




FIFTH OPINION ON Lithuania

Advisory Committee
on the Framework
Convention for
the Protection of
National Minorities
(ACFC)



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SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

1. Lithuanian society is largely still characterised by tolerance and respect with regard to persons belonging to several national minorities, including the Polish one which is the biggest in the country. The authorities continue to maintain an inclusive approach towards the scope of application of the Framework Convention. The long-standing negative attitudes and discrimination towards Roma persist, although the perception of Roma children has improved. The Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine has caused on the one hand a deterioration of attitudes towards persons belonging to the Russian minority, including in political discourse. The war, as well as political developments in Belarus, have also negatively affected perceptions towards persons belonging to the Belarusian minority. On the other hand, there has been a further improvement of attitudes towards persons belonging to the Ukrainian minority.

2. The absence of a comprehensive legislative framework makes the implementation of certain rights provided for by the Framework Convention difficult. This aspect coupled with the fact that claiming minority rights is frequently perceived as an expression of disloyalty to Lithuania or a threat to the status of the Lithuanian language, contributes to an atmosphere that discourages persons belonging to national minorities from invoking the rights provided by the Framework Convention.

Legal framework for national minority protection

3. Despite long-standing preparation and consultations, no Law on National Minorities has been adopted yet. Lithuania continues to lack a comprehensive legal framework especially for the implementation of linguistic rights enshrined in the Framework Convention (notably the use of minority languages in relations with administrative authorities, topographic indications and public signage of a private nature).

Scope of application and population census

4. Lithuania continues to consider the national communities represented in the National Communities Board (consultation body) as national minorities. Only elected representatives of active national communities (currently 20) become members of the National Communities Board. The authorities have complemented the register-based 2021 Population and Housing Census by carrying out the "Statistical survey on ethnicity, mother tongue and religion". However, there is a discrepancy between the official data on the number of persons belonging to national minorities and estimates or data provided by national minorities themselves. This may limit the acceptance and functionality of the national

minority policy based on the official data among persons belonging to national minorities.

Antidiscrimination

5. The authorities have included measures concerning national minorities in the Action Plans for the Promotion of Non-Discrimination 2017-2020 and 2021-2023. In order to support measures aimed at achieving full equality of persons belonging to national minorities, there is a need to adequately increase financial allocations to the equality bodies permitting them to raise awareness of their mandates among persons belonging to national minorities and facilitating assistance to such persons.

Culture

6. A variety of institutions are devoted to the promotion of different aspects of the culture of the Jewish and Karaim minorities. However, other national minorities lack comparable structures expressing, promoting and developing their cultures in a comprehensive and sustainable manner and depend on project-based funding of activities.

Intolerance and hate speech

7. The public perception of persons belonging to several national minorities, including the Polish minority, is positive. The war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has had the effect of improving attitudes towards persons belonging to the Ukrainian minority. However, attitudes towards persons belonging to the Russian minority have deteriorated, which is reflected in the renaming of institutions previously bearing names referring to Russian culture.

8. The number of crimes concerning "nationality" has increased since 2018. Against the background of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, there have been more instances of hate speech targeting persons belonging to the Russian minority.

Use of minority languages in the fields of media, administrative authorities, personal identity and other documents, private signage and education

9. There are public and private broadcast media as well as newspapers in the Polish and Russian languages. Belarusian, Ukrainian and Yiddish are used in the broadcast media to a more limited extent. However, persons belonging to most national minorities neither have access to television or radio broadcasting in their language, nor to print media published with sufficient frequency in these languages.

10. The relevant legislation discourages, and in many cases prevents, the oral use of minority languages in relations with administrative authorities. Whereas the written use of minority languages is allowed to some extent, municipalities decide individually whether they accept written requests in minority languages, which results in inconsistent practice.

11. The adoption of the 2022 Law on the Spelling of a Person's Name and Surname in Documents did not completely solve the long-standing issue of correct spelling of personal names in minority languages. The use of certain diacritics of the Latin script continues to be impossible when recording names in personal identity and other documents contrary to the provision of the Framework Convention regarding the use of personal names.

12. There still exists no legal basis for the use of minority languages in private signage and topographical indications in accordance with the Framework Convention. Minority languages are hardly visible in public.

13. Education in Polish and Russian as well as – on a smaller scale – Belarusian, Ukrainian and German is provided. Hebrew and Yiddish are taught in general education, which is not the case with Karaim and Romani. Other minority languages are taught in higher education and non-formal education. The use of minority languages in education is limited by the 2021 amendment to the Law on Education (providing at least five hours of education per week in Lithuanian in pre-school and pre-primary education) and by the fact that each school can determine the share of the minority language at the subsequent stages of education.

Intercultural education

14. The general programme of history provides thorough information about the culture and history of the Jewish minority at several grades. However, the cultures and histories of other national minorities are not yet reflected to the

same extent. Research on national minorities, which is encouraged by the authorities, could support, *inter alia* the further development of curricula, educational materials and teacher training with a view to providing information about all national minorities in general education.

Participation in decision-making

15. National minorities are represented at national level through an inclusive body, the National Communities Board, and their representatives have been involved in important matters concerning national minorities, notably the preparation of the Draft Law on National Minorities. At the level of local authorities, however, comparable consultative bodies are lacking in a considerable number of municipalities inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities.

Access of Roma to education, housing, healthcare and employment

16. The authorities have taken measures to enhance the educational opportunities for Roma children, facilitating their attendance, inclusion and socialisation within the education system, and for adult Roma. While access of Roma to education has improved, the enrolment of Roma in primary, secondary and higher education is still very low compared to the general population. Local and national authorities have taken steps to improve the housing conditions of Roma. However, due to their negative perception by the majority population, Roma continue to face barriers entering the private housing market. Access of Roma to healthcare has been improved, including by expanding compulsory health insurance coverage. Notwithstanding tailored projects and awareness-raising campaigns, the overall employment rates for Roma have remained unchanged, and disparities in income persist. National and local authorities have supported the empowerment of Roma women, promoting their active participation in social and cultural activities. Child marriage and high rates of pregnancy among Roma girls continue to limit their opportunities in education and employment.

Bilateral and multilateral co-operation

17. The authorities use bilateral relations with other states to support the protection of persons belonging to national minorities in Lithuania. The conclusion of agreements with additional states, as well as co-operation between local or regional authorities in Lithuania and in relevant other states, could further develop this policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

18. The Advisory Committee considers that the present concluding remarks and recommendations could serve as the basis for the resolution to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers with respect to the implementation of the Framework Convention by Lithuania.

19. The authorities are invited to take account of the detailed observations and recommendations contained in the present opinion of the Advisory Committee. In particular, they should take the following measures to improve further the implementation of the Framework Convention:

Recommendations for immediate action

20. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to undertake awareness-raising and trust-building measures with a view to creating a climate that is conducive for persons belonging to national minorities to invoke their rights under the Framework Convention. Intensified measures should also be taken to ensure that authorities at all levels are aware of their obligations deriving from the Framework Convention.

21. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to adopt without delay a comprehensive legal framework related to the protection of national minorities and thereby ensure that persons affiliating with national minorities will be able to effectively access rights enshrined in the Framework Convention.

22. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to provide for a legal basis and take various practical measures ensuring the right to use minority languages orally and in writing in relations with the administrative authorities and to monitor implementation of these measures. To this effect, the authorities should ensure that, in the areas where persons belonging to national minorities live traditionally, this right is not dependent on whether they make up a certain percentage of the local population. This right should also be guaranteed regardless of whether the applicant speaks Lithuanian and persons belonging to national minorities should be encouraged to invoke it.

23. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to establish a legal basis for the display of topographical indications also in minority languages and to co-ordinate the process of applying Article 11(3) of the Framework Convention at the national level. In doing so, the authorities should identify for each national minority the areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to that national minority, taking into account the individual situation of the national minority and the demographic structure of the area over a longer period than the census intervals, and

display topographical indications in the respective minority language in these areas.

24. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities, in close co-operation with representatives of the Roma minority, to continue implementing measures aimed at improving the housing conditions, access to healthcare services, employment opportunities and employability, and access to quality education of Roma, with particular attention to women and girls.

Further recommendations¹

25. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to support the establishment, for each national minority, of a sustainable structure for cultural activities meeting their needs and providing them with conditions, including long-term funding, for organising cultural activities and collecting, presenting and publishing cultural works of that national minority and persons affiliating with it, including women.

26. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their measures to combat stereotypes and prejudice against persons belonging to national minorities and to promote respect and intercultural dialogue throughout society as a whole.

27. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to pursue and strengthen their efforts to combat and prevent threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence on ethnic grounds and to ensure that alleged cases are promptly and effectively examined and, where appropriate, investigated and prosecuted.

28. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to take all necessary measures, including financial and legal, to ensure access to public and private broadcast and digital media as well as print media in minority languages for persons belonging to all national minorities. These measures should also include increased coverage of them in mainstream media and support to them for the creation of their own media.

29. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to amend the legislation to allow for the use of all diacritics in the languages of national minorities in the spelling of a person's first name and surname in personal identity and other documents. The authorities should also ensure that the procedures and costs related to changing these names are such that they do not discourage requests for name changes.

30. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to adopt legislation recognising the right to display in a minority language signs,

¹ The recommendations below are listed in the order of the corresponding articles of the Framework Convention.

inscriptions and other information of a private nature visible to the public.

31. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that curricula, teacher training and educational materials in general education provide concrete information about the histories and cultures of all national minorities and extend this information to other areas of the curriculum such as foreign language teaching. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that detailed information about these topics is provided in educational institutions attended by pupils belonging to national minorities and in the mainstream schools of the areas where those national minorities live.

Follow-up to these recommendations

32. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to organise a follow-up event after the publication of this fifth cycle Opinion, as they have done previously. It considers that a follow-up dialogue to review the observations and recommendations made in this Opinion would be beneficial. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee stands ready to support the authorities in identifying possible ways of implementing the recommendations contained in the present Opinion, drawing from its experience in the states parties to the Framework Convention.

MONITORING PROCEDURE

Follow-up activities related to the recommendations of the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee

33. The authorities have published the text of the Framework Convention, the fourth and fifth state reports, the Advisory Committee's Fourth Opinion and the related resolution adopted by the Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the Framework Convention by Lithuania² on the website of the Department of National Minorities and have translated them into Lithuanian, but not into minority languages. Documents relating to the Framework Convention in Lithuanian and/or English are also available on the websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Seimas (parliament), the Seimas Ombudsperson's Office, the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the House of National Communities. Furthermore, the authorities indicated that the Department of National Minorities organised seminars, conferences and training for the representatives from the fields of education and media as well as municipalities and non-governmental organisations, taking into account the recommendations of the fourth monitoring cycle.³ A roundtable to follow up on the recommendations of the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee took place on 17 November 2020 online, with the participation of Advisory Committee experts.⁴ The Advisory Committee welcomes this opportunity to exchange views on its recommendations and to identify ways forward.

Preparation of the state report for the fifth cycle

34. The draft state report was published on the website of the Department of National Minorities⁵ and was presented to and co-ordinated with the National Communities Board.⁶ According to the authorities, organisations representing and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities were consulted in its preparation. However, the Advisory Committee has been informed that not all non-governmental organisations working on national minority issues had been consulted. Gender-related aspects of minority rights were addressed in the report. The state report was received on 19 July 2021.

Country visit and adoption of the Fifth Opinion

35. This fifth-cycle opinion on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereinafter "the Framework Convention") by Lithuania was adopted in accordance with Article 26(1) of the

Framework Convention and Rule 25 of Resolution (2019)49 of the Committee of Ministers. The findings are based on information contained in the fifth state report, other written sources, as well as information obtained by the Advisory Committee from governmental and non-governmental sources during its visit to Vilnius city municipality, Pabradė and Švenčionys (both in Švenčionys region municipality) from 27 November to 1 December 2023. This visit was held in co-ordination with the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which adopted its draft sixth report on Lithuania in April 2024. The Advisory Committee expresses its gratitude to the authorities for their excellent co-operation before, during and after the visit. The draft opinion, as approved by the Advisory Committee on 30 May 2024, was transmitted to the Lithuanian authorities on 11 June 2024 for observations, according to Rule 37 of Resolution (2019)49. The Advisory Committee welcomes the observations received from the Lithuanian authorities on 30 August 2024.

36. A number of articles of the Framework Convention are not covered in the present opinion. Based on the information currently at its disposal, the Advisory Committee considers that the implementation of these articles does not give rise to any specific observations. This statement is not to be understood as signalling that adequate measures have now been taken and that efforts in this respect may be diminished or even halted. Rather, the Advisory Committee considers that the obligations of the Framework Convention require a sustained effort by the authorities. Furthermore, a certain state of affairs which may be considered acceptable at this stage may not necessarily be so in further cycles of monitoring. Finally, it may be that issues which appear at this stage to be of relatively minor concern prove over time to have been underestimated.

² [CM/ResCMN\(2019\)4](#).

³ See [Fifth Report submitted by Lithuania pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#), ACFC/SRV(2021)004, pp. 6-7.

⁴ See the programme of the meeting: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/follow-up-dialogue>.

⁵ See [website of the Department of National Minorities](#).

⁶ See [fifth state report](#), p. 4.

ARTICLE-BY-ARTICLE FINDINGS

Scope of application (Article 3)

37. In the previous (fourth) monitoring cycle, the Advisory Committee noted a flexible and inclusive approach taken by the authorities towards the scope of application of the Framework Convention.⁷ Lithuania continues to consider as national minorities the national communities represented in the National Communities Board (consultation body).⁸ The National Communities Board is a public advisory body under the Department of National Minorities, representing national minorities in matters of the co-ordination of the national minorities policy.⁹ It comprises representatives both of national minorities which have inhabited particular areas of the present territory of Lithuania for many centuries and of national minorities which developed as a result of migrations to Lithuania in the 20th century or during the last decades.¹⁰

38. During its visit to Lithuania, the Advisory Committee noted that a discussion between the authorities, representatives of national minorities and experts on the definition of the term "national minority" is ongoing. For example, representatives of some national minorities stated that there is a tendency in the political discourse about national minority protection in general and the Draft Law on National Minorities (see Article 4) in particular to consider only national minorities without a "kin-state" as national minorities, arguing that national minorities with a "kin-state" should be supported by that state.

