnic minority background face the same challenges as children and young people in general, but they often also face some additional challenges. Cultural, religious, linguistic and other minority-related factors, living condition

factors and refugee-specific factors all play a role in challenges that may result in a child being taken into care. However, there are no grounds to claim that the child's origins in themselves are grounds for a child to be taken into care. The basis for intervention by the Child Welfare Service is the best interests of the child, and the goal is to ensure that children and young people who live in conditions that may be detrimental to their health and development receive the necessary assistance. In practice, this often involves preventing violence, abuse and/or neglect within the family.

149. Forced placement of young people in institutions on the basis of the young person's own behaviour or actions is very invasive. In order to make the regulations clear and straightforward to apply, the rules on placement of young people in institutions are presented together in a separate chapter of the Act. The Child Welfare Tribunal must approve the placement, and the conditions laid down in the Act on, among other things, the best interests of the child and the child's right to participation apply.

150. The Child Welfare Institution Committee delivered its report in 2023. The report provides a thorough review of the challenges faced by child welfare institutions and presents comprehensive proposals for changes to ensure that children at the child welfare institutions receive good care, developmental support, and the necessary health care. The proposals will be followed up through the white paper on quality that is scheduled to be presented to the Storting in spring 2025.

151. Like other child welfare institutions, all private and municipal care centres for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors must be approved by the regional level of the Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat) or the City of Oslo. Bufetat conducts annual checks on private and municipal care centres through ongoing internal control. The county governor has supervisory authority and makes sure that the care centres are operated in accordance with the applicable regulations and that the children receive proper care, treatment and follow-up in the centres.

152. The right of children and parents to respect for their family life is a fundamental human right. It is a clear starting point that it is best for children to grow up in their own families. Care orders should thus normally be considered temporary, and it is always a goal to reunite children and their families, unless the best interests of the child dictate otherwise. Follow-up of the child and its parents after a child has been taken into care and the extent and quality of contact between the child and the parents are important prerequisites for the child and parents to be reunited once the conditions for this are met. The new Child Welfare Act clarifies the rules on contact, and these must be assessed in the context of the introductory provision on the best interests of the child and the child's right to participation and co-determination. The Act expressly states that the Child Welfare Tribunal shall determine the extent of contact on the basis of a concrete assessment of the individual case.

153. In spring 2024, the Government is presenting a white paper on foster homes. A number of measures are going to be presented that will contribute to increased stability and better recruitment of foster homes. There is a particular focus on enabling a higher degree of placement within the child's family, network and local community. The central Child Welfare Service has a statutory duty to offer a child a foster home when this is requested by the municipality. Challenges linked to recruiting and retaining foster homes can result in breaches of the duty to provide assistance.

154. A revised version of the foster home regulations came into force on 1 January 2024. Here it is specified that the municipal authorities must strive to choose foster homes in the child's local environment, unless the best interests of the child dictate otherwise.

155. In 2023, the Government presented a plan of action for recruitment of foster homes. This plan will help recruit foster homes for the children who are currently on a waiting list, primarily by providing better support for foster parents. Many municipalities have important collaborative projects underway related to foster homes through the grant scheme for municipal learning networks. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs is working to get more people to enrol in courses to become foster parents. In 2024, the Directorate has prepared detailed guidelines for how the child welfare services and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat) are to prevent relocations that are not in the best interests of the child.

(c)

156. In June 2023, the Government appointed a committee to conduct an official inquiry into international adoptions, in order to investigate whether the Norwegian authorities have exercised sufficient oversight and control over adoptions from overseas, and to uncover whether there have been any illegal and/or unethical circumstances in connection with adoptions from other countries to Norway. The committee has been mandated with assessing whether the existing system is sound and conducting a critical review of international adoption at the system level, with reviews of a sample of individual cases. The committee has also been tasked with assessing measures in the field of adoption and making recommendations on the adoption system. The committee will submit its report within two years from the start-up date and will also submit one or more sub-reports on the situation in individual countries or other appropriate topics.

157. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) is the Norwegian adoption authority and Norway's Central Authority pursuant to the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

158. In 2023, Bufdir has established a number of post-adoption services for adoptees and their families. This includes assistance in connection with finding out about their biological origins and assistance in questions about illegalities in their own case. In addition, a special service has been established for adoptees and their families that provides individual guidance to adoptees and their families on post-adoption services and information and professional support on adoption-specific issues for use in the relevant services. From 2024, new courses are available for adoptive parents based on trauma-informed care as a method, where topics include racism and the experience of alienation. The aim is to provide good parental support and guidance on the services that are available, as well as provide an opportunity to develop networks.

(d)

159. Children fleeing from Ukraine seeking protection in Norway can receive temporary collective protection. Collective protection means that the Norwegian immigration authorities do not assess the need for protection on an individual basis, but provide collective protection for people displaced from Ukraine and their family members. The permit is limited and granted for one year at a time, for up to three years. Ukrainians who receive collective protection do not have refugee status and do not receive a travel document for refugees.

160. In order to improve the municipalities' ability to respond to the current refugee situation due to the war in Ukraine, some temporary legislative amendments have been implemented in the Kindergarten Act and the Education Act, making it easier to establish temporary kindergartens and giving the municipalities a period of up to three months to offer a full programme of education and training, among other things.

161. Anyone who is granted temporary collective protection will be offered housing with public assistance. All children are entitled to health care, education and a place at a kindergarten (after settlement).

Reply to paragraph 21 of the list of issues prior to reporting

162. The Norwegian Correctional Service must ensure that, as a general rule, all prisoners are able to receive visits in prison, unless safety considerations dictate otherwise. Weight must always be afforded to children's right to access to (i.e. contact with) their parents in connection with the execution of a sentence. Prisons must make arrangements to ensure that children's visits take place in the least harmful manner possible. Children under the age of 15 can only visit prisoners accompanied by an adult, preferably their own legal guardian or other relatives.

Reply to paragraph 22 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

163. Everyone should be able to live their life freely, regardless of their functional ability. The Government maintains a policy that protects the rights of and actively assists marginalised groups, in order to ensure that individuals can master the challenges they face in life. In 2022, the Government presented a white paper on human rights for persons with intellectual disabilities.

