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Summary record of the 8th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 16 February 2023, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Abdel-Moneim

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

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

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

Fifth periodic report of Portugal (E/C.12/PRT/5; E/C.12/PRT/Q/5 and E/C.12/PRT/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Portugal joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. Bastos** (Portugal), introducing his country's fifth periodic report (E/C.12/PRT/5), said that the report and the replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/PRT/RQ/5), had been drafted in close cooperation and consultation with civil society. In Portugal, a broad national consensus had emerged regarding the importance of economic, social and cultural rights, which were protected by the Constitution. The Government promoted economic, social and cultural rights in multilateral human rights forums, including through the regular submission to the Human Rights Council of a resolution on the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights – a resolution which encouraged States to ratify or accede to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. In that regard, he wished to point out that two communications concerning Portugal had been submitted under the Optional Protocol, one of which had already been amicably resolved.
3. Much had changed since the review of the previous report of Portugal in 2014, when the country had been emerging from an economic adjustment programme implemented in the context of a serious international crisis. Since then, the Government's efforts had focused on boosting incomes, ensuring a fair distribution of economic growth, creating decent jobs and reducing poverty. In 2020, confronted with the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it had reinforced that same strategy, taking exceptional measures that included support for the maintenance of employment contracts, direct financial assistance for households, expansion of eligibility criteria for unemployment and other social benefits and regularization of the status of all migrants and asylum-seekers with pending applications. The recently adopted Recovery and Resilience Plan, which provided for €16.6 billion in investment by 2026, included funding for health, education, housing, culture and other social expenditure.
4. Portugal had a National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination, the aims of which were to mainstream the gender perspective across all areas of government, increase the participation of women in public and political life, promote equal pay for women and men and combat occupational segregation and domestic violence. In accordance with United Nations recommendations, Statistics Portugal was conducting a survey that would yield data disaggregated by ethnic origin, which would be available by the end of 2023.
5. Portugal had been among the first countries to adopt an action plan for the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. National and local support centres for migrant integration, operating with a one-stop shop model, provided housing, employment, education and health services for all migrants, irrespective of their legal status. Portugal had taken in some 50,000 Ukrainian refugees, many of whom had enrolled in educational institutions. Ukrainian refugees were granted social benefits.
6. In the area of justice, the Government had increased the human resources available to the courts, the criminal investigation police and the prison system and was seeking to improve access to justice for all through digitization of services. In 2021, it had adopted a national anti-corruption strategy and established the National Anti-Corruption Mechanism.
7. Although the economy was still recovering from the pandemic, positive trends had been observed in the labour sphere. The unemployment rate currently stood at a historic low of 6 per cent; the working population had risen to 4.9 million people; and the share of the workforce on temporary contracts had fallen. The poverty rate had also dropped to a new low, with 300,000 people lifted out of poverty since 2021. Poverty alleviation efforts had targeted child poverty, notably through the creation of the Child Guarantee. Annual minimum wage increases, investment in social services and various other measures had strengthened

the social protection floor. One major priority was the Decent Work Agenda. Recently adopted amendments to the Labour Code would regulate work on digital platforms, criminalize undeclared work and address employment precariousness. The Government had stepped up measures in support of work-life balance, including improvements to parental leave, and it planned to conduct a study on the four-day working week.

8. The Government was committed to increasing the public housing stock and planned to invest significantly in housing, with €3 billion set aside under the Recovery and Resilience Plan. It had responded to the current inflation crisis by capping annual rent increases at 2 per cent.

9. The health sector accounted for one seventh of all public investment. The Government intended to protect the country's achievement of a universally accessible, high-quality National Health Service and ensure that it continued to provide care for those who needed it without discrimination. The Mental Health Act, which was currently being revised, promoted community responses and the principle of autonomy. In 2000 Portugal had decriminalized the purchase, possession and use of all drugs. By combating stigmatization and distributing methadone and sterilized syringes, the authorities had almost halved the number of new HIV infections among drug users between 2012 and 2022. In 2021 the Government had adopted a food security and nutrition strategy and a national plan for a balanced and sustainable diet. The right to food was protected in the Portuguese school system, notably through the distribution of fruit and milk for students.