39. The Advisory Committee reiterates that, while support by "kin-states" for measures enabling access to minority rights for persons belonging to national minorities is to be welcomed, the aid received from those states in no way decreases or replaces the prime responsibility of the state party to implement effectively the rights of

persons belonging to national minorities domestically in accordance with the Framework Convention. Furthermore, "the question whether support is or is not available from another state cannot be used as a relevant point of differentiation with respect to recognition or access to rights. The Advisory Committee has criticised cases when different categories lead to the formation of hierarchies [...], as this may result in unjustified distinctions with respect to applicable rights."¹¹

40. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue to pursue an inclusive approach to the Framework Convention's personal scope of application, without drawing any unjustified distinctions between different minority communities.

Population census (Article 3)

41. The 2021 Population and Housing Census was conducted on the basis of administrative data from 19 major state registers and information systems. Since data on language and religion are not contained in the state registers and part of the population had not indicated their ethnic affiliation, an additional "Statistical survey on ethnicity, mother tongue and religion" was carried out online by the authorities in 2021. The survey form contained four questions about "ethnicity", "mother tongue(s)", proficiency in languages and religion and was also available in two minority languages (Polish, Russian).¹² The survey's results were combined and published with the statistical information of the census. The national authorities and Statistics Lithuania had consulted representatives of the Polish minority in the preparation of the survey's methodology due to concerns expressed by the latter about the accuracy of the official data. Following the survey, about 40 000 additional residents who

⁷ See [Fourth Opinion on Lithuania](#), ACFC/OP/IV(2018)004, para. 18.

⁸ See website of the [National Communities Board](#). Only elected representatives of active national communities become members of the National Communities Board. At present, the following national minorities are represented in the National Communities Board: Armenians, Azeris, Belarusians, Chechens, Estonians, Georgians, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Karaims, Kazakhs, Latvians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians and Uzbeks.

⁹ See [fifth state report](#), p. 9.

¹⁰ According to the authorities, traditional national minorities in Lithuania are Germans, Poles (present in the current territory of Lithuania since the early 14th century), Belarusians, Jews, Karaims, Tatars (end of 14th century), Roma (end of 15th century), Russians (Old Believers; end of 17th century), see National Minorities Department to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania (ed.): *Building Lithuania together*, Vilnius 2021, pp. 5, 17.

¹¹ [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4, The Framework Convention: a key tool to managing diversity through minority rights. The scope of application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#), adopted on 27 May 2016, para. 35.

¹² The questions relating to national minorities and their languages were: "What is your ethnicity?" with the response options "Pole", "Russian", "Belarusian", "Ukrainian", "Other (please indicate)" and "Prefer not to indicate"; "What is (are) your mother tongue(s)?" (the language the person knows best or usually uses in the family) with the response options "Polish", "Russian", "Belarusian", "Ukrainian", "Other (please indicate)" and "Prefer not to indicate"; "What other languages do you know (i.e. you can speak and/or write)?" with the response options "Polish", "Russian", "German", "Other (please indicate)" and "None"; and "Which religious community would you attribute yourself to?" with, for example, the response options "Evangelical Lutheran", "Old Believers", "Judaic", "Karaites", "Other (please indicate)", "None" and "Prefer not to indicate"; information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire.

had not participated in it were interviewed face-to-face.¹³

42. The Association of Poles in Lithuania initiated the alternative “Public Census of the Vilnius Region” in 2021 whose results suggested that the number of persons belonging to the Polish minority was three to ten percent higher than indicated in official statistics. The results were presented in the Seimas. However, the authorities note that they are not in a position to assess the quality of the data collected in the alternative “Public Census of the Vilnius Region”. During the Advisory Committee’s visit, representatives of other national minorities expressed doubts as to whether the official data about the number of persons belonging to national minorities fully reflects the reality.

43. The Advisory Committee reiterates that data collection exercises should provide the opportunity to indicate multiple ethnic affiliations and competences in different languages. Furthermore, it is necessary to collect data from a variety of sources, including from the national minorities themselves as well as from independent sociological, ethnographical and other types of research conducted in co-operation with their representatives.¹⁴

44. The Advisory Committee welcomes that the authorities have complemented the register-based census by carrying out the “Statistical survey on ethnicity, mother tongue and religion”. Its questions were formulated in such a way that persons belonging to all national minorities had the possibility to self-identify as such or to refrain from doing so. Furthermore, respondents could indicate two “mother tongues” and knowledge of different languages. It is also commendable that the survey did not only enquire about “mother tongue(s)”, but language proficiency in general, as many persons belonging to national minorities do not speak the minority language as their first language. Furthermore, knowing how many people speak a minority language as a second language is useful for planning public services in minority languages, which do not always require that a minority language is spoken as a first language.

45. However, the Advisory Committee considers that all national minorities represented in the National Communities Board and their languages should be indicated as response options to “ethnicity” and “mother tongue(s)” in any future surveys of this kind, instead of selecting only four of them. By specifying all national minorities and minority languages in combination with the option of additionally specifying “other”, a selection

would be avoided. Such an approach would also be consistent with the fact that the survey form had explicitly mentioned 13 religious communities. In addition, respondents should be given the opportunity to indicate multiple ethnic affiliations, which would correspond to the possibility to indicate two “mother tongues”. Furthermore, in view of the small number of questions, it would be justifiable to provide the survey form in all minority languages and not just in two. In order to complement the official data collection, the authorities could additionally take into consideration estimates made by organisations of all national minorities and independent research conducted in co-operation with the representatives of the national minorities.

46. The discrepancy between the official data and the estimates or data gathered by national minorities, as well as the lack of comprehensive independent research, may limit the acceptance of the official data, and thus potentially also the acceptance of the national minority policy based on it, by persons belonging to national minorities. Against this background, the Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should avoid making the rights of persons belonging to national minorities dependent on the proportion of such persons based on the census and survey results. Instead, the Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should ensure that essential rights enshrined in the Framework Convention are implemented for persons belonging to each national minority on a sustainable basis, in cases where minority rights are dependent on census results. Such rights comprise, for example, effective participation in public life and affairs, teaching in or of the minority language, access to broadcast and print media, cultural institutions and activities, and the use of the minority language in relations with administrative authorities and in topographical indications. The authorities could, in co-operation with representatives of the national minorities, determine policy measures for each national minority, taking into account its individual situation, its diverse needs and interest and the demographic structure of the area inhabited by persons belonging to the respective national minority over a longer period than the census intervals, and implement minority rights on a sustainable basis in these core areas.

47. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities can enjoy the rights enshrined in the Framework Convention on a sustainable basis, taking into account the demographic situation of the minority concerned over a longer

¹³ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 48-49. According to the census results, the largest national minorities were the Polish (183 421 persons), Russian (141 122 persons) and Belarusian (28 183 persons). See also para. 88 regarding the increase in numbers of Belarusians.

¹⁴ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), para. 16; and ACFC [Thematic Commentary No. 3, The Language Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities under the Framework Convention](#), adopted on 24 May 2012, ACFC/44DOC(2012)001 rev., para. 19.

period of time. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to take also alternative data collection into account in policy making regarding access to minority rights.

Legal and institutional framework for the protection of national minorities (Article 4)

48. No comprehensive legislative framework pertaining to national minorities has been adopted since the 1989 Law on National Minorities was declared null and void with effect of January 2010, along with other laws from the period before regaining independence. During the period under review, the national authorities have continued to carry out a series of consultations of stakeholders on a Draft Law on National Minorities, including representatives of national minorities (consultation of the National Communities Board and of individual national minorities), local authorities, educational institutions and academic experts. The Ministry of Justice is in charge of the inter-ministerial coordination of the draft law that has emerged from this consultation process.¹⁵

49. As the Advisory Committee was informed during its visit, no final decision has been taken as to whether the Draft Law on National Minorities will be adopted. It appears that several principal matters are not resolved yet. This includes the question of whether some rights should depend on the numerical share of persons belonging to national minorities in a given area and if so, which percentage threshold should be applied for access to individual minority rights. At the same time, the authorities underline that provisions on the rights and freedoms of persons belonging to national minorities are already included in various laws, namely the Law on Education, the Law on Public Administration, laws regulating judicial proceedings, the Law on Equal Treatment and the Law on the National Radio and Television. Moreover, they refer to the fact that the principle of the equality of persons enshrined in Article 29 of the Constitution¹⁶ provides that privileges may not be granted on grounds such as nationality or language.¹⁷

50. In addition to the Draft Law on National Minorities, an amendment to the Law on the State Language has been prepared, but not adopted either (see Article 11). The draft law includes provisions on the publication of information in languages other than Lithuanian and the exemption of radio and television programmes aimed at national minorities from the requirement to broadcast in, or translate them into, Lithuanian (dubbing, subtitling).¹⁸

51. At the level of the national authorities, the Department of National Minorities co-ordinates the national minority policy with relevant ministries and other actors, including civil society.

In addition, an Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Minorities supervises and advises on all issues related to national minorities.¹⁹

52. During its visit, the Advisory Committee noted a low awareness of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the Framework Convention among representatives of national minorities and local authorities. Interlocutors from all national minorities, albeit to a different extent, showed reluctance to invoke their rights for fear of being perceived as “disloyal” citizens of Lithuania or – in the case of linguistic rights – as persons not mastering Lithuanian. The Advisory Committee also observed a tendency to leave the implementation of some aspects of the Framework Convention to initiatives of the national minorities and/or local authorities, without sufficient monitoring at national level of whether action is taken by the relevant local authorities.

53. The Advisory Committee reiterates that while the Framework Convention binds states parties from its entry into force within the domestic jurisdiction, its framework character nevertheless requires additional legal instruments at domestic level to make it fully operational.²⁰ However, states have a margin of appreciation as to whether this shall be achieved through one uniform law on national minorities or by regulating minority rights through sectorial legislation. The Advisory Committee emphasises in this context that the most important requirement is that the domestic legal framework guarantees legal certainty and effective access to rights to persons belonging to national minorities.

54. The Advisory Committee regrets that, despite long-standing preparation and consultations, no Law on National Minorities has been adopted yet. As the Advisory Committee’s examination of the implementation of Articles 10 and 11 shows, Lithuania continues to lack a comprehensive legal framework especially for the implementation of linguistic rights enshrined in the Framework Convention. The Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should establish this legal basis as a matter of urgency either through a comprehensive Law on National Minorities or sectorial legislation, including by amending the Law on the State Language and the Law on Public Administration (see Articles 10 and 11 below). The legislation should also clearly define the obligations of local authorities and their monitoring by the national authorities who remain responsible for the implementation of the Framework Convention under international law.

¹⁵ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 12-14, 50.

¹⁶ Article 29 concerns equality and prohibition of restricting human rights and granting privileges based on *inter alia* “race”, nationality, language, origin and religion.

¹⁷ See [fifth state report](#), p. 94.

¹⁸ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee’s questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

¹⁹ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee’s questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

²⁰ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), para. 6.

55. With regard to the considerations on introducing local percentage thresholds as a basis for access to minority rights, the Advisory Committee notes that, given the demographic situation of the national minorities in Lithuania, it will not be feasible to set a general threshold that persons belonging to the numerically smaller national minorities can also reach in at least one municipality. A uniform percentage threshold would represent an insurmountable obstacle for most national minorities.

56. The Advisory Committee is concerned that there is a general climate that discourages persons belonging to national minorities from invoking rights provided by the Framework Convention. In addition, it considers that intensified measures are needed to inform the national and local authorities, organisations and other persons concerned of their rights and duties provided for by the Framework Convention and the national minority legislation. In this context, additional measures are needed to encourage persons belonging to national minorities to invoke their rights. In particular, it is important that the authorities clearly and publicly contradict the narrative that claiming minority rights is an expression of disloyalty to Lithuania or a threat to the status of the Lithuanian language. Moreover, in accordance with Article 4(3) of the Framework Convention, the adoption of adequate (including legislative) measures to promote full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority shall not be considered to be an act of discrimination.

57. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to undertake awareness-raising and trust-building measures with a view to creating a climate that is conducive for persons belonging to national minorities to invoke their rights under the Framework Convention. Intensified measures should also be taken to ensure that authorities at all levels are aware of their obligations deriving from the Framework Convention.

58. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to adopt without delay a comprehensive legal framework related to the protection of national minorities and thereby ensure that persons affiliating with national minorities will be able to effectively access rights enshrined in the Framework Convention.

Promotion of full and effective equality (Article 4)

59. The main law regulating equal opportunities in Lithuania is the Law on Equal Treatment, which implements Article 29 of the Constitution.²¹ The law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of *inter alia* “race”, nationality, citizenship, language, “origin”, religion and ethnicity. It provides that state and municipal institutions, educational institutions, employers, providers of goods and services as well as professional organisations must ensure equal opportunities. A person who has suffered discrimination on grounds listed in the law has the right to ask for compensation for damages caused by persons recognised by courts as perpetrators. A defendant must prove that the principle of equal opportunities was followed. In 2022, an amendment was adopted which obliges goods sellers, manufacturers and service providers to avoid harassment when providing services or selling goods, including on the basis of “race”, nationality, “origin” and language.²²

60. The Action Plan for the Promotion of Non-Discrimination 2017-2020 was the main strategic document aimed at achieving the goals of equal opportunities and non-discrimination policy. Some of its activities have concerned national minorities. For example, training was organised both on the strengthening of teaching Lithuanian in national minority schools and for teachers teaching in Belarusian, Polish and Russian. In 2020, the Action Plan for Promoting Non-Discrimination 2021-2023 was approved which also contained measures to prevent and combat discrimination against persons belonging to national minorities (hate speech, hate crimes).²³ With regard to additional measures adopted by the authorities to promote full and effective equality between persons belonging to national minorities and those belonging to the majority in economic, social, political and cultural life, the Advisory Committee refers to its examination under Articles 5 and 15.