164. Norwegian health legislation has the same overarching provisions concerning rights, which generally apply regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.

165. Norwegian municipalities provide health and care services to their citizens. The distribution of funds to the municipalities takes into account that each municipality is different, and funds are distributed according to, for example, the number of children of school age and the number of elderly people (cf. Section 5 (a)).

166. In addition, municipalities that have users who are very cost-intensive receive, upon application, reimbursement via the top-up financing scheme for resource-intensive services for these users, if the expenses exceed a given level. The county governor supervises the municipalities' health and care services and processes appeals across municipal boundaries.

(b)

167. Families who have or are expecting a child with a serious illness, injury or disability, and who will need long-term and complex or coordinated health and care services and other welfare services, are entitled to a child coordinator pursuant to the Patient and User Rights Act. The municipality's duty to appoint a child coordinator is stipulated in the Health and Care Services Act.

168. Children who receive services in children's and respite homes often have multiple, complex needs for assistance. Many of these have developmental disabilities and impaired ability to communicate their needs. Children are entitled to necessary services during the respite period. It is also regarded as absolutely necessary to map the child's needs and wishes, so that the services are designed in line with what is important for the child. Follow-up of the offer therefore often requires comprehensive input from the health and care services in the municipalities where the children live.

169. The next-of-kin of children with special needs must be confident that the care and services their children receive in children's and respite homes are of good quality and adapted to the individual child's needs. In a recent nationwide inspection of children's and respite homes, the Norwegian Health Inspectorate detected a number of non-conformities. In cases where the non-conformity was in breach of the law, the county governor requests that the municipal authority draw up a plan for how the findings are to be followed up and sets a time limit for when the violation must be remedied.

(c)

170. As part of the new escalation plan for mental health, the Government wants to improve services for children and young people with complex needs. Measures will include better coordination of the services that are available, continuation and improvement of the health offerings for children in the Child Welfare Service's care, and increasing competence in recognising and detecting early signs of neurodevelopmental disorders and their follow-up.

171. Measures to contribute to better services for children and young people with long-term and complex needs include continuing, renewing and improving health offerings in the Child Welfare Service. Furthermore, children in the Child Welfare Service's care who need health care must have as good access to health care as other children. A national pathway for child welfare has been established. This will help ensure that all children in the Child Welfare Service's care are screened and assessed for any somatic health problems, mental health

problems, substance abuse problems, sexual health problems, dental health problems, etc. such that they can receive the necessary health care (cf. 23 (d) and (e)).

Reply to paragraph 23 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g) and (h) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

172. See the presentation of the block funding of the municipalities in Section 5 (a) and 22 (a).

(b)

173. One of the most important services for children and young people is the child health clinic and school health service. Almost all children and young people come into contact with this service through standard check-ups. The service also has same-day drop-in appointments. The Government has strengthened the child health clinic and school health service both professionally and financially. All children and young people have the right to be registered with a general practitioner (GP). The Government has implemented measures to increase the capacity and stability of the general practitioner system.

(c)

174. All refugees and asylum seekers have the same entitlement to health care as the rest of the population.

(d)

175. The Health and Care Services Act stipulates that the municipalities must ensure that all people who reside in the municipality are offered the necessary health and care services. The municipality's responsibility includes all patient and health care user groups, including people with mental health challenges and substance abuse problems. The municipality must offer health-promoting and preventive services, assessment, diagnosis and treatment, and social, psychosocial and medical habilitation and rehabilitation. Specialised treatment for mental health disorders takes place in the specialist health service.

176. Many people with mental health problems and disorders are in contact with their GP. The child health clinic and school health service can also fulfil this role for children and young people, pregnant and post-partum families. In addition, there are separate low-threshold services for mental health. A report from the Office of the Auditor General in 2021 showed that 75 per cent of municipalities had their own low-threshold mental health service that treats children and young people.

177. Municipal services, such as the child health clinic and school health service, educational-psychological service (PPT) and/or Child Welfare Service, also treat children and young people. From 1 January 2020, all Norwegian municipalities are required by law to have clinical psychologists available. In 2023, the Government presented the white paper Escalation plan for mental health. One of the goals of this plan is that people in all municipalities shall have access to knowledge-based, low-threshold offerings within mental health and substance abuse.

(e)

178. One of the goals of the escalation plan for mental health is a 25 per cent reduction in the level of self-reported mental health symptoms among children and young people. The plan includes a number of measures both to address the causes of mental health problems among children and young people and to provide better assistance to individuals who need mental health services. Norway also has a national action plan for suicide prevention, which includes a zero vision for suicide.

179. The aim of the Government's action plan on gender and sexual diversity (2023–2026) is to improve queer people's quality of life, safeguard their rights, and contribute to greater

acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. A grant scheme has been established to strengthen efforts to improve mental health among queer people.

180. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration has separate guidelines for the identification and follow-up of vulnerable individuals both in reception centres for asylum seekers and in the asylum process.

(f)

181. The age of majority in respect of health issues is 16, from which age children have access to the same complaints systems as adults. They can appeal decisions regarding examination and treatment made without their consent to the county governor. Decisions on the use of coercive means in mental health services can be appealed to the mental health review board. The mental health review board's decisions in cases concerning forced observation and establishment or maintenance of compulsory mental health care can be brought before the district court for review pursuant to the special rules in Chapter 36 of the Dispute Act.

182. For children who have reached the age of 12, examination and treatment that involves staying in an institution and consent to being subject to the rules on compulsory mental health care, can be brought before the mental health review board if the child does not agree with the measure.

(g)

183. Diagnoses of ADHD among children in Norway are monitored through the Norwegian Patient Register, among others. Hyperkinetic disorder (ADHD) and attention deficit disorder are the most common issues among boys referred to the Mental Health Service for Children and Adolescents. There are professional guidelines on the assessment and treatment of ADHD for children, adolescents and adults.

(h)

184. Prevention of substance abuse requires coordinated efforts, and the responsibility is distributed across several ministries, underlying agencies and local authorities. For this reason, cross-sectoral work has been initiated under the auspices of the underlying directorates to ensure better cohesion and coordination of cross-sectoral efforts to prevent substance abuse aimed at children and young people.