10. The Government viewed education as the bedrock of social justice, democratic citizenship and inclusion and was committed to investing in the sector, as evidenced by the 35.8 per cent rise in the education budget since 2015 and the sharp drop in the school dropout rate, which had plummeted from 17.4 per cent to 5.9 per cent between 2014 and 2021. One of the Government's priorities was to ensure adults' access to education and training. Participation in lifelong learning was increasing, and in September 2022 the "Qualifica" Programme had reached the milestone of 1 million qualifications awarded. The number of higher education students had reached 433,000 – a new record – while the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with a higher education qualification had climbed from 17 to 47 per cent since 2000. In 2022, the Government had increased higher education study grants by 10 per cent. It also planned to launch programmes to reduce the dropout rate and to improve mental health in higher education, while maintaining a programme of study grants for Roma students and accelerating the implementation of a programme of affordable student housing.

11. The Government had significantly boosted investment in culture; had adopted a strategy to promote accessibility and inclusion in museums, monuments and palaces; and had committed to recruiting more staff for such sites. Theatre, cinema and contemporary art networks were being expanded, in coordination with local authorities.

12. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would be interested to know whether Covenant rights were protected by any domestic legislation other than the Constitution and how the legal framework of Portugal afforded effective remedies to ensure that citizens were able to exercise those rights. Since it appeared that Covenant provisions had a limited impact on the outcomes of court cases, he wished to know what had been done to provide specialized training for judges, prosecutors and lawyers on the justiciability of the Covenant and to raise awareness among public officials of the State party's obligations. He wondered what steps had been taken to raise public awareness of Covenant rights and of the remedies afforded by the Optional Protocol; whether free legal aid was available to citizens wishing to assert their Covenant rights before the courts or to submit individual communications; and how the State party ensured the observance of Covenant rights in the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira. What mechanisms were in place for monitoring and evaluating the realization of Covenant rights? What had been done to enhance public access to information held by authorities that citizens might require for the effective enjoyment of their Covenant rights?

13. It would be interesting to know how the State party had addressed the concerns expressed by the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions regarding the selection, appointment and dismissal of officials of the Office of the Ombudsman. He would welcome details concerning investigations conducted

by the Ombudsman that had resulted in effective remedies for the protection of the Covenant rights of Portuguese citizens.

14. On the subject of business and human rights, he wondered why the draft Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct and Human Rights had not been adopted; what measures had been taken to ensure that businesses applied due diligence in all their operations, both in Portugal and overseas; and whether any mechanism had been put in place to monitor businesses' compliance with human rights standards. It would be useful to know to what extent the draft Action Plan adhered to the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the Committee's general comment No. 24 (2017) on State obligations under the Covenant in the context of business activities. He would be grateful if the delegation could provide information on the legal remedies available to the victims of human rights abuses committed by businesses and give examples of cases in which those remedies had been applied.

15. He was curious to know what measures had been taken to effectively address drivers of climate change and other environmental issues, and what policies had been adopted to promote the engagement of the population in that regard. It would be useful to know what progress the State party had achieved in implementing emissions reduction policies, notably the pledge to attain carbon neutrality by 2050, and in meeting its obligations under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. What mechanisms were in place to ensure that the activities of Portuguese businesses operating abroad did not have an adverse impact on climate change or on the environment of host countries?

16. The Committee would be grateful for statistical information, disaggregated by age group and region, showing the progress achieved under the National Strategy to Combat Poverty. Information on the proportion of the population at risk of poverty and on steps taken to address the structural causes of poverty would also be appreciated. It would be interesting to know what measures and policies had been adopted to eradicate or mitigate poverty and to what extent existing policies ensured that sufficient resources were allocated to protecting the Covenant rights of the most disadvantaged population groups. The Committee would also welcome information regarding the allocation of public spending to address the disproportionately harsh socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. In particular, it wished to know how the Government ensured, in the light of competing priorities, such as reduction of the public debt, that its policies did not reduce public spending in sectors crucial for the realization of Covenant rights. Was public spending in those sectors adjusted for inflation, and had it recovered from the impact of the austerity measures imposed in the early 2010s? To what extent had the Recovery and Resilience Plan improved the standards and availability of health care, education, housing and social benefits?

17. He would welcome information on measures to ensure equal and non-discriminatory access to all Covenant rights by the members of the Roma community and people of African descent. An update on progress in implementing the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities, particularly regarding the inclusion of girls and women in society, would be particularly appreciated. What steps had been taken to address stigmatization of Roma people and ensure that complaints of discrimination against them were fully investigated and effective remedies and reparations provided to victims?