61. Lithuania has three ombudsperson institutions dealing also with national minority rights: the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, the Parliamentary Ombudsperson and the Ombudsperson for the Protection of the Rights of the Child. While the budget of these institutions has been increased during the monitoring period as an inflation adjustment, none of them has received sufficient funding enabling them to raise awareness of their mandates among persons belonging to national minorities.²⁴

²¹ Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania establishes the equality of persons and prohibits the restriction of human rights or granting privileges on the grounds of gender, “race”, nationality, language, “origin”, social status, belief, convictions or views; see [fifth state report](#), p. 83.

²² Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

²³ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 53-54, 62-63.

²⁴ The annual allocations from the state budget to the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson's Office have increased from €506 000

62. Representatives of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the Parliamentary Ombudsperson informed the Advisory Committee during its visit that only a small proportion of complaints received by them deal with nationality or language, owing to the limited awareness of these institutions among persons belonging to national minorities. In their view, appropriate resources should be allocated to them with a view to funding measures increasing outreach to persons belonging to national minorities and ensuring assistance to them. It appears that already at present complaints can be submitted also in minority languages, notably in Russian and Polish, although this is not specifically encouraged.

63. The Advisory Committee reiterates that it is essential for equality bodies and Ombudsperson institutions to reach out to individuals affiliating with national minorities through, among other things, awareness-raising among them, also in their minority languages.

64. The Advisory Committee appreciates that the authorities have included measures concerning national minorities in the Action Plans for the Promotion of Non-Discrimination 2017-2020 and 2021-2023. It considers that the authorities should include measures aiming at the implementation of the Framework Convention and the related monitoring recommendations into future action plans. In order to support measures aiming at achieving full equality of persons belonging to national minorities, the authorities need to provide allocations to the equality bodies and Ombudsperson institutions permitting them to raise awareness of their mandates among persons belonging to national minorities, undertake outreach activities and facilitate assistance to those persons, including by encouraging oral and written requests or complaints in the minority languages and providing replies or assistance in these languages.

65. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to provide additional resources to the equality bodies and Ombudsperson institutions allowing them to raise awareness and increase outreach of these institutions among persons belonging to national minorities and to assist such persons, including in their minority

languages, with a view to making effective use of available remedies.

Promotion of the cultures and identities of national minorities (Article 5)

66. Cultural institutions (e.g. libraries, cultural centres, museums) whose founders are the state or local authorities receive long-term basic funding (including e.g. staff and utilities) from the state or municipal budgets. In accordance with the applicable legal provisions, the support scheme for cultural activities of associations, including those of national minorities, is based on annual appropriations (January-December). According to the authorities, the Law on the Budget Structure would have to be amended to enable such organisations to apply for multi-annual projects.²⁵

67. Several institutions (e.g. museums, libraries, a cultural centre, a research centre) promote the culture and identity (history, traditions, cultural - including architectural - heritage, art, religion) of the Jewish minority by collecting, exhibiting and publishing cultural works. The history and culture of the Karaim minority is also comprehensively showcased in a museum in Trakai. Some cultural institutions present aspects of the cultures of other national minorities, e.g. institutions devoted to writers representing a minority culture (Yakub Kolas, Belarusian; Thomas Mann, German; Czesław Miłosz, Pole).²⁶

68. National authorities, the Lithuanian Council for Culture and municipalities co-fund projects of organisations of various national minorities which promote their cultures, traditions and heritage (e.g. events, publishing). The authorities also support the dissemination of the national minority cultures in the media (e.g. publication of articles in the press and on the internet, radio and television shows).²⁷

69. The authorities can finance management works of cultural heritage objects (research, conservation, restoration, design) with funds of the Heritage Management Programme. During the evaluation of applications for financing, objects of national minorities and/or traditional religious communities constitute one of the selection priorities. However, reconstruction of objects cannot be financed with state budget funds intended for heritage protection.²⁸

(2018) to €566 000 (2023). For project activities, it has used additional EU funds, to which the state contributed. The ordinary budget of the Office of the Seimas Ombudsman (state-budgetary-allowance) has increased from approximately €1.1 million (2018) to €1.4 million (2023). The ordinary (state-budgetary allowance) and extraordinary (non-state appropriations including EU funds) budget of the Office of the Ombudsman for the Protection of the Rights of the Child has increased from €504 000 (2018) to €753 000 (2023). See inter alia [fifth state report](#), pp. 51-52, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

²⁵ See [fifth state report](#), p. 68, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

²⁶ See [fifth state report](#), p. 124, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

²⁷ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 35-36, 117-118, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

²⁸ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

70. The Law on Public Holidays includes dates significant for national minorities such as the Day of Lithuanian National Communities (21 May), which are publicly commemorated. Furthermore, the Seimas had declared the year 2020 as the “Year of the Vilna Gaon and Lithuanian Jewish History”, the year 2021 as the “Year of Lithuanian Tatar History and Culture” and the year 2022 as the “Year of the Lithuanian Karaims”. Each commemorative year was accompanied by activities (cultural events, documentaries, television and radio programmes, exhibitions, publications) to highlight the contributions of these national minorities to the creation of the Lithuanian state, its history and culture.²⁹

71. The heritage of national minorities is also considered in tourism. Jewish culture is systematically promoted throughout Lithuania. In some municipalities, tourist information centres also highlight the local heritage of additional national minorities, notably Vilnius (Polish, German and Hungarian heritage), Trakai (Karaim heritage) and Klaipėda (German heritage). Kaunas is presented as a historically multicultural city. In some cases, the minority languages are used in inscriptions at sites or information about them. This practice depends on the manager of the site, the national minority and/or the number of visitors who can read the language.³⁰

72. During the Advisory Committee’s visit, representatives of several national minorities pointed out that exclusively project-based funding of their cultural activities (one-off activities lasting a maximum of one year) prevents organisation of regular activities. Moreover, interlocutors considered the state funding for cultural heritage objects of national minorities as insufficient and asked for an increased use of minority languages in cultural institutions such as museums. In a statement submitted to the Advisory Committee, representatives of the Karaim minority underline that the “Year of the Lithuanian Karaims” raised awareness of this national minority and welcome that the authorities support the renovation of the Karaim temples in Trakai and Vilnius. However, they criticise the Trakai region municipality for having carried out construction works in the historical quarter without respecting its traditional Karaim character.

73. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the cultural institutions and national minority activities, and the funding available for them, should be effective in promoting the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to develop their cultures, including languages, traditions and heritage. Making grants available solely on the basis of projects does not allow all national minorities to promote their national minority cultures on a regular and sustainable basis. Furthermore, the preservation

of the cultural heritage (e.g. in architecture) related to national minorities requires that it be inventoried and that dedicated funding be made available – including to private owners – for maintenance or reconstruction. Such a policy has also positive effects for awareness-raising about the history and culture of national minorities and cultural tourism (see Articles 5 and 6).

74. As regards funding, the Advisory Committee notes that the cultural institutions dedicated to the Jewish and Karaim national minorities in Lithuania which have been founded by the state or local authorities and receive long-term basic funding create stable conditions necessary for persons belonging to the respective national minorities to promote their culture, traditions and heritage. However, project-based funding – if approved – does not support long-term activities and does not usually lead to the establishment of cultural structures (institutions or facilities) that are regularly dedicated to promoting the culture of national minorities. Consequently, project-based funding alone does not create a sufficient and sustainable basis for the implementation of Article 5 of the Framework Convention. According to minority representatives, the lack of human and financial resources of many associations limits the number and scope of cultural activities organised for the national minority concerned.

75. In this context, the Advisory Committee also refers to Article 4(2) of the Framework Convention, according to which states parties undertake to promote in all areas of cultural life full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority as well as to take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities. As cultural institutions that promote the culture of the majority population receive long-term basic funding, this should also apply to all national minorities. An active role of the authorities in promoting the minority cultures (through long-term basic funding) would take due account of the “specific conditions” of national minorities, in particular the limited capacities of their associations.

76. The Advisory Committee welcomes the variety of institutions devoted to the promotion of different aspects of the culture of the Jewish and Karaim minorities. However, it notes that other national minorities lack structures dealing with their culture in a comprehensive manner going beyond specific aspects (e.g. institutions devoted to writers). In the view of the Advisory Committee, it would be beneficial if the national and relevant local authorities would provide support, including through long-term funding, for the establishment of institutional structures targeted to the specific

²⁹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 72-73, 113-114.

³⁰ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee’s questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

needs of each national minority. This would enable them to organise cultural activities and collect, present and publish cultural works of that national minority and persons affiliating with it, including women. In addition, in those local or regional areas which have been influenced by the culture of a national minority, mainstream cultural institutions not dedicated to the respective national minority (e.g. museums, media and cultural centres, cinema) should incorporate to an adequate extent the culture of the local national minority in their work (e.g. museum collections) and use the respective minority language (e.g. on websites, in explanatory texts and audio-guides of museums). Mainstreaming the cultures of national minorities in the activities of general cultural institutions could have a positive impact on the quantity, sustainability, economic basis and reach of cultural activities related to national minorities and promote intercultural understanding with a view to enhancing the appreciation for national minorities in society at large and creating a climate where persons belonging to national minorities feel accepted as society's integral and valued part.

77. The Advisory Committee appreciates that the national authorities support the conservation of architectural objects related to the cultural heritage of national minorities. In order to increase the impact of this work, the authorities should inventory cultural heritage objects related to national minorities and make available – including to private owners – funding also for the reconstruction of objects. Representatives of the national minorities should be involved in decisions concerning the maintenance of cultural objects related to their heritage.

78. The Advisory Committee welcomes that the Seimas has dedicated commemorative years to the Jewish, Karaim and Tatar minorities and finds that this was an original way of raising awareness of their presence in Lithuania. It considers that this practice should be continued with regard to the other national minorities.

79. The Advisory Committee is pleased to note that the heritage of national minorities is highlighted in local tourism. The information provided about relevant heritage objects, and in minority languages, not only raises awareness of national minorities among foreign visitors, but also among persons belonging to the majority population and the national minorities in Lithuania. These measures should be carried out in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities.

80. Finally, the Advisory Committee notes that Lithuania has not yet signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages yet, although Lithuania considered becoming a party to the Language Charter as early as 2013.³¹ The Advisory Committee considers that being a party to the Language Charter would support Lithuania in further developing its legislation, policy and practice regarding the use of minority languages and thereby support the implementation of several articles of the Framework Convention.

81. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to support the establishment, for each national minority, of a sustainable structure for cultural activities meeting their needs and providing them with conditions, including long-term funding, for organising cultural activities and collecting, presenting and publishing cultural works of that national minority and persons affiliating with it, including women.

82. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages with a view to promoting minority cultures and languages as part of Lithuania's cultural heritage and cultural diversity.

83. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to continue to use the positive potential of tourism in the context of promoting minority cultures and languages, in consultation with persons belonging to national minorities.

Intercultural dialogue and mutual respect (Article 6)

84. As far as the promotion of intercultural dialogue in education is concerned, the travelling exhibition "We Built Lithuania Together" has been presented in schools to provide information about the histories of the national minorities and persons belonging to them and their contribution to the formation of the Lithuanian state. For teaching staff, seminars on intercultural learning, social inclusion and the history of the Roma were organised (see further Article 12).³²

85. In the field of culture, the authorities approved the Concept of Representation of the History of National Minorities in Lithuania in 2019.³³ The concept aims to present the history of national minorities as a culturally, confessionally and linguistically important part of an integrated Lithuanian identity and to create the conditions for its effective presentation to the public. A related

³¹ Application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages - [Biennial Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to the Parliamentary Assembly](#), Doc. 13436, section 3.2.3.

³² See [fifth state report](#), pp. 16, 24-25.

³³ [Concept of Representation of the History of National Minorities](#).

action plan³⁴ contains activities to be implemented by national and local institutions as well as organisations of national minorities. In 2020, the government approved the National Progress Plan for 2021-2030 which contains an objective concerning national minorities. In this framework, travelling exhibitions as well as cultural and artistic projects on the history and culture of the national minorities are being implemented. The authorities have also published the interactive website “Discover the National Minorities of Lithuania” that provides some information on the history of national minorities, the activities of their organisations, major celebrations and the culinary heritage.³⁵ In addition, the aforementioned travelling exhibition “We Built Lithuania Together” has been presented in libraries and cultural centres. National and local authorities regularly support, in co-operation with Roma associations, events (e.g. International Roma Day, Roma Language Day, Roma Music Festival) that raise awareness of Romani language, customs and history among the majority population (see further Articles 5 and 12).³⁶

86. As regards the media, the Lithuanian National Television broadcasts documentaries about national minorities at irregular intervals. The Department of National Minorities annually awards to journalists the prize “For the Promotion of Intercultural Dialogue”. The authorities have also organised awareness-raising activities on how to overcome negative attitudes towards Roma in society, including in the media, and to create a positive image of Roma (see further Article 9).³⁷

87. As far as public attitudes towards persons affiliating with different ethnic groups are concerned, data published in 2022 showed that the perception of Poles, Georgians and Ukrainians among Lithuanians was the most favourable. The attitudes towards Ukrainians had improved considerably (64%), and 80% agreed that Lithuania should accept refugees from Ukraine. However, as in previous years, the least preferred people to live in one’s neighbourhood were Roma (59%), and 36% of respondents preferred not to share their workplace with a Roma. In addition, attitudes towards Russians had deteriorated significantly against the background of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Compared to 2021, the number of respondents who did not want to live next to Russians had increased (from

6% to 16%), as had the number of those who did not want to work with them (from 5% to 14%).³⁸

88. A survey published in 2024 showed that the recognition and understanding of discrimination as well as awareness of the societal groups most frequently affected have increased since 2019. A majority of respondents acknowledged that discrimination based on, among other things, Roma ethnic affiliation is widespread. In addition, a majority expressed dissatisfaction at the prospect of a Roma holding one of the highest political offices in Lithuania. A quarter of respondents preferred not to work with a Roma colleague, although this reluctance has decreased significantly. Despite negative attitudes towards Roma in general, 84% of respondents expressed satisfaction if their children had Roma classmates, and 78% felt that Roma culture and history should be part of the curriculum.³⁹ During the Advisory Committee’s visit, representatives of the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsperson equally indicated that, among all national minorities, the public attitudes towards Roma are particularly negative and that, as a result of the war of aggression against Ukraine, the public opinion regarding Russians and Belarusians had deteriorated. Interlocutors from the Russian minority criticised the fact that against the background of the war of aggression against Ukraine, several institutions across Lithuania bearing names with references to Russian culture had been renamed, for example the Russian Drama Theatre (now called the Old Theatre) and the Alexander Pushkin Literary Museum (now Markučiai Manor Museum) in Vilnius city municipality.⁴⁰ Representatives of the Tatar minority stated that persons belonging to this minority are in public discourse regularly associated with Muslim migrants and issues relating to migration, to which they object in view of the fact that the Tatar minority is a traditional and fully integrated national minority. Interlocutors from the Belarusian minority shared their concern that their associations are overburdened by measures welcoming and providing services to political refugees from Belarus.