185. The responsibility for the treatment of children and young people with serious substance abuse problems currently lies with the specialist health service. Many children and young people who have substance abuse and mental health challenges will not need specialised alcohol and substance abuse treatment, but will receive good help and follow-up from municipal services such as the child health clinic and school health service, their GP, special low-threshold services, and outreach services. The Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic (BUP) has broad experience in collaborating with, for example, school health services and the Child Welfare Service, and may therefore also constitute a good treatment option for young people who have developed a serious substance abuse problem. Children and young people with concurrent mental health and substance abuse disorders will in any case be referred to the Mental Health Service for Children and Adolescents (PHBU) for treatment. Some children and young people who are under the Child Welfare Service's care are treated for their substance abuse problems in the child welfare institution.

Reply to paragraph 24 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

186. Norway's enhanced climate targets under the Paris Agreement are to reduce emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. Norway wants to cut its greenhouse gas emissions in collaboration with the EU. The Climate Act stipulates Norway's enhanced climate targets for 2030 and the climate target for 2050. The Act forms the

framework for Norway's climate policy and is intended to help the country transition to a low-emission society, with the goal of a 90–95 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050.

187. In October 2023, the Government presented its second status report and updated plan to meet the 2030 climate targets. This plan will be presented to the Storting each year in October together with the Government's proposal for a budget. The Government has initiated work on a new climate report for the period up to 2035.

188. The Petroleum Act stipulates that the petroleum resources must be managed in a long-term perspective for the benefit of the Norwegian society as a whole. The interests of future generations are a significant consideration in Norway's petroleum policy, and the petroleum resources have been and will continue to be managed for the benefit of society over several generations with respect to value creation, employment and development of the welfare society. There is comprehensive regulation of emissions to air from the sector, with obligatory quotas and CO₂ tax as the main instruments.

189. Organisations representing children must be heard at key milestones for the petroleum activities, such as when opening new areas for exploration and in connection with impact assessments of planned developments.

(b)

190. Norway has the highest share of electricity produced from renewable sources and the lowest emissions from the power sector in Europe. Norway's ample access to renewable, emission-free electricity puts the country in a unique position globally.

191. Norway's ambition is that by 2040, areas will have been allocated for 30,000 MW of offshore wind production. Environmental aspects and pollution considerations are adequately addressed through legal frameworks and other instruments.

(c)

192. The Government is working to ensure that children and young people are involved in decision-making processes related to climate change. In 2023, the Ministry of Climate and Environment held a meeting with children and young people to discuss enhancing Norway's climate targets under the Paris Agreement. Meetings have also been held with UNICEF Norway, Save the Children Norway and the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU) on how children and young people can contribute to the work on the new climate report. The Ombudsperson for Children has also been involved in one of these meetings.

193. Two youth delegates are part of the official Norwegian delegation to the UN climate negotiations and attend meetings under the UN climate framework. Two youth delegates have attended COP 26 in Glasgow, COP 27 in Sharm el-Sheikh and COP 28 in Dubai. The Children's Panel on Climate Change has also attended the climate conferences in Sharm el-Sheikh and Dubai. At the Dubai climate action summit, Norway was a driving force behind the agreement to hold an expert dialogue on children's particular vulnerability to climate change during the June 2024 climate talks in Bonn.

194. Norway signed the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action at COP 26 in Glasgow. This declaration is intended to help strengthen children and young people's right to a healthy environment, including by recognising that children have an inalienable right to a healthy environment.

(d)

195. Awareness and knowledge of issues related to sustainable development and climate change have long been embedded in the Norwegian educational system. Norway has committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and UNESCO's Global Action Program on Education for Sustainable Development.

196. The Norwegian Kindergarten Act states that children must learn to take care of themselves, each other and nature. The Education Act states that pupils and apprentices must learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness.

197. In accordance with the Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens, Kindergartens shall foster the children's ability to think critically, act ethically and show solidarity. Children shall be given opportunities to give care and to look after their surroundings and the natural environment. For Sami children, this means living in harmony with, making use of and reaping the land. Sustainable development is one of three interdisciplinary topics in the Norwegian national curriculum for basic education. The pupils shall develop competencies that enable them to make responsible choices and to act ethically and with environmental awareness.

(e)

198. Norway has an ambitious chemicals policy, and it is a national goal that pollutants and other hazardous substances should not harm people or the environment. It is considered particularly important to protect vulnerable groups such as foetuses, children and young people.

199. The Norwegian authorities are actively working to stop the use and emissions of pollutants, and substances that give similar cause for concern. Effective regulations are important to protect children and young people from pollutants and other hazardous substances. Through the EEA Agreement, Norway adheres to EU regulations in the area of chemicals. Norway contributes actively to the development of the regulatory framework. For example, in collaboration with other European countries, Norway has worked to strengthen the regulations concerning toys. Norway is campaigning for several substances to be banned, including endocrine disruptors. Norway is also working actively at the global level to limit the use and emissions of hazardous substances.

Reply to paragraph 25 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

200. Child benefit is paid for all children under the age of 18 resident in Norway, regardless of the family's income.

201. Financial social assistance is the last resort safety net in Norway's welfare system. The state guidelines for financial social assistance, including rates for the children's living expenses, have been raised. With effect from 1 September 2022 child benefit is not included when financial social assistance is determined (cf. Section 6 (a)).

202. Through State grant schemes, funding is provided for affordable or free leisure activities that benefit children directly. Many of these are aimed at vulnerable children and young people, including children in low-income families.

203. Important policy measures to reduce poverty, also among families with children, are including more people into the labour market, universal welfare schemes, and fair and redistributive taxes.

204. In order for more youth to complete their education and get a job, a youth guarantee was introduced in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) from 1 July 2023. The guarantee ensures young people between the age of 16 and 30 who need assistance to get into the labour market early, close and individual follow-up.

205. Since the last report, kindergarten prices have been reduced. Free part-time places have been introduced in child care at school outside school hours (SFO), and the grant for free or affordable recreational activities for children and young people has been increased. These are measures that benefit children in poor families directly.

The cooperative strategy for children and young people in low-income families was launched in 2020 and expires in 2024.