18. He would like to know what measures were in place to combat racially motivated violence and ill-treatment, hate speech, hate crimes and intolerance against vulnerable and minority groups, including Roma, people of African descent, Muslims and members of the LGBTIQ community. It would also be interesting to learn what progress had been achieved in the implementation of the National Plan for Combating Racism and Discrimination 2021–2025, in particular with regard to setting up the Independent Observatory on Hate Speech, Racism and Xenophobia and conducting the survey on diversity and inclusion at work within the public administration. Information would also be welcome on any plans to introduce the systematic collection of disaggregated data in order to develop and assess the impact of targeted measures to improve the enjoyment of Covenant rights by disadvantaged groups.

19. He would appreciate updated information on progress in issuing citizens' identity cards to homeless persons, members of the Roma community and persons of African descent following the adoption of Act No. 61 of 2021. It would also be useful to have details of any

existing or planned steps to amend article 240 of the Criminal Code in order to make discrimination on the basis of language and all the other forms of discrimination set out under the Covenant punishable by law.

20. He would like to hear more about the measures adopted to address the persisting gender pay gap and vertical and horizontal gender-based segregation in the labour market. Had steps been taken to eliminate gender stereotypes, promote increased representation of women in managerial and decision-making positions, reduce the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work shouldered by women and help promote a better work-life balance for them?

21. He would also like more information on the one-stop shop model, in particular whether it provided overarching coordination for all refugee-related matters. Did the model operate with the participation of civil society organizations and legal entities, and was it sufficiently resourced to enable migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers to enjoy the rights enshrined in the Covenant?

The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

22. **A representative of Portugal** said that her Government had reported only examples of instances in which the Covenant had been invoked by higher courts for the simple reason that references to the Covenant could only be found in the published jurisprudence of those courts. Nevertheless, courts of first instance also made reference to the Covenant. The Ministry of Justice was seeking to make rulings of lower courts available by 2024.

23. Regarding efforts to raise awareness of the rights enshrined in the Covenant, the Bar Association had a human rights committee and carried out human rights training, as did the Centre for Judicial Studies, which provided training for judges, including online training. Covenant rights were monitored in the autonomous regions in the same way as in the rest of the country, and all laws also applied equally in the autonomous regions. The ombudsperson was elected by the Assembly of the Republic and was in turn responsible for appointing deputies. The Government had no involvement in the process.

24. Work was under way to amend article 240 of the Criminal Code in order to criminalize and punish discrimination based on racial, ethnic or national origin, nationality, descent, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or sexual characteristics, physical or mental disability, political or ideological convictions, education, or economic or social status. The Government acknowledged the shortcomings in Act No. 61 of 2021, and various government departments were now working on new legislation that would make it easier for persons with no fixed address to obtain a national identity card.

25. **A representative of Portugal** said that legal aid was available at little or no cost to persons lacking financial resources, including foreigners legally resident in Portugal, regardless of the type of case. Support was also provided for victims of domestic violence, including free legal assistance. Legal aid relating to communications submitted to the Committee under the Optional Protocol was organized largely through civil society organizations. Portugal did not have a specific disputes mechanism for human rights matters. Cases of that nature could be heard in all courts in Portugal.

26. **A representative of Portugal** said that a two-week training programme had been set up for public officials two years earlier to raise awareness of human rights, including those set out under the Covenant. The programme was comprehensive and interdisciplinary, and its content encompassed both domestic and international human rights bodies. It also covered the communication procedure under the Optional Protocol.

27. The Action Plan on Responsible Business Conduct and Human Rights was in the final drafting stage and was expected to be adopted in the near future. The Plan was based on the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. National legislation already incorporated many European Union directives relating to the protection of individuals whose human rights had been violated by companies. Portugal was also committed to the negotiations on a United Nations treaty on transnational corporations and human rights.

28. **A representative of Portugal** said that the results of a survey conducted in 2022 showed that, for the country as a whole, the percentage of the population at risk of poverty

or social exclusion had been 16.4 in 2021, 2 percentage points less than in 2020. The two autonomous regions and the Algarve had recorded a slight increase. The Azores region had its own poverty reduction strategy tailored to its particular situation. Updated data on the risk of poverty and social exclusion were available on the website of Statistics Portugal. The National Strategy to Combat Poverty was scheduled to run until 2030. It had clear, quantifiable goals that included reducing poverty among children and families, integrating young people into society, boosting employment and qualifications, strengthening public policies, promoting the integration of disadvantaged groups and supporting local development. The efforts to reduce the public debt would not lead to any reduction in investment in social policies.