89. The Advisory Committee reiterates that Article 6 of the Framework Convention calls for proactive efforts to foster a climate of mutual respect, understanding and co-operation among all persons in society, where persons belonging to

³⁴ [Action Plan](#).

³⁵ See [fifth state report](#), p. 78; [Discover the National Minorities of Lithuania](#).

³⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 16, 62, 112.

³⁷ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 17-19.

³⁸ See [Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania](#), pp. 10-11.

³⁹ See Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, [Discrimination Report Reveals Disturbing Trends in Lithuania](#), 24 January 2024.

⁴⁰ See [Vilnius renames Alexander Pushkin museum](#), Lithuanian National Radio and Television news portal, 3 August 2023.

national minorities are recognised as an integral and valued part of a diverse society, who effectively enjoy equal access to rights and resources despite difference, while being provided with opportunities for social interaction and inclusion across difference.⁴¹ It reiterates the preamble of the Framework Convention which states that “the creation of a climate of tolerance and dialogue is necessary to enable cultural diversity to be a source and a factor, not of division, but of enrichment for each society”. This should be reflected and fostered through legislation and policies. Against this background, the Advisory Committee reiterates the important role of education and culture in promoting intercultural dialogue as an essential societal value. In addition, it is important to avoid a situation whereby bilateral relations impact negatively on intercultural relations and that persons belonging to national minorities are associated with current or historical events in neighbouring countries. Decisions about names of institutions and topographic objects related to national minorities and their cultures should be taken in consultation with representatives of the national minorities concerned, and in a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue.

90. The Advisory Committee welcomes the measures taken by the authorities in the fields of education and culture to present the histories, religions, languages and cultures of national minorities, including popular aspects such as their culinary heritage or Roma music, to the public as part of an inclusive Lithuanian identity and integrated society and to mainstream the topic of national minorities into general policy documents such as the National Progress Plan. This approach contributes to ensuring that the elements of national minority identities are not perceived as “belonging” only to the national minorities and persons belonging to them and furthers general appreciation for the national minorities. The favourable perception of Poles is a positive sign in this context, bearing in mind that the Polish minority is the largest national minority in Lithuania. In addition, the increased awareness of discrimination in the population is to be welcomed.

91. At the same time, the Advisory Committee observes that the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has had the effect of improving attitudes towards Ukrainians, while attitudes towards Russians have deteriorated, based upon negative stereotypes. The Advisory Committee finds that the renaming of institutions bearing names with references to Russian culture contradicts the approach of

defining national minority cultures as an integral part of the identity of Lithuania. The promotion of Russian literature, theatre or language in Lithuania should be seen as unrelated to the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine and should be separated from it by the local and national authorities concerned. These observations apply *mutatis mutandis* to the Belarusian minority. In light of the above considerations, the Advisory Committee finds that a possible solution could be to introduce, in consultation with representatives of the national minority concerned, two names, combining the current names in Lithuanian with the former names in Russian.

92. The Advisory Committee further notes that there is a need that the authorities support associations of the Belarusian minority taking measures integrating political refugees from Belarus, which normally fall within the responsibilities of the authorities.

93. The Advisory Committee observes that the long-standing negative attitudes against Roma in the majority population persist, even if the perception of Roma children has improved. Negative attitudes against Roma are not only an obstacle to intercultural dialogue, but also a barrier to their socio-economic inclusion (see under Article 15). It is therefore to be welcomed that the authorities have taken measures to promote a positive image of Roma among the majority population, including in the media, and to support Roma, in particular school children, in their efforts to be fully included into society (see under Article 12). The Advisory Committee considers that these measures need to be intensified with a view to combating negative stereotypes against Roma in society.

94. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to intensify their measures to combat stereotypes and prejudice against persons belonging to national minorities and to promote respect and intercultural dialogue throughout society as a whole.

95. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to reconsider, in consultation with representatives of the national minority concerned, the renaming of institutions previously bearing names with references to Russian culture in a spirit of tolerance and respect of the cultural heritage of this minority.

Protection from hostility (Article 6)

96. The Criminal Code (Articles 169-171 and 312)⁴² remains the main legal basis for the

⁴¹ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), paras. 86-87.

⁴² Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code (“Crimes and Misdemeanours against a Person’s Equal Rights and Freedom of Conscience”) provides for liability in the following crimes (among others): Article 169 “Discrimination on Grounds of Nationality, Race, Sex,

prohibition of discrimination and incitement to hatred against persons belonging to national minorities. The number of registered crimes concerning “nationality” under Article 170 of the Criminal Code (“Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons”) has grown from five (of 21 crimes in total) in 2018 to 21 (84 in total) in 2022. Two crimes (of five in total) were referred to court in 2018 and ten (of 37) in 2022.⁴³

97. In 2019, the Ministry of the Interior commissioned a (partly EU-funded) qualitative study of hate crimes against vulnerable communities including Jews, Muslims and Roma, assessing the nature of community vulnerability, the impact on them and their protection needs. In addition, an analysis of the cases of criminal liability for hate crimes and hate speech was carried out. On this basis, the Office of the Prosecutor General has prepared methodological recommendations for pre-trial investigations into hate crimes and the peculiarities of inciting, organising and directing hate speech.⁴⁴

98. In 2020, the authorities set up a working group with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the fight against hate crime and hate speech. It includes representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of the Prosecutor General, the Police Department, the Department of National Minorities, the Office of the Inspector of Journalistic Ethics, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, NGOs and the Roma Community Centre. Among other matters, the working group is tasked with initiating activities that will strengthen the capacity of law enforcement institutions and other state institutions as well as civil society organisations to recognise hate crimes and hate speech.⁴⁵ In addition, the Department of National Minorities monitors the country’s information space and public speeches and responds to incitement to hatred.⁴⁶

99. The Action Plan for Promoting Non-Discrimination 2021-2023 has covered awareness-raising in recognising and reducing hate speech on the basis of nationality and increasing the competence of police trainees and officers to properly respond to, investigate and prevent hate crimes. The authorities have also

organised training for police officers, prosecutors and judges on the impact of hate crimes and hate speech and on recognising them and ensuring their effective prosecution. In addition, the Lithuanian Police School has implemented an EU project on effective response to hate crimes and hate speech. In 2020, roundtable discussions of police officers and prosecutors with representatives of hate crime-affected communities were organised to discuss the latter’s needs in relation to the work of law enforcement officers, resulting in the preparation of a guide for law enforcement officers on co-operation with such communities.⁴⁷

100. The number of complaints of possible discrimination on the grounds of “race”, nationality, citizenship, language, origin and ethnicity received by the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson has increased (2018 and 2019: 20; 2020: 18; 2021: 29; 2022: 30).⁴⁸ The Office of the Inspector of Journalistic Ethics may on its own initiative or following complaints from victims, activists or public organisations examine cases of prejudice against individuals or groups on the basis of *inter alia* their “race”, nationality, language, origin or religion and advise media to avoid unjustified negative attitudes towards them. During the period under review, the office has taken steps to encourage the reporting of hate speech on the Internet and carried out an information campaign throughout the country with the aim of helping people to recognise hate speech and distinguish it from the freedom of expression as well as to report it to the authorities. Seminars addressing people working with vulnerable groups (e.g. social workers) were organised. The office also prepared articles in Polish and Russian concerning e.g. hate speech against national minorities and persons affiliating with them.⁴⁹ During the Advisory Committee’s visit, the Office of the Inspector of Journalistic Ethics indicated that Russians are affected most by hate speech in the media.

101. The Advisory Committee reiterates that it is an obligation of states parties to undertake appropriate measures to protect persons who may be subject to threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence or hate speech as a result of their ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identities. States have the

Descent, Religion or Belonging to Other Groups”; Article 170 “Incitement against Any National, Racial, Ethnic, Religious or Other Group of Persons”. Article 312(2) provides for liability in the desecration of a grave or other place of public respect on racial, national, or religious grounds.

⁴³ Data of the Departmental Register of Criminal Offences. Lithuania has reported slightly different hate crime data to [ODIHR](#).

⁴⁴ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁵ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights: Promising Practice - [Working Group to promote an effective response to hate crime and hate speech in Lithuania](#).

⁴⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 15, 23.

⁴⁷ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 20, 23, 62-63.

⁴⁸ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 83-86; [2022 Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania](#), p. 28; [2021 Annual Report of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania](#), p. 36.

⁴⁹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 21-22.

obligation to take all necessary preventive measures as well as to ensure that cases of alleged hate crime and hate speech are effectively investigated. The Advisory Committee further reiterates that law enforcement agents should be appropriately trained to ensure that racially or ethnically motivated attacks and discrimination are identified and recorded, as well as duly investigated and punished through targeted, specialised and prompt action.⁵⁰ Measures to build trust between persons belonging to national minorities, relevant institutions and society at large, including spreading knowledge and awareness of national minorities, should be an integral part of strategies on combating hate speech.

102. The Advisory Committee welcomes the authorities' holistic approach in designing policies addressing hate crime and hate speech. This approach manifests itself in the establishment of a dedicated working group comprising representatives from the authorities, including the Department of National Minorities, police, judiciary, equality bodies and civil society. Policy measures have been taken on the basis of research carried out in consultation with representatives of some national minorities. In addition, training on hate crime and hate speech has been carried out for law enforcement institutions and measures have been taken to build trust between groups and communities and persons affiliating with them at risk of exposure to hate crimes and the police. New methodological recommendations for pre-trial investigations help to improve the identification and sanctioning of cases of alleged discrimination and ethnically motivated hostility.

103. At the same time, the Advisory Committee notes that the number of registered crimes concerning "nationality" under Article 170 of the Criminal Code has quadrupled and the number of crimes referred to court increased fivefold from 2018 to 2022. This rise may in part be due to increased awareness-raising by the authorities. However, the data by the Office of the Inspector of Journalistic Ethics suggests that both the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the arrival of refugees from Ukraine in Lithuania have triggered hate speech targeting persons belonging to the Russian minority in Lithuania. Against this background, the Advisory Committee considers that combating hate crime, including training for law enforcement agents and the judiciary, and evaluating the effectiveness of these measures in the short term need to be pursued and strengthened. In addition, it should be ensured that the available legal remedies against discrimination, hostility or violence on ethnic grounds are widely known to the public, in

particular amongst communities and persons affiliating with them that are most exposed to such behaviour. Moreover, the role of Roma mediators, whose training the authorities support, is to be promoted in the relations between Roma and the police.

104. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to pursue and strengthen their efforts to combat and prevent threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence on ethnic grounds and to ensure that alleged cases are promptly and effectively examined and, where appropriate, investigated and prosecuted.

Broadcast, digital and print media in minority languages (Article 9)

105. The Law on the National Radio and Television (Article 5(9)) requires the public broadcaster LRT to prepare television and radio programmes and website content for persons belonging to national minorities. In 2023, the Seimas adopted an amendment to the Law on the Provision of Information to the Public which established a new Media Support Fund that covers also media in minority languages.⁵¹

106. In the public media, six television programmes are broadcast in a minority language, namely one programme each in Belarusian (26 minutes/week), Polish (26 minutes/week) and Yiddish (26 minutes/day) and three programmes in Russian (two programmes of 15 minutes/day, one programme of 26 minutes/week). Furthermore, five radio programmes are broadcast in a minority language, that is in Belarusian (30 minutes/fortnightly), Polish (30 minutes/day), Russian (25 minutes/day), Ukrainian (30 minutes/week) and Yiddish/Russian (30 minutes/fortnightly). Moreover, LRT's portal provides complete news content in three minority languages (Polish, Russian and Ukrainian).⁵²

107. Private broadcasters in Lithuania also use some minority languages. Five television channels broadcast in a minority language, namely in Belarusian (one channel, 16 hours/week), Polish (two channels of 121 and 16 hours/week, respectively) and Russian (two online channels). In addition, five radio stations are broadcast in a minority language, namely in Belarusian (one station, 15 hours/week), Polish (two stations, more than 15 hours/week) and Russian (two stations, seven and six hours/week, respectively). The aforementioned public and private broadcasts are accessible throughout Lithuania (including via internet), have diverse content (e.g. news, entertainment) and target different age groups.⁵³

108. The authorities have provided financial

⁵⁰ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), para. 56.