206. In 2022, an expert group was set up to make recommendations on how public expenditure should be prioritised to improve the childhood conditions for children in low-income families and prevent poverty from being inherited. The expert group which submitted

its recommendations to the Government in October 2023 included input from children and young people.

207. A separate expert group was set up to look at what changes ought to be made in the education system to reduce social differences, increase social mobility and contribute to more people completing education. The expert group submitted its report in February 2024.

208. Both expert group reports will be followed up through a white paper on levelling out social inequalities and social mobility, which is scheduled to be presented in spring 2025. The work on the report will be seen in the context of the work on social missions launched in the “Long-term plan for research and higher education 2023–2032”, which aim to include more children and young people in education, employment and society through cross-sectoral, targeted efforts.

209. Families with low income and high housing expenses can apply for housing benefit, which has been increased in recent years. Municipal start-up loans help people who have long-term problems with getting a mortgage from an ordinary bank to buy or make adaptations to their own home. Families with children are a priority group in the municipal start-up loan scheme. In spring 2024, the Government presented a white paper on a fully comprehensive and active housing policy.

(b)

210. Statistics Norway (SSB) has investigated and recommended alternative poverty indicators to supplement persistent low income, which is the standard measure of poverty. The goal is to use indicators that provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the situation of children in poor families, and which capture the impacts of different measures on the financial situation of families with children.

211. In 2021, a decline in the proportion and number of children growing up in families with persistent low-income was recorded for the first time since the last report. Statistics Norway points out that the increase in child benefit for children under 6 years of age has probably contributed significantly to this decline.

212. In 2024, the grant scheme Grants for inclusion of children and young people amounted to approximately NOK 758 million. The scheme is going to be evaluated. In 2022 approximately 430,000 people were reached directly with various free or affordable activities through grants from the scheme.

213. The Government also has broad support schemes for voluntary organisations. NOK 2 billion has been awarded in full VAT compensation over the past two years, electricity support amounting to NOK 1,3 billion, and allocations of NOK 1,7 billion for sports facilities. Religious and philosophical communities receive grants from the State, including for activities for children and young people, which contribute to inclusion and good childhood conditions for children and young people.

(c)

214. In 2022, the Government, the municipal sector and a number of NGOs signed a renewed Declaration on Recreation. The declaration commits the signatories to working to enable children to participate in recreational activities. Grants for measures to include children and young people in recreational activities under the auspices of municipal authorities, NGOs and other State actors are an important instrument to realise the Declaration on Recreation (cf. Section 4 (a) and (c), and Section 25 (a)).

Reply to paragraph 26 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

215. The municipalities are responsible ensuring that pupils’ rights are safeguarded and that school buildings comply with laws and regulations. “Boosting competencies in special education and inclusive practice” is a programme to help ensure the municipal and county

authorities have the competencies they need, enabling them to identify and follow up all children and pupils so that they get a well-adapted and inclusive educational offering in kindergarten and school. The programme started in 2020 and is still under development, until it becomes a permanent solution from 2025.

216. The Government has also enabled a major increase in continuing education in special education for kindergarten and schoolteachers.

217. The Government has a grant scheme for specially adapted teaching materials and aids. Norway has introduced strict rules for the universal design of ICT, which also encompasses universal design of digital learning tools. Statped – the national special education service – produces and adapts learning materials for blind and weak-sighted pupils and for deaf pupils/pupils who use sign languages.

(b)

218. The proportion of pupils that complete upper secondary education has increased steadily over the past two decades. Since primary and lower secondary schooling is compulsory, almost all pupils complete these levels of education. There has nevertheless been an increase in the number of students who leave lower secondary school without complete academic qualifications (7.8 per cent in 2023). There has also been an increase in absence from school, an increase in reported cases of absence from school that gives rise for concern, and an increase in the proportion of pupils with persistent high absence (approximately 10 per cent absence or more).

219. The Norwegian Directorate for Education has investigated the scope of school absence among pupils and recommended a number of measures, including a new national system for collecting absence data for all school years and national guidelines for sharing “best practices”.

220. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development finances the City of Oslo’s Roma Mediator Service “Skolelostjenesten”. This service aims to strengthen learning outcomes, reduce absence from school, and increase the likelihood of pupils with a Roma background completing compulsory schooling.

(c)

221. Children under the age of 16 have the right and a duty to compulsory education. This also applies to children who are asylum seekers. The municipality where the child lives is responsible for providing compulsory primary and lower secondary education.

222. Children living in reception centres for asylum seekers are not entitled to a place in kindergarten. These children can get a place when they are granted a residence permit, are settled in a municipality, and meet the other conditions specified in the Kindergarten Act. However, municipalities can offer places in kindergarten to children living in reception centres for asylum seekers. The UDI then pays a grant to the municipality.

(d)

223. The Directorate for Education has developed a guide with a clear recommendation on regulation of the use of private mobile phones in schools. The goal is to promote the development of local regulations, increase concentration, improve the learning environment and reduce cyberbullying.

224. A zero-tolerance attitude towards bullying at schools has been enshrined in law, and schools are required to ensure that students have a good, safe school environment. There is a variety of measures that can help schools in this work, such as guidance and various online courses for competence raising. The Directorate is coordinating the measures that support efforts to develop good, inclusive and safe school environments, and assess what competencies schools currently need to develop a good, safe school environment.

(e)

225. The Education Act and the Independent Schools Act do not contain any rules on when an employee can intervene physically with pupils, even though situations arise where school employees use physical force. In May 2023, the Ministry of Education and Research submitted a proposal for new rules in the Education Act and the Independent Schools Act on the prevention of injuries and use of physical intervention. The proposal includes legislating that schools must work preventatively to avoid situations that involve physical interventions with pupils and that employees in the school can intervene physically with pupils to prevent injuries or significant damage to property. The bill was submitted to the Storting in spring 2024 and will come into force on 1 August 2024.

(f)

226. In spring 2023, the Government presented a white paper on Sami language, culture and society – Competence and recruitment in kindergartens, schools and higher education. This will be followed up in cooperation with the Sami Parliament of Norway.