29. **A representative of Portugal** said that the recently introduced Child Guarantee complemented the family allowance. The aim of the Child Guarantee scheme was to identify and provide financial and social support to vulnerable families so that their children could access education, health care, food and other services and fully enjoy their economic, social, cultural and other rights. The goal was to lift 170,000 children out of poverty by 2030.

30. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Youth Guarantee was expected to enhance the impact of the National Strategy to Combat Poverty, while a recent increase in the Social Integration Income would help anyone experiencing severe or extreme poverty, including families and elderly persons.

31. **A representative of Portugal** said that, under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, more than €11 billion was to be invested in areas such as health, housing, culture, climate and the digital transformation.

32. **A representative of Portugal** said that, as part of the activities planned to commemorate the International Decade for People of African Descent, the High Commission for Migration had released several publications to enhance knowledge about the population of African descent in Portugal, including one devoted specifically to women of African descent.

33. The National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities had received input from a range of stakeholders, including ministries, experts, municipalities, civil society organizations and members of the Roma community. Its guiding principles included interculturality, non-discrimination, participation and gender equality. Under the Strategy, two scholarship programmes had been set up: one offering scholarships for Roma primary and secondary school students, of which 118 had been awarded since 2020, and another providing scholarships for Roma students wishing to enter higher education, of which 36 had been awarded to young women and 43 to young men in the same period. In order to promote balanced gender representation, a minimum of 40 per cent of recipients of the latter grants had to be women.

34. The National Plan for Combatting Racism and Discrimination was founded on the cross-cutting principles of deconstructing stereotypes, intersectionality, integrated governance and integrated interventions to combat inequalities. It had been informed by public consultations and the contributions of various groups working to combat racism and discrimination. The 213 activities carried out so far had included the creation of a free online course to combat racial discrimination. The National Plan called for the creation of an Independent Observatory on Hate Speech, Racism and Xenophobia, which would promote the collection and dissemination of relevant information and create partnerships for research on the issue of racism. The Observatory would work with the Commission for Equality and Against Racial Discrimination.

35. Under the one-stop shop model, national support centres for migrant integration had been set up in order to address the various difficulties faced by migrants and to support their integration, including into the labour market. They brought together under one roof a range of services for migrants. There were four such centres across Portugal which had provided services to over 4 million migrants. The High Commission for Migration had a Council for Migration which engaged in consultations with civil society organizations in the development of migration policies. The Council was made up of 41 councillors, including representatives of migrant communities in Portugal.

36. **A representative of Portugal** said that eliminating gender stereotypes through both formal and informal education had been a national priority for Portugal for over 40 years, and educational programmes were in place to tackle the issue in schools at all levels. Programmes were also in place to address gender-based segregation in the labour market, including the “Engineers for a Day” programme, which promoted engineering and technical and scientific fields as career paths for women. A partnership for equality in information and communications technology also addressed gender-based segregation in educational and vocational training programmes. One of the goals of the Recovery and Resilience Plan was to overcome gender stereotypes as part of the digital transformation in education.

37. Amendments made in 2019 to the 2006 gender parity law had increased gender quotas for representation in national bodies from 33 to 40 per cent. Following the general elections of 2022, women now made up 37 per cent of representatives in the Assembly of the Republic. Laws were in force establishing quotas for gender representation in public administration, management positions and corporate boards of directors. The percentage of women on the boards of the largest businesses in the country had increased from 16 to 31 per cent between 2017 and 2021.

38. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Task Force) said that he would be interested to know to what extent the Recovery and Resilience Plan and other employment policies had addressed issues of unemployment among young people and whether the Plan also provided for training for minority groups, such as Roma people and migrants. He would welcome data on the tangible impact of the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma Communities on access to the labour market. He wondered whether the measures taken were commensurate with the scale of unemployment among Roma people.

39. He would be grateful if the delegation could provide further information on initiatives other than the gender parity law to address and combat unequal gender representation, particularly in senior management. He wished to know what policies had been put in place to address the low level of integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market. He also wondered how the State party had addressed issues of access to employment for refugees and migrants, particularly those issues stemming from their lack of nationally recognized diplomas. He would welcome further information on the measures taken to ensure the effectiveness of the amendments to labour law in recent years, such as increased labour inspections, awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes and incentives to ensure businesses’ compliance with the laws. Information on plans to systematically address cases of sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace would also be appreciated.