⁵¹ See [fifth state report](#), p. 92, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁵² Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

⁵³ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

support to projects concerning media in minority languages or informing (in Lithuanian) about national minorities, for example a news publication in Belarusian, a radio show in Russian and a media project concerning the Karaim minority. In addition, a considerable number of television channels in minority languages from abroad (notably Poland and the Russian Federation) are retransmitted or available free-of-charge on satellite television. As regards print media, three newspapers are published in Polish and 13 in Russian.⁵⁴

109. During the Advisory Committee's visit, representatives of different numerically small national minorities expressed the wish to obtain a presence in the broadcast media, be it through broadcasting in their language or programming dedicated to them. Interlocutors from the Polish minority stated that the broadcast duration of programmes in Polish had been reduced in recent years and that national minority media are generally underfunded.

110. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the availability of broadcast, print and digital media for national minorities and in minority languages is essential in different respects. The possibility for persons belonging to national minorities to receive information in their language is a precondition for equal and effective participation in public, economic, social and cultural life. Minority media raise the visibility and awareness of the national minorities as well as the prestige of the minority languages as an active tool of communication in the society. These aspects also encourage persons belonging to national minorities to self-identify as such and to use the minority language in daily life. In order to reach out to the national minority as a whole, media in minority languages should cover content from various genres (e.g. local and national news, entertainment, culture) and address different generations. The regularity and duration of such broadcasts and the publication intervals of print or digital media in minority languages should be adequate to achieve the aforementioned objectives and contribute to the development of the minority language. Digital and social media offer considerable potential to make audiovisual productions and newspaper content available in minority languages at a lower cost than is incurred by traditional (including print) media and irrespective of broadcasting hours.⁵⁵

111. The Advisory Committee notes that persons belonging to national minorities in Lithuania enjoy freedom to receive and impart information in minority languages, including from abroad, and face no restrictions to the freedom to hold

opinions in conformity with Article 9(1). It further observes that persons belonging to the Polish and Russian minorities enjoy access to a variety of (especially private) television broadcasts and – to a lesser extent – radio broadcasts. A basic offer of television and radio broadcasting in their language is available to persons belonging to the Belarusian minority. The Advisory Committee welcomes the use of Yiddish on radio and television, which is commendable. However, persons belonging to the Ukrainian minority have access to only one public radio programme in their language that has a limited broadcast duration. The fact that all aforementioned broadcasts can be received in the whole country, have diverse content and address different age groups ensures that they can reach out to the respective national minorities as a whole and support the societal participation of persons belonging to them. In general, the broadcast offer in minority languages is more developed in private than in public media.

112. The creation and the use of print media by persons belonging to national minorities is not hindered in conformity with Article 9(3). However, only persons belonging to the Polish and Russian minorities have newspapers in their languages.

113. Financial support by the authorities facilitates access to the media of persons belonging to some national minorities in conformity with Article 9(4). At the same time, the Advisory Committee notes that there is no television or radio broadcasting available, nor print media published with sufficient frequency, in their languages of numerically small national minorities. Furthermore, there is a lack of locally produced content relating to these numerically small minorities. In order to avoid any discrimination in their access to the media (Article 9(1)), the Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should implement new – notably financial – measures facilitating access to the media of persons belonging to the national minorities concerned, including support for the creation and use of their own media. This would also promote tolerance and support cultural pluralism. Digital and social media constitute an additional way of ensuring access to the media also of persons belonging to numerically smaller national minorities.

114. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to take all necessary measures, including financial and legal, to ensure access to public and private broadcast and digital media as well as print media in minority languages for persons belonging to all national minorities. These measures should also include increased

⁵⁴ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 89-90, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁵⁵ See also [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), paras. 40-41; [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), para. 69.

coverage of them in mainstream media and support to them for the creation of their own media.

Use of minority languages with administrative and judicial authorities (Article 10)

115. Regarding the oral use of minority languages in relations with administrative authorities, the enforcement regulations⁵⁶ of the Law on Public Administration foresee that an oral request may be submitted in a language other than Lithuanian if that language is understood by the civil servant dealing with it. If an applicant does not speak Lithuanian and there is no civil servant in the institution who understands the language used by the applicant, an interpreter must be present and shall be invited by the applicant on her/his initiative and own cost, unless the institution decides otherwise (Clause 12).⁵⁷

116. As regards the written use of minority languages in relations with administrative authorities, Clause 13.1 of the regulations provide that a written application must be submitted in Lithuanian or have a translation into Lithuanian approved in accordance with a procedure established by the Law on Notaries. However, in accordance with Clause 15, a translation is not required if the head of the institution has made use of the right to determine other languages in which written requests may be accepted.⁵⁸ Thus far, 26⁵⁹ municipalities have decided to accept written requests in Russian, six in Polish, and two each in German and Ukrainian. Eight municipalities accept written requests in any language.⁶⁰ The local authorities of Švenčionys, which have adopted the required order with regard to Polish and Russian, confirmed during the Advisory Committee's visit that they also reply in these languages to requests received in them. Representatives of local and national authorities told the Advisory Committee that municipalities are free to decide whether they adopt an order and to which languages they apply it. Independently of this procedure, 18 municipalities have translated parts of their websites into Russian, eight each into German and Ukrainian, six into Polish and one into Latvian.

117. With regard to criminal proceedings, each detained or arrested person must be informed immediately in a language that he or she understands of the reason for the detention or arrest. The Law on Courts (Article 8(2)) guarantees that persons who do not speak the official language shall have the right to participate

in court proceedings through an interpreter. Interpretation during court proceedings is provided by employed court interpreters (mainly for Russian, Polish and German), other court employees with the required language competence or by external translation service providers (e.g. for Latvian). As statistics on the use of minority languages in court proceedings are not usually collected, the authorities have conducted a survey among courts. Its results show that in 2018 and 2019, Russian, Polish, German or – in some cases – Latvian were used in interpretation and the translation of court documents at the Lithuanian Supreme Court, Court of Appeal of Lithuania, regional courts, district courts and/or administrative courts. In police offices, a translation service is provided for e.g. German, Latvian, Polish and Russian.⁶¹

118. During the Advisory Committee's visit, representatives of the Polish minority in particular emphasised their interest in using the minority language in dealings with the authorities. Interlocutors from other national minorities showed reluctance to use their language with the authorities for fear of being seen as "disloyal" citizens of Lithuania.

119. The Advisory Committee reiterates that one of the preconditions for the preservation and intergenerational transmission of a minority language as an essential element of the identity of a national minority is that the given language remains fully functional in all areas of daily life, including the field of administration. Therefore, it is important that persons belonging to national minorities can effectively use their minority languages in relations with administrative authorities. To this effect, the authorities should take legal and practical measures enabling the use of minority languages. The recruitment of civil servants mastering the minority language, including persons belonging to the national minority concerned, is also a way of promoting minority participation in public administration.⁶²

120. The Advisory Committee considers that the authorities have not provided the conditions which would make it possible to use the minority language orally in relations with the administrative authorities in conformity with Article 10(2) of the Framework Convention. The possibility to speak a minority language in an administrative procedure should not depend on the coincidental presence of a civil servant mastering the minority language. Those who make a request to administrative authorities will in many cases be in contact with only one or a

⁵⁶ Regulations for the Consideration of Applications and Complaints and the Servicing of Persons in Public Administration Entities.

⁵⁷ See [fifth state report](#), p. 94; [fourth state report](#), pp. 64-65.

⁵⁸ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 94-95.

⁵⁹ In addition, Panevėžys region municipality is planning to allow the use of Russian.

⁶⁰ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

⁶¹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 95-96.

⁶² See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), para. 56; [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 2, Effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and public affairs](#), adopted on 27 February 2008, para. 160.

few specialised civil servants, and it may easily happen that the competent civil servant does not master the respective minority language. In such a situation, it is unlikely that the applicant would undertake the effort to arrange for the services of an interpreter and accept the costs and a loss of time in processing the request. Furthermore, the right to use the minority language in relations with administrative authorities in accordance with Article 10(2) of the Framework Convention shall be guaranteed regardless of whether the applicant speaks Lithuanian or not. Consequently, the Law on Public Administration and its enforcement regulations discourage, and in many cases prevent, the oral use of minority languages in relations with administrative authorities.

121. The Advisory Committee acknowledges that Clause 15 of the regulations enables the written use of minority languages to some extent. However, whether or not a municipality accepts written requests in minority languages depends on the head of the institution. The national authorities do not systematically encourage the municipalities concerned to adopt an order, nor do they monitor its implementation, so that the implementation of Article 10(2) of the Framework Convention is partly left to the local authorities. The lack of a structured approach to the adoption of such orders is reflected in inconsistent implementation. For example, the possibility to submit written requests in Russian exists in 34 of Lithuania's 60 municipalities explicitly or implicitly, but no municipality has explicitly allowed written requests in Belarusian or Latvian. The submission of written requests in German and Polish, which is permitted in some municipalities, has not yet been allowed in several municipalities that are traditionally inhabited by Germans or Poles and have an important role for these minorities.⁶³ The possibility to use Romani in relations with administrative authorities – at least orally in Vilnius city municipality – has not yet been allowed either. Some municipalities have allowed the use of certain local minority languages, but not of others, and several municipalities which use minority languages on their websites do not allow written requests in the same languages.

122. Moreover, in most municipalities having allowed the submission of written requests in minority languages, this possibility is not on a regular basis advertised vis-à-vis persons belonging to national minorities, e.g. through visible notices on municipal websites. As a result, many persons belonging to national minorities are unaware of the possibility to use their language or at least not encouraged to do so. Such encouragement is particularly needed as many persons belonging to national minorities refrain from using their language with administrative authorities

in order not to be perceived as “disloyal” to Lithuania.

123. The Advisory Committee also notes that Article 10(2) of the Framework Convention applies in “areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers”. Consequently, in areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally, the right to use the minority language with administrative authorities and to receive a reply in this language must not be based on whether persons belonging to a national minority make up a certain percentage of the population (see Article 4, para. 50). Moreover, Article 10(2) applies to “the administrative authorities” located in or responsible for the area concerned, i.e. to all administrative authorities and their public services, not only to the local administrative authorities.

124. The Advisory Committee also emphasises that ensuring the “conditions which would make it possible to use the minority language” in relations with the administrative authorities (Article 10(2)) requires, in addition to the creation of a legal basis and the monitoring of its application, practical measures such as the recruitment and mobility of civil servants who speak minority languages, linguistic training of civil servants and capacity to translate official documents and forms.

125. As regards criminal proceedings in accordance with Article 10(3) of the Framework Convention, persons belonging to national minorities enjoy the right to be informed promptly in a language which they understand of the reasons for the arrest and to participate in court proceedings with the assistance of an interpreter. The Advisory Committee welcomes that minority languages have also been used in interpretation and translation before various courts in criminal and other proceedings.

126. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to provide for a legal basis and take various practical measures ensuring the right to use minority languages orally and in writing in relations with the administrative authorities and to monitor implementation of these measures. To this effect, the authorities should ensure that, in the areas where persons belonging to national minorities live traditionally, this right is not dependent on whether they make up a certain percentage of the local population. This right should also be guaranteed regardless of whether the applicant speaks Lithuanian and persons belonging to national minorities should be encouraged to invoke it.

Personal names in minority languages (Article 11)

⁶³ Regarding the Polish minority: e.g. Šalčininkai, Vilnius region municipality, Visaginas; regarding the German minority: e.g. Klaipėda city and region municipality, Neringa, Šilutė, Kaunas, Vilnius.

127. The Law on the Spelling of a Person's Name and Surname in Documents came into effect in 2022. According to its Article 3(3), citizens and their children who are of non-Lithuanian ethnicity, including persons belonging to national minorities, are permitted to use letters of the Latin script (without diacritics of the minority language concerned) for their names and surnames (including the letters w, q, x, which do not exist in Lithuanian). The procedures for recording names as outlined in the "Rules for Writing a Person's Name and Surname in Personal Identity and Other Documents" allow for these names to be written in the original form according to the rules of spelling and composition of the minority language with letters of the Latin alphabet, but without diacritics. Since the entry into force of the law, the Ministry of Justice has issued permits to change names and surnames for persons belonging to national minorities, including the minister herself.⁶⁴

128. During the Advisory Committee's visit, representatives of the Polish minority pointed out that the change of legislation only partly solves the issue of spelling of personal names in their language since diacritics such as "ı" or "z" can still not be used. Representatives of several national minorities noted that changing the spelling of names requires the person concerned to update all personal documents and pointed out that the related administrative fees discourage people from requesting such name changes.

129. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the right to adopt and effectively use one's personal name in a minority language is closely linked to personal identity, which makes it important that states parties ensure that individuals encounter no obstacles to the use and recognition of their names in their own language. Authorities may require that personal identity documents contain a phonetic transcription of the personal name into the official script it uses a foreign alphabet. The transcription should be as accurate as possible and should not be disconnected from the essential elements of the minority language, including its alphabet. New technologies facilitate the use of diacritic signs and alphabets of national minority languages. States are therefore encouraged to make use of such technical opportunities and consider the issuance of documents also in a minority language.⁶⁵

130. The Advisory Committee appreciates that the government and parliament have addressed the long-standing issue of correct spelling of personal names in minority languages. At the same time, the Advisory Committee finds that the 2022 Law on the Spelling of a Person's Name

and Surname in Documents does not entirely solve the shortcomings. It needs to be borne in mind that the right of every person belonging to a national minority to adopt and use his or her surname and first name(s) in the minority language, as foreseen in Article 11(1) of the Framework Convention, comprises the alphabet of the respective language, including all diacritics, as an essential element of that language. However, the law only (partly) allows to use letters of the Latin script when recording names in personal identity and other documents. The exclusion of certain diacritics for the reason that they do not also exist in Lithuanian links the spelling of a minority language to that of Lithuanian, not taking into account that the minority language is a language in its own right. In practical terms, the exclusion of diacritics results in the misspelling and mispronunciation of names in minority languages. The Advisory Committee also observes that modern text processing software allows the use of diacritics.

131. Several minority languages use non-Latin scripts such as the Cyrillic script. The Advisory Committee understands that for practical reasons, names in non-Latin script also need to be transcribed into the Latin script. However, the Advisory Committee considers that in such cases the personal names could appear in the documents both in the script of the minority language and in a phonetic transcription into the Latin script used in Lithuanian.