227. In the new Education Act it is a statutory duty for municipal and county authorities to offer parts of the teaching in Sami in Sami-speaking environments if this is necessary for the training to be pedagogically sound. Furthermore, the right to training in Sami at the upper secondary school level has been extended to also apply to non-Sami students who have been taught in Sami or learned Sami in primary and lower secondary school.

(g)

228. The curriculum from 2020 has Regulation status and sets parameters for the teaching. The framework plans for teacher education programmes must be based on the Education Act and applicable curricula for primary and secondary education and training. The core curriculum for primary and secondary education states that the education and training given must comply with human rights, and the pupils must also acquire knowledge about these rights.

Reply to paragraph 27 of the list of issues prior to reporting

229. Children and young people are priority target groups in the Government's policy for sports and the voluntary sector. Recruitment and inclusion of underrepresented groups is a priority task.

230. Music and performing arts institutions that receive funding via the fiscal budget are encouraged to work strategically and with a long-term perspective to lower thresholds for participation and to keep user payments down. They have also been tasked with facilitating music and performing arts offerings that are accessible to a broad and diverse audience (cf. Section 25 (c)).

231. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs manages the grant scheme "Grants for holiday and recreational activities for people with disabilities". The aim of this grant scheme is to give civil society, i.e. NGOs and foundations, the opportunity to arrange good holiday and recreational activities for people with disabilities. In 2023, NOK 25,7 million was allocated to the scheme.

232. The Norwegian Library of Talking Books and Braille is a State library that produces and lends out adapted literature to people with difficulties to read printed text. Information, recruitment and dissemination work aimed at children and young people has been a priority during the period.

233. A public committee has assessed the situation for Norwegian sign language. The right of hearing-impaired children and young people to be taught sign language and to be taught in sign language and have access to sign language environments are key topics in the committee's report. The report is under review (cf. Section 6 (a)).

Reply to paragraph 28 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

234. The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) and the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board (UNE) must ensure quick, efficient case processing that ensures the due process of law, i.e., the fair treatment and protection of the rights of the individual, and avoids putting children's lives on hold. Minor asylum seekers shall be given priority by both UDI and UNE in the processing of cases. This prioritisation applies to both unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors and families with children.

235. Foreigners who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted or being subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment in their country of origin, must, upon application, be recognised as a refugee and be granted a residence permit in Norway (cf. Section 28 of the Immigration Act). If the applicant is a child, this must be taken into account, and the threshold for what is regarded as persecution or degrading treatment may be lower for children than for adults.

236. The Immigration Act has special rules on the detention of families with children and unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. A minor foreign national may only be arrested when dictated by special circumstances and may only be detained in extraordinary situations. The best interests of the child must always be a fundamental consideration in cases concerning arrest and detention, and it must always be assessed whether alternative measures can be implemented instead.

237. In decisions that affect a child, the child is a party, and it must be explained how the best interests of the child and the options for alternative measures have been considered.

238. If the arrested foreigner is under the age of 18, they should not normally be held longer than the day after the arrest. If the police want to detain the arrested minor, they must be brought to court as soon as possible, and no later than the day after arrest. The best interests of the child must be a fundamental consideration in this assessment.

239. There have been some changes to the provisions on the detention of minors since Norway's last report in 2016. The previous 24-hour time limit meant that the removal of families with children had to be carried out in a rush, limiting the ability to ensure the children concerned were treated with due consideration. The time limit has now been extended to the "day after" the arrest, enabling better implementation of removal in cases where children are involved.

240. In UDI's administrative decisions regarding a limited residence permit for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors under the age of 18, information is provided that the permit will expire when the young person turns 18 and that the person in question is in principle obliged to leave Norway at that time. The decision also contains information about the right to appeal and the right to stay in Norway until the appeal has been processed, also after they have turned 18. No special information is given to foreigners who are granted a limited residence permit for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors under the age of 18 that they can apply for a residence permit on another basis, beyond the information that is publicly available on UDI's website udi.no aimed at all applicants. This is regarded as sufficient information, also for this group of applicants. Limited residence permits are only granted to unaccompanied minor asylum seekers who have no other basis for residence other than that the Norwegian authorities deem that the applicant would be without proper care if they were returned. Limiting the duration of the residence permit, so that it applies until the foreigner turns 18 years of age is also regarded as complying with the best interests of the child.

241. Norway has an age-adapted care service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors. This means that UDI is responsible for offering accommodation to unaccompanied minors between the ages of 15 and 18 at special reception centres for asylum seekers or departments that are adapted to their needs. In 2022, an independent supervisory authority was established to monitor the care of unaccompanied minors living in reception centres for asylum seekers. The purpose is to ensure that the individuals' legal rights are protected and to make sure that unaccompanied minors receive proper follow-up during their stay in a reception centre.

242. In cases where unaccompanied minors disappear from a reception centre, UDI has procedures for follow-up, which entail, among other things, that the Child Welfare Service, the individual's representative (guardian), their lawyer and the police are notified. It is the police that investigates any criminal acts, while UDI and the reception centres can help through preventive work and by cooperating with the police. In 2023, a major project was carried out to strengthen the police's investigation of cases where unaccompanied minors disappear from reception centres. The routines for notification between the police and the reception centres have been revised, and a new notification form has been introduced. The statistics have been amended to provide a better overview of the number of disappearances. New guidelines are now being prepared on investigation of disappearances.

(b)

243. Norway is not legally obliged to have a "reasonableness condition", since this cannot be derived from the Refugee Convention or international case law. Moreover, no one can be returned if they face a real risk of being subjected to persecution, the death penalty, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

244. The Norwegian authorities must always assess whether a residence permit can be granted pursuant to Section 38 of the Immigration Act in cases of internal flight. It will then be assessed whether strong humanitarian considerations or a particular connection with Norway can indicate that a residence permit should nevertheless be granted. The considerations that were previously assessed under the reasonableness condition are now assessed pursuant to Section 38.

(c)

245. Some of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors who arrive in Norway do not present identity documents, and there will often also be doubt as to the age of the applicant. The purpose of age determination procedures is to ensure that children are not erroneously assessed as adults, and similarly that adults are not erroneously assessed as children. Whether an applicant is an adult or a child may have an impact on the outcome of the asylum case. It is also important for the placement in a reception centre for asylum seekers, as there are separate reception centres for asylum seekers under the age of 18 years.