40. He would like to know what steps had been taken to integrate informal-sector workers into the social security system and whether there were plans to regularize the employment of temporary workers and provide them with social benefits. It would be useful to learn what tax policies and other monetary policies were in place to support and sustain funding for social security, particularly for minority groups. Lastly, he wondered whether Portugal planned to become a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and, if so, what the timeline for doing so would be.

The meeting was suspended at 4.55 p.m. and resumed at 5.10 p.m.

41. **A representative of Portugal** said that the unemployment rate among young people had decreased from 35 per cent in 2014 to 19 per cent in 2022. The employment of young people had been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because that group had been more likely to have temporary employment contracts than other population groups. In January 2023, a pact for the promotion of youth employment had been signed with over 50 businesses, which had committed to recruiting a larger percentage of young people and to providing training for young people while the pact was in force. Measures included in the Recovery and Resilience Plan provided incentives to businesses where young people made up over 35 per cent of employees.

42. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Decent Work Agenda aimed to reduce precarity in the labour market by stabilizing employment and improving the quality of available work; promote sustainable work and reduce temporary work; discourage the unjustified use of temporary contracts; prevent risks to and abuse of persons seeking their

first job by strengthening workers' rights; and reinforce measures to prevent undeclared work. Restrictions had been placed on the duration of temporary contracts and on the number of times such contracts could be renewed, and the use of outsourcing had been prohibited in the year following a collective lay-off or the abolition of a post. Internships were now paid at 80 per cent of the national minimum wage and student workers could receive both family benefits and bursaries. Regulations governing temporary employment agencies were now more rigorous, and recent amendments to labour legislation had criminalized undeclared work and provided greater protections for decent work.

43. **A representative of Portugal** said that the Authority for Working Conditions provided free information to any persons requesting it, both in person and through a national hotline. The Authority also used social media as part of its outreach to young people. In 2021, information had been provided to some 305,000 workers; all information provided conformed with International Labour Organization conventions.

44. The Labour Inspectorate had conducted close to 39,000 visits to workplaces in 2021. Labour inspectors provided information on the measures to be taken in the workplace in order to prevent accidents and to improve health and safety, monitored compliance with such measures and issued suspension notifications and warnings. In 2021, some 10,000 violations had been identified and necessary steps had been taken in response. Gender discrimination was prohibited under the Labour Code and a law promoting gender equality and equal pay for equal work had been adopted. Some 60 violations of equality and non-discrimination regulations had been identified and 538 warnings had been issued.

45. The Authority for Working Conditions had conducted national campaigns and carried out workplace inspections with a view to preventing undeclared work. In 2021, 150 workers in undeclared work situations had been identified, and measures had been taken to regularize their employment. The Authority worked with partners, such as border control officials, to address labour exploitation of migrants. Inspections had been carried out to identify migrant workers, particularly in the agriculture sector, and to ensure that those workers' rights were being respected. Leaflets in nine languages had been produced to inform workers of their rights and to ensure that they knew how to contact authorities for further information and advice in case of violations of labour laws.

46. **A representative of Portugal** said that the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities focused on education and qualification, training and employment, and support for independent living; support was also provided to employers of persons with disabilities. Laws enacted in 2001 and 2019 had established quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities in both the public and the private sector. Those provisions had been fully implemented in 2023.

47. **A representative of Portugal** said that a series of measures had been taken during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide support for workers who had been made redundant or forced to stop working during lockdown. Support had also been provided for families. Altogether, €3 billion had been made available for such support measures.

48. **A representative of Portugal** said that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, assistance had been provided to the self-employed, domestic workers, informal caregivers and agricultural labourers who would not normally have been eligible for benefits because they had not paid social security contributions or had not paid them for a sufficient period. Informal caregivers were able to participate in a voluntary contribution scheme and thus obtain social security coverage. Migrant workers had access to social security and pension insurance, including under bilateral agreements with their countries of origin.

49. **A representative of Portugal** said that, to promote the inclusion of Roma in the labour market, prizes were given to companies which employed more than five Roma persons. Under personalized employment plans drawn up with Roma who attended courses run by the Employment and Vocational Training Institute, those persons set clear goals and then were provided with individual support to foster their integration into the labour market. There were more than 1,300 such plans in existence currently.

50. **A representative of Portugal** said that, since 2017, the percentage of women in managerial positions had risen from 16 to 31 per cent in the private sector and from 27 to 40.3 per cent in the State sector.

51. **A representative of Portugal** said that Portugal had detailed legislation covering sexual coercion and harassment. Parliament was in the process of amending the definition of rape contained in article 164 of the Criminal Code. The Ministry of Justice was examining the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the European Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which revisited the whole question of consent to sexual acts.