132. The Advisory Committee further notes that requests to adopt and use personal names in accordance with the spelling of minority languages aim to restore the authentic and correct spelling of names. Taking this aspect into consideration, persons belonging to national minorities should be exempted from administrative fees related to the modification of personal identity and other documents. An exemption would not only be fair in view of the difficulties that those concerned have encountered for many years due to the system previously applied concerning their names, but also be essential to encourage persons belonging to national minorities to avail themselves of their right.

133. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to amend the legislation to allow for the use of all diacritics in the languages of national minorities in the spelling of a person's first name and surname in personal identity and other documents. The authorities should also ensure that the procedures and costs related to

⁶⁴ See [Lithuania's justice minister changes her name under new law allowing Polish spelling](#), Lithuanian National Radio and Television news portal, 25 May 2022.

⁶⁵ See *inter alia* the [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), para. 62.

changing these names are such that they do not discourage requests for name changes.

134. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to also use first names and surnames in non-Latin scripts in personal identity and other documents, in conjunction with a phonetic transcription in Lithuanian.

Use of minority languages in private signs and topographical indications (Article 11)

135. The legal framework pertaining to private information in minority languages visible to the public has not changed.⁶⁶ The Law on the State Language foresees that “public signs shall be in the state language” (Article 17) and that “[n]ames of organisations of ethnic communities [and] their informational signs may be rendered in other languages along with the state language” (Article 18). At the same time, it provides that “[o]ther laws [...] shall guarantee the right of persons belonging to ethnic communities to foster their language, culture and customs” (Article 1).⁶⁷ However, a law creating a basis for the implementation of Article 11(2) of the Framework Convention has not yet been adopted. During its visit to Lithuania, the Advisory Committee noted that minority languages lack public visibility even in areas where a significant part of the population uses the respective language. As far as topographical indications are concerned, the Law on the State Language provides that they “shall be written in the state language” (Article 14). Unlike in the case of private inscriptions, the law makes no exception for minority languages.

136. According to the authorities, “[s]treet and institution names are elements of management and administration, not a matter of cultural heritage; therefore, such names should be provided only in the state language”.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding this policy, there is a practice, albeit very limited, of displaying topographical indications in minority languages. The Vilnius city municipality has installed an additional street name sign in, *inter alia*, German, Karaim, Latvian, Polish, Russian, Tatar and Yiddish in one street each. Nevertheless, the national authorities stress that these names are “not equated with the official street names” and only appear on “decorative signs”.⁶⁹ The Vilnius city municipality, in cooperation with the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences and others, has also published a website on which, where applicable, the traditional name of each street in a minority language is listed (Polish, Yiddish, German) and historical city maps with such names (mostly in Polish) are shown. Furthermore, in several municipalities the place name in the local minority language is used on the municipal websites (e.g.

the Polish name Świąciany in Švenčionys) and in touristic signage (e.g. the German name Memel in Klaipėda and the Yiddish name Vilna in Vilnius).

137. During the Advisory Committee’s visit, representatives of national minorities expressed interest in displaying topographical indications in their minority language, but stated that the conditions for such use are currently no met. Representatives of some national minorities have refrained from formally demanding this due to a lack of a legal basis and for fear of being perceived as “troublemakers”. In its exchanges with representatives of local authorities, the Advisory Committee observed a lack of awareness of the obligations ensuing from the Framework Convention with regard to the provision of topographical indications in minority languages.

138. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the linguistic landscape is characterised to a considerable extent by private information (e.g. commercial signage). Consequently, the presence of minority languages in private information is of utmost importance to raise the visibility and awareness of the national minorities as well as the prestige of the minority language as an active tool of communication in the society. Such a presence also encourages persons belonging to national minorities to self-identify as such and to use the minority language in daily life. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee reiterates that topographical indications in minority languages contribute to the maintenance of the local linguistic and cultural heritage and raise awareness of local national minorities, conveying the message that a given territory is shared in harmony by different ethnic groups. If such indications depend on a threshold, the latter must not constitute a disproportionate obstacle with respect to certain minority languages, take due account of the specific conditions and consider the demographic structure of the area in question over a certain period.⁷⁰

139. The Advisory Committee regrets that Lithuania has not implemented the recommendation of the previous monitoring cycle to bring without delay the legislative framework regarding the use of minority languages in private signs and topographical indications in line with Articles 11(2) and 11(3) of the Framework Convention. In the absence of such a legal basis, the restrictive provisions of the Law on the State Language limit the use of minority languages in these fields.

140. The Advisory Committee considers that limiting private information in minority languages

⁶⁶ See [fifth state report](#), p. 98.

⁶⁷ Official translation into English.

⁶⁸ [Fifth state report](#), p. 39.

⁶⁹ [Fifth state report](#), p. 39.

⁷⁰ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), paras. 65-67.

to the names of minority organisations and their informational signs, as foreseen by the Law on the State Language, does not only constitute a considerable restriction in terms of quantity and visibility, but also conveys the message that the use of minority languages is a matter for persons belonging to the national minorities alone rather than for society as a whole. The Advisory Committee therefore considers that the authorities should adopt legislation creating the right for persons belonging to national minorities to display in his or her minority language signs, inscriptions and other information of a private nature visible to the public.

141. As regards topographical indications, the Advisory Committee stresses that topographical names in minority languages are part of the languages and the cultural heritage of the national minorities which Lithuania has “undertake[n] [...] to preserve” in accordance with Article 5(1) of the Framework Convention. In some municipalities, they are the original place names and therefore clearly part of the local cultural heritage.

142. The Advisory Committee considers that there is a need, in co-operation with the representatives of the national minorities, to identify for each national minority the areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to this national minority, taking into account the individual situation of the national minority and the demographic structure of the area over a longer period than the census intervals. In these areas, topographical indications should be displayed in the respective minority language on a permanent basis. In order to ensure mutual acceptance, the list of topographical names need to be compiled on the basis of independent research by institutions designated in co-operation with representatives of the national minorities. The process of applying Article 11(3) of the Framework Convention is to be co-ordinated by the national authorities and not left to the initiative of individual local authorities to ensure a coherent approach and early implementation of this provision.

143. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to establish a legal basis for the display of topographical indications also in minority languages and to co-ordinate the process of applying Article 11(3) of the Framework Convention at the national level. In doing so, the authorities should identify for each national minority the areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to

that national minority, taking into account the individual situation of the national minority and the demographic structure of the area over a longer period than the census intervals, and display topographical indications in the respective minority language in these areas.

144. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to adopt legislation recognising the right to display in a minority language signs, inscriptions and other information of a private nature visible to the public.

Intercultural education and knowledge about national minorities (Article 12)

145. In order to improve the knowledge in society about the cultures, histories and religions of national minorities, the general education curricula in formal education were updated in 2019 and 2020. The general programme of history pays special attention to the cultural heritage of the Lithuanian Jews and achievements of famous persons belonging to this minority. Teaching content includes the Holocaust (fifth grade), the spread of Lithuanian Jewish culture in the world (fifth grade), Jewish culture (seventh grade) and antisemitism (tenth grade). Furthermore, the programme now devotes explicit attention to the Roma in Lithuania, but in more general terms. The diversity of faiths in Lithuania and the specifics of places of ritual rites⁷¹ (sixth grade) as well as the influence of Islam on Europe (eighth grade) are equally covered. Pupils also learn about the heritage of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) in the ninth grade.⁷²

146. In non-formal education, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports provides financial support to the educational project “Circle of Cultures” in which pupils explore the heritage of national minorities such as Jews, Karaims, Roma and Ukrainians.⁷³

147. In general education, pupils learn two foreign languages, some of which are languages of national minorities. German can be chosen as a first “foreign” language in primary education (taught until the end of basic education, i.e. the twelfth grade in secondary school or the fourth grade in high school, for three lessons per week). German, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian are the minority languages which can be chosen as a second “foreign” language in the sixth grade (taught until the twelfth grade or the fourth grade in high school for two lessons per week).⁷⁴ Other minority languages can be learned in higher

⁷¹ Faiths: Catholicism, Islam, Judaism, Karaism, Old Believers, Orthodoxy, Protestantism; places of ritual rites: e.g. German church, Karaim kenesa, mosque, synagogue; information provided by the authorities.

⁷² See [fifth state report](#), p. 42, and additional information provided by the authorities.

⁷³ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

⁷⁴ Information provided by the authorities in their replies to the Advisory Committee's questionnaire, 9 November 2023.

education.

148. According to the authorities, teaching content concerning national minorities is integrated into teacher training and teaching materials. In co-operation with the Council of Europe and the Roma Community Centre, the authorities have also organised training encouraging the organisation of non-formal educational activities concerning Roma.⁷⁵

149. As regards research, the Department of National Minorities has an advisory body (Academic Council) comprising representatives of higher education institutions and, among others, experts working in the field of national minorities. Its purpose is to strengthen co-operation with the academic community in the field of national minorities and to advise the department on research related to the national minority policy. The authorities also encourage students of higher education institutions to choose topics related to national minorities for their research. This is also the purpose of an annual award granted by the authorities for the best academic work by a graduate on national minorities. Furthermore, the authorities co-operate with Lithuanian national libraries concerning research on the heritage of national minorities. Research on national minorities has also been carried out by the Lithuanian Institute of History (on Jews and Poles) and the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature (on Belarusians, Jews and Russians).⁷⁶

150. As part of the cultural education of children and youth, the “Cultural Passport” facilitates access to cultural and artistic services. It includes services dedicated to the cultures, histories and traditions of national minorities (e.g. Germans, Jews, Karaims, Poles, Tatars). For example, in 2023, about 20 services were implemented concerning Jewish culture. National minority associations and institutions are involved in the implementation of the programme.⁷⁷

151. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the way national minorities are protected is a reflection of the degree of knowledge about and appreciation for them in the majority population. Awareness raising among the majority population about the national minorities is therefore of utmost importance. In mainstream education (mainly schools also attended by pupils from the majority population), this requires that curricula, teacher training and educational (learning and teaching) materials provide basic, but concrete information about all national minorities, the basics of their histories and cultures, examples of their past and present contributions to the society and information about their present situation.

Teaching basic information about national minorities to pupils belonging to the majority population will enhance intercultural dialogue (see Article 6 above).⁷⁸

152. The Advisory Committee welcomes that teaching content in general education covers the religions of the national minorities as well as that the general programme of history provides thorough information about the culture and history of the Jewish minority at several grades and covers the Roma minority. At the same time, the Advisory Committee notes that the cultures and histories of other national minorities, including those that have a long historical presence in the country, are not reflected to the same extent. Against this background, the Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should ensure that curricula, teacher training and educational materials in general education provide basic, but concrete information about the histories, cultures and present situation of all national minorities, including in subjects other than history. Detailed information about these topics should be provided in educational institutions attended by pupils belonging to national minorities and in the mainstream schools of the areas where those national minorities live. The Advisory Committee also considers that the authorities should include such information in the curricula, teacher training and educational materials for the teaching of a minority language as a “foreign” language. In this context, literature of writers belonging to the respective national minority and media in Lithuania in this language could be used or classroom activities with the youth association of the national minority be organised.

153. The Advisory Committee appreciates that the authorities have included the cultural heritage of some national minorities in activities in non-formal education. In line with its observations concerning general education above, it considers that the authorities should take steps ensuring that programmes, teacher training and educational materials used in non-formal education provide information about all national minorities.

154. The Advisory Committee notes that the authorities support research on national minorities both by seeking policy advice (Academic Council) and by promoting young talent and considers that this comprehensive approach can support the implementation of all aspects of Articles 12(1) and 12(2), including the further development of curricula, educational materials and teacher training with regard to information about all national minorities.

⁷⁵ See [fifth state report](#), p. 34.

⁷⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 6-7, 99-101.

⁷⁷ See [fifth state report](#), p. 116, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁷⁸ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\), revising and replacing Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2006\)](#), adopted on 31 May 2024, paras. 26, 27.

Furthermore, the Advisory Committee is pleased to note that the heritage of national minorities is highlighted in cultural education of children and youth.

155. The Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that curricula, teacher training and educational materials in general education provide concrete information about the histories and cultures of all national minorities and extend this information to other areas of the curriculum such as foreign language teaching. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee calls on the authorities to ensure that detailed information about these topics is provided in educational institutions attended by pupils belonging to national minorities and in the mainstream schools of the areas where those national minorities live.

Access of Roma to education (Article 12)

156. In the framework of projects implemented by national and local authorities, the attendance of Roma children in general education schools has been supported by school social pedagogues and social workers. In Vilnius, the Roma Community Centre holds “integration” and “socialisation” classes for school-age children and a daycare centre provides support in learning everyday skills. The local authorities also urged Roma parents who received social housing to ensure their children’s school attendance. In addition, the authorities have organised training on “Peculiarities of Roma Children’s Education at School” for teachers and representatives of local authorities. Adult Roma attend schools for adult education where primary, basic and secondary education can be acquired.⁷⁹

157. In 2020, the survey “Situation of Roma Persons 2020” was conducted according to the criteria for assessing progress provided for in the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020. The survey had been commissioned by the national authorities and was a follow-up to a 2015 survey on Roma. It found that, compared to 2015, more Roma children were attending pre-school and pre-primary education institutions, Roma were more evenly distributed by classes in general education schools, and the number of Roma pupils over 16 years was increasing. In the youngest group (10-19 years), the share of Roma children who had not completed primary education or were still in primary school had decreased (from 36% in 2015 to 28% in 2020). In the youth group (20-29 years), the number of illiterate persons and those without primary education had decreased (from 11% to 4%) and the number of persons with basic education (from 22% to 30%) and secondary education (from 8% to 18 %) increased.⁸⁰ In Vilnius, the local 2020 Integration Programme for

Roma People has also resulted into increased attendance in schools.⁸¹

158. According to a report by the European Commission, non-governmental organisations working with the Roma minority highlight instances of invisible segregation when different rules are applied when Roma children stop attending school. Some schools reportedly transfer Roma children to a higher grade without their actual attendance. There are also reports about a form of segregation in the cities of Naujoji Akmenė, Joniškis and Klaipėda where the majority of Roma children are sent to “special schools” for children with special educational needs or children with disabilities. According to the schools, this is done in accordance with the decisions of parents themselves, as they believe their children will receive more attention from teachers and experience less bullying. It has also been criticised that the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society for 2022-2023 has no budget allocated for educational measures.⁸² During the Advisory Committee’s visit, representatives of Roma institutions pointed out that hardly any Roma are enrolled at university.