246. It is important that the best methods for age determination at any given time are used, and that the quality of the examinations is improved where possible. The Department of Forensic Medicine at Oslo University Hospital has the national scientific responsibility for assessing the age of unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, and has developed an age prediction tool called BioAlder, which is based on statistical modelling. The method uses X-rays of the applicant's hand and/or teeth. Researchers are working in parallel on developing a method for age estimation using DNA methylation. The methods available to us today do not indicate the individual's exact age and must therefore be considered in combination with the other information in the case. If there is any doubt, the applicant will be deemed to be under the age of 18.

Reply to paragraph 29 (a), (b) and (c) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

247. The Government is working on a dedicated plan of action to combat discrimination of the Sami people (cf. Section 11 (a)). Funding has been granted for measures to combat anti-Sami behaviour through the grant scheme "Action against racism, discrimination and hate speech". Hate speech against Sami people is addressed by the Stop Hate Speech movement.

248. The learning resource "Jeg vet" [I know] for use in kindergartens and school years 1–4 has been translated into Northern Sami, Southern Sami and Lule Sami. Work has been initiated to ensure that the knowledge and training portal "snakkemedbarn.no" [Talk to

children] is relevant to the Sami population, with subtitling and translation into Northern, Southern and Lule Sami.

249. The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs administers a grant scheme that aims to help prevent and combat violence and abuse in close relationships and safeguard adults and children who have been subjected to violence. One of the goals of the grant scheme is to ensure that indigenous peoples, as well as national and other ethnic minorities, have access to linguistically and culturally adapted offerings.

250. The Government's new escalation plan against violence and abuse of children and violence in close relations (2024–2028) contains a separate chapter on violence and abuse in Sami communities. The measures in the escalation plan are intended to pave the way for better prevention and combatting of violence and abuse in Sami communities. This involves enabling employees in relevant services to gain knowledge and skills in Sami languages, culture and social relations.

251. An important part of the work will be disseminating knowledge to children and young people and attitude-shaping campaigns aimed at the general public.

252. See also the discussion of bullying in Section 26 (d) and the discussion of the various action plans and strategies targeting different forms of discrimination in Section 11 (b)–(e).

(b)

253. The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens requires that all kindergartens must contribute to children becoming aware that the Sami people are the Indigenous people of Norway and learning about Sami culture. It is established in the core curriculum for primary and secondary education that Sami cultural heritage is part of Norway's cultural heritage and that Norwegian and the Sami languages have equal standing in Norway. The core curriculum for primary and secondary education also mentions the national minorities: Jews, Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Tater as groups with long-standing ties to Norway. These groups status as national minorities are in accordance with our international obligations, that they have contributed to Norway's cultural heritage, and that teaching and training must impart knowledge about these groups. Pupils must learn about the Sami people and the national minorities in multiple subjects, and these topics are included in various curricula.

(c)

254. In its judgment of October 2021, the Supreme Court of Norway ruled that the granting of licences for the development of windfarms in Storheia and Roan violates the rights of Sami reindeer herders to enjoy their own culture. In December 2021, the Ministry of Energy notified the parties that it would assess how to remedy this situation. In April 2023, the Minister of Energy initiated a mediation process between the parties in the Fosen case, to which all the parties agreed. The mediation between Sør-Fosen sijte and Fosen Vind DA resulted in an amicable agreement between the parties. Nord-Fosen siida and Roan Vind DA signed an agreement on 6 March 2024. The reindeer herding communities contributed to and have approved to the content of the agreements and the outcome of the case. Both parties agree that the agreements comply with the protection of reindeer husbandry pursuant to Article 27 of the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and safeguard the rights of reindeer herders from a generational perspective. Against this backdrop, the Ministry has discontinued the process on reversal of the licensing decisions.

Reply to paragraph 30 (a) and (b) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

255. Border crossing is not a requirement for a case to be defined as human trafficking. When it comes to underage victims, it is also not a prerequisite that coercion has been used, as is the case for adults. The Coordination Unit for Victims of Human Trafficking published a guide on identifying possible victims of human trafficking in July 2023. The guide is intended for anyone who through their work or voluntary work comes into contact with

vulnerable people and is concerned that they may have been or may be at risk of being exploited in human trafficking. The guide provides information about concepts, indicators and victims' rights, advice on how to facilitate identification and follow-up, and an overview of whom to refer people to for assistance and protection, and who can provide guidance.

(b)

256. It is the definition of human trafficking in the Penal Code that determines what is to be considered human trafficking pursuant to the Child Welfare Act. It is difficult to map the exact extent of underage victims of human trafficking in Norway. The Coordination Unit for Victims of Human Trafficking also publishes an annual status report, providing an overview of the scope and nature of human trafficking in Norway. In cases where children and young people may be vulnerable to human trafficking, it is especially important to act quickly to prevent the child from disappearing and/or being subjected to (more) abuse.

257. The situation can be very unclear when a child comes to Norway either alone or in the company of an adult who claims to be responsible for the care of the child without having any documentation to prove this. It is necessary to clarify how this responsibility is to be understood not only in terms of the law, but also from the perspective of the best interests of the child. The immigration authorities and the child welfare authorities collaborate in this area. The central authority for the 1996 Hague Convention provides assistance in obtaining information from foreign authorities, including ascertaining who has parental responsibility for the child.

258. The Child Welfare Act allows children to be placed in an institution, even against the child's will, if there is a risk of human trafficking. This provision regulates both ordinary administrative decisions and interim emergency orders.

Reply to paragraph 31 (a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

259. In 2023, the Director of Public Prosecution issued guidelines for police questioning of children and particularly vulnerable persons who are suspects in criminal proceedings. The guidelines are intended to help ensure compliance with the rules that apply in connection with police questioning of children and particularly vulnerable persons who are suspects, including safeguarding procedural rights such as protection against self-incrimination and the right to counsel. The guidelines are also intended to help ensure that the interviews are of good quality and that children are treated with consideration.

260. In 2023, the Storting adopted a number of amendments to the penal sanctions for juvenile offenders: "youth punishment" and "youth follow-up" (see also the response to 31 b)). Among other things, the sanctions system is being simplified to a two-track system, whereby "youth punishment" is imposed by the courts, while "youth follow-up" is decided in the prosecution track as an out-of-court sanction.