52. **A representative of Portugal** said that section 29 of the Labour Code criminalized harassment in the workplace. Victims could claim compensation, and neither they nor witnesses could be penalized for lodging a complaint. The legal provisions to combat harassment had been strengthened significantly by requiring companies to have a code of conduct that defined harassment and to inform workers about the procedure for reporting any such conduct and requesting help. In 2021, 19 cases of harassment had been recorded and 2 formal warnings had been issued. Companies must also supply employees with information about their obligations with respect to equality and non-discrimination. The Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security offered training and conducted awareness-raising activities with a view to preventing harassment and discrimination. Anyone in the private or public sector could submit a complaint form on the Ministry's website.

53. **A representative of Portugal** said that Portugal, like other members of the European Union, had not ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families because it would be unable to fulfil some of the obligations arising from ratification, since it was European Union institutions that had competence in respect of matters relating to such obligations. However, many of the provisions of the Convention had already been put into effect under domestic legislation. Moreover, Portugal was one of the countries spearheading action under the Global Compact for Migration, and its National Plan for the Implementation of the Global Compact on Migration included a range of measures that were in line with the standards set by the Convention.

54. **Mr. Bastos** (Portugal) said that the Government had focused on achieving results in the promotion of labour rights. Amendments to the Labour Code were aimed at combating job insecurity among the segments of the population, including migrant workers, who had been disproportionately affected by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government had endeavoured to devise public policies that would promote genuine economic recovery and improve working conditions in general. The steady rise in contributions to the social security system in recent years was probably indicative of an increase in formal employment and also reflected the fact that the COVID-10 pandemic had made workers more aware of the importance of social protection. The Government had tried to improve access to non-contributory benefits and ensure decent work for those in the informal sector, but at the same time it was encouraging the formalization of the informal economy as a means of ensuring access to full social protection for all workers. The fact that migrants accounted for 13 per cent of contributions to the social security system was a sign of their increasing integration therein. The aim of the Government's comprehensive approach was to promote inclusive and sustainable development of the labour market in a way that left nobody behind.

55. **The Chair** pointed out that the State party's accession to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families would help to consolidate migrants' rights under international human rights law through the monitoring and protection mechanisms that it offered.

56. **Mr. Florio Vaesken** said that accession to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families would also further the development and universalization of the human rights standards enshrined therein.

57. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he would appreciate information on tax policies to sustain social security. He would also be grateful for information on the impact of the Social Radar Programme and its effectiveness in meeting the increasing needs of older persons.

Information on the availability of crisis centres for women who had been the victims of violence would be welcome, as would up-to-date information on the effectiveness of current policies and measures to address the issues of poverty and inequality.

58. He would like to know how the State party had responded to allegations that social housing had been dismantled and that families of African descent had been resettled on the edges of towns. It would be helpful to have an assessment of the current housing strategies for women, persons of African descent and other marginalized groups. What steps were being taken to ensure that the voices of those in need of housing would be heard in the formulation and implementation of housing policies? He was curious to know whether the Recovery and Resilience Programme would help to reduce overcrowding due to population density in Lisbon. He further wished to know whether the 2 per cent ceiling on rent increases in Lisbon for 2023 would be made permanent and whether it would be supplemented by other policy measures to subsidize or help young people and working women access housing in Lisbon.

59. The Committee was aware of problems in the State party relating to wastewater treatment, management of solid waste and pesticide contamination of surface and groundwater and of foods. Information on what was being done to address those problems would be appreciated. The Committee would also like to hear about the measures put in place to ensure the right to health in light of all the challenges to the health system that had been revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, in particular information on measures to improve the access of migrants and people of African descent to the national health system, including through awareness-raising and the removal of administrative barriers. It would be useful to know whether the impact on women of the weekend closure of some maternity services had been assessed.

60. The Committee also wished to know whether the State party would adopt and implement the World Health Organization global air quality guidelines regarding fine particulate matter. It would welcome information on the outcome of the steps taken by the State party to decriminalize drug use. Data on the prevalence of drug use, drug-related deaths and the prevalence of HIV among drug users would also be appreciated. The Committee would also be grateful for disaggregated data on deaths from heart disease, other non-communicable diseases and long COVID. Lastly, the Committee would like to receive information on the availability of emergency obstetric care and mental health services in the autonomous regions of Madeira and the Azores.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.