159. The Advisory Committee reiterates that ensuring equal opportunities for access to quality education at all levels for persons belonging to national minorities as enshrined in Article 12(3) of the Framework Convention requires states to act resolutely across different but interlinked areas to ensure this right is upheld in practice: in monitoring school enrolment and attendance; in ensuring access to minority language education; in removing physical barriers to school attendance, such as a lack of schools in certain areas or no transportation; in acting to improve the confidence of parents and students in the education system; in monitoring school attainment, literacy, completion of studies, grades, gender disparities, access to higher education and employment.

160. The Advisory Committee welcomes that the authorities have taken measures to enhance the educational opportunities for Roma children, facilitating their attendance and inclusion within the education system, and for adult Roma. It appreciates the related co-operation of national and local authorities and the involvement of parents and teachers. Access to pre-school and pre-primary education institutions has improved, resulting in a decline in the number of Roma children without primary education and illiterate individuals, while witnessing an increase in those obtaining basic and secondary education. Notwithstanding these improvements, the attainment of primary, secondary and higher

⁷⁹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 6, 26-29, 31, 59-62.

⁸⁰ No data available for vocational education.

⁸¹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 64-65.

⁸² See European Commission, [European Equality Law Network, Lithuania- Country on Non-discrimination](#), 2023, pp. 45-46.

education remains an insurmountable obstacle for most Roma pupils and students. Enrolment in primary and secondary schools is still very low compared to the general population, and forms of segregation appear to persist in some schools. Consequently, there is a need to intensify the existing measures, evaluate their effectiveness and adjust them accordingly in the short and medium term. The Advisory Committee also considers that the authorities should consult representatives of the Roma minority about the reported enrolment of Roma children in special schools and, as appropriate, address this issue.

161. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to intensify their efforts in promoting inclusive and quality education of Roma children at all stages by resolutely addressing absenteeism and segregation, providing the funding required to further improve educational outcomes and taking measures to increase the share of young Roma attending higher education.

Teaching in and of minority languages (Article 14)

162. In accordance with the Law on Education (Article 30(2)), schools of general education and non-formal education provide opportunities for pupils belonging to national minorities to foster their national, ethnic and linguistic identity as well as to learn their mother tongue, history and culture. In 2021, an amendment to Article 30 of the Law on Education entered into force which provides that the pre-school and pre-primary education institutions of national minorities provide at least five hours of education per week in Lithuanian in order to improve the children's knowledge of the official language.⁸³ An order by the Minister for Education, Science and Sport regulates the teaching in and of Belarusian, German, Polish and Russian in primary, basic and secondary education in the period 2023-2025.⁸⁴

163. In the school year 2023/2024, education in minority languages at pre-school, pre-primary, primary, basic and secondary levels was provided in Belarusian (one school), German (one school), Polish (47 schools) and Russian (27 schools). Minority languages are not taught in vocational education. Pre-school education is organised bilingually (no less than four hours per week in the minority language and no less than five hours in Lithuanian). At the subsequent stages of education,⁸⁵ the subject Lithuanian and

topics related to Lithuania (in the subjects History, Geography and Civic Education, Knowledge of the World) are taught in Lithuanian. The language of instruction of the other subjects is in principle the minority language. However, the number of subjects taught in the minority language depends on each school administration. Bilingual education in Polish or Russian with Lithuanian or combining minority languages (Russian, Polish) as well as trilingual education (Lithuanian, Russian, Polish) is also organised at some schools. Teaching of Hebrew and Yiddish is provided at one school. Other minority languages are taught at non-formal education institutions (Sunday schools) established by national minorities.⁸⁶

164. In higher education, at the choice of the applicant, the grades of the maturity examinations in minority languages (Belarusian, German, Polish, Russian) are included in the calculation of the entrance score for university admission. Opportunities for studying Polish, or in Polish, exist in Vilnius (Polish Studies Centre at the Vilnius University; Polish Language and Culture Centre at Vytautas Magnus University; branch of the Faculty of Economics and Informatics of the University of Białystok/Poland, co-funded by Lithuania). At the European Humanities University in Vilnius, studies are conducted in Russian, Belarusian and German. Other minority languages can be studied in higher education.⁸⁷

165. In 2022 and 2023, the authorities organised further training for teachers teaching in Polish and Russian. Moreover, they annually organise further training for teachers of Sunday schools. The Macierz Szkolna Society, in co-operation with educational institutions and authorities, monitors the situation of education for persons affiliating with the Polish minority (e.g. availability of teachers and educational materials) and makes proposals.⁸⁸

166. During the Advisory Committee's visit, representatives of several national minorities expressed interest in extending the provision of education in minority languages, including at pre-school level. However, interlocutors from the Tatar minority stated that there is no demand for reviving Tatar, which is no longer a living language in Lithuania, through education. Representatives of the Polish minority confirmed that pupils belonging to this minority do not usually experience difficulties in learning

⁸³ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 43-44.

⁸⁴ Order on approval of the general educational plans for the primary, basic and secondary education programmes for the school years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, 24 April 2023; see also the Primary and Basic Education General Curriculum, No. ISAK-2433 approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 26 August 2008 and the General Secondary Education Curriculum (Part VI), No. V-269, approved by the Order of the Minister of Education, Science and Sport of 21 February 2011.

⁸⁵ Primary education (grades one to four), basic education (grades five to ten), high school (grades nine to twelve), secondary education (grades eleven to twelve). Vocational education is organised at grades eight to twelve.

⁸⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 106-109, and additional information provided by the authorities. Vocational education is organised at grades eight to twelve.

⁸⁷ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 44, 108, 109, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁸⁸ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 11, 43, 104-105, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

Lithuanian and obtain good results in the subject Lithuanian, at times even exceeding the national average.

167. The Advisory Committee reiterates that one of the purposes of minority language education is to maintain or lead to a degree of fluency and literacy which enables the learner to use the language in public and private life and transmit it to the next generation. In order to achieve this objective, minority languages should be included in the public school system, including languages of numerically smaller minorities. Furthermore, in a given geographical area, continuity in access to teaching in and of minority languages at all levels of education, from pre-school to higher and adult education, must be ensured. Given that pre-school is the first level of regular education, the Advisory Committee underlines the importance of pre-school education for learning a minority language, especially when that language is not the main one used in the family. The educational model (teaching in or of the language) must be chosen in such a way that it ensures proficiency in the minority language, taking into account that languages that are not regularly used in families or in public need to be used during a higher number of school hours. It is essential that the authorities do not take a purely passive approach, but actively encourage the demand for education in a minority language through awareness-raising among parents and young people. In addition, teacher training and the preparation of modern educational materials are essential for the provision of minority language education.⁸⁹

168. The Advisory Committee notes that the Law on Education provides for the right of every person belonging to a national minority to learn his or her minority language, as required by Article 14(1) of the Framework Convention. As regards the availability of adequate opportunities for teaching in or of minority languages (Article 14(2)), the Advisory Committee appreciates that education in Polish and Russian continues to be provided at all stages of education and that local continuity exists between the different stages, except for vocational education. However, education in Belarusian and German is only offered at one school each and not yet available in several municipalities inhabited by persons belonging to these national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers.⁹⁰ The Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should provide teaching in or of minority languages also in vocational and continuing education. The fact that some minority languages are needed in the cross-border economy constitutes an additional advantage for introducing such teaching.

169. The Advisory Committee welcomes that Hebrew and Yiddish are taught in general education. However, this is not the case of Karaim and Romani. The Advisory Committee considers that the authorities should consult representatives of the Karaim minority as to whether teaching of Karaim could be made available in general education in Trakai, which is inhabited traditionally by persons belonging to this minority. The Advisory Committee further considers that the authorities should consult representatives of the Roma minority to ascertain whether there is demand for the introduction of teaching of Romani in general education in Vilnius city municipality, where most persons belonging to the Roma minority live.

170. Persons belonging to the other national minorities do not inhabit particular areas of Lithuania traditionally or in substantial numbers, as required by Article 14(2). Nevertheless, they may learn their language in higher education and at non-formal education institutions (Sunday schools). The Advisory Committee appreciates the support provided by the authorities to Sunday schools, including further training of their teachers, which contributes to ensuring quality education within Sunday schools.

171. As far as the share of the minority language in education at national minority schools is concerned, the 2021 amendment to the Law on Education has made it impossible to organise pre-school education entirely in a minority language. However, the Advisory Committee notes that not all children belonging to national minorities are in need of special support in learning Lithuanian. On the contrary, children belonging to national minorities affected by linguistic assimilation would rather benefit from pre-school education in the minority language to acquire a degree of fluency in this language that they cannot acquire in their families. The Advisory Committee therefore considers that parents should be given the opportunity to choose between pre-school education in a minority language or bilingual education (with five hours per week in Lithuanian), in light of the child's linguistic needs and competences. The provision of pre-school education in minority languages would be "without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language" in conformity with Article 14(3), since Lithuanian is used as a medium of instruction at later stages of education.

172. Unlike at pre-school level, the minimum number of weekly hours to be taught in the minority language is not defined at the subsequent stages of education. In the view of the Advisory Committee, the fact that each school

⁸⁹ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3](#), paras. 71, 73-75; [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2024\), revising and replacing Thematic Commentary No. 1 \(2006\)](#), paras. 87, 96, 102, 103, 108, 117; [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 4](#), para. 60.

⁹⁰ In the case of Belarusian, this concerns Vilnius District Municipality, in the case of German Šilutė, Neringa, Klaipėda region municipality, Vilnius and Kaunas.

administration can determine the share of the minority language may reduce the use of that language as a medium of instruction, especially since many topics in the subjects History, Geography and Civic Education, and Knowledge of the World are related to Lithuania and must be taught in Lithuanian. The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that at the schools concerned, the use of the minority language as the main medium of instruction is ensured and supervised by the authorities.

173. In this context, the Advisory Committee welcomes the co-operation of the authorities with the Macierz Szkolna Society in monitoring the situation of Polish-language education. In light of this example, the authorities could consider establishing an independent supervisory body responsible for monitoring the effectiveness and quality of teaching in and of all minority languages.

174. The learning of Lithuanian and the teaching in this language is obligatory in general education and is effective. With the partial exception of Roma children, pupils belonging to national minorities acquire a competence in Lithuanian comparable to that of pupils belonging to the majority population and face no linguistic barriers in access to higher education or participation in the labour market or in other fields.

175. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities have access to pre-school education in their minority language as well as to primary, basic and secondary education with the minority language as the main medium of instruction.

176. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to extend the offer of education in Belarusian and German in the areas inhabited by persons belonging to the Belarusian and German minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, ensuring local continuity from pre-school to secondary education. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities, in co-operation with representatives of the Karaim and Roma minorities, to ascertain whether there is demand for introducing the teaching of Karaim and Romani in general education.

Effective participation in public affairs and decision-making processes (Article 15)

177. As far as the participation of persons affiliating with national minorities in national decision-making processes is concerned, the National Communities Board acts as an advisory body under the Department of National Minorities representing national minorities in the co-ordination of the policy concerning them.

Representatives of national minorities have been involved and consulted in the preparation of the Draft Law on National Minorities (see Article 4). The National Minorities Commission approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport comprises minority language teachers, researchers, representatives of schools, municipalities, associations and the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson. At present, the Belarusian, Greek, Jewish, Polish, Roma and Russian minorities are represented in the commission. Furthermore, the Roma minority was represented in the Inter-Institutional Working Group monitoring the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2015-2020. In addition, the post of Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Minorities has already been held by persons belonging to national minorities.⁹¹

178. At the level of municipalities, the Klaipėda City National Minorities Board and the Visaginas Municipality National Minorities Board under the respective local councils advise the municipalities in formulating the national minority policy and represent the interests of the national minorities. Each year, the national authorities grant an award to a municipality or an institution for special attention to its national minorities. Awards were granted to the municipalities of Zarasai (2022, concerning action for the Old Believers religious community), Telšiai (2021; Jewish minority), Jurbarkas (2020; Jewish minority), Šilutė (2019; German and Jewish minorities) and Kretinga (2018; Jewish minority).⁹²

179. The authorities support capacity building of national minority associations by conducting regular training on project management and through cultural centres of national minorities (public legal entities), which provide premises and advice to associations. The authorities have also organised, in co-operation with the Roma Community Centre, training for Roma on how to act as mediators between the Roma and society.⁹³

180. The Advisory Committee reiterates that in addition to national structures, local consultative mechanisms have proved to be a useful additional channel for the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in decision-making, especially in areas of competencies where decision-making powers have been decentralised.⁹⁴

181. The Advisory Committee welcomes that national minorities are represented at national level through an inclusive body, the National Communities Board, and have been involved in important matters concerning them, notably the preparation of the Draft Law on National

⁹¹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 8-9, 30-31, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁹² See [fifth state report](#), pp. 9, 128-129, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁹³ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 34, 69-70, 111.

⁹⁴ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 2](#), para. 115.

Minorities. However, during its visit, the Advisory Committee got the impression from its interlocutors that this body lacks effective influence on decision-making concerning national minority policy. The Advisory Committee believes that there is a need to strengthen the role of the National Communities Board in order for it to realise its potential.

182. At the level of local authorities, however, comparable consultative bodies are lacking in a considerable number of municipalities inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities. The Advisory Committee considers that the national authorities should approach respective municipalities and encourage them to set up such consultation mechanisms. For this purpose, the Advisory Committee finds it useful that the national authorities award municipalities that have taken commendable action for the benefit of national minorities, as such awards encourage local authorities to further develop their policy on the protection of national minorities.