261. The purpose of the proposal to simplify "youth follow-up" to a sanction that does not require judicial proceedings is to ensure better compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to implement interventions for the treatment of children who are in conflict with the law, without having to resort to judicial proceedings, so-called "diversion". In addition, the right of complaint is also being introduced for young people. Young people's right to participate, cf. Article 12, during the execution of "youth punishment" and "youth follow-up" sentences has also been codified in several provisions.

262. In the new Compensation for Violent Crime Act, the rights of the alleged perpetrator have been strengthened by making them a party to the case in cases for compensation for violent crime. This will strengthen the child's rights where the alleged perpetrator is a child. Alleged perpetrators have the right to be notified and the right to make a statement in the case, as well as the right to request access to the case documents.

(b)

263. Several of the improvements introduced by Act no. 110 of 20 December 2023 (cf. Section 31 (a)) are aimed at reducing the time between the offence and the reaction. Some of the changes will also pave the way for better collaboration across sectors. However, the legislative amendments have not resolved all the challenges, and the ministries are now working systematically on ensuring good quality in the execution of sentences.

264. The condition that the offender must “reside in Norway” in order to be handed down a sentence of “youth punishment” is being maintained. The reason for this is the activities that the young person must do during the execution of the sentence, as well as the follow-up and monitoring that must be carried out during the execution of the sentence. In the preparatory works to the Act, the Ministry has clarified that this condition should be interpreted on the basis of a specific assessment of the concrete circumstances of the individual case, and not automatically on the basis of the young person’s formal residence status alone. The decisive factor will be whether it can be assumed that the young person will be in Norway for long enough for a “youth punishment” sentence to be executed as intended. This will require a specific assessment of the individual case. If there is any doubt, decisive importance should be attached to the best interests of the child. The purpose of this specification is to ensure that the condition is practised in accordance with the prohibition of discrimination in Article 98 of the Norwegian Constitution and Article 2 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(c)

265. A person charged who was under the age of 18 at the time of the offence may only be sentenced to preventive detention if there are “altogether extraordinary circumstances”. In the preparatory works, the Ministry specified that this provision ought virtually never to be used, but that exceptional cases may conceivably occur where preventive detention will be the correct reaction. Unfortunately, there are cases where there are no alternative ways to safeguard public security. In light of the recommendation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Ministry is monitoring developments in the use of preventive detention for children.

(d)

266. The Criminal Procedure Act regulates the conditions for when a person charged in a criminal case should undergo forensic psychiatric evaluation. The rules are largely general and apply regardless of whether the person to undergo evaluation is an adult or a child. The Act’s guarantees concerning protection of the individual’s legal rights include that the forensic psychiatric expert witnesses must be appointed by the court and work on the basis of a written mandate determined by the court. The parties, including any legal guardian, have the right to express their views before the expert is appointed and the mandate is approved. As a general rule, the expert witnesses’ opinions must be presented in a written report, which is submitted to a national board of forensic medicine. The board reviews the report and makes the court aware of any material shortcomings.

267. The Criminal Procedure Act was amended in 2019 to strengthen the requirements regarding the impartiality and competence of forensic psychiatric expert witnesses. Section 165 a of the Criminal Procedure Act now stipulates that as a general rule two expert witnesses should be appointed, unless the court finds that one expert witness is sufficient or that the case requires more than two expert witnesses. In accordance with the Act, forensic psychiatric expert witnesses are subject to the same impartiality rules as judges.

268. The requirements that apply to expert witnesses are further regulated in Regulation on forensic psychiatric examinations and expert witnesses. Expert witnesses must be a qualified doctor or psychologist and must be licensed in accordance with the Norwegian Health Personnel Act. Moreover, the expert (or at least one of the experts in cases where there are several expert witnesses) must be an approved specialist in a field relevant to the forensic psychiatric examination that the expert is to perform. For example, if the person charged is a minor, the expert could be a specialist in child and adolescent psychiatry.

(e)

269. Children who are sentenced to unconditional prison sentences, as a general rule, serve their sentence at one of the Norwegian Correctional Service's two juvenile facilities – until they turn the age of 18. Juvenile correctional facilities must meet the special needs of children during deprivation of freedom and ensure that children are not incarcerated with adult prisoners. The average number of prisoners under the age of 18 years was 5.6 in 2017, and 5.2 in 2023. In addition to the juvenile facilities, the Eidsberg Unit of Indre Østfold Prison, which is an ordinary high-security men's prison, has three places for minors that can be used if necessary. In order to ensure sufficient capacity in the juvenile facilities, approximately NOK 11 million has been allocated in 2024 to expand the juvenile unit in Eidsvoll with two new places. As regards immigration cases, no minors or families with children have been detained at Trandum immigration detention centre since 2018. Instead they stay at Haraldvangen – a specially converted house with a more homely feel where the guards do not wear uniforms.

(f)

270. Norway defines solitary confinement as exclusion from the company of other prisoners. Exclusion may occur if the court has decided that this form of restriction must be imposed, or if there are incidents/situations in the unit that indicate that the child should be excluded from the company of the other prisoners. The Norwegian Criminal Services has separate rules for the use of exclusion for children. Prisoners at the juvenile facilities have access to extensive contact with the other inmates during the daytime in connection with work, education, programmes and other measures, and in their spare time, as far as this is practicable. Each juvenile facility must have established a general schedule in advance.

271. Two juvenile correctional facilities have been established. In 2024, the capacity of the juvenile facilities will be expanded by two more places, bringing the total capacity to ten places. The juvenile facilities are staffed by a variety of different professionals and also have an interdisciplinary team consisting of a psychologist, an educational adviser and a child welfare counsellor. This means that there are resources available to implement preventive and conflict-mitigating measures to avoid incidents escalating such that exclusion from the company of the other prisoners needs to be implemented. All children who are incarcerated in the juvenile correctional facilities are unlocked for 10 hours a day during which time they have access to their fellow inmates and a range of activities.

Reply to paragraph 32 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

272. The sale of children has been a criminal offence under Norwegian law since 2003. Pursuant to the Penal Code, any person who exploits a person who is under the age of 18 for prostitution or other sexual services, forced labour or forced services, or into consenting to the removal of internal organs shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding six years. The same penalty shall be applied to any person who provides payment or any other advantage to obtain consent for such a course of action from a person who has authority over the aggrieved person, or who receives such payment or advantage. If the offence is aggravated, it is punishable by imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years. In determining whether the violation is aggravated, particular weight is given to whether the person subjected to the act was under 18 years of age, whether severe violence or force was used and whether the act generated significant proceeds.

(b)

273. The Freedom of Speech Commission refers to ongoing legislative work in the EU, and proposes prioritising efforts to incorporate the Digital Services Act (DSA) into the EEA Agreement and Norwegian law. This – and any supplementary national legislation – will then ensure effective and coordinated monitoring of the digital platforms. Particular importance

is attached to protecting children and young people from harmful content and exploitation of children's vulnerabilities. The Government is reviewing the EU's Digital Services Act.

274. In 2022, the European Commission presented a proposal for a Regulation to prevent and combat sexual assault of children. Among other things, the proposal requires relevant online service providers to detect, report, block and remove child sexual abuse material from their services. The Government is assessing introducing a duty for Norwegian service providers to report if they discover that their services are being used for criminal storage or distribution of abuse material.

(c)

275. Section 257 of the Penal Code on human trafficking, Section 309 on the purchase of sexual services from minors, and Section 311 on the depiction of sexual abuse of children or depiction which sexualises children also apply to acts committed abroad when the perpetrator is a Norwegian national or domiciled in Norway. Section 257 of the Penal Code on human trafficking also applies to acts committed abroad by foreigners when the aggrieved person is a Norwegian national or domiciled in Norway.

(d)

276. We assume that the question of whether compensation can be claimed pursuant to the Compensatory Damages Act in the type of cases mentioned must be understood as referring to claims directed against a Norwegian national. In these kinds of cases, Norwegian courts are assumed to have jurisdiction under the rules of the Lugano Convention (cf. Article 2 and Article 5 (3)). Questions about choice of law in these kinds of cases will thus depend on an interpretation of non-statutory rules in Norwegian international private law. In decisions on choice of law issues, the Supreme Court of Norway has attached importance to the solutions in Regulation (EC) no. 593/2008 (Rome I) and Regulation (EC) no. 864/2007 (Rome II). According to the Rome II Regulation, the general starting point in cases of compensation outside of contractual relationships is that the law at the place where the event giving rise to damage occurs shall be applied – "lex locus delicti" (cf. Article 4 (1) of the regulation). However, depending on the circumstances, a Norwegian court could apply the Norwegian Compensatory Damages Act based on an interpretation of the rules in Articles 16 and 26 of the Rome II Regulation, i.e. if the court finds that not doing so would be contrary to internationally peremptory rules in Norway or the principle of *ordre public*. If the Norwegian Compensatory Damages Act can be applied in cases where the event giving rise to damage occurs somewhere other than Norway, it will thus depend on a more detailed assessment of the individual case.

277. Pursuant to the Compensation for Violent Crime Act, children and other persons who have been subjected to a criminal offence committed abroad can apply for compensation if they were resident in Norway at the time of the offence and the criminal case has been heard by a Norwegian court.

Reply to paragraph 33 (a), (b), (c) and (d) of the list of issues prior to reporting

(a)

278. The minimum age for doing compulsory military service in the Armed Forces or being employed in a military position in the Armed Forces is 19 years. The Home Guard has a voluntary youth organisation that is open to young people between the ages of 15 years and six months and 21. This organisation has no affiliation with the Norwegian defence structure as such. Membership in the youth organisation does not affect the likelihood of being conscripted for compulsory military service at the age of 19.

(b)

279. Children who have participated in acts of war and who come to Norway as refugees and asylum seekers need to feel safe and to receive good, adapted care. The child health clinic,

the school, the Child Welfare Service, the reception centre for asylum seekers, the religious community and the family all play a role in the care of the children. Some of the children will also need treatment for trauma. Five regional resource centres on violence, traumatic stress and suicide prevention have a special responsibility for expertise in psychosocial assistance for refugees.

280. The Armed Forces conduct courses for their personnel who are deployed to war and conflict zones. The training includes case studies, with relevant issues related to various conventions. In recent years, there has been a particular focus on sexual abuse and sexual exploitation.

(c)

281. As part of the mapping in connection with applications for protection from unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors, the applicants are asked about recruitment and any acts that have been committed in or outside their country of origin. In addition, searches are conducted in open sources. The main purpose of these inquiries is Norway's national security. The UDI notifies the Police Security Service (PST) about children and young people who have been identified in accordance with applicable indicator lists and instructions. The ordinary duty to notify the Child Welfare Service also applies.

282. The municipality is responsible for providing the necessary health care to newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees. The Norwegian Directorate of Health has prepared templates that the health service can use to detect incipient health needs for people over and under the age of 18. For people under the age of 18, a distinction is drawn between those who do and those who do not have a caregiver.

283. The Norwegian Directorate of Health's guide on health services for asylum seekers, refugees and reunited family members (IS-1022) states that the municipal authority must assess the need for the presence of health personnel who can follow up the individual's need for necessary health care and who can contact the police to prioritise individuals who need prompt health care and who need to be prioritised in the queue for registration and allocation of D-numbers.

(d)

284. All Norwegian nationals abroad can request consular assistance from the Norwegian Foreign Service. Consular assistance is provided on an individual basis and after individual assessment of the specific case. Requesting consular assistance and accepting any offers of consular assistance are voluntary. Parents who have parental responsibility for children have the right and a duty to make decisions for their children. With regard to the Norwegian citizens who have requested consular assistance from the Norwegian authorities to travel to Norway from refugee camps in Syria, the Norwegian Foreign Service has processed each case individually.

285. After individual assessments of the specific cases, assistance has been provided to travel to Norway. This is based on consideration for the life and health of children in what have been extraordinary cases. The Norwegian authorities are aware that there is currently one Norwegian child left in a camp in Syria. The child is with its mother, who has the parental responsibility. The woman has so far chosen not to accept an offer on consular assistance to travel to Norway.