183. The Advisory Committee considers the steps taken by the authorities to build capacity of national minority associations as important, including for the implementation of the Framework Convention. This is in the interest also of the authorities themselves in the context of their co-operation with these associations in the National Communities Board and similar bodies. The Advisory Committee considers that the national authorities should continue these measures, including by providing institutional support (operation and staff) to the umbrella associations of national minorities.

184. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to strengthen the role of the National Communities Board, and additionally to support municipalities to set up consultative mechanisms, with a view to enabling the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities, including numerically small ones, in decision-making processes concerning them.

Effective participation of Roma in social and economic life (Article 15)

Housing

185. With regard to the participation of Roma in social life, the survey “Situation of Roma Persons 2020” concluded that the housing conditions for Roma have improved, with a decrease in the number of people with problems in housing (from 72% in 2015 to 55% in 2020) and an increase in the share of people able to heat their homes sufficiently (from 48% to 75%). There has also been a decrease in the number of Roma households that have failed to pay utility bills two or more times due to a lack of money (from 58%

to 34%). Housing conditions of Roma have also improved in accordance with data of the 2021 census. Of Roma households, almost 87% have a bath, hot water and toilets, 93% have central heating and 100% have electricity.⁹⁵

186. The Vilnius city municipality, where a considerable number of Roma in Lithuania live, has implemented the “Vilnius (Kirtimai) Roma Settlement Integration into Society Programme for 2016-2019”. In its framework, Roma families have been supported in renting housing and exercising their right to compensation for part of the rent. In turn, Roma who received social housing were urged to pay their social housing rent and utilities on time. These measures have enabled Roma to leave the irregular settlement in Kirtimai. According to the local and national authorities, the settlement was dissolved as a result of these measures. In 2019, the Vilnius city municipality and the Lithuanian Roma Community signed a co-operation agreement on the inclusion of Roma into local society.⁹⁶

187. On the other hand, according to Roma organisations, in the proximity of the former Kirtimai settlement, several Roma families still live in conditions similar to Kirtimai. In addition, the Advisory Committee has been informed that on a few occasions landlords refused to rent their accommodation to Roma. This refusal had implications, as people without a declared place of residence cannot apply for a place in kindergarten or school, child benefit or other social benefits and services.⁹⁷

188. The Advisory Committee reiterates that states parties must remove barriers which prevent persons belonging to national minorities from having equal access to public services such as social housing.⁹⁸

189. The Advisory Committee therefore welcomes the steps taken by the authorities to dissolve the irregular Roma settlement in Kirtimai and to enhance the housing conditions of Roma while promoting their inclusion in society. At the same time, the Advisory Committee notes that the issue of Roma living in conditions of irregular settlements does not seem to have been completely solved in the proximity of Kirtimai. Moreover, the main obstacles for Roma to enter the private housing market are linked to their perception by the majority population. Without a shift in societal attitudes and decisive action to combat anti-Roma attitudes, the limited access of Roma will continue despite the above-mentioned efforts.

Healthcare

190. With respect to the access of Roma to healthcare, according to the survey “Situation of

⁹⁵ See [fifth state report](#), p. 66, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

⁹⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 31, 59-62, 61.

⁹⁷ See European Commission, [European Equality Law Network, Lithuania- Country on Non-discrimination](#), 2023 p. 49.

⁹⁸ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 2](#), para. 26.

Roma Persons 2020”, the subjective assessment of one’s health amongst persons belonging to the Roma minority has improved in the age group of up to 44 years while there has been an increase in the number of Roma aged 45 and older who rated their health as poor and very poor. Compared to the indicators of the entire population of Lithuania, there are more people among Roma who negatively assess their health, especially in the working-age and older age groups. According to data of the 2021 census, 96% of Roma are covered by compulsory health insurance. Social workers have facilitated visits to health care institutions. A study conducted by the Centre for Communicable Diseases and AIDS in 2019 found that Roma children are insufficiently vaccinated and that their vaccination coverage is significantly lower than among all the children in the country. Moreover, the national authorities have organised training for Roma and persons working with Roma on drug prevention.⁹⁹

191. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has expressed concern about the limited access to basic health services, including sexual and reproductive health services and modern contraceptives, for Roma girls and women, despite the existing compulsory health insurance system.¹⁰⁰

192. The Advisory Committee reiterates that difficulties in the access to healthcare have a negative impact on the participation of persons belonging to national minorities in socio-economic life. Women and girls belonging to the Roma minority with fewer facilities providing sexual and reproductive healthcare may be disproportionately impacted by this additional barrier in accessing health care.¹⁰¹

193. The Advisory Committee welcomes the efforts of the authorities to improve the access of Roma to healthcare, including expanding compulsory health insurance coverage. However, despite improvements, the Advisory Committee remains generally concerned about the health status of persons belonging to the Roma minority, particularly women and girls. The Advisory Committee also draws the attention of the authorities to the recent Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to the member States on equality for Roma and Traveller women and girls, which contains guidelines to address inequalities regarding healthcare and sexual and reproductive rights.¹⁰²

Employment

194. With regard to the participation of Roma in economic life, the authorities have implemented the project "Let's work together with the Roma - new job opportunities" (2016-2023) to support the employment and empowerment of Roma, especially the youth. The project has offered an extensive self-esteem raising programme for Roma youth, which also included international Roma youth exchanges and special career training conducted by Roma entrepreneurs. In addition, methods of inclusion of Roma in the labour market were identified, which helped Roma without basic education to acquire professional qualifications.¹⁰³

195. In the framework of the Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into Lithuanian Society for 2015-2020, the project "Working with the Roma: New Job Opportunities and Challenges" has been implemented with EU funding. It has aimed to help Roma be included into the labour market and society by providing *inter alia* support of social and work skills as well as vocational training and advice. It was implemented by the Roma Community Centre in co-operation with Roma associations and institutions. Participants acquired a profession or specific qualifications, studied in general education institutions, concluded employment contracts or registered with the Employment Service. Data of the Employment Service shows that the number of Roma receiving advice and employment through active labour market measures has increased.¹⁰⁴

196. As part of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020, the authorities have also organised seminars for employers on non-discrimination in the labour market, covering *inter alia* discrimination against people with different ethnic affiliation, notably Roma. In addition, the authorities have launched a campaign which was aimed at drawing the attention of the public and employers to the difficulties that Roma (among other groups) face integrating into the labour market while showing examples of employed Roma.¹⁰⁵

197. Despite the measures taken, the survey "Situation of Roma Persons 2020" recorded positive changes in the field of employment only in individual groups while the overall employment rates of Roma did not change much. Similarly to 2015, 11.4% of the respondents indicated that they are currently employed or self-employed. Significant changes were recorded in the age

⁹⁹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 31-33, 59-62, 65, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

¹⁰⁰ See Council of Europe, [European Committee of Social Rights Conclusions on Lithuania 2021](#), March 2022, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 2](#), para. 61.

¹⁰² Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)1, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2024.

¹⁰³ Additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

¹⁰⁴ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 25, 29-30, 34, 37, 57-58.

¹⁰⁵ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 30-31, 35, and additional information provided by the authorities on 9 November 2023.

group of young people (20-29 years). Compared to 2015, the share of employed young people had increased by 13% in 2020. The survey data also showed that the share of working Roma in Vilnius city municipality has increased significantly and the number of unemployed has decreased. The employment rate of women has not changed, remaining at 9%. Although in absolute terms Roma incomes have risen, they still lag behind the overall national indicators.¹⁰⁶

198. The Advisory Committee reiterates that state parties should take effective measures to remove any undue restrictions in the access to the labour market which particularly affect persons belonging to certain national minorities.¹⁰⁷ Alongside comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation (see Article 4), measures should be instituted to promote inclusivity in the labour market. These might include employer incentives, public-private partnerships, fiscal policies such as corporate tax breaks, language training, issuance of guidance for employers on their scope for taking positive action, and the reasonable accommodation of persons with special needs in the workplace.¹⁰⁸

199. The Advisory Committee welcomes the continuing efforts of the authorities to include Roma into the labour market, including long-running projects and awareness-raising campaigns. Notwithstanding these initiatives, the overall employment rates for Roma have remained unchanged, with only specific groups showing improvements, and disparities in income persist, indicating ongoing challenges in achieving economic integration.

Socio-economic participation of Roma women and girls

200. National and local authorities have taken measures to promote the empowerment of Roma women. The EU-funded project “Local Roma Platforms – The Path towards Cooperation with the Municipalities” promotes dialogue between Roma and municipalities in addressing issues of social inclusion, education, health care and culture. Roma women work as platform co-ordinators. As part of the Action Plan for Roma Integration into Lithuanian Society 2015-2020, the authorities have organised seminars for employers on principles of equal opportunities in the labour market, involving Roma women and covering inequalities between women and men.

In the project “Working with the Roma: New Job Opportunities and Challenges”, women were involved in the activities, including training on gender equality. The Vilnius city municipality has funded activities involving young Roma, especially girls and young mothers. Through educational, artistic and professional skill-development methods, the participants were encouraged to take an active part in social and cultural life, to acquire competencies needed for the labour market and to be aware of gender stereotypes. Moreover, training on the prevention of early marriages was organised.¹⁰⁹

201. The CEDAW has recommended Lithuania strengthen its measures to address horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and enhance access for women to the labour market, including Roma women, and remains concerned about the situation of Roma girls who are affected by child marriage.¹¹⁰ In addition, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has expressed concern about the high incidence of pregnancy among Roma girls in Lithuania.¹¹¹

202. The Advisory Committee reiterates that early marriage has negative consequences that violate, abuse or impair human rights and are linked to other human rights violations.

203. The Advisory Committee notes with satisfaction the co-operation between national and local authorities on the empowerment of Roma women, promoting gender equality and their active participation in social and cultural activities. It considers that the authorities, in close co-operation with representatives of the Roma minority, including Roma women, should continue these measures in a sustained manner with a view to effectively prevent child marriages and high rates of pregnancy among Roma girls.

204. The Advisory Committee urges the authorities to take further action to enhance the living and housing conditions of persons belonging to the Roma minority, and to combat negative attitudes towards Roma through awareness-raising initiatives. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to take measures designed to prevent early marriages, and to ensure access to healthcare services for the Roma, including sexual and reproductive health services, while raising awareness about their health rights. Additionally, promoting sustainable employment opportunities

¹⁰⁶ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 65-66.

¹⁰⁷ See [ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 2](#), para. 55.

¹⁰⁸ See also [OSCE HCNM Recommendations on Effective Participation of National Minorities in Social and Economic Life and Explanatory Note](#), October 2023, Recommendation 20, p. 47.

¹⁰⁹ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 30, 32-33, 37-38, 58, 61, 129.

¹¹⁰ See Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Lithuania, [CEDAW/C/LTU/CO/6](#), 12 November 2019, paras. 37b, 44b.

¹¹¹ See Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Lithuania, [CCPR/C/LTU/CO/4](#), August 2018, para. 29.

and improving the employability of Roma individuals, with a special focus on women, should remain a priority.

Bilateral and multilateral co-operation (Article 18)

205. Lithuania has concluded bilateral agreements with Belarus, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine which cover matters relating to persons belonging to national minorities as one of the areas of co-operation.¹¹² In 2019 and 2020 respectively, Lithuania and Poland signed the Declaration “On Education of the Polish National Minority in the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian National Minority in the Republic of Poland” and *inter alia* agreed to co-operate concerning the development, adaptation and provision of educational materials, organising in-service training for teachers, improving the educational conditions for pupils and children with special educational needs and continuous monitoring of education. The Advisory Committee has not received concrete information about the implementation of agreements concluded with states other than Poland.¹¹³

206. The Advisory Committee reiterates that the co-operation of a state party with neighbouring and other interested states can effectively complement the protection measures it takes at national level and support the development of the infrastructure of national minorities, for example in fields such as the production of educational

materials or teacher training.

207. The Advisory Committee welcomes that the authorities use bilateral relations with other states to further the protection of persons belonging to national minorities in Lithuania. It notes in particular the developed co-operation with Poland covering various elements of the organisation of education in Polish. In light of this practice, the Advisory Committee considers that the national authorities should initiate the conclusion, where appropriate, of bilateral and multilateral agreements enabling access to rights for persons belonging to national minorities and fully implement, where current conditions allow, existing agreements.

208. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee considers that it would be beneficial, where persons belonging to national minorities reside, to co-operate with local or regional authorities in other states in the framework of twinnings.

209. The Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to conclude, where appropriate, bilateral and multilateral agreements with other states to support the protection of persons belonging to the respective national minority in Lithuania and to implement existing agreements where current conditions allow. Furthermore, the Advisory Committee encourages the authorities to promote cross-border co-operation between local authorities located in Lithuania and the relevant states for this purpose.

¹¹² Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus on Co-operation in the Field of Culture; Treaty on the foundations of friendly relations and co-operation between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Hungary; Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Republic of Poland on Co-operation in the Fields of Culture, Education and Science; Agreement between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Moldova on Friendship and Co-operation; Co-operation Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation; Agreement between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Lithuania and the Ministry of Culture and Art of Ukraine on Co-operation and the Interdepartmental Co-operation Programme for 2016-2020, which was renewed on 18 March 2021, see [fifth state report](#), pp. 129-130, and additional information provided by the authorities.

¹¹³ See [fifth state report](#), pp. 10, 42.

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is an independent body that assists the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in evaluating the adequacy of the measures taken by the Parties to the Framework Convention to give effect to the principles set out therein.

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 10 November 1994 and entered into force on 1 February 1998, sets out principles to be respected as well as goals to be achieved by the states, in order to ensure the protection of national minorities. The text of the Framework Convention is available, among other languages, in Armenian, Azerbaijani, Estonian, German, Greek, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian.

This opinion contains the evaluation of the Advisory Committee following its 5th country visit to Lithuania.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation.

It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union.

All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE